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## Prosthetizing the Soul: Reading, Seeing, and Feeling in Seventeenth-Century Devotion

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**Prosthetizing the Soul: Reading, Seeing, and Feeling  
in Seventeenth-Century Devotion**

A Dissertation Presented

by

KATEY E. RODEN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2016

English

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**Prosthetizing the Soul: Reading, Seeing, and Feeling  
in Seventeenth-Century Devotion**

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## **DEDICATION**

To Mike

This has been your journey as much as mine.

Words fail to capture the depth of my gratitude for your patience and steadfast support.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to begin by acknowledging the immense debt I owe to the friends who have offered me immeasurable support over a stretch of many years. Chief among this set of spectacular individuals is Cathy Esterman, my dearest friend who has never failed to offer a sympathetic ear, a reassuring comment, and libations when needed. Special thanks and appreciation are also due to my graduate student colleagues Meghan Conine, Ann Garner, April Genung, Jess Landis, Nathaniel Leonard, Matteo Pangallo, Phil Palmer, Greg Sargent, Tim Watt, John Yargo, and Tim Zajac. You are some of the best and brightest people I have ever met.

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Finally, the deepest thanks are owed to my husband, Mike. You have held my hand through this journey, and I am a better person for having you by my side.

## ABSTRACT

### PROSTHETIZING THE SOUL: READING, SEEING, AND FEELING IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DEVOTION

MAY 2016

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My dissertation proposes a new context for reading early modern devotional writing's rich engagement with the language of the body in its focus on the relationship between gendered representations of devotional desire and spiritual ability in the religious poetry of seventeenth-century England. By tracing how somatic speech and bodily conditions are portrayed in the devotional poetry of John Milton, Richard Crashaw, Thomas Traherne, and An Collins, this project examines how these writers fashion spiritual states through the language of a sometime sorrowful and sometime ecstatic, but always desiring body. My project reveals how early modern authors manipulate or respond to gendered and bodily hierarchies to craft liturgically rich devotional scenes that exceed and overwhelm sensations of spiritual lack written on and within the bodies of the devotional figures presented therein. Through my focus on the body of the text and also the ways in which bodies are represented within devotional texts, I posit a new way of looking at early modern devotional writing: as prosthetics. The term *prosthesis* is most often associated with a medical appendage supplementing a bodily lack, but my project takes seriously the animating capacity of language as I demonstrate the ways in which early

modern devotional writing exhibits a “prosthetic impulse” that blurs mind-body divides via the amplified register of highly affective somatic speech. Far from mere metaphor, this dissertation shows how the prosthetized devotional text materializes and makes known the spiritual abilities of authors who actively frame divine desire around bodies in opposition to the normative cisgendered and ableist body so widely celebrated in religious discourses of the period. Reading devotional texts as prosthetics that supplement the spiritual lack experienced by early modern believers struggling to articulate their relationship with the divine reveals the problematic interplay between self and society in its blurring of the boundaries between immaterial soul, the material body, and the literal pages before us. My project thus demonstrates how the prosthetized text actively reframes dualist constructions of the body and soul, men and women, and also spiritual health and ability.



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## INTRODUCTION

### DESIRING BODIES AND THE PROSTHETIC POWER OF DEVOTIONAL VERSE

With every tool, man is perfecting his own organs...by means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance.... With the telephone he can hear at distance which would be unattainable... Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all of his auxiliary organs, he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.

—Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*<sup>1</sup>

In the epigraph above, Sigmund Freud suggests that technological innovation is tantamount to godliness. Our technologies allow us to conquer time, space, and also extend the range of our bodily abilities beyond what was previously thought possible. As each piece of adaptive technology allows us to more fully master our bodies and the material world that surrounds us, human beings become less creatures of the earth and increasingly godlike. The psychic unity and sense of autonomous agency Freud alludes to in the claim that mankind is “a kind of prosthetic God” rests entirely on the plethora of auxiliary devices that supplement humanity’s shortcomings and emphasize our lack of wholeness. Freud’s provocative image thus reveals something about the desire to

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey (1961; New York: Norton, 1989), 43-4.

<sup>2</sup> Burkhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, ed. Peter Burke (1860; New York: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Will Fisher notes that the *OED* first records *individual* as referring to “A single human being, as opposed to Society, the Family, etc.” in 1626. See *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), 201 n.2.

<sup>4</sup> Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005).

recognize in the self a sense of unfractured subjectivity, but it also acknowledges the reality that we most often come up wanting. His description of mankind as inching our way closer to the type of ontological wholeness envisioned in a divine Other like the Christian God, one prosthetized device at a time, is in many ways a reflection of the ideal modern subject. According to Jacob Burkhardt's influential claim, the concept of a modern individual as marked by consciousness of personal subjectivity and selfhood first appeared in the early modern period.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is true that the word *individual*, with all of its modern implications of wholeness and singularity, first formally entered the English language in the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> Steven Greenblatt, of course, picked up this idea and ran with it, boldly affirming that early modern writing exhibits both "selves and a sense that they could be fashioned" (1).<sup>4</sup> Like Burkhardt before him, Greenblatt's thesis spawned a host of critical inquiries into precisely how, and against what external pressures, early modern individuals saw themselves as just that: individuals.

It is equally true that the term *prosthesis* found its way into English vocabularies in the early modern period. At first glance, the concept of the self seems to have very little to do with prostheses, which are most often imagined as an artificial additive meant to supplement bodily lack through extension, augmentation, or enhancement of some kind. Prostheses have to do with the body, whereas modern subjectivity has to do with

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<sup>2</sup> Burkhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, ed. Peter Burke (1860; New York: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Will Fisher notes that the *OED* first records *individual* as referring to "A single human being, as opposed to Society, the Family, etc." in 1626. See *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), 201 n.2.

<sup>4</sup> Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005).

the experience of a fixed, immaterial internal self. Insofar as the prosthesis occupies a liminal space of being part of the body, but not the body, addable, removable, and also indispensable to personal autonomy and agency, the prosthesis disturbs almost all of the binaries we use to consider formation of selfhood. In short, the prosthesis compels us to consider the bounds between the body and self, because when we confront the prosthesis we are forced to contemplate where the edges might lie between our largely immaterial sense of self and the material things we create to enhance or make visible that very selfhood.

This project takes as its focus the “prosthetic impulse” of early modern devotional verse to expose the often-fraught relationships between bodies, belief, and the construction of devotional subjectivity in seventeenth-century England.<sup>5</sup> Given the ways the prosthesis mediates between the realm of the body and also the realm of the self, I argue that the prosthetized devotional text accomplishes the ontologically tricky work of representing divine desire, bringing it into being, and making its presence apparent to authors and readers alike. In this specific context, the devotional text stages a merger between the spiritual and material by embodying both the wants and desires of the self. My project thus takes seriously the animating capacity of language, especially poetic utterance, to manifest desire for divine presence and construct a devotional subjectivity in direct relation to a divine Other who is made immanently present through the prosthetic power of the devotional text.

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow the term “prosthetic impulse” from Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra, who use it to describe the relationship between the modern Western subject and an increasingly technologized word. See Smith and Morra, eds., *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

The poetic expression employed to achieve Real Presence in early modern religious verse is, I argue, prosthetic in nature precisely because both devotional texts and prostheses bring into being that which lacks body, whether that is devotional desire, the soul, or divine presence itself. Recent critical work on early modern devotional writing has largely focused on the interrelation between sacramental theology and the representational strategies of devotional poetry to develop what has variously been described as “eucharistic poetics,” “sacramental poetics,” “incarnational poetics,” and the “poetry of immanence.”<sup>6</sup> This brand of sacramental poetry is interested in crafting rich devotional scenes that exceed and overwhelm sensations of spiritual lack written on and within the bodies of the devotional figures presented therein. In its ambition to supplement sensations of spiritual lack by manifesting the devotional desire necessary to achieve Real Presence, incarnational or sacramental poetry reminds us of poetry’s corporeal qualities and also religious language’s ability to shape our sense of the self. Prosthesis accomplishes a similar aim in that it

is not a simple form of modification since it reconstitutes the entity to which it is added. As a result, it makes more sense to see it as a materialization of that entity – one that quite literally brings it into being. (Fisher 27)

Just as bread and wine are remade into body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, or an individual is created anew through the cleansing waters of baptism, sacramental poetry

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<sup>6</sup> Gary Kuchar, *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2005); Paul Cefalu, *English Renaissance Literature and Contemporary Theory: Sublime Objects of Theology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2008); Ryan Netzly, *Reading Desire and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011); Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2014).

shares with prostheses an investment in reconstitution and bringing forth. In this intrusion of the corporeal into the immaterial realm of divine desire and subjective self-fashioning, the prosthetized devotional text takes shape. At its heart, sacramental poetry deploys highly affective somatic speech to construct and maintain devotional desire. Devotional texts thus actively work to blur the lines between Word and flesh, Self and Other, soul and body. By rendering the boundaries between immaterial self and material body indistinguishable, the devotional text provides a space, much like the prosthesis itself, where these essential elements of self mingle and merge. In this respect, both religious verse and material prostheses invite contemplation over real and imagined boundaries between our largely immaterial sense of self and the material things we embody this self through.

The relation between literary texts and prostheses is long-standing, with the term *prosthesis* formally entering the English language in Thomas Wilson's popular treatise *The Arte of Rhetorique* in 1553. As David Wills points out in his groundbreaking study *Prosthesis*, Wilson describes *prosthesis* in a purely grammatical sense, as an artificial and thus unnatural addition to the beginning of a word (Wills 218).<sup>7</sup> Noting the pejorative nature of this representation, Wills asserts that Wilson's *Rhetorique* suggests an "unholy alliance" in its treatment of prosthesis, where such orthographic adjustments are represented as "the prostitution of language and rhetoric as its prosthetization, the putting forth or setting out by means of which the plain or lifeless inanimate becomes lively"

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the interconnection between "prosthesis" as a medical and rhetorical term in the early modern period, see David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1995), pp. 214-49. Particularly, Wills notes that the term was not recorded in English in a medical context until 1704, but this is not to say that it had not been in popular circulation previously.

(Wills 228).<sup>8</sup> Thomas Wilson's discomfort with rhetorical prostheses gestures to the power of language to alter and adapt our reality through its supplementation. In this sense, both Wilson and Wills speak to the interplay between the material and immaterial that enabled early moderns to view mental processes, emotions, language, and insights as potentially registering in material ways.

In considering the early modern devotional text as an actual rather than metaphoric prosthesis, a tool capable of materializing the state of the soul through the production of sacred affect, I seek to emphasize the vigorous exchange between the self, the spirit, the body, and a godly community intent on policing these very relations. In addition to bringing about a sense of immanence, one of the primary objectives of devotional poetry was to situate both readers and authors within systems of authority supported by church and state, and in doing so shape readers and writers of devotional literature into what Gary Kuchar has called "properly desiring subject[s]" (*Divine Subjection* 2). As I demonstrate in my first chapter, for instance, the prosthetized devotional text allows the disabled poet An Collins to quite literally embody otherwise internal sensations of joyful suffering in the face of physical hardships that could exclude her from the able-bodied community of the godly in post-Reformation England. Despite cultural constructions of the godly body as the normative body, through the supplementary power of her verse, Collins demonstrates that physical disability does not equate to spiritual inability. I thus invoke the concept of the prosthesis to highlight how

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<sup>8</sup> Specifically, Wills notes the etymological relation between rhetoric as the art of "setting forth" and prostitution as "putting oneself forth" in direct relation to the prosthetic as a "putting forth" that comes with the breakup of the medieval trivium, wherein rhetoric becomes corrupted, prostituted, the "means by which the human is subjected to an intimate relation with the inanimate" through rhetorical figures of unnecessary and unnatural addition. See pp. 214-15.

devotional texts are at once separate from the self, detachable and auxiliary, but also an important tool by which early modern individuals could cultivate a sense of self in response to larger cultural constructions of the godly subject.

David Wills has previously described the prosthesis as “the awkward conjunction of two discourses,” a collision that has made *prosthesis* a particularly rich concept through which scholars have explored a host of ontological questions (Wills 11). As a result, critical conversations surrounding prostheses and the very idea of the prosthetic are often interdisciplinary in nature. Prosthesis has become a seemingly indispensable trope to describe the extension and enhancement of the modern self chiefly as a result of increasing technological innovation. Disciplines ranging from science and technology to disability studies and anthropology have honed in on the prosthesis as “a tempting theoretical gadget with which to examine the porous places of bodies and tools” (Jain 49).<sup>9</sup> Disability theorists David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder have responded to the popularity of poststructuralist approaches to prosthesis as a theoretical tool to break down binary constructions by labeling such work “metaphorical opportunism” (*Body* 8).<sup>10</sup> Mitchell and Snyder dub purely metaphoric work with prosthesis as opportunistic specifically in that such approaches deploy disabled bodies to examine questions about subjectivity, technology, and even posthumanism, but without attending in the least to disability as a lived reality. This critique is expanded even further in their influential

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Jain, “The Prosthetic Imagination: Enabling and Disabling the Prosthesis Trope,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 24.1 (1999): 31-54.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, eds., *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997). In many respects, Mitchell and Snyder are responding to the extensive critical interest in cyborgs following Donna Haraway’s landmark essay “The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980’s,” *Socialist Review* 15.2 (1985): 65-107.



treatise *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, which calls attention to the pervasive presence of disabled characters and figures of disability throughout western literature. For Mitchell and Snyder, individuals who bear the marks of physical or cognitive disability catalyze the stories they appear in by initiating “a process of explanatory compensation” (*Narrative* 53).<sup>11</sup> In literary representation, the disabled person often embodies a figure of social difference and deviance, and their widespread representation reveals a deep-seated interest in reestablishing the socially accepted norms they themselves defy. Following in the vein of a literal and material prosthesis, Mitchell and Snyder demonstrate how the literary text not only supplements but also reaffirms the cultural norm, and in doing so, reveals much more about cultural expectations of normative bodies than disability itself.

My project is deeply indebted to David Mitchell’s and Sharon Snyder’s work on “narrative prosthesis” and their attention to the relation between literary representation and the lived reality of disabled persons. However, where Mitchell and Snyder frame their concept of narrative prosthesis entirely around representations of disability across many genres and literary periods, I focus exclusively on religious verse of the seventeenth century and the relationship between gendered representations of devotional desire and spiritual ability. The association between conceptions of spiritual ability and contemporary gender constructs abound in early modern devotional verse and were reinforced by popular views that able-bodied and patriarchal hierarchies were established by God. My project reveals how early modern authors manipulate or respond to such hierarchies by composing devotional texts that actively represent non-normative bodies

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<sup>11</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (2003; Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000).

as both desiring and desired by God. For example, when the then blind John Milton begins “19” (c. 1652) with a consideration of how his “light [has been] spent” (line 1) and then later alludes to the biblical parable of the day-laborers (l. 7), which concludes with Jesus curing two blind men, he invites consideration of the relationship between his own non-normative body and the sacred insight provided to readers through the power of his poetry.<sup>12</sup> In this example, Milton certainly engages in “narrative prosthesis” by presenting his blindness as necessitating the explanatory compensation the sonnet provides. In Milton’s great epic *Paradise Lost*, however, the author’s blindness is just as insistently present, but the prosthetic capacities of this devotional text narrating the greatest biblical story operate differently than the images of blindness in Milton’s sonnet sequence. By gesturing to the parable of the day-laborers wherein two blind men beg Jesus to help them see and are subsequently rewarded for their faith in Christ with physical sight, Milton reaffirms ableist perspectives that the normative body is the ideal Christian body. In *Paradise Lost*, however, Milton’s blindness, and the pain that comes with it, intrudes upon and destabilizes the time-space of the poem; in constructing blindness in this manner, Milton demands that readers both become aware of their own embodied interpretive practices and also acknowledge the reality of disabled persons as members of the godly community. Far from endorsing the able body as the godly norm, Milton instead reveals a disability subjectivity invested in placing his disabled body squarely at the heart of his sacred vision.

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<sup>12</sup> The parable of the day-laborers who express dissatisfaction with their agreed-upon wage to labor in a vineyard can be found in Matthew 20:1-16. Jesus’s curing of two blind men occurs in Matthew 20:30-4, which concludes the chapter.

My consideration of “prosthetized” religious verse very genuinely seeks to engage the devotional text as a “prosthetic device” wherein the “intangible aspects of desire, identification, and social relations” play out (Gonzalez 134).<sup>13</sup> Far from mere metaphor, the prosthetized text materializes and makes known the spiritual ability of authors who actively frame devotional desire around bodies that are in opposition to the normative cisgendered and ableist body so widely celebrated in religious discourses of the period. For example, I demonstrate how Richard Crashaw manipulates contemporary gender constructs to accommodate a range of embodied reading practices in “The Flaming Heart.” When Crashaw instructs the fictitious painter to transpose the qualities of Saint Teresa and the Seraphim in his painting because “his the blushes be, and hers the fires” (l. 38), he inverts the presumption that early modern women ought to embody a demure comportment and also the well-established belief that women’s bodies were physically cooler than men’s. Through the prosthetized poem, however, Crashaw reimagines and gives body to the spiritual zeal essential to initiate the process of kenotic self-emptying at the heart of his sacramental verse. Reading devotional texts as prosthetics that supplement the spiritual lack experienced by early modern believers struggling to articulate their relationship with the divine reveals the problematic interplay between self and society in its blurring of the boundaries between immaterial soul, the material body, and the literal pages of the text itself. The amplified register of Crashaw’s most baroque verse, for instance, reveals the extent to which socially constructed notions about sex and spirituality shape an individual’s access to self-expression and the affective piety that was frequently gendered as excessively bodily and thus necessarily feminine. The very idea

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<sup>13</sup> Jennifer A. Gonzalez, “Autotopographies,” in *Prosthetic Territories*, eds. Brahm and Driscoll (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

of the prosthetized devotional text is thus grounded in the recognition that religious belief and devotional practices were integral components to the way early moderns saw themselves as individuals with a private interior sense of self. The visible and public nature of prosthesis, however, also highlights how early modern individuals also lived in communities governed by a politico-religious state apparatus interested in actively demarcating the boundaries of appropriate bodies, desires, and spiritual states.

By focusing on the ways in which prosthetized texts reveal devotional desire, I highlight the complexity of human-divine communication and the difficulty early modern believers faced when trying to find a language capable of spanning the divide between fallen earthly bodies and a remote, possibly even indifferent God.<sup>14</sup> “Desire” itself has proven a locus for a great deal of critical work on early modern devotion, sacramental poetics in particular. As such, my project directly engages with current critical approaches to the nature of “desire” in the devotional context of early modern England. Richard Rambuss’ provocative assertion that “religion and sex have done...each other’s affective work” clearly establishes the relationship between body and belief as it is demonstrated through the interrelation between sacred and sexual language in incarnational poetry.<sup>15</sup> Rambuss thus foregrounds the problematic of “desire” for early moderns and the work required to generate, guide, and maintain appropriate desire. Spiritual desire expressed in a devotional context is particularly challenging in that it serves as the initial entry point to developing an intimate relationship with the divine. The relationship between bodies, texts, and devotional subjectivity thus also involves

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<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Garrett, “The Rhetoric of Supplication: Prayer Theory in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 46.2 (1993): 328-57.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998), 101.

disrupting the division between spiritual and material as well as the desiring subject and the divine object of desire.

As such, the Hegelian model of desire, which accounts for desire as a process, or work, suggests the types of devotional practices employed by early modern believers seeking a means not only to gain access to the divine but also to sustain human-divine intimacy. Hegel makes the connection between work and desire quite clear when he writes, “work...is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the [desired] thing.”<sup>16</sup> For Hegel, it seems, that which is desired is fashioned by the continual action, or work, of desiring. In a devotional context, desire that merely compensates for perceived spiritual lack is not enough; true devotional desire amplifies and extends godliness so much so that the fallen believer might experience Real Presence. In this sense, devotional desire is confirmed through intensive and sustained work, which itself can be proven through the prosthetic capacity of the devotional text.

Early modern devotional manuals thus encouraged pray-ers to get to work by generating religious zeal through meditation and self-exercise prior to prayer. The result of these preparatory spiritual exercises was an intense state of spiritual affectivity that could transcend the carnal body and inspire the pray-er toward a heartfelt, emotive, and genuine conversation with God. Seventeenth-century religious verse is particularly concerned with the construction and maintenance of a devotional subjectivity that not only offers a sense of wholeness to the individual, but also actively and authentically connects that individual with divine presence. This challenging devotional work thus demands consideration of the boundary points between the soul and the body, as

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<sup>16</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 118.

authentic devotional desire is as much a product of affective devotional work as it is tightly wound up in a sometime sorrowing and sometime ecstatic, but always desiring body.

In order to draw attention to the ways in which bodies and texts interact in these devotional contexts, my first chapter treats An Collins's *Divine Songs and Meditations* (1653) and the text's representation of her own infertility and failure to conform to the reproductive imperatives associated with the normative female body. Collins's reproductive disability takes center-stage in her poetics as I demonstrate how her devotional writing functions as the material supplement necessary to negotiate anxiety over exclusion from a godly community who might interpret her infertility as a sign of sinfulness. Ultimately, Collins's oscillation between expressions of spiritual joy, holy sorrow, and also bodily pain presents a distinct disability subjectivity that is accommodated by the prosthetic capacity of her devotional verse. In this prosthetic function, Collins's religious verse does more than normalize her disabled body; *Divine Songs* calls readers to recognize the diversity of bodies that exist in God's creation.

I turn next to the ways in which Thomas Traherne's devotional verse reveals an intense desire to become the sole object of God's gaze through the construction of a subject-speaker who actively disables all of his physical senses other than sight. I argue that this state of desirable disability forms the foundation of Traherne's ableist poetics, as his speaker transcends the body by drawing our attention to and then manipulating the gendered dynamics of contemporary ocular theories. By tracking the ways in which Traherne figures the eye as both a penetrating masculine agent and also penetrable and feminized, I reveal how Traherne's subject-speaker produces the lack necessary to

generate divine desire by crafting a hermaphroditic Christ figure who is at once present, accessible, and decidedly *other*. In order to formulate an ideal devotional subject who exhibits such a startling gender transitivity, Traherne relies on a number of metaphoric prostheses, mirrors and wombs in particular, that shape a devotional subject who, like the prosthesis itself, occupies a disturbing middle ground between socially acceptable bodily norms and a subjectivity that is shaped by the interrelation between body and soul.

Building off the prosthetic possibilities of the devotional text to occlude many of the binaries that undergird identity formation, my third chapter examines the devotional verse of Richard Crashaw. In this chapter I examine the ways in which Richard Crashaw appeals to both grammatical and liturgical literacy in some of his most baroque devotional poetry. By showing how Crashaw actively blurs the gendered divides associated with these overlapping modes of reading, I argue that Crashaw triangulates devotional desire between excessive female saints, readers, and the poet himself. This devotional strategy, I argue, reveals an incarnational poetics that relies exclusively on an intersubjective model of devotional desire. As a result, this intersubjective desire is made manifest by the material text and the reader's embodied, affective response to the images portrayed therein.

Finally, I conclude my dissertation with an interrogation of the ways in which John Milton's very public experience of blindness informs the depiction of mind-body relations in *Paradise Lost*. While Milton's monist belief in the indivisibility of body and spirit is well documented, I suggest that this hidden wholeness is dependent upon a staged encounter between sighted readers and an unsighted author who constantly portrays his blindness as sliding between metaphoric and material reality. I argue that

Milton's own autobiographical intrusions into the text proffer an embodied aesthetic of reading that ultimately encourages in readers a type of sacramental seeing that rejects the popular epistemological relation between physical sight and the acquisition of knowledge. As a result of this reorientation, Milton reveals the prosthetic power of *Paradise Lost* to materialize a monist vision of immanent divine presence that infuses able and disabled bodies alike.

Ultimately this dissertation contends that early modern devotional texts operate as prosthetic devices, wherein the text itself spans the gap between mind-body and subject-other relations just as a medical prosthesis would. By tracing the ways in which somatic speech shapes devotional desire in the religious verse of poets as politically and confessionally distinct as John Milton, An Collins, Thomas Traherne, and Richard Crashaw, my project seeks to make visible the powerful interplay between bodily states and the affective language of desire. The subject of mind-body relations in early modern devotion has generated a great deal of scholarship in recent years, but the field has not adequately addressed the relationship between devotional expression and contemporary constructions of bodily health and ability. I address this critical lack by examining how the early modern devotional text operates as a very real prosthetic territory invested in materializing and bringing into being the divine desire necessary for the development of sacred affect. Through the construction and maintenance of sacred affect, prosthetized devotional texts thus exhibit the essential role the body plays in both reading and writing devotional verse that is itself intended to compensate and supplement sensations of spiritual lack that manifest on and within the body.



As such, this dissertation offers a recalibration of David Mitchell's and Sharon Snyder's influential concept of "narrative prosthesis" by demonstrating the ways in which devotional texts quite literally extend, supplement, and ultimately prosthetize the souls of early modern devotional writers. By invoking literary prosthesis as more than mere metaphor, I invite a reimagining of early modern devotional verse that moves both spiritually and physically lacking, *other*, and transitive bodies from the margins to the center of their socio-cultural contexts. In my attention to the religious model of disability, as well as to gendered constructions of affective piety in early modern devotional verse, I seek to interrogate the intersectional relation between largely phallogentric and ableist discourses of seventeenth-century literary production.

## CHAPTER 1

### DISABLED DESIRE: READING AND WRITING REDEMPTION ON THE BODY IN AN COLLINS' *DIVINE SONGS AND MEDITACIONES* (1653)

Your child is nourished by your own blood...rectified or marred by your exercise, idleness, sleep, or watching, & Nature sees and knows how you swerve from what is fitting.

— Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives* (1651)<sup>17</sup>

As a historical figure, An Collins is as “nearly anonymous” as any author whose name graces her title page can be.<sup>18</sup> Her single, slim volume of devotional poetry and prose, *Divine Songs and Meditacions* (1653), is her only extant, or known, literary work.<sup>19</sup> Fashioned in the vein of spiritual autobiography, but lacking in any personal details that might elucidate the author’s confessional and political alignment, An Collins has proven something of an enigma as her equally evocative and ambiguous language has made it nearly impossible to pin down her position on many of the major issues of the period (Berry 261, 263). In keeping with this lack of biographical precision, An Collins has variously been labeled Quaker, Calvinist, anti-Calvinist, Roman Catholic, anti-Puritanical, Particular Baptist, and Presbyterian.<sup>20</sup> Her politics have similarly been

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<sup>17</sup> page 156.

<sup>18</sup> Sidney Gottlieb, “Introduction,” *An Collins Divine Songs and Meditacions*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996), vii.

<sup>19</sup> W. Carew Hazlitt lists a second 1658 edition in his *Handbook to the Popular, Poetical, and Dramatic Literature of Great Britain* (1867; repr. 1961); however, as Sidney Gottlieb notes, Hazlitt failed to mention a second edition in his earlier *Second Series of Bibliographical Collections and Notes on Early English Literature 1474-1700* (1862; repr. 1961) and the existence of a second edition has yet to be confirmed (“Introduction” xiii).

<sup>20</sup> Collins has been labeled a Calvinist (Hurley 55; Bell, Parfitt, and Shepherd 53; Wilcox 55), an anti-Calvinist (Norbook 881), a potential Roman Catholic (Greer 148), a Non-

described in a number of ways: pro-Commonwealth, anti-Commonwealth, critical of sectaries and Independents, and also royalist.<sup>21</sup> With potential textual evidence to support each of these claims, it is perhaps most safe to say that *Divine Songs and Meditations* “celebrates the contemporary Independent establishment as the fulfillment of the vision of the English Reformation”, and as such would likely have appealed to a relatively broad range of political and religious affiliations available to the godly or would-be godly in the 1650s (Clarke 82).<sup>22</sup> Despite the tantalizing biographical questions surrounding An Collins the person, critics do unanimously agree that when Collins does choose to make personal references, she unfailingly describes herself as afflicted, confined, unfruitful, and unsuited for bodily employment. Affliction is, undoubtedly, the focal point of *Divine Songs and Meditations*. As such, Collins has been treated as a perennial voice of

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Conformist with Quaker leanings (Gottlieb “Introduction” xvii-xviii; Price 250); an Anglican royalist whose Anglicanism is dominated by Calvinism (Comilang 83); and most recently a Presbyterian (Morissey 479).

<sup>21</sup> Her political stance is equally obscure. Gottlieb argues that Elaine Hobby, Stanley Stewart, and Helen Wilcox “overstate or oversimplify her conservatism” (“Introduction” xviii), while Greer et al. argue that Collins’s attacks on theological innovation fall in line with John Milton’s brand of radicalism (151). Elaine Hobby describes Collins’s emphasis on the necessity of a return to ecclesiastical and social order as “reactionary” (60), but Gottlieb stresses that this emphasis expresses a desire for continued reformation (“Introduction xviii) that does not necessarily imply Royalist politics (“Life” 224). And Robert C. Evans stresses Berry’s point that Collins’s language in the poems makes it “extremely difficult to pin her down precisely on many major issues” (Evans x).

<sup>22</sup> Specifically, Elizabeth Clarke cites the close relationship between Collins’s 714-line poem “The Discourse” and the theological pronouncements of the Westminster Assembly’s *Large Catechism* of 1647 to support her claim that Collins “engages directly with mainstream Presbyterian and Independent thought” (82). Likewise, in her analyses of Collins’s theological source texts for “The Discourse,” Mary Morissey draws attention to Collins’s use of key phrases from the Thirty-Nine Articles (1562) and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) in her treatment of the Trinity (470). Morissey’s larger argument connects Collins’s theological underpinning with the works of the Elizabethan Puritan theologian William Perkins; for more on Collins’s indebtedness to Perkins see Morissey, 469-73.

affliction, but without biographical details to fill in the gaps, the exact nature of her affliction has left readers with much to speculate upon.

In her *ODNB* entry, Sidney Gottlieb describes Collins as giving “voice to the pains of her triple affliction—as a physically disabled person, one of the godly living ‘where profaneness did abound’, and a woman traditionally constrained to silence and a limited range of activities.” In this statement, Gottlieb describes three separate, but overlapping communities, of which he identifies An Collins as a member. While there is ample evidence within *Divine Songs and Meditations* to support both Collins’s sex and belief in her election, the nature of her “disability” is less definite. Affliction was a popular topos in early modern devotional writing in that it enabled writers to both echo and place themselves within the spiritual tradition founded on Christ’s instruction “if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”<sup>23</sup> Understanding affliction as spiritually empowering encouraged devotional writers to pair their experience of fallenness and affliction with metaphors of recovery and redemption they hoped to one-day experience literally, and as a result early modern devotional writing is rich with representations of affliction. With this generic convention in mind, and especially given the gendered implications of her metaphoric portrayals of dry springs, unproductive gardens, and bloomless Springs, critics have wondered if Collins’s representation of her afflicted status is the product of real lived experience or simply a careful attunement to the form she writes within.

Most recently, Susannah Mintz has convincingly argued that it is most appropriate to consider An Collins’s sense of affliction through the lens of disability, and that *Divine*

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 16:24. Unless otherwise noted, this and subsequent biblical quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

*Songs and Meditations* offers a startlingly sophisticated anticipation of “a much later disability theology in taking bodily disrepair as a point of both commonality with Christ and poetic departure. Hardly a mark of philosophical or artistic immaturity, Collins’s identification with the damaged body of Christ is precisely what leads to her provocative recalibration of a devotional poetics” (Mintz 60). As Mintz so deftly points out, rather than presenting physical disability as an obstacle to be overcome, Collins instead develops a devotional practice that encourages readers to gaze directly at her disabled body and view it as a sight of spiritual purity worthy of celebration. Given this type of self-fashioning, whether or not Collins’s afflictions are more metaphor than actual malady appears far less interesting than *how* she negotiates contemporary constructions of ability and disability as she draws repeated correspondence between her broken, disabled body and intense and abundant spiritual vigor.

While devotional writing of this period is certainly rich with moving tales of affliction, this chapter will take seriously Collins’s assertion of bodily suffering and physical impairment to fully consider what reading a devotional text authored by a disabled woman might mean for the subjective self-fashioning we’ve come to expect in seventeenth-century devotional poetry and prose. Echoing Susannah Mintz’s claim that within the pages of *Divine Songs and Meditations* we might locate an emergent disability subjectivity, I will consider how An Collins’s devotional text itself stages a prosthetic intervention meant to direct our readerly gaze toward her disabled body in a very particular fashion. Rather than presenting her bodily condition as a status to be overcome, Collins instead positions her suffering body as functioning explicitly within the tradition of godly sorrow, a tradition that actively reframes disability or affliction as

spiritually empowering. Functioning as a prosthetic, a supplement to or extension of the body, *Divine Songs and Meditations* enables Collins to not only mediate the boundaries between the spirit and her disabled body, but also to lay claim to a disability subjectivity that positions the disabled body as more than just an obstacle that must be surmounted; instead, in the pages of her prosthetized text that comes to function as an extension of the self, An Collins asserts that her disabled body is evidence that she is a woman both desiring and desired of God.

### **Devotion and Disability: Prosthetizing the Saint's Body**

“Disability” has been, and continues to be, a vexed term used to describe complex circumstances and multidimensional concepts. In its modern usage, “disability” has been described and defined in medical, economic, legal, and sociopolitical terms, but there is considerable disparity between the understanding of disability in these modern communities and their seventeenth-century counterparts. In the modern sense, one’s status as disabled is dependent upon the adjoining of medical and administrative categories whereby “disability” is defined as “not purely a medical condition...but when his [the patient’s] actual or presumed ability to engage in gainful activity is reduced or absent because of impairment which in turn may or may not be combined with other factors” (Albrecht, Seelman, and Bury 100). In this model, disability is defined as a lack, which derives from both physical and “other” factors that result in impairment.

However, in this definition, the lack that causes impairment can be either actual or presumed, a condition which problematizes the term by offering the possibility of extending “disability” beyond the bounds of the person with impairment. The

presumption of disability can thus be made by anyone with any variety of motives or prejudices, a fact that profoundly informs the social reality of disability.<sup>24</sup> As such, the field of Disability Studies has largely critiqued a purely medical model of disability as it seeks to explain why disabled people “have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group” (Davis “Introduction” xv).<sup>25</sup> Given the weight of such a term, there is no neutral language with which disability can be discussed, and as a result, those marked with the “disability” label have met with soaring claims regarding their condition throughout history.<sup>26</sup>

Aristotle’s categorization of any corporeal excess or deficiency under the term “monstrosity” did a great deal to escalate contemporary language surrounding disability and skew perceptions of the disabled toward the negative. In Aristotle’s rendering, any body that deviates from the common course of nature (whether by birth, disease, or

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<sup>24</sup> The dangers of such a situation are perhaps best confirmed by Aristotle’s infamous characterization of female birth as the most common form of deformity wherein the male seed fails to replicate itself and instead produces a deviation from the otherwise ‘normal’ male body. See Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, trans. A. L. Peck (London: Heinemann, 1953) 728a 18; 737a 27.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the various theoretical approaches in the field of Disability Studies see Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine Seelman, and Michael Bury, eds., *The Handbook of Disability Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), especially Chapter 5, “Theorizing Disability” 123-141.

<sup>26</sup> For scholars who have previously noted the lack of neutral language on the subject of disability see: Gareth Williams, “Representing Disability: Some Questions of Phenomenology and Politics” in *Exploring the Divide: Illness and Disability*, eds. C. Barnes and G. Merer (Leeds, U.K.: The Disability Press, 1995) 194-212; Irving K. Zola, “Self, Identity and the Naming Question: Reflections on the Language of Disability,” *Social Science and Medicine* 36.2 (1993): 167-173; and Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York UP, 1998).

accident) ought to be considered monstrous, as “Monstrosities belong to the class of things contrary to nature, not any and every kind of nature, but Nature in her usual operations” (qtd. in Schildrick 11).<sup>27</sup> In this summation, Aristotle applies the category of the monstrous to anything that deviates from the *natural* course, and in doing so clearly identifies the physically different as unnatural and improper. This figuration of the disabled as monster is expanded upon in the Christian tradition, which also draws attention to the exceptional and uncommon nature of the disabled. In this tradition, however, “disability denotes an unusual relationship with God” and the disabled are considered in binary terms where “the person with disabilities is either divinely blessed or damned” (Eiseland “Barriers” 218). Biblical evidence for both of these interpretations abounds. The holiness codes in Leviticus, for example, link physical disability with sinfulness and uncleanness so much so that the disabled are barred access to the holiest spaces within the temple.<sup>28</sup> This portrayal of the disabled within the godly community is revised in the New Testament as Christ’s healing of the sick and disabled is celebrated. In John 9:1-3, for example, when his disciples ask if a blind man’s disability is the result of his or his parents’ sins, Jesus replies: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” In this Gospel story, blindness is made admirable as it enables a demonstration of God’s power and suggests an association between disability, forgiveness, and healing. However, in John 5:5-16,

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<sup>27</sup> For the original source see: Aristotle, *Generazione Animalium*, 767b, 5-10.

