

**The Passion of Christ in Seventeenth-Century Religious Poetry:
Crashaw, Donne, Herbert, Lanyer**

A dissertation submitted by
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in English

TUFTS UNIVERSITY
August 2015

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Abstract

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I have considered it, and find
 There is no dealing with thy mighty passion.
 George Herbert, "The Reprisal" (1-2)

The Passion of Christ explores how early modern poetry engages with the challenges of representing Christ's sacrifice. As Debora Shuger observes in *The Renaissance Bible*, Passion narratives "seemed to draw into themselves a wildly problematic and complex range of cultural issues. They are haunted by questions of selfhood, violence, gender, and history and provide the symbolic forms for such speculations" (8). As much as the works "draw" the issues "into themselves," however, they also reflect and respond to them. Post-Reformation English poets write within a religious climate of disruption, since the foundational tenets of the Protestant Reformation—the authority of written vernacular Scripture and the trust in faith and grace in effecting salvation—conflict with the Catholic belief in works and ritual practices. Through rhetorical readings of works by representative poets, I analyze how Passion poetry serves as a site of expressive negotiation for poets who seek to establish their complicated religious identities. Not surprisingly, representations of the Passion generate meanings as contradictory as the event itself: failure implies success, interpretation replaces Word, and imitation becomes creation.

In my first chapter, I argue for a reevaluation of Richard Crashaw's Passion poems as exercises in didacticism: as deliberate, self-conscious, instructive expressions of Christ's narrative, rather than as effusive, uncontained outpourings of Catholic extravagance. Responding to recent critical efforts to situate Crashaw's works within a masculine mode, I see his affective engagement as drawing instead from female medieval mystical devotion. My second chapter on John Donne (a convert in the opposite direction) considers the project of poetic self-fashioning in the context of changing speakers and a shifting self. Holding steady the event of the Passion underscores the uneasy, uneven relationship of Donne's speakers to this scene and highlights their dramatizations of identity formation. The third chapter on George Herbert more closely probes the practical and psychological problems of imitative expression: as language necessarily fails to articulate this inexpressible sacrifice, and as he struggles to reconcile language and art with purity of expression. I propose that Herbert develops an interactive version of *imitatio Christi* to expand the Reformed value of inwardness. Although critics focus on the social implications of Aemilia Lanyer's text, in the final chapter, I consider her work to be fundamentally religious. By reimagining the Passion narrative as a site of exclusively female compassion and strength, Lanyer insists upon women's obligation to interpret their religious history, validate their present, and shape their future.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and to the memory of my father,
Tracy Stubbs.

Acknowledgments

What a pleasure to acknowledge the wonderful people who have contributed personally, professionally, or both, to the completion of this project.

The insightful voices of my dissertation committee members have offered advice and encouragement throughout the years. I think the phrase “O Captain! My Captain!” was written prophetically in honor of my chair, Judith Haber, whose tireless commitment to my academic development has reached metaphysical proportions. A caring advocate and a dear friend, Judith has shaped and enriched my work and my life beyond words. Tufts would be a less rigorous place without Kevin Dunn and John Fyler, who offer wit, encyclopedic knowledge, and inspiration as mentors and educators. I got to know Donne through the sensitive ear and critical eye of Achsah Guibbory, whom I have been looking up to for over ten years as a model of the kind of researcher, educator, and person I want to be; the better I know her, the more I love and admire her.

The staff members in the Tufts English Department (including Noah Barrientos, who switched departments but left a legacy) have offered years of employment, support, and friendship. Conscientious and caring, Wendy Medeiros is departmental brain as well as departmental heart, and I’m fortunate to have worked in the efficient, fun environment she fosters. My good friends Chantal Hardy and Douglas Riggs make both department operations and film deconstruction seem easy.

I’m grateful to Dean Robert Cook and Jonathan Wilson for the dissertation fellowship from the Center for Humanities at Tufts that funded and enriched my final year, and to Sinaia Nathanson for the enduring pedagogical lessons of the Graduate Institute for Teaching. I’m especially grateful for the guidance of the most excellent First-Year Writing mentors, Carl Beckman and Carol Wilkinson, whose example and wisdom make us all better, more thoughtful educators.

My dear friends at Tufts have made me laugh, think, and grow. I’m particularly thankful to know Adam Spellmire, James Mulder, Gülfer Göze, Cheryl Alison, Ian Scott Todd, Diego Millan, Chris Payson, Barbara Orton, and Jenny Howe. East Hall is a more vibrant place because of the encouragement and dedication of Liz Ammons, Julia Genster, and Modhumita Roy.

My former bosses, Judy Goulding and Kristina Aikens, have always had my best interest at heart, and their kindness has had a lasting impact on how I relate to others. I will always cherish my relationship with Patsy Yaeger, whose warmth and sense of wonder will endure long after her death. Throughout graduate school, joyful visits with Joseph Walsh and Gayla McGlamery have given me strength. Mary Ellen Brennan and Laura Walsh are more like friends than family, and I’m so lucky they’re in my life.

To my most immediate family, I owe my most immediate thanks. My brother John lives far away but always feels close. The same goes for my mother and the memory of my father. My mother is the strongest, most curious and loving person I know, and she makes everything feel possible.

And finally, my husband Andy Tirrell has packed a lifetime of love, laughter, and support into eight short years. He is the St. Teresa to my Crashaw.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
From the Passion <i>of</i> Christ to the Passion <i>for</i> Christ	
Chapter I	19
Richard Crashaw's Didactic Piety	
Chapter II	71
John Donne's Multivocal Piety	
Chapter III	126
George Herbert's Imitative Piety	
Chapter IV	175
Aemilia Lanyer's (Re)Visionary Piety	
Coda	223
Milton's Passion	
Appendices	229
A. "The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa," Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1647-52)	
B. Title page, Richard Crashaw's <i>Carmen Deo Nostro</i> (1652)	
C. Title page, Aemilia Lanyer's <i>Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum</i> (1611)	
Works Cited	232

Introduction

From the *Passion of Christ* to the *Passion for Christ*

Deare Friend, sit down, the tale is long and sad.

George Herbert

The solemn speaker of George Herbert's "Love Unknown" offers a seat to Christ in the first line of the poem (above); a narrative of suffering and confusion, his "tale" relates his inability to comprehend Christ's divine love. Yet the long, sad tale that underpins the speaker's anguish is the narrative of suffering and confusion foundational to Christianity: the story of Christ's life and death. A scene of heightened emotional and visceral intensity, the Passion of Christ marks a moment during which the paradox of Christ's dual identity, as both mortal or human and immortal or divine, becomes obvious and palpable. For this reason, medieval and early modern poets have circled the Passion, at turns attracted to and repelled by it, in their work. The most famously strange poetic engagement perhaps belongs to John Milton, whose lyric "The Passion" ends with Milton's own note to the reader: "This subject the author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished." As Michael Carl Schoenfeldt argues, Milton's careful reprinting of the incomplete poem (along with its explanatory note) in two editions of his works suggests that "the fragment had some meaning for him" ("That Spectacle," 580). Whether this meaning aligns with Schoenfeldt's reading that Milton was

conveying “the idea that the sacrifice inevitably defeats human response” (581) or mine, that Milton was performing his own form of sacrifice in response, the outcome stands: “The Passion” remains the only “self-acknowledged failure” (Rosenblatt, 19) of Milton’s career.

Unlike Milton, the poets in *The Passion of Christ* engage consistently and comprehensively with the scene of the Passion. This dissertation investigates how representations of the Passion enable early modern poets to engage in religious and poetic exploration and self-definition. By comparing closely the ways in which they render this specific, charged event, one that lends itself to a subjective variability of interpretation, we may better understand how the poetry participates in the post-Reformation religious tensions of the seventeenth century in England. How can Christ’s bloody, seeping, debased body at once signify his strength and his vulnerability? How does the renewed attention to the Word impact those who interpret and craft written expression? How do these poets negotiate their relationship to a religious community that is Catholic and Protestant, and at each stage fractured and manifold? The driving questions behind this examination are the following: What can we learn about how these four poets struggled to order their lives as Christians from focusing on their depictions of the Passion as a single event? And further, how might differences in their religious poetic priorities shed light on the discourses of the religious climate from which they emerge?

The Passion of Christ is a particularly suitable occasion for considering devotional priorities because it presents a culmination of Christian paradoxes:

Christ's slow, painful march signifies steps closer to redemption; increased physical pain in one corresponds to freedom from eternal damnation for many; death enables (after)life. This moment forces believers to confront the contradictory basis of Christianity—that salvation required brutal destruction—and, for poets, it poses the logistical challenge of representing symbols and referents that coexist. A related religious event that inspires these considerations, the Eucharistic sacrament offers a recurring, ritualized act during which symbol (host, wine) clashes with referent (body, blood). In the Passion, the divine Christ takes human form and suffers mortal pain. A reversal in some aspects, the consecrated Eucharistic host becomes, at one extreme, the body of Christ, and at the other, spiritual nourishment from a mediated source, which believers then consume.¹ A full appreciation of each experience necessitates a belief in the fulfillment and logic of this mortal/divine, physical/symbolic collapse.² “Christ’s agony,” writes Debora Shuger, “provides the primary symbol for early modern speculation on selfhood and society” (127). The Passion’s crisis of contradictions, inconsistencies, defiance of logic, and multiplicity proves particularly attractive to religious poets who seek to understand the meaning of Christ’s incarnation and sacrifice and who probe the interrelations of faith and reason in their works.

¹ Jean-Louis Quantin further explains the prominent role of the Eucharist in the context of Reformation debates: “The eucharist had been the central symbol that organized religious culture on the eve of the Reformation. There was nothing more sacred than the consecrated host, Christ’s very own body hidden under the species of bread. To repudiate that belief was to challenge an entire world-view. It was the ultimate, most unforgivable heresy in the eyes of traditionalists” (24). Like the Eucharist, Passion poetry stimulates strong associations with both the physical reality and the symbolic significance of Christ’s mortal body.

² Recent critical works that explore these issues through the lens of Eucharistic sacramental poetics in early modern England include, among others, Kimberly Johnson’s *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Early Modern England* and Regina Schwartz’s *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*.

While the Passion provides the occasion for a comparatively large body of earlier lyrics, religious poets of the seventeenth century engage with it in ways that reflect the political, religious, and social tensions of post-Reformation England.³ Religious historians such as Brian Cummings argue for the centrality of textuality in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English reform—“Writing is not accidental to the history of religion,” he claims, “since belief and dogma are both mediated by a linguistic and literary process. Without reference to writing, the study of early modern religion is incomprehensible” (6)—and he further contends that the country undergoes “parallel revolutions in theology and in literary method” (281). Indeed, the primacy of the written word forms one of the foundational precepts of Reformation theology, and the writing generated in response to Scripture logically extends this relationship to the word. The adoption of Luther’s theology followed Henry VIII’s excommunication by the Roman Catholic pope, which led to the establishment of the Church of England in 1534.⁴ The Reformation’s main tenets of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* support the authority of the written vernacular Scripture (over ritual, ceremony, and church clerics) and the belief in an individual’s faith (over works) in effecting salvation. Condensing the religious shifts of the English Reformation as they correspond to

³ David Fowler remarks that, in medieval English literature, “the largest category of lyrics consists of those devoted to Good Friday. And aside from the occasional piece devoted to other incidents of that day—such as Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane—most of these are concerned with the Crucifixion, which is viewed from every conceivable vantage point” (88).

⁴ Adding flexibility to the timeline of events as it implicates the conceptualization of the English Reformation, Peter Marshall asserts: “‘The Reformation’ was once widely regarded as a historical event, initiated in Henry VIII’s reign and essentially concluded within the space of three decades. But only a political and statutory Reformation can be considered in any way complete by the early part of Elizabeth I’s reign, and then only with the benefit of hindsight” (567).

changes in the monarchy, Stephen Greenblatt courses through the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth:

In the space of a single lifetime, England had gone officially from Roman Catholicism, to Catholicism under the supreme headship of the English king, to a guarded Protestantism, to a more radical Protestantism, to a renewed and aggressive Roman Catholicism, and finally to Protestantism again. Each of these shifts was accompanied by danger, persecution, and death. It was enough to make people wary. Or skeptical. Or extremely agile. (*Introduction*, 540-1)

With the exception of Crashaw (b.1613), the poets in this dissertation straddled the reigns of Elizabeth, James, and Charles; they all inherit from the Reformation both an ominous sense of religious/political instability and an imperative to establish their own religious identity.⁵ The shifting religious climate, according to Norman Jones, offers the “possibility of choice” to those who self-define in the period after Elizabeth’s death: “The possibility of conversion, the awareness of alternatives, the idea of vocations grounded in conscience, meant nothing was static anymore” (5). As people involved in the “work” or act of writing, early modern religious poets negotiate their relationship to word and deed (now loaded concepts) in an unstable religious and political climate that, by affording options, at once offers them disorder and empowerment. The wariness, skepticism, and—

⁵ At the time of Elizabeth’s death in 1603, Lanyer was 34, Donne was 31, and Herbert was 10. My main focus will be the first few decades of the seventeenth century, though the events of the sixteenth century inform the poetry that emerges after it.

most especially—the agility that Greenblatt observes in early modern consciousness takes literal form as the religious poets of the seventeenth century probe questions of art and identity as they relate to word and deed.

The Protestant emphasis on the authorization of Scripture raises fundamental questions about the flexibility of language as it accommodates a range of rhetorical purposes and interpretative meanings. The interrelation of religion, politics, and language in this regard translates to a climate of theological and doctrinal multiplicity. Recognizing the manifold possibilities for organizing and apprehending theology, Peter Lake contends,

This was a period in which many discourses jostled against one another, each multivalent and capable of almost infinite combination with the other cultural strands of the period. Using often the same or very similar cultural materials and assumptions, contemporaries were able to produce a number of different totalising visions of their circumstances” (17).⁶

In this context of competing discourses, language is both the proposed locus of stability (Scripture) and the means of fluctuation (interpretation). Kevin Sharpe observes that rhetoric, “ideally a device for the communication of truths,” may also “become a mode of deception” (118). He further notes that the related issue

⁶ Like Lake, Molly Murray complicates the notion of the Reformation as a “single struggle between two monolithic churches, one determined to defeat the other,” arguing instead from the “post-revisionist” position that “Christianity in early modern England was much more ‘vexed’ and various than once was thought, and remained so for much longer” (2). Patrick Collinson defines “post-revisionism” as “revisionism beyond revisionism” that seeks to perform a “more drastic deconstruction of the elements, and defining labels, of Elizabethan religious history” (378).

of interpretation poses threats to political stability by the end of the sixteenth century: “Secondly the rise of Protestantism and religious division led to different interpretations of the Bible. Because the Holy Scripture was also a treatise for government such different interpretations fractured a common discourse of state into rival languages of power” (118). The religious poets emerging from these circumstances—especially, as we will see, Crashaw and Lanyer—draw upon interpretive energies as “languages of power” to generate agency through various expressions of the Passion.

With the consequences of interpretation comes the attendant question of how art, imagination, and invention factor into representations of religious devotion. In fact, writing itself as an act of “work” even bears on the Protestant belief in the supremacy of faith over deed. Achsah Guibbory situates the issue of human invention within the greater tension between ceremonialist and puritan ideologies:

Emphasizing the primacy of Scripture, and faith rather than works, early Protestant reformers questioned the usefulness in worship of things done or made by human beings. Still, the Elizabethan church had taken a middle ground between the radical Protestant commitment to *sola Scriptura* and the Roman Catholic view that church traditions share authority with the Bible. (*Ceremony and Community*, 15)

By interweaving their poetic invention and a reverence for scriptural authority, the poets considered here participate in the Elizabethan “middle ground” between a strict adherence to the word and a surrender to invention. Herbert’s lyrics in *The Temple*, for example, consistently return to questions about the propriety of luxuriating in language while crafting devotion. As Helen Wilcox observes, “Herbert’s skill in poetic ventriloquism raises the issue of the acceptable use of art in the service of God, particularly in view of the danger, repeatedly cited in his poems, of ‘Curling with metaphors a plain intention’” (*The English Poems*, xxxi).⁷ To varying degrees, all of the poets considered in this dissertation engage with the tension they perceive between artistic creation and sincere devotion, a conflict heightened by the Reformed suspicion of straying from their primary text.

In confronting, even embracing, the variability of the written word, the poets of the period must also contend with the relationship between the word and its generative source, the self. The tensions between private and performative expression, between didacticism and self-promotion, and between feeling and articulation, all influence—and are influenced by—how the poet conceives of his or her own selfhood. The flourishing of self-defining poetry in the period departs from earlier anonymous modes of lyrical devotion. Noting the overwhelming didactic function of medieval religious poetry, Douglas Gray remarks that medieval lyricists “are not primarily concerned with the construction of an enduring object for other people to admire, but rather for other people to use. The

⁷ Wilcox cites line 5 of “Jordan (II)” and further notes critical observations that the poem references Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* “in its account of the dilemmas of poetic invention, and particularly the resolution of the problem by apparently simple instructions from an outside voice” (365).

medieval poet speaks not only for himself, but in the name of the many; if he uses the poetic ‘I’ it will be in a way which may be shared by his readers” (60). The anonymous and generalized voice of medieval Passion lyrics inspires a greater emphasis on the pedagogical or functional use of the poetry than on the construction of a poetic selfhood. As Greenblatt argues in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, however, poets of the English Renaissance begin to emerge as distinctly, carefully constructed selves; their poetry becomes as much “a species of conduct” (136) as a conduct manual, with an increasing emphasis on the consciousness or performativity involved in the definition of the self. While Greenblatt finds that the project of self-fashioning cannot be realized fully because early modern selfhood is linked inextricably to culture (and that even subversion works to redefine and uphold cultural parameters), his endeavor to explore the heightened interest in self-fashioning in the period speaks to the concerns of early modern people who seek stability in self-construction, even if they fail to achieve it.⁸

The instability of religious and political institutions in Reformation England influences the rise in poetic self-consciousness. As the church moved within a range of theological expressions between Catholic ceremony and Protestant individuality, devotees were faced, first, with the task of defining their own relationship to God and, second, with the challenge of situating themselves as individuals within the body of the church. A Reformed Christian adopts the

⁸ Jonathan Goldberg adds that the project of self-fashioning, specifically in Greenblatt’s paradigm, arises from the unstable conditions of the period that shape it. He observes, “What he [Greenblatt] says about the work shares in the instability and contradictions of the culture in which it operates. The work cannot be separated from its condition of production, cannot be made unequivocal” (1204).

Protestant values of inwardness and personal devotion over the outward, affective, and communal modes of expression associated with Catholicism. As a result of the politically prescribed shift in values and beliefs, such as the rejection of the Eucharist as the literal body and blood of Christ, Reformation-era devotional poets faced a nearly obligatory self-articulation—as poet, as devotee—that had repercussions on both their lives and their works. In fact, two of the poets in this study, Crashaw and Donne, were converts in opposite directions, indicating both the strong emphasis on religious self-definition and the options available for religious alignment (and realignment) in the period. Molly Murray refers to conversion as a process of “reckoning” that produces “knotty, opaque, self-qualifying” verse that “registers its authors’ reconsiderations, and it also invites its closest readers to re-examine the forms through which they understand themselves and their place in the world” (173). While Murray focuses explicitly on how conversion relates to self-qualification, her statement applies more generally to the religious poets of the period. In their lives, these four poets sought to define themselves in relation to their God, and in their poetry, to recall Philip Sidney (a notably self-conscious early modern poet), they “sought fit words” and means of expressing this relation.⁹

Crashaw, Donne, Herbert, and Lanyer form a representative group in a few meaningful ways, religious affiliation (and conversion) among them.¹⁰

⁹ *Astrophil and Stella*, Sonnet 1, line 5 reads: “I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe.”

¹⁰ Herbert and Lanyer belonged to the Church of England throughout their lives; Donne converted from Catholicism to Protestantism; and, Crashaw converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. Although their technical doctrinal alignments can be helpful in generating a sense of how they self-identify, their poetic expressions (individual poems as well as bodies of poetry) more commonly reflect the doctrinal variation and inconsistency characteristic of post-

Critics seem at turns fascinated by and dismissive of Crashaw's works, which—in their “baroque” extremity—have been maligned as outpourings in bad taste.¹¹ Critical attention to Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* typically positions the volume either as a contribution to a collection of women's writing from the period or as a singular example of the devotional mode of a woman. My genre-based approach to analyzing Passion poetry includes Lanyer and Crashaw in the more established coupling of Donne and Herbert without the structural implications of assigning them representative roles (for example, “the baroque poet” or “the woman poet”). Instead, the comparative framing encourages insight into their individual and collective priorities from the coherence and incongruities that emerge in their renderings of the Passion, a scene that—despite their differences in religious affiliation, sex, usage of affective piety, and (later) critical acclaim—inspired them all to sustained poetic expression.

The chapters of this dissertation present the poets not chronologically (by age or publication dates), but rather, in an order that reflects their comparative focus on Christ's physical pain and suffering. In doing so, I build into the structure a de-escalating sense of engagement with emotion, or affect, either alongside or at the expense of intellectual piety.¹² This framing mirrors the transition during the Reformation from what Schoenfeldt deems Catholic

Reformation Christian poetry.

¹¹ Recent decades have seen a renewed interest in Crashaw's poetry, owing in part to Richard Rambuss, who re-claims the poet's depictions of Christic woundedness as masculine expression, and to the editorial efforts of John Edwards, who sees his emphasis on Christ's body as a unique form of counter-Reformation devotion.

¹² Caroline Walker Bynum defines “affective piety” as “emotional identification with scenes from Christ's life, especially his Nativity and Crucifixion” (112). She expands on this definition of affective piety—“exuberant, lyrical, and filled with images”—to include the historically feminine charge associated with emotional expression (105).

“emotional affect” and the “psychological effect” of Reformed subjecthood (“That Spectacle,” 564). The most keenly rendered use of affect comes from Crashaw, who fixates on Christ’s bodily woundedness—among other themes—to engage visceral sympathy from the reader. Donne, placed second on the spectrum, longs to “ride westward” away from the scene of the crucifixion, a distancing attempt that ironically brings him even closer to imagining the scene. His devotional lyrics feature a combination of immediate self-engagement with Christ’s pain and self-conscious removal from it. Some critics read Herbert’s “images of violent containment” (Huntley, 1) as emblematic of the inward-facing, solitary tendencies in his poetry. While his Passion poetry engages more symbolically with Christ’s pain than Crashaw’s and Donne’s, the interactivity imagined in his works, I argue, shatters the designation of “private ejaculation.”¹³ Finally, Lanyer’s text portrays the least affective engagement between herself (as speaker) and Christ, although her endorsement of affective piety in other women complicates her distanced position. While Crashaw and Lanyer frame this project at opposite ends, their works share strong affective as well as intellectual dimensions. Whereas Crashaw prioritizes affective engagement as a means of generating further meditation, Lanyer’s interpretive concerns have primacy over—in fact, *enable*—the affective piety she admires. While the ordering of the chapters seeks to compare the poets’ explicit affective engagement with Christ, their complex depictions of the Passion challenge categorizations that situate

¹³ While J. Stephen Murphy points out that the subtitle to Herbert’s *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* was likely an editorial addition by Nicholas Ferrar (who oversaw its publication), the distinction does highlight the tension between public and private devotional expression that Herbert explores in the volume.

“emotional affect” as distinctive from “psychological effect,” or Catholic against Protestant, often combining approaches to suggest their own complicated self-alignment.

Chapter One argues that Richard Crashaw’s use of affective piety—the most visible and critically addressed mode of expression in his “baroque” works—reflects just one dimension of a larger rhetorical project in his Passion poetry to inspire active reader engagement. Close readings of his relationship to interpretation (which he both models and endorses) reveal a strong didactic undercurrent that posits the written word as a starting point for further contemplation. To foster active participation, Crashaw draws upon the life and works of the mystic St. Teresa of Ávila as a devotional exemplar, and I argue that he locates her instructive inspiration in the earlier somatic religiosity of women.¹⁴ Crashaw’s meditations on Christ’s woundedness and excessive physicality, further, provide a means of exploring how shock and “bad taste” function as carefully employed tools to promote reflection. My reading of Crashaw’s didactic project departs from what Kimberly Johnson refers to as the “peculiar attentiveness to features that block interpretive absorption and disrupt referentiality” (*Made Flesh*, 145) in Crashaw’s works specifically and in post-Reformation devotional poetry more generally. Where Johnson sees a referentiality “preempted by the instance of poetics as an autonomous, self-substantiating entity” (145), I see an effort by Crashaw to force readers to pause,

¹⁴ This reading differs from the analysis of Richard Rambuss in *Closet Devotions*, which reads Crashaw’s affective engagement with Christ’s Passion as a site of male homoerotic desire.

sit in the poetic conundrum, and reach substantiation only through a combination of text and reader interpretation.

My second chapter builds on the considerations of poetic form and physical representation in Crashaw's works to better understand the project of poetic self-fashioning in the context of John Donne's changing speakers and shifting selves. Holding steady the moment of the Passion highlights the uneasy, uneven relationship of Donne's speakers to this scene as well as their associations with one another and with the crisis of poetic representation. Donne's Passion poetry catalogues the struggles he faces as a convert, and traces of doctrinal and formal tension characterize his works. Rhetorical readings of Donne's formally various Passion works—an occasional meditation ("Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward"), a circular sonnet sequence (*La Corona*), and assorted other *Holy Sonnets*—reveal his sustained rehearsal of identity as it relates to Christ's vexed personhood in the Passion.¹⁵ Donne's self-conscious, frustrated dramatizations of agency and self-construction operate within the unsettled religious circumstances that inform his Passion poetry.

Chapter Three investigates how George Herbert more closely probes the practical and psychological problems of religious expression: as language necessarily fails to articulate this inexpressible sacrifice, and as he struggles to reconcile language and art with sincerity and humility. Using a critical framework from Nandra Perry's *Imitatio Christi: The Poetics of Piety in Early Modern*

¹⁵ Brian Cummings locates the contradictions in Donne's works in the context of seventeenth-century religious discourses: "Yet in this obtuse juxtaposition of catholic and protestant, devotional and opportunistic, sincere and insincere, Donne's writing from the death of Elizabeth to the eve of the English revolution forms a summary and archetype of English religion in its most difficult century" (366).

England, the chapter explores the literary practice of imitation in Herbert's representations of Christ during his death. Herbert's engagement in a poetics of interactivity, I argue, offers an elaboration of the transformative concept of imitation, and it allows him to envision a more mutual, two-way relationship with Christ. His creative variations of more traditional modes of *imitatio Christi*—for instance, ventriloquizing Christ in “The Sacrifice” in order to generate sympathy for the mortal devout—contribute to his larger project to promote comprehensive experience as central to devotion.

In the final chapter, I approach Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* as a fundamentally religious text in the genre of Passion poetry; despite its dramatically sacred title, critical focus tends to explore how its religious themes enable Lanyer's more primary professional and social goals. By reimagining the Passion sequence as a site of exclusively female compassion and strength, I argue that Lanyer insists upon the meaningful role of women in shaping their religious history as well as their devotional present and future. Like Herbert, Lanyer shapes *imitatio Christi* to suit her (re)vision of language and narratives that continue to limit women's access to devotion and expression. Finding evidence of Christ in the pious women of her reinterpreted history as well as her present, she offers her audience both a reevaluation of the Passion (and its resonances in the Bible) and the tools to conduct interpretive processes on their own. Lanyer's gendered project provides a bookend to Crashaw's Christic gender blurring didacticism in the first chapter, as both poets endorse interpretation and find inspiration in the pious abilities of women. Finally, a brief coda explores the

issues raised throughout the four previous chapters as they bear on John Milton's odd fragment, "The Passion."

While I argue that post-Reformation religious poets take part in an increasingly self-conscious, self-*fashioned*¹⁶ approach to poetic expression, they also inherit a body of devotional logic and practice that inflects their Passion narratives. In particular, the practices of martyrdom and mysticism inform ideals of bodily engagement in devotion. Martyrdom literalizes much of the pain envisioned in these works (Donne's and Herbert's personas, for example, seek to share Christ's pain), and mystical visions fulfill the fantasy of God's physical, visually confirmed presence. In *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England*, Susannah Monta explicates the claim of martyrology whereby self-induced bodily suffering in the name of religious devotion promises divine transcendence. Donne brings this ideal to bear on imagined pain, according to Monta, who argues: "But rather than simply celebrating Protestant and/or Foxean versions of martyrdom instead, as many contemporaries did, Donne often posits alternative forms of interior, spiritualized suffering and argues that those forms of suffering may confer all of martyrdom's benefits, including religious confidence" (119). Donne's reappropriation of martyrdom's spiritual benefits for the writer of the seventeenth-century devotional lyric demonstrates his assertion of a new form of poetic agency, an agency that specifically focuses on and implicates the body.

¹⁶ Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* foregrounds the intensified consciousness of identity and selfhood in seventeenth-century devotional lyrics (especially as compared to earlier lyrics on the Passion). His observation that poets and dramatists of the English Renaissance "move toward a heightened investment of professional identity in artistic creation" (161) is complicated in each context, however, when "professional identity" is pious and "artistic creation" is devotional.

For background on mysticism's roots in the medieval period, as well as to inform considerations of the interrelations of pain (actual and symbolic), the body, and power that these poets explore and avoid, I rely on Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* and essays from *Fragmentation and Redemption*. Bynum writes about the ways in which the body is culturally constructed, tracing this phenomenon in medieval religious literature. Further, her studies on the "tension between body as a locus of pain and limitation, and body as a locus not merely of pleasure but of personhood itself" (*Fragmentation and Redemption*, 19) apply usefully to Donne's and Herbert's lyrics, which demonstrate an abiding interest in negotiating the role of pain and grief in self-construction. While a new set of historical attitudes and behaviors—not to mention developments in the production, distribution, and function of religious literature—characterizes the seventeenth century, Bynum's studies on gender and the body in the Middle Ages provide a helpful foundation from which to draw conclusions about the religious culture that followed. Her explanation of the relation of power to bodily agency in religious contexts foregrounds the emerging voices of seventeenth-century Passion poetry, particularly Lanyer's voice as a woman poet and Crashaw's depiction of gender liquidity in his works.¹⁷

The way poets grapple with expressing the inexpressible, Christ's pain and suffering during the Passion, relates to how they construct their own subjectivities. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes of the inability of words

¹⁷ In Lanyer's preface to her volume addressed "To the doubtfull Reader," she acknowledges the inspiration for her volume's title, which came to her in a dream years before she began writing *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. In the dream, she believes she "was appointed to performe this worke" by God, which situates the basis of her volume in the mystical tradition while departing from that tradition to embrace the verbal, rather than the visual, element.

to convey physical suffering, arguing that “the failure to express pain—whether the failure to objectify its attributes or instead the failure, once the attributes are objectified, to refer them to their original site in the human body—will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power” (14). I argue that the devotional poets of the seventeenth century confront and work through this “debased form of power,” in their case, the imperfect poetic rendering of the Passion, because Christ’s pain finds its corollary in their own mental anguish. Their engagement with Christ’s wounded body—either as it communicates literal physical rupture or as it expresses symbolic distance from the divine—reflects both their shattered sense of selfhood and their relationship to fractured religious institutions. Much like a prayer or a meditation used to transcend the physical limitations, Passion poetry connects bodies (Christ’s, the poet’s) with ideas, thus mediating the material and the inaccessibly spiritual. “Physical pain has no voice,” Scarry writes, “but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story” (3). The story of Christ’s pain that emerges from these works is not Christ’s own as much as a narrative of the poets’ own religious values, devotional goals, and professional struggles. It’s a complicated story by complicated people written in a complicated time. And, yet, 150 years later, William Blake writes of the constructive energies that complication engenders: “Without Contraries is no progression.”¹⁸ Crashaw, Donne, Herbert, and Lanyer all engage these productive contraries in their Passion poetry, and—through their active, engaged poetry—they all offer a sense of possibility in the face of disruption.

¹⁸ *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Section 3, line 6

Chapter One: Richard Crashaw's Didactic Piety

Introduction

Live Jesus, Live, and let it bee

My life to dye, for love of thee.

Richard Crashaw

Richard Crashaw's "author's motto," above, serves as the heading for the earliest printed volume of *Steps to the Temple* (1646), his collected sacred works.¹ A fitting introduction to his devotional poetry, the motto highlights three of his fundamental priorities: to situate his work within an existing devotional climate, to bring Christ to life for his readers ("Live Jesus, Live"), and to define himself through his devotion ("let it bee / My life to dye, for love of thee"). While these three efforts—religious contextualization, Christic resurrection, and self-identification—interweave in ways that shape and reinforce one another, this chapter focuses on how Crashaw's Passion poetry specifically brings Christ to life through narrations of his death and, more broadly, on how his priorities in these works demonstrate a rhetorically motivated engagement in a project of self-definition.

¹ The motto was adapted from *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu* (XII.13) by St. François de Sales (see George Walton Williams, 1).

While many critics focus on the “baroque” quality of Crashaw’s poetry—referencing its excess and extremity—few discuss it in the context of what may be considered a device of his rhetorical project. Developed from associations with Christ’s physicality, Crashaw’s keenly rendered use of affect reflects just one dimension of his works. The other, more intellectual component builds upon visceral sympathy and begs active, interpretive reader participation. For inspiration and example, Crashaw meaningfully draws upon the earlier somatic mode of religious women, such as St. Teresa of Ávila, who sought access to Christ through manipulations of their—and his—bodies. This reading differs from the recent work of Richard Rambuss, who understands Crashaw’s depictions of Christ’s vulnerable, wounded, and penetrable body as a masculine, homoeroticized site of desire, as “amorously attuned to a male Christ” (7). The first section examines how Crashaw draws upon the life and works of St. Teresa of Ávila for instructive inspiration; the second explores how his depictions of woundedness engage both affective and intellectual dimensions of piety; and the final section seeks to demonstrate how his “baroque” poetic extremity reveals a concentrated effort to instruct the reader in pious practice. Rather than understanding Crashaw’s poetic extremity as an exercise in bad taste, this consideration will situate his rhetorical devices within a larger didactic project that offers insight into how he defines himself as an individual and in relation to God.

The didactic project of Crashaw’s Passion poetry should contribute to considerations of his overall identity as poet and devotee because this didacticism

shapes his religious values. To draw upon Stephen Greenblatt's characterization, the act of self-fashioning in the early modern period "suggests representation of one's nature or intention in speech or actions. And with representation we turn to literature, or rather we may grasp that self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life" (3). Crashaw's poetry reveals a "nature or intention" that values both forging an active, personal, lasting connection to God and, extending further, instructing others to do the same. A close examination of his Passion poetry demonstrates his insistence on a combination of affective and intellectual dimensions of piety. He emphasizes the physical aspect of the Crucifixion (as well as Mary's involvement) to arouse the reader emotively; to inspire the intellect, he uses extremity and unexpected inversions. The resultant connection to God—built through a relationship to Christ's Passion—necessitates an active, interpretation-based engagement with devotional "texts": Crashaw's own, as well as those of other devotional poets and artists, religious texts, and beliefs of church leaders and institutions.

A brief sketch of the biographical details of Crashaw's life may help to establish the devotional and personal priorities that inform his works. Circumstances beyond his control—namely the deaths of his mother, stepmother, and father, a reputed puritan preacher—shaped his childhood. In 1631, he attended Pembroke College in Cambridge on a scholarship that required him to translate and prepare Greek and Latin epigrams for the Sunday New Testament

readings; the university's press published a volume of these epigrams, *Epigrammatum Sacrorum Liber*, in his graduation year, 1634. A fellowship the following year brought him to Peterhouse College, where he worked to refurbish and decorate the chapel and later took orders in 1638. Licensed by Parliament to investigate popish corruption in 1640, puritan investigators visited Peterhouse and the adjoining parish church, Little St. Mary's, where Crashaw was curate. Investigators disapproved of Crashaw's "superstitious" acts, mainly his adoration of the Virgin Mary.² The English civil war gained traction in the early 1640s, culminating for Crashaw in the loss of his fellowship, as well as the demolition of the "monuments of superstition and idolatry" (amounting to "60 superstitious Pictures, Some . . . Crucifixes & God the Father sitting in a Chayer") that he used to adorn Little St. Mary's and the Peterhouse chapel (Williams, xix). He later transferred the aesthetic, tangible, symbolic component of devotion that he put to practical use in these chapels to his poetry, where he again faces objection (this time from literary critics) to his ornate style.

While his conversion to Catholicism may be traced to his explicit request to receive favor from the Pope in 1645, his interest in Catholic priorities (ritual, aesthetics, adoration of the Virgin Mary) remains consistent throughout his devotional life. Laudian practices may have influenced Crashaw's hybrid form of worship, as Laud was the Archbishop of Canterbury while Crashaw lived and worked in Cambridge and Peterhouse. Still considered a branch of the Church of

² Puritan investigators also noted that Crashaw held "private masses," "washeth his hands at the vestry" before Communion, fashioned a "carpet to tread upon when offices are performed at the Altar," and changed into a "fresh paire of shoes" for approaching the altar (Williams, xvii).

England for doctrinal reasons, Laudian worship was more amenable to the Catholic practices of ritual and ceremony, as well as aesthetic engagement, than the more puritan sects.³ Because Crashaw's devotional background reflects such a mixture of influences—his puritan father, his Laudian educational environment, his eventual alignment with Rome—his technical Catholic conversion (which takes place after the majority of his poetry was written) seems less telling than his devotional priorities, which are sometimes hybrid, sometimes strictly Catholic, and—in his poetry—always striking.

After his epigrams, his first volume of poetry, *Steps to the Temple* (which echoes George Herbert's collection *The Temple*), was given to editor Humphrey Moosley by an unknown friend.⁴ Divided into two sections, *Sacred Poems* (divine works) and *The Delights of the Muses* (secular works), the religious poetry in this volume includes about 50 Latin epigrams and 15 longer poems: two psalm paraphrases, one poem on Herbert's *The Temple*, and six poems praising female saints (two each to the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and St. Teresa of Ávila), among others. A second edition of these works was published in 1648 with additions sent by Crashaw from abroad. The final publication of his works can be traced back to Crashaw himself, who arranged to publish the volume *Carmen Deo Nostro* with his friend Thomas Car. *Carmen Deo Nostro* includes 32 previously published works with the addition of a letter of gratitude to the Countess of Denbigh for serving as an intermediary between him and the Queen (which

³ Laud explains, "It is true the inward worship of the heart is the true service of God and no service acceptable without it; but the external worship of God in His Church is the great witness to the world that our heart stands right in that service of God."

⁴ It is unclear whether Crashaw intended for his poems to be published at this point. Interestingly, Moosley also edited works by Milton.

resulted in his eventual favor with the Pope) (Williams, xviii-xxii).⁵ As a Catholic convert, Crashaw could engage in the devotional practices and indulge the priorities that he uses in the service of his poetry's greater didactic project.