<sup>28</sup> Leviticus 21:17-26: “Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous. Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded. Or crookbackt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken.”



Jesus heals a man unable to walk and later, when he encounters that same man in temple, tells him “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” In this Gospel story, Christ seems to affirm a connection between disability and sin, even suggesting that disability is a just punishment for sin. The relationship between suffering, sin, forgiveness, and healing is further complicated by St. Paul’s emphasis on virtuous acceptance of suffering as a crucial sign of internal grace. In Paul’s model, and also through his own experience, the saint is purified through the crucible of physical impairment and affliction. Such stark representations leave very little opportunity for consideration beyond the archetypes of saint or devil and inevitably leave disabled individuals with only peripheral access to the religious community.

Early modern communities inherited both the Aristotelian and Christian traditions, and in the flux of reformation and revolution early moderns actively read physically different bodies as supranatural signifiers of God’s social, political, or religious commentary (Shildrick 12). For example, John Bulwer’s encyclopedic *Anthropometamorphosis* (published in 1653, the same year as *Divine Songs*) makes use of both these traditions as Bulwer identifies the meaning behind monstrous appearance:

these apparations that be contrarie to Nature, happen not without the providence of Almighty God, but for the punishing and admonishing of Men, these things by just judgment are often permitted, not but Man hath a great hand in these monstrosities; for inordinate Lust is drawn in as a Cause of these Events, whereby the seed of Man is made weak and unperfect.  
(qtd. in Shildrick 12)

Following the Aristotelian model, Bulwer first describes monstrous appearance as aberrant, but then immediately amends this judgment by placing such abnormal occurrences within God’s providence. Aristotle’s categorization attends primarily to physical qualities, but when Bulwer attaches the physical appearance of monstrosity to

man's "inordinate Lust" he draws a clear connection between the material and immaterial, and thus conjoins the Christian interpretation of the disabled with the monstrous. In short, Bulwer argues that monstrous bodies reveal God's intention to make mankind aware of sin through the understanding that disabled, or monstrous, bodies are the product of souls that lack the ability to accept God's grace.

As a result of such vexed narratives, disability identities are often shaped by the individual's choice or even ability to "pass", or "conceal social markers of impairment to avoid the stigma of disability" by appearing "normal," and thus effectively blurring the lines between a body that is socially conceived of as "normal" in that passing "expresses, reifies, and helps create concepts of normality" (Brune and Wilson 1-2).<sup>29</sup> This desire to pass for normal, to visually identify as a "normal" member of the community is often accomplished through some sort of prosthesis.

Thus, in the following pages I will argue that *Divine Songs and Meditations* reveals in An Collins what current Disability Studies scholars Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra have come to call a "prosthetic impulse"<sup>30</sup> in that her devotional writing supplements her disabled body, ultimately materializing the confluence between a disabled body and an overtly able soul. Collins's textual representation of her physical lack and simultaneous spiritual abundance offers the opportunity to negotiate these dual conditions precisely because the prosthetic itself suggests a blurry exchange between the animate and inanimate, authentic and artificial, human and inhuman. As a result, the prosthetized

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<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey A. Brune and Daniel J. Wilson, *Disability and Passing: Blurring the Lines of Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra, *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006).

devotional text obfuscates the boundaries between the author's body, soul, and the text itself, as we are invited to view both her soul and body in a swirling exchange between disability and ability that could only be viewed through the extension of self made possible by the prosthetic possibilities of the page.

From the very beginning of *Divine Songs and Meditaciones*, Collins's literary persona and lived experience as a disabled woman are deeply intertwined. In her brief prose address "To the Reader" Collins wastes little time engrafting both of these selves and also bringing her disability to the forefront of her reader's mind, declaring in the first sentence: "by divine Providence, I have been restrained from bodily employments, suting with my disposicion, which enforced me to a retired Course of life" (1).<sup>31</sup> This confession is expanded upon, albeit slightly, in "The Preface" when Collins declares that "through weakness" she has been "to the house confin'd" (line 1). The phrasing suggests that her removal from the world was not by choice, but a product of her bodily condition, which she has little control over. These highly suggestive remarks intimate that Collins's literary persona is tied directly to the experience of affliction, and we are meant to read her as inseparable from this experience.

This representation is further supported in "The Discourse", the first and longest poem in the collection, as Collins elaborates on the nature of her affliction:

Even in my Cradle did my Crosses breed,  
And so grew up with me, unto this day,  
Whereof variety of Cares proceed,  
Which of my selfe, I never could alay,  
Nor yet their multiplying brood destray,  
For one distemper could no sooner dy,

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<sup>31</sup> Unless otherwise noted, this and all further citations and/or references to An Collins's poetry and prose are from Gottlieb's edition: *Divine Songs and Meditaciones*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996).

But many others would his roome supply. (ll. 57-63)

Collins's metaphoric description of her continual sufferings as "crosses", which multiply rather than diminish, directly situates her affliction within two rich traditions: the tradition of godly sorrow stretching from patristic commentaries to Reformation exegeses, and also the poetic representation of "female fecundity run amok that ties into the literary line of Duessa and Sin" (Norcliffe 131). In the latter framework, Collins positions herself as victim of rather than mother to this brood of woes, and so enables her meaningful participation in the tradition of Christian suffering. However, following St. Paul's directive that true disciples readily accept, even welcome, the burden of affliction, these crosses present Collins with an interpretive dilemma she alone can resolve.<sup>32</sup>

Collins can choose to interpret her crosses as opportunities for greater unity with God, or, she can allow herself to become consumed by the physical and emotional hardship accompanying her affliction, and as such, reject the opportunity to begin the process of spiritual renewal that enables outward mortification to work within.<sup>33</sup> In response to this dilemma, Collins constructs a complex relational framework where the lines between not only body and soul but also text and self are blurred through the supplemental power of the prosthetic, a space where Collins is free to unremittingly mine religious sorrow for the affective tools to refigure her disabled body as an object of divine desire.

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<sup>32</sup> St. Paul first explicated the nature of godly sorrow in his powerful assertion of the reciprocal relationship between Christ's suffering and the consolation Christians achieve through that suffering. See 2 Corinthians, but particularly 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 on the relationship between Christ's suffering and Christian salvation.

<sup>33</sup> The Bible is rich with scriptural patterns denoting the importance of godly believers passively accepting adversity as a means of killing off the old sinful nature and birthing a new nature more fully attuned to Christ and Christian living. For example, see: Psalms 44:22; Luke 9:23; Romans 8:35-36; 1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 4:8-11, 16-17; Colossians 1:24; and 1 Peter 4:13.

Composing a book of devotional poetry and prose thus initiates the very prosthetic intervention Collins's situation demands of her. This blurry prosthetic work comes in the tension generated between sorrow and joy and also disability and ability within the text. Summarizing Augustine's influential interpretation of holy sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7, Gary Kuchar explains that holy sorrow is "not simply an affect, but a way of making oneself available to oneself as an object of knowledge" (5). This rendering suggests that meditating upon the experience of affliction provided ordinary men and women with the means to interrogate their lived experience within a larger Christian narrative, and in doing so draw meaning from their own lived experience. The genre of spiritual autobiography, with its conventional representation of astounding fluctuations between spiritual highs and lows allows precisely this, as writers place their sense of personal affliction within the larger context of the politico-religious turmoil of seventeenth-century England and also the long tradition of Christian suffering itself.<sup>34</sup> When An Collins describes her affliction as "suting to my disposicion," she thus intimates that the experience of affliction has enabled a very specific way of viewing both her condition and herself. For Collins, then, the self is conditioned by the body just as the

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<sup>34</sup> For works that discuss the prevalence of spiritual autobiography in the seventeenth century, as well as the codification of its generic conventions, see Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969); Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972); Leopold Damrosch, *God's Plot and Man's Stories* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985); Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1983); Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2002); D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2005); Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010); and most recently, Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012).

body is an essential condition for selfhood, as the term “disposition” could refer to her physical state, as in how her body is physically disposed; or perhaps, given the narrative of godly sorrow she is working within, how her body is indisposed. However, the *OED* defines “disposition” as also referring to a “natural tendency or bent of the mind, especially in relation to moral or social qualities.”<sup>35</sup> By positioning herself as inclined to or disposed to taking on the status of godly sorrower and bearer of crosses Collins appears acutely conscious of the genre in which she writes and its indebtedness to the biblical tradition of godly sorrow.<sup>36</sup>

This tradition finds expression in many seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographies whose narrative scaffold derives from the Calvinist *ordo salutis*, or order of salvation.<sup>37</sup> Like Bunyan in *Grace Abounding* or Christian in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s*

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<sup>35</sup> *OED*, 6. Although, it is also worth noting that Collins might be referring to her social class or position when she makes this comment. She is, after all, capable of living and writing in a “retired course of life”, and social status certainly disposes some to better pursue such a course.

<sup>36</sup> Both Catholic and Protestant traditions come to refer to holy sorrow as “compunction”, but subtle doctrinal differences emerge after the Council of Trent (1554-63) wherein Catholics argue that compunction must be passively accepted in order to provide salvation and Protestantism dictates that passive reception of compunction is conclusive proof of grace. Gary Kuchar draws out this subtle distinction more thoroughly in his introductory discussion of English poets from both traditions in *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2008), 10-25.

<sup>37</sup> For example, in John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), a text widely considered the apogee of seventeenth-century spiritual autobiography, Bunyan models his conversion narrative on the *ordo salutis* wherein the process of salvation is activated by acknowledgement of a deep sense of sinfulness in order to eventually recognize the salvific power of grace alone, a recognition that comes through considerable trial. For more on the *ordo salutis*, or order of salvation, see: Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York UP, 1963), and Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginners of American Expression* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1983).

*Progress* (1671; 1684), Collins's initial recognition of her sorrowful disposition simultaneously signifies the inherent sinfulness of all postlapsarian peoples and also her participation within the tradition of Christian suffering, which itself provides a vehicle by which the action of grace within can be recognized. As such, Collins endeavors to situate her experience of affliction within one of the most important aspects of this tradition, an element I argue has received inadequate consideration in relation to Collins's representation of her affliction: the experience of joy in the midst of sorrow.

Joy in sorrow is commonly represented within both Catholic and Protestant traditions by saints and martyrs who neither despaired nor lost faith while suffering considerable physical hardship.<sup>38</sup> In Calvin's rendering, the experience of "bitterness which we naturally feel under the cross" (3.8.11) *must* be tempered by spiritual joy, which derives from the consoling knowledge that "our Father's rod" (3.8.6) is meant to draw us closer to Him through sharing the experience of a joyful yet suffering incarnate Christ. Collins thus situates the "seeming desolate condicion" (1) she describes in "To the Reader" as an act of divine providence, and as such no matter for complaint. When viewed through the lens of joyful suffering, her multiplying crosses begin to produce "such enlargednesse of mind, and activity of spirit" that she comes to view her condition as anything but restraining; in fact, she finds it "most delightfull" ("To the Reader" 1). The seemingly contradictory experience of desolation and affliction generating delight thus marks Collins's affliction as a sign of grace, a grace so overwhelming that she describes herself as enlarged, dilated, or even made pregnant with a spiritual zeal so

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<sup>38</sup> Paul offers a very succinct expression of the Christian marriage between joy and sorrow in 2 Corinthians 12:10: "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12).

overwhelming it must burst forth. These pointed gestures to affliction so early in the text not only fall along gendered lines, but also serve to illustrate the devotional text's potential to stage a prosthetic intervention on Collins's behalf. As David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder define it, an effective prosthesis is both illusionary and compensatory, in that it compensates for "a body deemed lacking" by creating at least the illusion of wholeness, or normalcy (Mitchell and Snyder 6).<sup>39</sup> In Collins's case, the devotional text enables just such a reorientation, as her experience of lack reveals anxiety over how affliction is both written and read on her female body particularly.

The representation of spiritual joy as a product of physical affliction thus sets up an interdependence between Collins's bodily status as the cause for her many sorrows and the spiritual expressions contained within her volume of devotional verse. By drawing attention to her physically unproductive body and the sorrow it causes her, Collins frees her poetic persona to explore a range of spiritual desires in somatically charged language without risking accusations of lust and creatureliness precisely because her joy is constantly mediated, even produced, by the crosses she bears. Collins thus frames the joy she finds in composing poetry through the lens of her affliction, a reframing accomplished explicitly through the text's prosthetic intervention. With her faculties "enflamed...to put forth themselves, in a practise so pleasing," the consoling joy that Collins so desperately seeks finds form in divine poetry intended "for those Christians who are of disconsolat Spirits, who may perceive herein, the Faithfullnesse, Love, & Tender Compassionatnesse of God to his people" ("To the Reader" 1). Her poetry is directed toward those who seek spiritual consolation, which Collins claims to have

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<sup>39</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).



already achieved through the representation of her divine poetry as the very “image of her mind” (“Discourse” 53). Collins’s spiritual health is thus confirmed through the pleasing fruits of an enflamed mind, but also fruits that are nurtured and cultivated through a broken, painful body, which we never lose sight of throughout the text. Rather than obscuring and drawing our attention away from her own broken body, Collins conscientiously displays that body for our viewing, ever reminding us that disability is the norm, for her at least.

Given this initial representation, it might appear that Collins’s devotional verse will serve almost solely as a celebration of her sainthood, with Collins herself depicted as a beleaguered and afflicted saint suffering without a loss of faith. However, far from reveling in confirmation of her election, Collins instead demonstrates considerable concern over how her readers might interpret both her affliction and her motivation for writing poetry, which manifests in a swift adjustment of the potentially sensual language she previously used to describe her literary excitement. The provocative feeling of being enflamed by poetry is quickly reduced to a “satisfactory contentment” provided by the “manifestacion of Divine Truth, or rather the Truth it self, that reduced my mind to a peacefull temper, and spirituall calmnesse, taking my thoughts to Theologicall employments” (“To the Reader” 1). This qualification of her emotional state serves dual purposes: it at once explains the motivation for her writing, but also makes it quite clear that her sensations of delight and joy are tied to the activity of her spirit. The juxtaposition between her joy in poetry and experience of physical restraint enables Collins to demonstrate an acute consciousness of the interconnection between her physically unproductive bodily state and the mental productivity made visible by the

prosthetized text.

The production of spiritual calm, and the reduction of an enflamed, even ecstatic experience, however, could not be accomplished without Collins's previous presentation of her bodily state. In this attempt to remind us that she cannot escape her disabled body—that disability is her norm—the prosthetic function of the text becomes clear precisely because “to prostheticize...is to institute a notion of the body within a regime of tolerable deviance” (Mitchell and Snyder 6). By ensuring that readers can neither ignore her experience of bodily lack nor fully separate it from her status as godly sorrower, Collins effectively stages her disabled body in the least objectionable manner, and in doing so provides the very type of prosthetic intervention David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder refer to when they declare that, “if disability falls too far from an acceptable norm, a prosthetic intervention seeks to accomplish an erasure of difference all together; yet, failing that, as is always the case with prosthesis, the minimal goal is to return one to an acceptable degree of difference” (7). It is in this sense that *Divine Songs and Meditations* is prosthetized, as readers are consistently reminded that Collins's “norm” is quite far from that of her presumably able-bodied audience. Through the lens of godly sorrow, however, her disability can come to be recognized as an acceptable, even admirable, degree of difference.

### **Enabling Joy in Sorrow, the Prosthetic at Work**

Early on in the collection, Collins demonstrates a keen understanding of the various groups she is called to both identify with and also represent, as she grounds her cause to publish in terms that specifically meet with cultural expectations for a godly, female, and

disabled author. In “The Discourse” Collins speaks somewhat prophetically of her own current critical condition as she projects forward to readers with no knowledge of her personage: “though to them the Auther bee unknown, / Yet seeing here, the image of her mind; / They may conjecture how she was inclin’d” (ll. 52-4). Her contention that future readers might come to a true understanding of her inclinations through the “image of her mind” presented on the pages before them clarifies the supplemental or prosthetic relationship between Collins and her text, but she does not stop at simply declaring the text a direct representation of her mind. Collins completes the stanza containing this assertion with the following addendum: “And further note, that God doth Grace bestow, / Vpon his servants, though hee keeps them low” (ll. 55-6). This final couplet extends her earlier argument about the text’s ability to reflect her mind to firmly include her sense of affliction, perhaps even her physical state. In such a claim, Collins seems deeply aware that while she struggles to interpret being “kept low” as a sign of God’s grace, others may read her affliction as a sign of God’s displeasure. Given the fact that she dedicates the next five stanzas to a narration of the “multiplying brood” of crosses she has experienced from her infancy onward, it seems that the “image of her mind” cannot be properly considered without taking stock of her physical condition.

The crosses she bears appear fruitful, multiplying with no apparent end in sight, but Collins herself can claim no such fruition of her own without the aid of *Divine Songs*, a text that images both her mind and body. While the practice of writing poetry might leave her enflamed, enlarged, and bordering on the ecstatic, Collins clarifies her poetic agenda early, announcing that she would “rather former workes to vindicate / Than any new conception to relate” (“The Preface” ll. 13-14). This defense of her desire to write

poetry is thus grounded in the inherent productivity of her mind, which she assures us, offers no new “concepcion[s],” but is rich with the same spiritual vigor that infused both early reformers and the apostles themselves. However muted Collins’s joy might seem here, her phrasing does extend the gestational metaphors that concluded “To the Reader.” The term “conception”, of course, suggests the procreative powers of the human body, as well as the mind and imagination, and Collins plays on these multiple meanings as she grounds her poetry in a powerful assertion of her mind’s creative powers. However, by qualifying this assertion with a campaign against religious novelty in the immediately following stanzas, Collins makes it quite clear that her poetry will support the spiritual truths found in previously judged texts of spiritual worth; she claims no new revelations for herself.<sup>40</sup> The *OED* suggests that “concepcion” is used earliest in reference to the Immaculate Conception, a usage that underscores Collins’s assertions of poetic and spiritual purity. Mary’s acceptance of the immaculate conception and her ability to physically bear Christ in her womb and birth him into the world are clear signs of her grace.

Through its portrayal in the text, An Collins’s body may be deemed lacking, disabled, and insufficient, but her mind is fertile and productive, a point made most clearly when Collins describes her poetry as “the offspring of my mind” (l. 79). Like their “mother,” these poetic offspring may appear in “homly dresse” (l. 80), but “with Truth agree[s]” (l. 84). Just as George Herbert’s query “Is there in truth no beautie? (“Jordan I”

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<sup>40</sup> Specifically, Collins admonishes novelty in religion by stating that it is not the growth or augmentation of true religion that she takes issue with, but the ability of rhetorically sophisticated zealots to twist language with “extracted from old Heresies, / New form’d with Glosses to deceive the eyes / Of those who like to Children, do incline / To every new device that seems to shine” (ll. 60-63).

l. 2) asserts the value of plain speech in matters of faith, Collins argues that works of spiritual worth may take many shapes, even those that seem less attractive than others. Collins's apparent humility might simply be a devotional topos, but by deploying it in such proximity to the assertion that her poems are her offspring, she demands acknowledgement of the relational framework she has constructed between herself and her text. Given the prosthetic work the text performs, Collins's reading audience must accept the premise that there is more to both her body and her book than what meets the eye alone: Collins intends to write poetry containing "right informacion" that "more plainly show[s] the path-way to Salvacion" (ll. 90-1). Her prosthetic intervention might not be attractive or rhetorically sophisticated, but it effectively "tell[s] what God still for my Soule hath wrought" (l. 98). Her poetry is thus figured as both a compulsion of her soul and also a reflection of her body. As such, we cannot read her poems without also reading her disabled and decidedly female body.

This deeply gendered negotiation becomes the primary area of interest throughout her devotional verse, but Collins's initial introduction of this tension in the closing stanzas of "The Discourse" feels far less "explicitly female" (Clarke 84) than previous portions of "The Discourse." While Collins may be deeply invested in articulating the relationship between her sex and disability, analyzing her deployment of such gendered metaphors reveals that she is just as deeply invested in formulating a relational model between the sorrow she feels as a product of her disability and the experience of joy necessary to affirm the workings of an inward grace capable of denoting her affliction as an indicator of a special relationship with the divine rather than a mark of reprobation. As a result, the body becomes both a site of self-knowledge and also a site of tension

between the self, the experience of embodiment, and also conflicting pictures of the human body found within the Christian tradition. This is especially true for an individual like An Collins, who attaches the additional tension between reading her disabling affliction as a sign of election or a sign of reprobation to this already complicated interpretation of the broken body. The result is a necessary intervention that manifests in Collins's own formation of a "prosthetic territory," or a "space of collision between human and machine, where technology and humanity fuse" (Brahm and Driscoll).<sup>41</sup> Through the technology of the text, which functions as an addition or supplement to her bodily lack, Collins materializes and makes visible the ability of her soul while continuing to highlight her body's disability; in doing so the text itself provides not only evidence of "normality" but also the subsequent access to community that comes with the marker of either acceptable difference or able-bodiedness. In this vein, *Divine Songs* becomes the space wherein Collins can confront the dilemma that even the most faithful believer must face "continuall combates" ("The Discourse" l. 666) between the physical and the spiritual aspects of self. As she progresses throughout the collection, however, this dilemma is increasingly framed around an explicitly female, and deeply personal, experience of disability.

Collins introduces this vexed mind-body relationship in roughly the final 100 lines of the lengthy "Discourse", wherein she asserts the profoundly transformative power of faith by arguing that through faith "Corruption of our nature is thereby / *Disabled* so, as that iniquity / No longer rules, being by grace subdued, / Whereby the heart to goodnesse is renude" (ll. 620-23 emphasis added). The renewal accommodated

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<sup>41</sup> Gabriel Brahm and Mark Driscoll, eds., *Prosthetic Territories: Politics and Hypertechnologies*, Politics and Culture 3 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

by the transmuting action of internal grace becomes even more clearly expressed as Collins goes on to describe “Saving Faith applied” (l. 626) as working in multiple ways. First, it serves as “a corrosive to mortifie / And kill the power of inniquity” (ll. 627-28). Secondly, “the other part of true Sanctification” (l. 631) is:

...life or quickenning to holinesse,  
And may therefore be called renovacion,  
Like a Restorative it doth redresse,  
And him revive, that is dead in trespasse;  
Tis by the power of Christs Resurrection,  
That we are rais'd from sinne to such perfection” (ll. 632-37).

Collins’s choice to describe the action of internal grace as a corrosive, eating away not only the temptation of sin but also the very presence of sin, suggests much more than simple removal. The corrosive mortifies and ultimately decontaminates the previously sinful body, thus returning it to its original state of purity. In Collins’s rendering, the experience of being disabled is profoundly powerful and positive, as her speaker is made incapable of sinning through the powerful work of internal grace. While she certainly is not using *disability* in its modern sense, the claim that any experience of disability could be beneficial is startling in its inversion of contemporary constructs that present ability and being able-bodied as the preferred bodily state. In Collins’s presentation, however, disability becomes enabling; it is a desired state that not only improves the saint but also demonstrates that God desires saints in such a disabled state. This surprising reorientation could not be accomplished without Collins’s careful manipulation of her disabled body within the prosthetized text. The prosthetic function of the text is further elucidated by Collins’s repeated usage of the prefix *re-*, which, in a rhetorical sense, functions prosthetically in its supplementation and alteration of her state through language, underscoring Collins’s interest in returning to a previous condition while also

indicating her desire to access a “renude” (l. 623) sense of belief. This supplementation is achieved rhetorically, but it is also a product of diction choices that invert her sense of lack: her language choices quite literally disable the believer’s ability to sin in exchange for a life-altering experience of “renovacion” (l. 633) through the “Restorative” (l. 634) and “redresse[ing]” (l. 634) power of “Christ’s Resurrection” (l. 636).

Just as Christ’s body is resurrected and made whole, the speaker hopes for a re-birth that will disable sin and make her body

Like as a Child new born without defect,  
A perfect man he may be sayd to bee,  
Because his body’s perfect, in respect  
Of parts, though not in stature or degree  
Of growth, until or perfect age he bee;  
So have the faithfull imperfections some,  
Till to a perfect age in Christ they come. (ll. 645-51)

In this explanation, Collins deftly juxtaposes spiritual age with natural, physical age, and in doing so suggests that while she may have never experienced bodily perfection, she finds comfort in the “graces of the Spirit” that “spring up in his heart that’s Sanctified” (ll. 652-3). Describing this internal movement in such transformational terms suggests that the status of a saint’s body, although often painful and distracting, is not a true representation of their relationship with God precisely because even the most faithful have “imperfections some.” Collins’s figuration of the desirable body here is surprising in that she at once expresses desire to be re-made “without defect” but then swiftly abandons the perfectly able body as the absolute object of divine desire, ultimately arguing that the imperfect body signifies nothing more than the diversity of God’s



works.<sup>42</sup> Rather than expressing the hope of bodily renovation or being made able-bodied, Collins's driving agenda thus appears to be a defense of disabled bodies and a desire for inclusion of disabled bodies within the community of saints. As such, her poems and meditations express both considerable anxieties over her personal election as well as judgment from a reading audience, a dilemma that reveals both the problematics of disability and also the reality of the prosthetic intervention as illusionary—only ever accomplishing the façade of able-bodiedness, wholeness, or normalcy. As this passage reveals, the prosthetic can only function within a paradigm of ability, wherein full able-bodiedness and full social acceptance are not granted wholly to An Collins as a disabled person by virtue of the disabled body she possesses. Through the prosthetic function of devotional verse she can make visible the ability of her soul while simultaneously arguing for a reorientation of how the disabled body is interpreted, but in her lived experience, she can never escape her experience of lack.

The modern definition of disability echoes this emphasis on lack or inability, especially in its extension of disability beyond medical and physiognomic aspects to include “other factors.” While the vagaries of this modern definition attempt to account for psychological and emotional factors as contributors to one's status as disabled, the early modern notion of mind-body relations is much less vague regarding the association between the physical and non-physical. For early moderns, mental processes, emotions, and insights were all believed to register in material ways. The ease with which early

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<sup>42</sup> In this assertion Collins echoes Michel de Montaigne, who similarly describes the existence of disabled persons as proof of Nature's bounty and God's interest in an “infinity of forms.” For more on Montaigne's understanding of both the monstrous and disabled see David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000) 65-94.

moderns seem to accept such a fluid relationship reflects a pre-Cartesian understanding of mind-body relations where the body is understood as neither bounded nor fixed, but fluctuating within natural and cultural forces.<sup>43</sup> Using Michel de Montaigne as an exemplar, Dalia Judovitz argues that the pre-Cartesian body was “fully embedded in the fabric of the world,” functioning “as the horizon of subjective being and becoming” (Judovitz 67). In this model, the body becomes more than a “mere object of observation, the body disposes of forms of agency; it has the capacity to inform and transform the knowledge that the self seeks to attain” (Judovitz 68). For Collins, the junction between the self, the body, the experience of embodiment, and the various narratives of the afflicted body at work within the seventeenth century contribute to an ever-growing node of anxiety which causes fluctuations between identifying her affliction as a sign of grace and interpreting it as a marker of reprobation or divine dissatisfaction. Given this tension, An Collins’s disability cannot be categorized as wholly physical or psychological, but it seems safe to say that the term “disability” does an adequate job of expressing the intense feelings of inability and lack that Collins maps onto both material and immaterial aspects of her self.

Intervening upon and attempting to resolve this tension is the prosthetized text, presenting a space where Collins might work out the close coupling between her physical and spiritual conditions. It is in this vein that Collins frequently foregrounds an

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<sup>43</sup> For more on the early modern body as unbounded and fluctuating see, Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2004); Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2004); Carla Mazzio, *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Robert Cockcroft, *Rhetorical Affect in Early Modern Writing: Renaissance Passions Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

incapable, disabled, or afflicted body when speaking of, or even to, her soul.

“Meditacion Four” is perhaps the most powerful example of the reciprocity Collins envisions between these two elements of self as it addresses her soul, but is also deeply reliant on medical metaphors to aid Collins’s understanding of her affliction. Beginning with a direct address to her soul, Collins laments the fact that she has often sought internal peace, but instead feels an increased sense of internal disorder. Her soul, which is of a “froward disposicion, / Perceivest not thy mercyfull Physician” who “give[s] thee for thy health these strong purgacions / So may we call our daily molestacions” (ll. 3-6). The conceit of God as a physician drives the meditation with its powerful blending of medical and spiritual discourses. The figure of a divine physician administering purgatives to the soul allows Collins to deftly layer spiritual and physical afflictions in that the multivalent term “purgative” could refer to ceremonial or religious cleansing (*OED* 1-2) or the medicinal practice of purging excess humors to balance the body’s internal chemistry (*OED* 3a). In this portrayal, Collins’s experience with and knowledge of an afflicted body provides a language with which she can address, and potentially even alter, her “froward soul.” She makes the coupling of afflicted body and ungovernable soul even more pronounced when she pointedly invokes humoral terms to teach her soul how to respond to affliction:

If Physick for our Bodies health be tane,  
We hinder not the working of the same,  
Strong Physick if it purge not, putrifies,  
And more augments then heales our maladies,  
And as is sayd, our manifold Temptacions,  
Are nothing but thy scouring Purgacions. (ll. 21-6)

Collins’s instructive tone suggests a tense relationship between patient and body during a time of illness, but it also suggests that this tension can be usefully explicated for spiritual

gain. In such a summation of body and soul relations, Collins argues that her soul should interpret its affliction in the same manner a medical patient views treatments that are sometimes uncomfortable or distasteful. She instructs her soul to trust

...so Skilfull a Physician  
Who will not have their bitternesse abated,  
Till thy humors be evacuated;  
Then loose it down for thy Humilliacion,  
And hinder not its kindly Opperacion,  
As thou mayst by untimely voyding it  
By vain contentments, which thou mayst admit. (ll. 28-34)

Her soul, like a patient with imbalanced humors, must relinquish itself entirely to a physician skillful enough to cure the soul's ailments, even if the remedy is both painful and humiliating. The language of an afflicted and ill-balanced body is strikingly effective as Collins attempts to convince her wayward soul to conform to her desire for good spiritual health, a desire that is confirmed and manifested within the pages of the text she composes.

Just as an unruly patient might reject or even void a bitter, but useful, purgative and thereby prolong or even magnify the illness, the soul that does not accept the painful chastisements of God's rod will only achieve false comfort: "like cold water, tane in fevers hot, / Which for the present, though it seem to ease, / Yet after it increaseth the disease" (ll. 38-40). By grafting spiritual and physical affliction together, Collins attempts to uniformly comfort the body and soul, and in doing so reduce the anxiety produced by her "froward soul." However, her tone quickly shifts from instructive and informative to accusatory as she admonishes her soul:

But thou dost rather unto Grief incline,  
As Crosses therefore, subject to repine,  
Supposing oft, thy present troubles are  
Intolerable, and thy bane declare;

Whilst thou for this, thy selfe dost maserate  
Dispair unto thee doth intimate,  
That none hath been afflicted like to thee,  
Unparaleld thy visitacions bee. (ll. 41-8)

This frustration stems from her soul's apparent inability to look outside of itself—to properly frame her affliction within a larger narrative that enables the afflicted to interpret their burden as a blessing and sign of sainthood. Instead of feeling joy at such an opportunity for grace, her soul wallows in despair and is consumed with self. Failing to achieve a joyful normalcy, as prosthetics always do, the text has thus far only served to emphasize her sense of lack, of failure, and heighten the sense of isolation and lack of access to “normality.” In this failure, however, the text truly proves a “prosthetic device” in that it operates as an “autobiographical object” wherein the “intangible aspects of desire, identification, and social relations” play out (Gonzalez 134).<sup>44</sup> Collins's frustration, her feelings of painful singularity, express both her desire to belong and also the feeling that her bodily position will ultimately always mark her as *other*, even if her soul is represented as fully able through the prosthetic intervention of the devotional text. The illusion of the prosthesis, she fears, cannot be accomplished to such an effect that she can fully experience the joy required for redemption.

In his landmark study, Louis Martz notes that most of the poetry within the “poetry of meditation” tradition “lie[s] within the realm of meditation leading to devotion” (20). Composing a poem to her soul, and interrogating its flaws and failures within that poetic space, allows An Collins to envision this crucial component of her selfhood as separate and available for analysis. Through the text as prosthetic device she analyzes, questions,

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<sup>44</sup> Jennifer A. Gonzalez, “Autotopographies,” in *Prosthetic Territories*, eds. Brahm and Driscoll (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

and ultimately stages an intervention, to ensure that her soul is on the correct devotional path during the process of spiritual becoming that is underway.<sup>45</sup> In this model, the meditation precedes actual devotion, but Collins's interrogation of her soul in such bodily terms is problematic in that she does not ultimately desire to transcend her affliction, but rather to normalize it. William Scott Howard has described the "conversion of spiritual affliction into redemptive knowledge of the soul's regenerative powers granted through Christ's sacrifice and God's prevenient grace" as one of the "most prevalent topoi in seventeenth-century devotional verse" ("With *Deborah*" 242). Howard lists the rhetorical hallmarks of this tradition as: self-abnegation, confession of sins, and prayers of repentance ("With *Deborah*" 242). An Collins is certainly attempting to work within this generic topoi, but her metaphors have worked too well, and converting spiritual affliction into redemptive knowledge is complicated by her apparent difficulty separating physical from spiritual affliction. This difficulty is, in larger part, a product of anxiety over how a reading public will interpret and view both her body and her text.

Collins has grafted body and soul so closely together in this meditation that it becomes difficult to read her affliction as purely spiritual, as a marker of God's favor. In fact, it seems little comfort indeed when Collins declares that the only consolation available for the afflicted is the knowledge that "without cause he hath afflicted none, / Sith without doubt, his wayes so equall be, / For som great fault he thus correcteth thee, / Therefore to lowest thoughts thy self retire, / To seek the cause that moved God to ire" (ll. 74-8). Although Collins's instructive tone surrounding the medicated body suggests an

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<sup>45</sup> I deliberately echo Martz's three levels of meditation. Martz outlines these stages as *composition*, *analysis*, and *colloquy* and then links them with memory, understanding, and will. For more on this see, Martz 16-38.

air of confidence that the body's afflictions can be managed by medical treatments, the pronouncement that affliction is a sign of God's displeasure imbues all of her earlier metaphors of sickness with added meaning. If Collins has begun to believe that affliction is a sign of God's ill will, and she struggles to differentiate physical from spiritual affliction, then it seems she has cause to be anxious over the status of both her body and soul. As such, An Collins advises her soul to renew its covenant with God, try its forces again, and if "In them thou find a *disability*, / Then look to Christ, who doth thy weaknesse veiw / And of compassion will thy strength renew, / From him alone thou mayst that grace derive / Which like a Cordiall or Restorative, / Will strengthen and repair thy faculties, / Which else are dead to holy exercise" (ll. 88-94 emphasis added). Collins's use of the term "disability" is provocative, especially as her usage specifically invokes the concepts of inability or lack to describe a soul that desires but is unable to "walk before him [Christ] with an upright heart" (l. 85). When she describes Christ's healing powers as a "Cordiall or Restorative", Collins once again juxtaposes the phenomenal afflicted body of everyday experience with the spiritual curatives and comforts available from God alone, and in doing so underscores the interchange she feels between her spiritual and physical health. This relationship proves vexing for Collins as her disability becomes the means by which God will "make thy Understanding apprehend / God as a Father, who in Love doth send / Correction to his Children when they stray" (ll. 95-7). Collins's difficult relationship with her affliction(s) manifests in the paradox of interpreting her affliction as both a divine corrective and also a sign of her inability to act according to God's will. In this regard, Collins demonstrates a sense of affliction that most assuredly falls under the umbrella of disability as her anxiety over election bleeds

into anxiety over her body and both call attention to feelings of inability and lack resonating on spiritual as well as corporeal levels and playing out through her attempt at a prosthetic intervention.

Just as medical prostheses simultaneously confirm difference while also supporting the construction of acceptably normal bodies, An Collins persistently invites readers to gaze upon her disabled, and subsequently sorrowing body, in a manner that zooms in on her distinct sense of physical lack in relation to “normal” or able bodies. Such a representation, especially for a contemporary reading public deeply invested in discerning material signs of spiritual health in and on the body, positions her text at a provocative crossroads: is it a bodily prosthesis, whereby the text metaphorically at least rehabilitates and makes able her afflicted body? Or, as I suggest, could her devotional verse function as a spiritual prosthesis? The prosthesis is at once a technical device meant to function as a supplement to bodily lack and also a particularly rich metaphor to describe the movement between the experience of lack and then the supplementation to remove or compensate for that lack. If we consider the devotional text as a piece of technology, an implement wherein any author might construct a verbal or rhetorical supplement to lessen or modify their experience of spiritual lack, then the devotional text might function as a prosthetic of the soul.

The prosthetic possibilities of such a tool, appendage, or technical implement shift when an author like An Collins engages in the production of a text that is at once devotional and also prosthetic. As a woman whose sense of self and relation to the world has been conditioned by real lived experience of bodily lack, and bodily disability that might be read as an indication of spiritual disability as well, An Collins’s devotional



verse makes the metaphoric and literal boundaries of prosthesis indistinguishable, just as the boundaries between her soul and body are indistinguishable to her. Rather than constructing the text as a bodily prosthesis, whereby she might overcome her physical disabilities through the work of the spirit, Collins constructs a complex relational framework where the lines between not only body and soul but also text and self are blurred through the supplemental power of the prosthetic. In this sense, I echo and build upon Mintz's claim that Collins's verse crafts a unique disability subjectivity by positing that the devotional text as prosthesis enables An Collins to redefine body-soul relations in direct response to contemporary spiritual subjectivities derived almost exclusively from ableist perspectives. When read through the lens of prosthesis, Collins's representation of self, body, and soul, in the space of her text forces readers to grapple with the very same set of boundary debates that Allucquère Rosanne Stone advances in current discussions of human-prosthetic relations: where do the edges lie between the person and the prostheses they use to communicate?<sup>46</sup> Isn't a devotional text an attempt to spell out, to communicate the language and state of the human soul? Couldn't Collins's devotional text function as a spiritual prosthesis, especially given the interdependence between physical and spiritual states so widely accepted in the period? In order to answer these questions and also to more fully elucidate the prosthetic function of *Divine Songs*, for the remaining pages I will focus on Collins's oscillation between expressions of spiritual joy and also bodily pain, which ultimately offer a provocative new perspective in early modern spiritual subjectivity: a perspective deriving explicitly from the divisive space between recognizing the self as a member of the body politic while also negotiating the

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<sup>46</sup> Allucquère Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (1995; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001) 5.

politics of the body.

For example, in “A Song manifesting The Saints eternall Happinesse” Collins invokes a traditional garden metaphor to describe the godly as consisting of two types: the whole, described as flowers, and the weak, described as weeds. In Collins’s rendering both weeds and flowers may count themselves members of the elect and thus achieve “eternall Happinesse”, but prior to that time they both grow together and similarly suffer from storms “which much confusion breeds” (l. 20). She clarifies the nature of this confusion by suggesting that storms are more difficult for those who carry the added burden of weakness and physical imperfection:

Some for weaknesse are dismaid,  
And some are comfortlesse,  
Because of some defect of sence,  
Or want of comlinesse

Grant some may have  
Proporcion so compleat,  
That correspondency of parts  
Declares Perfections seat (ll. 21-8)

In this comparison Collins places incredible emphasis on the appeal of physical correspondence. The “weeds” may be described as weak, comfortless, defected, and unattractive, but Collins’s tone suggests a sense of incompleteness and insufficiency much deeper than mere dismay at being judged weak or found unattractive. She goes on to assert that even those with perfect physical proportions and “correspondency of parts” carry burdens, but this assertion seems small comfort given her consciousness of the social value placed on physical symmetry. In this sympathetic portrayal, the spiritual happiness and joy integral to confirming one’s election and truly uniting oneself with Christ is obstructed for those “weeds” who have visible signs of imperfection. This

rendering of the apparently reciprocal relationship between spiritual health and bodily condition is echoed in Mary K. Nelson's assertion that early moderns were inclined to interpret physical anomalies as indicators of immoral activity (5). Given this mode of thinking, the emotional weight of Collins's comparison certainly lies with those weeds who may be elect but bear the much greater burden of finding themselves disproportionate and lacking corresponding parts.

Collins's apparent interest in making a case for the unattractive or defected as members of the elect lends considerable support to Gottlieb's assertion that she did indeed suffer from some sort of actual affliction that left her with a "lifelong sense of physical vulnerability, disability, and shame" (*ODNB*). It certainly supports Susannah Mintz's assertion that

The fact that Collins never directly offers any definitive physical etiology for her suffering raises a further possibility that her many mentions of unspecified afflictedness, beyond simply maintaining her privacy or a certain social decorum where a woman's bodily matters are concerned, may also refer to rejection from the community (66).

Collins's sense of exclusion and isolation is brought to bear in her sustained interest in mediating physical ailments in this particular poem as she continues on to describe the transition achieved by "the Saint that finish hath his course" who "Shall be for ever free" (ll.63-4). These saints leave

Bodies which here  
Are matter thick and grosse,  
Attaining to this happinesse,  
Are freed from their drosse:  
And as the Sunn  
Appeares in brightest Sky,  
So every body glorifi'd  
Shall be for clarity,  
And likewise be impassible,  
Uncapable of pain

Having agility to move,  
Whose vigour shall remain. (ll. 73-84)

Collins is, of course, speaking of the eventual reunion of body and soul each saint will experience following Christ's second coming. She thus positions her zealous soul and also her broken body within the larger corporate community of the saints. Within the pages of her text, at least, she can fashion a place for herself within this community, even if it is denied to her in lived experience.

However, her keen interest in not only purifying the saint's body but also closing it, making it "impassable" and "incapable of pain," demonstrates the incredible conflict between interpreting one's affliction as productive, even spiritually joyful, and being unable to surmount the experience of actual physical pain. Nevertheless, Collins sounds incredibly hopeful at the prospect of closing the body to all pain and doing away with this conflict. Given her earlier emphasis on the burdens of weak and physically incomplete members of the godly, one gets the sense that Collins has more than a poetic or devotional interest in crafting a poetics of social acceptance and divine redemption for the afflicted. Her desire to draw attention to the bodies of the afflicted, bodies that lack earthly glory and are subject to harsh judgment, and then close those bodies to pain, suggests a much greater investment in afflicted bodies than merely troping them for rhetorical purposes. Collins's sustained interest in the external effects of affliction distinguish her from other female devotional writers, like Margaret Hoby or Dionys Fitzherbert, who frequently cite an internal sense of being struck down by God's rod as a cause to withdraw from the world. Collins certainly expresses similarly internalized concerns about her relationship with God, but her anxiety centers almost exclusively on the relation between internal concerns and their external manifestations. She might

employ widely used devotional images like gardens, flowers, weeds, and seasons to describe affliction within her poetry and prose, but her subject matter appears deeply personal.

Rather than arguing that she has transcended her affliction and cannot or even should not be judged by virtue of her bodily condition, Collins instead strategically aligns herself with those whose “fall is through infirmity” but “Who shall not be forsaken utterly” (“The Discourse” ll. 685-6). This rhetorical and spiritual positioning is important in that it at once argues that spiritual perfection is a hard-won and often lengthy pursuit while simultaneously tying her devotional voice explicitly to the weak, disabled, and infirm. In fact, describing failings that manifest as “infirmity” is quite suggestive. “Infirmity” most prominently calls to mind bodily disease or weakness, but it can also refer to a “want of validity” (*OED* 1b), a description that pointedly speaks to the social context of disability. Given Collins’s earlier defense of those faithful who wish to be “Like as a Child new born without defect” (l. 645) but find themselves with “imperfections some” (l. 650), the validation Collins so deeply desires must come in both physical and spiritual terms; she needs to confirm that an imperfect, infirm, and even disabled body may be counted among the elect. However, Collins does more than simply present this problem; in the very next stanza she offers a method by which her election can be confirmed. She writes:

For soon a Godly sorrow will arise  
And over-flow the heart of such a one,  
Which blessedly the same so mollifies,  
That it relents for having so mis-gone  
Which godly grieffe or sorrow is all one  
For having so displeased God by sinne,  
Who hath to him a loving Father been. (“The Discourse” ll. 687-93)

It seems her “infirmity” has been productive, resulting in proof of election in the form of a powerful “Godly sorrow” that overflows from within and ultimately mollifies the sinful or doubting believer. The production of godly sorrow confirms a type of righteous suffering that neatly attends to Collins’s bodily dilemma. The final suggestion that God’s displeasure has manifested in the loving rod of “infirmity” clarifies Collins’s seemingly endless predicament of interpreting affliction as elevating while simultaneously battling the doubt that experiencing such an “infirmity” causes. Collins’s decision to immerse herself in the experience of infirmity and disability suggests that *Divine Songs* is much more about reframing *how* her affliction is viewed by the surrounding world than an attempt to transcend it altogether.

This profoundly positive portrayal of godly sorrow sets up the final, and most impactful image of “The Discourse.” Collins contends that the sinner or doubter must meditate upon their own personal failings “till he be reconcil’d to God” (l. 696) and “hath attain’d recovery” (l. 701), but she fails to elucidate precisely how this is accomplished or how one might affirm that recovery and reconciliation have actually taken place. She may use the language of recuperation, recovery, and renewal, but these metaphors serve a larger goal: validation of the afflicted body in all its prosthetized glory. In order to accomplish this task, Collins contends that her recovery is built around the activity of godly sorrow within, and while this sorrow may not transform her physically, it does have an incredible internal impact as the recuperated believer diligently works to ensure a continued consciousness of grace by actively securing the self. Writing of this renewed believer, Collins declares:

The breach without delay he fortifies  
With stronger resolucion manfully,

And with a Watch impregnable likewise,  
Against assaults of this his enemies,  
And all assaies of their re-entry  
Through which so many perish finally. (ll. 701-7)

The image of a fortress capable of repelling even the most tempting sins and disconcerting doubts is undoubtedly powerful, but the heart of this fortress is the astonishing activity within. This enclosed space virtually teems with the sensation of a grace that, having been produced by the affective work of godly sorrow in her heart, irradiates from within the speaker herself. It is evocative then that Collins should describe this space as “impregnable”, a term that further underscores the importance of her self-containment while also asserting that *every* idea, feeling, or expression issuing forth from this space is the product of both a soul and a disabled body which ought to be read as spiritually chaste. Through the image of her body as a fortress policed by herself against herself, Collins deftly introduces the devotional voice that we will hear in the songs to come as being “like Baakhtin’s classical body...rigidly ‘finished’: her signs are the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house” (Stallybrass 127). This closed off body is the direct result of Collins’s prosthetic intervention reframing *how* her body and soul are interpreted, and through this representation Collins attempts to prove chastity as well as ability. In doing so she encourages her readers to view her songs as the product of not only a godly sufferer, but also as emanating from a specifically female point of view. This is an important initial gesture toward the deeply gendered language of reproduction that runs repeatedly throughout the remainder of the volume, and it will be this language that Collins ultimately comes to rely upon in her examination of the incredible tension between a woman’s unproductive body yet productive mind.

### **Bodies that Lack: A Fruitful Female Body**

The fortified internal space crafted by Collins at the close of “The Discourse” appears a product of much more than just anxiety over election; it suggests a particular dilemma for the devout woman who must contend with constructing both a divine other and also a private self that the world deems proper. Susan Comilang clarifies this predicament, noting that the experience of spiritual retreat resonated differently for women as

the woman in withdrawal had to contend with being commodified as a governable, spatial body. In other words, her desire for devotion could be elided by another’s need to control her; to control her privacy and what she did within it. The woman and the space become one and the same. (81)

Given these restrictions, any devotional act, performed in either public or private, becomes a site of tension for the female saint where “the woman’s outward stillness to the world may create a recessed withdrawal, but her inward activities are not entirely solitary” (Comilang 82). This is certainly the case for An Collins, who feels anxiety over not only the relationship between external and internal aspects of herself, but also the public’s perception of this connection. Despite her best efforts to mitigate it, this anxiety ultimately impedes her ability to joyfully withdraw into herself. As a result, Collins presents her literary persona as experiencing, and attempting to mediate, a personal as well as communal crisis of interpretation over her sorrow, the product of her bodily state.

Collins responds to this public-private and body-soul dilemma through frequent invocations of a seemingly traditional *hortus conclusus*, but as Patricia Demers notes, Collins’s *hortus conclusus* is unique in that her enclosed garden features unusual emphasis on “the specialty of intellectual parturition” (202). Collins’s clearest articulation of the *hortus conclusus* can be found in a poem simply entitled “Another



Song I”, wherein Collins asserts, “Yet as a garden is my mind enclosed fast / Being to safety so confind from storm and blast / Apt to produce a fruit most rare, / That is not common with every woman / That fruitfull are” (ll. 26-30).<sup>47</sup> Mary Norcliffe argues that this figuration indelibly ties Collins’s “whole identity and human worth on her ability to fashion language” as her mind becomes “the key refuge and center of calm...a world of freedom and fertility, a protected virgin womb where literary and spiritual realities exotic and external can be conceived and grow” (Norcliffe 233). Indeed, this figuration powerfully and prosthetically cleaves Collins’s sense of self to the act of producing devotional verse, but in this relation Collins is not alone. As the editors of *Kissing the Rod* keenly point out, Collins is one of several “religious women poets who would adopt the metaphor of literary babies to excuse their pride in their work” (Greer *et al.* 142, 144).<sup>48</sup> Collins’s divine poetry, which was previously figured in “The Discourse” as both offspring and also the image of her mind, thus follows the “protestant birth ethic” which through the literary childbirth conceit “designate[s] a lack of smart poetic or literary dress as a sign of pure association with truth” (Semler 433). However, when Collins deploys this conceit she asserts much more than a simple correlation between her chaste soul,

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<sup>47</sup> Collins includes four poems in total with this self-same title. For precision’s sake I will thus include a numeral with the title to distinguish.

<sup>48</sup> Greer and her fellow editors in *Kissing the Rod* directly compare Collins’s devotional poetry to that of the anonymous female author of *Eliza’s Babes* (1652) and also Elizabeth Major’s *Honey on the Rod: or a comfortable Contemplation for one in Affliction with sundry Poems on several Subjects* (1656). Patricia Demers builds upon this trifold in which she argues that these three female authors of devotional texts respond to a specifically religious form of melancholy that ultimately enables movement inward in the face of incredible social and political loss experienced in the external, and primarily patriarchal, world of the Commonwealth. See Demers, “Penseroso Triptych: “Eliza,” An Collins, Elizabeth Major,” in *Discovering and (Re)Covering the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric*, eds. Eugene Cunnar and Jeffrey Johnson (Pittsburgh, Duquesne UP, 2001): 185-204.

unaffected verse, and a productive mind; rather, Collins's immensely fruitful mind is presented in direct contrast to the physical fruitfulness of other women. This is one of the very few places in all of Collins's collection where she projects outside of herself to specifically situate her own voice within a larger female community. Norcliffe identifies the power of this juxtaposition when she asserts that Collins's mental fruitfulness is thus depicted as extraordinary in the face of the somewhat banal fruitfulness and fertility of "every woman" (233). In this deliberate juxtaposition Collins seems to not only advertise the purity of her soul but also celebrate her ability to access an interior realm of subjectivity made accessible through the supplemental power of her devotional verse, a place where a fertile soul is deemed far more valuable than a fruitful body.

However, I would contend that Collins's assertions of a peacefully enclosed mental garden are not quite as confident and celebratory as previously supposed. Rather, the security of Collins's mental garden is disturbed by her continued reliance on a powerful seasonal conceit that proves the only ever illusionary capacity of the prosthesis in its persistent invitation to read her body as only generating the façade of normalcy while privately remaining insufficient, disappointing, lacking, and painfully present. In the first stanza of "Another Song I" Collins constructs a seasonal conceit to describe her expectation that "The Winter of my infancy being over-past / I then supposed, suddenly the Spring would hast" (ll. 1-2). The Spring depicted in the second stanza is a bountiful and solely female enclave wherein "*Ver* brings her mate the flowery Queen / The Groves shee dresses, her Art expresses / On every Green" (ll. 8-10). In Collins's rendering, spring is depicted as a bastion of female fecundity with Spring personified as female and also mated to yet another female figure whose "Art" is so prolific that it radically

transforms the surrounding landscape from barren to blossoming. This is the vision of spring she expects will follow a winter of immaturity and infancy, and given the natural seasonal cycle, she supposes that her own seasons *must* develop accordingly. However, Collins's celebratory portrayal of spring abruptly ends when she shifts her focus from the natural and expected progression of the seasons to the reality of her own personal experience:

But in my Spring it was not so, but contrary,  
For no delightfull flowers grew to please the eye,  
No hopefull bud, nor fruitfull bough,  
No moderat showers which causeth flowers  
To spring and grow.

My Aprill was exceeding dry, therefore unkind;  
Whence tis that small utility I look to find,  
For when that Aprill is so dry,  
(As hath been spoken) it doth betoken  
Much scarcity.

Thus is my Spring now almost past in heavinesse  
The Sky of pleasure's over-cast with sad distresse  
For by a comfortlesse Eclips,  
Disconsolacion and sore vexacion,  
My blossom nips. (ll. 11-25)

The somatologically rich language Collins uses to describe her condition simultaneously stresses the fertility she so desperately desired but “now” (l. 21) clearly lacks. As Collins shifts her focus from the expectation of fertility to the reality of fruitlessness, it becomes increasingly apparent that while she may desire and even attempt to access the “creative garden of the *Song of Songs*” and finally “feel blessed among women” (Norcliffe 233) through an explanation of her extraordinarily fruitful mind, Collins's *hortus conclusus* ultimately appears more besieged than safely enclosed. She is beset by consciousness that she *should* be moist and fertile, but instead finds herself “exceeding dry”, a

physiognomic status that, when read autobiographically, suggests an absence of menstruation, clarifies the nature of her disability, and effectively blockades Collins's entry to a larger female community defined by gendered imperatives to reproduce.<sup>49</sup> Her sense of isolation from this larger female community is thus heightened as she inverts the common conception that women have "fruitful wombs [but] barren brains" (Gillespie 172) by retreating into the shelter of her mind, a *hortus conclusus* figured in direct opposition to the productive and fertile female body celebrated in *Song of Songs*.

Sarah Skwire has asserted that "for Collins separation and barrenness are connected" and while Collins appreciates the protective shelter offered by her *hortus conclusus* she "may also believe that her seclusion contributes to her difference and distinction" (Skwire 14-15).<sup>50</sup> In Skwire's reading, as Norcliffe, and Demers also suggest, Collins's sense of distinction is liberating and celebratory as she reinterprets the rules for defining female worth to read in strictly spiritual terms. In this process Collins "re-envision[s] [barrenness] as an aid to creativity", and thus "reveals her consideration of her gender, and her intellect and writing as signs of her power" (Skwire 15). In this view, Collins's disabled womb can only be read as a sign of election, proof that God desires her as much as she desires Him. It can also be read in strictly female terms, and it is in this construction that the language of parturition proves as problematic for Collins as it is vital in the fashioning of a productive mental garden through the prosthetized text. Collins's

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<sup>49</sup> Sarah Skwire reads this line as more than "simply an image of intellectual or spiritual barrenness, but a reference to physical barrenness or amenorrhea that may have been a symptom of the illness that kept Collins an invalid" (13).

<sup>50</sup> In the assertion of Collins's appreciative view of her *hortus conclusus*, Skwire draws a connection between Collins and female saints who have perceived enclosure as a means to "refuse her destiny as a 'functionary of man and his culture' and to experiment with the elation of 'true autonomy'" (15). In this claim Skwire cites Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 55.

seeming success in re-envisioning herself as productive is thus attenuated by an incredible concern over how both her physical and spiritual conditions might be interpreted by others who cannot see past either her disability or the prosthetic that seeks to normalize it. For both Collins and her audience it seems, the prosthesis provides the illusion of normalcy, of ability, but ultimately keeps difference and disability the prime focus.

When Collins invokes such embodied states she once again invites readers to examine the state of her soul in direct correlation with her bodily condition, and in doing so squarely positions herself as not only separate from a larger community of women with fruitful bodies, but also in direct opposition to a reading public with preconceived notions about the relationship between a woman's reproductive and spiritual abilities. In a time when many men and women were deeply invested in discerning signs of grace and election in their lives, the maternal body was believed to possess the unique capacity to illustrate in a decidedly material fashion the status of a woman's soul.<sup>51</sup> Maternal bodies were writ large with significance, showing signs of both moral and physical health as the production of a whole and healthy child indicated moral living and a deformed or ailing child indicated the private but now public sins of the mother.<sup>52</sup> A healthy and able-

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<sup>51</sup> Yet another contemporary belief about monstrous birth suggested that children took the shape of whatever was in the mother's vision at the time of conception, so if a woman looked at an image of a horse at the moment of conception, then the child conceived would be imprinted with that form.

<sup>52</sup> For more on the relationship between maternal sin and infant deformation or disability see: Valerie Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren* (London: Routledge, 1990); Mary K. Nelson, "Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*: Stigmatizing the "Disabled" Womb" *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29.4 (2009): 1-28; Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005).

bodied child thus reveals precisely what Collins's collection of devotional verse is meant to reveal through its prosthetic intervention: the status of the mother's soul. In this sense, a child presents the very same supplement or addition necessary to designate a godly woman as Collins's devotional verse supplements and makes visible her spiritual state. Patricia Crawford has claimed that in the early modern period, "it seems as if the godly woman was the successfully socialized woman" (*Women* 4), but given the spiritual and moral authority attached to mothers, it seems equally accurate to say that the godly woman was successfully socialized to associate both her spiritual and social value with her ability to successfully procreate. In this vein, motherhood not only authorizes a woman's speech but also her status in the religious, familial, and social communities she is a part of. Such incredible contemporary interest in mediating motherhood suggests a sustained early modern anxiety over inscrutable private interior spaces (like the womb or the heart) and their ability to produce external and highly legible signs of election.<sup>53</sup> Collins not only participates in this anxiety but also explicitly reproduces it in the stanzas surrounding her declaration of mental fruitfulness.

Returning now to "Another Song I," this anxiety is evident in the parenthetical statement embedded within the description of her infertility: "(As hath been spoken) it [her dryness] doth betoken / Much scarcity" (ll.19-20). The state of Collins's womb has been the subject of considerable expectation within the space of this poem, but this parenthetical suggests that it is not only her own personal expectations Collins is keen to redress. She worries about popular opinion, and rather than retreating inward as she attempts to redefine barrenness as an aid to her creative powers, Collins instead projects

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<sup>53</sup> Culpeper's *Directory for Midwives* saw consistent reprinting from its original 1651 publication date into the eighteenth century.

an anxious gaze outward onto a larger community likely inclined to view an infertile female body as disabled, ungodly, and reprobate. In this regard, Collins's anxiety over the "scarcity" of her bodily productions is much more the focus of this poem than any celebratory assertion of a powerful and enabling *hortus conclusus*. This anxiety manifests in the stanzas immediately following her assertion of a fruitful mental garden when she asserts, "A Love of goodnesse is the chieftest plant therein" (l. 31); the second most bounteous plant is a "Dislike to sin" (l. 32) which "grow[s] in spite of misery" (l. 33). These plants produce moral qualities "Which Grace doth nourish and cause to flourish / Continually" (ll. 34-5). If Collins's sense of separation and distinction from other women both constructs and causes her retreat to the security of an immaterial spiritual realm of the self then her access to this garden, and the fruitful plants within, can only come through consciousness of that which distinguishes her from other women. Recognition of the affliction of reproductive disability becomes the conduit by which she confirms her election, and in this movement An Collins once again inverts the expectation that disability is negative, abnormal, or proof of God's disfavor. Just as able-bodied women confirm the status of their souls by bearing healthy and able-bodied children, An Collins affirms her spiritual ability through the production of a text which functions prosthetically to materialize and make known the immaterial status of her soul.

However powerful this inversion might be, it is temporary. Collins's external concerns impede upon the security of her mental garden as she abruptly ceases to celebrate the workings of inward Grace by declaring:

But evill mocions, corrupt seeds, fall here also  
whenc springs prophanesse as do weeds where flowers grow  
Which must supplanted be with speed  
These weeds of Error, Distrust and Terror,

Lest woe succeed

So shall they not molest, the plants before exprest  
Which countervails these outward wants, & purchase rest  
Which more commodious is for me  
Then outward pleasures or earthly treasures  
Enjoyd would be. (ll. 36-45)

The initial “but” effectively, and swiftly, diminishes her previous avowal that Grace continuously nourishes “and cause[s] to flourish” (l. 34) the moral virtues cultivated within her mental garden. As a result, it becomes apparent that Collins’s *hortus conclusus* is not secure; it has been penetrated by the “weeds of Error, Distrust, and Terror” (l. 39). The presence of such contamination causes a flurry of anxiety-inducing internal activity to expunge such disruptive emotional states before they take root. Her choice to break the stanza mid-sentence places considerable emphasis on the connection between her desire to speedily supplant these weeds and their incredible power to molest, disrupt, or afflict all of the plants growing within her mental garden. The nature of this affliction is telling: Collins contends that, if left to grow, these weeds would “countervail,” or make equal, her external wants and the plants she desires to cultivate within, namely a love of goodness and a dislike for sin. The tension apparent in her concern over equalizing the external and the internal points to the heart of Collins’s anxiety over the relationship between her body and her soul and how easily they might be countervailed. Although Collins’s mind, her *hortus conclusus*, can produce a “fruit most rare”, it appears that the fruit found within *Divine Songs* is constructed as much by Collins’s careful linkage between physical infertility and spiritual productivity as it is by the seventeenth-century readers whom she fears will interpret her disabled body as an indicator of her spiritual worth.



Writing within the tradition of godly sorrow then provides An Collins with a very pointed end goal: to normalize, but never erase, her experience of physical affliction. This is evident as she consistently draws attention to the impact of her physical condition on her sense of godliness. This is accomplished early in her collection when she ties her experience of physical suffering and isolation with the scriptural encouragement found in Hebrews 13:5 and Romans 8:28, that “He doth not leave nor forsake them” “But causeth all things to work for their good” (“To the Reader” 1). Collins reads these passages typologically, immediately applying their message to her own condition, declaring: “this I doubt not, but most Saints in som measure, do experimentally know” (1). This self-assured statement stems from her position as an afflicted person; the affirming words of scripture work to reassure Collins that her lived experience of suffering and bodily ailment is a “normal” marker of sainthood. By conjoining her continued position as an afflicted person with scriptural referents stressing God’s commitment to His children through times of trial, Collins suggests that she has been, and continues to be, tested, but not forsaken, by God. Her affliction will work for her good, and this she “experimentally know[s].”

As a result, Collins frames her poetic and spiritual joys as dependent upon each other, and through this fusion, both spiritual and poetic joys work prosthetically to affirm her personal election as well as her status within the larger community of saints. Following this vein, Collins most clearly attempts to align her affliction as evidence of God’s grace when she depicts her seemingly ceaseless crosses as being “like the messengers of *Job*” (“The Discourse” l. 64), a rhetorical maneuver that Sidney Gottlieb has characterized as “an almost obligatory” allusion to the trials of Job “which still fails

to add much interest to this particular tale of woe” (Gottlieb “Introduction” viii). The allusion does seem formulaic, and thus evidence that Collins consciously writes in a devotional mode wherein her right to speak is authenticated by situating her literary persona directly within the tradition of Christian suffering, as her lived experience as a disabled woman presents a number of hurdles to such self expression. Far from signifying that Collins is merely troping her afflictions, this formulaic gesture, I think, does a great deal to situate the prosthetic impulse of the text itself. Job is not only one of the most archetypal figures of godly suffering, but he is also *the* quintessential “supercrip,” a current term deployed by Disability Studies theorists to describe a disabled or afflicted individual whose “inspirational stories of courage, dedication, and hard work prove that it can be done, that one can defy the odds and accomplish the impossible” (Berger 648).<sup>54</sup> Or, and perhaps even more to the point in An Collins’s case, the label “supercrip” might be bestowed on an impaired individual who simply lives “an ordinary” life (Kama 450), and thus overcomes the obstacles presumed to accompany their affliction.<sup>55</sup> In either case, Job is a figure whose faith was so powerful that he was not only able to cope with his many afflictions, but he also becomes an object of admiration for all those able-bodied people encountering his suffering through their own scriptural reading and devotional work. Collins’s formulaic gesture to Job, in this regard, acknowledges that while she cannot affect a complete erasure of her difference altogether she can present her difference in a manner that normalizes it by inviting readers to view

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<sup>54</sup> R.J. Berger, “Disability and the Dedicated Wheelchair Athlete: Beyond the ‘Supercrip’ Critique,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 37.6 (2008): 647–78.

<sup>55</sup> Amit Kama “Supercrips Versus the Pitiful Handicapped: Reception of Disabling Images by Disabled Audience Members. *Communications* 29.4 (2004): 447–66.

her joyful suffering as the sign of an able soul marked for redemption. Given the contemporary roadblocks limiting women's speech, let alone disabled women's speech, this crucial shift in perception towards a normalized experience of disability could only be achieved via the prosthetic possibilities of a devotional text that relentlessly makes visible both a faithful soul and a suffering body.

However, Collins can only go so far to connect her suffering with Job's—she does not present herself, or her spiritual ability for that matter, in the form of a “supercrip” zealously overcoming her obstacles. While Job elicits both pity and adoration via his unceasing faith in God's goodness despite his suffering, Collins complicates her portrayal of godly suffering by declaring that her sufferings are so pronounced they not only remove “all motions of delight” but also leave such motions altogether “defast” (“The Discourse” l. 66). Collins's diction is provocative in its invocation of defacement, an immensely powerful act of violation and destruction made particularly painful by virtue of its ability to obscure the object of defacement, to let the object remain, but strip it of its original signification. In Collins's case, delight is the object of defacement: still present, but inaccessible and obscured through the veil of her affliction. As a result, she becomes profoundly anxious to the point that “my minde it self, would much torment, / Vpon the rack of restless discontent” (ll. 69-70). This statement suggests that the spiritual consolation Collins claimed as a product of her affliction has been difficult to maintain or perhaps has not fully formed.

Following this tension, the expression of affliction within Collins's spiritual autobiography points to a psychology of anxiety in keeping with larger corporate concern over identification of the godly in post-Reformation England. However, this tension

resonates quite differently for An Collins as she experiences it dually: first, in regard to her election and secondly as to *how* her disabled body is interpreted by a populace largely inclined to associate the status of the body with that of the soul.<sup>56</sup> While Collins might initially link her sorrows to a joy that confirms her election, she also gives a great deal of attention to the tenuous nature of this connection.

Rather than presenting her suffering body as subordinate to “a triumphantly active, productive, and hermetic mind,” as is the case in a great deal of devotional verse, Susannah Mintz contends that Collins disrupts the “strict dichotomies of breakage and wholeness, disablement and capability, penetration and enclosure” in order to ultimately “locate in her portrayal of breakdown, bodily interiors, sensory experience, and the boundaries of gender a celebration of the self and a form of devotional practice that does not set the broken body aside” (Mintz 63-4). Mintz thus suggests that Collins invites readers to place their gaze squarely on her disabled body and come to view it as anything but an obstacle to be overcome. Through the prosthetic intervention posed through *Divine Songs and Meditations*, Collins’s disabled and insufficient body is consistently presented within and in relation to the “normal” body, but her body is never fully normalized in the sense that she might now “pass” as able-bodied; rather, Collins ensures that her readers cannot avoid or ignore her sense of bodily lack. In doing so, Collins’s prosthetized text presents a disabled body that sorrows in a godly fashion, and in

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<sup>56</sup> For more on the psychological effects of Puritanism, particularly, see: John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991), and John Morill, “A liberation theology? Aspects of Puritanism in the English Revolution,” in *Puritanism and its Discontents*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Newark and London: U of Delaware P, 2003), 27-48. Morill describes the anxiety that accompanied Puritanism as a “cultural process” (38).

celebrating her ability to sorrow in such a manner we must also celebrate the experience of lack that is her norm. It is in An Collins's fascinating invitation to gaze upon and celebrate her disabled body and to identify the spectrum of divinely desired bodies that the prosthetic possibilities of the devotional text come into view, as the text allows Collins not to "pass" as a normal member of the godly community, but to transform the very rules by which godliness is both written and read on the body.

## CHAPTER 2

### REFLECTIONS OF A DIVINE (M)OTHER: THOMAS TRAHERNE AND THE GENDERING OF DESIRE

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

—Matthew 6:22-23

As has frequently been noted, the eye plays an important role not only in Thomas Traherne's (c. 1637-74) poetic representation of selfhood, but also in his rendering of God, the soul, and the relationship between God and mankind.<sup>57</sup> Traherne's poem "My Spirit," for example, begins with a pun that proves foundational for his poetic: "My Naked Simple Life was I. / That Act so Strongly Shind / Upon the Earth, the Sea, the Skie, / It was the Substance of My Mind. / The Sence it self was I" (1.1-5).<sup>58</sup> In this

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<sup>57</sup> The importance of eye imagery to Traherne has been a touchstone for Traherne scholarship following the publication of the following foundational studies on Traherne's imagery: Harold G. Ridlon, "The Function of the 'Infant-Ey' in Traherne's Poetry," *SP* 61 (1964): 627-39; A. L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969); and Alison J. Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne* (St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 1970).

<sup>58</sup> This and all subsequent references to Traherne's poetry are taken from *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, Ed. Gladys Wade (London: P.J. & A.E. Dobell, 1932). *Poems of Felicity* was not published in Traherne's lifetime, and went unknown until 1896-7, when W. T. Brooke purchased a manuscript copy of *Centuries of Meditation* and also a folio volume containing poems and a commonplace book originally thought to be the work of Henry Vaughan until 1903, when Betram Dobbell identified the poetry as Traherne's and published *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* (1903) and also *Centuries* (1908). This recovery led to the 1910 discovery and publication of *Poems of Felicity* in the British Museum. The collection that makes up *Poems of Felicity* exists in two manuscripts: the Burney MS and the Dobbell MS. The Burney MS appears to have been the copy from which the poet's brother, Philip, was working to prepare for publication after Thomas's death; the editorial license with which Philip altered and rearranged the poems, however, have led me, whenever possible, to refer to the Dobbell MS, which appears to be free from Philip's rather heavy hand.

depiction, Traherne's ability to know himself and understand God's creative force is entirely dependent upon a particular bodily sense: sight. Sightedness enables Traherne's speaker to craft an "I" that is fully understood and also fully in line with God's love, a love that manifests in His creative activity, which in turn provides a plethora of material delights for Traherne to feast his eyes upon. As the poem continues, however, Traherne's investment in sightedness becomes even more apparent when his subject-speaker gestures beyond his own sightedness toward the importance of divine sight. Describing his spirit as boundless, not contained by "Brims or Borders," Traherne asserts, "We see, My Essence was all Capacitie" (1.7-8). The "We" capable of seeing an entity that has neither "Dross nor Matter" (1.6) can only comprise the speaker himself and his maker, God. In this sense, Traherne's ability to "see" himself for what he truly is (eye/I) relies entirely upon God also seeing him. Traherne proceeds to declare his spirit "all Ey, all Act, all Sight" (2.12), but he also asserts that it is "more Voluble then Light: / Which can put on ten thousand Forms, / Being clothd with what it self adorns" (2.15-17). Traherne's soul may be all capacity, all perception, but if it is voluble, it is also the object of a readily moving eye (*OED* 2b). Traherne's comparison between his soul and light that becomes even more apparent when it comes into contact with matter, and then takes on the image of that which it enlightens, confirms A. Leigh De Neef's claim that Traherne's "entire poetic is predicated upon a spectacular objectification, a fashioning of a self-to-be-seen for the Other who is conceived of having a desire to see" (116). God's choice to see, to observe, and to gaze upon Traherne's speaker is confirmation of His desire for a reciprocal gaze, which in turn registers desire for God. This relation makes a great deal of sense in that Traherne's eye/I formulation is premised upon the presumed correlation

between seeing and knowing—that when God sees into human souls, He knows what they truly desire, and when humans see their desire for and communion with God they come to greater knowledge of self.