I. "More than a woman": St. Teresa as Mystic, Writer, and Devotional Exemplar

Although the two poems about St. Teresa of Ávila, "The Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable Saint Teresa" (and its rejoinder, "An Apology for the Foregoing Hymn") and "The Flaming Heart," do not engage directly with the scene of the Passion, Crashaw's devotional priorities in these poems will establish a helpful foundation for considering the didactic project of his Passion poetry. His investment in St. Teresa as a religious figure dovetails nicely with his abiding interest in the Passion, as both Christ and St. Teresa—a mystic, a saint, and (in his words) "more than a woman"—serve as bridges between humans and God.⁶ Further, like Christ, St. Teresa occupies paradoxical roles as both human and divine, both sufferer and one brought to salvation, and both individual and symbolic exemplar. In addition to being drawn to St. Teresa as a figure, Crashaw saw in her work an opportunity to maintain its instructional goals while

⁵ A mention-worthy editorial change in this edition is the exclusion of Crashaw's secular works, which refocused his poetic identity as strictly religious.

⁶ The heading of "A Hymn" reads "Foundress of the Reformation of the Discalced Carmelites, both men and woman; a woman for angelical height of speculation, for masculine courage of performance, more than a woman. Who yet a child, outran maturity, and durst plot a martyrdom."

translating her story into a different creative format.⁷ This translation takes form both literally (writing English text from its Spanish source) and figuratively as he creates his own poetic interpretation.

The St. Teresa odes offer a lens through which to view Crashaw's emphasis on teaching and learning as they contribute to interpretation, an act he endorses as an active means of forging a relationship with God. Further, the universalizing gestures in these poems align him and the reader (as interpreters and devotees) as well as St. Teresa and Christ (as intermediaries to God), resulting in a layered practice of textual engagement (hers, his, the reader's) that collapses subjectivity and objectivity in the interest of promoting devotion. Crashaw draws upon the life and works of St. Teresa in order to establish similar devotional priorities in his own works. He shares with her two foundational values: a desire to transcend the limitations that separate the believer from God, and a belief in a necessary affective component to piety. Whereas St. Teresa fulfills this goal by promoting openness to experience, Crashaw offers training in interpretation to influence others. In the end, Crashaw and St. Teresa both advocate for a version of *active* participation in devotion, a practice Crashaw endorses, updates, and models using the medium of St. Teresa's life.

St. Teresa's *The Way to Perfection* engages an excessive and illogical conceit to explain how tears that "flow from prayer" are strengthened, not

⁷ Among the many critics who have noted St. Teresa's rhetorical efforts, J. M. Cohen observes, "Teresa is, therefore, the best of the mystical writers for those who do not accept or understand the relationship between God and man that is assumed by the mystics of all ages and countries. She is careful to explain everything that she can, and she dwells longer on the early steps than on the later" (*The Life of St. Teresa*, 14).

extinguished, by the fire of love for God. Anticipating her readers' response to this irrationality, she writes, "The two are not contraries, but of the same land."

She continues:

Have no fear that the one element will do harm to the other; rather, they help each other produce their effect. For the water of true tears, those that flow in true prayer, readily given by the King of heaven, helps the fire burn more and last longer; and the *fire* helps the *water* bring refreshment. Oh, God help me, what a beautiful and marvelous thing, that fire makes one feel *cooler*! Yes, and it even freezes all worldly attachments when it is joined to the living water from heaven.⁸

While the fire of love that St. Teresa discusses is symbolic, the tears are the real, physical products of what she refers to as "true prayer." By introducing physical tears to the metaphorical fire, she casts both elements in terms of their sensory potential, even *feeling* the heat of the fire before the tears cool it. Like Crashaw in "The Weeper," St. Teresa bridges the gulf between God and man, between the spiritual and physical realms, in this case by understanding tears and fire in their transformative power and forcing the reader to contemplate their significance rather than their physical impossibility.

⁸ *The Way to Perfection*, Chapter 19, section 5, page 109 (Kiernan Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans. and eds.)

It is importantly through the physical, bodily engagement of the tears, however, that Crashaw and St. Teresa realize a closer connection to the spiritual world. Mystical texts often highlight bodily involvement in worship—implicating both the mystic’s own body and Christ’s mortal form—as these considerations activate an emotional, visceral response, urging the devotee to *feel* rather than to *intellectualize* a connection to God. To invoke this affective reaction, both St. Teresa and Crashaw draw upon functions of the body like crying that have literal resonance as well as symbolic potential. To use Caroline Walker Bynum’s definition from *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, “affective piety” broadly denotes “emotional identification with scenes from Christ’s life, especially his Nativity and Crucifixion” (112). This identification with Christ—who is both mortal and divine—serves to bridge the gap between the devotee and God.

St. Teresa activates this emotional register by implicating her body in a desire to transcend the boundary between the physical and the spiritual realms. With parallels to the condition of Christ as both sufferer and redeemer, she writes of the exquisite pain of prayer:

Another type of prayer quite frequent is a kind of *wound* in which it seems as though an arrow is thrust into the heart, or into the soul itself. Thus the wound causes a severe pain which makes the soul moan; yet, the pain is so *delightful* the soul would never want it to go away. This pain is not in the senses, nor is the sore a physical one; but the pain lies in the interior depths of the soul without resemblance to bodily pain. Yet, since the

experience cannot be explained save through comparisons, these rough comparisons are used (I mean rough when compared to what the experience is); but I don't know how to describe it any other way.⁹

St. Teresa uses her own body as the medium to combine the spiritual with the necessarily physical experience of prayer. However, she acknowledges the inadequacy of understanding prayer in this way by further abstracting the physical pain and locating it, ironically, in the “interior depths of the soul.” She ends the thought by nodding to the insufficiency of language or understanding to convey spiritual transcendence, favoring the experience itself rather than its intelligibility.

St. Teresa's promotion of an experiential apprehension of divine understanding leaves little room for the nuns in her order who were not mystics to achieve the same close connection to God. Her works suggest her discomfort as she struggles with this limitation and, as Elizabeth Armstrong affirms, “She continually engages in a discussion which sometimes becomes an argument about the conflict between the educated priest and the mystic, between the person who thinks and the person who feels, a wonderful dialogue between experience and authority” (12). Her anxious, cautious approach to the act of interpretation may account for her privileging of experience over authority. In the middle of a narration on “true vision,” St. Teresa reveals her attitude toward interpretation, or even just the mediation of information:

⁹ *Vita, Spiritual Testimonies*, Section 59, Sub-section 17, p. 359

...many of the things I write about here do not come from my own head, but my heavenly Master tells them to me. The things I designate with the words ‘this I understood’ or ‘the Lord said this to me’ cause me great scrupulosity if I leave out even as much as a syllable. Hence if I don’t recall everything exactly, I put it down as coming from myself; or also, some things are from me. I don’t call mine what is good, for I already know that there is nothing good in me but what the Lord has given me without my meriting it. But when I say ‘coming from me,’ I mean not being made known to me through a revelation.¹⁰

This passage demonstrates St. Teresa’s self-acknowledged scrupulousness about what to attribute to her own mind and what to credit as a revelation from God. The thought of leaving out “as much as a syllable” causes her great distress, and she takes pains to ensure that her readers will recognize her signal phrases for mediated text. The dangers of interpretation for St. Teresa seem to be related to the problem of trying to use an imperfect means—in this case, language—to gain perfect understanding; this echoes her earlier discomfort with language (and the body) as the only available way of conveying the exquisite pain of prayer.

Unlike St. Teresa, Crashaw regards interpretation as a productive counterpart to affective piety and a way of engaging actively in one’s devotion. Correction and reinterpretation mark the occasion for Crashaw’s second ode to St. Teresa, “The Flaming Heart.” Itself an interpretation of St. Teresa’s story, the

¹⁰ *Vita*, Chapter 39, section 8, p. 270

heading—“Upon the book and picture of the seraphical Saint Teresa, (as she is visually expressed with a Seraphim beside her)”—appears before the poem to announce the image (see Appendix A) as its inspiration. The image’s foregrounding demonstrates Crashaw’s view that visual expression forms a powerful and observable aspect of devotion, a belief he put into practice by adorning the chapels in his earlier life and by printing etchings and images alongside his poetry. Like “the book” that inspired the image, the “picture” has great potential to teach others, but only if each interpretation aligns with what Crashaw deems an appropriate understanding. The beginning of the poem reads as a call to reinterpretation:

Well meaning readers! You that come as friends

...

Readers, be rul’d by me; and make

Here a well-plac’t mistake.

You must transpose the picture quite

And spell it wrong to read it right;

Read Him for her, and her for him;

And call the saint the seraphim.

Painter, what didst thou understand

To put her dart into his hand!

(1, 7-14)

From the outset, Crashaw codes the audience as willing (“well meaning”), “friends” amenable to his project. The direct address to “readers” in lines 1 and 7 shifts subtly to the verbal imperative that they “Read” (in this context, interpret) the image and the story differently, thus enlisting them as active participants moving toward his own understanding of St. Teresa’s significance. He includes himself in this process as an interpretive guide by asking the audience to surrender (“be rul’d by me”) to his reading as he explains its reasoning. His self-insertion as teacher, rather than mere poet/persuader, perhaps owes in part to the suspension of logic that he endorses; he hopes they will willingly follow him through a “well-plac’d mistake” and “transpose” the image in order to “read it right.”¹¹ In these lines, readers learn that there is a correct interpretation of a text (in this case, a visual one inspired by a textual one) and that the correct interpretation is not necessarily the logical one. By chiding the painter for underestimating St. Teresa’s significance, Crashaw empowers his audience to be suspicious, open-minded, and most importantly, *active* in their engagement with the text.

Leading by example, Crashaw demonstrates that readers have the power to engage actively with a text as he advocates for the superiority of his own reassessment:

¹¹ The implications for reversing the markers of gender in this poem are addressed later in the chapter.

Resume and rectify thy rude design;

Undresse thy Seraphim into Mine.

Give Him the vail, give her the dart.

...

Give her the dart for it is she

(Fair youth) shootes both thy shaft and Thee. (39-42, 47-48)

In these lines, Crashaw calls for a reinterpretation of St. Teresa's mystical role based on her impact rather than the facts of her story. He urges readers to reassign, or "rectify," the power to St. Teresa, whom he deems its rightful agent because of her lasting influence. Yet, the re-appropriation of power in this context becomes triangular, not simply reversed, as Crashaw showcases his own powerful role. As the speaker in the poem, he creates its imperatives; further, he highlights that the proper interpretation of the story is his ("Mine"). When the poem reaches a midpoint, the explicit call for reinterpretation at the beginning transitions into an enactment of that reassessment and its rationale. Primed from the first stanza to read actively, readers on alert may begin here to connect Crashaw's lessons at the beginning of the poem to their practical application, resulting in their own empowerment as readers and devotees. In this way, Crashaw at once exercises

and confers power: he privileges his own reading while training readers to interpret on their own in a like manner.

The end of the poem circles back to the beginning by once again aligning reading and action; in this case, however, the intensely subjective ending contrasts with the more objective beginning stanzas. Moving from rationalization to description, Crashaw now focuses on his personal experience of reading St. Teresa's autobiography in order to relate her potential impact:

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,

...

Leave nothing of my Selfe in me.

Let me so read thy life, that I

Unto all life of mine may dy.

(87-90, 106-8)

As in the beginning where he makes reinterpretation the occasion for the poem, Crashaw focuses on the necessity for active interplay between the text and its reader in the ending. Instead of explicitly guiding the reader, however, he makes

himself an example of an everyman reader who properly engages with St. Teresa's text. The curious distinction between the text and the super-text, or the "scatter'd shafts of light that play among the leaves" of the autobiography, provides one hint of what Crashaw sees as the new energy and possibilities that come from active reading. Taken to represent a manifestation of the reader's textual engagement, the shafts of light—or enlightenment—have the power to enter his heart (his "Brest") as well as his mind. The intense and intimate experience of reading St. Teresa's autobiography that he narrates in this section only becomes possible if the reader follows the instructions that he offers at the beginning of the poem about proper reading, interpretation, and engagement with the text; here and elsewhere in his poetry, reading well, according to Crashaw, involves the action of interpretation. Thus the subtle verbal echo of the verb "Leave"—from passive page of text in line 88 to act of self-evacuation in line 106—recalls the evolution of the noun "reader" (lines 1 and 7) to the verb "read" (lines 10 and 11). The word "read" even reappears in the very end as a reminder of the occasion for the poem, the lessons about active engagement it imparts, and the potential for personal devotional transcendence it unveils.

Like "The Flaming Heart," Crashaw's other ode to St. Teresa, "A Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable Sainte Teresa," highlights the value of St. Teresa's autobiography as a work with the ability to teach. In the following section, Crashaw narrates St. Teresa's quest for martyrdom by focusing on her potential to reach others as a devotional exemplar:

She'l bargain with them; and will give

Them God; teach them how to live

In him; or, if they this deny,

For him she'l teach them how to Dy. (51-4)

Appearing twice in quick succession, the word “teach” conveys Crashaw’s estimation of St. Teresa’s impact over those she encounters during her life. This impact extends beyond her lifetime, though, to reach those who read her autobiography—like Crashaw, the model reader of “The Flaming Heart” whose reading ignites the “scatter’d shafts of light that play among the leaves” of her story. A third layer of readership includes Crashaw’s own audience, readers of “A Hymn,” whom St. Teresa’s story (in Crashaw’s retelling) may instruct in devotion. Throughout the poem, Crashaw’s universalizing gestures, such as this audience layering, demonstrate the value he places on the potential for reading to inspire pious progress.

The proverbial construction of lines 33-34, “‘Tis Love, not Yeares or Limbs that can / Make the Martyr, or the man,” frames the sentiment with instructional resonance. This statement also widens the scope of the poem about St. Teresa to apply to martyrs more generally; extending further, they stretch to include “the man” (or the reader), linking St. Teresa, martyrs, and men through their capacity to love. Crashaw continues to blur the experiences of St. Teresa and those who may learn from her by collapsing the distance between himself and St.

Teresa, momentarily taking on her voice in line 57—“Farewell then, all the world! Adieu”—and then reverting back to narrator in the next line, “Teresa is no more for you.” At line 97, he begins a series of detailed imaginative musings on the process and heavenly aftermath of St. Teresa’s martyrdom, such as “How kindly will thy gentle Heart / Kisse the sweetly-killing dart” (105-6). The hypothetical construction, combined with the intricate visual details and ecstatic resonance of these projections, depict Crashaw as a hybrid poet/mystic, one who envisions Heaven, but only on behalf of another. Through this collapsing—and thus, universalizing—action, Crashaw uses himself as an example of how personal devotional imagination may allow readers to access a closer union with God.

Crashaw uses the prominent final lines of the poem to leave the reader with a lasting sense of how St. Teresa’s story may be more universally instructive. As in “The Flaming Heart,” which ends with his pleas to be taught, “A Hymn” ends with an outward-reaching lesson about learning:

Thou with the Lamb, thy lord, shalt goe;

And whereso’ere he settes his white

Stepps, walk with Him those wayes of light

Which who in death would live to see,

Must learn in life to dy like thee.

(179-82)

The impersonal pronoun “who,” which in this context stands for whoever—specifically, whoever overcomes death by living in Heaven—drives the poem’s shift to objectivity. By ending with a message about learning (as well as the key call-to-action word “must”), Crashaw emphasizes the importance of going beyond an appreciation of St. Teresa’s name and honor and putting into practice her ideals in one’s devotional life. His contorted phrasing is distracting—“who in death would live to see, must learn in life to die like thee”—but its reverse ordering (dying like St. Teresa, living like St. Teresa, seeing Heaven) allows him to transition from her life to the more universal life of the devotee. He notably emphasizes the “living,” and the conditional/imperative word “must” implies the story’s potential continued influence. He ends by connecting the deaths of St. Teresa and the impersonal reader and, by extension, aligns their lives by raising the reader to her heights as a devotional exemplar.

In a subtle verbal echo, Crashaw extends the connection between St. Teresa, himself, and the reader in “An Apology for the Foregoing Hymn: As Having Been Writ when the Author Was Yet among the Protestants,” his short poetic rejoinder to “A Hymn.” Grouping himself with the reader, he writes, “...Change we too our shape, / (My soul,) Some drink from men to beasts, O then / Drink we till we prove *more, not less than men*,” (34-36, added emphasis), which recalls the phrase he attributes to St. Teresa in the heading of “A Hymn,” “more than a woman.” The two poems share more than the gesture of linking St. Teresa with Crashaw and their readership; additionally, they both highlight the

value of proper interpretation, specifically when it involves relying on experiential understanding. Crashaw writes:

Thus have I back again to thy bright name,
 (Fair flood of holy fires!) transfus'd the flame
 I took from reading thee...
 ...
 ... 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. (1-3, 6-8)

A close contextual reading of the act of transfusion reveals its object to be the “flame” inspired by the text rather than the text itself.¹² By referring to the “flame” that, importantly, he “took,” Crashaw alludes to the act of interpretation that requires a personal investment in order for its proper activation. He supports this point in line 8 by emphasizing that his learning—that “Love is eloquence”—relies on a combined interpretation of intellectual (eloquence) and abstract emotional (Love) elements.

¹² This construction recalls the sentiment raised in “The Flaming Heart,” where Crashaw begs the “scatter’d shafts of light, that play / Among the leaves of thy large books” (87-88) to combine with his heart and “break in” (89) to his chest.

Later in the poem, he bridges intellectual/emotional and physical understanding by returning to the conception of the reader who internalizes St. Teresa's story, this time with a more imaginative and productive outcome:

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'd] into a nest
 Of little eagles and young loves, whose high
 Flights scorn the lazy dust, and things that die. (23-28)

The phrase "wondering reader" recalls the first audience address, "Well meaning readers!" in "The Flaming Heart." In both cases, he refers to his own experience of reading St. Teresa's autobiography while also gesturing outward to the porous mind of the poem's reader. He suggests that reading and interpreting these works correctly (actively) will lead to moral and physical exaltation, a transcendence (or "high flights") that contrasts with the lower states of passivity ("the lazy dust"). Crashaw's colorful metaphor of animation highlights this point, likening the result of textual engagement to a new birth, or hatching, and insisting on its personal internal significance. The attitude of superiority is significant here, as Crashaw appeals to the reader's desire to wield power and not only defy death but also

judge—or “scorn”—those who cannot. The appeal to the reader’s interest in exaltation above other living beings carries through to the end of the poem in the following line: “...Mortality / May drink itself up, and forget to die” (45-6). As in the Shakespearean sonnets that appeal to the young man’s ego, this rhetorical strategy entices readers with the promise of the power of immortality while also—through the insistent reader-to-reader connections—betraying Crashaw’s own access to this influence.

While “An Apology” could be considered an ideological extension of “A Hymn” in its treatment of reading and instruction, it serves as a generic departure in its hybrid critical/poetic form. “An Apology” speaks to Crashaw’s consciousness of being a translator and creator and shows contextual self-awareness as he negotiates distinctions, erasing those that he deems unnecessary, like the perceived barrier between English- and Spanish-language devotion: “Let no fond hate / Of names and words so far prejudicate. / Souls are Spaniards too: one friendly flood / Of baptism blends them all into a blood” (13-16). He strives, however, to uphold other distinctions, like his chosen label of Catholic, that construct his religious image. In Crashaw’s own words, this label marks the occasion for “An Apology for the Foregoing Hymn,” the subtitle of which reads “As Having Been Writ when the Author was Yet among the Protestants.” The apology he offers applies not to the content of “The Hymn” but to his designation as Protestant at the time of its writing.

Crashaw’s emphasis on self-defining as Catholic in “An Apology” offers one stirring of a tension he engages more largely between poetry as outwardly

directed and devotion as personally experienced. He melds the two in line 8, “I learn’d to know that Love is eloquence,” suggesting that love of God is analogous to its (masterful) expression. This line generically associates Crashaw’s creative works with St. Teresa’s while also gesturing to the act of learning or interpretation that informs the process. Her autobiography proves especially helpful in this project because of its own combination of personal mystical experience and inherent didacticism. Kieran Kavanaugh notes St. Teresa’s audience engagement in her autobiography, stating “The manuscript read more like a long letter, in which she frequently addressed the person for whom she wrote, carried on a dialogue with him, made appeals to his theological competence, and so on” (18). Crashaw interprets this manuscript anew in his poetry, triangulates a relationship among St. Teresa, himself, and the reader, and thus empowers his audience to read and interpret actively.

II. “And haste to drink the wholesome dart”¹³: Ecstatic and Didactic Woundedness

Crashaw and St. Teresa share a particular interest in the scene of the Passion to perform this interpretive work; Zuberi Itrat-Husein comments on this mutual attraction, claiming:

¹³ *Carmen Deo Nostro*, line 46

Crashaw must have read St. Teresa's devotion to the Passion in her *Autobiography*. She remarks that it was the contemplation of the Passion of Christ which helped her to concentrate on prayer: 'It seemed to me that the being alone and afflicted, like a person in trouble, must needs permit me to come near unto Him...I thought of the bloody sweat, and of the affliction He endured there; I wished, if it had been possible, to wipe away that painful sweat from His face.' (177)

Crashaw too "thought of the bloody sweat" of Christ during the Crucifixion. His Passion poetry depicts immediate, ecstatic, impactful, swollen, oozing corporeality. "O these wakefull wounds of thine!" he begins in "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord," "Are they Mouthes? or are they eyes?" (1-2). In both the title and the content of the epigram, Crashaw focuses on the wounds themselves rather than on the wounded being. In fact, wounds appear so insistently in his poetry that they often take on the agency of perception and communication, here as "eyes" and "Mouthes." Crashaw uses this active woundedness—visceral, extremely physical, and lasting—as an instructional tool that governs his exploration of the connection between the physical and the spiritual, the mortal and the divine, and the sinning and the redemptive.

Woundedness in Crashaw's poetry, I would suggest, has a twofold force: first, as an insistent literal presence in the poems, which use vivid physical images to enable access to affective piety, particularly through an appreciation of Mary's condition as suffering mother. Secondly, woundedness provides a means of

understanding the Passion's symbolic implications, which draw upon Christ's physical pain and excruciating suffering in order to signal the redemptive aspect of his sacrifice. Thus, depictions of woundedness occupy a dual role as literal pain and metaphorical transcendence, as old despair and new hope. Sarah Covington notes the paradoxical position and didactic possibilities of wounds, claiming that they "are both unique and collectively experienced, both repulsive and soul-opening—and in scars, memory-inducing—as they provoke the witness to look, and to look away; they are, finally, most intimately known to everyone in their redeeming debilitation" (178). Crashaw finds wounds particularly useful for explicating his desire to employ the physical—albeit in extraordinary configurations—to access the spiritual and to relate divine instruction. In this way, he means to wound—or to viscerally sting—the reader. For Crashaw, wounds are active, or, in his words, "wakefull" and "surviving," and their poetic rendering provides a point of entry for initial shock and confusion, followed by an interpretation of their significance, and finally, a contemplation of the lasting impact that they arouse. In the end, Crashaw links wounds, words, and weapons, all of which work to inspire productive reflections about Christ's sacrifice.

Tellingly, the most commonly depicted images of Christ in the medieval and early modern periods were as an innocent babe sitting with his mother and as a wounded man dying on the cross. Elaine Scarry observes that the Pietà, "the single image people again and again name as the most overwhelming...should be a conflation of the other two, for it at once pictures Jesus crucified and Jesus in the infant world of his mother's lap" (216). Crashaw recalls Christ's two states—

one nonverbal, one pierced, both disrobed and vulnerable—to develop another register of imaginative entry into Christian devotion. Generated most powerfully by combining Christ’s physical woundedness with Mary’s sorrow, the affective appeal of his Passion narratives rounds out their intellectual dimension with an insistence on the physical and the visceral. Noting Crashaw’s investment in Marian devotion, Maureen Sabine observes, “Crashaw does not look down on female materiality or maintain that it formed no part of Heaven. On the contrary, his poetry of faith turned its full, unblinking gaze on the maternal body which Mary had prepared for Christ. As he traced the contours of this body, he made it seem perfectly natural that Christ should feel at home in his mother’s lap” (149). Crashaw uses this maternal resonance—in its physical connection as well as its emotional investment—to inspire a sympathetic, affective reaction from readers of his Passion poetry.

Crashaw commonly constructs Mary’s emotional grief and Christ’s physical woundedness as overlapping, interactive, and reinforcing, as in his extended translation of the hymn “Sancta Maria Dolorum.” Line 20, “Her eyes bleed tears, His wounds weep blood!”, exemplifies this blurred experience and foreshadows the development of Christ’s wounds as sites for shared experience. Stanza 3 reads:

O, costly intercourse

Of death’s, and worse

Divided loves: while Son and Mother

Discourse alternate wounds to one another!

Quick deaths that grow

And gather as they come and go;

His nails write swords in Her, which soon Her heart

Pays back, with more than their own smart;

Her swords, still growing with His pain,

Turn spears, and straight come home again.

This translation imagines the Crucifixion as witnessed by Mary, the scene's devotional exemplar, whose powerful anguish manifests itself as combined emotional and physical pain. In turn, her grief—incited by his wounds—becomes physicalized, turning their shared woundedness into a means of connecting during this time of love “divided.” The complementary nature of this relationship begins with Christ's initial physical pain (“his nails”), which then translates Mary's grief into physical pain (“swords in Her”), which returns, stronger (“still growing with His pain”), to Christ, whose pain is compounded by Mary's grief. At each interval, the mutual understanding of the other person's pain serves to fortify their collective suffering, which is represented physically by the implements used to inflict the wounds: nails, swords, and spears. With the phrase “his nails write swords in her,” Crashaw implies that discourse of another kind is implicitly

involved in this exchange of wounds. “In Crashaw, suffering with Christ becomes a linguistic, poetic act,” writes Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, “in his poetry, the textual and the somatic converge” (147). Crashaw gives voice to Christ’s and Mary’s pain by making their wounds the means of “intercourse” and “discourse,” terms that imply a dialogue. In this way, wound sites are coded as part of a communicative, verbal, shared experience: “his nails write” in her, instructing her to both read and feel his pain.

As the hymn progresses, Crashaw expresses his hope to join in this intercourse of wounds between Christ and Mary. He creates the link between wounds and words—by enabling wounds to “discourse,” or convey information—as a way of bridging experience and understanding. He pleads for instruction in stanza 6: “O, teach these wounds to bleed / In me; me, so to read / This book of loves, thus writ / In lines of death, my life may copy it / With loyal cares” (51-5). In the phrase “teach these wounds to bleed in me,” Crashaw uses wounds to express his desire to acknowledge Christ’s physical sacrifice while begging for intellectual comprehension. He emphasizes the instructional value of wounds by affording them the agency to learn and, in turn, to teach him through their symbolic import. This stanza marks a shift between the initial portrayal of the extreme corporeality of the Crucifixion (wounds and wounding implements) and its intellectual or instructional possibilities (a “book of loves thus writ in lines of death”). While Crashaw registers the physical and emotional gravity of the Crucifixion, he considers how to transfer these experiences to himself and to the

reader through the poem. He seeks, then, not only to “read” or understand this experience but to “copy it” or make it legible to others.

As Crashaw focuses on the intellectual legibility of Christ’s sacrifice in order to advance this understanding, he remains insistent on the necessity of a corresponding—indeed inseparable—physical comprehension of Christ’s sacrifice. Akin to how the interplay between Mary’s emotional grief and Christ’s physical wounds generates an even stronger sense of affective piety, Crashaw’s self-assertion into this scene demonstrates a belief that the intellectual and physical facets of divine instruction necessarily reinforce each other. For this reason, he intensifies his desire to share in the wounding experience of Christ and Mary by exclaiming: “Come, wounds! come, darts! / Nail’d hands! And piercèd hearts! / Come, your whole selves, sorrow’s great Son and Mother, / Nor grudge a younger brother / Of griefs his portion” (75-9). This ecstatic outpouring echoes the brute physicality of Christ’s wounds in stanza 3, as it recalls the wounding instruments and wounded flesh that first incite Crashaw’s contemplation of the Crucifixion. He again seeks to share in this experience intimately, even rationing himself a prescribed “portion” of the grief.

He takes this desire to an extreme at the end of the hymn by appealing to Mary to teach him how to “mix wounds” with Christ: “Which these torn hands transcribed on Thy true heart; / O, teach me, too, the art / To study him so, till we mix / Wounds, and become one crucifix” (97-100). Again he pleads for communality and instruction, for the ability to intellectually (through “study” and “art”) “transcribe,” or articulate a bridge between physicality (“torn hands”) and

emotion (“true heart”). Crashaw looks to the figure of Mary, whose relationship with Christ is both physical (as his mother) and emotional (as his loving, grieving witness during the Passion), for this understanding. Though Mary’s unique position as Christ’s mother affords her access to a heightened mode of affective piety, Crashaw draws upon her simultaneous role as human devotee in order to instruct his readers in devotion. In this way, Mary and St. Teresa, Crashaw’s other devotional exemplar, are like Christ—both extraordinary and ordinary—and serve as figures for mediating the gulf between humans and God. Speaking to Mary’s prominent position in Crashaw’s faith, Maureen Sabine argues that he “comes to worship Christ through the medium of Mary,” an unpopular approach at the time that aimed to “suggest that Mary was an extraordinary and yet an ordinary woman” (159). By suggesting that Mary’s affective piety, or at least a version of it, may be available to the “ordinary” devotee, Crashaw alludes to a potential connection to God that includes physical and emotional, as well as intellectual, dimensions.

The “transcription” phase that necessarily makes the “discourse” of wounds in “*Sancta Maria Dolorum*” legible to Crashaw is collapsed in “*Charitas Nimia*” (or, “*Excessive Love*”), a poem that meditates on the insignificance of the mortal man who caused Christ’s suffering. After an engaging Donnean first question—“Lord, what is man?” (1)—Crashaw develops a direct correlation between wounding and writing. Toward the end of the poem, he invokes Christ’s wounds:

If my base lust

Bargain'd with death and well-beseeming dust

Why should the white

Lamb's bosom write

The purple name

Of my sin's shame? (55-60)

In these lines, wounding is writing. R. V. Young notes the inseparability of wounds and writing, claiming, "The ink in which man's sin is inscribed is the blood of the Lamb, pouring out of his wounds. Sin is thus dissipated in discourse; the incarnate Word takes sin upon himself by setting it down in his own blood" ("Crashaw and Biblical Poetics," 41). The incarnate Word, therefore, occupies both passive and active positions, as his wounds are the blood and the ink, the sacrifice and the discourse. While the phrase "purple name" evokes the violence of Christ's physically powerless, bloodied body, it also suggests agency in its ability to both "name" and "write." Since the same act involves the naming of the sin and the payment for it, Crashaw links woundedness and writing as active and redemptive.

Although "The Flaming Heart" does not directly concern the Passion, this poem includes a relationship between wounds and words that extends to include weapons; the linkage enables Crashaw to weave in and out of the physical and

spiritual realms, to manipulate determinations of agency and passivity, and to focus on the authorial or productive aspect of his considerations. He first connects words/poetry and weapons in lines 55-6: “What magazins [armories] of immortall Armes there shine! / Heavn’s great artillery in each love-spun line.” Both “immortal armes” and “heavn’s great artillery” are housed, significantly, in the armory of “each love-spun line” of poetry. The term “immortall,” used here to describe inanimate weaponry, has another, more particular resonance with poetry’s written, everlasting qualities. Having established a connection between words and weapons, he then links wounds to weapons:

For in love’s field was never found

A nobler weapon than a wound.

Love’s passives are his activ’st part.

The wounded is the wounding heart. (71-4)

Wounds are thus explicitly deemed the noblest of weapons. Crashaw stresses that passive wounds (“love’s passives”) may serve as active weapons (“his activ’st part”) and that the heart is most powerful when wounded because its woundedness activates its communicative agency. Within 20 lines, Crashaw connects words or poetry and weapons (lines 55-6) and wounds and weapons (lines 71-4); since words or poetry and wounds are likened to weapons in close

proximity, their implicit relationship is cross-linked. As weapons, or instruments with the potential to break through barriers, both words and wounds—typically considered inactive—have the agency to arouse a shocking, lasting intellectual impact.

In the case of his own poetry, Crashaw is both the writer and the reader, both the wounder and the wounded, and, as such, his poems become weapons of both self-destruction and self-instruction. At the same time, he uses himself as an example for other readers by instructing them to become simultaneously passive and active, to allow themselves to be pierced by divine understanding, but to access this understanding by active reading. Nandra Perry writes that Crashaw's "goal is not so much to signify as to transfuse the reader with divine love, whose plentitude ultimately precludes all speech" ("Tis Heaven," 12). Yet, only through speech and words is he able to strike the reader with the distorted logic, the inverted concepts, and the excessive, frenzied imagery that his poems convey. If successful, the transfusion that takes place will eventually abandon speech and logic, but not before necessarily using words as a point of entry, as a wound that will grant access and, in time, become the active contemplation of Christ's sacrifice. "Live here, great Heart; and love and dy and kill; / And bleed and wound; and yield and conquer still" (78-80), Crashaw writes in "The Flaming Heart." As he shows the heart of St. Teresa to be both dying and killing, both yielding and conquering, he hopes that this divine understanding—portrayed through the physical, wounded body—will extend to the yielding, wounded reader. As in "In vulnera Dei Pendentis" ["On the wounds of God hanging (on the

cross)"]], where "The thorns cruelly watered by this rain flourish / and hope forthwith to change into new roses" (11-12), these poems challenge the reader to engage both affectively and intellectually, to internalize the strong connection among wounds, weapons, and words, and to interpret Christ's piercing "thorns" as redemptive "roses."

In the end, St. Teresa and Crashaw share some foundational mystical priorities, such as an excessive, logically inconsistent, visionary aesthetic, a desire to engage in affective piety through considerations of physicality, and a mission to encourage others to take part actively in devotion. Yet in their missions they diverge, as St. Teresa—a mystic who channels revelations directly from God—feels reluctant to trust the language and interpretive ability that may interfere with what she deems "true vision." Crashaw, on the other hand, embraces interpretation as a means of complementing affective piety with an intellectual bent. He models the act of interpretation, in "The Flaming Heart" and in other poems, in order to train others to approach their faith with an active, open mind. In this way, the logical inconsistencies and extremity in his works serve as opportunities to think through what it means for Christ's "wakeful wounds" to be mouths and eyes, communicating information or truth to the devotee. For St. Teresa, however, the rational impossibility of water and fire reinforcing, rather than extinguishing, one another is a mystery beyond her power to understand. Perhaps as a non-mystic with mystical sensibilities, Crashaw sought a way to use the resources available to him—sensitivity to language, emotion, and imaginative possibility—to make his devotion practical rather than mystical. By performing

an act of interpretation on a figure who *denounces* interpretation, he demonstrates a certain pious resourcefulness, and possibly, even a sense of irony.

III. “This foot hath got a mouth and lippes”¹⁴: The Baroque

A fitting vehicle through which to explore an affective connection to God, woundedness provides one of a medley of excessive, dramatic, and shocking rhetorical resources that define Crashaw’s style as “baroque,” according to critics. Speaking to Crashaw’s engagement in this movement, Covington argues, “...the wound was also an emblem that contained within itself contradictions and oppositions that fit within the purposes of the parallel movement labeled baroque, with its bringing together the sacred and profane, the extravagant and the homely, all under the guise of a complex and penetrative emotionalism” (162). Crashaw’s Passion poetry achieves the “penetrative emotionalism” in Covington’s definition through a complex combination of affective and intellectual piety, which he inspires by focusing on the physical body (Christ’s, Mary’s, St. Teresa’s, his own, the reader’s) and training readers to interpret its symbolic implications. His depictions of baroque physicality involve sensory and logical confusion, immediacy, inversions (most strikingly as they implicate gender), and attention to excess that serve to distort a clear visual or intellectual understanding of his subjects. Michael Morgan Holmes explains Crashaw’s efforts to “move beyond

¹⁴ “On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord,” line 13

stiffly traditional and literal interpretations” as “crucial to Christian theology.” He continues, “This hermeneutic phenomenon provides a background for numerous other of Crashaw’s attempts,” as the poet advocates for readers to “write out and interpret naturalized precepts and traditions in strange new ways” (129). These efforts to engage the reader in the active processes of reconciliation and interpretation, which use rhetorical devices considered extreme or odd or baroque, operate ultimately in the service of a didactic project. While the extremity of the poetry, certainly its most memorable feature, tends to overwhelm the more calculated underlying efforts, the didacticism of these works is a foundational aspect of Crashaw’s personal and public devotion.

In its bizarre physical distortions, Crashaw’s poetry leaves the reader with an impression, rather than with a realistic depiction, of events. In the epigram “Luke 7. She Began to Wash His Feet with Tears and Wipe Them with the Hairs of Her Head,” Crashaw takes the notion of mixing blood and tears to a place of logistical impossibility. The epigram reads:

Her eyes’ flood licks His feet’s fair stain,

Her hair’s flame licks up that again.

This flame thus quench’d hath brighter beams,

This flood thus stained, fairer streams.

The remarkable evenness of the epigram's phrasing contrasts with the illegibility of the image that it depicts. Beyond the typical epigrammatic tidiness of the rhyme scheme, the organization of the words themselves imposes a uniform structure: "Her eyes' flood licks" is echoed immediately by "Her hair's flame licks," and "This flame thus quenched" is followed directly by "This flood thus stained." The logical irregularity of the acts that Crashaw describes, however, undercuts the regularity of these structures. He applies the verb "licks" to two disparate—even elementally opposite—subjects, one of water (flood) and the other of fire (flame). This distortion of expectations, particularly as it emerges from such structural steadiness, creates an impression of simultaneous sensory vividness and intellectual disruption.

In addition to his use of unexpected phrasing, Crashaw also challenges imaginative faculties by manipulating an economics of excess in order to depict memorable imagery. As we have seen in the short preface to "A Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable Sainte Teresa," he praises the virgin martyr for being "more than a woman," and his emphasis on the excess of her divine sacrifice continues throughout the poem. After marking her death as multiplied, as plural "Deaths, so numerous" (110), he writes of her greeting by angels in heaven, where "Thousands of crown'd Soules throng to be / Themselves thy crown" (166-7). Her heavenly crown thus becomes a massive coronet that contains and represents thousands of other crowned souls. This collapse of souls is enlivened by the immediacy of the action, the thronging and clamoring of many that condense to form her single crown. The thousand heavenly souls appear again at

the end of the poem, as Crashaw describes her divine girdle: "...thy rich zone / Sparkling with the sacred flames / Of thousand soules..." (172-4). Crashaw envisions Teresa in heaven as one entity representing many as she wears items (a crown and a girdle) that condense, contain, and collapse a multitude of souls onto her single body. This gesture of heavenly economy is achieved by appealing to the physical to express the magnitude of her intangible divine sacrifice; she wears these souls, which collect to bear witness to her glory.