This formulation of divine-subject relations has resulted in a number of Heideggerian, Hegelian, and Lacanian readings of Traherne reliant upon the premise that we cannot desire what we do not lack.<sup>59</sup> Traherne’s economy of desire built around sight has thus been found to represent God as an absent object of desire, the result of which is both divine and human desire necessarily reaching out across a daunting metaphysical chasm that Traherne’s devotional poetry seeks to bridge.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in *Centuries of Meditation* (pub. 1908) Traherne himself has the following to say about desire:

Desire imports something absent: and a need of what is absent. God was never without this Tree of Life. He did desire infinitely, yet He was never without the fruits of this Tree, which are the joys it produced. I must lead you out of this, into another World, to learn your wants. For till you find them you will never be happy. Wants themselves being Sacred Occasions and Means of Felicity. (qtd. in Cefalu 166-7)<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For the most extensive Lacanian interpretation of Traherne’s rendering of desire, see A. Leigh De Neef, *Traherne in Dialogue: Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1988), 115-38. See also Denise Inge, *Wanting Like a God: Desire and Freedom in Thomas Traherne* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 184-91; Paul Cefalu, *English Renaissance Literature and Contemporary Theory: Sublime Objects of Theology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), ch. 4. In contrast, Gary Kuchar opposes readings of Traherne that emphasize lack. See Gary Kuchar, *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2005), ch. 4; and Kuchar’s “Organs of Thy Praise: The Function and Rhetoric of the Body in Thomas Traherne,” in *Religion in the Age of Reason: A Transatlantic Study of the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: AMS Press, 2009), 58-81.

<sup>60</sup> A chasm that fashions the anxiety, despair, melancholy and angst of protestant poetics that decidedly contrasts with Traherne’s felicitous and celebratory expression.

<sup>61</sup> *Christian Ethicks*, I:43.20-30.



Traherne's explanation of desire as an "importing" of absence suggests that desire itself is grounded upon recognition of lack—that God must be absent for humans to desire Him. However, the "Tree of Life" Traherne refers to is the selfsame Tree of Life cited in Revelation 22:1-5, the means by which all that was lost in the Fall is returned to mankind through the salvific power of Christ's sacrifice and second coming.<sup>62</sup> Traherne's invocation of this Tree implies that when humans consume the fruits offered by Christ's sacrifice, they accept God's loving offer for redemption. When considering the role desire plays in Traherne's rendering of divine-human relations, Paul Cefalu accurately contends that "Traherne is concerned with the mutability by which desire forms a circuit between God and man" (167). The resolution to desire's mutability is, for Traherne, Christ, the very vehicle by which desire between mankind and God passes because "one can say of Christ unproblematically that his essence is pure love and pure act, if one considers that his *person* is pure act, but his *substance* is pure love" (Cefalu 171). Traherne's devotional poetry may be framed around a desire to see and be seen by an absent divine Other, but I would add that the love Traherne so vigorously celebrates points to an immanence made wholly accessible through the nourishing and regenerating body of Christ, a body that paradoxically confirms and conquers the speaker's experience of lack.

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<sup>62</sup> Revelation 22:1-5: Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bondservants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

This chapter will thus contend that Thomas Traherne develops a relationship between the gendered dimensions of seventeenth-century ocular theory and his own excessive exclamations of joy and Adamic purity to craft a Christ-figure who functions as both mother and Other to Traherne's speaker. Reading Christ as a desired and desiring, foreign and familiar Other shifts the interpretive landscape of Traherne criticism to open up a new way of reading Traherne's representations of sight and selfhood as expressions of both knowledge and desire. In the passage from *Centuries* quoted above, Traherne declares that it is important to know one's own desires because "Wants themselves" are "Sacred Occasions and Means of Felicity" (I.43.30).<sup>63</sup> In this construction, knowing his desires offers Traherne the ability to celebrate a sacred Other who is simultaneously different from but also present within himself. The result of accurately perceiving desire then is a greater knowledge of how to locate a concomitant divinity and difference within the self. I will assert that in Traherne's poetic representation, this desire finds form in the body of a hermaphroditic Christ who is both like and unlike Traherne's desiring subject but is always immanently present.

### **To See and Be Seen as Adam**

When considering the poetry of Thomas Traherne it has become commonplace for critics to note both the singularity of his bewildering taxonomies and excessive physiological blazons and also how these stylistic choices display Traherne's desire to marry the otherwise fractious bedfellows of faith and reason, the anatomist's theatre and the temple,

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Traherne, *Christian Ethicks*, Ed. Carol L. Marks and George Robert Guffey (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968).

and Neoplatonism with Mechanism.<sup>64</sup> Traherne has thus been dubbed a poet who burdened himself with the incredible task of “transform[ing] what the anatomist displayed into a richer prospect than science could imagine, since he sought to reinvest the body with a species of awe and wonder” (Sawday 258). The desacramentalization and objectification that accompanied increasingly mechanist views of the body fall flat in the face of Traherne’s supremely connected and wholly felicitous self. Traherne’s expressions of joyful bliss are so abundant that his early biographer Gladys Wade asserts that Traherne himself “became one of the most radiantly, most infectiously happy mortals this earth has known” (Wade 3), an estimation that derives almost exclusively from his frequent allusions to overwhelming sensations of jubilation as a result of connectedness with the divine. For Traherne, this sense of communion with his maker does not register in small and passive inklings; rather, Traherne’s happy knowledge of oneness vibrates throughout the natural world. He sees and celebrates God in every feature and form of the material world, a world governed by a divine *logos* that not only gives humans dominion over a bright and beautiful universe but also invests their bodies with a marvelous internal cosmos all its own. Indeed, Thomas Traherne is a poet, priest, and perhaps even a mystic, who wrote in an age when the explorer’s zeal had turned inward

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<sup>64</sup> Over the last fifty years a great deal of Traherne’s manuscript writings have been recovered: in 1964 *Select Meditations* was identified; in 1981 *Commentaries of Heaven* was properly attributed to Traherne, after being saved from a burning trash heap in 1967, and most recently in 1996 and 1997 two more manuscripts were unearthed: “The Ceremonial Law”, which had been in the Folger Shakespeare Library since 1958 and also a large volume in the Lambeth Palace Library containing “Inducements to Retiredness”, “A Somber View”, and “Seeds of Eternity.” Currently, all of Traherne’s extant works, both those published in his lifetime and those discovered in manuscript form only, are for the first time being brought together in a collected edition, including commentary, under the editorial supervision of Jan Ross with the intent to be published in 2017 through Boydell & Brewer Press.

and identified the human form as the greatest region of discovery. Within the caverns of the human body lay astounding knowledge, but Traherne, a poet who “reaches down into the bones and discovers an altogether different rhetoric of discovery” (Sawday 257), claims more than simple knowledge when he ventures into the recesses of the human body: he claims revelation.

While his poems revel in every inch of intestine and every blush of blood coursing through veins, they also firmly position the human body as a type crafted in the image of the body incarnate. For Traherne, each and every human body was intended for study, meditation, and ultimately reading in relation to the archetypal body of Christ, a body both open for viewing but closed to sin, both suffering and celebrating. It is his desire for intimate communion with this dialectical and divine body that enables Traherne to fashion an incarnational poetic that celebrates not only God’s immanence but also the fact that humans were created with the inherent ability to see, know, and feel divine presence. Despite his well-noted appreciation for the visible body, Traherne frequently gestures to an internal compartment deemed even more important than reveling in divinely ordered viscera.<sup>65</sup> Traherne articulates a desire to return to a perfect prelapsarian time that closes the metaphysical gap between man and his maker.<sup>66</sup> This desire comes to

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<sup>65</sup> Traherne’s celebration of the body is perhaps best shown in “The Person,” wherein Traherne pronounces: “The Naked Things / Are most Sublime, and Brightest shew, / When they alone are seen [...] When we all Metaphores remov, / For, Metaphores conceal, / And only Vapours prove. / They best are Blazond when we see / The Anatomie” (“The Person” 2.1-3, 8-12).

<sup>66</sup> In “‘Organs of Thy Praise’: The Function and Rhetoric of the Body” Gary Kuchar notes that Jonathan Sawday’s influential reading of Traherne’s resistance to a wholly anatomized, empirically ordered, and thus desacralized, body fails to fully recognize the importance of embodiment itself as a mode of knowing both God and the self. As a result, Kuchar asserts that for Traherne, “embodiment and the ‘intermutuality’ that follows from it is nothing less than the most intimate dimensions of sacramental

bear in Traherne's insistent celebrations of childhood innocence and his fascination with the pure, undiluted sight associated with an infancy that is always figured as prelapsarian.

In "Eden," for example, Traherne declares:

Those things which first his [Adam's] Eden did adorn,  
My Infancy  
Did crown. Simplicity  
Was my Protection when I first was born.  
Mine Eyes those Treasures first did see  
Which God first made. The first Effects of Love  
My first Enjoyments upon Earth did prove. (6.1-7)

The Adamic state of childhood Traherne fashions is grounded in the speaker's ability not only to see God's creation, but also to see it rightly. As his eyes perceive the "first Effects of Love," the speaker's access to felicitous recognition of agapic love is grounded in metaphors of sightedness. When Traherne gains Adamic sight he knows God as Adam did. In this original state of connectedness, Traherne feels neither sensations of need nor lack. It is only in a postlapsarian world that Traherne's speaker becomes aware of wants, needs, and lack when he comes into contact with "Vain Costly Toys, / Swearing and roaring Boys, / Shops, Markets, Taverns, Coaches..." (4.2-4); living in this fallen world reorients the speaker's perception so dramatically that "Unwelcome Penitence" (4.1) becomes paramount in his thoughts. As a result of such distractions, Traherne expresses incredible desire to return to a place in time, or a spiritual state, when "my Sight, / My Ears and Heart did fill, and freely move" (3.3-4). In this ideal space, Traherne's speaker is all sensory perception: he is all eyes, ears, and heart, but all of these receptors convey information to a self that is solely spiritual, a state that is a direct result of his presence in

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experience and knowledge at a point in time when the metaphysical framework grounding such sacramentality had begun to shift toward a dualist, and in this respect wholly non-sacramental, view of the body/mind relation" (62).

Eden, where there are no physical wants. Instead, in Eden, the only “lack” available to prelapsarian man is a divinity that is both present with Adam but absent from him, and thus God himself can be the only object of Adam’s desires.

In this sense, Traherne’s desire for Adamic purity becomes a fantasy of shutting his body off to all external influences, of making it a closed container that cannot be penetrated by the world around him, and in doing so, Traherne hopes to fashion an Adamic self whose sole desire is God. This brand of prelapsarian desire is perhaps most fully expressed in “Dumnesse,” a poem that again longingly reaches back to a childlike state of purity:

Man was born to Meditat on Things,  
And to Contemplat the Eternal Springs  
Of God and Nature, Glory, Bliss and Pleasure;  
That Life and Love might be his Heavenly Treasure:  
And therefore Speechless made at first, that he  
Might in himself profoundly Busied be:  
And not vent out, before he hath t’ake in  
Those Antidots that guard his Soul from Sin.  
Wise Nature made him Deaf too, that he might  
Not be disturbd, while he doth take Delight  
In inward Things, nor be depravd with Tongues,  
Nor Injurd by the Errors and the Wrongs  
That *Mortal Words* convey. For Sin and Death  
Are most infused by accursed Breath,  
That flowing from Corrupted Intraills, bear  
Those hidden Plagues which Souls may justly fear.  
(ll. 1-16, original emphasis)

Traherne’s intense desire to remove himself from both an oral and aural world issues forth a fantasy of isolation contingent upon disabling the speaker’s ability to both perceive and create language. When the speaker is removed from this disabled yet secure space, communication with other postlapsarian people proves a destabilizing and even contaminating prospect. Traherne portrays language itself as fallen: the product of a

corrupting “Living Vehicle of Wind” (l. 25) that leaves the speaker’s mind “infected” (l. 26) by the “Mixture” (l. 28). For Traherne, externals generate contagion, and this contagion registers in and on the penetrable body. By figuring himself as both deaf and mute, and thus isolated from the sinfulness of the world, Traherne’s speaker turns inward to find “total and unbounded connection with the divine, producing in turn assertions of unpermeated self-possession” (Mintz 9). This sense of self-possession, however, is, as Susannah Mintz notes, built entirely upon the absolute reality of Traherne’s sightedness: “Only by being able to look (and not simply to imagine, understand, or intellectualize) does the subject-speaker of Traherne’s poems make his expansive claims of possession and joyfulness” (Mintz 4).<sup>67</sup> In the isolation produced by his “Dumnesse,” Traherne’s bliss is dependent upon his “Non-Intelligence of Human Words” (l. 21), but even when he does open himself up to the world through language he constructs yet another space where he might find the spiritual union attributed to this state of isolation.

### **To See and Be Seen as Christ**

Following his unwholesome “mixture” with the postlapsarian world, “the Holy Door, / Or Gate of Souls was closd, and mind being One / With in it self to me alone was Known” (“Dumnesse” ll. 28-30). The communion between Traherne’s speaker and the divine is

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<sup>67</sup> In “Strange Bodies: Thomas Traherne’s Disabled Subject” Mintz very usefully applies the language and lens of Disability Studies to Traherne’s metaphoric imaging of himself as deaf, mute, and blind. Ultimately, Mintz argues that Traherne’s entire poetic self-representation derives from an “ableist” position that appropriates the language of disability without addressing the social and material circumstances of the disabled. As a result, the disabled body becomes a foil to Traherne’s ideal and felicitous body, and this relationship serves only to “reinforce problematic stereotypes by underwriting the hegemony of an idealized, ‘natural,’ wonder-inspiring physical form that strives for order against the vagaries of embodiment” (Mintz 20).

such that even when he breaks his bliss and engages in fallen speech, he is still able to access the divine through a conscious rejection of the contaminating external world; he can further quarantine himself by retreating through a “Holy Door” that is closed to sinners, but enables him singular access to oneness with God. Once through this sacred doorway, Traherne finds “Cleerer Eys / To see all Creatures full of Deities; / Especially Ones self: And to Admire / The Satisfaction of all True Desire” (ll. 40-3). When Traherne moves inward he crosses a threshold between his own body and the body of the divine Other that comes to bear in his metaphoric representation of interiority as passing through a “Holy Door.” This imagery draws explicitly from John 10:7-9, wherein Christ proclaims, “I am the door of the sheep....I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” In medieval and Roman Catholic imagery, Christ’s crucifixion wounds were frequently imaged as doors or passageways that, when meditated upon, offered access to divine communion, or in Bonaventure’s formulation entrance into Christ’s “wombe” (qtd. in Covington, 164).<sup>68</sup> The spiritual and physical rebirth made available to humanity through Christ’s willingness to be wounded underscores Bonaventure’s deployment of the wound-as-womb metaphor, but it also calls attention to Traherne’s suggestive gestures toward the affective tradition that depicts Christ as both feminized and maternal in order to emphasize not only his humanity but also his undeniably physical role in ensuring human

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<sup>68</sup> The wound-as-door metaphor was a popular touchstone well beyond the medieval period. See, for example, George Herbert’s “The Bag” wherein Christ asserts, in the moments directly after receiving his side-wound, “hereafter /...the doore / shall still be open” (ll. 37-39). See also Richard Crashaw, “John 10:7-9. I Am the Door,” *Divine Epigram #205*, ll. 1-2.



redemption.<sup>69</sup> Through the Christ-as-door metaphor, Traherne reimagines the speaker's desire for the Other as a desire to remove the boundaries between them, to do away with the wounds he has experienced in the world by fashioning the Other as present and nourishing, as a mother's womb is to her unborn infant.<sup>70</sup> When Traherne's speaker begins to think of himself in such a way, he suddenly understands "True Desire" and also identifies the divine as working within all of His creatures. The figure of "Mother Jesus" undergirds this newborn self-perception, and enables Traherne to refigure the relationship between his speaker and the Other as one of mutually shared desire. As one of the sheep invited through the door to salvation, Traherne's speaker experiences admiration of both the self as one who desires truly and the divine as the truest object of desire.

In contrast, when he was solely concerned with external contagion, and thus primarily oriented toward the body, he did not recognize this internal grace so readily, and his ability to desire rightly was subject to both disease and disability. It is in the reorientation of the speaker's desire that Gary Kuchar contends that Traherne's body is

figured not only as something in excess of representation, but also operates as one of the central means by which the self realizes a view of itself as "a seeming Intervall between Time and Eternity, the Golden link or Tie of the World, yea the Hymenaeus Marrying the Creator and his Creatures together" (*Centuries*, 4.74). Operating as a copula within the sacramental grammar of his work (a "hymen"), the body functions mystically, filling up, as it were, the loss inflicted through the

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<sup>69</sup> For the most noted work on Christ's feminization, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: U of California P, 1982), 113-34.

<sup>70</sup> In an assessment of George Herbert's manipulation of the widespread medieval image of "Mother Jesus," Michael Schoenfeldt has persuasively argued that the image of a feminized Christ was alive and well in Reformed discourse in England as Christ's nurturing qualities pair with his "willingness to assume a vulnerable body and be entered by all opens him up to the contamination of a fallen, and surprisingly feminine, sexuality" (Schoenfeldt 282).

desacramentalization of the *corpus mysticum*. (original emphasis, *Divine Subjection* 188)

Kuchar's evocative association between the symbolism of the hymen and mind-body relations makes Traherne's aim to sacralize the body quite clear. Just as the hymen functions as the "door" to the womb, Christ himself functions as the door through which salvation for body and soul becomes possible. In Traherne's representation of Christ's body as a door, a door that his speaker eagerly enters into, he is reborn. As a result, his sight is fully reoriented toward the internal rather than the external, and his body can be read "as a sacred hymn—an embodied psalm, as it were" (Kuchar, *Divine Subjection*, 182). Once this reorientation is initiated, Traherne immediately sings an ecstatic hymn celebrating his ability

To see, love, Covet, hav, Enjoy and Prais, in one:  
To Prize and to be ravished: to be true,  
Sincere and Single in a Blessed View  
To prize and prais. ("Dumnesse" ll. 51-4)

In this state of right desire and pure selfhood Traherne can authentically see himself and celebrate not only by praising but also by "prizing," a term that frequently appears in Traherne's poetry and does much to clarify his sense of felicitous oneness with a divine Other. To "prize" something means either to greatly esteem or value it (*OED* 2a) or to offer an evaluation of its monetary worth (*OED* 1a). When Traherne declares that he will "prize and praise" he invokes both senses of the verb. He suggests that God is a valuable, praiseworthy object of his desire, but Traherne is interested in much more than merely "prizing" God—he also desires to be prized. Thankfully for our speaker the act of "prizing" appears reciprocal as Traherne's divine appraisal is quickly followed by ravishment, a confirmation that the divine Other finds him prize-worthy. Through

“prizing,” we are confronted with “Traherne’s theology of desire...because it is in his discussion of prizing that we see desire not just as that which indicates or locates treasure, or that which awakes in us the infinite, but as a force that purifies our sight and transforms our actions” (Inge 107). Prizing and being prized thus demonstrate desire in both the speaker and his God, and in doing so, clarifies the manner in which Traherne’s God can appear to be absent but also immanent and accessible within his poetry.

The act of prizing confirms the communal relationship between the two, a relationship that prompts the speaker to move even further inward. Following the ravishment that confirms God’s estimation of Traherne’s subject-speaker as a prize worth the wanting, he proclaims: “Thus was I pent within / A Fort, Impregnable to any Sin” (“Dumnesse” ll. 54-5). Being “pent within” is not only an assertion of interiority, but a claim to exclusive access to the most secure *hortus conclusus* ever created: Eden. In this sense, Traherne’s subject-speaker figures himself as a type of Adam, who himself is a pre-type for Christ.<sup>71</sup> This rhetorical alignment comes to fruition in the speaker’s recognition of himself as the singular object of God’s gaze. Like Adam and then Christ, Traherne’s speaker sees and celebrates himself as God’s most valuable prize. As the single object of God’s “Blessed View” (l. 53), Traherne asserts a sense of oneness with God that could only be matched by a prelapsarian Adam or the God incarnate, Christ.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The biblical connection between Christ and Adam lies in Christ’s role as the mediator through whom Adam’s fall is redeemed. Adam is thus seen as a pre-type for Christ and Christ is seen as a second Adam. See Romans 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-2.

<sup>72</sup> Traherne’s typological alignment between his subject-speaker and both Christ and Adam is perhaps most explicit in the following announcement from “The Salutation”: “Long time before / I in my Mother’s Womb was born, / A GOD preparing did this Glorious Store, / The World for me adorne. / Into this Eden so Divine and fair, / So Wide and Bright, I com his Son and Heir. (6.1-6). “The Salutation” is the opening poem in both the Dobell (1903) and Burney (1910) manuscripts; however, this particular stanza,

However, Traherne's celebrations of communion are entirely contingent upon his speaker being "pent within / A Fort, Impregnable" (ll. 54-5). Depicting the body as impenetrable might appear to comfort a subject-speaker deeply concerned with finding security in God's loving gaze, but Traherne's feelings of being "pent within" suggest that recognition of the self as the sole object of God's gaze might also cause considerable apprehension.<sup>73</sup>

The tension between desiring God's gaze and the unease it might produce manifests most clearly when Traherne's celebrations of impermeability to sin and prelapsarian purity intersect with contemporary ocular theories that position the eyes as orifices capable of both penetrating and being penetrated by a loving gaze. Early moderns inherited two vying but coexistent interpretations of the mechanism of sight from classical Antiquity.<sup>74</sup> Plato posits an effluxive theory of vision wherein the eyes project beams of light outward that then transmit perceptions of the essential spirits emitted by external objects. This Platonic theory of extramission was further refined by Galen, who engenders the eye with even greater creative force as it transmits a "visual pneuma" that imposes form upon the essential spirits it comes into contact with. In

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the sixth of the otherwise seven stanza poem, was removed in the Burney MS, presumably by its editor Philip Traherne.

<sup>73</sup> According to the *OED*, to be "pent" as: "shut up within narrow limits; closely confined; held back under pressure" (1).

<sup>74</sup> For more on classical sources detailing the workings of vision, see Sergei Lobanov-Rostovsky, "Taming the Basilisk," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (London: Routledge, 1997), 195-217; and also, Lance K. Donaldson-Evans, *Love's Fatal Glance: A Study of Eye Imagery in the Poets of the Ecole Lyonnaise*, Romance Monographs 39 (University of Mississippi, 1980).

contrast, Aristotle offers an ocular theory of intromission where the eye functions as receptacle to the essential spirits radiating outward from objects of vision. The extramission theory thus denies the eye “the aggressive and dynamic quality implicitly vested in them by the platonic theory” (Donaldson-Evans 13), while intromission presents sight as “the painful reception of tiny images sent out by the objects of vision, and as an intrusion of things upon the eye and mind” (Westejn 151). These theories merge in erotically charged Renaissance poetry that genders the penetrable, womblike Aristotelian eye as female and the penetrating, transforming, power of the Platonic-Galenic eye as male. In the language of love, and particularly the Petrarchan conceit of the eroticized eye, the lover’s eye might emit ocular darts that first penetrate the beloved’s eyes and then penetrate her soul just as the ocular rays emanating from her beauty might dangerously mingle with the lover’s blood making him all the more receptive to her image. In this poetic tradition, love is conceived through a swirl of wounding, penetrating, and imprinting gazes that can leave both parties indelibly altered. As Robert Burton notes in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, the “Eye betrays the soul and is both Active and Passive in this business; it wounds and is wounded, is an especial cause and instrument, both in the subject and in the object” (qtd. in Lobanov-Rostovksy, 203). In Burton’s estimation, eyes are figured as both active and passive, the matter and maker through which love is conceived, and thus to gaze or be gazed upon lovingly is to enter into a battle where ocular beams engage the penetrable early modern body and ultimately place Traherne’s eye/I formulation at considerable risk.

It comes as no surprise then, that when Traherne blissfully envisions himself shut off from the fallen world and the sole object of God’s gaze, he faces the discomfiting

recognition that despite his best efforts to render the body impregnable, if he desires God's loving gaze he cannot escape penetration. The vision of a self almost hermetically sealed from sin thus functions as an ideal that is both supported and destabilized by the very ocular theories Traherne employs to construct it. Traherne's interest in fashioning such an ideal subject-speaker does much to underscore Gary Kuchar's assertion that Traherne's poetry "constructs a vision of the ideally praising subject that is grounded upon a deepened focus on experience and consciousness vis-à-vis embodied existence" (Kuchar, *Divine Subjection*, 182). I agree with Kuchar's evaluation of Traherne's relationship with the body—Traherne's speaker, mystical as he may at times appear, is not interested in crafting a vatic devotional subject removed entirely from the reality of embodiment. Traherne is so deeply concerned with embodiment that rather than retreating from a body that cannot be made perfectly impenetrable, he fashions a subject capable of ideally praising God by investing his subject-speaker's body with a transitivity that encourages the very doubleness Burton attributes to the eye, an organ that itself crosses boundaries by being simultaneously active and passive, male and female. It is in this manipulation of ocular theories that Traherne develops an ideal subject in typological alignment with the body of Christ, a body that is also traditionally figured as active and passive, male and female, open for viewing but closed to sin.

For example, in the poem "Sight" Traherne invites his readers to consider how both ocular theories contribute to the eye/I construction of selfhood that undergirds his poetics.<sup>75</sup> Traherne writes:

Mine Infant-Ey  
[...]

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<sup>75</sup> "Sight" appears in the Burney MS and not in the Dobell MS.

Did make me see  
Two *Sights* in me,  
Three Eys adorn'd my Face:  
Two Luminaries in my Flesh  
Did me refresh;  
But one did lurk within,  
Beneath my Skin,  
*That* was of greater Worth than both the other;  
For those were Twins; but this had ne'r a Brother. (ll. 1-12)

The importance of sightedness to Traherne's selfhood is paramount as he explicitly juxtaposes the fleshly physical eyes against the immaterial spiritual eye of the soul, but this very construction places Traherne's inescapable doubleness at the forefront: he is a man who desires the spirit alone but finds himself encased in flesh. This sense of doubleness is structured upon ocular theories that position the eye as both penetrable and penetrating as well as a multivalent archetype evocative of spiritual enlightenment but also a representation of female genitalia, the womb even.<sup>76</sup> According to Carl Jung, the eye's archetypal relation to female genitalia underscores the eye as a symbol for newfound enlightenment that begins with rebirth or a symbolic return to the womb of the mother and reentry into the physical world as an indelibly altered, enlightened, individual.<sup>77</sup> In his desires to become solely spiritual, Traherne has figured his speaker as

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<sup>76</sup> The metaphoric sexualization and gendering of the eye was frequently employed in Shakespearean language where the "eye" became a common pun for vagina (Williams 118).

<sup>77</sup> Carl Jung identifies the eye as one of the suprapersonal archetypes that span both culture and time to form humanity's collective unconscious. Jung specifically identifies the gendered aspects of the eye as an archetype at work in both Eastern and Western religious iconography and imagery. Specifically, he points to the Hindu story of Indra who was punished for his wanton behavior with representations of female genitalia all over his body that were then exchanged for eyes as a symbol of his renewal when he was forgiven (*Symbols* 268). Likewise, the multi-eyed and multi-sided Hindu figure of Shiva is styled as an excessive individual catapulting between hedonism and asceticism who only finds balance through his wife, Parvati. Shiva's third eye represents his wisdom, but

all eye, both an active agent and a passive receptacle. This doubleness comes to bear in Traherne's representation of extramission as he declares,

Those Eys of Sense  
That did dispense  
Their Beams to nat'ral things,  
I quickly found  
In narrow Bound  
To know but earthly Springs.  
But *that* which throu the Hevens went  
Was excellent,  
And Endless; for the Ball  
Was Spirit' all:  
A visiv Ey things visible doth see;  
But with th' Invisible, Invisibles agree. (ll. 13-24)

Traherne's rendering of extramission suggests that the pneuma radiating outward from his "visiv eye" is capable of perceiving only that which is equally as physical as the eye and its beams, but the eye that was styled as being of "greater Worth" (l. 11) in the first stanza is able to project its beams outward to that which is also invisible precisely because it too lacks matter.

This double sight encourages Traherne to view himself as an active, even potent, agent in the world precisely because, "One World was not...Ev'n then enough for me" (ll. 25-7). As a result of his perception that he is a master of that which can be seen and also that which cannot, Traherne's speaker claims an implicitly masculine desire:

New Regions I must see.  
In distant Coasts new Glories I  
Did long to spy:  
What this World did present  
Could not content (ll. 30-4).

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he is also frequently imaged as half man and half woman, a representation that speaks to the insight that accompanies Shiva's balance through Parvati.



When Traherne's speaker describes the process of sight through extramission and simultaneously demands to see new regions of the world, he suggests a desire to conquer, transform, and make the world his own precisely because in this ocular theory "the eye is both sovereign and implicitly *male*: it engenders the visible world by its projection of spiritual substance" (Lobanov-Rostovsky 198). Traherne's self-directive to essentially see the world into being thus functions as a particularly male imperative: his desire to inscribe himself upon the world follows the popular representation of literary creation as childbirth, a relatively commonplace metaphor amongst male writers of the seventeenth century.<sup>78</sup> In this construction, Traherne's representation of sightedness seems to fall in line with the phallogentric discourse of seventeenth-century literary production wherein masculine creativity works as a projection of sexual potency precisely because, following the theory of extramission Traherne outlines above, his male subject-speaker engenders being through both the force of his sight and the power of Traherne's pen.

However, Traherne's concentrated focus on his speaker's inherent doubleness precludes this masculine desire from being read as either wholly spiritual, as in a desire to discover new regions of the soul, or wholly physical, as in a desire to conquer the world through the transformative power of sight. Traherne's speaker acknowledges this ambiguity when he concludes the stanza by declaring, "But, while I look'd on Outward Beauties *here*, / Most earnestly expected Others *there*" (ll. 35-6, original emphasis). The masculine agency Traherne gestures toward is complicated by the recognition that he expects outward beauty *here* in the external world to produce inward beauties *there* in his

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<sup>78</sup> For a detailed discussion of this topos amongst seventeenth-century male poets, see L. E. Semler, "The Protestant Birth Ethic: Aesthetic, Political, and Religious Contexts for *Eliza's Babes* (1652)," *ELR* 30.3 (2000): 432-56 (esp. 433-34).

soul; he expects to be penetrated just as he desires to penetrate. He also expects this penetration to be productive, and it is: stanza four is entirely focused on the “Som such thing” (l. 41) generated within the mind as the result of his perception of external beauty. The clumsiness of this expression alone suggests a lack of mastery, perhaps even recognition that Traherne’s subject-speaker is not truly able to consider himself the potent and active male spectator he so desired to present himself to be. Instead, his assurance is undone by his doubleness, and he cannot escape the sensations of lack that find expression in his inability to master his own speech.

Such a construction appears to counter Stanley Fish’s claims that an authoritative masculine speaker cannot voice masculine creative authority unless he is presented with a feminine principle that “provides him with the occasion of *self-assertion*” (Fish 229). In Fish’s estimation, the blank page presents the male poet with a “female passivity” open for inscription by the male poet’s pen (Fish 228), a pen that feminist literary critics have equated with the phallus.<sup>79</sup> The feminine principle available to Traherne to assert himself upon may be his manuscript, but the feminine principle he makes available to his subject-speaker to assert masculine authority upon and through is Nature herself, an entity emitting rays of beauty that generates much more anxiety than authority over the “Som such Thing” (l. 41) produced within him as a result of this contact with Nature’s beauty. The combination of Traherne’s subject-speaker recognizing his own penetrability while also being unable to articulate the precise nature of his mind contributes to a subjectivity

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<sup>79</sup> Feminist criticism has convincingly documented the link between linguistic representation and the phallus. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975); Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

which is, in his own words, caught between “*here*” (l. 35) and “*there*” (l. 36), neither entirely in the physical world nor the spiritual world, and neither wholly male nor wholly female. Instead, Traherne’s speaker both shapes the world and is shaped by externally penetrating agents in the world. In this duality Traherne’s subject-speaker may be read as a metaphoric hermaphrodite, a being Ovid describes as “*both and neither*” (DeVun 194, emphasis added).

### **To See the Self as Both and Neither**

Just as ocular theories attributed male and female characteristics to the eye through the language of activity and passivity, Traherne’s gender transitivity is evocative of contemporary speculation over the nature of human conception and the gender doubleness that was considered a natural outcome of the mixing between male and female seed within the private and mysterious recesses of the womb. Following in the same vein as their theoretical counterparts of extramission and intromission, the Aristotelian argument that the male “seed” was hotter and therefore a more active reproductive agent than the female component was equally as popular as the Galenic position that conception was the result of co-mingling between the male and female elements where either could dominate but not fully extinguish the other. As a result, Anthony Fletcher has argued, “there was seen to be in everyone some trace at birth of gender doubleness...belief in the mingling of [woman’s] seed with their own in the womb made it impossible for men to think of themselves as wholly gendered male beings

until they had struggled free of maternal making and maternal influence” (58-9).<sup>80</sup> Given the contemporary opacity surrounding conception and the activity of the male and female agents within the maternal body, it thus becomes important for early modern men to confirm maleness. Mental creativity provides a likely means to prove distinction from the feminine as Galenic models of the humoral body attributed intellectual dexterity with the dry and hot bodies equated with masculinity. As a result, the Spanish physician Juan Huarte de San Juan can confidently assert:

To think that a woman can be hot and dry, or endowed with wit and ability conformable to these two qualities, is a very great error; because if the seed of which she was formed, had been hot and dry in their domination, she should have been born a man, and not a woman...she was by God created cold and moist, which temperature, is necessary to make a woman fruitful and apt for childbirth, but an enemy to knowledge.  
(qtd. in Eisaman Maus *Inwardness* 183-4)

In Huarte’s estimation, maleness is as much a mental predisposition to creativity and ability as it is a result of chromosomal dominance that initiates within the womb but carries on without. To be female was to be a passive but fertile receptacle to the active male agent. The hermaphrodite, however, was a liminal figure, the result, according to Aristotle, of an excess of the passive reproductive material contributed by the mother (DeVun 197). Within the transitive body of the hermaphrodite, as it is in the transitive organ of the eye, lay the ability to be active and passive, both and neither.

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<sup>80</sup> Fletcher’s assertion, I think, lends considerable context to the popularity of the literary childbirth conceit amongst male authors; it is also worth noting, however, that Elizabeth D. Harvey has drawn correlations between male usage of this trope and the medicalization of pregnancy and birth by male physicians seeking to replace female midwives and thus refashion the previously female domain of the birthing chamber. See Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 76-115.

This duality positions the hermaphrodite as an apt, albeit potentially surprising, metaphor for Christ from the late Middle Ages through the seventeenth century. As both the Son of God and also the body through which all of humanity is reborn, Christ is both male and maternal, divine and human. In this sense, Christ is, like the hermaphrodite, liminal, both and neither. As is the case with the affective piety of the high Middle Ages that popularized the image of the hermaphroditic Christ, Traherne's devotional verse emphasizes creation and incarnation much more than atonement and judgment.<sup>81</sup> The mystery of the incarnation finds form in the image of the hermaphrodite as it enables Traherne to assert a plasticity of identity for his subject-speaker by positioning him in direct relation to what Michel de Certeau claims is the chief focus of seventeenth-century mysticism: "to produce a mystic body...an alien body against which the institution of medicine would eventually win out in imposing a scientific body" (85). In this assertion, de Certeau describes early modern Catholicism and Protestantism as adhering to an invisible/visible binary wherein the Protestant arm favored the visual in its privileging of the scriptural corpus while the Catholic arm aligns with the invisible in its privileging of the sacrament. The result, according to de Certeau, is that until the mid-seventeenth century, the mystical body functioned as the "other" in relation to visible realities (84-5). When Traherne positions his subject-speaker across gendered divides, he actively invites readers to look across binary constructs and gendered modes of writing and reorient their

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<sup>81</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum writes that "concentration on the Eucharist and on Christ's suffering in the Passion, which increases in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century devotions, is not primarily a stress on the sacrifice needed to bridge the enormous gap between us in our sin and God in his glory; it is rather an identification with the fact that Christ is what we are" (*Jesus as Mother* 130).

sight to embrace the inherent duality within themselves, and thus come to perceive an alien but accessible divine Other already within the self.

In the poem “Fullnesse,” for example, Traherne ties his speaker’s revelation of divine love specifically to an experience of embodiment that crosses gender lines, and in doing so, gestures specifically toward our inherent duality. He describes the recognition of agapic love as,

The Mirror of an Endless Life,  
The Shadow of a Virgin Wife,  
A Spiritual World Standing within,  
An Univers enclosed in Skin.  
My Power exerted, or my Perfect Being,  
If not Enjoying, yet an Act of Seeing. (ll. 5-10)

As the poem’s title suggests, this “Act of Seeing” produces a “Fullnesse” within the speaker that utilizes the language of pregnancy to convey the intimate and mysterious bond shared between the divine Other and the speaker. Through recognition of how agapic love works from within to reorient his perception of the self, the speaker comes to recognize an enigmatic internal duality that generates an entirely new conception of the self. When Traherne’s subject-speaker describes himself as “an Act of Seeing” he invites readers to reimagine his eye/I construction of selfhood as generating a subjectivity that is formulated upon the active and passive, penetrating and penetrable qualities of the eye. As such, Traherne’s subject-speaker becomes ideal precisely because he embodies the very transitivity attributed to a hermaphroditic Christ. The metaphors he selects in this brief passage do much to convey his newfound sense of not just any duality, but of an otherness projecting well beyond the speaker’s purview. In his own representation he becomes a mirror and a shadow, both reflective items that tender access to idyllic states of being in the form of “an Endless Life” and “a Virgin Wife.” Traherne’s ideal subject

finds form in his frequent gestures to mirror imagery and the importance of sightedness as the means by which the devotional subject can become an inward-looking and authentic spectator of the self's mystical alien aspects.

Traherne's interest in sightedness and his frequent tropes on mirrors and mirroring work to develop a prosthetized relation between his speaker and a God who desires him as much as He is desired. The poem "Amendment," for example, includes a stanza devoted to an ecstatic questioning of the soul's nature: Traherne wonders, "is my Soul a Mirror that must Shine / Even like the Sun, and be far more Divine?" (5.6-7).<sup>82</sup> By invoking the metaphor of a mirror that ideally reflects something "far more Divine" than itself, the speaker imagines God's desiring gaze shining down upon him and then reflecting back a confirmation of shared desire. The tone of the question is hopeful. The speaker *wants* this mirror metaphor to prove true, but if the soul is indeed the most valued component and truest formulation of the self, then imaging the soul as a mirror presents the speaker with yet another potentially anxiety-inducing dilemma. Sight of the "real" self may offer an uncomfortable recognition of the self as simultaneously self and other as the external presence reflected in the mirror is suggestive of the reality within, but can only function as an insufficient sign of that internal reality. The mirror does not offer any assurance that what we see will correlate with our self-conception. The fact that Traherne constructs this mirror image in the form of a question confirms the uneasy truth that he has no assurance the reflection gazing back at him will pair with the self he desires to see.

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<sup>82</sup> The poem "Amendment" appears in the Dobell MS, but not in the Burney MS.

Anxiety over a potential discrepancy between one's reflection and self-conception extends well beyond Traherne's invocation of mirror imagery. The fact that mirror imagery appears in Western literature from the medieval period onward, roughly following the wide-scale production and dissemination of mirrors both on and beyond the continent, suggests considerable concern over how mirrors might, or might not, offer access to the "real" self.<sup>83</sup> Early modern mirrors, although much improved from their medieval precursors, were as likely to distort images, as they were to display them. As a result, Deborah Shuger has argued that early moderns might envisage more than their real forms when they gazed into mirrors. The mirror could reveal an ideal form, as the devout viewer might see the image of Christ through the mirror, or, in contrast, the mirror might reveal uncomfortable truths about the viewer as its own pneumatic rays penetrate the body's surface and peer deep into the viewer's soul to mirror back knowledge of sinfulness or reprobation.<sup>84</sup> As a real material object, Frederick Goldin claims the early modern mirror has the unique capacity to

consider both the matter and form together. The mirror awakens our consciousness of the idea by translating it into sensible images. It shows us an image of eternal beauty....But that image is fleeting, it has no substance; and we must learn how to leave the mirror behind and to love a being that is invisible and immutable. (178)

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<sup>83</sup> For a more detailed discussion of mirrors and mirror technology in the Renaissance, see Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle-Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982); Edward P. Nolan, *Now Through a Glass Darkly: Specular Images of Being and Knowing* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1990); and Faye Tudor, "'All in him selfe as in a glass he sees': Mirrors and Vision in the Renaissance," in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, eds. John Shannon and Charles H. Carman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 171-86.

<sup>84</sup> See Deborah Shuger, "The 'I' of the Beholder: Renaissance Mirrors and the Reflexive Mind," in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, eds. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999), 21-41.



In Goldin's rendering the mirror bridges the divide between the real and the ideal or the earthly and the divine, but it also speaks to a very real problem for early modern believers gazing into a mirror hoping to confirm divine desire. This is precisely the case for Traherne, and as a result the mirror images that appear in his poetry enable the speaker to discern not only divine desire but also an authentic sense of the dual self.

Returning now to Traherne's ponderous question regarding the reflective nature of his soul, and whether it truly does mirror back divine love, it is no surprise to find that he wastes little time toying with so potent an image. In the stanza immediately following his query Traherne offers the following response, and in doing so renders his question rhetorical:

Thy Soul, O GOD, doth prize  
The Seas, the Earth, our Souls, the Skies,  
As we return the same to Thee;  
They more delight thine Eys,  
And Sweeter be,  
As unto Thee we Offer up the same,  
Then as to us, from Thee at first they came. ("Amendment" 6.1-7)

Traherne resolves the tension the mirror might have evoked by clearly affirming that when he looks into his soul, he sees God gazing and prizing, and in return reciprocates the very divine love God has tendered. The mirror thus offers Traherne's subject-speaker much more than simple confirmation of divine desire: it offers him the ability to respond to agapic love appropriately, by reflecting it back. As a result, he is able to ecstatically exclaim, "O how doth Sacred Lov / His Gifts refine, Exalt, Improve!" ("Amendment" 7.1-2). Traherne's ability to love, to prize, and to praise God is grounded in his mirroring back the love he receives, and in this swirling exchange it seems as though the "Sacred Lov" issued back to God is nothing less than divine love itself. The speaker's soul, the

mirror that love is channeled through, thus offers Traherne's subject-speaker the ability to not only receive divine desire, but also the ability to come to envision an "other" image of the divine within the self capable of emitting divine love.

In this regard, mirror imagery proves the foundation for Traherne's argument that the ideally praising subject must be able to see and reflect what is simultaneously present and not present within him. As the mirror image of agapic love, the speaker's soul becomes "A living endless Ey" and "an inward Sphere of Light, / Or an interminable Orb of Sight" ("The Præparative" 2.2, 5-6). In this ideal state Traherne's subject-speaker is "thus prepar'd for all Felicity" (5.1). The sacramental nature of this newfound self-perception is undeniable, as the speaker has progressed from mere assertions of prelapsarian purity to ecstatic exclamations of divine union so intense that the speaker finally cannot conceive of himself as autonomous from the divine Other. This construction of the self encourages the speaker to sublimate any perception of self that is not in connection with the divine. In this self-conception, Traherne appears to write in what Nancy Chodorow has called a feminine devotional mode shaped by culturally produced values and practices that encouraged women to "experience a sense of self-in-relation that is in contrast to men's creation of a self that wishes to deny relation and connection" (viii). As a male poet interested in crafting a relational model of selfhood, Traherne appears to defy critical constructions of the devotional mode as adhering to strictly gendered lines; instead, Traherne's intentional blurring of the male/female binary problematizes the construction of the self as either wholly male or wholly female.

This mode of self-fashioning enables Traherne to craft extraordinarily rich connections between the body of Christ and the body of the believer, and in doing so

Traherne demonstrates interest in fashioning an “ideally praising subject” (Kuchar, *Divine Subjection*, 182) who is ideal precisely because his body, like Christ’s, invites us inward to revel in being both and neither, foreign and familiar. This newfound sense of self, however, requires a great deal of work to fully reorient the speaker’s sight from the visible/invisible, male/female binary modes of perception. In order to achieve this task, Traherne once again shapes his speaker into a prelapsarian Adam whose desire is naturally oriented toward God. In the poem “Silence,” for example, Traherne expresses desire to perform the self-same work Adam is tasked with as he declares, “The Inward Work is the Supreme: for all / The other were occasioned by the Fall” (ll. 3-4). In Traherne’s styling, the “work” of Adamic man was simply to look “in himself to feel his Bliss, to view / His Sacred Treasures” (ll. 22-3). However, this “inward work” requires insight and evaluation as Traherne’s would-be-Adam must do more than simply exult in the many treasures available to him in the prelapsarian world. Traherne issues two proximate lists that order his speaker’s internal work: he must first, “See, Prize, Give hearty Thanks within, and Love” (l. 25), and secondly, “see, Approve, take Pleasure, and rejoice” (l. 29). Traherne’s injunction to “see” first and foremost conveys the importance of knowledge and understanding as the most essential tools of evaluation, for it is evaluation in the form of prizing and approval that enables thankfulness, love, pleasure, and ultimately the ability to rejoice. These lists employ the language of the rising market economy, an economy increasingly based upon speculation and a reformulation of value and worth in purely commercial terms. As such, this economic language betrays a truth about Traherne’s speaker: he may claim Adamic purity and prelapsarian sight, but he is

deeply anxious about his worth, his prize-worthiness, and his own desire for divine appraisal.<sup>85</sup>

This anxiety proves the impetus to more fully fashion the self as Adamic, and by virtue of the typological association between Christ and Adam, as Christ-like. Only when the speaker is able to view the inward work as the most important work available to him can he move to man's true calling: "to Enjoy him, and to Imitate / The Life and Glory of his High Estate" (ll. 37-8). Traherne thus constructs an ideal subject-speaker who consciously values, or "prizes" a life lived in divine imitation. Once this choice is made, the speaker is able to fully articulate his experience of divine love:

All Spirit, Life and Power,  
All Lov and Joy, in his Eternal Bower.  
A World of Innocence as then was mine,  
In which the Joys of Paradice did shine  
And while I was not here I was in Heaven,  
Not resting one, but evry Day in Seven. (ll. 45-50)

In this explanation, Traherne's speaker moves beyond simple imitation of the divine: he expresses union. To describe himself as experiencing not only the joys of Eden, but also being with the divine Other in "his Eternal Bower" suggests incredible intimacy. This intimacy is enabled by the security of a space protected from all forms of sin and sinfulness, as the speaker makes clear in his assertion that "No other Customs, New-found Wants, or Dreams / Invented here polluted my pure Streams" (ll. 55-6). The speaker's anxiety over pollution, or a corruption that might open the speaker to unwanted impurities, is evidenced further in his final assertion before entering the bower: "There's

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<sup>85</sup> For more on economic language and imagery in Traherne's canon, see David Hawkes, "Thomas Traherne: A Critique of Political Economy," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 62:3-4 (1999): 369-88. See also Denise Inge, *Wanting like A God: Desire and Freedom in Thomas Traherne* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 110-23.

no Contagion here” (l. 60). Traherne’s angst over spiritual contagion, and his adamant pronouncement that his streams are not polluted, offers a suggestive reading of a bower in which joy and love can be fully experienced. Traherne’s bower is meant to be wholly spiritual, but the language is altogether corporeal, betraying apprehension over the state of the body in a realm defined entirely by desire.

To counter the concern that sexual desire might supplant spiritual desire, Traherne’s speaker issues the following pronouncement: “An unperceived Donor gave all Pleasures, / There nothing was but I, and all my Treasures” (ll. 61-2). The closed recess of a bower populated solely by pleasure is reminiscent of the sensual delights offered in Spenser’s Bower of Bliss, but this potentially carnal association is quickly abandoned as Traherne’s speaker clarifies the nature of the pleasures offered within:

The Union was so Strait between them two,  
That all was eithers which my Soul could view.  
His Gifts, and my Possessions, both our Treasures;  
He mine, and I the Ocean of his Pleasures.  
He was an Ocean of Delights from Whom  
The Living Springs and Golden Streams did com:  
My Bosom was an Ocean into which  
They all did run. And me they did enrich. (ll. 67-74)

The union that takes place is thus figured as deeply reciprocal, where the divine is so “other” to Traherne’s speaker that he can only be articulated as an “unperceived donor” who brings gifts and also receives the speaker’s bountiful treasures. Although each party is intensely different than the other, they are each enriched by the mutual flow of gifts between the two. Their union is both joyful and sensual, an emulation of the erotic blazons in Song of Solomon, particularly the passages that describe the beloved as both unspotted (Song of Solomon 4:7) and also as a pure spring discharging clear streams (Song of Solomon 4:12).

Traherne desires to see himself as the ideal object of desire portrayed in Song of Solomon, but his erotically charged rendering of the private interior space within the bower moves toward a violation of the very bodily boundaries he has so anxiously constructed. This violation of the body's borders comes in the overtly sexual expression of their union as undulating waves of pleasure that enrich the speaker by exceeding and overwhelming his physical boundaries—the gift that Traherne's divine Other brings into the bower is a *jouissance* so excessive it dissolves the speaker's body. In the same vein as some of Crashaw's most controversial baroque imagery, both the speaker and his beloved Other are reduced to liquid. As their spirits intermingle in what appears to be a procreative process of unification they become "Ocean[s] of Delight" to each other, and the speaker's bosom brims over with "Living and Golden Streams."<sup>86</sup> The result of this consanguinity is the perception of "A vast and Infinit Capacitie" (l. 75) that makes the speaker's bosom "like the Deitie" (l. 76). The union between speaker and the previously unperceived donor is far removed from the physical coupling Traherne's eroticism gestures toward. His newborn perception of personal and unmediated access to the divine derives specifically from the speaker's liquefaction and the disintegration of bodily boundaries. This wholly spiritual imaging removes the threat of external penetration and contagion precisely because the highly pleasurable interrelation between donor and speaker is anything but the result of an externally penetrating agent. As his body becomes more and more difficult to perceive as his own matter, the speaker becomes increasingly capable of perceiving the divine as a type of mnemonic residue that

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<sup>86</sup> This imagery also appears to draw from Song of Solomon 4, wherein the beloved is described as "a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon" (4:15).

has always been imprinted within his bosom—Traherne’s subject-speaker thus comes to recognize an all-encompassing but un-invasive Other who has always been present within himself.

Given this transitivity across physical boundaries, the speaker’s self-perception shifts entirely away from external forms at the close of “Silence.” This becomes clear when he asserts: “For so my spirit was an Endless Sphere, / Like God himself, and Heaven and Earth was there” (ll. 85-6). Like the divine Other whom he now fully perceives, the speaker comes to recognize himself as boundless, which in turn reinforces the Other’s desire for the speaker, who has himself become an ideal subject worthy of being prized. Through the speaker’s newfound recognition of the Other within himself, the physical, earthly body has been renovated into celestial flesh, but this does not mean Traherne abandons the body or simply renders it an empty vessel for the divine spirit to fill. Traherne’s object is to fashion a speaker who is capable of not only identifying otherness within himself, but also attuning his desire toward this present Other in an effort to experience a sense of felicitous union. Figuring himself as an “Endless Sphere” enables just such an attunement as the speaker imagines himself a body of polyphonous love with no beginning or end, but circling back to a divine Other who takes as much pleasure in him as He gives.

This self-conception is just that—self-conceiving. The union between the self and newly perceived but always present Other is generative in that the “conception” produces a deeply felt perception of a self-in-relation-to-Other that takes place wholly within the self. In this regard, the liquescent and procreant union that occurs inside Traherne’s enclosed bower is reminiscent of yet another internalized, fecund, and liquid landscape:

the womb. Throughout his devotional verse Traherne gestures to the female womb frequently, and consistently represents the womb as a desirably generative space. In “The Return,” for example, Traherne’s subject-speaker not only announces, “My early Tutor is the Womb: / I still my Cradle lov” (ll. 3-4), but also passionately “Perceiv[es] it safest to abide / An Infant still; and therefore fly/ [...] to the Womb, / That I may yet New-born becom” (ll. 9-10, 12-14).<sup>87</sup> In these representations, the womb presents a metaphoric space where the speaker can access not only the particular security available to unborn infants but also the purity available to those yet to be tainted with original sin or the temptations of the fallen world.

In this sense, the womb functions as the apogee of Traherne’s desire for prelapsarian purity, but womb imagery also explains his subject-speaker’s most basic expectation for his soul. For example, in “The Estate” Traherne’s subject-speaker ponders:

Shall I becom  
Within my self a Living Tomb  
Of useless Wonders? Shall the fair, and brave,  
And great Endowments of my Soul lie Waste;  
Which ought to be a Fountain and a Womb  
Of Praises unto Thee? (ll. 5-10)

The outcome of such an inquiry is a profound emphasis on both productivity and usefulness as key components to the speaker’s conception of self. With the soul figured as either a tomb filled with useless wonder or a womb actively producing divine praise, it is obvious which option the speaker finds most desirable. If the object of the speaker’s desire is an intimate union with the divine Other, the comparison between a womb and a tomb makes it quite clear that Traherne’s speaker must be useful; he must render himself

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<sup>87</sup> “The Return” appears in the Burney MS, but not in the Dobell MS.



productive. It is in this representation that Traherne's gender transitivity truly finds form. Rather than figuring the womb as a purely enclosed and private space removed from the penetrating eyes of the world, and thus a safe space for his speaker to craft subjectivity and selfhood, Traherne links the activity of a flowing fountain and a womb that nourishes and incubates that which is within. The weight of this passage is thus on the importance of the internal being made external, a movement outward rather than a retreat within. In contrast, the "Living Tomb" is described with a resoundingly negative adjective: it is "useless" precisely because what is contained within cannot flow outward; it is self-contained and sealed off.

This isolation points to the very state Traherne so adamantly desired in his poems "Dumnesse" and "Silence," but this depiction of isolation and containment appears entirely pejorative. If, as Susannah Mintz notes, Traherne is interested in "demarcate[ing] the boundaries of the normal body" (Mintz 18), he must attend to the fact that a "normal" body cannot ever be fully sealed—it must be penetrable and it must be productive. The womb is an ideal image for such an argument as its inscrutability renders it an apt metaphorical space to craft and secure an otherwise vulnerable and unstable subjectivity, but it is also a bodily organ whose "normal" function is to expel and make visible that which it once concealed. Pointing to the metaphoric linkage between the womb and the enclosed gardens, little rooms, and prison cells favored by male poets like Carew, Donne, and Lovelace, Katherine Eisaman Maus asserts:

the appeal of the woman's body, then, for a man who wants a subjective refuge, seems to be the way it is closed in upon itself, the way her interior is protected by opaque bodily perimeters. At the same time, as an emblem of a "closed" subjectivity the female body is defective insofar as it is penetrable, insofar as it is, in fact, a sort of paradigm of penetrability. (*Inwardness* 193)

Insofar as the female body's penetrability renders it "defective" in the construction of a securely fashioned masculine subjectivity, this self-same "deficiency" renders it a deeply effective image in Traherne's construction of the lack required to inspire the divine desire that ultimately leads to union. It is thus in Traherne's celebration of the womb's duality, its interiority and also external production, that Traherne's deployment of womb imagery resonates in a distinctly different fashion than the appropriation of female physiology Maus identifies in so many of Traherne's male peers. Rather than simply supporting an assertion of masculine authority over the inscrutable female body, in Traherne's depiction, the womb's numinous and shadowy recesses are just as important as its effluxive habit of making the unknown known. Just as Traherne celebrates the eyes' dual capacity for emanation and reception, his depiction of the womb as paradoxically penetrable yet secure engenders his subject-speaker with admiration for a body that is both and neither, alien and familiar, and in this duality very much like the divine.

For Traherne then, the image of an actively generative womb that both reveals and conceals underscores the importance of a productive union between the speaker and the divine Other in the process of self-conception. The womb is neither a passive nor impotent image; Traherne's correlation between a productive womb and an active, pure, secure soul relies upon the complex physical union between mother and unborn child and the speaker's recognition of union with a distinctly present but different Other within himself. The collective force of Traherne's womb imagery thus seems to offer the very type of "gender disorientation" which Katherine Eiasaman Maus identifies as an effect of early modern male poet's troping the internalized, productive, and penetrable female body ("A Womb of His Own" 275). However, Traherne's affective and erotically

charged metaphoric of divine-human union occludes the sensual, and sexed, body in favor of a subject-speaker who positions himself across the binary of male/female. Whether it is expressed as a desire to return to the security of an unborn infant within the womb, to experience the sensuous pleasures within the womblike space of the bower, or to revel in the undeniable productivity of the womb as it transmits interior knowledge to the exterior world, Traherne's desire to identify sacred otherness within himself shatters the "natural" binaries of presence/lack, self/Other, external/internal, and male/female that both desire and devotional subjectivity have so frequently been framed upon.

### **To See the Other as the Mother**

Feminine states like pregnancy and feminine spaces like the womb work in consort with tropes on sightedness to form the foundation upon which divine-human relations are fashioned within Traherne's poetic. Traherne's interest in the enigmatic recesses of the womb and his depiction of wombs as safe and secure havens of spiritual and physical connectivity echo his representation of eyes as the vehicles by which his subject-speaker seeks and discovers subjectivity and selfhood in direct relation to a divine Other.<sup>88</sup> Such a figuration demonstrates Traherne's investment in blurring gender boundaries in order to articulate a relationship with the divine Other that is at once grounded in the lack necessary to generate true desire but also attuned to constructing an Other who is

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<sup>88</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, early modern theories of conception and sight intersect in their gendering of the organs and physiological material involved in both seeing and conceiving as either active or passive, but their overlap can be seen even more clearly in the commonly held opinion that an infant would take on the shape of whatever object was in the mother's line of vision at the moment of conception. This theory follows the intromission model, as it figures the mother's eyes as being just as penetrable as her body, and in both respects figures the woman as *the* passage agent in the procreative acts of both sight and sex.

accessible enough that the experience of lack registers as inspirational rather than disheartening. There is perhaps no better example of this stratagem than Traherne's representation of the Virgin Mary, a figure closely connected with Christ's metaphoric hermaphroditism.<sup>89</sup> Just as Christ occupies a liminal status between human and divine, Mary's complex, and paradoxical, representation in Catholic and Protestant traditions as perpetual Virgin but also Mother and Bride to Christ epitomizes the union of contraries attached to Christ himself. Mary's role in providing Christ's humanity positions her in a place of otherwise unparalleled intimacy with the divine. As such, Mary provides Traherne with a potent image of binary-breaking divine-human relations precisely because she has an altogether unique and undeniable access to the very divine otherness Traherne's speaker so desperately desires.

Traherne's depiction of Mary in Part II of "The Inference" actively invites readers to look across contemporary gender constructs and gendered modes of writing to reorient their sight toward a divine Other within the self.<sup>90</sup> The poem is divided into two sections, with the first focused on the speaker's progression from concerning himself with "Things" to more correctly attuning his attention to "Thoughts."<sup>91</sup> In this setup, the speaker implicitly compels himself to turn inward and "see" with his mind's eye rather

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<sup>89</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Jesus-Mary hermaphrodite, see Leah DeVun's study of alchemical treatises tracing the usage of religious language to describe the philosopher's stone and alchemical practices: "The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69:2 (2008): 193-218.

<sup>90</sup> "The Inference" is included in the Burney MS, but does not appear in the Dobell MS.

<sup>91</sup> Barbara Lewalski describes this progression as a movement "from the infant's delight in and possession of all God's works to the man's intellectual comprehension of his nature and privileges" (359).

than allowing physical sights and physical temptations to cloud his judgment. In an attempt to distinguish between the two, and reorient his sight appropriately, the speaker declares: "...Thoughts the Sense / Affect and touch. Nay, when a Thing is near / It can't affect but as it doth appear" (1.18-20). This description echoes the ocular theories of extramission and intromission insofar as the speaker finds himself always affected by "Thoughts" that radiate outward but is still anxious over how "Things" penetrate the mind and body once they are perceived. However, as Barbara Lewalski argues, Traherne's commitment to attune himself to "Thoughts" rather than "Things" reveals a desire to progress "from the infant's delight in and possession of all God's works to the man's intellectual comprehension of his nature and privileges" (359). As a result of this desire, Traherne's subject-speaker ties his sense of selfhood not only to "Thoughts," but also to the duality at the heart of the ocular theories undergirding his eye/I construction of subjectivity. The speaker thus focuses on the effects his thoughts will generate:

Since then by Thoughts I only see;  
 Since Thought alone affecteth me;  
 Since these are Reall things when shewn;  
 And since as Things are known  
 Or thought, they pleas or kill: What Care ought I  
 (Since Thoughts apply  
 Things to my Mind) those Thoughts aright  
 To frame, and watch them day and night;  
 Suppressing such as will my Conscience stain,  
 That *Hevn'ly Thoughts* me *hev'nly Things* may gain.  
 (1.21- 30, original emphasis)

His thoughts may be internalized and appear entirely spiritual, but the speaker's focus on their productivity confirms both the activity of the speaker's mind and also the fact that his mind is correctly oriented toward heaven. Within this articulation of the mind's orientation is a surprising refusal to abandon "Things" entirely. Instead, Traherne's

speaker declares that his thoughts enable proper sight of the “few Things alone” that “griev my Soul, or gratify my Mind, / Which I do find / Within” (1.34-7). It seems Traherne’s speaker cannot fully disconnect “Things” from “Thoughts” because both prove pathways to knowledge of the self as transitive, dual even. Just as “Thoughts” are initially introduced in “The Inference” as “inward Balms or Spears; / The living Joys, or Griefs and Fears; / The Light, or els the Fire” (1.11-13), “Things” too appear dual in that they exist internally as well as externally and may also bring either joy or grief, depending on one’s orientation toward them. For Traherne’s speaker, things and thoughts are not mutually exclusive, and as a result, the speaker wonders: “How many Thousands see the Sky, / The Sun and Moon, as well as I?” (1.51-2). His is a question of sight. He wonders if he really does perceive what he ought to: is his sight properly oriented toward God, and if so, what might it mean that his experience of both “Thoughts” and “Things” proves so difficult to distinguish.

When the speaker thinks of himself in binary modes, as either joyous or grieving, he seems at odds with both his thoughts and the things around him. He locates himself in a middle ground between these states as he asks, “How many more that view the Seas, / Feel neither Joy nor Eas?” (1.53-4). Traherne’s subject-speaker appears isolated in his singular perception of the divine, and as a result, his properly oriented sight that embraces his and the Other’s duality produces apostrophic exclamations celebrating his discernment of a divine Otherness imbuing both things and thoughts with a wonder that inspires desire through and acknowledgment of what he lacks. Traherne writes:

Let all my Thoughts be fixt upon His Throne;  
And Him alone  
For all His gracious Gifts admire,  
Him only with my soul desire:

Or griev for Sin. That with du Sense, the Pleasure  
I may possess of His Eternal Treasure. (1.55-60)

These lines conclude Part I of “The Inference,” and in keeping with the section’s theme, Traherne’s emphasis lies firmly on the progress from “Things to Thoughts” and how this progress is accommodated exclusively by the senses. In his entreaty to desire God more than His gifts, Traherne acknowledges his own inability to separate fully from a world so full of beautiful things made by God’s own hand. Instead of fully retreating from things, Traherne cleverly reorients his speaker’s desire to focus solely on God while also enabling him to admire the earthly treasures available to those “with du Sense” to perceive such divine gifts. Traherne’s thoughts thus appear transitive: they are focused on God alone, but are still able to account for the things around him that prove God’s absolute Otherness. As it was with Traherne’s celebration of the womb’s ability to both secure the internal while also making that which is contained available to the external world, Traherne’s progress from “Things to Thoughts” reveals an interest in crafting a subject-speaker who can truly see the flux between things and thoughts, the internal and the external, and in doing so come to union with the divine.

Given Traherne’s interest in this interplay, it should come as no great surprise to find the Virgin Mary at the heart of his argument about the relation between the otherwise binary constructions of things/thoughts, external/internal, male/female, and divine/human. At the outset of Part II, however, Traherne once again relies on typology to demarcate his speaker’s right thoughts about the relation between himself and the divine Other. In this instance, Traherne styles his subject-speaker in relation to David, a biblical figure who “a Temple in his Mind *conceiv’d*; / And that Intention was so well receiv’d / By God, that all the Sacred Palaces / That ever were did less His Glory pleas”

(2.1-4, emphasis added). Traherne's admiration for David's ability to construct an interior palace hallmarked by enviable intimacy with the divine registers in the speaker's subsequent reflection:

If Thoughts are such; such Valuable Things;  
Such reall Goods; such human Cherubins;  
Material Delights; transcendent Objects; Ends  
Of all God's Works, which most His Ey intends. (2.5-8)

Traherne thus claims that rightly oriented thoughts are productive: they produce material delights as valuable as the thoughts that produce them. These material delights, or "Valuable Things" as it were, invite humans into the realm of the transcendent, and our experience of them is pleasing to God's eye precisely because God created them to be enjoyed. In this formulation, if we desire God to look on us with pleasure, our thoughts must be oriented toward Him in such a way that we see Him in all of His works: everything resonates as a "transcendent Object" because there is transcendence in every object. This mindset encourages Traherne to launch into a full-fledged celebration of humanity precisely because man is capable of producing "such Thoughts...So excellent in Nature, Valu, Use" (2.9-10). Devout men's hearts, Traherne asserts, "conceiv" (2.14) a limitless number of such thoughts, and are thus "Seed-plots of activ Piety" (2.17). These thoughts, which orient men's sight to properly interpret the material world, "He values more / Than the Material World He made before" (2.17-18). In this construction, Traherne finally comes to celebrate his position as the singular object of God's gaze, the first in His sight.

However, Traherne's recognition of the Other's desire for him is also presented as a celebration of the mind's creative powers, an image that is reinforced by the language of conception surrounding Traherne's right thoughts and delightful things. This language



is bolstered by yet another typological linkage that both solidifies and complicates the speaker's position as an individual both desiring and desired of God. Reflecting upon the activity of the devout, and ostensibly male, minds capable of conceiving such thoughts, Traherne shifts our attention from David's internally conceived Temple to "the Blessed-Virgin-Mother / Of God's own Son, (rather than any other)" (2.19-21). The intended comparison between David and Mary comes to bear in Traherne's efforts to draw our attention to Mary's doubleness: she is both virgin and mother, a fact reinforced by the parenthetical which reminds readers of her singular position in this respect. David's inwardly conceived temple is thus juxtaposed against Mary's inward conceptions, which are plural in nature. Through the mystery of the Immaculate Conception Mary conceives Christ, but it is her internal conceptions, or thoughts, to which she

Apply'd her Mind; for, of her pious Care  
To treasure up those Truths which she did hear  
Concerning Christ, in thoughtful Heart, w're told;  
But not that e'r with Offerings of Gold  
The Temple she enrich. (2.22-6)

In his representation of Mary's internal and maternal conceptions, Traherne highlights her duality. She is, like David, able to construct an interior space in her mind that God prefers above all others, but Mary's body houses more than a mental seed plot from which her piety springs forth. Mary's body is undeniably generative, and following the metaphorical linkage between the male poet's creative mind and the creative capability of the female womb, Mary's mind is imbued with a creative force equal to that of her womb. As a result of this incredible power, a power that seems to cross gendered constructions of creativity, authorship, and interiority, Mary experiences the very material delight and transcendent objects Traherne's speaker so joyfully celebrated as the

outcome of his properly attuned thoughts. Traherne's invocation of Mary solidifies that the "conception" Traherne speaks of is meant to be read as both physical and spiritual: Mary's thoughts render her body and her mind a "seed-plot of activ piety," the result of which is an unparalleled physical intimacy with the divine Other in the form of Christ.

Mary's divine conception thus positions her within the scope of the hermaphroditic. She carries a child that is part of her flesh and yet not of the flesh; she carries divinity within her, but she is not divine herself; she is both and neither. As such, Mary's body, like Christ's body, functions as a simultaneously symbolic and fleshly door by which men might reorient their thoughts and gain spiritual rebirth and renewal. Mary's conceptions, both somatic and spiritual, serve as an amplification of Gary Kuchar's assertion that the body functions as a sacred hymen in Traherne's poetic representation precisely because Mary's body enables a view of the self that is both rightly attuned to internal thoughts but also capable of externalizing that which is produced within. Mary's mental and physical aptitude for faith provides a provocative type for Traherne to celebrate the relationship between thoughts and things insofar as her properly attuned mind results in such visible and even visceral evidence of right thinking. When Mary conceives of the divine, she makes meaning within her body; rather than moving from "Things to Thoughts," Mary's rightly oriented thoughts produce the divinest things: Christ. Mary's example thus serves to highlight the interplay between things and thoughts much more than it suggests a linear movement transitioning fully from one to the other. Once "This understood," writes Traherne, "How glorious, how divine, how great, how good / May we becom!" (2.25-7). Mary's paradoxical penetrability and purity is thus celebrated as the means by which all of mankind might

fashion intimate union with the divine and become “like the Deity / In managing our Thoughts aright!” (2.27-8). Mary proves a powerful and evocative image of spiritual union because we see, as a result of her spiritual aptitude for God, a bodily proximity to Christ, but what looms just as large in our envisioning of Mary is her dissimilitude to the Other, because she is like us. She is both and neither, and in this state, Mary experiences the self-same lack that drives our desire to see and know the body of the Other, even if it is already present within both she and us.

In his construction of the productive body as the means by which the self might come to view itself as an object of God’s desiring gaze, Traherne ultimately fashions a subject-speaker who comes to view himself as participating in an *imago dei* relationship. In such a relationship, Traherne’s subject-speaker turns his penetrating eyes inward, upon himself, to become the Pauline speculum enigmatically reflecting back the presence of an alien Other. In “The Odour,” for example, Traherne commands: “thy self enjoy and see: / At once the Mirror and the Object be” (ll. 53-4).<sup>92</sup> It is an assertion of interiority and also a call to self-examination, but through the evocative image of the mirror it is also an honest directive to identify the self’s duality, its otherness. Looking into a mirror provides access to a self that is, like Christ, Mary, and even Adam, foreign and familiar, yet highly accessible. Through this lens, and the gendered and bodily boundaries embedded within the contemporary ocular theories Traherne relies upon to shape his speaker’s subjectivity (*eye/I*), Traherne is able to fashion a subject-speaker who sees himself in the *imago dei* relationship as “both like God and, not being God, unlike God” (Nolan 5). In this relationship Traherne’s subject-speaker finds the lack that generates a

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<sup>92</sup> “The Odour” appears in the Burney MS, but not the Dobell MS.

desire for intimate union with a divine Other who is accessible, present, and available to him because of the transitive natures they share.

Ultimately, then, Traherne's careful interrelation between eyes, wombs, and mirrors all work to craft a poetic space wherein his subject-speaker might come to know himself through the prosthetic possibilities of his devotional verse. Rather than retreating inward and entirely away from the body, Traherne persistently draws our attention to the space between the postlapsarian self he sees and experiences and the self he wishes God to see. Insofar as Traherne focuses on the ideal self through his eye/I formulation, and particularly in his indistinction between experiencing and mirroring back God's agapic love, Traherne's subject-speaker transverses the gap between his own postlapsarian condition and a divine Other who is not so distant as to be beyond desire. In the space between the body and belief, Traherne fashions a devotional text with what seems the sole purpose of refiguring the self as mutable, transitive, both part of the divine and not. In Traherne's felicitous rendering of the body as a vehicle toward rather than a hurdle occluding authentic intimacy with the divine Other, his devotional verse comes to function as a type of spiritual prostheses, an extension of his body that both aids in the process of identifying the abilities of his soul and even enhances his soul's ability to transverse the space between the body and belief. In this vein, Traherne's figuration of the body reads quite distinctly from An Collins's rendering of a body plagued with anxiety-inducing otherness.