Crashaw combines these techniques of synesthesia, intellectual disorder, and manipulations of excess in his critically maligned poem, "The Weeper," which succeeds in crafting altogether new, disorienting, lasting imagery. Stanzas 4 and 5 of the poem read:

Upwards thou dost weep,

Heaven's bosom drinks the gentle stream.

Where th' milky rivers creep,

Thine floats above and is the cream.

Waters above the heav'ns, what they be

We are taught best by thy tears and thee.

Every morn from hence

A brisk cherub something sips

Whose sacred influence

Adds sweetness to his sweetest lips.

Then to his music. And his song

Tastes of this breakfast all day long.

On a basic structural level, Crashaw pairs subjects and verbs to unnatural effect, creating sensory and intellectual confusion. For example, the “rivers” of Mary Magdalene’s tears do not flow, gush, stream, pour, or surge but “creep,” a verb that seems incommensurate with the movement of liquid. Crashaw uses similarly peculiar combinations in stanza 10 when he writes “Softly let them [the “poor drops”] creep,” and in stanza 13, when he adds, “Golden though he be, / Golden Tagus murmurs though.” The bizarreness of the image of liquid creeping upward to be drunk by the bosom of heaven relies, in part, on the foundational disorientation of a liquid that “creeps” or “murmurs.” The resultant synesthesia of the cherub whose song “tastes of this breakfast all day long” involves further logical displacement, as the “song”—passive and auditory—gains the active and animate capacity to “taste” as well.

In these stanzas, Crashaw combines his implausible sensory constructions with his tendency to represent divine interactions in terms of excess. Mary Magdalene’s tears do not merely enter heaven; her upward-moving stream of

tears floats even higher, pushing “above” and representing undiluted “cream” rather than milk. Further, the “sacred influence” of her creamy tears reaches the cherub and yet still “adds sweetness” to what Crashaw has already deemed superlative, his “sweetest lips.” This outlandish conceit surpasses itself in stanza 19, when the image doubles, becoming “...two faithful fountains / Two walking baths, two weeping motions, / Portable and compendious oceans.” Here, the teary rivers become disparate bodies of water, each of which indicates particular nuances that wash together in a liquid frenzy. Significantly, these liquid bodies gained strength and physical agency, as they are portrayed as “walking” and “portable.” Crashaw’s visual conception of the healing agency of Mary Magdalene’s tears undergoes shifts toward physicality that further destabilize its rocky foundation. In such cases, Marc Bertolaso argues that Crashaw invokes a deep response, but to “the concept embodied more than on any sensuous particular” (9). As a result of this intensely physical blur, the reader is left to contemplate a conceptual image that is at once vividly rendered and unintelligible.

The liquid ecstasy that Crashaw creates through physically insistent, yet spiritually charged, imagery results from conscious deliberation. In tracing patterns of rhyme and theme in Crashaw’s poetry, Mary Ellen Rickey notes, “They [Crashaw’s religious meditations] are, unfortunately, frequently dismissed as brilliant but somewhat jagged outpourings shaped by emotion alone and consequently random and haphazard. Actually, all of these show evidences of careful planning” (38). The intentionally chaotic effect serves as part of Crashaw’s project to use physicality as a means of depicting, experiencing,

praising, and relating to the divine. He endeavors to reach readers by impressing his visionary meditations upon them, by scarring them with initial images that require further sorting out and contemplation. In this way, Crashaw's poetry has a wounding effect, even when woundedness is not its primary subject; he uses confused, excessive physicality to convey the visceral sting of his divine subjects and hopes that a lasting imprint—a scar—will engender further productive or redemptive consideration.

In his effort to create a shocking impression upon the reader, Crashaw uses intellectually confusing verbal and visual constructions. On basic logical levels, he twists modes of sensory apprehension and uses imagery of excess to draw attention to how the physical realm interacts with the spiritual world. On a more visceral level, though, he makes these physical portrayals immediate and, often, somehow inverted. Drawing from Crashaw's own language in "The Flaming Heart," Deneen Sensai attributes these tendencies to Crashaw's project to use poetry as a means of reaching the reader, arguing that he "employs a poetics in which he 'spells' or rather, 'writes' it 'wrong' in order to ensure that it be read 'right'" (3). In the context of Crashaw's endeavor to have an impact on the reader, one might extend Sensai's interpretation to explain that Crashaw depicts it shockingly in order to ensure that it be impactful. To this end, he commonly inverts his ideas and images in straightforward and complex ways. For example, the final stanza of "The Weeper" ends with a simple inversion: "Crown'd heads are toys. We go to meet / A worthy object, our Lord's feet." In this ending, Crashaw takes an image typically associated with a position of power and

material wealth (the crowned head) and sets it against Christ's feet, which recall both the mortal function of walking and the divine resonance of his sacrifice. In addition to physically flipping the body, this conceptual inversion shows that the worthy "object" is actually Christ's lowly feet, rather than the meaningless "toys" or adornments of kingship. This simple example demonstrates how Crashaw uses an inversion to make the reader do the mental work, to be invested enough in the incongruence of the concept (here both the alignment of head and foot and the incongruence of devotional and political leadership) to think about it further.

A richer use of inversion, Crashaw's fluid treatment of gender allows him to access and operate within a grayer area of interpretive possibility. The explicit imperative to switch the markers of gender in "The Flaming Heart" —"You must transpose the picture quite, / And spell it wrong to read it right; / Read Him for her, and her for him; / And call the Saint the Seraphim" (9-12)—expresses Crashaw's reading of the body as potentially mutable, or at least, working in another symbolic register. This applies most strikingly to Crashaw's vision of Christ's wounded body during the Passion. Passive, wounded, and bleeding, Christ's crucified body—often surrounded by the bodies of Mary and other weeping women—seems to accord with Bynum's account of how medieval women understood Christ's sacrifice as a shift to the feminine. Bynum writes, "Christ's death on the cross was a symbolic reversal—for he became, not male (king or priest or recipient of nurture), but female (a lactating and birthing mother, nurturer of others)" (*Holy Feast*, 289).¹⁵ Crashaw's emphasis on Christ's body in

¹⁵ While Bynum's work addresses the devotions of medieval women, the raw associations of the

its liquidity and wounded vulnerability, coupled with his sustained interest in the affective piety of women, supports Bynum's reading of the crucified Christ's body as feminized.¹⁶ Yet his Passion poetry credits the mortal Christ with the understanding of the significance of his sacrifice, situating his woundedness within the context of typically male traits of control, power, and agency. Therefore, the speaker of "The Flaming Heart" calls for a gender reversal that is anomalous in its direct substitution; Crashaw's treatment of a feminized Christ more often describes a process of gender blurring at work in the service of a highly affective, emotive—and finally, didactic—project.

In "Luke 11. Blessed Be the Paps which Thou Hast Sucked," Crashaw demonstrates the instability of the gender binary as its breakdown forces a reassessment of expectations and power dynamics. The epigram reads:

Suppose He had been tabled at thy teats,

Thy hunger feels not what He eats.

He'll have His teat ere long (a bloody one);

wounded, bleeding, ever-present body in female devotional practices operate as a strategy in Crashaw's seventeenth-century works that aims to connect to the reader affectively. In reference to this strategy, Sabine notes that (in contrast to Donne and Herbert) "Crashaw pressures the reader to participate in a process which now seems 'foreign' in spirit to us. It is not unacceptably continental but medieval, yet beckoning us with an eccentric freshness from the remote past to abandon a proudly hoarded singularity of self and recover a common likeness to God which necessitates a redistribution of feminine and masculine gifts without demanding that men and women should cease to be considered different" (145). This "redistribution" may be another way of understanding the gender blurring for which Crashaw's poetry often advocates.

¹⁶ This reading takes an alternative view of Rambuss's recent efforts to situate Christic woundedness and penetrability in Crashaw's poems as masculine and homoerotic.

The mother then must suck the Son.¹⁷

The beginning of the epigram depicts a hypothetical mother-reader (with an inescapable allusion to Mary) who nurses Christ. Quickly, the lines transition from the literal act of nursing, or providing nourishment from mother's body to offspring, to the symbolic act of Christ's body providing nourishment to mortal souls. The site of this transition is the epigram's most graphic physical image: the bloody breasts (belonging either to Christ, as "the mother than must suck the son," or to the mother, as "he'll have his teat ere long (a bloody one)").

Representing the sins of mankind, the blood of the mother's breast needs the cleansing of salvation made possible only by Christ's bodily sacrifice. In this epigram, the expectations of gender roles (and, with them, power dynamics) become disordered when Christ becomes feminized, a mother figure who must be sucked. Bynum's definition of a woman as "nurturer of others" may be applied here to demonstrate Crashaw's relaxation of strict designations like male/female, powerful/powerless, and nurturer/nurtured. Instead, he operates within a foggier area of interpretative possibility, mixing the literal and the symbolic registers to promote devotion that engages readers through incongruity and unexpectedness and, ultimately, leads them to a singular form of piety.

¹⁷ The source of the epigram, Luke 11.27-28, reads, "And it came to pass, as he spoke these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.' But he said, 'Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.'"

Crashaw trains readers to make these interpretive leaps in his poetry; for example, he begins “Carmen Deo Nostro” with a physically shocking and spiritually charged inverted image. Significantly, the emblem of a padlocked heart (see Appendix B) appears before the 1652 edition of this poem. The *Norton Anthology* glosses this image: “The heart here has a hinge on the right, to show that it can be opened, but is sealed on the left with a scroll or phylactery inscribed with letters standing for the Word, which alone enables one to open the heart. Crashaw is said to have engraved this image himself” (1648). Through this handmade image, Crashaw demonstrates the importance he places on a visual, the stand-in for a physical, component to his devotional poetry. The poem takes this image as its point of departure in the first lines: “What heav’n-entreated heart is this / Stands trembling at the gate of bliss?” (1-2). This trembling, personified heart stands at heaven’s gates awaiting entry. While the reversal of inward (heart) and outward (body) is conceptually as straightforward as the “crowned head...Lord’s feet” inversion in “The Weeper,” the sheer physicality of this image is more overwhelming. Immediately following the hand-drawn emblem, the reader imagines a heart—not merely waiting, but standing and trembling, heavy and fearful. Speaking to the emphatically physical language of Crashaw’s poetry, Kimberly Johnson notes, “Perhaps the documented failure of most of Crashaw’s readers to spiritualize the physical is a consequence not of their ritual unpreparedness but rather of the poem’s insistence on language that refuses to give way to the spiritual” (“Indigestible Poetics,” 38). The language that frames this personified heart-throbbing image indeed highlights the physical over the

spiritual; yet, in the sheer bizarreness and “insistence” of this inward-outward inversion, Crashaw begs the reader to determine the significance of the metaphor.

While readers take time to sort out the inversions that Crashaw’s poetry presents—while they struggle to make legible what he has made illegible—they are struck by the immediacy and vibrancy of the poems. This immediacy comes through in the physical depictions of concepts (such as the throbbing heart at heaven’s gate), but also in the structural and tonal urgency, as well as the emphasis on action, in the poems. Crashaw seems particularly interested in enlivening his images of woundedness, which, in turn, he sees as didactic agents. He begins “On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord” with the ejaculation “O these wakefull wounds of thine!” to emphasize his belief in the instructional import, the active potential, of wounds. Similarly, the title of the divine epigram “On the Still Surviving Marks of Our Savior’s Wounds” indicates Crashaw’s concentration on wounds as not merely remaining, but surviving, or immortal. The epigram reads:

“Whatever the story of their cruelty, / Or nail or thorn or spear have writ in Thee / Are in another sense / Still legible; / Sweet is the difference: / Once I did spell / Every red letter / A wound of Thine, / Now (what is better) / Balsam for mine.”

Crashaw demonstrates that the legibility of Christ’s wounds is “still” fresh and urgent for him; the red letters that Christ’s wounds supply are his salvation, his balsam. The association of blood/woundedness and writing here again highlights the potential for active, surviving wounds and words to serve as means of both instruction and salvation.

The baroque excesses and inversions that characterize Crashaw's Passion poetry function not as haphazard outpourings but as carefully employed rhetorical devices in the service of training readers to understand Christ's sacrifice in a way Crashaw deems correct. One of the few critics who engage with Crashaw's didacticism, Gary Kuchar, writes that "Crashaw's texts must work to contain the rhetorical excesses that they employed in order to arouse readers to emotively charged devotion" (11). Yet Kuchar's argument implies that the "rhetorical excesses" have gained strength beyond Crashaw's design, that they have become a force he must "work to contain." Crashaw's excesses, instead, fit within his larger rhetorical project to inspire "emotively" and, I would add, *intellectually* charged devotion. Their leaky rejection of containment—the excesses, the inversions, and the gender blurring—creates their very didactic thrust. Crashaw's interest in exploring and exploding propriety (in a sense, the opposite of the baroque) may relate to his personal struggle to take ownership of his own piety by converting to Catholicism at a time when post-Reformation devotees sought to understand their relationship to God and to the church.

If, as Greenblatt asserts, "self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9), what kind of self, we might ask, does Richard Crashaw fashion in his Passion poetry?

To consider Crashaw's context, the unstable religious and political institutions in post-Reformation England afforded him the impetus to explore his religious identity and to depart dramatically from his father's Puritan household.

The didactic project of his work aligns with the tumultuous religious and political circumstances in which he wrote. His odes to St. Teresa both position her as a devotional exemplar and train readers to engage actively with text through interpretation (often by privileging feeling or sense over a more logical reading). Holmes speaks to the role of Crashaw's St. Teresa in reacting to the "politicized aesthetic programme" of using hagiology to support Counter-Reformation religious politics: "Crashaw reverses what we have seen to be canonization's usual role in upholding normative categories, and makes of it instead a vehicle for the discohering of prescriptive gender and national identities" (130). His depictions of the Christic woundedness and Marian devotion during the Passion inspire readers to affective piety, which is reinforced by the intellectual engagement that his baroque extremity requires. These rhetorical devices, agents of the reader's "discohering of prescriptive gender and national identities," work to create Crashaw's didactic project of preparing readers to face their faith with an open, porous interpretive mind—an asset during a time of religious institutional upheaval.

In his own life, Crashaw also had to evaluate his devotional beliefs and embrace a designation, Catholic, that he found more suitable to his mind and his heart. His early adoration of the Virgin Mary at Peterhouse emerges again when he positions women—the Virgin Mary, St. Teresa, and Mary Magdalene—as devotional exemplars in his poetry. Kuchar situates Crashaw's treatment of female religious figures within his context, noting that "the question of what it means to predicate an ideally devout subject in the theologically and liturgically

unstable conditions of early modern England often turns on how gender identifications work in relation to changing attitudes toward the embodiment of ideals in feminine personages” (10). Crashaw’s exclusive valorization of female religious figures, of their lives and of their affective piety, reclaims the older, more typically female Catholic mode that embraces the body as central to worship. A somatic emphasis in poetry resonates with the Catholic value of works-based devotion, as the body is the vehicle for action rather than mere contemplation. Greenblatt notes the implications of this value for self-definition in the period, claiming that “the Protestant emphasis on *inward* grace tends to obscure the implication of the body and hence to render public behavior incomprehensible or irrelevant” (78). Crashaw’s poetry and public image share a commitment to using the body to inspire action; his position as a religious leader in early life aligns with his role as a potentially influential affective poet, both figures who empower devotees to become actively engaged.

Yet Crashaw’s instructive, outwardly directed poetry empowers readers while also clinging to power: “Readers, be rul’d by me,” he begins in line 7 of “The Flaming Heart.” Although the line applies immediately to the specific instance of the poem (Crashaw’s guidance in redistributing influence to St. Teresa), the imperative language more broadly relates to Crashaw’s exertion of power. Making himself the interpretive devotional exemplar, he demonstrates the analytical practices that he trains readers to develop and advocates explicitly and implicitly for his own reading as correct.¹⁸ Cynthia Marshall’s understanding of

¹⁸ “You must transpose the picture quite / And spell it wrong to read it right” (lines 9-10)

the role of self-disintegration in the project of self-definition speaks to Crashaw's complicated relationship to power:

Because the narrative terms in which we have understood the so-called birth of subjectivity invest value in the emergent self, we have overemphasized its early dominance, for a surprising variety of popular texts indicate the considerable pleasure afforded to early modern audiences by experiences of shattering or dissolution... As a result, we inherit from the Renaissance not only a violent literary culture but also a notion of subjective identity partly molded through interaction with textual forms that cast pleasure in terms of dominance and submission, assertion and dissolution. (3-4)

The dissolution of Crashaw's identity may be understood in Marshall's framing as a controlled release of agency. Transferring his interpretive skills to readers by training them, he engages in a form of *imitatio Christi* by becoming, like Christ, both dominant and submissive in his sacrifice.

Reaching beyond poetic influence, Crashaw's imitation of Christ also places the poet himself—with the benefit of knowing future events—at the scene of the Passion. Like Donne's speakers' desire to be tormented in a way that matches Christ's suffering in the *Holy Sonnets*, Crashaw's gesture of inclusion creates a foundational comparison between himself and Christ. In "Sancta Maria

Dolorum,” for example, he deems himself a relation who deserves to experience Christ’s wounding and Mary’s emotional grief in the moment. “Nor grudge a younger brother / Of griefs his portion” (78-9), he begs. One interpretation might consider the demand he makes to insert himself into the Passion (as both wounded body and grieving heart) to be part of his poetry’s didactic project; he teaches readers to engage both aspects of their piety so they may access richer devotion. Another interpretation, however, might understand his self-inclusion at the Crucifixion as a presumptuous act, suggesting that his devotional capacities match those of Christ and Mary. A third interpretation may synthesize the two in the service of both social and personal pressures, resulting in a project of self-definition that fashions Crashaw—like St. Teresa—as a singular, confident devotional exemplar. Crashaw performs a similar act of simultaneous assertion and disavowal of power in “On Master George Herbert’s Book Entitled the Temple of Sacred Poems, Sent to a Gentlewoman.”¹⁹ The poem ends:

And though Herbert’s name do we owe

These devotions, fairest, know

That while I lay them on the shrine

Of your white hand, they are mine. (15-18)

¹⁹ Crashaw’s reactionary relationship to Herbert, particularly as its prioritization of inwardness contrasts Crashaw’s outward-directed project, will be explored further in Chapter Three.

After the superlative compliment that Herbert's poetic devotions are the "fairest," Crashaw alludes to his fellow poet's death and ends, significantly, with the simple possessive statement of reclamation. "They are mine" both encourages readers of Crashaw's poetry to trust his values and devotional influence and, taken another way, self-reflexively defines Crashaw as a conflicted agent of the word.

Chapter Two: John Donne's Multivocal Piety

Introduction

In response to a supervisor's directive to cover up her cross necklace, British Airways flight attendant Nadia Eweida filed a lawsuit in 2006 against the airline on the grounds of religious discrimination. British Airways changed its uniform policy to accommodate Eweida's cross (and other religious symbols) the following year; Eweida had, however, already appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, which—finding that her rights had been violated—ruled in her favor in January 2013.¹ The spirit of this recent episode, which engages the idea of public religious identity (here even “humanity”), recalls a similar church controversy over the Sign of the Cross in England some 400 years earlier.

When James came to power in 1603 after Elizabeth's death, he received the millenary petition from Puritans who objected to certain ceremonial church practices.² Subsequently, the Church of England addressed Reformed changes to public gestures of devotion that originated in Catholic worship, such as the Sign of the Cross during mass, in *The Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical*. Canon 30 permits the “lawful use of the Cross in Baptism” with the following explanation:

¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-21025710>

² The millenary petition led to the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, where, according to Neil Rhodes, “The Puritans won few concessions and the real ‘substance’ of the conference turned out to be the unscheduled suggestion from their representative, John Rainolds, for a new translation of the Bible” (174).

Yes, the Holy Ghost by the mouths of the Apostles did honour the name of the Cross (being hateful among the Jews) so far, that under it he comprehended not only Christ crucified, but the force, effects, and merits of His Death and Passion, with all the comforts, fruits, and promises, which we receive or expect thereby.

Secondly, the honour and dignity of the name of the Cross begat a reverend estimation even in the Apostles' times (for aught that is known to the contrary) of the Sign of the Cross which the Christians shortly after used in all their actions: thereby making an outward show and profession, even to the astonishment of the Jews, that they were not ashamed to acknowledge Him for their Lord and Savior, who died for them upon the Cross.

Thirdly, it must be confessed, that in process of time the Sign of the Cross was greatly abused in the Church of Rome, especially after that corruption of Popery had once possessed it.

Despite the allegation of abuse, the Church of England allows the Sign of the Cross during the sacrament of Baptism because of its ability to symbolize and impart the “force, effects, and merits of His Death and Passion” (and their attendant “comforts, fruits, and promises”).³ John Donne found himself

³ The writers of *The Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical* clarify that the Sign of the Cross may be made during Baptism only because it forms “no part of the substance of the

responding to this shifting, unstable, multivocal theological climate by adding his own voice to the chorus as a poet, a philosopher, a dissident, a convert, and a preacher. His poem “The Crosse,” for example, addresses controversy about the cross explicitly: “From me, no pulpit, nor misgrounded law, / Nor scandal taken, shall this cross withdraw” (9-10). His poetic investment in the symbolic cross—and, by extension, the Passion sequence itself—demonstrates how, for him, the scene of Christ’s death lives on and how even the world around him takes part in an “outward show and profession” of piety:

Look down, thou spiest out crosses in small things;
 Look up, thou seest birds raised on crossed wings;
 All the globe’s frame, and spheres, is nothing else
 But the meridians crossing parallels.
 Material crosses then, good physic be,
 But yet spiritual have chief dignity. (lines 21-26, “The Crosse”)

The speaker in these lines instructs readers to awaken their senses and interpretive capacities to embrace the natural symbols of Christ that surround them.

Characteristically, Donne then shifts to consider the “material” in opposition to the “spiritual” cross, noting the tension between the two.⁴ Donne’s response to the cross controversy in this poem demonstrates his belief that laws may be

sacrament.”

⁴ Ramie Targoff devotes her recent book, *John Donne: Body and Soul*, to this mediation, beginning with the fundamental assertion, “For Donne, the relationship between the body and the soul—a relationship he regarded as one of mutual necessity—was the defining bond of his life” (1).

“misgrounded” (9) and that believers must find ways to exercise their own agency. Establishing poetic agency affords Donne the means of responding to changes in his religious circumstances, such as the cross controversy; the subject of the Passion allows him to explore both lawful and theological contradictions (importantly, for Donne, the mortal/divine Christ) and to probe the unity and division of the physical and spiritual realms.

Like Crashaw’s Passion poetry, Donne’s poems reveal a keen, sustained interest in the physical—especially the violent—component of Christ’s bodily sacrifice. At times, Donne’s imagination of Christ’s pain moves into a realm of self-implication, as his speakers express a longing to imagine *and* experience a version of the Crucifixion. In “The Crosse,” for example, the speaker expresses this yearning by claiming, “Who can deny me power, and liberty / To stretch mine arms, and mine own cross be?” (17-18), and then reaffirming, “For when that Crosse ungrudged, unto you sticks, / Then are you to yourself, a crucifix” (31-32). Donne’s considerations of the Passion explore the manifestations of power and agency involved in the gesture of imitating Christ on the cross, as the phrase “Who can deny me power” suggests. To this end, his poetry engages consistently with the fundamental question of identity, a vexed issue in a period of religious, political, and social instability, especially for a convert with both a proud Catholic heritage and pride in his professional potential.

This chapter will explore Donne’s Passion poetry and its investigations and manifestations of subjecthood in order to gain insight into his priorities as a

religious poet. Distinguishing between Catholic and Protestant expressive modes, Michal Carl Schoenfeldt writes:

Whereas the goal of Catholic meditational writers is to imagine the self in the scenario of the Passion in order to cultivate the extreme passions it arouses, Donne, Herbert, and Milton discover the difficulty of that act of imagination, and stumble upon the corollary truth that the fitting object of sacrifice is the tacitly arrogant self that would claim to be able to respond appropriately to this event. (“That Spectacle,” 564)

Donne’s convert status complicates Schoenfeldt’s conception of the difference between Catholic and Protestant Passion modes, especially since Donne’s interest in expression of religious identity rehearses *both* Catholic and Protestant features and beliefs. For example, while his efforts to self-identify and forge a personal relationship with God demonstrate the reformed emphasis on inwardness, his frustrated “works” (in both senses of the term) lack the assurance in faith and grace, rather than merit, to engender salvation. Just as I argue for a reconsideration of Crashaw’s didactic Passion works as intellectually demanding (in that sense alone, even “Protestant”), I will explore the alternative affective potential of Donne’s works (as they, at times, present the speaker himself rather than Christ as the central subject of emotional engagement). Further, Donne’s Passion poetry—particularly in sonnet form—consciously uses formal stability to

contain conflicting theological content; this gesture suggests fluidity in his devotional and poetic modes that responds to his circumstances.

A brief biographical sketch of Donne's life will help to establish his priorities as a son, devotee, poet, husband, and preacher. Donne was born in 1572 into a Roman Catholic mercantile family in a relatively wealthy part of London.⁵ He witnessed a legacy of tumult resulting from his family's Catholic origins: most notably, the fate of his great, great uncle—Sir Thomas More—who was Lord Chancellor of England, the humanist author of *Utopia*, and a Catholic martyr (beheaded for treason). After Donne's father's death, he lived from age 4 to age 10 with his mother and stepfather, a Catholic physician. Between ages 9 and 11, Donne likely communicated with his uncle Jasper Haywood, who returned to England on a secret Jesuit mission in 1581. Jasper was indicted for treason in 1583 and imprisoned; anecdotes from Donne's later writings suggest that he and his mother visited Jasper in prison. In these cases, his Catholic family played an integral role in shaping his awareness of the interrelation of religion, politics, and ethics.⁶

After a private education at home, Donne entered Oxford at age twelve and later possibly transferred to Cambridge, where the Oath of Allegiance was discretionary, to study logic and rhetoric. Ages twelve through eighteen create

⁵ Donne's background information comes from a combination of biographical works by R. C. Bald, Dennis Flynn, and Arthur Marotti. The *Donne Variorum* provides information on dating and publication.

⁶ In more emphatic terms, Dennis Flynn writes: "A descendant of a group directly afflicted by enormous and penetrating social developments, Donne's personality stemmed from a family experience that influenced virtually everything he wrote" (394). See Flynn's "Donne's Family Background" for details about how Donne's family background "was a history of opposition to Tudor religious reform" (383).

what Dennis Flynn deems “the most pregnant of all puzzles confronting Donne’s biographer” (10) since accounts of Donne’s life at this time are conflicting. Meanwhile, the plague swelled in London, and Donne’s brother Henry was imprisoned (and died shortly thereafter of the plague) for harboring a Catholic priest. Perhaps prompted by the religious tumult surrounding him, Donne redirected his studies toward theology and canon law, alluding to his disappointment with both Catholic and Protestant religions in the *Satires*. Donne’s conversion from deeply entrenched familial Roman Catholicism to Protestantism (a reverse of Richard Crashaw’s conversion) cannot be traced to one moment or period.

Employed as a secretary for a highly ranking official (the Lord Keeper), Donne met Ann More, who lived in the house through family relations. Anticipating her father’s disapproval, they married secretly in the Anglican rite and were forced to leave after the Lord Keeper fired thirty-year-old Donne (on the urging of More’s father). Donne sought employment while living off Ann’s inheritance, fathered seven children, and engaged the patronage of Lady Bedford (whose literary court also included Ben Jonson) and Magdalen Herbert (mother of George Herbert and the recipient of the *La Corona* sonnets) during this time. A combination of biographical and stylistic arguments lead critics of the *Donne Variorum* to date his satires, prose paradoxes, and epigrams “before or soon after 1600” (lxix); editors believe he wrote the elegies in the 1590s, though “hard evidence for dating these poems is scarce” (lxi). Editors have more precise

information for *La Corona*, dating the series between 1607 and 1609.⁷ Critical evidence suggests that Donne wrote the *Holy Sonnets* between 1608 and 1610, though they did not appear in print until the 1630s.⁸ According to R. C. Bald, the years between 1607 and 1610 were “probably the most disturbed and anxious years of Donne’s life” (235). The publication of his political and satirical works *Pseudo-Martyr* and *Ignatius his Conclave* in 1610 led to King James’s request that Donne take religious office. He refused and instead found the patronage of the Drury family after swaying them with an elegy he wrote for their daughter, Elizabeth. He and Ann had another child, and he spent 1613 (the titular year of “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward”) and 1614 sick, nearly going blind, and making his final bid for secular employment. He briefly entertained the idea of publishing his manuscripts, according to a letter to a friend dated December 20, 1614, as “a valediction to the world, before I take Orders” (*Letters*, Oliver, ed., 9) before deciding they might reflect negatively on his position of Deacon and Priest of St. Paul’s chapel.⁹ He took orders and became a priest in the Church of England in 1615; to mark this occasion, he commissioned a fresh signature seal that displayed the crucified Christ on an anchor, strengthening his identification with Christ in his written correspondence. Donne returned from a trip in 1617 to learn that Ann died in childbirth at age 33. He was promoted to Dean of St. Paul’s

⁷ Annabel Patterson delves into the debate among Donne’s editors—Grierson, Gossart, and Gardner—about whether he sent *La Corona* to Magdalen Herbert in 1607 or to “E of D” in 1609 (70).

⁸ Achsah Guibbory notes the three exceptions, “Since shee whom I lovd,” “Show me dear Christ,” and “Oh, to vex me”), which appear after his ordination in the Westmoreland manuscript, suggesting that he may have written them later (“Donne’s Religious Poetry,” 231).

⁹ Explanations for Donne’s avoidance of publication (with exception to the *Anniversaries*) include both his value of exclusivity and his fear of professional—and personal—repercussions from his works’ irreverence.

in 1621 and battled a relapsing fever in 1623 (which prompted his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*).

He experienced periods of sickness and health until delivering his final sermon, *Deaths Duell*, to Charles I on the first Friday of Lent in 1631; this was considered by many to be his own funeral sermon as well. He lay for ten subsequent days in his shroud and commissioned a deathbed self-portrait, which featured the imagined moment of his resurrection. Death shifted from a subject of fascination in Donne's life and works to his ultimate fixation. Ben Saunders writes about this phase, "He prepared for that final date with assiduous care, posing for a portrait in his funeral shroud, keeping the resulting ghastly image by his bedside like a lover's picture, and roundly declaring, 'I were miserable if I might not dye'" (2). Published in 1633, the first collected edition of his poems reappeared five times in the twenty years that followed, with praise from John Marston, Ben Jonson, Izaak Walton (his first biographer), and Thomas Carew. Walton's characterization of Donne's personality also speaks to the struggles and tensions that he explores in his poetry: "The melancholy and pleasant humour, were in him so contempered, that each gave advantage to the other, and made his company one of the delights of mankind" (6).

The following sections will explore how Donne negotiates a sense of religious identity in poems about the Passion and its resonances. At times, comparisons to Crashaw's works in the previous chapter will illuminate similarities and differences in the two poets' approaches to the same subject.

Fundamental to this analysis is the consideration of each poem's speaker as 1) not Donne himself, as poet/speaker conflation limits interpretive possibility, and 2) speaking singularly in each poem, despite similarities across Donne's works.¹⁰ By resisting the identification of Donne with his different speakers, I hope to show how he explores and performs conflicting religious positions and identities; further, I aim to argue that this investigation is central to a comprehensive understanding of the poetry. Complicating this practice, the editors' note on the *Holy Sonnets* in the *Donne Variorum* reads:

A signal feature of the manuscript transmission of the *Holy Sonnets* is that none of the poems has a history of individual circulation. However ordered, these sonnets invariably traveled in groups, a fact suggesting that the concept of sequence was integral to Donne's understanding of the genre from the very beginning" (lx-lxi).

By considering each poem (even poems that form groups) as a singular articulation—rather than studying the poems collectively as articulations by a single, unifying speaker—I hope to more clearly hold steady the contradictions that inform Donne's rehearsal of identity.¹¹ The first section reads the longest and

¹⁰ The exception to the second condition is *La Corona*, a series of seven linked sonnets with a repeated line connecting the sequence. The specific form of the series begs for its consideration as a whole with parts, rather than as complete sonnets in themselves. In "The Religious Sonnet," R. V. Young refers to the sequence as "unequivocally a single poetic structure" and argues, relatedly, that the sonnets "are thus mutually interdependent for the manifestation of their full significance" (221).

¹¹ Through this delineation of poetic articulations, I commit one of the "sins" that Richard Strier lays out in his article, "Going in the Wrong Direction: Lyric Criticism and Donne's 'Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward.'" While Strier believes that "we should restrict talk about

chronologically latest of Donne's Passion poems, "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," as a frustrated exercise in coping with life in the aftermath of salvation. The second section on the *La Corona* sonnet sequence explores how the speaker exercises deferral by substituting form for content. Finally, the third section offers a new approach to reading the critically saturated *Holy Sonnets* as self-conscious dramatizations of engaging in the act of self-definition.

**I. "that sacrifice, which ransom'd us": Agency and Selfhood in
"Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward"**

More than his other works, Donne's poem "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward" encourages conflation of poet and speaker by biographers and critics alike. The overlap is certainly tempting; the speaker narrates his struggle to ride physically westward while his "Soules form bends toward the East" (10) to the scene of the Crucifixion on Good Friday; meanwhile, Donne himself—always struggling to reconcile body and soul—was also riding westward on horseback on Good Friday in 1613 when he wrote the poem.¹² Critics use the tidiness of this overlap to offer a wide range of interpretations of the speaker's (and Donne's) journey. A. B. Chambers describes it as "a departure from the Christian path, a

personae to cases where the speaker has clearly specifiable differences from the historical author" (14), I believe that, even when biographical information may place the poet in the circumstance of the poem, the interpretive possibilities multiply when the readings accommodate dramatic exploration, especially as it relates to identity construction. Further, "personae" may be a misleading term in that it assumes fully articulated beings. Rather, I consider the speakers of Donne's Passion works to be products of the same sensibility.

¹² John Stubbs writes that Donne rode between houses of his patrons on this day. From Polesworth (in the east), the house of his friend Henry Goodyer, he went westbound to Wales, where he met Sir Edward Herbert at his home, Montgomery Castle (286). Perhaps his phrase "span the Poles" (line 21) was inspired in part by his departure from Polesworth.

turning from light to enter the ways of darkness” (48), while Barbara Lewalski reads the exercise as “the speaker’s failure to conduct a traditional ‘deliberate’ Good Friday meditation” (*Protestant Poetics*, 278). Joe Glaser favors a conversion narrative, claiming that the poem “provides the clearest evidence we have as to Donne’s attitudes as he moved toward ordination in the Anglican Church” (169), and Frances Malpezzi reads the poem’s physical symbolism to support how the journey describes “the paradigmatic earthly pilgrimage through life to death and eternal life in the celestial city of the new Jerusalem” (26). William Halewood’s interpretation resonates with that of Chambers and departs from Lewalski’s in believing the subject to be “a radically Protestant meditation on sin and salvation—thus *about* sin and salvation, not about meditation” (218). To this rich and varied body of criticism, I hope to add another perspective by understanding the speaker’s persistent self-referentiality to be central to the poem. Considering the poem as the speaker’s exercise in rehearsing and establishing selfhood through manifestations of agency offers powerful mediated insight into Donne’s own negotiation of identity.

Tracing the evolution of the speaker’s agency through the 42-line poem from beginning to end will provide insight into his values and priorities as they develop. The poem begins in a detached, expansive, philosophical frame (evocative of the rhetoric Donne studied at Cambridge), which showcases the speaker’s facility with language and argument:

Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,

The intelligence that moves, devotion is,
 And as the other Spheares, by being growne
 Subject to forraigne motion, lose their owne,
 And being by others hurried every day,
 Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:
 Pleasure or business, so, our Soules admit
 For their first mover, and are whirld by it. (1-8)

The regularity of the logical construction that opens the poem—“Let” *this*, “then” *that*—quickly collapses under the expansion of the idea. The expectation that the continuation “And as” (3) sets up does not find its corollary *then that* phrase; instead, the conceit builds to accommodate more information, signaled by “And being” (5), and again hangs without a resultant action until the final, syntactically confusing “obey” (6) at the end of the thought. The speaker underscores his idea of the soul’s derailment by posing and then himself derailing a straightforward recognizable verbal frame. This subversion leaves the reader with the sense that the speaker exercises a highly sophisticated mastery of mechanics and language. Even the pretense of organizing and containing the amorphous, enigmatic soul into a shape—or, in another register, into language—suggests the speaker’s belief that the soul resists organization, containment, and control. At the end of this eight-line segment, the speaker conveys a twofold expression: first, his potent mastery of language; and, secondly, that mastery’s impotence in the face of the greater themes he explores.

Despite his powerful facility with language, the passive constructions in this section reflect the speaker's feeling of powerlessness as his soul encounters outside stimulus. He emphasizes the soul's lack of agency in lines 3-4 with the phrase "by being growne subject to foreign motion." Carefully avoiding active voice, "growing," he instead favors "being grown" as it accommodates "subject to," a phrase that explicitly denotes passivity.¹³ He further highlights submission with the emphatic supplement "by others" (5) when "being hurried" alone would have conveyed the thought. The context of this section establishes that the "foreign motion" (4) and "pleasure or business" (7) that steer the soul off course are negative influences. These forces cause chaos, having a "hurried" (5) and "whirld" (8) effect; additionally, their impact goes against the nature of souls, inciting them to "lose their own" (4) motion and disobey their "natural form" (6). The speaker's foundational claim dictates that devotion should govern the soul's path, and its elaboration explains that foreign or earthly motions interfere with that natural path. Inflecting this binary, however, is the sense of powerlessness that comes from the inability to control one's soul, as it either falls prey to outside forces or serves God. The narrative content also reflects the speaker's metacommentary about his own agency, as he finds his power in language, the resource that fails to forge a constructive role to facilitate an interaction with God.

The next lines connect the introductory philosophical frame to the speaker's own concrete position as a devotee on Good Friday with the hinge word "hence":

¹³ Anthony Bellete describes this poem as "the most carefully and deliberately wrought of all Donne's devotional poems" (347).