The devotional verse of Thomas Traherne, and also Richard Crashaw, as I will demonstrate in the coming chapter, productively stages the experience of otherness as a necessary tool in the generation and maintenance of a divine desire that cannot be

separated from the body. As such, it becomes apparent that unlike An Collins, whose very real experience of otherness and lack prove so overwhelming that they preclude expressions or sensations of divine union, Traherne and Crashaw each seek not only to maintain “want” or “lack” to generate desire for the divine, but they build it into the body. Writing from the privileged position of able-bodied men, both Traherne and Crashaw celebrate the body’s duality as their devotional speakers and subjects bound to and fro across gendered lines and in doing so come to know themselves in relation to a divine Other who is both present and accessible, like but unlike them.

### CHAPTER 3

#### WHO'S HOT FOR CRASHAW?: GENDER ILLITERACY, INTERSUBJECTIVITY, AND THE IDEAL READER IN "THE FLAMING HEART"

The tender pragmatism of flesh has poetries no enigma—human or divine—can diminish or demean. Indeed, it can only cause them, and then walk out.

—John Fowles<sup>93</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, Edmund Gosse declared Crashaw's description of Mary Magdalene's eyes as "Two walking baths; two weeping motions; / Portable, & compendious oceans" in "The Weeper" as not only "the worst lines in Crashaw" but also "perhaps the worst lines in all English poetry."<sup>94</sup> In the excoriating criticism initiated by Gosse, Crashaw's style has variously been derided for its "over-ripeness" and "hysterical intensity," the "repulsive succulence" of his imagery, and the "cheap glitter of his diction."<sup>95</sup> In fact, one can hardly speak of Crashaw without some reference to his checkered critical reception, a reception that has proven quite as excessive as Crashaw's verse itself.<sup>96</sup> It has thus become an unfortunate commonplace in

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<sup>93</sup> *The Ebony Tower* (New York: Little Brown, 1974), 244.

<sup>94</sup> Edmund Gosse, "Richard Crashaw," *Seventeenth Century Studies* (London: William Heinemann, 1914), 174. However, Gosse's chapter on Crashaw is reprinted from *Cornhill Magazine* 47 (1883): 424-38.

<sup>95</sup> For "over-ripeness" see: Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 147. For "hysterical intensity" see Gosse, "Richard Crashaw," 157. For "repulsive succulence" see John M. Wallace, rev. of *The Wit of Love: Donne, Carew, Crashaw, Marvell*, by Louis Martz, *Renaissance Quarterly* 24.2 (1971), 282. For "cheap glitter" see Percy H. Osmond, "Crashaw and Beaumont," in *The Mystical Poets of the English Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 125.

<sup>96</sup> In his survey chapter on Crashaw in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993): 244-55,

Crashavian criticism to note the frequency with which Richard Crashaw's poetry has been the subject of critical lambast directed almost exclusively at his sacramental imagery.

Crashaw and his offensive excess, his often disturbing blending of bodies, blood, milk, and tears, has been described as evidence of his "feminine engendered faith," a claim that has typically tied Crashaw's verse to the Roman Catholicism he converted to sometime between 1644 and 1645.<sup>97</sup> Despite the fact that Crashaw composed most of his poetry well before his eventual conversion to Roman Catholicism, the pairing of his ultimate confessional alignment with his penchant for imaging the affective and mystical unions at play between a divine Other and holy women, namely Saint Teresa, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary, have marked both the poet and his poetry with the label of "alien" and "other" in its apparent departure from the masculine devotional voice critics have come to associate with contemporary English poetics.<sup>98</sup> In his introduction

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Anthony Low notes that Crashaw's poetry has been attacked as "among other things, neurotic, perverted, feminine, infantile, 'foreign', extravagant, tasteless, Catholic, and even cannibalistic. Some central quality in his poetry has consistently outraged critical tempers, inspiring otherwise moderate writers to reach for their purplest prose" (242).

<sup>97</sup> The phrase derives from Maureen Sabine, *Feminine Engendered Faith: John Donne and Richard Crashaw* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>98</sup> Crashaw's 1970 editor George Walton Williams describes him as "the most un-English of all the English poets," and even Williams' praise of Crashaw as "the leading English representative" of the Baroque style is couched in the disparaging caveat that the Baroque is "fundamentally foreign to the spirit of English poetry": *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970), xv, xxii. Likewise, and in direct contrast to John Donne's central voice in seventeenth-century English verse, Janel Mueller describes Crashaw as an "eccentric, marginal figure...an idiosyncratic extreme in the adoption of Continental modes of sensibility": "Women among the Metaphysicals: A Case, Mostly, of Being Donne For," *Modern Philology* 87 (1989), 144. Such marginalization of Crashaw in comparison to the most acclaimed voices of English metaphysical poetry draws largely from Barbara Kiefer Lewalski's influential study *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J.:

to the most recent critical edition of Crashaw's collected works, Richard Rambuss keenly notes, "Since the mid-nineteenth century, critics have taken Crashaw's Catholic conversion not only as his life's signal event (which it probably is) but also as the explanatory context for his work's every mannerism (which it is not)" (xviii). Crashaw's checkered critical heritage, his labeling as neither English nor masculine, thus appears a direct result of his eventual Roman Catholicism, a conversion which facilitates Crashaw's apparent "bad taste" in both religion and aesthetics" (Murray 105). More recently, however, Crashaw's excess, as well as his "female-centered sacramental vision" (Kuchar 93), has been associated with the Eucharistic theology and Laudian devotional practices that Puritan divines critiqued as both highly feminine and Roman Catholic in origin. This critical turn to more fully incorporate Crashaw within the High Anglicanism of the English church, and thus diminish, if not eradicate his alien status prompts, I think, a reassessment of not only how "other" Crashaw and his verse may be to contemporary English devotional poets, but also how Crashaw's verse disturbs our fixed notions of "normal" representations of devotional subjectivity in the early modern period. This chapter will thus attempt to redress Crashaw's critical othering by demonstrating how his "feminine engendered faith" compels readers to engage in a type of devotional spectatorship that ties subjectivity not only to the body of the believer, but also to the relation between the self and an Other who is immanently present within the devotional work of reading and writing poetry. This relational mode becomes apparent in Crashaw's frequent gestures toward embodied modes of reading and receiving his verse that

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Princeton UP, 1979), wherein Lewalski identifies Crashaw's verse as emerging "out of a very different aesthetics emanating from Trent and the continental Counter Reformation" (12).



correlate closely with the liturgical literacy at the heart of medieval Catholicism, but largely associated with women religious. Ultimately, I will argue that the most extreme sacramental moments within Richard Crashaw's verse work to develop a subjectivity that is anything but stable; rather, it is always fluxing between the text itself, the reader, and the sacred affect at work in both. Thus, the subjectivity cultivated in Crashaw's verse is far from the type of selfhood critics have come to expect from the "self-fashioning" poetics of the early modern era in that it moves well beyond the bounds of the self.

Rather than seeking to secure and stabilize the borders of the individual self, Crashaw reveals an incredible commitment to destabilizing the very bounds that we have seen An Collins and Thomas Traherne so adamantly attempt to construct and maintain in their verse. Instead of imaging the body as a tightly sealed container, closed to sin, Crashaw's often female or feminized sacramental subjects jubilantly intermingle with each other, Crashaw's speaker, and even the reader. If Crashaw is a poet of liquefaction, wherein the tears, milk, blood, and water that flows between his sacred subjects have been condemned as the most far-fetched of all his metaphysical conceits, this chapter will interrogate how those sacramental moments produce scenes of devotional spectatorship that both engage and also stress the transposition between liturgical and grammatical literacies, male and female gender categories, self and other. Ultimately, I will argue that Crashaw's sacramental vision is grounded in fashioning a self-in-relation, an intersubjective self wholly reliant on the generation of empathy and affect in not only Crashaw's sacred subjects but also his readers. Crashaw's careful attention to the somatic marking of empathy between the subjects of his verse and also its readers thus imagines the body as anything but ancillary to the spiritual work of salvation. Instead, in

Crashaw's excessive and empathic blurring of both bodily and gendered boundaries, his verse becomes the vehicle by which "we come to experience our bodies as objects belonging to an intersubjective world" (Teske 779).<sup>99</sup> Ultimately, then, entering the often-liquid landscapes of Crashaw's most provocative verse encourages readers to become conscious of their own "somatic marking," and thus initiate the kenotic process that ties our experience of consciousness to the bodily sensations of encountering a divine Other. The result of this newfound consciousness and interrelation between reading, seeing, feeling, and believing is an ideal reader who comes into being through the triangulated relation between Crashaw's subject-speaker, his devotional subject, and themselves.

### **Learning Our Literacies: Gender, Affect, and Right Reading**

A great deal has been written of Richard Crashaw's devotion to holy women and the affective traditions of the late medieval Roman Catholic Church that inspired women like Teresa of Avila to express her sense of union with the divine so emotively.<sup>100</sup> The

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<sup>99</sup> J. A. Teske, "From Embodied to Extended Cognition," *Zygon: Journal of Science and Religion* 48 (2013): 759–787.

<sup>100</sup> Happily, the pejorative association of Crashaw's work as "feminine" has also begun to lose critical steam: see Molly Murray, "Richard Crashaw and the Gender of Conversion," in *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 105-137; Gary Kuchar, "The Gendering of God and the Advent of the Subject in the Poetry of Richard Crashaw," in *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Duquesne: Duquesne UP, 2005), 93-149; Maurine Sabine, *Feminine Engendered Faith: The Poetry of John Donne and Richard Crashaw* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); Eugene Cunnar, "Crashaw's 'Sancta Maria Dolorum,' Controversy and Coherence" in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. J.R. Roberts (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1990), 80-98; Mueller, "Women among the Metaphysicals"; Paul A. Parrish, "The Feminizing of Power: Crashaw's Life and Art," in *"The Muses Common-Weale": Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth*

affective devotional practices developed in late medieval England equipped both lay and elite with the steadfast belief that devotion was both a doing and a feeling thing, and this sense of interplay between the earnest commitment to right devotion and the sensations of godly affect brought about through that devotional work was not lost with the Reformation. Occupying an ambiguous position in seventeenth-century moral philosophy, the passions were both great devotional aids but also great hurdles in their responsiveness to outward objects and ideas: desirable passions, such as godly affect, could be generated and directed through prayer and meditation practices which could also diminish undesired passions. The work of devotion, then, takes place on and within a passionate and desiring body that requires hyperbolic expressions of faith to at once engender godly affect and also sustain it long enough to stir the self toward real remorse and repentance in the face of our less than divine affections. “Heightened rhetoric,” according to Kate Narveson in her study of early modern prayer books, “was the answer to the deadness the believer experienced daily. What is expressed in meditation and prayer is not direct experience but rather an intentionally exaggerated and vivid self-imagining along lines set out by the theological discourse of spiritual psychology, calculated to ignite and shape affective experience” (“Profession” 128). In Roman Catholicism the fashioning of such affective experiences was accommodated by both a liturgical service and ritual piety practices attuned to sensory engagement that encouraged the type of “sacramental seeing” Bob Scribner describes as “a visual

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*Century*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1988), 148-62; Parrish, “‘O Sweet Contest’: Gender and Value in ‘The Weeper,’” in Roberts (ed.), *Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, 127-39; and Sandra K. Fischer, “Crashaw, Ste. Teresa, and the Icon of Mystical Ravishment,” *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 4 (1983): 176-89.

experience and a pious action . . . essentially a form of the gaze, prolonged, contemplative encounter with the holy figure represented” (461). This mode of seeing and believing supports Eamon Duffy’s description of late medieval religious culture as one which “responded vividly and immediately to the visual.”<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, late medieval devotion meant much more than the ability to read scripture; it required the ability to engage in a “sacramental seeing” that manifested in the body through the production of godly affect.

Katherine Zieman’s nuanced exploration of gender and literacy in late medieval England speaks to the prominence of this mode of sacramental seeing, as she identifies two vying literacy practices at play in late medieval devotional culture: liturgical literacy and grammatical literacy. Zieman distinguishes these interpretive and meaning-making modes by suggesting that largely illiterate laypeople might be denied access to grammatical literacy but had unmediated access to liturgical performance, which could “draw upon a number of learned abilities” and thus become a site for exploring the “ambiguous relationship between skill and performance, and between performance and understanding.”<sup>102</sup> Zieman’s ultimate argumentative thrust contends that for the liturgically but not grammatically literate “meaning is perceived in the body, not in the mind” (101). This particular variety of literacy was most frequently associated with

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<sup>101</sup> Eamon Duffy, “Late Medieval Religion,” in *Gothic Art for England, 1400-1547*, eds. Richard Marks and Raul Williamson (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 56-67 (65).

<sup>102</sup> Katherine Zieman, “Reading, Singing and Understanding: Constructions of the Literacy of Women Religious in Late Medieval England,” in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 97-120 (106). Zieman defines literacy as such: “not a unitary or uniform activity, nor does it have meaning outside of the social formations that determine how written texts might function within them” (97).

women religious. As a result, liturgical literacy became a contested space where a highly educated and Latinate priesthood concerned over the potential for false claims of revelation began a campaign to adjoin spiritual Truth with grammatical competency (Zieman 110). This linkage between grammatical literacy, or learnedness, and spiritual authority extends from the Roman Catholicism of the late medieval period to the thoroughly Protestant landscape of post-Reformation England where a highly educated professional clergy/prelacy grounded their access to the divine and their right to preach in the demonstrated performance of grammatical literacy. What is more, the increased popularity of sermons and sermon-hearing in the seventeenth century as a form of popular worship also did much to generate a culture of religiosity wherein grammatical literacy was deemed paramount for salvation.<sup>103</sup> The linkage between performance of grammatical literacy, either in the form of private godly reading or public participation in its exercise through godly hearing of a learned divine, collectively supports the Reformation dictum of *sola scriptura*, a pronouncement that all but cements the triumph of grammatical literacy over liturgical literacy as *the* means of godliness in the Protestant faith.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> James I's personal interest in academic/theological disputation did much to popularize the sermon in seventeenth-century England, just as James' conception of kingship heavily relied on the balance of faction within his growing episcopacy. On the growth of sermon-culture in seventeenth-century England, see Lori Anne Ferrell, *Government by Polemic: James I, the King's Preachers, and the Rhetorics of Conformity, 1603-1625* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998); Peter McCullough, *Sermons at Court: Politics and Religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); and Ferrell and McCullough's *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600-1750* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2000).

<sup>104</sup> James Simpson calls attention to a crucial paradox in the Protestant dictum that reading Scripture is a necessary component, but that only the elect could read it correctly. Furthermore, Protestant divines certainly knew that reading Scripture required linguistic and interpretive skills that might be beyond unlearned laity, but still proclaimed the

The post-Reformation interdependence between grammatical literacy and godliness then places considerable weight on not only the linguistic skill required to read and comprehend, but also properly attuning one's mind to receive the scriptural message at hand and immediately apply it to the self. Grammatical literacy, as it is implemented in the practice of active reading, thus "transforms the heart, opens the eyes, and suffuses the soul with sweet comfort and zeal for godliness."<sup>105</sup> Like devotion itself, godly reading was conceived of as both a doing and a feeling thing. Reading Scripture in a godly fashion required both grammatical literacy and also a commitment to engage in a great deal of interpretive work. The godly, however, were called to perform that interpretive work on much more than Scripture alone; reading well demanded that godly believers deploy those soul-saving interpretive skills on their own bodies in the careful examination, production, and maintenance of the passions required to enflame the otherwise cool hearts of fallen men and women. The strain between the interpretive work of reading and feeling appears strikingly similar to the tension Katherine Zieman identifies between grammatical literacy and liturgical literacy, but in a post-Reformation England where grammatical literacy functions as the *modus operandi* for devotion, any preference for liturgy over grammar as a means to grace was grounds enough for the accusation of a preference for Arminianism over Calvinism, or even further down the

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necessity of godly reading. Kate Narveson identifies these paradoxes as trapping the laity in "an anxiety-producing mode of reading that gave the illusion of freedom but insisted on submission to the church's 'true' interpretation as a mark of election" (85). See James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008), ch. 4; and Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Narveson, 81.

slippery confessional slope paved with ritual and ornamentation: a preference for Roman Catholicism over the true Protestant Church. Similarly, High Churchmen found equal fault with too great an emphasis on grammatical literacy and the preeminence granted to hearing the preached word over feeling and appropriately responding to “the beauty of holiness” that ought to be part of liturgical performance.

In his support of Archbishop Laud’s mission to reinvest English churches with liturgical elements meant precisely to stimulate the type of sacramental seeing required to generate and maintain godly affect, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes complains that “the stream of our times makes religion nothing but auricular profession... The word is holy, I know, and I wish it all the honour that may be; but God forbid we should think that in *hoc uno sunt omnia*. All our ‘holiness’ is in hearing, all our service is ear-service; that were in effect as much as to say all the body were an ear” (qtd. in Fincham 232).<sup>106</sup> Andrewes’ criticism of the preeminence of hearing Scripture expounded by learned divines over all other forms of worship, and over all of the remaining bodily senses that ought to be equally engaged in devotional work, functions as a critique of a devotional mode solely reliant on grammatical literacy. Rather, High Churchmen desired devotional spaces that attended to the grammatical literacy of the Word but also to the liturgical literacy that could span the gap between performance and understanding; thus the concerted interest in liturgical reforms and physical beautification of Richard Crashaw’s own Cambridge enclave at Peterhouse, as Matthew Wren, John Cosin, and Crashaw himself worked to

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<sup>106</sup> Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990).

refit the chapel with stained glass windows and paintings, among a great many other ornamentations.<sup>107</sup>

The ceremonial, visually rich, and blatantly Roman Catholic court of Charles I's Queen, Henrietta Maria, magnified Puritan anxiety over such renewed interest in the affective elements of worship, and the surge of courtly lady converts to Roman Catholicism that reached its zenith in the 1630s eventually pushed Puritan anxiety over religious backsliding into the all-out frenzy against devotional images conducive to affective piety practices that came with the Civil War. The "emotional fervor and sensual vividness of much Catholic devotional literature directed specifically at women," writes Molly Murray, led many virulent anti-Catholics, William Crashaw, Richard's father, chief amongst them, to associate Roman Catholicism's sensual eye-devotion with seduction, as women's impressionable nature gave way to the eroticized eye gazing on affective images capable of transforming devotional desire from *caritas* to *eros*. Much like spiritual love, passionate love was styled in equally exalted language, typically taking the form of a burning presence that often manifested in vision, as passionate gazes emit fiery darts that wound and penetrate the object of affection. With the highly public Catholicism of Henrietta Maria, and the rapid-fire conversion of many of her ladies in the

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<sup>107</sup> For more on Crashaw's commitment to outfitting and adorning his "Mother of Peter[house]" in the Laudian style see Paul Parrish's analysis of Crashaw's occasional poetry explicitly composed to raise funds for the replenishment and beautification of Peterhouse: "Writing about Mother: Richard Crashaw and the Maternal Body," in *Performance for a Lifetime: A Festschrift Honoring Dorothy Harell Brown: Essays on Women, Religion, and the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara Ewell (New Orleans, LA: Loyola University, 1997), 223-38. For the influence of Peterhouse on Crashaw and other poets see Hilton Kelliher, "Crashaw at Cambridge," in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. John Roberts (Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 1990), 180-214; and also Patrick Grant, *Images and Ideas in Literature of the English Renaissance* (Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1979), 118.



1630s-40s, “reimagining the Catholic conversions of women,” particularly of elite women who could potentially sway their politically powerful husbands, “as the result of a sexualized ‘fall’ enabled Protestant men to maintain the fantasy of a simple countermeasure: protecting women from eroticized Catholic temptation” (Murray 110). In the association of Roman Catholic faith with the sensual female body, anti-Catholic polemicists like William Crashaw attacked what they interpreted as an inappropriate concentration on female authority in devotional practice, Mariology particularly.<sup>108</sup> The result is the popular argument that Roman Catholicism appealed to the body’s sensibilities while Protestantism appealed to the intellect.

Thus comes the accusation that Crashaw’s “rhetorical copiousness” (Wong 351), his excessive flux between divine images and ever more extreme metaphors functions as evidence of feminine predilections, in aesthetics as well as religion. Given Crashaw’s admiration of and devotion to extraordinary holy women like the Virgin Mother, Saint Teresa, Queen Henrietta Maria, the highly principled ‘mother’ of Little Gidding, Mary Collett, and the seeking but wholly devout patroness the Countess of Denbigh, it comes as little surprise then to see that contemporary responses to Crashaw’s conversion circle just as pointedly around the association of Roman Catholicism with women. The anonymously authored pamphlet *Legenda Ligneae* (1652/3) clarifies such an association with the following description of a recently converted Richard Crashaw:

This peevish sillie Seeker glided away from his Principles in a Poetical vein of fancy and impertinent curiosity, and finding that Verses...much pleas’d some female wits, Crashaw crept by degrees into favour and

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<sup>108</sup> For a detailed account of the contemporary correlation between Roman Catholicism and women, femaleness, and the sensual body see Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (1999; Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2005).

acquaintance with some Court-Ladies, and with gross commendations of their parts and beauties (burnisht and varnisht with some other agreeable adulations) he got first the estimation of an innocent, harmless Convert; and, a purse being made by some deluded, vain-glorious Ladies. (Rambuss "Introduction" xlix)

This account firmly aligns Crashaw's conversion not only with delusion but Crashaw himself with the overly emotional vanities of women whose confessional affiliation was envisioned as deriving more from aesthetic appreciation of images and the emotions that accompany them than rational discernment of the Word. The perceived emotional instability of women, and Catholicism's seeming manipulation of this very quality, is further highlighted as the *Legenda Lignea* author goes on to describe Crashaw as a "shuttlecock so tost with every changeable puff and blast" (Martin xxxvi). Crashaw, it seems, is accused of not only converting to a faith actively deceiving susceptible and vain women, but also being as changeable as women themselves.<sup>109</sup>

The carefully constructed affective and somatic register responsible for the liturgical resonances within Crashaw's verse thus appear to mark his otherness in comparison with contemporary English devotional writers like Donne and Herbert, whose devotion it seems is more to the "rhetorical gods of logic, argumentation, and analysis" than Crashaw's own devotion to "intimate and emotional experiences" that move well beyond the purview of logic.<sup>110</sup> These critical divisions, it seems, mirror those found within post-Reformation literary and confessional circles to the extent that the early twentieth-century critic Percy Osmond's dismissal of Crashaw's verse as nothing

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<sup>109</sup> Molly Murray identifies the *Legenda Lignea* depiction of Crashaw as an early, perhaps the earliest, version of the critical claim that Crashaw's Catholicism "unmanned him" (107).

<sup>110</sup> Parrish, "Gender and Value" 128.

but “cheap glitter,” could easily and convincingly be attributed to a post-Reformation anti-Catholic polemicist bemoaning the attraction of the Roman Catholic faith, and its appeal to women particularly. Rather than giving any real weight to Crashaw’s contemporary description as “Herbert’s second,” a portrayal found in the title of both the 1646 and 1648 editions of *Steps to the Temple* and penned by his likely original editor Joseph Beaumont, it has proven much more popular to singularly identify Crashaw with the affect of the Continent than the intellectualized spiritualism of his native English Protestantism.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, Crashaw’s verse is liturgical in nature, and thus it does lend itself to an interpretive mode that has historically been associated with women religious, but the aesthetic binaries between early modern Protestantism and Roman Catholicism appear far blurrier in contemporary practice than their representation in our own critical categories.<sup>112</sup> The critical claims that Crashaw’s verse both derives from and also appeals

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<sup>111</sup> This trend has marked modern Crashaw scholarship. See Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1939); Mario Praz, “The Flaming Heart: Richard Crashaw and the Baroque” in *The Flaming Heart: Essays on Crashaw, Machiavelli, and Other Studies in the Relations between Italian and English Literature from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot*, ed. Mario Praz (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 204-63; Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton UP: 1979); Ryan Netzley, “Oral Devotion: Eucharistic Theology and the Religious Lyrics of Richard Crashaw,” *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 44 (2002), 247-72; James M. Bromley, “Intimacy and the Body in Seventeenth-Century Religious Devotion,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11 (2005): 1-41; Kimberly Johnson, “Richard Crashaw’s Indigestible Poetics,” in *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2014), 119-47; Ryan Netzley, “Reading Indistinction: Desire, Indistinguishability, and Metonymic Reading in Richard Crashaw’s Religious Lyrics,” in *Reading Desire and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: U of Toronto P: 2011), 66-105.

<sup>112</sup> Among revisionist critics who point explicitly to Crashaw as they highlight aesthetic and devotional indistinction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sophie Read argues that with the Reformation the language of transubstantiation does not disappear from reformed thought and verse; instead, Eucharistic theology began to be viewed symbolically rather than literally, becoming a central means of figuring sacramental presence in English devotional verse of the period for both reformed and recusant alike.

to a feminine rather than masculine point of view only serve to reproduce the fault lines within the post-Reformation English church, wherein Catholic and Counter-Reformation devotional verse was (and often continues to be) typically associated with a visual and highly feminine aesthetic and Protestantism with a masculine verbal aesthetic.<sup>113</sup> As the case may be, however, these superficial divisions appear to neatly mirror the very literacy modes, and their gendered dimensions Katherine Zieman outlines in late medieval culture.

As such, an analysis of *how* Richard Crashaw engages these two aesthetics, and the vying literacy modes they attend to, provides a compelling new lens through which we might examine not only the affective surfeit in Crashaw's critically contested poetry, but also the legitimacy of delineating confessional affiliation through such aesthetic distinctions altogether. Deneen Senasi has similarly drawn attention to the intersection between reading and embodiment in Crashaw's poetry, claiming that Crashaw

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See Read, "The Rhetoric of Real Presence in the Seventeenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2008). P.G. Stanwood makes a similar claim regarding Crashaw's verse, particularly in "Time and Liturgy in Donne, Crashaw and T.S. Eliot," *Mosaic* 12 (1979): 91-105. Finally, and most recently, Joseph R. Teller convincingly demonstrates that the always-controversial sensuality in Crashaw's Passion poetry derives from the immensely popular and thereby mainstream English crucifixion piety following St. Bernard of Clairvaux, whose highly stylized, open, bleeding, and suffering images of Christ's body deeply resemble Crashaw's own portrayal of Christ. See Joseph R. Teller, "Why Crashaw was not Catholic: The Passion and Popular Protestant Devotion," *English Literary Renaissance* 43.2 (2013): 239-67.

<sup>113</sup> In his influential 1926 Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, T.S. Eliot identifies Donne as conveying a "powerful intellect" and decidedly "strongly masculine nature" while Crashaw exhibits a "devotional temperament rather than a theological mind" (162). Eliot's distinction of Donne as a "voluptuary of thought" where Crashaw "could be called a voluptuary of religious emotion" (168) has done a great deal to tie Crashaw's verse to a "feminine" mode and define the feminine versus the masculine qualities in all metaphysical poetry. See, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

orchestrates an aesthetic of reading and embodiment whose locus is the convergence of the spiritual with the material. That poetics compels readers to confront the tenuous, tension-filled intersections where bodies and words collide, where they seem to struggle with one another for ascendancy, and where those boundaries that force them into opposition become more malleable, more dissolute, and more problematic. (Senasi 1-2)

In this focus Senasi ultimately asserts that Crashaw's poetics, and the embodied reading that he demands within them, problematizes the binary association of Protestantism with the Word and Counter-Reformation culture with the visual; Crashaw's verse, according to Senasi, "reflects the semiotic sophistication of that admixture of Word and flesh, as he incorporates the body into the Word as an integral part of the sacred ritual of reading. In this way, the body becomes a sign of the Word and the Word a sign of the body, while significance materializes in both directions at once" (3). Thus, my analysis of how Crashaw's sacramental and incarnational poetics invoke both grammatical and liturgical literacies, and the gendered representation of these interpretive modes, is deeply indebted to Senasi's work on how Crashaw's poetry actively instructs its readers to engage in embodied reading practices.

### **Indistinguishable Others: Spelling Wrong to Read Crashaw Right**

Crashaw's most explicit and oft-quoted poetic instruction for right reading is indisputably within his poem "The Flaming Heart," wherein his admiration for Saint Teresa and her ecstatic union with Christ is provocatively figured in direct comparison to its usual pictorial representation. In the poem's prefatory note, Crashaw invites readers to consider "the Book and Picture of the Seraphical Saint Teresa (As She Is Usually

Expressed with a Seraphim beside Her)” (238).<sup>114</sup> The parenthetical note directs readers to engage in a dual interpretive practice: not only must they read the poem, but also envision Saint Teresa’s image as it is traditionally figured with a spear-wielding Seraphim hovering over her. We are thus encouraged to simultaneously engage in several reading modes that also represent divergent aesthetic appeals: the visual and the verbal. These modes appear equally important to the reading task at hand, as Crashaw advises that neither interpretive method alone could provide the correct reading of this stimulating devotional image. Instead, by inviting readers to study his words as well as the picture in their mind’s eye, Crashaw asks those “Well-meaning readers! you that come as friends” (l. 1) to practice the grammatical literacy required for reading and also the liturgical literacy required for viewing and experiencing the sacred scene imagined within the space of the poem. In order to accomplish this dual reading, Crashaw commands,

Readers, be ruled by me; and make  
Here a well-placed and wise mistake.  
You must transpose the picture quite,  
And spell it wrong to read it right (ll. 7-10).

In the remainder of the poem to come, as Senasi points out, “the reader here will be directed, through the use of imperatives and capitalization linked with verbal meaning, to think and feel in specified ways at specified times.... that sense of authorial control is not merely a question of what is being read, but how it is read” (Senasi 14). Crashaw’s urging “to read rightly not only the individual words of the poem” but also “larger bodies of meaning envisioned on a broader semiotic scale” (Senasi 14), suggests that both

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<sup>114</sup> Unless otherwise noted, this and all subsequent references to Crashaw’s poetry will be taken from *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Richard Rambuss (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2013).

grammatical and liturgical interpretive practices are necessary for readers to accurately and feelingly interpret his poem.

This bridging of literacy practices that appear to be otherwise at odds is reinforced by Crashaw's instruction to "transpose" the picture, a verb choice with multivalent possibilities. Crashaw could be instructing his reader to rearrange the picture's elements and imagine Teresa as the active agent, piercing and penetrating the passive seraphim with her dart (*OED* 5). Likewise, the directive to transpose might simply encourage readers to consider the picture's adaptation in terms of artistic form as it moves from visual image to verbal poetry (*OED* 2). Finally, in his command to "transpose the picture quite" Crashaw might very well allude to Teresa's own transformation and conversion from a single self into another form, a self-in-other as the saint and seraphim transform from separate entities to one celestial being through an indiscernible exchange of ecstatic darts and wounds (*OED* 1). The verb choice simultaneously suggests all three meanings, but the weight of Crashaw's instruction lies in this last connotation, as the first stanza's concluding couplet makes clear: "Read him for her, and her for him; / And call the saint the seraphim" (ll. 11-12). In order to read rightly, instructs Crashaw, we must understand the exact nature of the transposition that has taken place. Prior to this couplet, Crashaw bids his reader to "spell it wrong to read it right" (l. 10), which encourages grammatical attention through its precise focus on spelling, or the execution of proper linguistic skill as the primary means to interpret the picture. The final couplet, however, inverts the orthographic order we have been called to notice, and we are left at odds with the poem's verbal meaning as Crashaw directs the imagined painter to reinterpret and reorient his

painting to better account for the liturgical semiotics of Teresa's writing, rather than simply reporting their grammatical content in visual form.

Given the pictorial representation of the saint and seraphim as side-by-side Crashaw's instruction to read him for her and her for him means much more than simply imagining the two switching physical locations. Rather, the reader must transpose the affective work and embodied state the saint and seraphim are meant to represent.

According to the appropriate order of the painting, the male seraphim penetrates the female saint, and she is inseminated with a powerful godly affect that alters her bodily state from a woman's usual coolness to a hot fiery zeal for God:

Why man, this speaks pure mortal frame;  
And mocks with female frost love's manly flame.  
One would suspect thou meant'st to paint  
Some weak, inferior, woman saint. (ll. 23-6)

Crashaw directs our attention explicitly to this humoral transformation, and the affective state that causes such a transposition in order to accentuate the inversion that has taken place. Senasi's reading of this transposition, that "Crashaw admonishes the conventions of painterly representation in this poem not to dismiss them as a 'vehicle of truth' but to correct them" (15) is certainly accurate, but I would like to push this assertion even further. Crashaw's transposal of her for him and weak female coolness for powerful male heat does more than correct the notion that either the word or the image is the "vehicle for truth"; instead, they function in unison, mutually reinforcing the other as both the saint and seraphim as well as painting and poem take on the other's qualities. This convergence of supposed opposites reveals the troubling incongruity that led Robert Martin Adams to influentially identify Crashaw's affinity for unifying elements of "the most intense opposition, his 'highest' thoughts and 'lowest' feelings, his most physical



sensations and his most spiritual aspirations” (66) with the poet’s inherently “bad taste.”<sup>115</sup> The hierarchy Adams alludes to here is interesting, in that Crashaw’s spiritual thoughts are described as much higher in the taxonomy of appropriate subjects for poetry than the ardent feelings he evokes or appeals to in order to express those thoughts. Given the gendering of these two categories, and Crashaw’s indecorous blending of the two, Adams’ reaction to Crashaw’s apparently lofty masculine thoughts but lowly feminine expression sounds altogether like the very anxiety expressed by male clergy who so diligently tied devotion to linguistically expressed thoughts over the feelings which might convey those very ideas in and through the body’s participation with liturgical performance. The yoking of Crashaw’s “bad taste” with his blending of contraries that evoke the divisive interpretive paradigms of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as contemporary notions that grammatical literacy appealed to men and liturgical literacy to women, reveals potential critical discomfort with, and perhaps even bias against poetry that seeks more than mimesis, but incarnation of real presence and the real devotional affect that positions believers to receive such presence.<sup>116</sup>

Happily, Alexander Wong’s treatment of Crashaw’s “weak, inferior, woman saint” (l. 26), reprises Adams’s portrayal of Crashaw’s incongruity by suggesting its

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<sup>115</sup> For the relationship between Crashaw’s conjoining of incongruous images, like pain with pleasure, life with death, fruition with denial, and the body with the spiritual, see Robert Martin Adams, “Taste and Bad Taste in Metaphysical Poetry: Richard Crashaw and Dylan Thomas,” *Hudson Review* 8 (1955): 61-77.

<sup>116</sup> Recent Crashaw studies, thankfully, have sought to redress Crashaw’s label of having “bad taste” with careful attention to the sacramental and incarnational elements within his verse. See Ryan Netzley, “Reading Indistinction” (2011); Gary Kuchar, “The Gendering of God” (2005); Kimberly Johnson, “Richard Crashaw’s Indigestible Poetics” (2014); and Richard Rambuss, “Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder; Or, How to Do Things with Tears,” in *Structures of Feeling in Seventeenth-Century Cultural Expression*, ed. Susan McClary (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2012), 253-71.

foundation in the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition of utilizing inappropriate or unfitting images to describe the divine. According to Wong, the sheer incongruity of some of Crashaw's more grotesque or improper images serve the larger, and Dionysian, aim of highlighting the numinous and inexpressible nature of God. Crashaw's deliberate gesture to the painting's "weak, inferior, woman saint" thus appears incongruous with the impressive and spiritually potent figure the poem later depicts. In contrast, Wong suggests that

the image of a dumpy old woman, so mundanely realistic, might likewise prevent the imagination from reaching the higher truth about the saint. So Crashaw suggests an imaginative alteration to the traditional image, which, making it much less realistic or believable – making it, indeed, rather absurd, by means of a paradoxical and deliberately perverse metaphysical transposition – allows for a more profound understanding of spiritual realities. (Wong 356)

Crashaw's revision thus intentionally moves from "pure mortal frame" (l. 23) by compelling readers to account for the abundant and unnatural heat that Teresa emits as a woman who "mocks with female frost love's manly flame" (l. 24). Readers are called to take heed of the material elements of the figures presented, but in this inversion, readers are equally directed to realize that this exchange is, in Wong's words, "perverse" and "absurd." The absurdity of the humoral inversion of the genders productively propels readers to understand that the passionate body is an important conduit of faith, but those passions must be directed by right thoughts. Robert Martin Adams' categories might well be reinvoked more productively here as it appears Crashaw's incongruous portrayal of the saint and the seraphim require that *both* thoughts and feelings be directed toward the highest spiritual ideal for meaning to be made. Rather than bad taste, it seems, Crashaw's inverting transposition of gender categories intentionally blurs the divide between

liturgical and grammatical literacy modes, words and images, thoughts and feelings, cold women and hot men.

The result in readers is both a heightened attention to grammatical as well as liturgical literacy as they become conscious of a struggle between these vying interpretive modes. As this process is underway, Crashaw refuses to relinquish his authorial prerogative. He plays the part of school master fashioning and framing our grammatical literacy, and never letting its import escape us, whilst also playing the role of affective tutor, by forcing us to develop the proper bodily responses to the liturgical resonances of the images he lays out before us, both verbal and visual. For instance, immediately after compelling readers to attribute “all those fair and flagrant things” (l. 34) that describe the young seraphim to Teresa, Crashaw reminds readers that he is in control of both the images before us, and also the interpretative work we engage in through our reading:

Do then as equal right requires,  
Since his the blushes be, and hers the fires,  
Resume and rectify thy rude design;  
Undress thy seraphim into mine.  
Redeem this injury of thy art;  
Give him the veil, give her the dart. (ll. 37-42)

Crashaw instructs readers to “resume” our interpretive work through the blending of our grammatical attention to his words and their precise order with the image in our mind’s eye as we “rectify” or improve the visual image by following his direction alone. The reader must thus become conscious of their own cognitive processes, which rely entirely upon an imagined reenactment of the scene according to Crashaw’s precise direction; the reader is compelled to follow Crashaw’s lead as his picture is reassembled and simulated in their mind’s eye, replete with its emotional underpinning. In this hermeneutic, readers become deeply aware of how their own cognitive processes are written on and within the

body as they struggle to make meaning in the poem, either grammatically or through the emotive responses that register through the passionate body as a consequence of Crashaw's surprising inversions. Regardless of which register is at work, though, Crashaw remains in complete and total control. All of the reader's interpretive agency is subsumed in Crashaw's imaging; in comparison to his ornate inversions, our design is deemed "rude" and in need of rectification. Crashaw's charge that readers "Undress thy seraphim into mine" (l. 40) insinuates that right reading will only come when readers strip themselves of individual interpretive agency. In this blending of grammar, grace, and godly affect, readers, it seems, must be ruled in order to read right.

Ultimately, as a result of the synchronized push and pull between reader and speaker and also word and image, the text becomes a space of liturgical performance constructed around the very ambiguity between learned ability, performance, and understanding that Katherine Zieman points to in her construction of liturgical literacy. This tension allows Crashaw to not only transcend the oppositional constructions of verbal versus visual and grammatical versus liturgical literacies, but also to construct space for an ideal reader who, by virtue of forced attention to these binary categories, is both linguistically capable of following Crashaw's direction and also emotionally engaged enough to perform the type of sacramental seeing Crashaw requires. Crashaw thus encourages a potentially surprising view of the cognition required to practice grammatical literacy in that his ideal reader cannot separate the body from the mind, but must come to recognize that "cognition not only requires a brain, but is grounded more fully, not only in the body, but in the marriage of a whole person with the world" (Teske 760). For the poem to make meaning, readers are compelled to at once identify the

poem's liturgical resonances while also feeling them deeply and authentically in their hearts, but a singular deployment of either meaning-making mode will fail to accurately reflect the poem's message. That message can only come from a marriage of mind with body, thoughts with feelings, and the reader with an Other whom selfhood is recognized through and with.

As these interpretive modes have historically been attached to female and male devotional communities, Crashaw's ideal reader crosses a set of discursive boundaries that fall along deeply gendered lines. Much like Thomas Traherne, Richard Crashaw's construction of such a reader proffers a vision of devotional practice, and godly reading, that embraces a thoroughly intersubjective mode of self-making, a mode that is profoundly reliant on gender transitivity. While I have made a similar claim about Thomas Traherne, who depicts both Christ and the Virgin Mary with hermaphroditic qualities so that his Divine Other can be both foreign and accessible by crossing gendered divides, Richard Crashaw has been accused of writing from a solely feminine point of view.<sup>117</sup> As a result, focusing on Crashaw's gender transitivity opens up a new way of approaching this controversial poet. In order to highlight this manipulation of gender

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<sup>117</sup> It is important to note that while a great deal of Crashavian criticism has focused on Crashaw's seemingly feminine perspective, Richard Rambuss has made significant contributions to Crashaw studies with his assertion that much of Crashaw's incarnational verse invokes a sacred eroticism that is deeply homoerotic. What is more, and in welcome contrast to critical attention to Crashaw's commitment to religious women in both life and devotion, Rambuss has also called attention to the intimate circle of male poet-priests in which Crashaw circulated in his lifetime, of whom the most notable are Nicholas Ferrar, Joseph Beaumont, Abraham Cowley, and Thomas Carre. For Rambuss' analysis of Crashaw's treatment of sacred eroticism see, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998); and "Sacred Subjects and the Aversive Metaphysical Conceit: Crashaw, Serrano, Ofili," *English Literary History* 71.2 (Summer, 2004), 497-530. For Rambuss' treatment of homosocial resonances in Crashaw's verse, see "Introduction," in *The English Poems of Richard Crashaw* (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2013), lx-lxiii.

bounds, I would like to gesture back to Crashaw's earlier directive that he will rule within the space of his poem and later that readers should "undress thy seraphim into mine" (l. 40). These domineering assertions do much to emphasize Crashaw's own linguistic and poetic power, perhaps even hinting at the masculine voice critics expect from metaphysical poets of the period. It is on this very point that Susannah Mintz criticizes Maurine Sabine's argument that Crashaw subverts conventionally gendered notions of identity in that Crashaw's frequent portrayal of the feminine as emotional, nurturing mothers relegates women "to the realm of passivity and denies strong feeling to other contemporary male poets," which ultimately leads to the "overtly male, often fiercely aggressive tone which Crashaw at times exhibits" (Mintz 113).<sup>118</sup> Crashaw's directive to "rule" his readers in "The Flaming Heart" is certainly one of the most aggressively masculine moments in his entire canon. Yet this masculine potential is at risk of being overrun by the feminine excess that characterizes the passages to come and Crashaw's description of Teresa's effluxive and ecstatic union with the divine. In an attempt to straddle the fine line between masculine poetic control and the feminized excess that guarantees "the mysterious moment of illumination" that comes with "the Eucharistic 'sealing' of words with Word, of names and Name, of particular with universal" (Kuchar 101), Crashaw constructs a devotional speaker whose poetic skill and very selfhood rely upon an intersubjective exchange with several Others: a divine Other in the form of Teresa, a devotional Other in the form of his reader, and also an artistic Other in the fictitious painter against whom Crashaw compares his artistic skill and the veracity of his

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<sup>118</sup> In Mintz's claim that such gendered binaries deny other early modern male poets the ability to feel strongly and deeply, she specifically points to Herbert's "Grief" and Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Weeping," where both male poets express considerable, if not prodigious grief and emotional vulnerability.

devotional vision. By developing such an extensive set of Others, Crashaw is able to engage directly in the “tensions between his phallogocentric form and gynocentric theme” (Kuchar 98), or, as I have argued above, the tensions between the grammatical literacy that supports a phallogocentric view of devotional practice and the liturgical literacy that enables incarnational poetics.

In order to maintain his control, Crashaw reinvests in the power of his gendered inversion and heightens the rhetoric surrounding Teresa’s masculine fire as he directs readers, through the guise of instructing the painter, “Give him the veil; that he may cover / The red cheeks of a rivaled lover. / Ashamed that our world, now, can show / Nests of new seraphims below” (ll. 43-46). Teresa’s astounding activity is deliberately juxtaposed with the seraphim’s passivity, but his bashful shame is also the result of Teresa’s perverse figuration as a rival lover whose virility is confirmed in the production of “nests of seraphim below.” The “nests” that have only “now” been filled with newly conceived seraphim are a result not of the male seraphim’s zeal for God, but Teresa’s startling virility. In Crashaw’s rendering, Teresa’s fiery zeal for God flies out from her ecstatic merger with the divine filling nests in the world below with her spiritual children.<sup>119</sup> The image evokes Song of Solomon 14 wherein the beloved bridegroom

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<sup>119</sup> Likewise, Teresa’s virility is similarly figured in “A Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable Saint Teresa,” wherein Teresa’s ecstatic communion and enflaming faith produces “sons of thy vows” (l. 167). In his “Introduction” to the most recent critical edition of Crashaw’s poetry, Richard Rambuss points to the transition from the feminine pronouns of “she” and “her” to “he” and “his,” the result of which is Teresa’s “hypergender” morphing into a “hypermaternity” in “A Hymn” (lxx). While Rambuss identifies the gendered transpositions of these pronouns as producing “hypermaternity,” I think it is important to note that this brand of maternity is characterized by its masculine production, which in turn highlights Teresa’s own masculine qualities. Like Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth, whose self-induced unsexing leads her husband to declare, “Bring forth men children only, / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but

Christ is metaphorized as a dove fluttering to nest within the clefts of the rock. The erotics of the passage suggest that the nurturing and procreant image of a nest enclosed within the security of a rocky barrier could easily be read as a womb. The anonymous late fourteenth-century religious love lyric “In a Valey of This Restless Mynde” clarifies this reading as its author “draws on the rich tradition of associating Christ’s wounds with sexual and spiritual ecstasy” (McCullough 28). The poet writes:

Alle myn humours Y have opened hir to –  
There my bodi hath maad hir hertis baite,  
*Quia amore languo.*  
In my side Y have made hir neste.  
Loke in: How weet a wounde is here! (originally cited in McCullough 29)

The sexual and Eucharistic connotations of these lines work together, as Eleanor McCullough points out in “the reference to ‘humours,’ or the mingling of the blood and water of Christ with the milk and blood of the female” (29).<sup>120</sup> While Crashaw’s allusion to Song of Solomon does not contain the suggestive language of Christ’s side wound as a womb-like sacred space in which ecstatic lovemaking and mystical union occur, the resonances are still quite similar.<sup>121</sup>

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males” (1.7.72-74), Teresa’s maternal mettle, it seems, reveals masculinity and thus her gender representation is blurry at best.

<sup>120</sup> Eleanor McCullough usefully offers this modern rendition of the verse: “I have opened her up to all my bodily fluids -- / There my body has been made bait for her heart, / *Because I languish in love.* / In my side I have made her nest. / Look in: How wet a wound is here!” (29).

<sup>121</sup> Crashaw’s devotion to imaging the sacred body, and sacred wounds, of the God incarnate Christ, is perhaps most evident in his sequence of divine epigrams wherein Christ’s wounds are repeatedly celebrated for their productivity: in “On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord” Crashaw’s speaker wonders if Christ’s wounds are either mouths or eyes that either cry or kiss; in “On our Crucified Lord Naked, and Bloody” the side wound is imagined as a “purple wardrobe” housing Christ’s sacred blood, which the faithful should put on as the richest dressing available to them (l. 4); and finally, in “On



Teresa's humoral inversion earlier in the poem similarly calls our attention to the bodily effects of love. Christ the bridegroom's assertion that his body is open for penetration, indeed graphically so as he demands that his beloved, and also his reading audience, look into his wet wound, is the result of languishing in love for his beloved. The result of such deeply felt love is a highly feminized Christ who simultaneously occupies the position of male bridegroom and the female beloved who both invites and is open for penetration. Teresa's position in "The Flaming Heart" is similarly gender bending in its increasingly devotional emphasis on a female body that morphs into a lover capable of filling all of the nests, or wombs, of the world with her inseminating spirit. According to Roland Barthes, "A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love" (14); ironically, when this same philosophy of love is applied to a woman, it seems as though she can be made masculine through the inverting power of love.<sup>122</sup> Regardless, just as Christ's hermaphroditic qualities mark him as both and neither, Teresa similarly occupies a transitive position within this poem. She is powerful and active, penetrating and potent, but Crashaw ultimately restrains her shocking transitivity, and the liturgically rich resonances that come with it, in favor of reminding his readers that he, not she, holds the power. She might have the dart, but his pen ultimately has the power to craft our relationship with her through his art.

Crashaw's speaker shifts from directly addressing and commanding his readers to focus on Teresa's procreative, and seemingly masculine, power to direct not only the young seraphim within the poem, but also the very darts that spring from Teresa's eyes.

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the Bleeding Wounds of our Crucified Lord," Christ's wounds emit rivers (l. 4) that ultimately mix with his tears to water roses (l. 24).

<sup>122</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (1978; New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).

Crashaw repeatedly charges the young male seraphim to not only give Teresa the dart, but he commands all of the hearts she has penetrated to speak and verbally recount the power of her love. For example, Crashaw compels the seraphim to

Give her the dart for it is she  
(Fair youth) shoots both thy shaft and thee.  
Say, all ye wise and well-pierced hearts  
That live and die amidst her darts,  
What is't your tasteful spirits do prove  
In that rare life of her, and love?  
Say and bear witness. Sends she not  
A seraphim at every shot?  
What magazines of immortal arms there shine!  
Heav'n's great artillery in each love-spun line. (ll. 47-56)

Through the amplified register with which Crashaw fashions Teresa's heart-piercing penetrative ecstasy, the passionate and permeable hearts of his readers are metonymically represented in those that "live and die amidst her darts." Crashaw's affective language is meant to function as powerfully as Teresa's gaze within the space of the poem. In life Teresa may have favored private and secluded devotional spaces for prayer and writing, as her reform initiatives within the Carmelite order suggest, but within the space of Crashaw's poem, her heart flames outward as effervescently and publicly as possible. What is within Teresa cannot be contained.

The intensity of her penetrating gaze is further highlighted by Crashaw's repeated imperative to "say" (l. 49) and then to "say and bear witness" (l. 53). While readers may respond with lively affect to Crashaw's shocking and incongruous representation of Teresa as a wildly productive lover, these demands ensure that readers remain cognizant of the linguistic skill required to properly read and interpret his poem and not become transfixed on the provocative images alone. This figuration of Teresa decisively fashions this provocative female saint in the image of Christ in its deliberate echo of the Christ-as-

Cupid conceit deployed throughout much of Crashaw's Christological poetry. For example, just as Crashaw demands here that readers "say and bear witness" to Teresa's loving and productive excess, he makes a similar gesture in his Passion poem, "On the Wounds of the Lord Jesus" when his speaker ostensibly invites the Roman soldiers responsible for Christ's crucifixion to "come, and see / Mighty Love's artillery" (ll. 1-2). This directive to view the instruments of Christ's sacred wounds as "Mighty Love's artillery" sounds remarkably similar to Crashaw's pun on Teresa's fiery gaze produced through his own enflaming poetry in "The Flaming Heart" when he asserts that apt readers will surely identify "Heav'n's great artillery in each love-spun line" (l. 56). In his refashioning of the traditional *arma Christi* with eroticized weapons of love, Teresa comes to occupy Christ's exact position in this Passion poem. While Teresa sends "a seraphim at every shot" (l. 54) and shines forth with "magazines of immortal arms" (l. 55), readers of "On the Wounds of the Lord Jesus" are instructed to imagine

the conquering dart; and lo  
 There shines his quiver, there his bow.  
 These the passive weapons are,  
 That made great Love a man of war.  
 The quiver, that he bore, did bide  
 So near, it proved his very side.  
 In it there sat but one sole dart;  
 A piercing one, his pierced heart. (ll. 3-10)

Crashaw thus simultaneously figures Christ as a "man of war" whose "great Love" renders him both a victim of the Roman soldiers' weapons and also a weapon who himself wounds those readers who read Crashaw's words with appropriate emotional engagement.

Teresa's martial representation is similarly reflexive as she wields a gaze whose darts equal even God's greatest battery, and, according to Plato's effluxive visual theory,

that gaze may be emitted through eyes that project beams or “lines” of light outward. However, Crashaw reminds us that it is he who wields the pen that engenders such incredible devotional affect in Christ, Teresa, and readers themselves. My reading of “pen” for “dart” here is aided by Crashaw’s own comparison earlier in “The Flaming Heart,” when he redresses his fictitious painter as: “most poor-spirited of men! / had thy cold pencil kissed her pen / Thou couldst not so unkindly err / To show us this faint shade for her” (ll. 19-22). Crashaw’s accusation that the painter of such a poor image has only a “cold pencil” at his disposal is suggestive, especially given its proximity to Teresa’s humoral inversion from female frost to manly flame in line 24. The underlying assertion, it seems, is that the fictional artist, in direct comparison to Crashaw, composes from a female disposition. His pencil is too cold to properly image a Saint as fiery as Teresa; Crashaw’s pencil and the poet who employs it, on the other hand, are suggestively figured as effective and as scorchingly hot as Teresa’s darts.

As Crashaw attempts to direct our attention away from Teresa’s gaze and onto his own potent rhetorical might, however, something strange occurs: he claims allegiance with the seraphim! Crashaw’s speaker backpedals from figuring Teresa’s startling activity by declaring: “But if it be the frequent fate / Of worst faults to be fortunate; / If all’s prescription; and proud wrong / Harkens not to a humble song; / For all the gallantry of him, / Give me the suffering seraphim” (ll. 59- 64). Given the speaker’s great admiration for Teresa, and also the rhetorical work Crashaw has put into investing her inversion with liturgical weight, this sudden attention to and affection for the seraphim seems an unexpected turn. Crashaw suggests that if pride and aesthetic prescription prevent the reader from being impacted or moved by his “humble song,”

then turning their attention from Teresa's stage-stealing flames to a humble male seraph may provide a more aesthetically pleasing devotional subject. According to our speaker, the male seraph's appeal derives specifically from his "gallantry," a pointed descriptor suggesting a range of meanings: a splendid appearance (2a), bravery or heroic bearing (3a), courtliness, or devotion to the female sex (5a), loyalty and devotion to a monarch (5b), and finally amorous intercourse with the opposite sex (8a). A great many of these definitions could easily have been applied to Crashaw himself; his description in the *Legenda Lignea* (1652/3) alludes at least to those dealing with the opposite sex, and his loyalty to Queen Henrietta Maria certainly would dub him "gallant." His aesthetic tastes in both church ornamentation and poetry account for his interest in splendid appearance, even if not for his person, and these splendors might very well also account for Crashaw's highly suggestive, even amorous poetic engagement with women.

In this sudden empathy for the seraph's position Crashaw invites readers to associate the bashful but gallant angel with him, a poet and priest whose devotion to holy women was so great that he suffered alienation and persecution for the sake of his gallant devotion, a feminine devotion that continues to mark Crashaw's critical heritage. Crashaw entertains this association with the seraph for a mere moment before turning his attention back to Teresa, but his gallant words have formed a gorgeous image that erects an affecting intersubjectivity between Crashaw, the seraph, and the flaming female saint whom neither can quite outshine. Such an intersubjective construction of the speaker, the poet, and poem's devotional subjects reflects Crashaw's deliberate linkage of the mind and body, both actively engaged in the process of discerning how his rhetorical skill commands both liturgical and grammatical attention in his readers. The cognitive work

required to make sense of Crashaw's imaging then is inherently social, demanding that readers consciously "simulate our own minds to understand those of others, particularly their interior states, their pleasures and pains, their emotions, and their intentions" (Teske 766). In order to properly perceive Crashaw's complex inversions and transpositions, his empathy and intersubjectivity, readers must come to identify the relational model Crashaw assembles between the saint and the seraph, but also between themselves and the devotional figures he has produced.

If John Teske's assertion that "intersubjectivity is built from felt bodily states" (766) is true, and if indeed Crashaw is invested in an intersubjective mode of self-making here, then he must figure the relation between the saint, the seraph, and the reader in a way that appeals to our sensory and cerebral perceptions, and he does. This relation is fashioned explicitly through Crashaw's emphasis on bodily states. As the poem continues, Crashaw proceeds to transpose his own position within the inversion, removing the ecstatic descriptors he had earlier attributed to Teresa. Now, the seraphim lays claim to "the bravery of all those bright things, / The glowing cheeks, the glistening wings; / The rosy hand, the radiant dart" (ll. 65-7), and readers are directed to "Leave her alone the flaming heart" (l. 68). All of the masculine qualities previously attributed to Teresa are thus stripped away, revealing only her ardent passion for God as she fully transcends her earthly self. This transformation comes as Teresa moves from shooting darts at Crashaw's readers, to being left with "Not one loose shaft but love's whole quiver" (l. 70). She transitions from active shooter to the literal receptacle that holds the arrows; she still emits divine love, but in a much more reflexive manner, as Crashaw contends:

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.  
O heart! the equal poise of love's both parts  
Big alike with wounds and darts. (ll. 71-76)

Crashaw's representation of love as a battlefield fraught with both weapons and wounds draws on a long tradition extending back through Plato and Ovid. Where Teresa was previously envisioned as the agent of love actively inseminating and procreating in the earthly nests of readers' hearts, she is now presented fully as the victim of God's love, or *charitatis victim*. "To be a recipient of the 'wound of love' dealt by God, and described not only by Teresa but by John of the Cross and Francis de Sales," writes Sarah Covington, "is to be conjoined to the divine while also reminded of the distance of the union; one receives the wound of his presence but cannot endure the pain of that presence in one's body—that love—for any length of time" (164). The result of such an image is a profound emphasis on Teresa's embodiment and the reader's obligation to interpret this ecstatic body appropriately. Rather than leaving readers alone to confront this interpretive pressure, Crashaw comes to our aid, drawing our attention to the paradoxical activity and passivity of Teresa's apostrophized heart. Teresa's enflamed heart has enlarged and grown "Big alike with wounds and darts" (l. 76), an all too somatic description that suggests more than divine presence. The suggestion is that Teresa's ability to absorb and internalize wounding darts of love has left her pregnant.

This profoundly embodied and uniquely female state presents a whole new mode of consciousness for Teresa, as it seems her sense of self, as well as her sense of God's love, cannot be separated from her body. Her "big" body reveals precisely what it also conceals, and the fact that she knows and has been known by the divine Other is

exhibited by her body; her subjectivity is thus derived through what Antonio Damasio describes as “somatic marking” a process wherein the sense of conscious experience is explicitly tied to bodily sensation, and cannot be understood without bodily perspective.<sup>123</sup> In such a relation, the body and the mind are indistinguishable from each other, just as Teresa’s activity and passivity are figured in Crashaw’s famous assertion, “Love’s passives are his activ’st part” (l. 73), a reflexive positioning that sounds remarkably similar to the ultimate description of the relationship between Christ, his wounds, and the instruments of those sacred wounds in “On the Wounds of the Lord Jesus.” In this incarnational Passion poem, Crashaw asserts, “The weapon, that he wore, he was” (l. 12), thus fashioning Christ’s penetrated body as both active and passive, a weapon and a wound. Teresa’s active passivity is similarly figured in terms of both her consciousness of God’s wounding love and also her bodily expression of a love she both passively absorbs and also actively incubates in a most visible and visceral manner. Crashaw’s figuration of Teresa is decidedly Eucharistic as she takes on the role of a communicant whom God resides within in an especially physical manner. In regard to Crashaw’s Eucharistic imagery, Kimberly Johnson suggests, “the reader . . . must confront language whose irreducible physicality works to veil the spiritual principle it represents, a poetic strategy that replicates the challenge of discerning Christ’s body through the representational veils of bread and wine” (121). Ryan Netzley similarly argues, “Crashaw offers us [readers] a sacramental scenario that relies on indistinction, treating the communicant not as the consumer of the Eucharistic elements, but as potentially identical to them” (87). Crashaw’s most liturgical scenes, it seems, are thus cloaked in

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<sup>123</sup> For more on “somatic marking” see Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994).



indistinction and irreducible physicality that could just as easily veil the divine Other as they might invoke Him. The answer to this dilemma is consciousness of intersubjectivity, as it is produced through active reading attuned to both grammatical and liturgical interpretive modes.<sup>124</sup>

Crashaw's suggestive envisioning of Teresa is meant to actively establish our understanding not only of her bodily state, but also of our own bodily states as we engage in the interpretive work of reading, envisioning, and feeling in response to Crashaw's images. It is not surprising then that Crashaw's suggestive rendering of Teresa's ecstasy as both Eucharistic and embodied is followed with yet another reminder of his authorial skill, and the negotiation he develops between the cognitive practices required for both liturgical and grammatical literacies. Still addressing Teresa's apostrophized heart, Crashaw directs the heart itself to

Live in these conquering leaves; live all the same;  
And walk through all tongues one triumphant flame.  
Live here, great heart; and love and die and kill;  
And bleed and wound; and yield and conquer still. (ll. 77-80)

The assertion that Teresa's heart lives within the leaves of Crashaw's book of poetry suggests that he has brought her to life. He has animated and enflamed the otherwise frumpy old woman saint produced by the fictitious painter through a portrayal of Teresa

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<sup>124</sup> According to Anthony Low, who follows Augustine Baker, Crashaw is an apt practitioner of "sensible devotion" or "sensible affection," which differs from Ignatian meditative practices in its lesser emphasis on intellectual apprehension of the meditative object. Rather, as Baker puts it, "sensible devotion" is the result of an "abundance of affections in the Heart," which yields emotional expression. Low describes this devotional mode in Crashaw's verse in his claim that "There is no lack of intellectual activity in his poems, yet the affections seem to flow spontaneously, to require no promptings from reason or discursive imagination." See Anthony Low, *Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (New York: New York UP, 1978), 130-1.

centered entirely around the deluge of an incredible outpouring of love that dies, kills, bleeds, wounds, yields, and ultimately conquers. Through Crashaw's masterful depiction Teresa's spiritual fervor is translated into "all tongues," a claim that suggests she appeals to both the visual and verbal inclinations of her audience.<sup>125</sup> The result is a saint who may no longer wield the seraphim's dart, but whose life of "mystic deaths" (l. 83) leaves her always walking in a "crowd of loves and martyrdoms" (l. 82) making "wise souls" her "love-slain witnesses" (ll. 83-4). The focus here is less on Teresa and much more on the overwhelmingly lethal heat of her heart, which burns so brightly with divine love that other souls who observe it are immediately slain by the force of her love. Readers' understanding of Teresa's intersubjective relation to the divine Other, and of Teresa herself, is a direct result of the somatic markings divine love has produced within her but also in the reader's consciousness of her somatically expressed love marking and wounding their own hearts as they read. If they are "wise souls," Crashaw instructs, they will find themselves both slain by her love and witness to an affective image that is so effective it generates crowds of martyrs willing to sacrifice themselves for such love.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> This assertion resembles Crashaw's depiction of the transnationality of the human soul in "An Apology for the Foregoing Hymn," which follows "A Hymn to Saint Teresa" in the *Steps to the Temple* (1648), but follows both "A Hymn" and "The Flaming Heart" in *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652). In "An Apology" Crashaw defends his devotion to Teresa, a Roman Catholic and Spanish saint, by declaring: "Souls are not Spaniards too, one friendly flood / Of baptism blends them all into a blood" (ll. 15-16).

<sup>126</sup> Crashaw's epigram "Luke 10: And a certain priest coming that way looked on him and passed by" presents an even more explicit commitment to a vision of Christ's sacred wounds as reflexive, as the poem voices Christ admonishing an onlooker who is accused of passing by and "handling and turning" his wounds with "an unwounded eye" (l. 2). Crashaw's physical language of "handling and turning" suggests that engaging in such sacred seeing without engaging the body and making oneself emotionally available to the liturgical scene envisioned divests the scene of its proper sacramentalism. This is made evident in the poem's ultimate claim that "the calm that cools thine eye does shipwrack mine...unmoved to see one wretched, it so make him so" (ll. 3-4). In this construction

Crashaw's commitment to intersubjectivity becomes most clear in his consistent emphasis on the heat of Teresa's heart, which he directly addresses as "O sweet incendiary" (l. 85), a transition that clarifies the metonymic relationship between the heart and heat itself while also generating considerable empathy. Hers is a flaming heart, but also a heart that causes others to flame. This chiasmic representation generates considerable empathy, as Teresa's great woundedness produces an empathic exchange, wherein the affective experience of Teresa herself is mirrored in the reader, who in turn comes to recognize the self through an empathic blurring of selves, bodies, hearts, heat, and feelings.<sup>127</sup> In this view, "the self and other have no independent existence, no intrinsic identity, and our subjectivity is preceded by an intersubjectivity produced by empathies running deeply beneath our embodied and interdependent biological lives" (Teske 779). In Crashaw's depiction of this overheated exchange between a self and other comes consciousness of the self that is bred through both intersubjectivity and the embodied cognitive processes at work in the act of reading and feeling his devotional verse.

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Crashaw, voicing Christ, demands not only a gaze into his wounds, but a reflexive woundedness in his audience, else they make Christ suffer even more violently by suffering alone. Much like "The Flaming Heart," this poem demonstrates Crashaw's devotion to intersubjectivity as the primary means to generate and also interpret real presence.

<sup>127</sup> Usefully enough, cognitive scientists explain that the feeling of empathy is the direct result of involuntary and sensorimotor coupling mediated by "mirror neurons" that are active in the perception of intent as well as understanding the emotional and mental states of others as mirror neurons simulate similar motions. See Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti, "A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 8 (2004): 396-403; Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero, "The Mirror-Neuron System," *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 27 (2004): 169-92; and Marco Iacobini, *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

In the flames that erupt from Teresa's heart comes a liturgical moment with the potential to overwhelm or over-wound the reader with its piercing affect. Crashaw consequently tempers Teresa's flames by once again drawing our attention to his governing role in her production, directing her heart to

...show here thy art,  
Upon this carcass of a hard, cold, heart;  
Let all thy scattered shafts of light, that play  
Among the leaves of thy large books of day,  
Combined against this breast at once break in  
And take away from me my self and sin,  
This gracious robbery shall thy bounty be;  
And my best fortunes such fair spoils of me. (ll. 85-92)

In Crashaw's demand that Teresa's heart, not Teresa herself, show her "art" and begin the affective work of breaking open the speaker's cold heart, Crashaw gestures back to the humoral inversion at the poem's outset that enables Teresa to wield such a potent and enflamed heart. However, this humoral interchange between a cold male and a hot woman does much more than give Teresa the male attributes of heat and activity – her heat, and the poet's artful construction of it, initiates the kenotic process of self-emptying essential to the spiritual rebirth and renewal that will come with consciousness of the self as a devotional subject. Crashaw's speaker takes on the passive part by actively inviting the piercing and penetrating light emitted from her holy heart, which is figured as an open book that comes and turns the dark night of his soul to a blisteringly hot day.

Consequently, the speaker becomes as hot as she, and the old self is burnt up in fiery zeal for God's love. Such sacramental imagery might very easily be read as too affective – pointing too much to the body and the heightened emotional register required to accurately make meaning of this scene – but Crashaw accounts for even this response as he points readers back to the idea of fortunate misreading found in the assertion that his

“best fortunes” are found in such “fair spoils of me” (l. 92). The speaker’s claim to be fortunate in his faults derives from the newfound knowledge of self he has gained from the painful purging of sin that has commenced with his careful transposition of Teresa as the hot and holy agent at the center of Crashaw’s text. This misreading or transposition is the product of Crashaw’s own careful tutorial of his readers and their reading habits, and thus Crashaw once again calls any overly enflamed readers to remember their grammatical attention, and continue to follow his rule.

This gentle reminder of his authorial prerogative, and the reader’s lack of interpretive agency, introduces a slew of apostrophic and hyperbolic expressions meant to amplify the emotional register of the poem’s conclusion. Crashaw addresses Teresa explicitly now, and no longer directs his attention to her heart alone, exclaiming, “O thou undaunted daughter of desires!” (l. 93). Crashaw then immediately attempts to describe such divine desire through a set of ever-increasing comparisons that project the presence of a divine Other who responds intimately, emotively, and bodily to Teresa’s intense desires:

By all thy dow’r of lights and fires;  
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;  
By all thy lives and deaths of love;  
By thy large draughts of intellectual day,  
And by thy thirsts of love more large than they;  
By all thy brim-filled bowls of fierce desire;  
By thy last morning’s draught of liquid fire (ll. 94-100).

The focus here is on a divine Other who becomes present through the affective work of devotion and with the incarnational rhetoric that triangulates between the devotional desire voiced in Crashaw’s amplified comparisons, his subject-speaker’s desire to read Teresa rightly, and his readers’ desire to interpret the poem both feelingly and

thoughtfully. The final scene in Crashaw's imagining is that of a wedding, where Teresa takes on the part of bride, bringing her hot heart as a dowry to her bridegroom, Christ. This highly sensual imagery drawn from Song of Solomon relies heavily upon the reader's passionate involvement with Teresa's wounds of love brought about by her recognition of the intersubjective self, a self-in-relation to an empathic Other who feels and desires as passionately as she does. In the traditional wedding imagery provided by Crashaw that figure is certainly the divine Other, but as the comparisons advance it becomes evident that a range of others are also present to wound and be wounded by Teresa's flaming heart. Crashaw's diction directs the readers to never lose sight of themselves in this kenotic process as they are reminded to account for their own embodied cognitive practices as they interpret the poem. Specifically, Crashaw's "draughts of intellectual day" and "thirsts of love more large than they" appeal specifically to both grammatical as well as liturgical literacies, and the need for both in order for readers to "read right." Crashaw's repeated emphasis on Teresa's "draughts," which is reiterated in lines 97 and 100, is an interesting choice in that it may well refer to the drawing of a bow or sweep of a weapon (10), as Teresa is originally described as wielding not only wounding darts but also love's whole quiver, and thus the diction choice reminds readers of Teresa's intense activity at the poem's outset as well as her status of a Christ-like "man of war." "Draught" also suggests the drinking in of something either by the mind, soul, or body (16, 17), an interpretation that is assisted by Crashaw's rendering of her love as "thirsts" (l. 98) that overwhelm "brim-fold bowls of fierce desire" (l. 99). Crashaw's extended description of Teresa's desire also serves as a

draught, however, as the term can also refer to drawing or stretching something out (18), as Crashaw certainly does in this final pile of comparisons to describe Teresa's love.

In fact, Crashaw's interest in Teresa's draughts functions much more convincingly as a reference to the self than a description of her ecstatic state, for Crashaw may also be punning on the drawing to which he refers to at the poem's outset.

"Draught" can also describe a writing implement's stroke on a surface (25) or representation of figures in work of art (28b). This final interpretation is reinforced by the parenthetical Crashaw embeds in the middle of this important final scene. As the comparisons wind down, and the important intersubjective self-fashioning that comes with recognizing and knowing the self-in-relation is underway, Crashaw interrupts the kenotic process just as readers might come to fully recognize themselves as active agents within the poem's intersubjective rendering of divine desire:

By the full kingdom of that final kiss  
That seized thy parting soul, and sealed thee his;  
By all the heav'ns thou hast in him  
(Fair sister of the seraphim!)  
By all of him we have in thee;  
Leave nothing of my self in me. (ll. 101-06)

The most important, and also most liturgically significant moment of the wedding ceremony comes with the final kiss confirming the couple's spiritual and physical union. Crashaw stylizes this crucial sacramental scene with Teresa's soul departing her body to be fully sealed to the divine, but her ecstatic union serves a greater purpose in Crashaw's rendering: it points to us. Through her union, Crashaw contends, "we" have access to the divine Other and can know him as fully as she does, but our desire for him and access to him is channeled through Teresa's desire as Crashaw's subject-speaker declares "we"

have him only “through thee.”<sup>128</sup> If we have not come to know ourselves through our reading of Teresa’s overwhelming desire, her insatiable thirsts, and her furious heat, then we certainly cannot come to know the divine Other. We must engage in that particular sacramental seeing of the self that accommodates both our feelings and our thoughts as they interact within the body of the believer. It seems meaningful then that this is the only plural first person pronoun that appears in the entire poem, as Crashaw deliberately transitions his speaker from the singular subjective states conveyed through the “you” and “me” of his earlier directives to the empathic blurring of subjective boundaries that “we” accomplishes. Crashaw’s subject-speaker thus comes to see himself defined fully and completely in relation to an equally human set of others: his readers, with whom he is in communion.