Hence is't, that I am carried towards the West
 This day, when my Soules form bends toward the East.
 There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,
 And by that setting endless day beget;
 But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
 Sinne had eternally benighted all. (9-14)

The passive phrase “I am carried” (9) works both to create continuity with the previous section and to break with the philosophical abstraction of the opening by announcing the speaker’s presence in this moment. His first use of the first-person in the active voice, “I should see” (11), conveys the immediacy of his vision. Though couched in the subjunctive/imperative *should*, the section finds detail and specificity in the modifier “this” of “this Crosse” (13). A less precise choice would have been “the Crosse,” or even “his Crosse,” but “this” suggests that the speaker has envisioned the Crucifixion before and that the scene lingers in his immediate mind. A quick paraphrase of this section might read as follows: The speaker travels westward when his soul longs to be in the east, the site of the Crucifixion; further, a state of sinfulness (night) would have been the mortal condition had Christ’s death not prevented it. On the more straightforward level, the reader bears witness to the speaker’s understanding of salvation and acknowledgment of his failure to commemorate the day properly.

However, a closer reading of the speaker's exact language yields an interpretation that complicates his gratitude. The phrase "endlesse day" (12)—which, on the surface, connotes the state of salvation that Christ engendered—resonates with "eternally benighted" (14), even though the latter imparts an action. Seemingly opposite (endless day as salvation and eternal night as sin), these phrases share the idea of infinity through the terms "endless" and "eternally." Considered alongside "hurried *every day*" from line 5, a sense of frustration in the hopelessness of a state (even a positive one) that is "endless" or "eternal" pervades the sentiment. Comparing "endlesse day" and "eternally benighted" in terms of the states that they express also strengthens their association. While "benighted" in context functions as a verb, taken in an alternate sense, the condition it captures—that of a world with sin—indicates a circumstance rather than a specific moment. "Day," on the other hand, can be measured, contained, and—perhaps most importantly—moved beyond. In this way, "daytime" or "daylight" would have better complimented "benighted" as a vague, positive condition; yet, the speaker chooses the more urgent, immediate, specific term "day," suggesting that Good Friday—with Christ on *this* cross—lives endlessly in his mind.¹⁴ "*This* crosse" (13) echoes "*this* Day" (10) to suggest the speaker's own cross to bear, the endless debt that he owes to Christ and that he cannot possibly repay.

The concentration on the speaker's specific account of the Passion ("*this* Crosse") conveys a subjective, personal description of the scene that supports the

¹⁴ The homophones "Sunne" and *son* (Christ) strengthen this connection between Christ and day(light).

poem's focus on him. Here the speaker diverges from Crashaw's Passion works, which repeatedly emphasize the outward potential impact of narrations of the scene, as in "Charitas Nimia": "Why should the white / Lamb's bosom write / The purple name / Of my sin's shame? (57-60). While Crashaw does reference himself as everyman sinner in the excerpt, he places the lingering focus on Christ's pain (the action and impact) rather than on himself as its agent. On the other hand, the speaker of "Goodfriday" is himself the central subject of the Crucifixion, as the next section demonstrates:

Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
 That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
 Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
 What a death were it then to see God dye?
 It made his own Leiutenant Nature shrink,
 It made his footstool crack, and the Sunne wink. (15-20)

The core of the sentiment is its impact on the speaker, who couches "that spectacle" between phrases signaling his self-consideration, "dare I almost be glad" and "too much weight for mee." Again, the more generous reading of the speaker's sentiment in lines 15-16 would interpret "too much weight" as too emotionally heavy or psychologically grave for the speaker to see or bear. Yet, these lines could also, alternatively or simultaneously, signal the agitation the speaker feels at his powerlessness in the situation. "Dare I almost be glad" allows

the speaker to test out different, potentially inappropriate, reactions to the Passion, and it points to his layers of feelings about living in the aftermath of salvation.

The speaker does a calculus of his predicament in lines 17 and 18: If seeing God, for mortals, means dying, then what does seeing God die mean? The question that he poses in line 18 does more than merely point to a theological query; it highlights the incommensurability of power in God's and man's stations and the speaker's discomfort with the imbalance.

The next section again focuses on the speaker's own experience as potential witness to the Passion while situating him in the context of the grand scope of the opening:

Could I behold those hands which span the Poles
 And tune all spheres at once peirc'd with those holes?
 Could I behold that endless height which is
 Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
 Humbled below us? Or that blood which is
 The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
 Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
 By God, for his apparel, rag'd, and torne? (21-28)

Echoing "this Day" (10) and "this Crosse" (13), the phrases "*those* hands" (21) and "*those* holes" (22) appear at the exact center of the poem to add a sense of specificity to the imposing wider world of "Poles" (21) and "spheares" (22). By

juxtaposing these two realms—one vague/macro and one detailed/micro—the speaker shows the difference in scale of divine and human existence. He notes that, even in mortal form, Christ accomplishes feats unavailable to men, such as enriching dust with his blood to form dirt.¹⁵ He also proves that he has meditated on this image: this day, this cross, those hands, and those holes in that specific mortal/divine hybrid body. Thus Christ’s “endless height” (23) resonates with the “endless day” evoked in line 12 as a presence endlessly in his mind because of his powerlessness to cope with its enormity. In this way, the poem allows the speaker to share the devotee’s general frustration over endlessness, a condition that he combats by locating himself on a particular journey at a particular time as he fixates on Christ at the pivotal point in his mortal life. With this gesture, though, he likens himself to Christ as both men suffer their fates: one as a powerful savior who ends eternal sin and one as a powerless devotee who lives with the guilt of eternal salvation.

The repeated interrogative “Could I behold” resonates with the earlier phrase “Dare I almost be glad” and with a similar sentiment in the poem “The Crosse,” a meditation on the everyday symbolic pervasiveness of the Passion. The speaker of “The Crosse” begins by asking, “Since Christ embraced the cross itself, dare I / His image, th’image of His cross, deny?” (1-2) and later echoing, “Who from the picture would avert his eye?” (7). The speaker implies a sense of obligation that the devotee experiences: of course the speaker dare not deny the

¹⁵ Malpezzi notes the 17th Century belief in the curative properties of Christ’s blood, explaining, “In medieval and Renaissance art there are a number of visual representations of Christ’s blood making dirt of dust. Usually at the scene of the crucifixion the ground is dried and cracked around the cross but dark and damp at its foot, and sometimes fertile with flowers as the blood of the second Adam renews the dry souls of those who share in Adam’s sin” (27).

image (and goes on to let it unfold), and of course no one would avert his eye from the picture. Yet, considered together, the prominence of the question as the poem's opener, its reiteration, and the repeated appearance of "Could I behold" in "Goodfriday" suggest Donne's interest (across poems and speakers) in exercising the power of denial. Speaking to the more implicit insinuation of the question in "The Crosse," Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen argues:

[I]t also opens up the possibility of averting one's eyes from Christ's agony in the first place, and this possibility has already affected the speaker's own spiritual perspective at the outset. Indeed, the speaker's inner distance from affective devotion to the Passion is in fact the central reality of the poem. (110)

In each poem, the speaker's self-reflection (especially as it involves his agency) creates this "inner distance from affective devotion," which suggests that Donne's Passion poetry, in these cases, rehearses a concern with the sacrifice of power that affective piety necessitates.

In contrast to Crashaw, who creates and savors opportunities for affective engagement, the speaker of "Goodfriday" seems to avoid affective piety; this appears strikingly in his evocation of Mary. Much like his self-directed focus on the scene of the Crucifixion, the speaker's allusion to Mary serves to develop his own inner feelings rather than to reflect on hers:

If on these things I durst not look, durst I
 Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
 Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus
 Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us. (29-32)

The speaker's reference to Mary's presence during the Passion recalls Crashaw's sustained interest in Mary's role as Christ's grieving mother. However, compared to Crashaw's portrayals of Marian devotion—inspiring an affective, visceral, and sympathetic contemplation of Christ's mother's suffering (recall their “discoursing alternate wounds to one another” from *Sancta Maria Dolorum*)—the speaker of “Goodfriday” offers a more intellectually bent, sterile account of her role. Characterized as a business partner rather than as a grieving parent,¹⁶ Mary serves to strengthen the speaker's feeling of subjection in the poem. The phrases “Gods partner” and “furnish'd thus *half* of that Sacrifice” depict the Passion in economic terms as they parcel out ownership and quantify suffering. For the speaker, then, Mary alone appears to have surmounted the obstacle that human devotees face (and the source of his frustration): their lack of power that would enable them to take part in Christ's sacrifice in a meaningful way.

The most telling phrase in this section, however, and the one that governs the spirit of the poem, includes the continuation of line 32: “that Sacrifice, *which ransom'd us*” (32). Well suited to the section's earlier economic terms, the idea of ransom elaborates on the concept to suggest an unbalanced power dynamic. The

¹⁶ While the single adjective “miserable” (30) describes Mary, the representation of her grief centers on its impact on the speaker rather than on herself.

“us” that ends the line creates a sense of an us-and-them dichotomy in which the speaker finds himself to be an “us” wishing to be a part of “them.” Crashaw too expresses a desire to be part of an “us” in some Passion poetry; for example, he explicitly begs for a portion of grief in *Sancta Maria Dolorum*: “Come, wounds! come, darts! / Nail’d hands! And piercèd hearts! / Come, your whole selves, sorrow’s great Son and Mother, / Nor grudge a younger brother / Of griefs his portion” (75-9). Like the speaker of “Goodfriday,” Crashaw (here the “younger brother”) quantifies Passion suffering and longs to carve out a portion of it for himself. The spirited eagerness of Crashaw’s sentiment, however, lacks the bitterness and discontent of the speaker in “Goodfriday,” who focuses on his obligation rather than on the expression of astonished gratitude conveyed by Crashaw’s line “Nail’d hands! And piercèd hearts!” (76). Ransom is the consequence of salvation that the speaker of “Goodfriday” mourns, a ransom that haunts him “endlessly” from the position of a mortal devotee who cannot pay his debt.

The poem’s final lines introduce graphic, violent imagery that appears in both Donne’s and Crashaw’s Passion poetry:

Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
 They’re present yet unto my memory,
 For that looks towards them; and thou lookst towards mee,
 O Saviour, as thou hang’st upon the tree;
 I turne my backe to thee, but to receive

Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
 O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
 Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
 Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
 That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face. (33-42)

The sense of movement that the speaker creates with the phrase “as I ride” is undercut by “present yet unto my memory,” which recalls the static perpetuity of the endless day. Since the speaker cannot actually draw upon a memory of the day, perhaps “these things” refers in another way to his burden, the “ransom,” rather than only to the details of the Crucifixion. The speaker’s sudden apostrophe to Christ, “O Saviour” (36), gestures to the possibility of a conversation, dialogue, or exchange; yet, in this context of unequal partnership, it lays a foundation for his shocking declaration “I turne my back to thee” (37). Desperate to engage in self-assertion through action, the speaker resorts to presenting himself as a pious failure seeking Christ’s punishment. As a disappointment, he may interact with God, from whom he demands chastisement: “O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee, / burne off my rusts, and my deformity” (39-40). His series of imperatives allows him to create a sense of self by asserting his presence meaningfully and physically, allowing him to escape the burdens of endless contemplation and hopeless grief. Not Christ but the speaker, therefore, forms the site of affective piety in the poem, and the reader is in the position of pondering the speaker’s predicament rather than focusing mainly on Christ’s sacrifice.

The centrality of the speaker's experience of living in the aftermath of the Passion, rather than of Christ's experience of being crucified, suggests his driving desire to define himself in relation to Christ. Nancy Selleck writes that Donne's use of physical imagery is "often degrading in Bakhtin's regenerative sense" as it works "in the interest of renewal or salvation." She continues:

In its own enlivening way, then, Donne's intensely physical imagery brings grotesque realism into the realms of both love poetry and Christian doctrine. And in this way, his emphasis on the body is not a means of self-involvement or self-assertion, but a way of representing the self's connection and even subjection to *other* bodies, souls, and persons—including the 'persons' of God. (59-60)

Selleck's explanation might apply more readily to Crashaw, who also demonstrates a desire for self-evacuation in the interest of rebirth. "The Flaming Heart," for example, ends with his appeal to St. Teresa: "Leave nothing of my Selfe in me. / Let me so read thy life, that I / Unto all life of mine may dy" (106-108). Begging to become empty of himself and porous to St. Teresa's visionary instruction, Crashaw models proper engagement with religious texts for his readers: "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" (87-90). Selleck's reading accommodates Crashaw's approach to forge a meaningful, physically charged relationship with others who

may bridge the gap between the mortal and divine realms (here the visionary St. Teresa). However, the reading fails to capture the complexity of the speakers' plights in Donne's Passion poetry. In order for connection (physical, emotional, spiritual), or even subjection, to be possible, Donne's speaker in "Goodfriday" must realize and express his identity, which—judging by his frustrations—seems inseparable from his ability to assert his agency.¹⁷

Schoenfeldt addresses the speaker's ironically empowering disavowal of power, noting,

The poem's conclusion pointedly juxtaposes the speaker's horrified refusal to look at God with a sense of the mortal subject's complete visibility before God. The speaker cannot return God's gaze, he says, until God has properly punished him. Although Foucault and feminist film theory have taught us to conceptualize the gaze as an inherently intrusive, even oppressive phenomenon, Donne was fascinated by a contrary notion: the immense comfort that can emerge from a sense of complete visibility before God, and the corollary fear that God will not deign to bestow such a gaze upon him. (568)

¹⁷ Richard Strier argues that Donne's desire to self-identify is linked to his rejection of Calvinist doctrine: "When Jesus looks toward Donne from the cross, Jesus presumably knows at whom He was looking. He knows Donne as a sinner, as an imperfect being, but He does know Donne then—as an actual, historical person. The real meaning of the prayer and fantasy seems to be closer to something like 'That I may know me.' Donne does not want to know himself as a fallen person vis-à-vis God—Calvin's prescription for self-knowledge. Donne wants to know himself as perfect" ("Going in the Wrong Direction," 23).

The argument that the speaker desires to be the object of God's gaze may be extended, in this case, to his sense of a *constructive* identity. The endpoint of the speaker's imperatives, that God "mayst know" (42) him, suggests his determination to be acknowledged. Whereas Crashaw would likely have written from the other perspective—that of desiring to know God—the speaker of "Goodfriday" yearns for God to know him, a self-centered focus that points to his own fears about more than just his lack of agency, but at their core, about his unsubstantiated identity.

Critics interpret the final line of the poem—"and I'll turne my face"—in multiple ways: as a turning away from sin and toward grace, as a transition from death to eternal life, as a symbolic embracing of the Passion and its significance. In keeping with his life and works, Donne likely meant to yield many possible interpretations, even conflicting ones, at once. One that has not generated critical conversation, though, is its bearing on the previous line, "Restore thine image" (41). Immediately following the directive "Burne off my rusts, and my deformity" (40), "Restore thine image" may continue the same thread of the coin metaphor. Glaser's explanation of the "fires of reminting" provides helpful context for the identity implications of the coin metaphor: "They not only burnt away rusts and deformities, but offered a fresh start. Each piece of money, no matter how battered, emerged bright and clean, ready for a new career" (174).¹⁸ Though Glaser's explication of the coin metaphor supports his interpretation of how the

¹⁸ Glaser details this process as he relates it to identity, "But the more thoroughgoing process implied at the end of 'Goodfriday' involves a total change of identity, a change Donne often prayed for. Bad money—clipped, hollowed, defaced, worn, or corroded coin—was called in, melted down, purified, and reminted as bullion. The fires of this reminting appealed strongly to Donne" (174).

poem relates to Donne's life at the time of its composition, the idea of reminting as a means of forging a new identity (out of the same material substance) also informs the final promise "I'll turne my face."¹⁹

The speaker may, on some level, be advocating for Christ to permit or perform a version of *imitatio Christi* through him. The punishment of violent burning for which he begs—to remove his sins and moral deficiencies—imparts a sense of brutality that connects him to Christ through the physical abuse they both endure (or seek to endure) on Good Friday. Immediately after his supplication for punishment, the speaker pleads, "Restore thine image," with the lingering suggestion that he do so "...in me." This interpretation would imbue "and I'll turne my face" with a meaning of change rather than directional shift. In this vein, the speaker proposes that his face be changed in the likeness of Christ, a proposition that reflects a desire to inhabit a position of equality, or at least a position of some agency. Alternatively, "Restore thine image" with the possible addendum "...in me" may signify the speaker's desire to revisit the scene of the Passion by returning to a time when sinners needed redemption. If so, this reenactment casts the speaker in the role of Christ, as the knowing recipient of abuse. Either way, the speaker entertains the idea of imitating Christ—a bold gesture that indicates his discomfort with his lack of agency as a human devotee living in the aftermath of salvation. Thus the "Let, then" frame that opens the poem sees its corollary "If, then" construction at the end; only, this time, the

¹⁹ Glaser continues by concluding, "In 1613, worn down by unresolved feelings of guilt over his apostasy and forced to acknowledge the hopelessness of his secular ambitions, Donne came to feel that his own suffering entitled him to such a new beginning" (174).

frame highlights the speaker's assertion of power, "If...*you cede some control*," he implies, "*then*..I'll turn my face."

The hypothetical nature of the frame that ends the poem contributes to its lack of closure. Thus the speaker's frustration over his inability to repay "that sacrifice, which ransom'd us" lingers, like the endless day that he bemoans. Critical readings of the poem's ending tend to argue for a narrative trajectory and resolution. Malpezzi, for example, writes, "Having dramatically learned the accessibility of sacred time through his meditation as he sees with his mind's eye that 'spectacle of too much weight,' he is made one with the crucified Christ. He now travels the *via purgative*, ready to accept the afflictions God gives him to help rein in the unruly beast as he rides to salvation" (29). Halewood believes the outcome to be even more resolved, arguing that "in the concluding lines of the poem, God enters to be spoken to, an event rhetorically signaled by a rush of vocatives that puts an end to question and debate, and closure for the work as a whole is effected by the 'ordinary miracle' of God's rectifying presence. As in *Job*, there is nothing more to say" (228). The speaker may have no more to say, but he remains far from experiencing narrative or psychological closure. Closure for the speaker in "Goodfriday" is impossible because he lacks the agency to forge a relationship with Christ that would be commensurate with Christ's sacrifice. His identity—dependent upon his agency—remains unsettled, as does his debt.

II. “Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise”: Form and Power in the *La Corona* Sonnets

As in “Goodfriday,” Donne found poetic inspiration in the overlap of providential circumstances when he wrote “Upon the Annunciation and Passion Falling Upon One Day” five years earlier. Like Donne, the speaker of “Goodfriday” travels physically westward on Good Friday while his “soules form bends toward the east” (10) to the site of the Crucifixion. In March of 1608, Good Friday coincided with Lady Day, or the celebration of the Annunciation of Mary. The thematic relation of these two days likely appealed to Donne, whose poetry (both religious and secular) shows a sustained interest in juxtaposition—here a day of feasting meets with a day of fasting—and temporal compression, as the beginning and ending of Christ’s mortal life intersect. As lines 19-22 show, the speaker of “Upon the Annunciation” shares with the speaker of “Goodfriday” a preoccupation with the notion of the coincidence of beginnings and endings, of endlessness as it relates to Christ’s narrative:

All this, and all between, this day hath shown,
Th’abridgement of Christ’s story, which makes one,
(As in plain maps, the farthest west is east)
Of th’angels *Ave* and *Consummatum est*.

Line 21 carefully observes that east and west mark arbitrary distinctions on a fluid landscape, and line 22 brings this perception to bear on Christ's life; it condenses the language of Christ's beginning (the angel Gabriel's hail, "Ave," at the Annunciation) and ending ("Consummatum est" references Christ's final words, "It is finished").²⁰ The distinct speakers of Donne's Passion works have in common a fascination with cycles, boundaries, and endlessness as they simultaneously represent and fail to capture Christ's experience. Like "Goodfriday" and the earlier "Upon the Annunciation," Donne's *La Corona* explores the nature of limits and limitlessness through both its content and its form, which is unique among his greater body of religious poetry.

Donne's *La Corona*, a series of seven linked sonnets, refers to "corona di sonnetti," a type of sonnet sequence that repeats the last line of each sonnet as the first line of one that follows, and ends, coming full circle, with the first line of the first sonnet. At the time of its composition, readers would likely have associated the sequence with the Catholic practice of saying the rosary in seven stages, rather than in the more typical five or fifteen.²¹ The sonnet also held a position of prominence as a secular form, and Helen Wilcox notes its dominant association with "the Petrarchan tradition of earthly love," a connection more interesting when she observes that "his love poems in the *Songs and Sonets* include no formal sonnets... In some sense, then, Donne's religious sonnets may be seen as love poems to God" ("Devotional Writing," 150). The title also introduces the symbolic crown, which the poem defines both religiously and secularly in the first

²⁰ Quoted from Luke 1:28 and John 19:30, respectively.

²¹ See P. M. Oliver, p.98, who notes the foundational publication of a sonnet sequence by poet George Chapman in 1588 entitled *A Coronet for his Mistress Philosophy*.

sonnet: as poetry (line 1), as a poet's laurel wreath (line 5), as Christ's crown of thorns (line 7), as heavenly reward (line 8), and as a verb indicating an ending (line 9).²² Compared to "Goodfriday," the *La Corona* sonnets demonstrate how another speaker reflecting on the events of Christ's life and death (at times, explicitly the Passion) also struggles, in a different way, to reconcile the finite and the infinite, also draws upon linguistic resources available to him, and also seeks to understand better his own place as devotee in the aftermath of salvation (and in the wake of the Reformation). While the sonnets of *La Corona* have generated less critical attention than Donne's more immediate and intense *Holy Sonnets*, their relational structure offers a pointed opportunity for considering how poetic form relates to a recurring speaker's manifestation of agency and construction of selfhood.

Though not explicitly about the Passion, the first sonnet of *La Corona* sets the tone for the sequence as a whole, introduces its main concerns, models wordplay and other formal maneuvering, and suggests moments of self-referentiality (both text and speaker) that course throughout the piece. The first line, "Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise," occupies a position of great prominence, as it also serves as the last line of the sequence, tying together and re-starting the series. It immediately establishes the speaker's awareness of his limited power, as he begs for condescension with the word "Deign," refers to his writing/praying "hands" as the modest instruments of his agency, and

²² In full, lines 1-9 read: "Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise, / Weav'd in my low, devout melancholy, / Thou which of good hast, yea, art treasury, / All changing unchang'd Ancient of Days. / But do not, with a vile crown of frail bays, / Reward my muse's white sincerity, / But what thy thorny crown gain'd, that give me, / A crown of glory, which doth flower always. / The ends crown our works, but thou crown'st our ends."

reaffirms his comparatively subordinate position by noting his upward-directed “praise.” He further situates the poem within the context of its composition with the second line, “Weav’d in my low devout melancholy.” Oliver urges readers to resist the impulse to ascribe this “only reference to the poet-speaker’s extra-textual life” to Donne himself as its speaker, warning that “readers need to beware of taking Donne at his word because he suddenly sounds as if he wishes them to do so” (99). Yet, regardless of their biographical attribution, the first two lines offer particularly helpful information about the focus of the series as a whole: the sequence begins and ends with references to its creation, not its narrative content; the speaker (a self-acknowledged poet himself,²³ though not necessarily Donne) wishes to emerge as a presence in the piece; and, finally, the tenor of the sonnets is established as “low” and melancholic.

The sorrowful, contemplative, quiet tone of *La Corona* contrasts with the more frustrated, anxious feeling of “Goodfriday,” though both speakers wrestle with similar concerns. The issue of endlessness, which I argue causes great distress for the speaker in “Goodfriday,” appears throughout the *La Corona* sonnets with similar regularity. In the first sonnet, for example, the speaker toys with the meaning of “crown” as the verb for “to top off, end, or finish”:

The ends crown our works, but thou crown’st our ends,

For at our end begins our endlesse rest,

The first last end, now zealously possest, (9-11)

²³ This dual identity will be reflected in the term “poet-speaker,” which refers to the speaker’s self-identification as a poet rather than to Donne as speaker and poet.

The repetition of variations of “end” (five times in three lines) and “crown” (twice in this section and six times in the sonnet), coupled with the tidy end-rhymes, creates a sense of contemplative play in these lines. The reader muses on the multiplicity of meanings of these two words and begins to think of the way language stretches to encompass experience and broaden articulation. Unlike the “endlesse day” (line 12) in “Goodfriday,” which causes the speaker intense frustration over the necessity of unending repetition, the “endlesse rest” (line 10) of *La Corona* connotes a state of ease. Although each of the phrases relates to salvation, the speaker of *La Corona* makes deliverance seem unequivocally peaceful rather than psychologically punitive.

Critical attention to *La Corona* offers various reasons that may explain its tonal irregularity in comparison to other religious poetry.²⁴ In her seminal essay, “The Religious Poetry of John Donne,” Helen Gardner asserts that *La Corona*’s roots in oral prayer account for its singular tone. She writes:

La Corona has been undervalued as a poem by comparison with the *Holy Sonnets*, because [of] the difference of intention... The *La Corona* sonnets are inspired by liturgical prayer and praise--oral prayer; not by private meditation and the tradition of mental prayer... The petitions with which the last three poems end, though couched in the singular, are petitions which any man might pray. (123)

²⁴ On the whole, critical work on the *Holy Sonnets* finds the speakers’ state of agitation similar to the one I argue for in “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward.”

In a similar vein, Oliver argues for a didactic reading of Donne's motives, claiming that the speaker takes an "engaged stance" and demonstrates a "capacity to teach, enthuse and move in a poem which is also obsessed with word-play and rhetoric" (104). I would modify these readings slightly to suggest that the early sequence serves as a testing ground for both modes—oral prayer and private meditation—and additionally, that what Gardner and Oliver see as a potentially didactic function more closely resembles a devotee struggling personally to sort through paradox than instructing others in devotion. Oliver notes further that, in Donne's devotional works:

Where praise of the deity is found, it is mixed with other, more self-referential elements...where the speaker is heard congratulating himself on being about to enter heaven. Apart from 'A Litany,' and 'La Corona,' the religious poems [by Donne] are rarely celebratory, and never celebratory in the simple sense in which the poems of Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw are as a matter of course. (10)

Though Oliver's impulse to set aside "A Litany" and *La Corona* speaks to their meditative tone, self-referentiality in *La Corona* is not absent but indeed one of its defining characteristics, and it sheds light on the poet-speaker's priority of asserting selfhood. The speaker's self-consciousness in *La Corona*, coupled with the Petrarchan resonance of the form, conveys a self-interested (yet meditative)

persona who dabbles in various modes of prayer, argument, and form in order to rehearse and establish a sense of self.

The speaker's focus on his own role as poet-speaker begins in the first sonnet. After the first line calls attention to his writing and praying "hands," the second elaborates on his psychological state as craftsman of the piece. Tellingly, the speaker's emphasis on his inward mood of "low *devout melancholy*"—rather than using the more outward-directed construction "low *melancholic devotion*"—prioritizes his psychology over his potential impact. References to writing throughout the sequence, for example, "The ends crown our works" from line 9, contribute similarly to the development of the poet-speaker's self-consciousness. Interpreted in one way, "works" refers to the life of a tested Christian (here with a particularly Catholic inflection) who strives for salvation. Taken as a self-reflection on the speaker's circumstance, however, the word "works" could also describe the sonnet sequence, especially as the "ends" in this case refer to the specific form of the piece with its recurring end-lines. The poet-speaker references his written craft again in the sixth sonnet, "Resurrection," in line 8: "If in thy little book my name thou enroll." In the context of the occasion, resurrection, the sentiment denotes the list of mortals who would be welcome into heaven. Yet the speaker may simultaneously allude to a poet's fame and lasting presence in print.²⁵

²⁵ This comparison to writing appears in other works by Donne, such as "The Canonization": "And if no piece of chronicle we prove, / We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;" (lines 31-2). The speaker relies on the translation of "stanza" for "room" to highlight the connection to poetry.

The poet-speaker's self-referentiality is perhaps most conspicuous through his self-insertion in the fifth sonnet, "Crucifying," and through his centrality in the sixth, "Resurrection." As in "Goodfriday," where the speaker frames his consideration of the Crucifixion within the parameters of his own psychological ability—"Yet dare *I almost be glad*, I do not see / That spectacle of *too much weight for me*" (lines 15-16)—the speaker of *La Corona* emerges as an important figure in his consideration of the Passion. "Crucifying" begins with the final line of the previous sonnet, "By miracles exceeding power of man" (1). The explicit awareness of the incommensurability of power between Christ and mortals demonstrates the poet-speaker's concern with his inability to match or repay the miracle of salvation. His response to this powerlessness involves flexing the power of language—through various forms of wordplay, reversals, and paradox—in his narration of the Passion, as in lines 9-14:

Nay to an inch. Loe, where condemned he
 Bears his own cross, with pain, yet by and by
 When it bears him, he must bear more and die;
 Now thou art lifted up, draw me to thee,
 And at thy death giving such liberal dole,
 Moist, with one drop of my blood, my dry soule.

The speaker spells out the logical reversal of Christ bearing the cross that, in turn, bears him; he further complicates the sentiment by noting that Christ must then

bear more, inviting readers to guess what that entails. The section recalls a similar interest in irony expressed through wordplay in the second sonnet, “Annunciation.” Lines 3-4, “Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear, / Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die,” refer to Christ’s paradoxical position as simultaneously mortal and divine. The parallel construction of the two lines lends a sense of play, almost in terms of a riddle, to the idea, especially as they follow “That All, which always is All everywhere” (2). Again, in comparison to the agitated fear of infinity in “Goodfriday,” the omnipresence of Christ in *La Corona* is registered on a formal level (here, overwhelmingly through sound, with the thrice-repeated “all”) and presented rather than challenged.

However, the tonal difference of the two works should not distract from their common focus: in each piece, the speaker struggles to realize a sense of identity, though through different means. This interpretation challenges the reading of Targoff, who agrees with Annabel Patterson in finding *La Corona* “not primarily concerned with the poet’s spiritual life” (108). Though the poet-speaker of *La Corona* lacks the urgency and restlessness in “Goodfriday,” he still implicates himself in the Passion narrative as a means of responding to Christ’s sacrifice. He makes this connection explicitly in “Crucifying”: “Now thou art lifted up, draw me to thee” (line 12). The poet-speaker expresses a desire to share in Christ’s pain, as he conjures the image of their overlapping bodies on the cross. A version of this sentiment appears in Donne’s “A Litanie,” another sequential religious piece written around the same time as *La Corona*. The speaker of “A Litanie” begs:

O be thou nailed unto my heart,
 And crucified again,
 Part not from it, though it from thee would part,
 But let it be by applying so thy pain,
 Drowned in thy blood, and in thy passion slain.

(lines 5-9, stanza II, *The Son*, “A Litanie”)

The speaker of “A Litanie” shares with the speakers of “Goodfriday” and *La Corona* a longing to move beyond bearing witness to the Passion and to enter into a version of the events of the day through *imitatio Christi*. In “Goodfriday,” the speaker seeks physical punishment as a way of sharing in Christ’s pain and power, thus easing the burden of each figure. In “A Litanie,” the speaker appeals to Christ for a metaphorical second, personal Crucifixion in which he alone experiences the benefits of salvation. In *La Corona*, the poet-speaker breaks with the logical puzzling, wordplay, and other formal machinations that characterize the sequence in order to convey, in simple terms, a desire to bridge the gap between the stations of the mortal and his god.

The poet-speaker’s comparatively subtle self-inclusion in *La Corona* reaches its peak in the sixth sonnet, “Resurrection.” Julia J. Smith notes the focal shift between “Crucifying” and “Resurrection”:

We scarcely realize that human flesh and blood are at the centre of this intricate pattern of language and abstract thought. The way in which the figure of Christ slips from Donne's attention is illustrated by the next sonnet, 'Resurrection,' in which Donne himself, and not Christ, has become the subject of the poem. (516)

Although Smith conflates the speaker and Donne, which limits the full range of interpretive possibilities, her observation about the subject of the poem sheds light on the speaker's priorities. What promises to narrate Christ's resurrection instead highlights the speaker's salvation. Though references to the poet-speaker and his writing occur throughout the sonnets, the first-person "I" pronoun appears for the first time in this section:

May then sins sleep, and deaths soon from me pass,
 That waked from both, I again risen may
 Salute the last, and everlasting day. ("Resurrection," 12-14)

The speaker who wished to be united with Christ during the Crucifixion in line 12 of the previous sonnet ("Now thou art lifted up, draw me to thee") has now fully substituted for him as the central figure of the resurrection; imitation here becomes replacement. The sonnet ends, fittingly, with a paradoxical phrase about endings—the "last" day of Christ's life becomes the "everlasting" state of salvation. Although the phrase "everlasting day" conveys a sense of comfort in

this context—compared to the claustrophobic “endless day” (line 12) of “Goodfriday”—the speaker of *La Corona* demonstrates his shared desire to situate himself within the narrative of salvation.

“Salute the last, and everlasting day” carries over to the next, and final, sonnet in the series, “Ascension,” verbally enacting the sentiment by delivering on its promise to both *be the last* (as it ends “Resurrection”) and *last* (as its repetition begins “Ascension”). With this gesture, the sequence returns to the formal play that allows the poet-speaker to explore his relationship to Christ’s life. The final lines of the sonnet, “And if the holy Spirit, my Muse did raise, / Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise” (lines 13-14), echo precisely the poet-speaker’s opening intention to compose a devotional work. In this way, the series begins and ends (to the extent that it ends) with the speaker’s acknowledgment of his craft. *La Corona*’s formal circularity, coupled with its integrated meditative repetition, speaks to the poet-speaker’s struggle to use the resource available to him—language and, by extension, poetic form—to distract from his inadequacy. Unable to escape the constraints of language and mortality, the poet-speaker will strive, muse, pray, and play, ultimately to reset and continue the process of substituting form for authority in order to achieve agency and intimacy with Christ. Compared to the unfulfilled speaker of “Goodfriday” who desperately seeks the authority necessary to bridge the power imbalance between him and God, the poet-speaker of *La Corona* resolves to use his hands for writing as well as for “prayer and praise.” Endlessness, which the speaker of “Goodfriday” sees as a state of personal misery (even in salvation), allows the

speaker of *La Corona* a formal, cyclical response that defers his establishment of selfhood.

III. Negotiating Speakers and Speaker Negotiation in the *Holy Sonnets*

But who am I that dare dispute with thee, / O God?

This question from lines 9-10 of Sonnet 5 (“If poisonous minerals”) offers provocative insights into the body of Donne’s religious sonnets as a whole: it demonstrates his longstanding poetic acknowledgment of the difference in station between man and God; it implies an understanding—within this limited power—of how man has been granted the agency of individual thought, expression, and dispute; and finally, taken in brief, it poses a direct, loaded question about identity, “But who am I?” As the speakers of “Goodfriday” and *La Corona* use distinctive approaches to tone and argument, the speakers of the *Holy Sonnets* engage with the issues of power and identity in various conflicting and conflicted ways (sometimes even within a single sonnet). Yet their underlying quest to establish identity in relation to God informs and unites their voices as they test out modes of self-definition. I have argued that the speaker of “Goodfriday” engages in a version of psychologically frustrated *imitatio Christi* and that the speaker of *La Corona* substitutes form for power or action. The speakers of the *Holy Sonnets* that engage with the Crucifixion may be seen to synthesize both of these

approaches, as they use the established sonnet form to rehearse, exercise, and voice their frustrations as they tackle the pressing question: “But who am I?”

“So unstable are the roles used by Donne’s speakers that it sometimes seems as if they are oblivious of what they have been saying” (150), writes Oliver of Donne’s speakers in the *Holy Sonnets*. This point speaks to the well-documented theological multiplicity in the poems, as the speakers at once embrace and question doctrine, and as they seem to endorse competing religious affiliations in the same breath. Oliver’s interpretation aligns in part with the prevailing reading of the *Holy Sonnets* as Donne’s final struggle before accepting Calvinist doctrine.²⁶ Yet perhaps the contradictory impulses that critics identify could be considered alternatively as a conscious dramatization—serious, parodic, or a little of both—of the plight of a devotee living in Donne’s volatile religious climate. Thus the speaker remains the central subject of the poems, as in “Goodfriday” and *La Corona*, but here with an added acknowledgment of the immediate social pressures, especially the pressure to identify, that a devotee confronts.

Its prescribed structure and tidy schematic make the sonnet a fitting formal counterpart to the incompatible theological viewpoints of the speakers in the *Holy Sonnets*. Acknowledging the accommodating capacity of the sonnet form, Targoff writes, “With its built-in mechanisms for posing and answering its own questions, the sonnet allows Donne to unleash and then rein in his imaginative reach, to

²⁶ See R. V. Young, “Donne’s Holy Sonnets and The Theology of Grace,” for the limitations of this reading, including that it “attempts to establish the existence of an exclusively Protestant mode of poetry without determining whether the same features of theme and style are available in contemporaneous Catholic poetry” and that it “forces the Holy Sonnets into a doctrinal frame that often overlooks the equivocal resonance and play of wit in Donne’s poetry” (20).

create hypothetical and counterfactual scenarios that can be poetically if not devotionally resolved” (107). Louis Martz argues famously that Donne’s use of the form situates the *Holy Sonnets* within the Ignatian meditational tradition, and Oliver further observes that “it is inconceivable that Donne would not have noticed that in the *Holy Sonnets* he was drawing on the meditative strategies of a religion he had long since abandoned” (116). In light of the Catholic meditative origins of the form, Donne’s exploration of competing theological voices (particularly Calvinism) calls his alignment with either designation into question. To this I would add the further complication of the sonnet’s secular resonance, as readers and Donne alike would have associated the form with Petrarch’s love poetry. Thus, built into the framework of the *Holy Sonnets* are: a theological conflict between form and content, an associative breakdown between religious and secular expression, and—by extension—a criticism of the futile impulses to seek definition and to realize identity.

The *Holy Sonnets* that engage with the Passion or its resonances provide a way of seeing how different lyrical voices handle a common theme.²⁷ Sonnet 7 (“Spit in my face”) and Sonnet 10 (“Batter my heart”) use violence and a rhetoric of commanding to explore degrees of inclusion in the Crucifixion narrative. The libertine-turned-philosopher/devotee of Sonnet 9 (“What if this present”) and the soul-sick speaker of Sonnet 2 (“Oh my black Soule”) draw upon Passion symbolism to examine shame as an integral component of self-understanding and self-realization. Each poem considers the tension between religious agency and

²⁷ A note on the numbering of the sonnets: this ordering follows suit with the *Donne Variorum* (Vol. 7) in adopting the organization that the *Variorum* editors believe to be Donne’s final of three arrangements of the poems; this is the version published in 1633.

poetic self-assertion through depictions of direct and symbolic *imitatio Christi* as a means of entering a dynamic of socio-political and religious power.

Like Crashaw, Donne draws upon shock and violence in his Passion poetry to activate a sense of urgency and intensity. In the *Holy Sonnets*, these devices take shape as commands that relegate the speaker to positions of subjection, often punishment: “Oh make thy self with holy mourning black,” “Repair me now,” “Batter my heart,” “And burn me, O Lord,” “Take me to you, imprison me.”²⁸ The speaker of Sonnet 7 (“Spit in my face”) begins the octave with a series of imperatives that recast him as Christ during the Passion:

Spitt in my face, yee Jewes, and pierce my side,
 Buffett, and scoff, scourge, and crucifie mee:
 For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd: and only hee
 Who could doe none iniquitie hath dyed.
 But by my Death cannot bee satisfied
 My sinnes which pass the Jewes impietie:
 They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I
 Crucifie him daily, being nowe glorified. (1-8)

Like the speakers of “Goodfriday” and, more subtly, *La Corona*, the speaker here works his centrality into the structure of the poem; the first lines foreground his presence with the phrases “my face” and “my side,” as well as his substitution for Christ conveyed by “crucifie *mee*.” The speaker slips out of *imitatio Christi* to

²⁸ All lines (or portions of lines) appear in the *Holy Sonnets*.

shift the focus from the Crucifixion to his own death as a mortal, with the signal phrase “by *my* Death” (5), which fails to make up for his sins. He addresses his powerlessness in the face of Christ’s sacrifice by building a sense of the magnitude of his sins. For example, he has not merely sinned but has emphatically “sinn’d, and sinn’d” (3) and claims that his betrayal in the wake of salvation amounts to a daily, personal Crucifixion: “...but I / Crucifie him daily, being nowe glorified” (7-8). The excessive violence he commands and the excessive sinning he highlights serve to divert attention from his impotence. For a poem that begins so actively—six verbs in the first two lines—inaction becomes the focus, and the shifting, unanswered imperatives hang with an empty ring. The speaker inhabits every role that he describes: he becomes Christ during the Passion; he becomes himself, a sinner with a massive capacity for both sinning and atoning; and finally, he becomes the Jews of his original address, active in Christ’s daily Crucifixion. This excessive, all-encompassing subjecthood begs a critical eye to the quest for self-definition.

In addition to juggling multiple conflicting identities, the sonnet contains irreconcilable theological positions. Its narrative trajectory implies a shift from an affective representation of Christ’s pain (and the speaker’s desire to take part in the experience) in the octave to a more detached consideration of a mortal’s inability to understand God’s plan in the sestet, hinging on line 9: “Oh lett mee then his strange love still admire.” Noting this shift, van Dijkhuizen claims,

That the poem should move so abruptly...to a Calvinist perspective only serves to highlight the unresolved tension between the two. Indeed, the poem itself may be said to spring from this conflict: Donne employs the sonnet form to juxtapose incompatible attitudes towards Christ's suffering, and the poem enacts this incompatibility as it unfolds. (106)

The failure of both theological perspectives—Catholic/meditative and Calvinist/metaphorical—stems from the speaker's inability to realize a sense of self that would be compatible with a theological decision. He fails in the octave to engage affectively with the Passion (making himself central rather than Christ), and he fails in the sestet to demonstrate the assurance of faith necessary to Calvinism, as he labels God's love "strange" (9) and spells out the nagging paradox of God's mortality in line 13: "God cloath'd himself in vile mans fleash." As a result, the speaker of Sonnet 7 emerges as a figure who struggles to determine his identity as he experiments with form (the sonnet as Ignatian and Petrarchan), theology (namely Catholic and Calvinist), and his own role (as one who punishes, one who is punished, and one who redeems).

Though not explicitly about the Passion, Sonnet 10 ("Batter my heart") resonates with Sonnet 7, beginning with the series of commands that enlist God in the speaker's punishment:

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for you
As yet, but knock, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;

That I may rise and stand, orethrowe mee; and bend
 Your force to break, blowe, burne, and make mee newe.
 I, like an usurp'd towne, to another due,
 Labor to'admitt you; but oh to noe end.
 Reason, your Vice-roye in mee, mee should defend,
 But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue. (1-8)

The speaker's string of imperatives sounds similar to the speaker's requests for "corrections" in "Goodfriday"—"I turne my backe to thee, but to receive / Corrections" (37-38) written 4-5 years later. In "Goodfriday," as in both Sonnet 7 and Sonnet 10, the force of the speaker's voice compensates for his passivity. Schoenfeldt speaks to the complicated sense of agency in "Goodfriday" that the speaker of Sonnet 10 shares, noting that "... it offers an unstable blend of command and submission to the superior to whom the speaker desires to submit unconditionally. Punish me, the speaker says, and only then will I offer you, the highest superior, the common respect of showing my face rather than my backside" (569). The sense of implicit ironic play that Schoenfeldt evokes may be at work as well in Sonnet 10, which also engages in the absurd act of commanding the ultimate commander. The extremity of the volume and the magnitude of these imperatives further supports a suggestion of irony that relates to the speaker's powerlessness. The 2:1 ratio of verbs to nouns in the first four

lines indicates the speaker's compensation for his lack of ability to transcend hope and metaphor; for such an active poem, nothing is actually happening.²⁹

For the speaker of Sonnets 7 and 10, the act of welcoming pain engages in the tension, common in Donne's poetry, between humility and agency. Cynthia Marshall elaborates on this tension as it relates to identity construction:

Holding onto one's autonomy suggested sinful pride. To convey the undesirability of self-assertion, both Catholics and Protestants used the bodily image of a hard or stony heart as an emblem of spiritual deadness. John Donne's familiar line 'Batter my heart, three person'd God...breake, blowe, burn and make me new'...registers the antipathy felt toward an assured, confident selfhood, which was understood to impede the requisite humility of faith. (20)

The antipathy that Marshall identifies in Sonnet 10, however, is complicated by the speaker's simultaneously destructive and constructive use of imagined pain. His desires reach their endpoint in the rebuilding rather than in the destruction. "And make mee newe," he pleads in line 4, and he carries this sentiment to the end of the sonnet: "Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I, / Except you inthrall mee, never shalbee free, / Nor ever chast except you ravish mee" (12-14). His wish for reconstitution—as imprisoned yet free and as ravished yet chaste—

²⁹ In discussing Donne's relationship to Calvinism, John Stachniewski notes: "The doctrinal emphases of Calvinism—total depravity, double predestination, irresistibility of grace, etc.—conferred on man an extreme passivity. And the corollary of this was that the Protestant God was heavily interventionist in the world and in human lives" (688). Stachniewski's point speaks to the powerless speaker of the sonnet who fears inaction from both himself and God.

combines the terminology of destruction with the implication of restoration. In this way, the speaker transcends the definitional limitations of language by exercising its metaphorical flexibility (“freedom” through imprisonment and “chastity” through ravishing). However, the consequence of this flexibility is a lack of certainty about how to define himself.

The escalating violence of the actions that the speaker demands of God likewise serves to deflect from his impotence. The more the speaker expresses himself, the more he becomes frustrated by his powerlessness, and his desire to feel pain intensifies. He progresses from begging God to “knock, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend” (2) to pleading for more severe actions: “break, blowe, burne, and make mee newe” (4). Here the speaker’s failure to express imagined pain leads him to intensify the actions and, in turn, causes him extreme frustration as his expressive inability bears on his unarticulated sense of self as a devotee. The resultant “action” is the expression of the sonnet, which highlights and rehearses the limitations of language that expose the speaker’s futile quest for identity. What does it mean, the speaker probes, to be a mere mortal devotee in the face of a “three-person’d God”?

To move beyond the limitations of language and reality, the speaker of Sonnet 9 (“What if this present”) uses imaginative resources to explore a symbolic relationship to the Passion. While the speakers of Sonnet 7 (“Spit in my face”) and Sonnet 10 (“Batter my heart”) direct their attention outward to physical investment in the body, the speaker of Sonnet 9 looks inward to consult his soul. The octave that sets up this address reads:

What if this present were the worlds last night?
 Mark in my heart O Soule where thou dost dwell,
 The Picture of Christ crucified, and tell,
 Whether that countenance can thee affright.
 Teares in his eyes quench the amazeing light,
 Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell
 And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell
 Which prayed forgiveness for his foes fierce spight? (1-8)

A version of this sonnet's philosophical opening—with its detached introductory question—is echoed later in “Goodfriday” as the speaker sets up a recognizable rhetorical structure, “Let man's soul be a sphere, and then, in this, / The intelligence that moves, devotion is” (1-2). In both poems, the speaker foregrounds the tension between body and soul as they relate to devotion. Both poems also pose the possibility of engaging with the Passion indirectly; in “Goodfriday,” the speaker turns to his imagined memory: “Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye, / They're present yet unto my memory” (33-34). In Sonnet 9, the speaker refers to his soul, which houses an imagined image, or a “Picture of Christ crucified” (3). Although the image of the crucified Christ is separated by layers of removal—the speaker first directs his soul to his heart, which houses the image—the depiction includes some meticulous physical details, such as the “teares in his eyes” and how the “blood fills his frownes.” Just

as the image of Christ holds both metaphoric and realistic significance for the speaker, the sonnet itself houses competing impulses to define his theology and identity.

The divided monologue of the speaker's self-address highlights the dramatization of his effort to understand his place on the eve of his death. Oliver comments on the means of address by noting that the "speaker treats his soul as if it belongs to someone else or even to an entirely different species." He further suggests that Donne's speakers "provide their own audiences. Part of the reader's amusement is to witness this high degree of self-consciousness" (155). The speaker's self-consciousness magnifies in the sestet when he guiltily references his "Idolatrie" (9) and "Prophane Mistresses" (10). The inclusions about the speaker's past romantic life remind the reader of the sonnet form's prevailing resonance as a vehicle for secular love poetry in the period. The speaker of Sonnet 2 ("O my black Soule") likewise alludes to his shameful past in the sestet:

Yet Grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack.
 But whoe shall give thee that Grace to beginne?
 Oh make thy self with holy mourning black
 And red with blushing as thou art with sinne
 Or wash thee in Christs bloud, which hath this might
 That being Red, it dyes red soules to white. (9-14)

Tinged with romantic nuance, the speaker's references to repentance and states of sin and shame combine the sacred and secular modes of expression. "Red with blushing," the speaker's soul is thus coded as guilty of sin, love, or both. Further, the red and white colors that, in secular poetry, are traditionally applied to the beloved, here describe Christ's salvific blood and the purified soul. The collapse of secular and religious terminology, along with the self-conscious, dramatic self-division of the speaker and his soul, lend a sense of instability to the form and content of both Sonnet 9 and Sonnet 2.

Gary Kuchar uses this instability to explain the conflicted religious doctrines in Sonnet 9 ("What if this present"): "Unlike Ignatian meditation, Protestant traditions of meditative prayer avoid the composition of place and the use of sense experience as a means of accessing divinity. Like many of the *Holy Sonnets*, 'What if this present' fails devotionally because its speaker is caught within competing traditions" (560). Critics have long noted the inclusion of incompatible theological stances in the body of the *Holy Sonnets*, but the designation of the poem (or poems) as a devotional failure involves a twofold assumption: 1) that the sonnets are unified by a single speaker, and 2) that their shared purpose is to pose and resolve the theological conflict. These assumptions greatly limit the interpretive potential of the sonnets, which seem to have speakers of vastly different temperaments. For example, the frenzied, shocking, commanding speakers of Sonnet 7 ("Spitt in my face") and Sonnet 10 ("Batter my heart") lack the deep introspection of the more philosophical speakers of Sonnet 2 ("O my black Soule") and Sonnet 9 ("What if this present"). Further, the

assumption of the speakers' joint intention to endorse firmly a single theological viewpoint sacrifices the broader exercise of dramatic query. The speakers of the *Holy Sonnets*, like the speakers of "Goodfriday" and *La Corona*, are personally invested in an exploration of who they are in relation not only to God but also to their craft and their wider world.

In the second paragraph of Nabokov's *Lolita*, the narrator Humbert Humbert parses the title character's name: "She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita" (9). Donne's name falls prey to the same fate as Lolita's, as the impulse to divide his life tidily into phases, categories, and stages of religious affiliation has led critics and biographers to identify him: He was Jack Donne, seductive rake. He was Dr. Donne, pious minister. He was John Donne, son, student, convert, husband, mourner, father, secretary, patient, priest, dean. Ryan Netzley's recent book on Donne seizes on this impulse and delineates his poetic life in terms of performances—pulpit, promethean, protean, passionate, patronage, personal. But how did John Donne—whose deep, porous, inquisitive mind produced a lifetime of writing in prose and poetry—define himself?

In this chapter, I have begun to explore that complicated question as its answers bear on both Donne's religious identity and the tumultuous post-Reformation climate from which he emerged. His desperation to achieve a sense of selfhood and—by extension—a personal relationship with God aligns with the

reformed sensibility of inwardness. The agitation he demonstrates in failing to achieve assurance of self, however, bespeaks a more fundamental lack of confidence in the faith that, according to reformed theology, will save him. To remedy this lack of assurance, he turns to writing poetry, substituting work for faith (and thus, borrowing from Catholicism). Because his intended audience includes patrons and a small coterie of peers, and because the speaker forms the central subject of his works, those works may be seen as a more private rehearsal of identity, rather than as a didactic exercise like Crashaw's and Lanyer's. Faced with the enormity of the Passion, his speakers seek power by toying with its surrender, and Donne continues to address a God who, unlike Herbert's God, never responds. In "Goodfriday," the speaker does not achieve a resolution because his lack of agency equates to his lack of ability to fashion an identity. Reading the poem in this way, rather than strictly as a conversion narrative or other theological struggle, offers insight into the religious subject's strong pressure to align religiously in the Reformation. The speaker of *La Corona* fails similarly in resolving his struggles, yet the temporary deferral offered by language and form provide both hope and futility in the form of circularity. Refocusing perspective in reading the *Holy Sonnets* that engage with the Passion allows their speakers to emerge as successful dramatists enacting and criticizing the effort to search for religious identity in a climate so conflicted at its core. It feels appropriate to end a consideration of Donne's quest for identity with his own words written in a letter on the subject:³⁰

³⁰ Walton's *Life*, 14

I would fain do something; but that I cannot tell what, is no wonder. For to choose, is to do: but to be no part of any body, is to be nothing. At most, the greatest persons, are but great wens, and excrescences; men of wit and delightful conversation, but as moles for ornament, except they be so incorporated into the body of the world, that they contribute something to the sustenation of the whole.

Chapter Three: George Herbert's Imitative Piety

Introduction

In keeping with the intimate poetic voice of the individual lyrics in *The Temple*, George Herbert dedicates the collection to his Lord:

Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
 Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
 And must return. Accept of them and me,
 And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.

Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:

Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

This simple dedication highlights Herbert's interest in defining his relation to his Lord, a subject also undertaken by Donne (and, to a lesser extent, Crashaw), which appears to an insistent degree in Herbert's lyrics. Caught between the acts of surrendering and asserting his creative agency, Herbert engages the paradox of striving for a devotional mode—to "sing best"—that matches the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice. Yet he acknowledges his lack of access to means that might properly repay God: his works "present themselves," as he hides his poetic authority behind self-reflexive construction; he disavows authorship by reiterating that these works are "not mine, for from thee they came"; he conveys the cyclical

inevitability of mortality (from which God is exempt) by noting that his labors “must return” to God; and, finally, he begs for acceptance, both on behalf of his poetry (which he has already relinquished as God’s property) and for himself. Similar gestures of self-negation amass throughout *The Temple* (in particular, “The Church”) to establish Herbert’s authorial identity as, on the one hand, characterized by modesty, lack, and the desire to please. Imperfect as he considers it, poetry affords him creative ways of envisioning a closer connection to God. Undercutting this humility, however, the productive aspect of his identity emerges from claiming and dramatizing inadequacy. What begins as a meek devotional offering ends with a solemn but emphatic request, as Herbert beseeches God to suspend readers who might “hurt themselves, *or me*” (added emphasis) from reading his poetry. Unlike Donne, who uses Passion poetry and its forms—such as *imitatio Christi*—to establish agency as a means to self-realization, Herbert’s Passion poems capture and record the comprehensive experience of his faith. Where Crashaw values interpreting, modeling, and teaching, and Donne wrestles with power and self-definition, Herbert employs a poetics of interaction, both as a formal device within individual poems and more broadly through the comparative relations among his works.

In his introduction to *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, John Tobin looks to Herbert’s background for insight into the poetry: “Certain it is that Herbert was a very able younger son of a prominent family, one whose personal physical vulnerability never deprived him of an inner confidence, a sense of social

entitlement, that shines through his writings whether in *The Country Parson*, where he refuses to have the church and its ministries condescended to by the upper classes, or in the many poems of dialogue with God where, however humble the guilty speaker in the poem may be, he is confident of being a worthy member of the dialogue” (xiv).¹ The “inner confidence” and self-worth that Tobin describes may indeed stem from the aristocratic prominence of the Protestant Herbert family, which had significant intellectual and literary influence in the period. His mother, Magdalen Herbert, was a patroness of John Donne, who dedicated “Of St. Mary Magdalen” and possibly the *La Corona* sonnets to her. Her son Edward, George’s brother, was an author and a political figure, acting as King James’s ambassador to France. His living cousins included Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (the sister of Sir Philip Sidney), and William and Phillip Herbert, the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery.

Born in 1593, George Herbert was one of ten children. He excelled scholastically at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he thrived as an elected Fellow (1616), Reader in Rhetoric (1618), and Public Orator to the University (1620-7). He demonstrates his rhetorical mastery in *The Temple*, as his devices range from classical and learned to playful and provocative. He became a member of Parliament for the Earl of Montgomery in 1624, and he served as the prebend of a church near the religious community of Little Gidding two years later.² He married Jane Danvers in 1629 and (like Crashaw, but unlike

¹ The biographical information that follows comes from a combination of introductory notes (Tobin, Mario Di Cesare, and Helen Wilcox) and textual commentary (Wilcox and James Boyd White).

² White notes with fascination Herbert’s involvement in the restoration of this church: “This

Donne) never had children. With the patronage of his cousin, the Earl of Pembroke, he became the rector of a small church, Bemerton, in 1630 and was ordained a priest later that year; he completed *The Temple* during this time. His health declined rapidly in this period until his death in 1633 of tuberculosis. Izaak Walton ends his biography of Herbert by noting that he died “without an enemy”: “Thus he liv’d, and thus he dy’d like a Saint, unspotted of the World, full of Alms-deeds, full of Humility, and all the examples of a virtuous life...” (116).³

Just before his death, Herbert gave orders that *The Temple*, his collected religious works, be sent to his friend, editor, and the founder of Little Gidding, Nicholas Ferrar. Divided into three main sections, *The Temple* begins with “The Church-Porch,” a didactic, instructional poem spoken in the voice of a religious authority. As the transition to the central section, “The Church,” implies, the poems become more nuanced, more intimate, and more personal when the reader crosses the threshold from outside to inside, from porch to sacred church.⁴ This section includes more than 170 poems, among them the Passion poetry that will be discussed in this chapter. The third section, “The Church Militant,” is a historical and prophetic poem that, according to Tobin, stylistically and tonally “reflects the influence of Donne’s ‘Second Anniversary’ and Spenser’s ‘Mother

church had become much dilapidated; he restored it beautifully, at his own expense and that of other members of his family” (ix). Herbert’s interest in restoration recalls Crashaw’s careful restoration and adornment of Little St. Mary’s and the Peterhouse chapel.

³ Although critics question the accuracy of Walton’s biography—for example, Schoenfeldt labels it “notoriously unreliable” (*Bodies and Selves*, 115)—I like to think he got this part right.

⁴ The final section of “The Church-Porch” is *Superliminare*, a Vulgate Latin noun which references “the lintel, the space over the door where such a poem might be inscribed” (White, 73).

Hubbard's Tale'" (417).⁵ The tonal differences in each section—from didactic to intimate to intellectual—display the variety of Herbert's interests and experiences as a public preacher, a private devotee, and a distinguished thinker.⁶

The two main surviving manuscripts of *The Temple*, commonly referred to as *W* and *B* (after the Williams and Bodleian libraries that house them), were prepared years apart. *W* is believed to have been compiled in the mid-1620s; this manuscript includes corrections in Herbert's own hand. After his death, *B* was prepared in 1633 by scribes at Little Gidding who used the manuscript (now lost or destroyed) that Herbert sent to Ferrar. The *B* manuscript includes more than twice as many poems as the earlier *W* manuscript, as well as revisions to the early versions; for these reasons, I use the poetry from the *B* manuscript, as it likely reflects Herbert's latest editorial decisions.⁷ Though never published in his lifetime, these works may have seen a very small audience, as biographical accounts suggest that Herbert set some poems to music (which he also composed) and joined the choir at Bemerton in song.

The first publication of *The Temple* in 1633—the same year as the publication of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*—was entirely at Ferrar's discretion, as Herbert left him the following note: "[I]f he can think it may turn to the advantage

⁵ Wilcox notes the popularity of "The Church Militant" among "puritan critics of the Church of England" and adds that the poem places Herbert "firmly in the context of the controversies and poetic modes of his time, reminding the reader that he was not uninterested in arguments; he simply chose to conduct them in a more individualised rhetorical mode while writing the lyrics of *The Church*" (xxxix).

⁶ In situating Herbert on a Protestant spectrum, Tobin suggests, "The best that we can say is that he is not 'High' church or, to use the term anachronistically, 'Anglo-Catholic' or Laudian, but he does prefer ceremony over barrenness and is drawn frequently and powerfully to the image and role of the Eucharistic sacrament" (xii).

⁷ The one exception to this is a consideration of the fascinating revisions to "The Passion," a stand-alone poem in *W*, that, in *B*, constitutes the final twelve lines of "Good Friday."

of any dejected poor Soul, let it be made publick; if not, let him burn it; for I and it, are less than the least of God's mercies."⁸ The concern that Herbert expresses here recalls a similar sentiment at the end of the dedication: "Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain: / Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain." At both the beginning and, arguably, the very end of *The Temple* (as the note to Ferrar could be considered Herbert's last words on the collection), Herbert raises the issue of the public/private devotional divide. The foundation of privacy—as reading the works is elective (Herbert solicits a kind of devotional contract from those who continue reading) and selective (useful only for those who may "make a gain" or find "advantage")—suggests that the poems have deeply personal significance to him. Unlike Crashaw and Donne, who circulated their poems to audiences in their lifetimes, Herbert's audience constituted himself and his God, opening to a wider readership of souls only possibly, and only after his death.

Herbert has maintained a healthy readership to this day. Recent criticism by Achsah Guibbory and Michael Carl Schoenfeldt situates discussions about Herbert's doctrinal affiliation within the context of the "contemporary conflict over worship" that divides ceremonialist and individual devotional priorities (Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community*, 45), as well as within the tense relationship between workings of the outward body and the inward mind, described as a "particularly literal mode of self-fashioning, one that turns inward as much as outward" (Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 38).⁹ These works have

⁸ Cited in Walton's *Life of Herbert* (109)

⁹ Foundational critical texts like Barbara Kiefer Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century English Lyric* and Richard Strier's *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry* have devoted scholarship to situating Herbert and his

given rise to scholarship on sacramental poetics in *The Temple*, as critics like Robert Whalen investigate the way sacrament provides a means of integrating ceremony and privacy. Martin Elsky finds sacramental topoi to be embedded in the framework of “The Church,” arguing that Herbert uses sacrament in order “to be part of the Passion story by fulfilling in his own spiritual life the sacramental types established by the Crucifixion, thereby receiving its benefits” (321). I hope to add to this conversation a close consideration of Herbert’s varied depictions of the Passion as they establish concerns and priorities that develop in the greater body of poems in “The Church”; his unique treatments of the Passion, I will argue, offer insight into what “benefits”—pious, personal, psychological—he seeks, as well as a means of better understanding contrasting representations by Crashaw and Donne.

Built into the foundation of Christianity, the paradox of the Passion necessitates that only destruction can bring about salvation; Christ’s assumption of mortal form is integral to this paradox, as it forces him to experience the limits of mortality by dying. Thus, in a sense, Christ performs the original, and most important, *imitatio* by taking human form and living a mortal life. Therefore, the imitation of Christ, or *imitatio Christi*, enacts a very natural reversal of this gesture: devout mortals who seek to respond to the Passion present a creative manifestation of Christ’s original imitation. Nandra Perry’s new book, *Imitatio Christi: The Poetics of Piety in Early Modern England*, offers a way of

work within Protestant doctrinal categories; Elizabeth Clarke later jokingly notes that scholars “have assigned Herbert to every religious and political category from revolutionary Puritan to enthusiastic Laudian” (12).

conceptualizing Herbert's interactive engagement with the Passion.¹⁰ While Herbert is not featured in the book, Perry's contention that early modern representations of *imitatio Christi* "speak to deeply felt and widely held anxieties about the relationship of linguistic 'surfaces' to the poetic, philosophical, and theological 'essences' they were long believed to contain and convey" (5) applies to Herbert's longstanding discomfort with his attachment to language as a means of bridging mortal surface and divine essence.

Like Herbert, both Crashaw and Donne rely on the flexibility of language in their Passion works: Crashaw models interpretation and active pious engagement to a didactic end, and Donne uses interpretive and formal ingenuity to seek agency and (by extension) self-realization. Herbert uses the fluidity of language in striking and imaginative ways, as he reflects the wholeness of Christ and the comprehensive experience of the believer through imitation. Regina Maria Schwartz seems to have Crashaw and Donne in mind when she observes that "Herbert's poetry does not try to offer a mental or sensory picture of the miracle of divine love; it does not try to contain its subject. Rather it somehow depicts a miracle that language can only point toward" (6). Where Crashaw simulates the wounded Christ by training the reader to appreciate *both* a "mental" and a "sensory" picture of "the miracle of divine love," and Donne tries to "contain" or emulate Christ in the hopes of asserting selfhood, Herbert uses

¹⁰ Perry defines *imitatio Christi* as "the traditional devotional practice of imitating Christ in his person and Passion" (2), a definition stemming from the more general conception of early modern *imitatio*, or, according to Thomas M. Greene, "a precept and activity which...embraced not only literature, but pedagogy, grammar, rhetoric, esthetics, the visual arts, music, historiography, politics, and philosophy" and had consequences for "the theory of style, the philosophy of history, and for conceptions of the self" (1-2).

imitative means to test out relations between pious obedience and the creative assertion of will.

In Section I of this chapter, I explore how the Passion poetry in “The Church” conveys Herbert’s conception of spiritual progress as necessarily ongoing and experientially comprehensive to enable one to achieve the fullest understanding of Christ’s sacrifice. Just one event, a critical one, since it marks the origin of salvation for the mortal devout as well as the first thematic cluster in “The Church,” the Passion in Herbert’s poems models the concentration of time and experience after Christ, who lives outside of time and mortal limitations.¹¹ By interweaving discrete depictions of the Passion, Herbert suggests that devotion in its richest apprehension involves efforts toward revisionary, ever-developing, comprehensive understanding. The second section of the chapter builds on the foundation of the Passion poetics of “The Church” to probe Herbert’s use of *imitatio Christi* as it enlivens lyrics that involve various forms of interaction and dialogue. Interactive engagement affords Herbert a familiarity with Christ that allows him to circumvent the perceived one-sidedness or univocality of prayer. Thus he conducts what Helen Vendler describes as “theoretical experiments in mutuality, yearning ‘horizontal’ revisions of the soul’s usual ‘vertical’ distance from God in the conventional rhetoric of prayer” (30), adding voices and dialogue to his poetic structures of interiority. Herbert’s interactive poems, I argue, expand

¹¹ The exception to this is “The Altar,” the first poem of “The Church,” which reads as an introduction to the body of lyrics. Joseph H. Summers writes that the opening poem “*is* the altar upon which the following poems (Herbert’s ‘sacrifice of praise’) are offered, and it is an explanation of the reason for their composition. God has commanded a continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving made from the broken and contrite heart” (267).

the form of *imitatio Christi* to accommodate a spoken, recorded form of intimacy. The considerations of progress and interaction bear on the use of language and poetic form, as Herbert's relationship to language speaks to a larger conception of piety that requires elasticity and creativity as well as determination and ongoing engagement.¹² In the end, Herbert's lyrics reflect a sense of the importance of comprehensive experience in faith—which includes moments of despair as well as moments of assurance—that is less of a priority in Crashaw's and Donne's religious works. Herbert's devotion inhabits a poetic space that connects the progressive journey of the believer to that of the mortal Christ, featuring the wide-ranging paradoxes, failures, and successes that make up experience.

**I. “There is no dealing with thy mighty passion”¹³: Herbert's Passions in
“Good Friday,” “The Thanksgiving,” and “The Reprisal”**

After the introductory poem, “The Altar,” “The Church” section of *The Temple* begins with a cluster of Passion poetry, a fitting starting point for considerations of the Christian condition and its attendant significance and practices. The seventh poem in this sequence, “Good Friday” offers the rare opportunity to examine Herbert's shifting priorities in dealing with the event of

¹² Herbert channels his exploratory attitude through the speakers in his poems. In order to avoid direct conflation of Herbert with his speakers, I follow Peter Hühn's “functionalist” critical model, which understands poems as “constructing a kind of generalized model for exploring and enacting specific conditions of the self” (221). Since Herbert, like Donne, probes discrete (and, at times, competing) “conditions of the self,” this lens creates the displacement needed to realize Herbert's unified vision, one that encompasses various voices and struggles. Further, I differentiate between the different, but closely connected, speakers of the lyrics in order to accommodate the separate attitudes adopted by Herbert in the interest of promoting his ideal of experience.

¹³ “The Reprisal,” line 2

Christ's death, as he revises the earlier Williams version (arranged in the mid-1620s) to read as an appreciably different poem in the later Bodleian manuscript (arranged in 1633). In "Expanding the Poem Itself: Reading George Herbert's Revisions," Janis Lull argues for a consideration of Herbert's *W* manuscript alongside the later *B* version to appreciate more fully his devotional goals. Lull's article does not, however, include "Good Friday," which reveals how Herbert changed his conception of the Passion, the foundational event of "The Church." More generally, Herbert's attitude toward language and the revision process in "Good Friday" may be understood in the context of the overall composition of *The Temple* as demonstrating the successful devout's ethic of adaptability and continued effort.

In its earliest recorded form, "The Passion" appears in *W* as a twelve-line standalone poem in three stanzas:

Since blood is fittest, Lord, to write
 Thy sorrows in, and bloody fight;
 My heart hath store, write there, where in
 One box doth lie both ink and sin:

That when sin spies so many foes,
 Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes,
 All come to lodge there, sin may say,
No room for me, and fly away.

Sin being gone, O fill the place,
 And keep possession with thy grace;
 Lest sin take courage and return,
 And all the writings blot or burn.

The speaker references writing in the first and last lines of the poem, thus circumscribing the Passion within subtle references to its narrativity. Initially urging Christ to share his sorrows by writing them in blood, the speaker ends by requesting the continued presence of the sacred text in his heart so that sin may not take root there. A destruction of the Lord's writing, or the account of his "whips," "nails," "wounds," and "woes," would realize the speaker's fear: that sin would replace God's grace. The vulnerable nature of writing, which can be blotted, burned, or lost (as in the case of the Ten Commandments), threatens a sin of erasure, as a record of the Passion narrative could be compromised.¹⁴

Yet, by suggesting that writing may ward off sin (which would occupy the same space), the speaker indirectly introduces the possibility that sin may also take the form of writing. He hints at the uncomfortable coexistence of sin and ink in his heart, "where in / One box doth lie both ink and sin" (3-4), suggesting possible contamination of the writing by sin. Herbert reiterates this possibility in his note to Ferrar when seeking publication discretion: "[I]f he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor Soul, let it be made publick; if not, let

¹⁴ James Boyd White links the speaker's request for God to write on his heart with the writing of the Ten Commandments: "The idea must be a carryover from 'The Sinner,' that God will write his story on the heart as once he wrote his laws upon a stone" (116).

him burn it; for I and it are less than the least of God's mercies" (Walton, *Life of Herbert*, 109). The idea of permanently destroying text to prevent sin from gripping one's soul unites the two disparate voices: the speaker of the lyric and Herbert himself in the letter. In the poem, the Lord's narrative of the Passion would be lost and supplanted by sin. In the letter, Herbert suggests that the destruction of his text (which alludes to the Passion as the pinnacle of "God's mercies")—in its mortal inferiority—could be preferable to its circulation. The poem thus offers a complicated treatment of language, writing, and narrative as both repellent of and susceptible to sin, an assessment Herbert shares in his note, in his Passion lyrics, and in his greater body of poetry.

"The Passion" shows sensitivity to the Passion's narrativity, as well as awareness of the task of narrating the narrative, through the speaker's request that the Lord write the story himself. Crashaw's "Charitas Nimia" likewise creates a direct link between writing (more specifically, Christ's writing) and the Passion: "Why should the white / Lamb's bosom write / The purple name / Of my sin's shame?" (57-60). In Crashaw's poem, the reference to constructing the Passion narrative also has a twofold function: to point out the injustice of Christ's death, and, on a more instructional level, to demonstrate the interpretive acts that Crashaw hopes to model and enlist from his readers. Whereas Crashaw's poem offers the tools to arrive at a personally meaningful interpretation of the Passion, Herbert's begs for the Lord to bypass the dilution caused by language and imprint the event onto his heart. As compared to Crashaw's, Herbert's early poem characterizes the Passion as most successfully rendered when infused directly by

God into the heart of the devout to prevent contamination, the encroachment of sin, and—by extension—the dangers of narrative mediation by a mortal.¹⁵

The speaker's limited, nuanced involvement in the narrative gestures toward Christ's account without supplying the details himself. For example, the "foes" of sin are the Lord's "sorrows" (internal rhyme from the previous stanza), the narrative details of his crucifixion. He elaborates by grouping the elements of the story into categories that capture physicality and emotion in broad terms: "Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes" (6). Despite avoiding narrative authority over the Passion, however, the speaker comfortably ventriloquizes sin's imagined response to Christ's text, "*No room for me*" (8). By featuring levels of narrativity in his early poem "The Passion"—the speaker tells the story of asking Christ to tell his story—Herbert reflects his discomfort with mortal, mediated language, especially when entrusted to convey an experience as meaningful as Christ's death.¹⁶

Yet Herbert's message also encourages textual preservation through his allusions to destruction, and it supports rereading and reconsideration, as he revises this poem by absorbing it into his longer later work, "Good Friday":

O my chief good,
 How shall I measure out thy blood?
 How shall I count what thee befell,

¹⁵ The speaker's request for the direct infusion of the Lord's narrative recalls St. Teresa of Ávila's concerns about mediated language in her autobiography.

¹⁶ Herbert features the Lord as writer in lines 19-20 of "A True Hymn"—"As when th'heart says (sighing to be approved) / *O, could I love!* And stops: God writeth, *Loved*"—which will be discussed in the next section.

And each grief tell?

Shall I thy woes

Number according to thy foes?

Or, since one star showed thy first breath,

Shall all thy death?

Or shall each leaf,

Which falls in Autumn, score a grief?

Or cannot leaves, but fruit, be sign

Of the true vine?

Then let each hour

Of my whole life one grief devour;

That thy distress through all may run,

And be my sun.

Or rather let

My several sins their sorrows get;

That as each beast his cure doth know,

Each sin may so.¹⁷

¹⁷ The text of "The Passion" follows, comprising the final twelve lines of the poem.

Graphically and metrically, the addition of these twenty lines creates a stark contrast with the final twelve lines. The metric variation within each of the five added stanzas (4-8-8-4) adds a sense of circularity that highlights the uniformity of the final three (8-8-8-8); further, the visual choppiness of this beginning section accentuates the blocked text of the last three stanzas. These formal differences reflect the shift in content between the two sections, as the poem moves from tensely questioning to hopefully assured. Herbert's six rhetorical questions in the beginning section find resolution, if only in cadence, in the declarative statements toward the end. Tinged with an economic valence—"measure" (2), "count" (3), "tell" (4), "each" (4, 9, 13, 20), "number" (6), "one" (7, 14), "all" (8, 15), "score" (10), and "whole" (14)—the questions suggest a drive to quantify that clashes with the speaker's repeated interrogative term "shall" (2, 3, 5, 8, 9) and unsettled term "or" (7, 9, 11, 17), neither of which appears in the final three stanzas. Schoenfeldt speaks to the trajectory of the two segments of the poem, noting that the final stanzas "transform the speaker's effort to compose a response to the sacrifice into a prayer to be made the vehicle of divine writing" ("That Spectacle," 579). The poem thus shifts attitudes, starting with a speaker who questions how to "tell" (4)—in both senses of "count" and "relate"—the story of the Passion, and ending with a speaker who asks the Lord to "write" (21) the story himself.

Since Herbert revises "The Passion" by adding a voice of uncertainty to the voice of faithful confidence, he likely found the journey from insecurity to assurance to be important in conceptualizing the events of "Good Friday." By combining the two parts, Herbert may record—visually, aurally, and

substantively—the experience of coming to spiritual awareness. The circularity and uneasy chopiness of the beginning, with its unanswered questions and unsuccessful attempts to quantify grief and gratitude, add meaning to the prayerful endpoint by cataloguing the experience of working toward piety. James Boyd White connects the poem’s focus on writing to Herbert’s own revision process: “This writing is connected with what Herbert himself is doing: writing and rewriting towards a kind of knowledge that is imaginative, narrative, and experiential in kind, and that cannot be reduced to the quantitative or intellectual” (116). White’s observation about the experiential aspect of Herbert’s values seems especially apt, given the circumstances of this poem’s revision as well as its added content. Herbert underscores the connection between the speaker’s path to prayer and the process of textual revision by developing the subtle reference to writing in lines 3-4 (“How shall I count what thee befell, / And each grief tell?”) into the foundational request of the final stanzas, “My heart hath store, *write there*, where in / One box doth lie both ink and sin” (23-24, emphasis added). Besides the primary focus on responding to the Passion and the repeated rhyme words “woes, foes” (5-6) in the penultimate stanza (25-26), little else unites these two disparate segments. The contrast creates a formal awareness that “The Passion” alone, despite its references to writing, lacks. Taken in conjunction with the speaker’s transition from self-reliance to faith, the formal shift in the poem signals the prioritization of content—in this case, embracing Christ in one’s heart—over creativity. Herbert takes pains to highlight and record this journey, demonstrating his investment in the progressive nature of experience.

of the event in order to respond with appropriate awareness and appreciation. “Shall I weep blood?” (5), he asks, hoping to partake in the physical pain of the event through the emotional channels available to him. The speaker’s grasping at means to engage with Christ’s divine Passion highlights his awareness of his own mortal limitations; even as he recasts the “doleful story” (11) of the Passion, he acknowledges the futility of his creative act: “‘Tis but to tell the tale is told” (8).

The recognition that “the tale is told” also calls attention to the speaker’s own imaginative retelling of the Passion narrative in “The Thanksgiving,” as well as Herbert’s reiterations of the event in “The Church.” Verbal cues link the lyrics, signaling a heightened awareness of how form relates to the nuances in content. For example, the beginnings of “Good Friday” and “The Thanksgiving” both repeat the construction “Shall I” to couch their rhetorical questions in conditionality. The phrase appears five times in the first sixteen lines of “The Thanksgiving” and three times in the first five lines of “Good Friday,” shifting in each poem: in “The Thanksgiving,” to more emphatic phrasing “I will” and “I’ll” (appearing eleven times in the last 33 lines), and in “Good Friday,” to imperatives, as the speaker’s first-person references disappear in favor of his requests to Christ. The high concentration of the memorable phrase “Shall I” in the beginning section of “Good Friday” reminds the reader of the same usage in “The Thanksgiving,” a gesture that formally supports the idea of progression across poems—promoting the *effort* to develop rather than endorsing each speaker’s specific iteration of development. When read in sequence, the poems speak to each other, taking up similar lines of thought, feelings, and modes of

response, which Herbert voices differently but ties together structurally to generate meaning through the experience that variation affords.

The structural argument about progression appears in *The Temple* as a volume, in “The Church” as a section, and in the Passion poems that form its beginning lyrical cluster. The explicit verbal echoes, like the repeated “Shall I” bridging “The Thanksgiving” and “Good Friday,” work alongside more subtle connections among the works. The opening couplets of “The Thanksgiving”—“O King of grief! (A title strange, yet true, / To thee of all kings only due) / O King of wounds! How shall I grieve for thee, / Who in all grief preventest me?” (1-4)—for example, pick up on the thread that the previous poem in sequence, “The Sacrifice,” starts. Appearing just after “The Altar,” “The Sacrifice” is Herbert’s attempt to allow Christ to narrate the events of the Passion in the first person.¹⁸ Written in 63 four-line stanzas, “The Sacrifice” repeats the rhetorical question “Was ever grief like mine?” as the fourth line of each stanza, with only two notable exceptions. This question—echoing, chanting, and enchanting—becomes a familiar refrain by the end of the poem, and it establishes Christ’s grief, Christ’s perspective, and Christ’s voice as the primary considerations for the works that follow. The final statement, “Never was grief like mine” (252), finds an anxious indirect response in the exclamation, “O king of grief!” (1), which bursts from the speaker of “The Thanksgiving.” He goes on to reflect on Christ’s grief by asking “how shall I grieve for thee” (3), thus setting up the foundational concern of how to respond to the Passion. Through resonances with Christ’s unmatched grief in

¹⁸ The extraordinary act and significance of ventriloquizing Christ in this poem will be discussed in the next section.

“The Sacrifice,” the speaker’s consideration of his own grief in “The Thanksgiving” represents a richer and more complicated narrative.

Ultimately unsure of how to respond, the speaker of “The Thanksgiving” ends by acknowledging his failure to engage with the Passion in a way acceptable to him: “Then for thy passion—I will do for that— / Alas, my God, I know not what” (49-50). The task of what to “do” falls to the next poem, “The Reprisal,” which begins, “I have considered it, and find / There is no dealing with thy mighty passion” (1-2). By implying that the consideration occurs between the space of these poems—straddling the questioning speaker who does not know what to “do” and the resigned speaker who thinks there is no “dealing with” the Passion—Herbert suggests that progressive piety includes silent, private, intangible work as well as the more visible devotional demonstrations. Through his irresolute, questioning speakers, he also reflects the importance of effort in the face of potential (or necessary) failure.

By the end of “The Thanksgiving,” the speaker reiterates his earlier nod to feeling powerless in the wake of the Passion: “As for thy passion—But of that anon, / When with the other I have done” (29-30). This temporary postponement follows the series of rhetorical questions, delaying tactics themselves, as they engage “the other,” or responses to the more manageable details of a devout life. Schoenfeldt suggests the speaker’s reason for avoiding the Passion, noting: “When he turns to the subject of the Passion, though, the meter falters, as the speaker stutters into authenticity, realizing that humans can never offer a sacrifice that would in any way match that of Jesus” (“That Spectacle,” 576). Yet Herbert

documents the speaker's tactics of avoidance and delay, which punctuate the poem in strategically prominent places; rhetorical questions in the beginning lead to "As for thy passion—But of that anon, / When with the other I have done" (29-30) in the middle, which speaks to the final lines, "Then for thy passion—I will do for that— / Alas, my God, I know not what" (49-50). Herbert emphasizes his speaker's failures to engage with the Passion, failures that, in their visibility and "authenticity," offer a gesture of humility in the place of impossible repayment.

The speaker evokes the impossibility of a mortal response to the Passion by embedding a question about imitation into the poem's structure of deferral and humility. He poses the loaded, telling, culminating rhetorical question, "But how then shall I imitate thee, and / Copy thy fair, though bloody hand?" (15-16). Following "The Sacrifice," a lyric written from the perspective of Christ, this question bears on the issue of writing as well as on the directive to model behavior after Christ. Copying the "fair, though bloody hand" of the Lord would involve a process of transcription that quite literally switches hands from divine to mortal, from savior to saved, from donor to supplicant. This transfer showcases the power imbalance so frustrating to Donne in "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," whose speaker struggles to reconcile his own circumstances and Christ's in the final lines: "O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee, / Burne off my rusts, and my deformity, / Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace, / That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face" (39-42). Donne's speaker seeks a physical and spiritual transformation from God, punishments that would obliterate his sins and any physical evidence of his sinning, mortal selfhood. He

begs for the restoration of Christ's "image," which, as I argue in the previous chapter, would "turne" his "face" to more closely resemble God's image. If the speaker of Donne's "Goodfriday" were to answer the speaker's question in "The Thanksgiving"—"But how then shall I imitate thee, and / Copy thy fair, though bloody hand?" (15-16)—the answer would involve absorbing Christ's identity as a means of bridging the power imbalance and achieving greater physical and spiritual intimacy.

By foregrounding the question of imitation early in the Passion cluster, Herbert establishes its centrality to the many considerations that follow and lays a foundation for comparative understanding. In the instance of "The Thanksgiving," the speaker's effort to "copy" Christ's "hand" contextually relates to writing and failure.¹⁹ James Boyd White argues compellingly for a reason why Herbert's speaker fails to respond appropriately to the Passion, noting:

...in its very attempt to respond the imagination will appropriate the central role to itself, as the human and poetic imagination always does, making it 'mine' not in the sense of benefitting from it, but in the sense of claiming it, if only as the material of one's art. It is thus a performance of exactly the sort of self-centeredness from which the Passion is intended to save us. (106)

¹⁹ Allusions to writing appear earlier in the poem: "'Tis but to tell the tale is told" (8) and the reference to Christ's "doleful story" (11).

By depicting a speaker who insistently performs failure rather than “material of one’s art,” Herbert dramatizes the avoidance of engagement with the Passion in a way that leaves the focus on Christ’s incredible gesture rather than on his own poetic craft.

Yet the repeated performance of failure, as well as the numerous creative engagements in iterations of *imitatio Christi* (though less blatantly self-centered than Donne’s speaker in “Goodfriday”) in this and other Passion poems also undercuts the humility of the exercise. The acknowledgment of failure in the final line of “The Thanksgiving,” which White deems “its highest moment” (107), is indeed a gesture of artistic self-sacrifice in the context of the lyric. But why not stop there, letting the failure speak where words could not? Instead, “The Reprisal” picks up where “The Thanksgiving” leaves off:

I have considered it, and find
 There is no dealing with thy mighty passion:
 For though I die for thee, I am behind;
 My sins deserve the condemnation.

O make me innocent, that I
 May give a disentangled state and free;
 And yet thy wounds still my attempts defy,
 For by thy death I die for thee.

Ah! was it not enough that thou
 By thy eternal glory didst outgo me?
 Could'st thou not grief's sad conquests me allow,
 But in all victories overthrow me?

Yet by confession will I come
 Into the conquest. Though I can do nought
 Against thee, in thee I will overcome
 The man, who once against thee fought.

In a conversational and personal voice, the speaker of “The Reprisal” revisits the same thread that the more stylized speaker of “The Thanksgiving” tries to unravel. The shorter length and stanza divisions lend a sense of tidiness to the theme that “The Thanksgiving” (longer, more hymnlike, and with undivided lines) leaves unanswered, suggesting that even a very different temperament and approach meet with failure when facing the Passion. The speaker’s resolute tone contrasts with the message of irresolution in the poem; his “attempts” (7) to engage with the Passion have met with defiance, and his findings—final, after consideration—take the form of a maxim: “There is no dealing with thy mighty passion” (2). The settled quality of the speaker’s thoughts comes from the reader’s trust in his quiet, invisible work, as he announces his consideration as a foregone process in line 1 and his “attempts” in line 7. Although the speaker

claims creative defeat at the beginning of the poem, he goes on, “dealing with” the Passion ironically by focusing on its inexpressibility.

The speaker faces a devotional imperative, as one obligated to express the inexpressible (and further, to do so in terms that do not overstep his mortal position), that Herbert prioritizes through his emphasis on progression in “The Church.” Guibbory locates this imperative in contemporary debates about the nature of ceremonial worship, “the necessary sacrifice of praise to God” (*Ceremony and Community*, p. 68), as it relates to potentially idolatrous devotion. She argues, “To create devotional art is to ‘invent’ hymns of praise—that is, to engage in ceremonial worship. Though human creations are imperfect and thus superfluous in comparison with God’s, *not* to write devotional poetry—and, analogously, not to perform ceremonial worship—is to omit something God expects” (68-9). Herbert’s Passion lyrics dramatize God’s expectation of failure, demonstrating, at once, the humility associated with claiming inferiority and the creative agency involved in crafting and conveying failure.

Whereas the speaker of “Good Friday” uses economic language to signal his inferiority and to perform the dilemma of the vexed creative devout, the speaker of “The Reprisal” engages language of competition to similar ends. He asks: “Could’st thou not grief’s sad conquests me allow, / But in all victories overthrow me?” (11-12). The speaker reflects on his impotence in the face of Christ’s “eternal glory” (10), which leaves him powerless to achieve a small victory such as grief, claimed first by Christ through his modified refrain “Never was grief like mine” (216, 252) in “The Sacrifice.” The evocation of “all

victories” recalls the striking exclamation in “The Thanksgiving”—“Thy art of love, which I’ll turn back on thee: / O my dear Savior, Victory!” (47-8)—which appears just before his acknowledgment of failure at the end of the poem. Victory as an advantageous outcome in each case (even a victory as short-lived as a line’s worth) positions the act of creative devotion as antagonistic to Christ’s sacrifice. What does it mean to desire victory over Christ? Does the speaker of “The Thanksgiving” wish to turn the crafted “art of love” back on Christ, and win? What forms does victory take?

Herbert poses these questions in his Passion poems, answering them only obliquely by casting doubt over their answerability and by calling attention to the strangeness of the competitive effort. Though they continue to strive for victory creatively, the speakers find it unattainable from their mortal station. In “The Reprisal” particularly, the speaker contextualizes the conflict between himself and Christ explicitly through a high concentration of competitive language that, in its very insistence, highlights the baseline absurdity of the competition. Line 8—“For by thy death I die for thee”—develops the sentiment he raises in line 3, “For though I die for thee, I am behind,” as the lines position the speaker as engaging in the same struggle as Christ but still falling “behind.” He further highlights the contest aurally through the end-rhymes of the second stanza; “outgo me” (10) pairs with “overthrow me” (12), both of which refer to “thou” (9, 11) as the antecedent. The speaker intensifies this technique in the final stanza by augmenting his strength from “will I come” (13) to “I will overcome” (15). In this stanza, the speaker transitions from the “sad conquests” he seeks *of* Christ in line

11 to the “conquest” *through* Christ in line 14, a competitive shift that signals his own maturity. The speaker thus hints at the insufficient competitive framing of his gratitude earlier in the poem, recasting the conquest within a more manageable context, as he positions himself against “the man” (16) rather than his God. By recording this shift, Herbert dramatizes the failure that leads to spiritual progress, advocating for the humility that enables greater understanding.

The speaker’s misguided competition in “The Reprisal” resonates with the insufficient economic language of “The Thanksgiving” to suggest a process of repeated, visible lapses in devotional progress. Understood alongside “Good Friday”—which, revised from “The Passion,” traces the development of the devotee from questioning to assured—these Passion poems enact the comprehensive experience of the flawed, but well-meaning and creative, mortal believer. The poems speak to each other through common threads and resonances: the repeated phrasing “Shall I” that unites “The Thanksgiving” and “Good Friday”; the doomed framing mechanisms, rhetorical in “The Thanksgiving,” competitive in “The Reprisal,” and economic in “Good Friday”; the odd concentration on “victory” in “The Thanksgiving” and “The Reprisal”; the centrality of grief that begins in “The Sacrifice” and courses through the three other poems; the dramatization of the space between the poems, particularly as “The Sacrifice” sets up “The Thanksgiving,” which leads directly to “The Reprisal”; and finally, the performance of failure and deferral in each poem, whether highlighted by the speaker or added by Herbert during revisions. These devices beg for a comparative understanding of the poems, as they enrich one

another by resolving (though temporarily) and revisiting Herbert's central concerns about how to respond to the Passion humbly and appropriately. Herbert places importance on uncertainty, revision, and continued effort by both dramatizing failure and persisting in it; yet there is also victory in taking ownership of defeat and in continuing to write, if only to explore the bounds of defeat. The complicated relationship between Herbert's iterations of "sacrifice" (Christ's, those of his speakers, his own) and Christ's original sacrifice is most dramatically tested in his poetic engagements with imitation and interaction, or his means of copying Christ's "fair, though bloody, hand."

II. "Was ever grief like mine?"²⁰: Herbert's Poetry of Imitation and Interaction

In the *Defense of Poesy*, Philip Sidney defines poetry through its creative function, deeming it "an art of imitation...that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth" and sees the role of the poet as an innovator: "...our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is."²¹ Taken together, these statements reflect a tension in Herbert's lyrics, which probe the relation between "erected wit" and "the art of imitation," especially as poetic craft inflects narrative reproduction. While the speaker of "Good Friday" skirts the subject by asking the Lord to write his own narrative himself, Herbert's other lyrics—particularly those that represent interaction and imitation—engage it more directly. Perry's

²⁰ The refrain of "The Sacrifice," appearing as every fourth line except lines 212 and 248, where the modified form reads: "Never was grief like mine."

²¹ *Renaissance Literature: An Anthology of Poetry and Prose*, John C. Hunter, ed., 514

conception of the period's literary *imitatio* provides a useful framing for Herbert's concerns in these works: "Practiced skillfully, then, early modern *imitatio* is a technique for constructing original, but broadly meaningful, systems of signification from the remnants of an authoritative, but irrecoverable, past. It is a delicate art, balanced perilously between the extremes of slavish traditionalism and radically destabilizing innovation" (5). Understanding Herbert's various representations of interaction throughout "The Church" as creative iterations of *imitatio Christi* allows for a comprehensive appreciation of his efforts to respond to the Passion.

In his first and longest Passion poem (in fact, the longest lyric in "The Church"), "The Sacrifice," Herbert creates a platform on which Christ himself narrates the events of his death, highlighting irony, mortal ingratitude, and his emotional and physical suffering. Each of the 63 four-line stanzas consists of three rhymed lines and a refrain—"Was ever grief like mine?" or, twice, "Never was grief like mine"—that develops through repetition, continually reestablishing and resetting the poem's central focus on Christ's grief.²² Tobin observes the poem's Holy Week liturgical foundation; the details draw from "the tradition of reproaches, or *Improperia*, complaints by Christ in his Passion to the people on Good Friday, and...the ironically juxtaposed biblical verses, often suggested to the attentive reader by a single word" (334). Saturated with biblical allusions, the poem reads as a catalogue of references to the written Word, which serves the function of the "authoritative past" in Perry's definition of *imitatio*.

²² As Wilcox and others note, the question references Lamentations 1.12: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger" (104).

time in this stanza calls attention to Christ's omnipresence, his condition of existing outside of time and other mortal constraints, as he knows his fate "full well" (246). The poem thus dramatizes a connective understanding of time, one that uses the present to relate the past and the future and that values experience, reflection, and progression. Christ's omnipresence sets up a model for Herbert's belief (here and in subsequent poems) in the pious imperative to continue working on conceptions of his evolving relationship with his Lord through comparison and revision. Herbert voices this value through a Christ-speaker of his own creation, a powerful narrative technique that validates as it imitates.

The twofold benefit of the *imitatio Christi* Herbert employs in the poem allows him, on the one hand, to make Christ's presence immediate and palpable, and on the other, to explore and justify his own concerns. Positioned between the shaped poem "The Altar" and the saturated single stanza of "The Thanksgiving," "The Sacrifice" uses tidy constructions of ironic reversal—such as "I, who am Truth, turn into Truth their deeds" (179)—and a cyclical refrain and cadence that highlight its formal regularity. The Christ-speaker of Herbert's creation narrates his Passion with a straightforward authority that contrasts with the stylized creativity of the lyrics that surround it. Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen discusses the poem's heightened formal awareness as it relates to imitation:

In 'The Sacrifice,' *imitatio Christi* through suffering takes place on a level of poetic form, in the central conceit of making Christ the speaker of a poem... The Christ who speaks in the poem, then, may assert the

uniqueness of his suffering, but the formal conceit of ‘The Sacrifice’—Herbert’s appropriation of Christ’s voice—operates on the assumption that humans can share in his pain through imaginative and, we might add, poetic empathy. (133)

Imitation certainly affords access to a version of Christ’s pain through the insistence on his grief and disappointment; although, another, more complicated, result of imitating Christ’s speech in “The Sacrifice” is the empathy that Herbert imagines for himself.

Herbert plays the role of invisible scribe in the poem, a position that becomes more perceptible through the lyric’s sensitive attention to form and layered interaction, its subtle references to writing and creation, and its resonances with other works in “The Church.” The Christ-speaker’s representations of hands (and their craft) stand out as among the few allusions to the body, and they signify creation by both Christ (who engenders salvation) and Herbert (who crafts the poem). The first mention of hands as agents of action appears in the twelfth stanza (lines 45-48):

See, they lay hold on me, not with the hands
Of faith, but fury: yet at their commands
I suffer binding, who have loosed their bands:²³

²³ Tobin notes the Biblical allusions in this stanza: “This is a conflation of Ezekiel 34:27, ‘...they...shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke,’ and Psalm 116:16 (AV), ‘O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.’” (335-6).

Was ever grief like mine?

Line 47 conveys the stinging irony that Christ must knowingly “suffer binding” in order to free mortals from their doomed fate; hearing this through the voice of the savior himself intensifies the message. The sentiment that hands may enact positive or negative change (free or bind) builds upon the previous idea that hands may work for good (“faith”) or evil (“fury”). The straightforward physical representation—the hands of fury that “lay hold” on Christ—contrasts with the more curious conception of “hands of faith.” From the perspective of the stanza, “hands of faith” would serve to distinguish Christ’s followers from his persecutors; yet, in the greater context of the poem, the phrase “hands of faith” gestures back to the very hands that penned it in this tribute to Christ.

Stanzas 20 and 21 (lines 77-84) elaborate on the notion of hands of “fury,” as they apply to Herod’s misdeeds: “*Herod* and all his bands do set me light, / Who teach all hands to war, fingers to fight” (77-78). The physical representation of hands in this case is the positive one, as it conveys Christ’s power and “might” (79). In the context of his physical submission during the Passion, however, teaching “hands to war” and “fingers to fight” implies an altogether different kind of battle, one that retaliates against condemnation. “*Herod* in judgment sits, while I do stand; / Examines me with a censorious hand” (81-82), narrates Christ, who implicitly summons the hands and fingers that he has trained to support him in the war on faith. The final reference to hands applies to Christ’s own—“They buffet me, and box me as they list, / Who grasp the earth and heaven with my fist” (129-

130)—recalling Donne’s similar sentiment in lines 21-22 of “Goodfriday” (“Could I behold those hands which span the Poles / And tune all spheres at once peirc’d with those holes?”). Both poems express the tragedy of Christ’s sacrifice by situating his mortal powerlessness during the Passion within the enormity of his divine influence. The phrase “grasp the earth and heaven with my fist” conveys more than Christ’s power, however; more literally, it reflects Herbert’s involvement in *imitatio Christi* in this poem, as he uses his poetic fist to grasp, or better understand, and to pen his creative version of “the earth and heaven.” Each of these references depicts hands as divided: they commit both good and evil acts, and they suggest both physical and metaphorical meanings. Perhaps the least figurative reading, the interpretation that hands signify Herbert’s own craftsmanship, contributes to the heightened awareness of form in the poem.

The fresh imagination of Herbert’s *imitatio Christi* goes beyond ventriloquizing Christ in his Passion to include layers of interaction between Christ and the people he encounters. The crowd’s damning voice, for example, courses through the poem, strengthening the sense of the injustice of Christ’s death through specific, realistic, haunting details: “Hark how they cry aloud still, *Crucify: / It is not fit he live a day*, they cry” (97-98); “Mine own dear people, cry, *Away, away*” (102); “Servants and abjects flout me; they are witty: / *Now prophesy who strikes thee*, is their ditty” (141-142); “They bow their knees to me, and cry, *Hail king: / Whatever scoffs or scornfulness can bring*” (173-174); “Thus trimmed forth they bring me to the rout, / *Who Crucify him*, cry with one strong shout” (185-186). The recorded shouts by the crowd introduce an element of

interaction that complicates—and thus calls attention to—the imitative form. Herbert envisions the poem by first interpreting Christ’s feelings of grief during the Passion; he then imitates Christ by voicing those feelings as he imagines Christ would; and finally, he moves beyond these foundational representations to imagine how Christ would characterize his interactions with others. Kimberly Johnson’s observation about the “meaningful objecthood” (43) that Herbert attributes to language in *The Temple* bears upon the poem’s interactive layering. She writes, “Such formal ingenuity should not be regarded as mere ornamentation or even a reinforcement of the ‘real meaning’ of the poem as expressed in its content. Rather, an emphasis on form, on surface, as opaque in Herbert’s poetry demands that we confront form *qua* form, that we register the presence of the poem as a material artifact” (44). The multiple levels of removal from what is already a foundationally imaginative first-person expression add to Christ’s lyric a recording function that substantiates the poem’s formal objecthood by calling attention to its intricate dimensions.

Perhaps the most interesting imagined dialogue, however, appears in stanza 54 (lines 213-216), which marks the moment when Christ addresses God the Father as well as the first revision to the refrain:

But, *O my God, my God!* why leav’st thou me,
 The son, in whom thou dost delight to be?
My God, my God—
 Never was grief like mine.

In this striking moment, Christ breaks his narrative in order to speak directly to God. Schoenfeldt observes the formal irony of Herbert's imitative representation as it relates to the poem's content, arguing, "There is a profound structural irony in the existence of a poem in which a mortal poet assumes the voice of the suffering God telling his creatures that they cannot appropriate the sacrifice represented therein" ("That Spectacle," p.572-3). This irony becomes particularly perceptible in these lines as Christ conveys his heightened despair. Until now, Christ was both the speaker and the divine authority in the poem; however, the invocation to God the Father situates Christ in a position more like Herbert's, one who longs for God but acutely feels the distance that separates them.

Herbert echoes line 213 in form and content, though through a different speaker, in the next poem, "The Thanksgiving": "*My God, my God, why dost thou part from me?*" (9). Just as in "The Sacrifice," the line in "The Thanksgiving" stands out as a sudden exclamation that shakes the speaker out of his narrative. Memorable and personal, this sentiment operates alongside the verbal failures in each poem (the deferrals in "The Thanksgiving," and even the overt performance of failure in "The Reprisal"), further establishing a connection between the Christ-speaker and Herbert's mortal speakers. When his words and imagination fail in "The Sacrifice"—"*My God, my God—*" (215)—Christ jumps ahead to the structural reliability of the poem's form, revising the refrain meaningfully in order to accommodate the heaviness of the moment. Thus the irony that Schoenfeldt observes reaches greater heights as Herbert's creative license goes beyond

imitating Christ's narrative voice: he links Christ with his other speakers by capturing, by *daring* to capture, a moment of divine verbal breakdown.

The final stanza (lines 249-252) offers a gesture of further imitative removal that renews the poem's focus on form:

But now I die; now all is finished.

My woe, man's weal: and now I bow my head.

Only let others say, when I am dead,

Never was grief like mine.

Christ again changes the familiar refrain "Was ever grief like mine?" to "Never was grief like mine," the resounding statement that repeats line 216. As the last line of the poem, the declaration sets up the initial emotional outburst of the speaker in "The Thanksgiving"—"O King of grief!" (1). Christ's final narrative act is to die, but he defers this act in the interest of organizing his final formal act of surrendering language. He writes, "But *now* I die; *now* all is finished. / My woe, man's weal: and *now* I bow my head" (249-250, emphasis added), with each ironic "now" signaling further delay. The Christ-speaker's final formal gesture of recoding and relinquishing the refrain, the language that has been most closely associated with him, actually ends the poem. Herbert's Christ grants permission for unspecified "others" to engage language creatively and devotionally as he did: "Only let others say, when I am dead / Never was grief like mine" (251-252). Thus Herbert builds into "The Sacrifice," through an imaginative engagement in

imitatio Christi, the devotional imperative to explore one's relationship to the Passion and, importantly, the blessing to share in Christ's language (to "say") using the "hands of faith" that craft poetic form.

Though less explicitly focused on Christ and his Passion, Herbert's interactive poetry throughout "The Church" presents creative engagements with *imitatio Christi* that should be considered alongside "The Sacrifice" for a richer understanding of how imitation allows him to explore and test his devotional values. Interaction adds dimension to imitation, as Herbert must first imagine the voice of another and then capture that voice as it relates outward. The creative leeway that enables Herbert to imagine levels of interaction—such as multiple voices, echoes of the self, and writers within the lyric—is also what makes these formal relations suspect. The considerations that frame Perry's investigation of early modern literary *imitatio* bear on Herbert's use of interactive poetry as an offshoot of imitation:

Can human signs point humans to God or merely to fictions of their own making? Do they enable people to follow and become like Christ or entangle them in the labyrinth of their own selfish desires? If...the Renaissance is marked by the hope of the former and the fear of the latter, then *imitatio* can be seen as a dangerous but necessary strategy for improving the odds in God's favor. By grounding language in authorized and authorizing sources, it reduces (to borrow a phrase from Waswo) the

‘intoxicating and terrifying possibility of *making* meaning,’ the possibility, in other, less anachronistic words, of sin. (5)

In the following interactive poems, Herbert tests himself and his creative ability by not simply making meaning, but rather, by finding various existing meanings in works of his own making.

“A True Hymn” features the interaction of a sighing, speaking heart, a writing God, and a narrator who bridges the two. Though it appears well after the Passion cluster, the poem may be seen to respond to “Good Friday” in its realization of the speaker’s request for God to write in his heart: “Since blood is fittest, Lord, to write / Thy sorrows in, and bloody fight; / My heart hath store, write there, where in / One box doth lie both ink and sin” (21-24). In a slightly different context, “A True Hymn” dramatizes the heart’s own plea for God to supplement its “somewhat scant” verse, foregrounding the tension between truth and art. “The fineness which a hymn or psalm affords, / Is, when the soul unto the lines accords” (9-10), reasons the speaker, justifying the heart’s simple words by virtue of their sincerity (while also implying the potential artificiality of ornamental language). God intervenes in the final stanza (lines 16-20), supplying the last word of the poem:

Whereas if th’ heart be moved,
 Although the verse be somewhat scant,
 God doth supply the want.

As when th' heart says (sighing to be approved)

O, could I love! and stops: God writeth, *Loved*.

Vendler interprets this moment—when God anticipates the heart's need and enters the poem—as validation for its sincere, though “inferior,” verse: “Because the divinely inscribed ‘*Loved*’ not only fills out the verse line but also completes the rhyme, we see that when the poet’s heart fills with love, God steps in to make the ‘somewhat scant’ verse perfect in all respects—in thought, in rhythm, and in rhyme” (15). Yet the perfection of God’s response and the assurance it offers the heart are offered at a formal distance through the hinging comparative preposition “As” (19). By couching the imitation of God-as-writer in a simile and using “Loved” in the passive voice and, at least ambiguously, in the past tense—thus responding to “Am I loved?” rather than the posed question, “Could I love?—Herbert avoids depicting the direct infusion of God’s words, which the speaker solicits in “Good Friday.” Instead, God’s involvement in the end of the poem justifies the speaker’s concerns about language clouding truth by performing the impediments to its expression rather than enacting a gesture of straightforward assurance.²⁴

Whereas in the ending of “A True Hymn,” “God doth supply the want” (18) to finish the line (even if the “want” is at a remove), the reverse takes place in “Dialogue,” a four-stanza interactive poem in traditional dialogue form that

²⁴ Though oblique in expression, the assurance of God’s “*Loved*” echoes the sentiment of “The Thanksgiving”: “the tale is told” (8). Further, it accords with the idea, present throughout *The Temple*, that everything the speaker wants to do has already been done for him.

alternates between a mortal speaker and Christ. The mortal interrupts Christ's designated verse to end the final stanza (lines 25-32):

That is all, if that I could

Get without repining;

And my clay my creature would

Follow my resigning.

That as I did freely part

With my glory and desert,

Left all joys to feel all smart—

Ah! no more: thou break'st my heart.

Form, expectation, and context entitle the final line to Christ, who abides by the dialogue format throughout the poem and, in the case of the final sentence about the Passion, sets up a three-line framework for his conclusive statement. The more straightforward interpretation of this line sees the moment as too emotionally overwhelming for the mortal supplicant, who shows his grief by interrupting Christ. For instance, van Dijkhuizen writes, "Although this exclamation conforms to the metre and rhyme scheme of the stanza, it is typographically isolated from the main body of the poem. The suggestion is that the speaker's sudden awareness of Christ's suffering overflows from poetic form, and renders further poetic utterance both superfluous and impossible" (139). Yet van Dijkhuizen's observation about the formal details of the line—as simultaneously fitting and

disruptive—suggests other possible readings: what if the speaker of the last line is Christ, like the aggrieved Christ of “The Sacrifice,” interrupting himself? Or, perhaps more interestingly, what if both Christ and the mortal contribute the line simultaneously? The Christ-speaker of “The Sacrifice” relinquishes his refrain to “others” (251), setting a precedent for sharing and recasting language, particularly as it might apply to disparate contexts. The idea that the same line could be spoken by either Christ or the speaker (both overwhelmed by grief) with very different meanings contributes to the greater concept that language and form—and their ruptures—enable identification with Christ. In this way, what van Dijkhuizen sees as poetic utterance rendered “both superfluous and impossible” may instead suggest cohesion, as the poem’s imitative flexibility facilitates mortal/divine conformity.

A similar gesture of linguistic unity takes place at the end of “The Cross,” a poem less explicitly interactive than “Dialogue.” The speaker of “The Cross” engages *imitatio Christi* subtly by fixating on his experience of hopelessness and inability, which causes a version of emotional and psychological crucifixion. His incapacity stems from his failure of expression, for he seeks “some place, where [he] might sing” (3) and contemplates, “What I would do for thee, if once my groans / Could be allowed for harmony” (15-16). In an effort to remedy his distress, the speaker invokes Christ’s words, claiming them as his own in the final stanza (lines 31-36):

Ah my dear Father, ease my smart!

These contraries crush me: these cross actions
 Do wind a rope about, and cut my heart:
 And yet since these thy contradictions
 Are properly a cross felt by thy Son,
 With but four words, my words, *Thy will be done*.

In one sense, the speaker's creative engagement with *imitatio Christi* allows him to represent his own emotional death in a way that parallels the Passion by calling attention to the "contraries" or paradoxes and "cross actions" common to both. The poem's final gesture, however, involves linguistic appropriation rather than straightforward imitation.

Most critics describe the ending as a moment of unification between the speaker and Christ. Schoenfeldt, for example, finds that the final words solidify the speaker's representative *imitatio Christi*: "...ventriloquizing Christ's four words as if they were his own completes the identification of his suffering with that of his savior" (*Prayer and Power*, 147). In a similar vein, Elizabeth Clarke believes that this act demonstrates the humility of the speaker (whom she identifies as Herbert himself), which strengthens his association with Christ:

The last four words of 'The Crosse' signify Herbert's surrender to God in several ways. The words '*Thy will be done*' are not really his own at all. They are the words of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Herbert has correctly located his own place in salvation history: this is Golgotha.

However, he has also correctly judged that the crucifixion to be held is not his own, but Christ's. Taking Christ's response as his own, he identifies himself with Christ's death, just as Romans 6 advocates. (216)

The speaker's final identification with Christ becomes more meaningful, though, when considered a product of his earlier fears about expressive inability. His emphatic ownership of the familiar phrase from The Lord's Prayer—which he reiterates with the aside “*my words*” (36, emphasis added)—implies his awareness of the appropriation as well as his effort to recast the language in the context of his situation. Like the speaker of “Dialogue,” the speaker of “The Cross” suggests the mutual applicability of the same phrase to Christ and himself, an act that allows him to transcend his anxiety about expression while inflecting a known expression with a creative valence. In this case, then, imitation through direct appropriation of Christ's language provides a more powerful identification (as well as an endpoint) than imitation solely through metaphor.

Herbert's poems that represent imitation, interaction, or both, explore the possibility of a response to (and perhaps even a greater appreciation of) Christ's sacrifice. Using Christ as lyrical narrator, “The Sacrifice” dramatizes the Passion in a way that positions Christ as reaching out to Herbert (rather than the reverse, a more typical use of *imitatio Christi*). This gesture allows Herbert to rehearse and validate his own devotional beliefs—such as his valuing of progressive engagement in faith—as well as to highlight formal awareness through layers of interaction. Where “The Sacrifice” creates a foundation for comparing and

sharing formal properties, such as language, “A True Hymn” performs a formal justification for Herbert’s concerns about language, particularly the tension between art and truth, by depicting God as an imperfect writer. Both “Dialogue” and “The Cross” demonstrate how interaction, interruption, and shared language may enable a stronger identification with Christ than more straightforward iterations of *imitatio Christi*. Clarke speaks to Herbert’s keen interest in interactivity: “Herbert is all too aware that no external voice actually intrudes into his poetry; at least, if it does, it speaks in his own familiar accents. However, he is so committed to the possibility of representation and communication that he is willing to take any risks involved in representing the divine Word in human words” (268). The representational risks, to use Perry’s framing, seem to involve “the two extremes of slavish traditionalism and radically destabilizing innovation” (5). Yet Herbert seems to have found a solution that mediates between strict imitation and unbounded creation, or—as in the case of his interactive poems—the extremes of “familiar accents” and “external voice.” Rather than generating something entirely new or merely imitating something old, Herbert finds a middle-ground in shared language that has both authorizing roots and applicability to other interpretive contexts. Thus, for Herbert, the phrase “my words” (“The Cross,” 36) conveys at once irony and sincerity, at once art and truth.

“To Herbert’s sensitive conscience,” writes Rosemond Tuve, “his Jordans never stayed crossed” (196). Because his “sensitive conscience” governs *The*

Temple, Herbert's poems offer conflicting messages about their main concepts; failure, victory, creativity, and humility, for instance, become shifting notions rather than absolutes. The first offering on "The Altar," the Passion cluster allows Herbert to explore and dismantle these ideas as they relate to Christ's own offering. By incorporating "The Passion" into the later "Good Friday"—and adding a sense of insecurity to the existing reassurance—Herbert demonstrates the importance he places on representing experience as inclusive, both in form and in content. He reinforces the significance of comprehensiveness by linking his poems explicitly (as "The Thanksgiving" responds directly to "The Sacrifice," for example) and subtly (through verbal echoes and implied work between poems). Both within and across poems, moments of weakness, despair, and failure appear alongside moments of strength, hope, and victory, suggesting ultimately the value in understanding the journey rather than the endpoint. Herbert finds stability and constancy, ironically, in his imperative to persistently question, revisit, and recast his values.

Creative representations of *imitatio Christi* and interaction afford Herbert the formal flexibility to represent various relationships with Christ (as well as different characterizations of Christ himself). In the unusual perspective of "The Sacrifice" (and "Dialogue," to a lesser extent) for example, Herbert's identification with Christ reverses the typical directionality of *imitatio Christi* and instead places the mortal in the sympathetic position. Herbert further uses interaction to explore the role of artistic language in devotion; he dramatizes his concerns about imitation and innovation in "A True Hymn" and finds a mediation

between the extremes of copying and creating in the use of shared language in “The Cross.” Neither poem posits a definitive method or solution, but considered comparatively, the Passion poems offer a sense of the various representative possibilities available to the active mortal devout. As Guibbory observes, “We are closest to the spirit of his poetry when we recognize its contradictory impulses” (*Ceremony and Community*, 78), and imitation allows Herbert’s “sensitive conscience” a broad foundation for representing conflict. Interaction thus operates both as a formal device within Herbert’s poems and as a model among them, as recognizing how his works relate offers the richest appreciation of them.

Situated within the larger three-part structure of *The Temple*, “The Church” itself enacts the condition of living in uncertainty, of balancing sin and salvation, and of wavering feelings of hope and hopelessness. Elsky argues that the structure of “The Church” reflects its content, as it provides “a chronicle of the spiritual and emotional life lived in that ambiguous time between the Passion events (“The Sacrifice”) and the end time (“Dooms-day”), between the partial fulfillment of the prophecy of redemption and its final fulfillment” (314). Herbert captures this sense of inhabiting the middle in a consistent though ever-changing way, a unique contribution in the context of the other poets in this study.

Crashaw’s works differ in many meaningful ways, chiefly his more affective engagement with Christ’s sacrifice and his poetry’s didactic bent. Donne’s Passion poetry operates in the service of establishing a sense of selfhood that would allow him greater intimacy with Christ; as a result of this self-focus, his works feel frustrated, disheartened, and unsettled. Herbert’s Passion poetry lacks

the didacticism of Crashaw's, though comparative readings of the works support the value of progression and experience. Herbert also balances the sense of frustration that is characteristic of Donne's Passion works with moments of reassurance, resulting in his middle state that ultimately favors neither in a greater effort to promote the importance of both.

Thus, Herbert's body of poetry dramatizes the situation of the Reformed devotee who struggles to define his relation to religion in a climate of competing theologies, definitions, and values. Clarke begins *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry* with the assertion, "Probably the most impressive construction in *The Temple* is the role of the Reformation poet" (1). As a comprehensive body—like the bleeding body of Christ that arouses both painful reflection and hopeful inspiration—his poems allow him to subsume the competing impulses of Reformation theology and engage with God more meaningfully. Herbert incorporates conflict into his works and offers, through his engagement with *imitatio Christi*, some modest solutions (like adopting shared language into new creative contexts), but more generally, he offers a dramatization of the experience of the believer as well as the pious imperative to take an active role in devotion. In this respect—remaining active and alert—Herbert finds common ground with his cousins in content, but not in poetic temperament, Crashaw and Donne. "And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name," Herbert writes in his Dedication. Herbert strives indeed, and though his Jordans never stay crossed, he always has sight of the other side.

Chapter Four: Aemilia Lanyer's (Re)Visionary Piety

Introduction

Also when he [Pontius Pilate] was set down upon the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream by reason of him.

Matthew 27:19¹

But heare the words of thy most worthy wife,
Who sends to thee, to beg her Saviours life.

Aemilia Lanyer, "Salve Deus" (lines 751-2)²

In the above lines from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Aemilia Lanyer refers to attempts by Pontius Pilate's unnamed wife to intervene in his condemnation of Christ. A snapshot of her more comprehensive vision of the Passion, this passage demonstrates many of her fundamental priorities in the volume. Her focus on the relevance and positive influence of Biblical women, for example, is foundational to her project of reinterpreting the Bible as a catalogue of female piety and compassion. In this particular case, the renewed attention to the intercession of Pilate's wife highlights her virtuous instincts as well as his wickedness and

¹ I follow the prevailing critical practice of using the Geneva Bible (1560) as Lanyer's source. *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 edition*, introduction Lloyd E. Berry. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

² All quotations from Lanyer's text refer to Susanne Woods, ed., *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. *Salve Deus* refers to the book, while "Salve Deus" indicates the title poem.

power; but, more fundamentally, it brings Pilate's wife into the narrative.³

Lanyer's subtle modifier "her" does similar work by reminding the reader that Christ's death offers salvation to all, that *the* savior is also *her* savior. The dream that prompts Pilate's wife's involvement—an experience that Lanyer herself credits for the title of her volume in the appended note "To the doubtfull Reader"—recalls the dream-vision trope common to mystical female devotional texts, and it reminds the reader of women's longstanding history of visionary piety. Finally, Lanyer's phrase "heare the words" bespeaks her greater effort to integrate and validate women's words: women of history, women of the Bible, contemporary women of court, and, perhaps most compellingly, the woman writing this poem.

Lanyer's priorities, particularly her interest in engaging with the Passion through intermediaries, align in some ways with those of Crashaw, Donne, and Herbert in their Passion works. A kindred poetic spirit, Crashaw also doubles as the speaker in his works and, like Lanyer, looks to women (especially St. Teresa and Mary) as devotional exemplars, finding instructional value in their experiences. While Donne's frustrated attempts at establishing identity form a more self-focused engagement with the Passion, he shares with Lanyer efforts to achieve agency in the service of validation; in Lanyer's case, however, the authorizing effort seems at least partly steeped in her complicated position as a woman writer. Besides their engagement in the humility topos, Herbert and

³ The famous "Eve's Apologie" segment of the poem that follows this section extends the same practice by recasting the Fall in terms of Adam's strength and Eve's weakness (though her strength emerges as the narrative unfolds) and, correspondingly, Adam's culpability and Eve's misfortune.

Lanyer have in common the impulse to seek creative ways of organizing, shaping, and understanding their relationship to God through *imitatio Christi*. While Herbert uses interaction and imitative reversal to reach upward to the divine realm, Lanyer brings the divine into conversation with the mortal, finding access to God through her human companions, exemplars, and pious women. In doing so, she honors the spirit of the Passion as the experience of Christ's mortality. Her volume's emphasis on redefining one's vision of the world stems from this commitment to narrating the Passion in mortal terms, and her logical, rhetorical arguments provide counterparts to the divine foundation of faith. While other poets focus on the uniqueness of Christ's suffering (Crashaw), the uniqueness of their own suffering for Christ (Donne), or a combination of the two (Herbert), Lanyer focuses on the uniqueness of a mortal woman's ability to appreciate the Passion.

Although scholars know more about Lanyer's life and circumstances than those of most other women of her time, her biographical details—gathered and interpreted from her parents' wills, court documents, notes from acquaintances (among them, the astrologer/consultant Simon Forman), and statements within her poems—remain largely spotty and mysterious.⁴ Born in 1569 to Margaret Johnson and Baptist Bassano, a court musician from Venice, Aemilia and her sister Angela Bassano lived with “some privilege,” which began to dwindle

⁴ Biographical details and information about Lanyer's background come from a combination of Susanne Woods (both *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet* and *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*), Keri Boyd McBride, Kimberly Anne Coles, and Helen Wilcox (*1611: Authority, Gender, and the Word*).

before their father's death in 1576.⁵ Aemilia Bassano's early participation in court society—particularly her acquaintance with Lady Susan Bertie, the Dowager Duchess of Kent (daughter of staunch Protestant Catherine Brandon Bertie and the recipient of one of Lanyer's dedications)—likely accounts for the classical education and rhetorical training that emerge in her works.⁶ By age 18, Aemilia had befriended 63-year-old Henry Cary, Lord Hundson, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain and a patron of Shakespeare's theater company. Marriage records show that Aemilia married Alfonso Lanyer, a court musician for the Queen, in 1592, and gave birth to a son in 1593; many believe that her son, Henry, was named after his biological father, Henry Cary. After many miscarriages, Lanyer gave birth in 1598 to a daughter, Odillya, who died nine months later.⁷

At some point between 1609 and 1610, Lanyer wrote "The Description of Cooke-ham," a poem inspired by her time spent with Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, and her daughter, Anne Clifford, at their country estate. Susanne Woods argues that this time with the Cliffords "must count as among the most powerful experiences of Lanyer's life, if only through their impetus in creating much of the poetry in the *Salve Deus*" (*The Poems*, xxv). In 1613, Alphonso Lanyer died, an event that began a 20-year litigation between Aemilia and the

⁵ Woods extrapolates this detail from the casebook of Simon Forman, who includes an entry from Lanyer's visit in which he notes that "the welth of her father failed before he died & he began to be miserable in his estate" (*The Poems*, xvii).

⁶ Elaborating on the political and religious influence of the Bertie household, McBride reveals that the "family was notable for the arch-Protestant politics that made them exiles during Mary's reign." She argues additionally that the possibly Jewish origins of Lanyer's father made her "the product of multiple religious standpoints, none of which alone can define her particular religious positioning in the 'Salve Deus' (31).

⁷ Woods notes of this sad event: "It seems likely that this birth of a female child after a history of miscarriages had a strong impact on Lanyer's sense of her own continuing identity, and it may even be that her daughter's name [Odillya] derives from combining 'ode' with her own name, 'Aemilia,' perhaps reflecting her developing identity as a poet" (*The Poems*, xxv).

Lanyers over the hay and grain patent that generated the family's main income. Left with the task of providing for herself and her son, Lanyer founded and ran a school between 1617 and 1619. Kimberly Anne Coles believes that the school, coupled with Lanyer's involvement in the Elizabethan court, provides evidence of her education, arguing:

Lanyer founded a school to 'educate the children of divers persons of worth' in the wealthy suburb of St. Giles in the Field of 1617...educational training of this kind would have required knowledge of the classics, and some reading ability in Latin and Greek. Which is to say that Lanyer was fairly anomalous (even by late sixteenth-century standards): a woman of middling class position with a good education. (151-152)

In the years following the closure of her school, Lanyer engaged in financial disputes with her landlord, who—according to legal documents—harassed her after finding a higher-paying tenant in order to drive her from the property. This, along with the prevailing belief that she spent her later years with her son (who became a court flautist) and his family, suggest that Lanyer was neither wealthy nor poor. After her son's death in 1634, Lanyer upheld the ongoing patent dispute with her husband's family to provide for her grandchildren, whom she helped to raise. After outliving her husband and two children, Aemilia Lanyer died in 1645 at age 76. Though the details of Lanyer's

life emerge from interpreting various, sometimes random, documents, Woods infers that “together these materials sketch a portrait of an intelligent, attractive, strong-minded woman whose life on the fringes of Elizabethan and Jacobean court society gave her some opportunity for education and advancement, but whose ambitions outstripped her social class and financial resources” (*The Poems*, xv). As the first English woman poet to seek professional status as a writer, Lanyer indeed outstrips her social circumstances, and—since her environment could not accommodate her vision and ideas—she wrote a new one that could.

Lanyer’s devotion to her professional writing pursuit led to the creation of her book of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. The title refers to the central poem on Christ’s Passion, the “Salve Deus,” which appears among “divers other things not unfit to be read”: a long section of prose and verse dedications (to particular patronesses, to women in general, and to the “Vertuous Reader”); “The Description of Cooke-ham,” an appended ode to the Clifford country estate; and finally, a short closing note addressed to “the doubtfull Reader.” Exclusively addressing women—even the “Vertuous Reader” turns out to be targeting “all virtuous Ladies and Gentlewomen of this kingdome” (48)—the dedications comprise about a third of the work. Their twofold function both honors potential patronesses and prepares readers for Lanyer’s revisionary representation of the Passion as an event with female compassion and piety at its core. Written in ottava rima, the 1,840-line “Salve Deus” provides an account of the Passion that features a feminized Christ, the women who attended to him, and other exemplary women of history, of the Bible (particularly an exonerated Eve), and of Lanyer’s

acquaintance. Lanyer herself forms the lyrical “I” of the poem and speaks directly, sometimes explicitly, to Margaret Clifford. The 210 lines of “The Description of Cooke-ham” offer a nostalgic, melancholic account of losing the all-female Eden that Cookham, the Clifford country estate, represents; Lanyer’s connection of the manor to Eden links this largely secular work to the “Salve Deus” poem that precedes it.

Lanyer’s volume shares a publication year with other influential texts, most notably the King James Bible, John Donne’s first printed poem, “An Anatomy of the World,” the first collected *Works* by Edmund Spenser, and George Chapman’s English translation of Homer’s *Iliad*; further, 1611 saw the first dramatic performances of *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*. Though Lanyer’s volume offers a fascinating and unique contribution to the devotional lyric genre—as a Passion text written by a woman for women—Helen Wilcox cautions against making her “an oversimplified emblem of the early modern woman poet” (46). Other influential women were writing during her time, such as Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (one of Lanyer’s dedicatees), whose lyrical translations of the Psalms saw a wide manuscript circulation. Further, Michael Morgan Holmes finds kinship between Lanyer’s volume and polemical works by Arbella Stuart (cousin of James I and another of Lanyer’s addressees) and Rachel Speght, all of which he deems “capable not only of denaturalizing the status quo but also of effecting social transformations” (90). Nevertheless, as a religious text with a social message, Lanyer’s volume offers one important representation of

how an early modern woman poet negotiates the religious, artistic, and social influences of her time.

Critical attention to Lanyer's volume—beginning in the 1970s with Barbara Lewalski and A. L. Rowse—has increased as the canon has seen a broader inclusion of early modern woman poets.⁸ As a way of integrating Lanyer, many scholars focus on her affinities with other contemporary, more typically canonical, writers. Woods, for example, considers Lanyer's relationships to Spenser, Shakespeare, and Jonson in *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*. The connection to Jonson and the country-house poem genre accounts for most of the scholarship on "The Description of Cooke-ham"; yet, some recent critics, such as Patrick Cook, endeavor to look back to its features of "polyphonic richness" (105) as a devotional poem, rather than to inscribe it within the country-house poem genre that, many argue, it inaugurates. I hope to add to the comparative integration of Lanyer's work by considering *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* as a meaningful contribution to the Passion genre; it offers a unique vision of the event also represented in works by Crashaw, Donne, and Herbert. Taken as a whole, the volume combines many genres, and the Passion narrative works within this comprehensive vision of female virtue and religiosity.

A significant amount of Lanyer scholarship focuses on her patronage appeals and, by extension, her relationships with the women she addresses. Coles builds on Lewalski's arguments about Mary Sidney Herbert's authorizing role, suggesting that Lanyer "self-consciously situates her own poetic project in the

⁸ Rowse argues that Lanyer was the "dark lady" of Shakespeare's sonnets, a contention that has since been undermined by David Bevington and others (see "A. L. Rowse's Dark Lady" in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*).

context of a religious literary tradition that Herbert enabled” (156), and Debra Rienstra specifies that Herbert’s translation of the Psalms sets a precedent for the “female, Psalmic ‘I’” that Lanyer uses to “claim not just a poetic vocation, but a *prophetic* vocation” (82). Wendy Wall compares the dedications of Mary Sidney Herbert and Lanyer to demonstrate their rhetorical similarity and to suggest Sidney’s influence over Lanyer. Wall also contributes the observation that Lanyer uses the blazon—traditionally applied to woman—to anatomize and feminize Christ’s body.

While many recent scholars have concentrated on the important political and social implications of Lanyer’s volume, this chapter focuses instead on its occasion, Christ’s Passion, as a profound event that elicits the author’s unique pious expression. Approaching the text through its devotional subject matter—rather than through the social struggles that Lanyer faces as an early modern woman poet—extends a similar critical perspective to her text as scholars apply to the poetry of devotional male poets, whose foundational religious priorities remain largely unchallenged. Although Lanyer’s social climate and professional aspirations inform her volume in meaningful ways, my aim is to take seriously the religious content as fundamental to her project, rather than as supportive of her primarily secular goals. This concentration would contribute to critical conversations about devotional texts by early modern women, which offer, according to Danielle Clarke, “the public display of piety and devotion, a series of ‘self-fashionings’ through a discourse permitted to women and pre-existing stereotypes and conventions, but often revealing a strong political and ideological

edge” (126). More specifically, this focus responds to the critical contention voiced by Coles that “what is clear is that religious conviction was not Lanyer’s sole—probably not even her prevailing—motivation” (149). By calling attention to the centrality of Lanyer’s devotional project, this chapter explores the ways in which her religious priorities factor crucially into her singular vision of a pious, companionate, female community.

The artistic and rhetorical devices in Lanyer’s devotional text create an original contribution to the Passion genre, as she uses the resources available to her to recast the prevailing narrative. The first section of this chapter will explore Lanyer’s sustained attention to the events of human betrayal that frame the Passion. Rather than concentrating primarily on Christ himself, Lanyer catalogues his treatment by others: the abuse of sinful men (his disciples, for example) and, conversely, the compassion of virtuous women (demonstrated by Mary and others). She thus crafts a human-centric vision of the Passion that engages a version of *imitatio Christi* by finding evidence of Christ, or Christ himself, in a community of pious women. Like Crashaw, Lanyer advocates for her reader to “transpose the picture quite / And spell it wrong to read it right” (“The Flaming Heart,” 9-10). In the second section of the chapter, I elaborate on the revisionary ethos of her project. By establishing the logical validity of her original interpretations, she offers them to her readers as fresh devotional models for engaging with their religious present. The third section then explores how Lanyer further justifies women’s exceptional access to holiness by using devotional models—such as dream visions and an emphasis on a feminized Christ—that

recall their history of religious expression. Lanyer has in common with the Passion works of Crashaw, Donne, and Herbert a desire to bridge the distance between the mortal and divine realms; *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* departs from the other works by taking the lead from Christ's mortality, bringing Christ down to her rather than elevating herself up to him.

I. "But now returning to thy sleeping Friends"⁹: Lanyer's Passion for Womankind

The original title page of the "Salve Deus" (see Appendix C) promises the narration of "The Passion of Christ" as its first subject.¹⁰ However, in keeping with the layering practice of the greater volume *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, the "Salve Deus" begins with dedications to Queen Elizabeth and to Margaret Clifford, the Countess of Cumberland. Following the dedications, a long meditation on the betrayal of the disciples—"these monsters" (497) or "this accursed crew" (513)—shifts the assumed focus from Christ to his company.¹¹ This sizable section on the disloyalty of the disciples performs many functions: it extends the human focus of the dedications, gesturing to Christ through the people that surround him; it sets up the gender dynamic of male sinfulness (as compared to female virtue) central to the poem; and it destabilizes the conventional

⁹ "Salve Deus," line 417

¹⁰ The first section, "The Passion of Christ," is followed in numerical order by: "Eve's Apologie in defence of Women," "The Teares of the Daughters of Jerusalem," and "The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgine Marie."

¹¹ By my calculation, Lanyer's first reference to the disciples appears on line 337, and the sustained description of their betrayal ends some 300 lines later on line 632. This accounts for about one sixth of the 1,840-line poem.

discourse that glosses over—or even forgives—moments of injustice during the Passion.

In working to establish the disciples' unfaithfulness, Lanyer emphasizes their inability to console Christ as he grieves before his death. She writes:

Sweet Lord, how couldst thou thus to flesh and blood
 Communicate thy grieffe? tell of thy woes?
 Thou knew'st they had no power to doe thee good,
 But were the cause thou must endure these blowes,
 Beeing the Scorpions bred in *Adams* mud,
 Whose poys'ned sinnes did worke among thy foes,
 To re-charge thy over-burd'ned soule,
 Although the sorowes now they doe condole. (377-84)

The disciples, the “scorpions bred in Adam’s mud,” not only fail to comfort Christ but also, more fundamentally, cause his suffering; their “poys’ned sinnes” contribute to the evil that necessitates his sacrifice. Lanyer roots this evil in Original Sin, which she ascribes to Adam briefly in this stanza and expansively in the “Eve’s Apologie” section of the poem. By highlighting the incommensurability of divine suffering and mortal (“flesh and blood”) understanding, Lanyer suggests an incompatibility of communication and emotion between Christ and mortals. She reiterates this point later, noting that the disciples “had no apprehension of thy paine” (464).

Lanyer qualifies the argument, however, to suggest that men specifically, not mankind more generally, offer Christ no consolation. Through a comparison to the daughters of Jerusalem (along with other pious women), she shows the lack of compassion from “flesh and blood” to be an exclusively male shortcoming. She creates subtle references between the trio of disloyal disciples (Peter, James, and John), ironically designated “three Friends” (419), one of whom (Peter) will “deny him thrice” (346) and the daughters of Jerusalem, or the “thrice happy women” (969) who followed Christ to his death. The compassion of these women elicits a response from Christ, demonstrating the possibility of communication between humans—specifically women—and their savior: “Yet these poore women, by their piteous cries / Did moove their Lord, their Lover, and their King, / To take compassion, turne about, and speake / To them whose hearts were ready now to breake” (981-4). The failure of the disciples to commiserate with Christ sharply contrasts with the easy affective connection that he shares with the daughters of Jerusalem, whose genuine “piteous cries / Did moove their Lord.”

Lanyer criticizes the disciples’ failure to sympathize with Christ’s circumstances, and she extends her condemnation to include their inability to understand their offenses. She suggests that the untroubled minds of the disciples—as they sleep both literally and metaphorically—reveal their remorselessness: “They slept in Ease, whilst thou in Paine didst pray; / Loe, they in Sleepe, and thou in Sorow drown’d” (427-8); “Their eyes were heavie, and their hearts asleepe” (465); “Nay, though he said unto them, I am he, / They could not know him, whom their eyes did see” (503-4). At regular intervals, Lanyer

depicts the disciples as blind to the magnitude of their betrayal, implying that their inability to console Christ relates to their failure to comprehend the circumstances. Aligning herself as speaker with the emotional fervor of the daughters of Jerusalem, Lanyer temporarily abandons the controlled narration of the previous statements as her indignation reaches a climax:

How blinde were they could not discern the Light!

How dull! if not to understand the truth,

How weake! if meekenesse overcame their might;

How stony hearted, if not mov'd to ruth:

How void of Pitie, and how full of Spight,

Gainst him that was the Lord of Light and Truth:

Here insolent Boldnesse checkt by Love and Grace,

Retires, and falls before our Makers face. (505-12)

Though Lanyer returns to the poem's more modulated narrative voice after this stanza, it offers a gesture of bold, exclamatory outrage in the face of the disciples' sleepy inaction.

Lanyer again draws a subtle comparison between the disciples and the daughters of Jerusalem by contrasting her forceful exasperation in the previous memorable stanza with quiet admiration of the following one:

Most blessed daughters of Jerusalem,

Who found such favour in your Saviors sight,
 To turne his face when you did pitie him;
 Your tearfull eyes, beheld his eies more bright;
 Your Faith and Love unto such grace did clime,
 To have reflection from this Heav'nly Light:

Your Eagles eyes did gaze against this Sunne,

Your hearts did thinke, he dead, the world were done. (985-92)

This passage (stanza 124) begs comparison with lines 505-512 (stanza 64) about the disciples, as its analogous structure, repeated content, and expanded argument offer a counterpart to the earlier meditation. The parallel construction of the five “How...” exclamations that begin stanza 64 matches the four “Your...” statements of stanza 124. While other devotional poems (such as Herbert’s “The Thanksgiving”) commonly build emphasis through repeated phrasing, Lanyer seldom engages in the practice in the “Salve Deus,” and the structural similarity calls attention to the two unusual stanzas. The repeated, progressive language offers an additional association: the disciples’ condition “void of Pitie” (509) becomes the daughters’ action, “you did pity him” (987), the “Light” that the disciples “could not discern” (505) turns into the women’s positive reinforcement, or “reflection from his Heav’nly Light” (990), the disciples’ insolence, which “*falls before* our Makers face” (512, emphasis added) finds a foil in the women’s pity, which touches Christ and serves to “*turne* his face” (987, emphasis added), the “Love and Grace” of Christ that separates him from the disciples’ infidelity (511) become a means of mutual affective devotion for the

women, whose “Love unto such grace did clime” (989), the unmoved “stony hearted” disciples (508) weigh against the heightened emotion and understanding of the daughters, whose “hearts did think” (992), and, finally, the blindness that Lanyer reiterates in line 505, “How blind were they,” contrasts with the “tearfull eyes” (988) and the “Eagles eyes” (991) of the feeling, thinking women, and it recalls the well-developed metaphor of blindness and inaction that courses through the narration of the disciples. Thus Lanyer offers women’s compassionate reception of Christ in stanza 124 as an indirect response to the disciples’ betrayal in stanza 64 and suggests that the Passion narrative ought to include examples of men’s disloyalty as well as women’s benevolence.

In her effort to represent the betrayal of the disciples, who can neither commiserate with Christ nor comprehend his circumstances like the daughters of Jerusalem, Lanyer implies that their humanity and association with the earth contribute to their failures. “What great weaknesse in the Flesh was found!” (426), she writes in reference to the disciples’ unwillingness to recognize Christ, and she expounds on this idea in stanza 79:

Those deare Disciples that he most did love,
 And were attendant at his becke and call,
 When triall of affliction came to prove,
 They first left him, who now must leave them all:
 For they were earth, and he came from above,
 Which made them apt to flie, and fit to fall:

Though they protest they never will forsake him,
 They do like men, when dangers overtake them. (625-32)

With striking resemblance to lines in Herbert's "The Sacrifice," Lanyer shifts the focus from the irony of the disciples' betrayal—"They first left him, who now must leave them all" (628)—to the reason for it, their connection to the earth.¹² In fact, the careful phrasing of the next line suggests more than a strong association between the disciples and the fleshly earth by implying the relation of their identity: the disciples "*were* earth," while Christ merely "*came from above*" (629, emphasis added). Further, the distinction between the mortal and divine realms highlights their discontinuity; mortal attempts to "flie," or abandon Christ through betrayal, also holds the secondary meaning of "fly," or rise from the earth. Both meanings meet with failure, a "fall" (630) that represents either sin or physical distance from heaven. The final line of the stanza reiterates Lanyer's argument about man's inherent shortcomings. "They do like men," she reminds the reader, implying their weakness in the face of difficulty. She carries the idea throughout the section on disciples, later referring to them as "wretched Worldlings made of dust and earth / Whose hard'ned hearts, with pride and mallice swell" (675-6).

Yet the disciples alone do not carry the shame of an association with the earth. Lanyer expands the insistent relationship between man (and his faults) and the earth to implicate other men, among them Pontius Pilate and Adam. After recounting Pilate's actions, she writes, "By this Example [Pilate], what can be

¹² In its tidy ironic logic, Lanyer's line 628 sounds similar to Christ's one-liners in Herbert's "The Sacrifice," such as "I him obey, who all things else command" (83).

expected / From wicked Man, which on the Earth doth live?" (737-8). The qualifier "which on the Earth doth live" would stand out if not for the foundational argument that man's wickedness relates, at least in part, to his connection to the earth and its attendant mortal behaviors. The example of Pilate serves as a prelude to the "Eves Apologie" section of the poem, which explains the problem of man's earthly origins by reinterpreting Original Sin as Adam's failing, rather than as Eve's temptation. Lanyer foreshadows this argument in an early description of the disciples, "Beeing the Scorpions bred in *Adams* mud" (381), which ascribes their sinful behavior to their earthly roots, but with the critical modifier that designates Adam as the sinful source.¹³ The arguments that progress in the "Eves Apologie" section include the justification for relating men exclusively to the earth (and, by extension, to mortal weakness): "For he was Lord and King of all the earth, / Before poore Eve had either life or breath" (783-4). The poem argues that the disciples and Pilate owe their earthly sinfulness to Adam, and—just as the compassionate daughters of Jerusalem balance the traitorous disciples—Lanyer offers examples of women (Pilate's wife and Eve, in this case) who prove that the phrase "They do like men" (625) applies strictly to earthly men and their mortal limitations.

Representations of Lanyer's women demonstrate her vision of their distance from earth and sin, as well as their superior capacities to connect meaningfully with God. Their affective abilities, according to Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, stem in part from the position of sufferer, a role they share with

¹³ Additionally, according to Genesis 2:7, God created "man of the dust of the ground," a detail that strengthens the link between Adam and the earth that Lanyer emphasizes.

Christ: “Seizing on the prominent role of compassionate women at the scene of the Crucifixion (an interest she shares with Crashaw), Lanyer presents identification with Christ in his suffering as an especially female prerogative. Moreover, she recognizes the suffering of woman in the reviled and unjustly punished Christ” (28). Like Crashaw, Lanyer relies on female devotional exemplars to model pious behavior. Unlike Crashaw, who consistently writes about the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and St. Teresa (and also, importantly, his own affective connection to Christ), however, Lanyer evokes women who occupy a greater range of social and historical positions (substituting women’s affect for her own). Her descriptions of Mary and the Countess of Cumberland offer perhaps the most comprehensive accounts of female devotion in the poem: Mary, as the mother of Christ and chief mortal sufferer, and the Countess, as Lanyer’s example of the potential for contemporary virtuous women to achieve intimacy with Christ.

The meditation on Mary’s role during the Passion involves details of her life and history, which maintain the central focus on the experience of the Passion as it affects the people surrounding the event, rather than Christ himself. Lanyer depicts Mary’s loss as extreme by cataloguing her many relations with Christ: “Her Sonne, her Husband, Father, Saviour, King, / Whose death killd Death, and tooke away his sting” (1023-4). These lines further complement the later description of her roles, “Making thee Servant, Mother, Wife, and Nurse / To Heavens bright King, that freed us from the curse” (1087-8). By listing Mary’s diverse associations with Christ, Lanyer establishes her amplified suffering, for

she loses not only his range of identities but also her own. Lanyer muses, “How could shee choose but thinke her selfe undone, / He dying, with whose glory shee was crowned” (1013-4), merging Mary’s identity with Christ’s by implying their joint dissolution.

Mary’s intimacy, or shared identity, with Christ aligns her closely with the divine realm and creates distance from the mortal earth that Lanyer so closely associates with men. The following lines, for example, reveal her ability to communicate with the angel Gabriel: “To thee most beauteous Queene of Woman-kind, / The Angell did unfold his Makers mind” (1039-40). Mary’s communication with the divine realm demonstrates the possibility of a mortal’s access to the divine by showing a woman’s heightened capacity.¹⁴ Further, the label “Queen of Woman-kind” nods to her separation from—and, in context, superiority to—men, mankind, and the earth.¹⁵ The section on Mary revisits the negative association of sin and flesh by alluding to Mary’s nurturing body with the compliment, “Grace and Perfection resting in thy breast” (1090), a phrase that foregrounds the later expression “sweet off-spring of thy body” (1130). Caroline Walker Bynum argues that, in medieval women’s devotion, “the symbolic association of humanity with the female thus derived strength both from the association of humanity with physicality (and *woman* was the symbol of flesh) and from the association of Christ’s humanity with his mother” (*Holy Feast*, 269).

¹⁴ Interestingly, Lanyer does not focus on Mary’s condition as a mortal without Original Sin; perhaps this omission works in the service of fortifying Mary’s association with mortal women.

¹⁵ This recalls man’s failed attempt to bridge the gulf between the mortal and the divine in lines 629-30: “For they were earth, and he came from above, / Which made them apt to flie, and fit to fall.” It also echoes Lanyer’s earlier language in “To all vertuous Ladies in general,” to whom she promises the possibility of elevation: “Thus may you flie from dull and sensuall earth” (64).

Drawing from medieval devotional practices, Lanyer uses the connection among humanity, women, and the body to recast flesh positively in regard to Mary, as her physical body offers Christ comfort, safety, and life.¹⁶

As Lanyer's contemporary, patroness, reader, and—by most accounts, friend—the Countess of Cumberland serves as a different kind of devotional exemplar than Mary, though Lanyer unites them through their common access to the divine realm. While Mary holds the title “most beauteous Queene of Woman-kind” (1039), the Countess also shares in divine royalty: “Then Madame, doe not blame / Me, when I shew the World but what is yours, / And decke you with that crowne which is your due, / That of Heavn's beauty Earth may take a view” (1461-4). Lanyer's poetic efforts allow the earth to experience the heavenly beauty of the Countess, a beauty that the poem carefully redefines as pious integrity. She further uses the metaphor of keys, which symbolize permissibility, to confirm the Countess's access to heaven: “These are those Keyes Saint *Peter* did possesse, / Which with a Spirituall power are giv'n to thee” (1369-70).¹⁷ While the source of the “Spirituall power” remains open to interpretation, the Countess's alignment with the divine realm is well-defined.

Lanyer subtly associates the Countess with Mary through their womanhood, affording the Countess access to something approximating Mary's devotional status, and insisting upon their superior piety. In the following

¹⁶ Understood in another sense, the particular word “breast” implies that her grace and perfection manifest appropriately in her womanhood. This recalls the earlier reference to the Countess's integrity—“Thou faire example, live without compare, / With Honours triumphs seated in thy breast” (177-8)—which also suggests a link between her goodness and her womanhood.

¹⁷ “Power of the keys” also refers to Pope's power to save or condemn.

segment, she describes the Countess as a vessel for the Passion narrative (recalling Herbert's "Good Friday"):¹⁸

Therefore (good Madame) in your heart I leave
 His perfect picture, where it still shall stand,
 Deeply engraved in that holy shrine,
 Environed with Love and Thoughts divine.

There may you see him as a God in glory,
 And as a man in miserable case;
 There may you reade his true and perfect storie,
 His bleeding body there you may embrace,
 And kisse his dying cheekes with teares of sorrow,
 With joyfull grieffe, you may intreat for grace;
 And all your prayers, and your almes-deeds
 May bring to stop his cruell wounds that bleeds. (1325-36)

The "holy shrine" (1327) of the Countess's mortal heart proves a suitable vessel for Christ's image, body, and story, surrounding him with "Love and Thoughts divine" (1328). Lanyer proposes the Countess's body as an instrument of safety and shelter for Christ, while also implying a maternal association with Mary, as one who carries and protects Christ. Further, Lanyer suggests that the Countess engage with Christ in a variety of ways that reflect the diversity of Mary's roles, "servant, mother, wife, and nurse" (1087): as servant, the Countess may "intreat

¹⁸ "Since blood is fittest, Lord, to write / Thy sorrows in, and bloody fight; / My heart hath store, write there, where in / One box doth lie both ink and sin" (21-4)

for grace” (1334); as mother, she may “embrace” his “bleeding body” (1332); as wife, she may “kisse his dying cheeks” (1333); and, as nurse, she may “bring a stop to his cruell wounds” (1336). Thus, Lanyer represents the Countess’s access to the divine realm in terms of the womanhood she shares with Mary, who enables the Countess to forge similar relationships with Christ.

Through comparative descriptions—whether through difference, as in the case of the disciples and the daughters of Jerusalem, or similarity, as with Mary and the Countess—Lanyer establishes a vision of the Passion that elevates women’s piety over men’s by demonstrating their superior devotional capacities. She takes this further by associating mortal women with the divine realm; for example, Mary is “undone” (1013) as Christ dies because her identity hinges on her multiple relations to him. Woods argues that Lanyer engages a “conflation of female virtue which mirrors Christ’s sacrifice, orders the natural world, and leads to a woman’s own poetic art” (*A Companion*, 129), suggesting that the totalizing goodness of women links them to both Christ’s divine act and Lanyer’s own mortal craft. Using the descriptors “dove” and “turtle dove”—the symbol for steadfast love—Lanyer applies a common title that unites all three figures: Christ, Mary, and the Countess. She first uses it to establish the Countess’s faith, writing “Thy constant faith like to the Turtle Dove” (157), and she goes on to apply the title to Christ by referencing “th’ afflicted body of this innocent Dove” (994). She then addresses Mary, noting “thy Child a Lamb and thou a Turtle dove” (1093). The term refers to the Countess again later in the poem when Lanyer judges her against Cleopatra, praising the Countess by the comparison: “Shee love and lives

chaste as the Turtle dove” (1437). Lanyer’s gesture of creating commonality among the women she narrates, the women she addresses, and—in this case—Christ, serves to spread and share their virtuous qualities.

The totalizing goodness of women in her vision of the Passion unites women of the past with women of the present, including Lanyer herself and the women reading the poem, whose active reading eyes contrast with those of the sleeping disciples. Clarke brings the idea of shared identification to bear on Lanyer herself as poet who relates to Mary:

While she uses the conventional humility *topoi*, Lanyer merges her identification with ‘the voices which have been suppressed’ in the New Testament with her strategy of textualisation, turning her ‘booke’ into the mediating figure of Christ, and thereby placing herself as a kind of literary Virgin Mary ushering forth the text, which *is* Christ. (160)

While Lanyer certainly draws poetic strength and validation from her ability to discern the quality of women’s piety, her revisionary contribution seems more instructional than devotionally self-implicating, as Clarke suggests, akin to Crashaw’s interpretive modeling rather than to Donne’s self-establishment.

Lanyer’s implication of her human dedicatees, however, exalts them to a status that bridges the mortal and the divine. In “To all vertuous Ladies in generall,” for example, she explains that “Gods holy Angels will direct your Doves” (57), an elaboration of the earlier comment that innocent doves will guide

the virtuous reader's chariot as it approaches Heaven. From the blurring of shared pious virtue among women—women in general, specific patronesses and dedicatees, women of the Bible, women of history and mythology—Lanyer achieves a well-realized vision of female community. The revisionary focus on community and humanity (though including only women) mourns Christ through women who have the appropriate affective and intellectual capacities to relate to him. This contrasts with Donne's and Herbert's attempts to reach upward and transcend the limitations of power (Donne) and language (Herbert) through their poetry. Lanyer's poem offers a more human-centric solution to the problem of distance from God, a representation that logically upholds the centrality of Christ's mortality in the Passion.

II. "They tell his Words, though farre from his intent": Lanyer's Revisionary

Ethos

In order to find Christ in the pious women of the Passion, Lanyer must engage in narrative revisions and Biblical reinterpretations that counteract the prevailing exclusionary discourses of men. Thus, the "Salve Deus" devotes space and poetic energy to one of its key concerns: the revisionary project of including and exonerating women involved in the Passion. Kari Boyd McBride sees these re-conceptualizing efforts as a means of fashioning identity for women, arguing, "Lanyer's 'Salve Deus' is of interest not only because she constructs female subjectivity in contrast to male sinfulness, but for the way in which she subverts

much of the oppressive potential of the narrative” (32). I would go further to suggest that for Lanyer, the Passion’s “oppressive potential” is a functional narrative reality that she seeks to re-envision through a bold, female-centric reframing. Her revisionary efforts specifically target language (which she redefines) and predominant Biblical and historical interpretations (which she overhauls), offering an alternative logical narrative in their stead. To this end, Lanyer uses rhetoric and logic similar to those of Crashaw, who calls for active reading engagement throughout his works. In “The Flaming Heart,” for example, he advocates for a reallocation of power to St. Teresa, whom he deems more worthy than the seraphim whom the painting—in this case, the visual narrative—depicts as more powerful. Like Crashaw, Lanyer also solicits critical reading and thinking from her audience, as her passage on the disciples reveals: “They tell his Words, though farre from his intent / And what his Speeches were, not what he meant” (655-6). By recognizing a gap between Christ’s words/speeches and his intent/meaning, she identifies the failure of the prevailing male discourse to capture the significance of Christ’s sacrifice.

Language—as the interpreted Word and as the resultant discourse—forms the root of Lanyer’s mistrust of prevailing narratives, since it shapes the predominant discourse that maintains men’s authority. By destabilizing language, even at the basic level of individual words and concepts, Lanyer is able to envision her own, more just, narrative of the Passion that centers on women’s piety. One term that proves particularly loaded for Lanyer, “beauty,” provides the focus for eight sustained stanzas (64 lines) of the “Salve Deus,” as well as

appearing in assorted allusions throughout the poem. The dedication “To the Ladie *Katherine* Countesse of Suffolke” features one of the first references to “beauty” as it describes Christ, “In whom is all that Ladies can desire; / If Beauty, who hath bin more faire than he?” (85-6). The redefinition of beauty as a male attribute goes against expectations that the word describes a woman; further, its connection to Christ adds a religious valence that Lanyer carries through her usage of the term in future sections. Finally, the phrase “all that Ladies can desire” nods to the conventional directionality of “beauty,” which commonly indicates the object of male desire. Lanyer’s use of the term reverses male agency and instead offers women the power to desire, though she qualifies this desire as religiously inflected through its association to Christ.

Lanyer’s longer meditation on beauty appears between two separate addresses to the Countess, thus structurally implicating the Countess in her considerations. Moreover, the discussion appears before Lanyer broaches the event of the Passion, suggesting that the act of interrogating language should inform the Passion narrative as well as its prelude. Written by Lanyer herself, the marginal title “An Invective against outward beauty unaccompanied with virtue” offers a glimpse into her exasperated attitude toward prevailing conceptions and uses of superficial “beauty.” The first stanza of the section establishes Lanyer’s purposeful departure from its typical usage:

That outward Beautie which the world commends,
Is not the subject I will write upon,

Whose date expir'd, that tyrant Time soone ends,
 Those gawdie colours soone are spent and gone:
 But those faire Virtues which on thee attends
 Are alwaies fresh, they never are but one:

They make thy Beautie fairer to behold,

Than was that Queenes for whom proud *Troy* was sold. (185-92)

Lanyer creates a distinction between the “beauty” she wishes to discuss in the context of the Passion and the familiar “outward Beautie which the world commends” (185). Using Helen of Troy as a historical symbol of the “beauty” she wishes to redefine, Lanyer argues that a more timeless, less “gawdie” (188) conception of “beauty” emerges through “faire Virtues” (189). A similar term that Lanyer also redefines in this context, “fair,” modifies “Virtues” (189), conveying abstract, rather than physical, meaning. When “fairer” applies to “Beautie” two lines later, both terms begin to take on a connotation of deeper, more inward, significance.

Lanyer develops the meditation on her newly defined “beauty” in the next stanza, again setting it against the secular resonance, and affirming its religious nuance through an association with salvation:

As for those matchlesse colours Red and White,
 Or perfit features in a fading face,
 Or due proportion pleasing to the sight;
 All these doe draw but dangers and disgrace:

A mind enrich'd with Virtue, shines more bright,
 Addes everlasting Beauty, gives true grace,
 Frames an immortall Goddesse on the earth,
 Who though she dies, yet Fame gives her new berth. (193-200)

Using the same structural set-up as in the previous stanza, Lanyer discusses the problem of the prevailing definition of beauty in the first half of the stanza and offers her religious definition of the term as a solution in the last four lines. The organizational repetition between this and the previous stanza reinforces the presentation of the argument as problem/solution and structurally supports Lanyer's position. She cites the attraction of "dangers and disgrace" (196) as the problems with the common conception of physical "beauty" and suggests instead that "Virtue" (189, 197) affords the mind "everlasting Beauty" (198). The term "everlasting" (198) resonates with "immortall" (199) and "new berth" (200) to express that virtue leads to salvation, the gift of Christ's sacrifice. The nod to the Passion recalls the occasion for it, the Fall, for which Lanyer blames Adam, rather than Eve (the culprit in prevailing biblical discourse). Wendy Miller Roberts notes that Lanyer's Adam "fell because of the outward appearance of the fruit, a remarkable indictment considering that Early Modern women were frequently accused of external and frivolous preoccupations," and affirms that Lanyer thus "reverses the expected critique of women's superficiality and instead credits women with a preoccupation exclusively associated with men: knowledge" (16). By redefining "beauty" as a religious concept, Lanyer both undermines the common male-driven association between women and outward beauty and

advocates for a more substantial religious meaning of the term. Further, she conditions the reader to be mindful of the need to interrogate narratives—most significantly, Adam and Eve’s—in order to reinterpret them in ways that call attention to women’s underappreciated “true grace” (198).

Lanyer foregrounds the need for interrogation and re-interpretation of prevailing narratives by alluding to the possibility of misapprehension. She contrasts Christ’s sincerity with mortal male deception, for example, to demonstrate the dire consequences of misinterpretation: “He speaketh truth, but thou wilt not beleeve, / Nor canst thou apprehend it to be so: / Though he expresse his Glory unto thee, / Thy Owly eies are blind, and cannot see” (709-712). In these lines, Lanyer emphasizes the inability of the false witnesses to “beleeve,” “apprehend,” or “see” Christ’s truth—three displays of incompetence that bespeak their lack of faith, understanding, and perception. Lyn Bennett observes Lanyer’s facility with the rhetorical approaches of male devotional writers, such as the logic that reveals the failures of false witnesses: “In its ready familiarity with stylistic and rhetorical techniques used by theologians, poets and orators alike—professions we most readily associate with early modern men—*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* blurs the kinds of gender distinctions its content might encourage us to make” (175). The blurring—or at times, even reversal—of gender and power distinctions in Lanyer’s text contributes to the force of her logic. She positions compassionate, understanding, pious women against examples of male interpretive and devotional failure, as in the following excerpt of the prose dedication to the Countess:

...I present unto you even our Lord Jesus himselfe, whose infinit value is not to be comprehended within the weake imagination or wit of man: and as Saint *Peter* gave health to the body, so I deliver you the health of the soule... (6-10).

Lanyer contends that man's "weake imagination or wit" prevents his comprehension of the Passion, implying that a woman poet can offer a woman reader the narrative with success.¹⁹

A successful appreciation of the Passion, Lanyer argues, depends on the reader's ability to interpret the narrative properly; throughout the poem, she suggests that virtue determines interpretive capacities. Lanyer associates virtue and interpretation explicitly in the prose note "To the Vertuous Reader" (which appears just before the "Salve Deus" poem):

...I refer these my imperfect indeavours, knowing that according to their owne excellent dispositions, they will rather, cherish, nourish, and increase the least sparke of virtue where they find it, by their favourable and best interpretations, then quench it by wrong constructions. To whom I wish all increase of virtue, and desire their best opinions. (57-62)

¹⁹ She also refers to the Countess's depth of pious understanding by suggesting that the poem will fulfill the Countess's soul, rather than merely her body. This echoes Lanyer's opening statement in "To all vertuous Ladies in general": "Each blessed Lady that in Virtue spends / Your pretious time to beautifie your soules" (1-2), which links virtue and beauty to the soul.

The possibility for misinterpretation is raised here, as the reader's "virtue" (60) leads directly to the "favourable and best interpretations" rather than to the alternative "wrong constructions" (60-1). Lanyer sees virtue as a necessary prerequisite for interpretive ability, and she goes further to align virtue and womanhood. Erica Longfellow reads the relationship among interpretation, virtue, and women as one wherein the interpretive act generates women's virtue: "Her poem and its epideictic apparatus exist to guide both men and women to 'best interpretations' of the possibilities for virtue in women" (68). While Lanyer certainly guides the reader to interpret positive qualities in the women of her narrative, the virtue—as in the example cited above—seems to preexist and drive the interpretation. Further, the close association between virtue and womanhood implies that the act of proper interpretation is largely, or perhaps only, accessible to women.

Among the chief reinterpretations in the poem, the recasting of blame for the Fall (condemning Adam rather than Eve) courses through the poem, even informing "The Description of Cooke-ham," the ode to the Edenic Clifford estate that follows the "Salve Deus." The logic supporting this revision finds that Eve's weakness allows the serpent to test Adam's strength; Adam then fails the test. The poem repeatedly establishes that weakness triggers the sequence: "Let not us Women glory in Mens fall, / Who had power given to over-rule us all" (759-60); "What Weaknesse offerd, Strength might have refused" (778); "He never sought her weakenesse to reprove, / With those sharpe words, which he of God did heare" (805-6); "Her weakenesse did the Serpents words obey; / But you in

malice Gods deare Sonne betray” (815-6); “If one weake woman simply did offend, / This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end” (831-2). Within the space of about 50 lines, Lanyer refers to Eve’s weakness four times, generally in contrast to Adam’s strength and power. Her tone becomes more accusatory as the narrative develops, beginning with general constructions guided by “Women,” “Men,” “Weaknesse,” and “Strength,” progressing to third-person narration, and ending finally in direct address to Adam (with “you” driving the indictment). In a sense, then, Eve becomes weaker as Lanyer (through her persuasive voice) becomes stronger.

By establishing Eve’s weakness, however, Lanyer sets up Eve’s—and, more generally, women’s—amenability to religious virtue. In doing so, she endorses not only a reinterpretation of the narrative of the Fall but also a revision of the reader’s understanding of “weakness” (which recalls her redefinition of “beauty”). Coles contextualizes Lanyer’s practice of generating agency through the conception of women’s weakness: “The figure of the religious woman embodied the instabilities and ideals of the radical religious change that was taking place. Assumptions encoded in the sex/gender system could be traded upon to empower the writing of women in public and polemical discourse” (185). Indeed, Lanyer manipulates assumptions about weakness in women in order to justify her volume, asking pardon for the “weakenesse of [her] brain” (“To the Ladie *Anne*, Countesse of Dorcet, 141). Yet by stanza 37, she demonstrates that weakness and womanhood are especially porous to God’s grace:

But yet the Weaker thou dost seeme to be
 In Sexe, or Sence, the more his Glory shines,
 That doth infuze such powrefull Grace in thee,
 To shew thy Love in these few humble Lines;
 The Widowes Myte, with this may well agree,
 Her little All more worth than golden mynes,
 Beeing more deerer to our loving Lord,
 Than all the wealth that Kingdoms could afford. (289-96)

Lanyer first calls attention to the need to reinterpret “weakness” by dissociating how the Countess might “seeme to be” and the reality of her connection to Christ. The “powerful Grace” that her intimacy allows nullifies the weakness “in Sexe” that the men who drive religious discourse find in her. Lanyer ends by likening the “golden mynes” of kingdoms to easy superficiality of, for instance, the disciples, who “do like men, when dangers overtake them” (632). She, instead, associates the Countess with the poor widow who, in her weakness, proves truer, more generous, and thus “deerer to our loving Lord” (295).²⁰

Lanyer’s revisionary efforts in the “Salve Deus” take a logical approach to dismantling language, particularly gender-inflected terms such as “beauty” and “weakness,” in order to offer an alternative vision of the Passion and its related events. Using the newly defined concepts, she reinterprets fundamental Biblical events and represents them in a mode that concentrates on the pious virtue of the women who have been overlooked and underrepresented in prevailing narratives.

²⁰ Woods cites Mark 12:41 and Luke 21:1-4 for the parable of the widow who “gave all she had, though small, to the Temple in Jerusalem, while wealthier people gave less” (64).

Clarke finds Lanyer's interpretive efforts to be "her most powerful argument": "...not that biblical authority has to be undermined, rather that interpretive traditions need to be less selective in relation to their sources" (159). By foregrounding the revisionary interpretations early in the poem, Lanyer challenges her readers to apply the same practices to the events of the Passion. While the heavy emphasis on elevating and exonerating women may suggest secular motivations, it may also demonstrate that Lanyer conditions the reader to understand the Passion better through this interpretive primer. Her logical revisions provide the critical dimension for the poem's greater representation of woman-centric piety as it contrasts with man-centric betrayal. She uses mortal organizing principles—rationality, logic, and interpretation—to support a Passion narrative that finds Christ in the pious women of the past, reflects him in the pious women of the present, and trains readers to recognize him in pious women of the future. This offers a fresh, logically sound, vision of the events of the Passion that influences women's piety and future relationships to the Bible and to their devotional community.

III. "this rare Phoenix of that worn-out age"²¹: Lanyer's Relationship to Women's Devotion

While Lanyer's revisionary "Salve Deus" offers a fresh interpretation of how women inform the Passion and related events, it also draws upon earlier modes of women's religiosity. Her focus on a physicalized and feminized Christ,

²¹ "Salve Deus," line 1689

for instance, upholds a longstanding tradition of associating the suffering body of Christ with women.²² In *Fragmentation and Redemption*, Bynum reminds that “Not only was Christ enfleshed with flesh from a woman; his own flesh did womanly things; it bled, it bled food and it gave birth” (101). Bynum’s claim reflects Lanyer’s own language in “To the Vertuous reader,” as she characterizes “evill disposed men” as those who,

...forgetting they were borne of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the means of women, they would be quite extinguished out of the world, and a final ende of them all, doe like Vipers deface the wombs wherein they were bred, onely to give way and utterance to their want of discretion and goodnesse. (19-24)

Lanyer makes use of the association between women’s and Christ’s life-giving powers in the service of advancing her argument that mortal women reflect Christ. Further, she invokes the dream-vision trope to create continuity between women’s religious past and her narration, as well as to validate her interpretations. “The content of the dream is open to interpretation,” Clarke contends, “setting up a viable relationship between author, text and reader which is not necessarily predicated upon the personal credit either of speaker or author” (148). While

²² Among others, Julian of Norwich is an important precursor to the development of affective piety and the dream vision as modes of worship particularly accessible to women. In *Showings*, for example, she desires to share in Christ’s pain after having a revelation of his wounded body: “And in alle this time of Christes presens, I felte no paine, but for Christes paines” (183). Her experience of sorrow and pain follows directly from meditating on Christ’s, demonstrating an affective engagement with Christ’s suffering.

Lanyer guides the interpretations that she hopes her readers will believe and model, the dream vision offers a clean slate on which to represent a narrative, and it hints at the dreamer's superior, almost mystical, intimacy with the divine realm. Lanyer's use of early women's religious practices offers her readers a comprehensive picture of their devotional past which may complement the pious present and future that Lanyer conditions them to envision.

Compared to Donne's, Herbert's, and—most strikingly—Crashaw's Passion works, Lanyer's long meditation on the Passion includes a surprising lack of focus on Christ himself, favoring instead the experiences of the mortals who attend to him in life and witness his death. The few sections that center on Christ—such as the following passage on the salvific properties of his blood—cast him in an intensely physicalized and sensuous light:

Sweet holy rivers, pure celestiall springs,
 Proceeding from that fountaine of our life;
 Swift sugred currents that salvation brings,
 Cleare christall streames, purging all sinne and strife,
 Faire floods, where soules do bathe their snow-white wings,
 Before they flie to true eternall life:

Sweet Nectar and Ambrosia, food of Saints,
 Which whoso tasteth, never after faints.

This hony dropping dew of holy love,

Sweet milke, wherewith we weaklings are restored. (1729-38)

The elaborate description of Christ's blood, which resonates with Crashaw's expressions of sublime liquidity, both feminizes and physicalizes Christ through its language of bodily sweetness and nourishment. According to Bynum, "Both men and women wove—from Pauline references to meat and milk and from the rich breast and food images of the Song of Songs—a complex sense of Christ's blood as the nourishment and intoxication of the soul. Both men and women therefore saw the body on the cross, which in dying fed the world, as in some sense female" (271).²³ Lanyer evokes both senses of Christ's blood as "nourishment" and "intoxication of the soul" in this passage. Rather than recasting the concept of "sweetness" (as she does with "beauty"), Lanyer reinforces its gendered associations with women and endorses the belief in Christ's blood as nourishing, wholesome, and salvific. She repeats the word "sweet" three times in ten lines (followed by "sweetnesse" twice in the next five), supplemented by the similar terms "sugred" (1731), "Nectar" (1735), and "hony" (1737). The property of sweet taste informs the more explicit terms of food and sustenance, culminating in the final line, "Sweet milke, wherewith we weaklings are restored" (1738), which alludes to breast milk and likens Christ to a nursing mother who feeds his children, or "weaklings." The sustained description of the

²³ Woods notes that much of Lanyer's source material comes from "Song of Songs" (xxxviii); therefore, while Bynum writes of medieval devotional thoughts and practices, it is likely that Lanyer carries this interpretation of Christ's blood into her seventeenth-century text.

salvific properties of Christ's blood represents him as a maternal figure who nourishes bodies and provides for souls an occasion to "bathe their snow-white wings" (1733).

As Christ's own mother and chief mourner, Mary combines the maternal and affective associations that Lanyer also attributes to Christ. Through Mary and other female exemplars, such as the daughters of Jerusalem, Lanyer demonstrates how women's suffering touches and moves the suffering Christ. Her marginal titles for these sections, "The teares of the daughters of Jerusalem" and "The sorrow of the virgin Marie," highlight the centrality of women's affective engagement in the Passion. Yet, she also includes a stanza that displays Christ's wounded body that—in its descriptive physicality—suggests parallels to the physicality typically associated with women.²⁴ The stanza reads:

His joynts dis-joynted, and his legges hang downe,
 His alabaster breast, his bloody side,
 His members torne, and on his head a Crowne
 Of sharpest Thorns, to satisfie for pride:
 Anguish and Paine doe all his Sences drowne,
 While they his holy garments do divide:
 His bowels drie, his heart full fraught with grieffe,

²⁴ Warren contends that Lanyer's suffering Christ matches the descriptive modes of "many female mystics" in that "Christ's suffering flesh is female flesh." She goes on to argue that, among Lanyer's contemporaries, "male-authored texts exhibit strong anxiety about the concept of Christ's femaleness" (53).

Crying to him that yeelds him no reliefe. (1161-8)

Lanyer feminizes Christ directly through the description of his “alabaster” breast (1161) and associatively by likening his feeling of “Anguish” (1165) and act of “Crying” (1168) to those of the distraught women who surround him. However, the intense focus on Christ’s body and its vulnerability draws upon an even more foundational relationship between women and physicality. Bynum remarks on the potential empowerment of this association for women writers, noting that “Whereas male writers used the traditional dichotomy of male and female to criticize particular women and to differentiate sharply between male and female roles, male and female characteristics, women used the dichotomy differently. To women, the notion of the female as flesh became an argument for women’s *imitatio Christi* through physicality” (*Holy Feast*, 263). A suffering, physicalized Christ provides a suitable imitative counterpart to the suffering, physicalized women who Lanyer places at his side. The stanza’s concentration on Christ’s body and its ruptures dovetails with Lanyer’s consistent arguments throughout the poem about the superior capacities of women’s piety. The resultant version of *imitatio Christi*, which finds aspects of womanhood in Christ, substantiates its reverse: Lanyer’s conviction that one may find Christ in women.

Along with the medieval practice of feminizing Christ through representations of his suffering and fleshliness, Lanyer draws upon the dream-vision trope as a means of validating her project and situating it within the realm of religious traditions accessible to women. The visionary dimension of dreams

aligns well with the *revisionary* dimension of Lanyer's volume, and, as Clarke further explains: "Dreams were a highly adaptable and flexible medium, especially for writing that was struggling with questions of authority, language, and propriety, as the precedent of Chaucer clearly demonstrates" (148). As an early modern religious woman writer with an early modern audience of courtly women, Lanyer faces challenges with all of these issues—"authority, language, and propriety"—and she bookends them with two iterations of the dream-vision trope: one specific dedication and one general closing message. Her ending prose note, "To the doubtfull Reader," provides her illuminating final comment on the volume:

Gentle Reader, if thou desire to be resolved, why I give this Title, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, know for certaine; that it was delivered unto me in sleepe many yeares before I had any intent to write in this maner, and was quite out of my memory, untill I had written the Passion of Christ, when immediately it came into my remembrance, what I had dreamed long before; and thinking it a significant token, that I was appointed to performe this Worke, I gave the very same words I received in sleepe as the fittest Title I could devise for this Booke. (1-9)

The message demonstrates the dream vision's complicated relationship to authorial agency; while the dream authorizes the project, it simultaneously strips

the author of creative ownership. According to Holmes, “Lanyer takes full responsibility for her dream vision” (96), suggesting that she finds opportunity—rather than disadvantage—in the trope’s necessary negotiation of agency. She highlights the fact that the validating dream offers only the “Title” (1, 9) of the work and that it “was quite out of [her] memory” (5) and only “came into my remembrance” (5-6) once the volume was complete. Thus Lanyer retains the validating aspect of the divinely inspired dream and the implication of her latent mystical connection to God, while also reminding the reader that only she crafts the poem. God may have “appointed” her “to performe this Worke” (7-8), but the product of this appointing is Lanyer’s alone.

The dream vision that Lanyer recounts in the dedication to Mary Sidney, “The Authors Dreame to the Ladie *Marie*, the Countesse Dowager of *Pembrooke*,” conveys a more imaginary and visual experience than the dream that she credits with the title of the volume. The dream visualizes Mary Sidney in the heavens surrounded by goddesses and muses who adore her: “Throgh al the world that worthy Ladies praise, / And by Eternall Fame I saw her crown’d” (15-6). Even in this more traditional use of the dream-vision trope, Lanyer retains a level of control, directing the events from her slumber:

Thus I in sleep the heavenlist musicke hard,
That ever earthly eares did entertaine;
And durst not wake, for feare to be debard
Of what my sences sought still to retaine.

Yet sleeping, praid dull Slumber to unfold

Her noble name, who was of all admired; (129-34)

Lanyer wills herself to stay asleep so that the dream may unfold—“And durst not wake, for feare to be debard” (131)—and even solicits information by praying to “dull Slumber” (133). Rather than surrendering to sleep and recounting the narration offered to her, Lanyer takes an active role in envisioning and guiding the dream: “And what my heart desir’d, mine eies had seene” (174). Lanyer’s dream offers validation for her work that, Rienstra argues, allows her to “bypass the implied authorization of her audience and establish herself as one of God’s poets, according to Pembroke’s example” (98). While Lanyer uses the dream-vision dedication to appeal to Mary Sidney’s authority as a religious woman poet in an advantageous position, she seems to undercut its divine authorizing function by directing the dream herself. She offers an alternative self-authorization that relies on her own discretion as a devout woman poet who finds opportunity in creative places.

The dream vision provides a framework for the “Salve Deus” poem in which Lanyer draws upon her mortal womanhood for credibility in narrating a woman-centric revision of the Passion. Her use of early modes of women’s religiosity—such as the focus on Christ’s femininity and the dream-vision trope—provide a historical record of women’s devotion. Lanyer values this history, leaning on it to substantiate her visionary poetics. She writes in “To the virtuous

reader”: “Many other examples I could alleadge of divers faithfull and virtuous women, who have in all ages, not onely beene Confessors, but also indured most cruel martyrdome for their faith in Jesus Christ” (50-4). The variety of roles for devout women of the past is meant to inform the options for devout women of Lanyer’s present and future; finding Christ in one another, Lanyer argues, they can circumvent their social limitations and shape their own devotional circumstances.

Published four years after Lanyer’s volume, Joseph Swetnam’s *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615) set into motion a five-year pamphlet war about the *querelle des femmes*, or the controversy over women.²⁵ The aggressive voice and flawed rhetoric of Swetnam’s misogynist *Araignment* detract from the persuasiveness of his arguments, and critics have long noted his selective and inaccurate usage of Biblical and classical sources. However, the *Araignment* and the published responses in defense of women—particularly those by Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam (with Joane Sharp), and Constantia Munda—offer telling glimpses into the content and rhetoric used to condemn and vindicate women.²⁶ Speght’s and

²⁵ “Defences of Women” by Teague and De Haas provides background information about Swetnam and the *querelle des femmes*. Teague and De Haas note that Swetnam contributes to a longstanding tradition of anti-women invectives and responses, reviving “the polemical pamphlet controversy over women that had been on the wane since 1592” (255).

²⁶ Bronwen Price argues that James I’s succession, with its attendant “overt and encompassing form of patriarchy,” stimulates the growth of women’s writing in the early seventeenth century: “The ideology of patriarchal absolutism advocated by James I’s *True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) presented an image of natural law in which paternal authority was affirmed through a

Sowernam's texts, for example, refute charges central to the controversy that implicate Eve over Adam for the Fall. According to Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus*, Eve "was not produced from Adam's foot, to be his too low inferior; nor from his head to be his superior; but from his side, near his heart, to be his equal" (141). Speght's claim for equality on Eve's behalf offers an alternative to Lanyer's exoneration of Eve on the grounds that Adam's strength should have outmatched Eve's weakness, though both texts participate in the debate by suggesting reinterpretations of the prevailing—and, in Speght's case, pressing—discourse about women's place in religion and society.

Whereas the prose pamphlets engage the woman question explicitly, Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (with its imposing religious title afforded in a dream) does so within the parameters of a Passion narrative. Lanyer's poem shares with Crashaw's Passion works an effort to engage active, interpretive piety. Crashaw looks to Christ's "wakefull wounds" (line 1 of "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord"), for example, to elicit the reader's affective response—a response that he trains the reader to generate by modeling proper interpretive practices. Both poets employ female devotional exemplars as a means of modeling and guiding affective response; the suffering Mary is common to both, while Crashaw's St. Teresa parallels Lanyer's Countess in some respects, as both figures mediate between the mortal and divine realms. For Crashaw and Lanyer, meditation on the Passion provides a productive means of intimacy with Christ, and, as van Dijkhuizen observes, "Crashaw and Lanyer are not so much troubled

network of interdependent relations between God over the world, king over state and father or husband over the family" (289).

by the question of whether humans can take part in the Passion, but proceed from the belief that this is both an ethical duty and a human possibility” (147). The didactic Passion poetry of Crashaw and the revisionary human-centric volume by Lanyer offer hope to early modern audiences who wish to bridge the gap between themselves and their God. Although Crashaw converts to Catholicism and Lanyer belongs to the Church of England, their Passion works share enough common ground to suggest fluidity in the doctrinal distinctions of the period.

Lanyer’s poem shares fewer commonalities with the Passion works of Donne, who—to borrow van Dijkhuizen’s phrase—remains *intensely* “troubled by the question of whether humans can take part in the Passion” (147). Donne’s frustration manifests itself in his efforts to achieve selfhood, and, despite their differences, both he and Lanyer engage in this exercise. In the “Salve Deus,” Lanyer and the women she narrates achieve self-construction through a series of relationships and through community. For example, Mary finds herself “undone” (1013) as Christ dies, for Lanyer ascribes to them a shared sense of identity. However, Donne’s self-fashioning project defines his Passion poetry, as he believes the establishment of selfhood to be a prerequisite to intimacy with God. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt argues that Donne realizes selfhood through imagined contact, “To be left alone, unregarded and self-governing, is far worse than to be punished for as in Tyndale or, more familiarly, in Donne’s Holy Sonnets, identity is achieved in moments of chastisement” (125). While the establishment of selfhood for Lanyer aligns with the project of connecting a community of women (including herself) and pooling their virtues, she

nonetheless shares with Donne the priority of self-construction in relation to others and to God.

The Passion works of Herbert and Lanyer have in common a sense that *imitatio Christi*, applied creatively, offers a way of bridging the gulf between the mortal and divine realms. This accords in part with Bennett's contention that "as poets and as rhetors, Lanyer and Herbert most closely correspond in their mutual recognition that the practice of art is at once inadequate and necessary to devotional expression" (231). Both poets apply the "practice of art," even as they engage *imitatio*: Herbert, through interactions and reversals of imitative expectation (as in "The Sacrifice," where a speaking Christ offers sympathy to Herbert himself), and Lanyer, by finding evidence of Christ in the women of her religious past, present, and (implied) future. They both seem to struggle with language, with expression, and with humility. Further, they seem to struggle with their inherited sin and with their powerlessness to change that. But they also seem to find hope in Christ: through faith (Herbert) and through faith in other women (Lanyer).

"There is no remedy to the woman question in Swetnam other than abstinence and the retreat into all-male company" (59), writes Clarke, answering Swetnam's text with the melodramatic implications of his affronts. Yet, in Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, the all-female community of patronesses, dedicatees, virtuous readers, and historical figures that the author weaves reads not as melodramatic but as visionary. In a way, then, the volume is Lanyer's own version of the Cookham estate: an immortal place that offers freedom, equality,

inspiration, companionship, and support in a mortal community of virtuous women believers.

Coda

Milton's Passion

*The subject the Author finding it to be above the yeers he had,
when he wrote it, and nothing satisfi'd with what
was begun, left it unfinisht.*

John Milton

John Milton's explanatory note (above) ends his poetic fragment, "The Passion," with prose. Milton likely composed "The Passion" in 1630, and scholars believe that he intended to include it as part of a sequence of poems (starting with "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity") celebrating the festivals of the Christian calendar.¹ The fragment appeared initially in 1646 in his first printed collection of verse, *Poems 1645*, and its seven stanzas have been overwhelmingly critically maligned; in some recent examples, Colin Burrow deems the unfinished piece "an odd youthful stub" (54), and Michael Schoenfeldt finds certain sections saturated with "ludicrous clichés" ("That Spectacle," 579) and others, worse yet, "like Crashaw on a bad day" (580). Though Milton never finished "The Passion," he includes the fragment, along with its appended explanation, in two collections of his works after the first volume. The reproductions raise the question: Why might

¹ See Stella P. Revard, who notes that "the meter and rhyme scheme are those of the introductory stanzas of the Nativity Ode," and further, that line 2 ("Wherwith the stage of Ayr and Earth did ring") alludes to "the composition of the Nativity Ode and especially the prominence of music within that ode" (32).

Milton have documented his unfinished, cliché-filled failure to represent Christ's Passion? I would suggest that "The Passion," even—or, *especially*—as a fragment, dramatizes the struggles that poets face in writing Passion poetry—struggles we can see in all of the poets in this dissertation. In his unfinished piece, Milton confronts overlapping questions about poetic self-implication (like Crashaw), about the potential for intimacy with Christ (like Donne), about the suitability of poetic form (like Herbert), and about negotiating the primacy of the Word (like Lanyer).

For example, Milton's "The Passion" and Crashaw's Passion poetry have in common poetic self-implication and references to the act of writing; in fact, both poets even refer to the materiality of text, or its physical "leaves," implicating the textual object in their devotion.² In different ways, their works explore the issue of self-consciousness in religious poetry and the suitability of their own personal involvement as writers of their verse. The couplet that ends Milton's fifth stanza demonstrates his self-inclusion: "The leaves should all be black whereon I write, / And letters where my tears have washt a wannish white" (34-5). Milton refers to the black-edged pages common to funeral elegies—while his poetic color scheme is black and white, however, the question of his self-referentiality is less straightforward. Crashaw, by contrast, focuses on the transformative potential of encountering text in the epigram, "On the Still Surviving Marks of Our Savior's Wounds": "Once I did spell / Every red letter / A wound of Thine, / Now (what is better) / Balsam for mine" (6-10). Whereas

² Lines 88-90 of Crashaw's "The Flaming Heart" read: "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."

Milton's lines refer to authorial imperatives—his text and tears *should* be a certain way—Crashaw focuses on the progressive meaning that meditating on Christ's Passion (rather than fixating on the details, or “every red letter”) generates for him. Milton reaffirms his emotionally detached relationship to the text at the end of the seventh stanza: “For sure so well instructed are my tears, / That they would fitly fall in order'd Characters” (48-49). Milton represents the poetic process as the influence of “well instructed” tears over “order'd Characters,” suggesting that self-implication Passion poetry involves measured artificiality. Crashaw, on the other hand, depicts himself as a willing, necessary participant in the Passion—“Nor grudge a younger brother / Of griefs his portion” (*Sancta Maria Dolorum*, 78-9), he begs—and, even at a remove, he finds intermediaries (St. Teresa and Mary, for example) who afford him access to the scene.

Extending the issue of self-reflexivity, Milton's fragment further examines the stakes of using poetry as a vehicle for representing the Passion, a formal concern he shares with Herbert. Milton invokes the god of poetry and the sun, Phoebus, to demonstrate his resolution to write poetry about *the* Son: “These latter scenes confine my roving vers, / To this Horizon is my Phoebus bound” (22-3). Milton's ostentatious announcement of purpose—which may be considered a delaying tactic—fails in its stated confinement of his verse, instead leading him to defer to another narrative about the Passion: “Loud o're the rest *Cremona's* Trump doth sound” (26). Stella P. Revard contextualizes this reference: “Marco Girolamo Vida, born in Cremona, composed *The Christiad* (1535), a brief Latin epic in six books on Christ's life, with a particular focus on

Christ's passion" (33). After stating his authorial purpose, Milton alludes to Vida's text in the space of three lines rather than penning his own. We have seen similar engagements with uncertainty, delay, and self-acknowledged failure in Herbert's poetry (including the revision of his early poem, "The Passion," which he absorbs into the longer "Good Friday").³ Herbert and Milton clearly both find poetic failure to be an important aspect of the experience of writing devotional works; Milton, however, makes the additional statement about the expressive potential of fractured, unfinished expression.

Like Donne's Passion poetry, Milton's fragment exercises concerns about the possibility of achieving intimacy with Christ. For Donne, this intimacy involves bridging the distance between himself and God, between the mortal and the divine, between the body and the spirit. As the philosophical, detached framing of "Goodfriday 1613. Riding Westward" gives way to more intricate details of the crucifixion, he creates tonal division that performs verbally the distance he seeks to overcome. In "The Passion," Milton avoids intimacy with Christ, with the scene of the Passion, and even with himself as mourner (as his studied tears from lines 48-49 confirm). Observing the fragment's disengagement with the scene, Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen believes that the piece, for Milton, raises the "question of whether co-suffering is possible in the first place," and he adds: "The poem is also revealing in what it leaves out: Milton seems uninterested in a detailed poetic rendition of Christ's suffering and in the idea of compassion with Christ, yet is also unable to find an alternative thematic focus for his projected

³ Another example of delay appears in "The Thanksgiving" when the speaker postpones addressing the Passion: "As for thy passion—But of that anon, / When with the other I have done" (29-30).

Passion poem” (100). I would propose that Milton does find an “alternative thematic focus” in his classical references: to Hercules, “of labours huge and hard” (14); to Phoebus, “To this Horizon is my Phoebus bound” (23); and to Zeus and Hera, whose allusion ends the fragment, “a race of mourners on som pregnant cloud” (56). Like Donne, Milton uses grand, expansive, detached references to distract from—indeed, to call attention to—his lack of intimacy with Christ during the Passion. Unlike Donne, who juxtaposes the philosophical frame and the more immediate “spectacle of too much weight for mee” (15), however, Milton ends the project before exploring Christ’s suffering.

Perhaps in response to the question of how to incorporate Scripture in poetry during a time of increased primacy of the Word, Milton and Lanyer both rely on classical and Biblical references in their Passion works. According to Kari Boyd McBride and John Ulreich, the allusions in each case serve an authorizing function: “The ground of self-authorization in both poets is the practice of Biblical interpretation—a reworking of the Bible that simultaneously affirms and radically revises crucial Biblical texts” (334). Both poets use Scripture to situate their Passion works within central religious narratives: Lanyer, as a means of reinterpreting the prevailing discourse, and Milton, as a means of once again delaying his own Passion narrative. Milton’s reference to Christ’s anointing (from Matthew 26:7) in lines 15-16, “He sov’ran Priest stooping his regal head / That dropt with odorous oil down his fair eyes,” for example, recounts a moment on the periphery, rather than in the center, of Christ’s Passion.

Ultimately, Milton's fragment grapples with some of the fundamental questions—about poetic form, personal implication, intimacy, and the relation of the Word to the word—that Crashaw, Donne, Herbert, and Lanyer engage in their Passion poetry. The unfinished nature of "The Passion" seems to bear on all of these questions, answering them with fracture rather than closure: poetic form breaks down; personal implication leads to dissolution; intimacy is either impossible or inexpressible; the Word engenders silence. Schoenfeldt argues that, for Milton, "The subject was not just beyond the poet's years, but beyond the capacity of any Christian to fathom" ("That Spectacle," 581). I would modify Schoenfeldt's claim to suggest that Milton does fathom the Passion—if only indirectly—in his fragment, "The Passion," and in his related poem, "Upon the Circumcision." Like Crashaw, Donne, Lanyer, and Herbert, Milton found poetic engagements with the Passion—engagements that are necessarily fractured, failed, distanced, imperfect—that better reflected his vision of the narrative and the world.

Appendix A

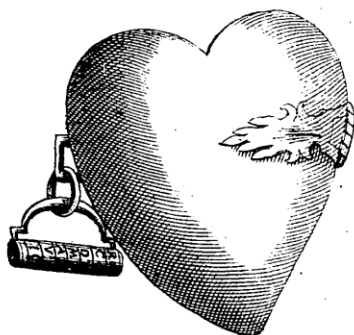


“The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa,” sculpted by Gian Lorenzo Bernini between 1647 and 1652; Material: White marble; Location: Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.

Source: <http://www.chiesasantamariavittoriaroma.it/85.aspx> (accessed 7/14/15)

This famous sculpture dramatizes Saint Teresa’s account of being pierced by a seraphim. She writes: “I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron’s point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it.” (*Vita*, Ch. 29, Part 17)

Appendix B



NON VI.

*'Tis not the work of force but skill
To find the way into man's will.
'Tis love alone can hearts unlock.
Who knows the WORD, he needs not knock.*

TO THE
Noblest & best of Ladyes, the
Countesse of Denbigh,
Perfwading her to Resolution in Religion,
& to render her selfe without further
delay into the Communion of
the Catholick Church.

WHat heau'n-intreated HEART is This?
Stands trembling at the gate of blisse;
Holds fast the door, yet dares not vèture
Fairly to open it, and enter.

Title page for Richard Crashaw's *Carmen Deo Nostro*

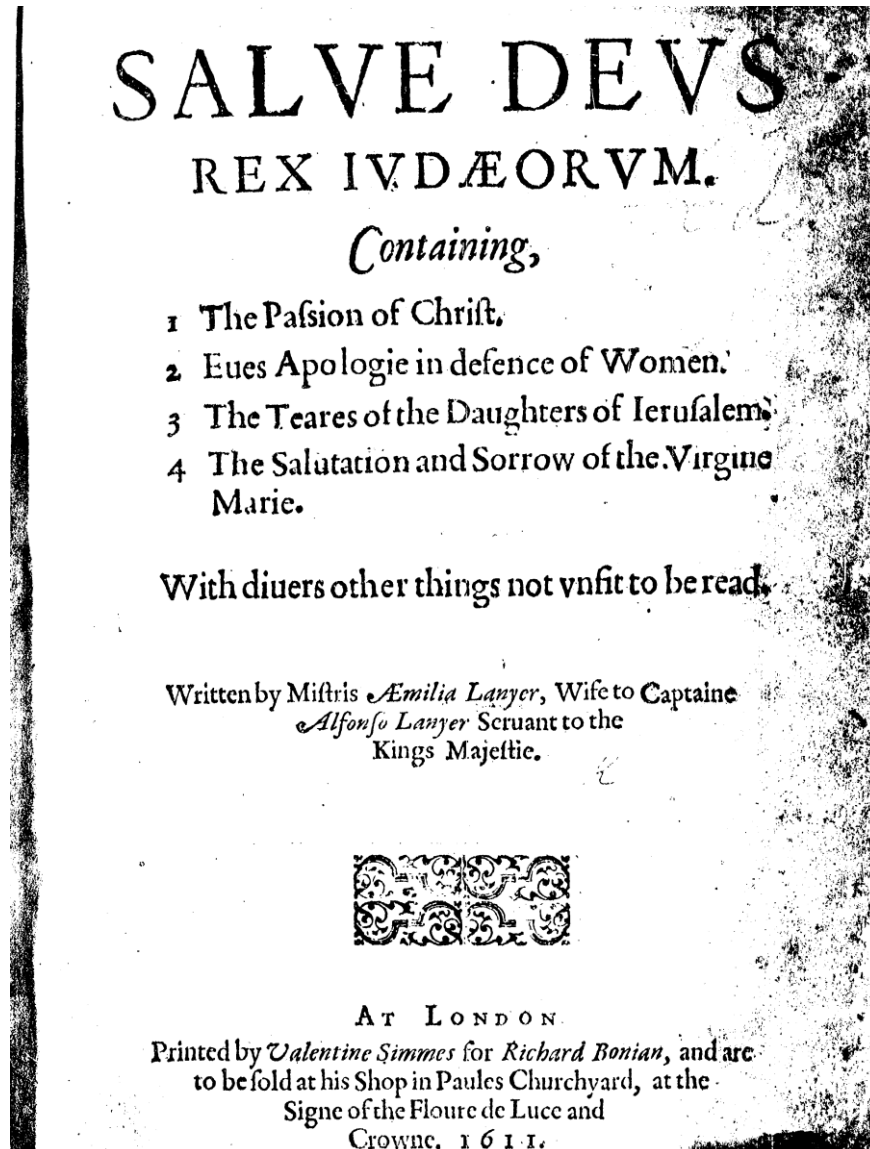
Source: Early English Books Online (accessed 14 July 2015)
http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:120112:4

Date: 1652

Reel position: Thomason / 202:E.1598[1]

Copy from: British Library

Appendix C



Title page for Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

Source: Early English Books Online (accessed 1 July 2015)
<http://eebo.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/search>

Date: 1611

Bib name / number: STC (2nd ed.) / 15227.5

Physical description: [110] p.

Copy from: British Library

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