Crashaw’s commitment to define the self in relation to an other, or more accurately a set of others, reveals that the self cannot recognize divine love without flowing into an other and seeing the self as part of the Other. This celebration of intersubjectivity manifests most convincingly in Crashaw’s shocking interruption of Teresa’s and the readers’ kenosis with the parenthetical: “By all the heav’ns thou hast in him / (Fair sister of the seraphim!) / By all of him we have in thee; / Leave nothing of myself in me” (ll. 103-6). The penultimate effect of such a startling interruption at the poem’s most sacramentally rich and resonant moment is to remind the reader of Crashaw, the poet who has directed our attention away from the seraphim’s powerful central

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<sup>128</sup> In his reading of Thomas Carre’s “Crashawe, the Anagram,” Richard Rambuss declares that in the speaker’s homosocial bonding over both Crashaw’s and Carre’s mutual Marian devotion, “it is not Jesus who triangulates desire between men, as is often the case in such amorous spiritual friendships, but a startlingly eroticized Virgin Mary” (“Introduction” lxiii).



presence in the originally envisioned painting. In this final thrust, Crashaw inserts himself fully into the space of the poem, defining himself in an intersubjective mode that relies on the communion between words and images as well as thoughts and feelings to enable the kenotic removal of self that comes with his final lines: “Let me so read thy life, that I / Unto all life of mine may die” (ll. 107-08).<sup>129</sup> The enjambment in this final couplet is revealing: the self or “I” must flow outward in order to die for love of the Other. This image is not nearly as provocatively liquescent as many of his other Teresean or Marian poems, but the effect is astoundingly similar in its focus on distribution and dissemination of the self through interrelation with an Other.<sup>130</sup>

Crashaw concludes his meditation on Teresa’s flaming heart and the liturgical as well as grammatical interpretive modes through which we must approach her image by breaking down the borders of the self. His free acceptance of a boundless self, indeed a self who can “see our own hearts beating in the neck of the other” (Teske 781), is far from the highly individuated self seeking complete and utter removal from the body that Crashaw’s many critics have come to expect from his contemporaries and early modern devotional verse at large. Rather, “The Flaming Heart” reveals what Ryan Netzley has

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<sup>129</sup> The self evacuation enclosed in lines 106-108, which were appended to the poem as part of the larger final coda made up of lines 85-108, appear in the *Carmen Deo Nostrum* printing and were almost certainly composed after Crashaw’s conversion to Roman Catholicism. For all of his criticism of Crashaw’s excessive emotion, T.S. Eliot describes these final lines as the most brilliant of all Crashaw’s canon, declaring them “beyond analysis and perfected beyond criticism...the ultimate literary expression of the religious feeling of that strange period of sensual religious intensity” that is the Baroque (179-80).

<sup>130</sup> One need only look to “The Weeper,” “The Tear,” or “Sancta Maria Dolorum” for more explicit liquefaction that similarly leads Crashaw’s devotional subjects, and by association his readers, toward a recognition of a devotional selfhood crafted through intersubjectivity. Likewise, the expressive deluge of blood and water that pours forth from Christ’s wounds and plays such a central role in all of Crashaw’s Passion poetry functions similarly in its reflexive figuration.

termed Crashaw's commitment to "indistinguishability." However correctly Netzley identifies Crashaw's devotion to blending, liquefying, and generally relying on indistinction to create and also cover immanence within his poetics, Netzley ultimately argues that in Crashaw there is "no invitation for readerly participation; no performativity" (*Reading Desire* 104) as Crashaw's verse "drives us just to be present, without all of the learning and action and self-distinction that pedagogy implies" (Netzley 105). "The Flaming Heart," I would contend, offers a sharp contrast to this claim, as Crashaw's indistinction relies almost entirely on blurring gendered literacy modes as well as gendered bodies in the ultimate pedagogical act: teaching selflessly. Crashaw's investment in reminding readers of his presence, offering instruction to them, and then purposefully blending into the shared experience of kenotic self discovery that comes through the intersubjective architecture of love allows the poet Richard Crashaw, like Thomas Traherne's divine Other, to occupy the space of "both and neither."

Given the intersubjective self-fashioning that occurs in this exchange between Crashaw, Teresa, and his readers throughout the poem, the suggestion that the poet himself takes on the very hermaphroditic or at least trans status attributed to Teresa throughout the poem cannot be surprising. Rather, this construction functions as the ultimate gesture toward a self that is defined through intersubjectivity and the reflexive relationship that reveals blurry devotional boundaries between bodies, selves, and others. As such, it seems fitting that recent Crashavian criticism has moved away from the masculine versus feminine binary that once characterized critical reception of Crashaw's verse; instead, critics have recently proffered affirmations of Crashaw's authorial and cultural androgyny that manifests in a "devotional cosmopolitanism that values ecstatic

religious experience over national or doctrinal difference” (Rambuss “Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder 261).<sup>131</sup> This larger trend treating Crashaw’s entire canon as “androgynous” butts up against Susan Stewart’s reading of “The Flaming Heart” in which she claims that the complex and gendered power dynamics within the poem reveal a “complex transvestitism of power that is completely in line with Counter-Reformation dictates about the reception of holy images” (184).<sup>132</sup> However accurate Stewart’s rendering of the relationship between gender transposition and power in “The Flaming Heart” may be, her ultimate argumentative thrust positions all of Crashaw’s amplified rhetoric squarely within the Baroque rather than metaphysical poetic tradition. Like Crashaw’s seemingly feminine excess, this distinction has done a great deal to support Crashaw’s critical rendering as “foreign” and “other” to the masculine and English voices of metaphysical verse.

Much as Crashaw’s interest in gender transpositions have facilitated critical revision of this baroque poet, Richard Rambuss notes that “the fervent ecumenism of Crashaw’s Teresa poems also accords with the revisionary, expansive notion of a ‘universal Baroque’ recently put forward by Peter Davidson” (“Introduction” lxxiii). For Davidson, the Baroque indicates a flexible set of symbolic and international conventions that discursively override “all the allegiances of religious confession or nationality which have come to seem, since the turn of the century, unavoidable descriptors of a cultural endeavor” (qtd. in Rambuss “Introduction” lxxiii). Rambuss thus encourages a

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<sup>131</sup> For the “androgynous” qualities of Crashaw’s verse see, Eugene Cunnar, “Crashaw’s ‘Sancta Maria Dolorum’”; Paul A. Parrish, “The Feminizing of Power”; Sandra K. Fischer, “Crashaw, Ste. Teresa, and the Icon of Mystical Ravishment”; and finally, Mueller, “Women among the Metaphysicals.”

<sup>132</sup> See Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002).

reconsideration of Richard Crashaw not only as “Herbert’s second,” as he was styled in his own time, but also as a “baroque experimentalist, part of an early modern Anglo-Catholic avant-garde” invested in intentionally blurring the confessional distinctions that have formed the scaffolding for a great deal of Crashavian criticism (Rambuss “Introduction” xxxii). Such a re-visioning does much more than simply recuperate Crashaw to the High Church Anglicanism of the Laudian reforms, as Graham Parry sees Crashaw’s experimentalism and ecumenism.<sup>133</sup> Rather, Crashaw’s agile deployment of a “universal Baroque” reveals neither an exclusively liturgical nor an exclusively grammatical Crashaw, but a poet who demands that his readers engage and invest in the sometimes-fraught interplay between these interpretive modes and the confessional affiliations they gesture to.

In this vein, Rambuss has recently sought to reframe his influential and persuasive approach to Crashaw’s inhabiting of, rather than merely metaphoric gestures toward, the tropes of sacred eroticism and the language of a passionate and desiring body in his devotional verse, noting that his past work on Crashaw “ may have underplayed the intellectual qualities of his poetry in its relish for the poetry’s visceral, protean physicality” (“Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder” 266). As Rambuss goes on to point out, Crashaw may well be a poet who celebrates “surfaces, forms, decoration, sensations, ritual texts, and objects” (267) as opposed to the deep interiority critics have long celebrated in Donne and Herbert, but it seems an appropriate time for critics to also

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<sup>133</sup> Graham Parry describes Crashaw as a poet “most intimately caught up in the high Laudian phase of worship” (140) with a “readiness to enlarge the devotional territory of the English Church by appropriating subjects that were conventionally regarded as Catholic property” (141). See, *Glory, Laud and Honour: The Arts of the Anglican Counter-Reformation* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006).

“recognize the opulence and amplification of Crashaw’s poetry as an intellectual, even academic performance (and pleasure) [which] is not to say that it is not also devout. This is a literary practice of piety and intellect” (266). Crashaw’s concerted emphasis on enacting both grammatical and liturgical literacies in readers of “The Flaming Heart” directly supports such a revised view of Crashaw’s verse as both appealing to High Anglican as well as Roman Catholic and recusant sentiments. Crashaw’s verse should thus be considered, and critically accepted as “both and neither.”

As I have argued above, Crashaw may initially compel readers of “The Flaming Heart” to be ruled by him, and he may work diligently to remind them of his instructive and artistic contributions to the efficacy of their reading practices, but the self-distinction that comes with a unilateral pedagogical agenda gives way in “The Flaming Heart” as Crashaw’s speaker ultimately figures himself in an active state of agape, selfless in love of the other that is constructed through active engagement with *how* others come to know and feel love themselves. By the time we reach Crashaw’s final demand to “Let me so read thy life, that I / Unto all life of mine may die” (ll. 107-8), Crashaw’s subject-speaker can only be defined intersubjectively, as an “I” that defines the reader just as much as the poem’s speaker. Just as Crashaw deliberately collapses the seraphim’s and Teresa’s affective states into each other throughout the course of the poem, Crashaw constructs an architecture of loving intersubjectivity wherein his speaker and his reader become conscious of selfhood through their relation to each other, the divine Other, and the ecstatic otherness of Teresa’s flaming heart. Crashaw’s deliberate appeal to the thoughts and feelings that respond to both liturgical and grammatical interpretive modes not only reveals but revels in a self-in-relation, who comes into being through desire for an Other.

Rather than distinguishing his verse as stemming from either a continental and foreign or English and native devotional tradition, as either masculine or feminine, Crashaw's careful envisioning of how both thoughts and feelings interact with bodies and belief in his liturgically rich yet intellectually driven incarnational poetics reveals a commitment to blurring a great many boundaries all for the sake of real and true devotion to a divine Other whom we come to know ourselves through.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISABLING THE GAZE: RECONCILING MILTON'S BLINDNESS WITH A MONIST VISION OF DEVOTIONAL DESIRE

The blind, mad, lame, crippled, and unusually embodied have fired the imagination and underwritten the metaphors of classic Western literature. From Sophocles to Toni Morrison, disability confers distinction on protagonists and drives narrative.

—Rosemarie Garland-Thompson<sup>134</sup>

Man is a living being, intrinsically and properly one and individual. He is not double or separable: not, as is commonly thought, produced from and composed of two distinct and different elements, soul and body. On the contrary, the whole man is soul, and the soul man: a body, in other words, or individual substance: animated, sensitive, and rational

—John Milton, *Christian Doctrine*<sup>135</sup>

The above epigraph from John Milton is generally taken to be the most assertive statement of the poet's monism, or the belief in "the inseparability of matter and spirit, body and soul."<sup>136</sup> The preceding epigraph from a prominent 21<sup>st</sup>-century Disability Studies scholar appears at first glance to have very little to do with John Milton and even less to do with a belief system grounded in merging the immaterial and material aspects of the self. However, in the great pantheon of blind bards and disabled heroes Garland-Thompson gestures to, John Milton looms large. Not only did Milton feature a number of blind narrators and characters in his poetry, but at the age of 43 Milton's previously diminishing eyesight gave way to total blindness, and the internationally recognized poet

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<sup>134</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, "Disability and Representation," *PMLA* 120.2 (2005): 522-27 (523).

<sup>135</sup> Don M. Wolfe, ed., *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953-82), 6:318.

<sup>136</sup> William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983), 220.

and polemicist found himself enveloped in darkness.<sup>137</sup> Milton's physical disability was far from lost on enemies eager to declare his blindness "a direct punishment from God" (Lewalski *Life* 407) and thus proof of his political heresy.<sup>138</sup>

This chapter will assert that the monist vision of an indivisible body and spirit at the heart of *Paradise Lost* directly engages with Milton's own identity as an unsighted person. The monism that underpins Milton's great epic enables angels, devils, and mankind to share both narrative and physical space, but it is the persistently dualist ontologies of Satan and his cohort that ultimately prove Milton's deep commitment to monism.<sup>139</sup> In his rejection of dualist ontologies that attempt to separate the soul from the body, Milton offers up the possibility of a hidden wholeness, or as he comes to call it in Book 12 a "paradise within" (line 587), that is available to each and every human being, regardless of physical impairment. This vision of wholeness, I argue, is supported in part by a staged encounter between sighted readers and an unsighted author who constantly

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<sup>137</sup> According to John Aubrey, Milton's vision began to decline swiftly while composing *A Second Defense of the English People* (1651), with one of his eyes failing altogether before the text was complete; his other eye failed, leaving him completely blind, early in the spring of 1652 (Jones 230). Milton himself describes first becoming conscious of diminishing eyesight in the mid 1640s, ten years prior to extensively describing his degenerating sight to his friend the Athenian scholar, diplomat, and zealous proponent of Greek liberty, Leonard Philaras. Milton's 1654 letter to Philaras provides the most authoritative description of his descent into blindness, as he is responding to his friend's request for such a report to pass along to the French physician François Thévenin in the hopes of successful treatment. In the letter, however, Milton sounds distinctly less than hopeful about the prospect of altering his condition. See William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen Fallon, eds., *The Essential Prose of John Milton* (New York: Modern Library, 2013), especially 17-18.

<sup>138</sup> Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1979).

<sup>139</sup> Stephen Fallon makes this convincing argument in *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1991). See chapters 6-7 especially.



portrays blindness as sliding between the metaphoric and material reality. The joint presence of physical disability and metaphoric enlightenment places tremendous pressure on readers of *Paradise Lost* to engage in the interpretive work of deciphering truth from trope. But for Milton, I will argue, the lines between the immaterial and material are always blurry. In the process of this interpretive work Milton forces readers to become acutely aware of the unreliability of sightedness as the means of perceiving truth. Ultimately, the persistent intrusion of the literal onto the allegorical trains readers to accept the epistemological collapse between seeing and knowing that allows Milton to recast his marginalized position as an unsighted person by pointedly destabilizing the ableist epistemologies that view the godly body as the able body.

In doing so, Milton reveals the prosthetic power of *Paradise Lost* to materialize a monist vision of immanent divine presence that infuses able and disabled bodies alike. I thus posit the prosthetic power of *Paradise Lost* to upset the rigid dichotomies between material and immaterial, ability and disability, and also poetry and lived reality by offering readers a devotional subjectivity that neither rejects nor removes from the disabled body.

### **Staring at the Blind**

To say that Milton's blindness had an impact on his later poetry is neither revolutionary nor terribly interesting. Eleanor Gertrude Brown, Marjorie Hope Nicolson, William Kerrigan, Angelica Duran, Jennifer Sherman Roberts, and William John Silverman, among others, have all discussed Milton's poetic production in direct relation to the

cultural and medical contexts of his disability.<sup>140</sup> Given that Milton lived and wrote in a world where sightedness occupied not only the dominant cultural position, but also carried considerable spiritual signification, it is no surprise to find that Milton's blindness, and that of his narrator, operates as an explicit theme in a poem that is quite literally saturated with gazes.<sup>141</sup> God, Satan, Adam, and Eve all explore and assess their surroundings visually, and the landscape itself issues "answering looks" (4.464). Even the most inattentive of readers would be hard-pressed to conclude *Paradise Lost* without becoming conscious of the eye's incredible power to shape our sense of the world and also our place within it.

Since sight was, and largely continues to be, understood as the most predominant of human senses, the event of Milton's blindness met with considerable contemporary response. The prospect of a blind prophet was ripe for signification, and the "classic double-sided trope of blindness as both a sign of perceptual or ethical inadequacy and a mystical gift" (Mintz "Dalilah's Touch" 151) was quickly deployed by friends and

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<sup>140</sup> Eleanor Gertrude Brown, *Milton's Blindness* (New York: Columbia UP, 1934); Marjorie Hope Nicolson, "Milton and the Telescope," *ELH* 2.1 (1935): 1-32; Nicolson, "The Telescope and Imagination," *Modern Philology* 32.3 (1935): 233-260; Kerrigan, *Sacred Complex*; Jennifer Sherman Roberts, "Getting an Earful: The Place and Process of Hearing in Early Modern England," diss. U of Minnesota, 2007; Angelica Duran, "The Blind Bard, According to John Milton and His Contemporaries," *Mosaic* 46.3 (2013): 141-57; William John Silverman, "Seeing While Blind: Disability, Theories of Vision, and Milton's Poetry," diss. Florida State University, 2011.

<sup>141</sup> Franklin R. Baruch's "Milton's Blindness: The Conscious and Unconscious Patterns of Autobiography" also argues that Milton's experience of blindness is closely integrated into his poetry as "an interaction of mutual needs, with Milton's requirements both as a poet and as an emotionally wounded, sensitive man in perfect symbiotic union" (26). While identifying Milton's blindness as a crucial component of Milton's poetic self representation, Baruch, however, fails to fully account for the ways in which Milton's status as not just a blind, but a disabled person, drives his representation of vision in *Paradise Lost*. See Baruch, *ELH* 42.1 (1975): 26-37.

enemies alike. Given the unavoidable public performance of Milton's disability, this first section will outline contemporary responses to Milton's blindness and also the ways in which *Paradise Lost* was seen as closely connected to Milton's disability. This foundation is necessary to illustrate the ways in which Milton develops a disability subjectivity in *Paradise Lost* that actively confronts ableist positions that often interpret disability as something out of place and in need of correction.

Partisan vitriol was quick to figure Milton's disability as indicative of both misguided political opinions, and undeniable evidence of divine judgment—an external signifier that if a prophet at all, the prophet in support of revolution and regicide was as false as the Pharisees.<sup>142</sup> In *No Blind Guides* (1660), for example, Robert L'Estrange viciously adapts Matthew 15:14 to warn the English populace against Milton's political guidance via the rather pointed claim that “If the Blinde lead the Blinde, Both shall fall into the Ditch” (*No Blind Guides* 1). In the same year and in a similar manner *The Censure of the Rota* celebrated the demise of Milton's beloved Protectorate by lambasting him for having “scribbled [his] eyes out” for “little or no purpose” (4).<sup>143</sup> In response, Milton embraced the relation between the material state of his body and the inner workings of his soul by actively refuting the image of a god-forsaken blind man. In *The Second Defense of the English People* (1654), for example, Milton offers the alternate image of a devoted servant to the state who lost his sight pursuing two godly

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<sup>142</sup> For a more far-reaching account of how Milton's detractors characterized his blindness in popular print than I provide here, see Duran, “The Blind Bard,” esp. 152-54.

<sup>143</sup> *The censure of the Rota upon Mr Miltons book, entituled, The ready and easie way to establish a free common-wealth* (1660). The tract is a royalist burlesque ascribed to the republican James Harrington in a way designed to mock both Milton and Harrington. Roger L'Estrange, *No blinde guides, in answer to a seditious pamphlet of J. Milton's intituled Brief notes upon a late sermon* (1660).

callings: duty and liberty. When Milton's detractors styled his blindness as a physical manifestation of an internal lack, Milton could respond by formulating his blindness as the product of an excessive devotion that, while physically inconvenient, was more than compensated for with prophetic insight.

To support such a perspective, Milton could and did draw from a litany of "ancient bards and wise men" composed of philosophers, poets, statesmen, theologians, and biblical figures who, though blind, were "recompensed with far more potent gifts" (*Second Defense* 1080).<sup>144</sup> Milton's rhetorical ability, he vehemently argued, was not impinged in the least by his lack of eyesight, an assertion supported by governmental provision of amanuenses and assistants so that he might continue on in his role as Secretary of Foreign Tongues (1649-60) well after his eyesight abandoned him altogether.<sup>145</sup> In fact, in the years after the Restoration (1660), when Milton's star ought to have seemed the most dim, he could lay claim to a number of eager young pupils like Thomas Ellwood and Cyriack Skinner as evidence of sustained intellectual and poetic vigor, if not his continued celebrity. Milton's self-representation was, according to David Loewenstein, a brilliant blend of "personal drama" with an "epic vision of history"

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<sup>144</sup> For a thorough treatment of the Greek mythology surrounding blindness and insight see Françoise Létoublon, "To See or Not to See: Blind People and Blindness in Ancient Greek Myths," in *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, eds. Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia D. Karakantza, and Olga Levaniouk, *Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010). On the Christian tradition see Chad Hartstock, *Biblical Interpretation Series: Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Boston: Brill, 2007); and Moshe Barasch, *Blindness: The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>145</sup> For a more detailed account of the onset of Milton's blindness, see Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, eds., *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2008), 211-13.

(*Milton and the Drama of History* 171).<sup>146</sup> Indeed, the image of Milton as loyal subject sacrificing his vision for the sake of the “grand old cause” was so provocative that it invited political adversaries to view his blindness as “fair game” for “insults [that] utilized the same categories in describing his blindness as did Milton himself” (Duran “The Blind Bard” 151). Milton was too public and too divisive of a figure for his disability to simply exist—it demanded a story (Bérubé 570).<sup>147</sup> Milton understood this truth all too well, as the event of his blindness elicited a great many stories, and *Paradise Lost* provided an opportunity to control that narrative as best he could.

Milton’s identity as a disabled person is so intimately tied to *Paradise Lost* that his friend and fellow poet, Andrew Marvell, makes Milton’s blindness the focus of his introductory poem celebrating the second printing of *Paradise Lost*. Much like the poem it is meant to introduce, “On Mr. Milton’s *Paradise Lost*” relentlessly calls attention to the poet’s blindness as Andrew Marvell struggles to interpret his friend’s physical condition in relation to the selfsame archetypal constructions of disability Milton himself had to respond to. In the following analysis, I would like to draw attention to the ways in which Marvell’s prefatory poem plays with culturally ambivalent representations of blindness to present Milton’s disabled body as *the* real exhibit worthy of sustained observation in *Paradise Lost*. In doing so, I demonstrate the complex ways in which longstanding disability scripts ricochet between Milton’s own disability performance, communal judgments and expectations, and ultimately our own readerly experience of

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<sup>146</sup> David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1990).

<sup>147</sup> This particular claim regarding Milton’s unique circumstances adapts Michael Bérubé’s larger claim that all disability demands a story. For more on disability as an impetus to narrative see Bérubé, “Disability and Narrative,” *PMLA* 120.2 (2005): 568-76.

*Paradise Lost.*

In Marvell's encomiastic poem, Milton's blindness looms large, casting a spectral shadow over both the occasional poem and the epic it introduces. Marvell frames "On Mr. Milton's *Paradise Lost*" almost entirely around the dichotomy between sight and sightedness. Marvell himself assumes the role of both spectator and critic, as the opening lines suggest:

When I beheld the poet blind, yet bold,  
In slender book his vast design unfold,  
Messiah crowned, God's reconciled decree,  
Rebelling angels, the Forbidden Tree,  
Heav'n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, all; the argument  
Held me a while, misdoubting his intent  
That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)  
The sacred truth to fable and old song,  
(So Samson groped the temple's posts in spite)  
The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight. (lines 1-10)<sup>148</sup>

From the poem's outset, Marvell presents himself as a reader with misdoubts about the very project of Milton's great epic. The poem's concern initially centers on the tension between Milton's rhetorical strength overwhelming its biblical subject and transposing the sacred into no more than fiction, a work of art rather than faith. However, it is worth noting that Marvell's backhanded compliment praising Milton's poetic might is grounded in an overt reminder of the poet's physical disability. The coordinating conjunction "yet" in Marvell's initial description of Milton as a "poet blind, yet bold" (l. 1) situates Milton's poetic vigor as an unexpected surprise, given his blindness. Marvell's speaker appears shocked by Milton's surprising lack of inability, and this opening attention to blindness as anything but disabling suggests that readers too will find themselves

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<sup>148</sup> Andrew Marvell, *The Complete Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith, rev. ed. (Harlow, England and New York: Pearson, 2007). For more on the influences and composition of Marvell's prefatory poem, see pp. 180-2.

surprised by not only Milton's dexterity in verse but also the vast design of *Paradise Lost* itself. These feelings of surprise turn to near-alarm in line nine's parenthetical aside comparing the blind bard to the equally blind biblical hero Samson.<sup>149</sup> Judith Scherer Herz reads this comparison as an opportunity for Marvell to cast himself as a "double spectator" of both *Samson Agonistes* and also *Paradise Lost*, claiming that the parenthetical itself positions Samson the character and also the play that bears his name as "a synonym for its creator" (245).<sup>150</sup> We are to read Milton and Samson as interchangeable by virtue of their shared disability.<sup>151</sup> In Herz's reading, Marvell's comparison echoes the bard's own anxiety at the heart of *Samson*: that he just may be an embittered blind man void of sufficient divine inspiration to match the task at hand, but emboldened by recognition of divine disfavor and a taste for vengeance against his enemies (245). Marvell's allusion certainly invites readers to consider the author of *Paradise Lost* in direct relation to the blind Israelite hero of the accompanying text, but the weight of this comparison lies in the set of parentheticals that juxtapose Milton's

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<sup>149</sup> Nigel Smith notes that Marvell's reference to Samson in relation to Milton is the first in a tradition of critical association between Milton and Samson. See Smith, 183, n. 9.

<sup>150</sup> Judith Scherer Herz, "Milton and Marvell: The Poet as Fit Reader," *Modern Language Quarterly* 39.3 (1978): 239-63.

<sup>151</sup> In contrast, Eleanor Gertrude Brown's seminal work *Milton's Blindness*, which she approaches from her own position as an unsighted individual, disputes any direct correlation between Samson and Milton for the reason that Samson readily associates his blindness with punishment for his sins while Milton vociferously rejects identifying his blindness with either sin or punishment. See *Milton's Blindness* (1934; New York: Octagon, 1968). Stephen Fallon similarly asserts that while the depiction of blindness in *Samson Agonistes* is informed by Milton's own "intimate and bitter experience" we are not to read Samson as an analogue for Milton himself. See *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-representation and Authority* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007), 252.

intellectual strength and the physical strength with which Samson enacts his revenge.<sup>152</sup> It is notable that the comparison to Samson, whose blindness could easily be read as a punishment for his sins, echoes royalist critiques of Milton's disability (McWilliams 164).<sup>153</sup> In making such a comparison, Marvell positions Milton's blindness, rather than the poem he is meant to introduce, as the real focus of readerly attention; readers are bluntly invited to consider whether Milton's blindness signifies sin or prophetic insight, the product of God's good grace.

To that end, the epistemology supporting the entire poem revolves upon sightedness as the premier means of acquiring knowledge. Marvell pointedly declares that he "beheld" Milton's verse and "saw him strong" (ll. 1,7), thus positioning himself as a sighted critic of Milton's poem.<sup>154</sup> What is more, Marvell's first line, "When I beheld the poet blind, yet bold" may deliberately echo Milton's own first line in "Sonnet 19," wherein a blind Milton reflects back on his sighted days: "When I consider how my light is spent" (l. 1).<sup>155</sup> Exchanging consideration, a verb that suggests a process of prolonged thought, with beholding, which suggests an immediate sensory witnessing rather than an internal process of cogitation, underscores Marvell's sightedness as well as the

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<sup>152</sup> Nigel Smith also glosses lines 6-10 as expressing concern over the possibility that Milton intentionally taints Christianity with the intrusion of classical myth as an act of revenge for the divine punishment of blindness. See Smith, 183.

<sup>153</sup> John McWilliams, "Marvell and Milton's Literary Friendship Reconsidered," *SEL* 46.1 *The English Renaissance* (2006): 155-77.

<sup>154</sup> Nigel Smith also notes Marvell deploying similar phrasing in a letter to Milton discussing his *Defensio Secunda* in June of 1654: "When I consider how equally it turns and rises with so many figures." See Smith, 182.

<sup>155</sup> There is debate regarding the numbering of Milton's sonnets. I take my numbering from William, Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen Fallon, eds., *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (New York: Modern Library, 2007).



preeminence of visual sight as a more facile means of acquiring understanding. In doing so, Marvell directly juxtaposes his mode of meaning making against the blind figures of Samson and Milton who must rely on the lesser senses of touch and sound to make sense of their worlds. Marvell's description of Samson "groping" the temple's pillars makes these comparisons all the more clear. In *The Transposer Rehears'd* (1673), for instance, Milton's detractor Samuel Butler describes the "blind author of *Paradise Lost*" beginning Book 3 "groping for a beam of *Light*" (orig. cited in Smith, 183). When Marvell compares Milton to Samson, and then describes Samson as groping his way through the world, he obliquely gestures to the long-standing tradition of linking blindness with sensuality, a relation that comes to fuller fruition in the speaker's subsequent concern over the blind poet losing his artistic course when wandering in such a "wide field" (l.13). The transposition of touch for sight as the primary mode of apprehending the world led to popular medieval and early modern stereotypes of the blind as being fixated on groping, reaching, and altogether consumed with a range of desirous touches that put their sensual natures on exhibit (Classen 52).<sup>156</sup> Marvell's comparison to Samson thus posits that Milton's poetry may be an act of revenge, an angry attempt at compensating for the loss of his sight. Marvell simply proffers this potential interpretation, tucking away the implicit comparison between Samson's blind groping and the possibility of his friend's sensual nature in a parenthetical that insulates himself from such an accusation. However, the comparison between Milton and Samson, a biblical figure whose blindness is directly linked to his sensual appetites, certainly encourages readers to approach an epic so ambitious as *Paradise Lost* with a watchful eye set on discerning whether

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<sup>156</sup> Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: U of Illinois P, 2012).

Milton's poem is a product of heavenly muses singing into Milton's discerning ear or if it is perhaps a product of more corporal concerns.

This explicit attention to Milton's blindness continues throughout the poem, where in the second stanza Marvell shifts abruptly from his initial trepidation over the blind bard's motivations to considerable praise:

Yet as I read, soon growing less severe,  
I liked his project, the success did fear;  
Through that wide field how he his way should find  
O'er which lame faith leads understanding blind;  
Lest he perplexed the things he would explain,  
And what was easy he should render vain. (ll. 11-16)

While this brief second stanza transitions away from the profoundly negative image of Milton as a violent revenger, Marvell's concern over the nature of Milton's inspiration persists. He wonders if this poetic task is driven by personal vanity rather than divine inspiration. Marvell's earlier worries over the suitability of Milton's project may have dissipated as he continues to read and more fully comes to "see" and thus apprehend Milton's narrative agenda, but his fascination with Milton's blindness implies a much deeper sense of apprehension at the prospect of Milton's success. This unease finds form in Marvell's imagined scene of navigation, where the blind man easily traverses the most challenging poetic grounds without any apparent stumbling or assistance. Milton's sound navigation disturbs popular assumptions about the blind, assumptions that Marvell is quick to remind us of with the subsequent images of "lame faith" leading "understanding blind" through the perplexing wilderness of divine verse.<sup>157</sup> The semicolon in line

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<sup>157</sup> The image of the faithful Edgar leading a physically blinded Gloucester in *King Lear* comes immediately to mind. Edgar's disguise as the mad beggar Poor Tom would have classified him amongst the indigent whose lack of financial worth made them the social equivalent of the "lame" beggars traditionally supported through charitable giving of the godly community. For more on the relation between disabled persons and the

fourteen conjoins two oppositional images of disability: first, we see a dexterous blind man easily navigating the field in front of him, and secondly, Marvell presents the contrary image of a blind man who means to complete an easy task, but makes it so difficult it is rendered worthless. Both of these oppositional images gesture back to Marvell's initial concern over whether Milton's project might ultimately prove an exercise in artistic skill rather than authentic devotion. The artistically gifted blind man makes quick work of the challenges presented by the incredible narrative range presented to him. However, in his ambition to provide readers with greater understanding by way of his imaginative rendering of the sacred, Marvell suggests that he might risk perplexing readers for whom simple faith suffices. In either case, Marvell's repeated waffling between concern and praise and then back again is facilitated entirely by the images of disability the poem has thus far relied upon. What is clear, however, is how Marvell's representation of disability reminds readers of the expected limitations of blindness. Whether uniquely gifted or struggling in vain, in either case we are confronted with a body that lacks the sense most associated with understanding. In Marvell's construction, Milton's body is an abnormal body, and as such it cannot pass without narration and interpretation (Couser 457).<sup>158</sup>

Curiously enough, the image of a blinded Milton struggling in vain to perform a

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impoverished in early modern England see Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2001), esp. pp. 23-27.

<sup>158</sup> Speaking of disabled bodies, Thomas G. Couser asserts, "the unmarked case – the 'normal' body – can pass without narration" whereas "the scar, the limp, the missing limb, or the obvious prosthesis – calls for a story" (457): see "Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 456-59.

task that a sighted person would presumably execute with greater ease bears a shadowy resemblance to a story told by one of Milton's contemporary critics, Pierre du Moulin. In this recounted fantasy vision, du Moulin gleefully looks on

in silence, and not without a soft chuckle, at seeing my bantling laid at another man's door, and the blind and furious Milton fighting and slashing the air, like the hoodwinked horse-combatants in the old circle, not knowing by whom he was struck and whom he struck in return. (orig. cited in Masson 220)<sup>159</sup>

Du Moulin's desire to look on as Milton plays the blind buffoon struggling to make sense of his surroundings suggests a very particular kind of gaze. He does not want to passively observe Milton; rather, du Moulin fantasizes about humiliating Milton through a gaze that aggressively frames the gifted author as entirely lacking understanding, a man confused enough to mistake du Moulin's "bantling" or bastard child for someone else's. The "bantling" du Moulin refers to can only be *Regii Sanguinis Clamor Ad Coelum Adversus Parricidas Anglicanos* (1652), a public critique of Milton's support of regicide that was authored by du Moulin, but misattributed to Alexander More, whom Milton mercilessly skewered in his rebuttal. Milton's forceful response to *Regii Sanguinis*, and du Moulin's subsequently imagined scene deriding Milton's ability to comprehend the world around him, demonstrates that "even the literary endeavors of the blind... could be recast as physical comedy unintentionally performed by those who, because sightless, know not what they do" (Classen 55). Du Moulin knew full well that Milton was a worthy intellectual opponent, but his blindness offers the opportunity for an accusation

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<sup>159</sup> David Masson, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time*, vol. 5 (London: Macmillan, 1877). For more on the relationship between Pierre du Moulin, see Martin Dzelzainis, "Milton, Peter du Moulin and the Authorship of *Regii Sanguinis Clamor Ad Coelum Adversus Parricidas Anglicanos* (1652)," *Notes and Queries* 60.4 (2013): 537-8.

that would have otherwise been completely unfounded. If Milton was subject to accusations of immorality and comic imbecility on account of his blindness, one would think that a poem written by a friend to introduce and celebrate a significant poetic achievement would categorically reject any association of blindness with such negative stereotypes. Marvell's poem, however, does not.

Instead, Marvell conscientiously places a series of disability scripts before readers' eyes. Throughout the poem readers are treated to a parade of familiar disability tropes: the "obsessive avenger" intent on exacting revenge on those whom he deems responsible for his impairment; the "comic misadventurer" whose disabled body operates as the locus of comedic violence that is initiated in viewing the disabled body in action; and finally, as the poem begins to feel more authentically encomiastic, we meet the "inspirational overcomer" who somehow manages to surmount the limitations and pathology of their abnormal body.<sup>160</sup> It is interesting to note, that as Marvell transitions from negative to positive disability scripts he turns our readerly gaze away from Milton's blindness and onto himself. He admits feelings of jealousy (l. 18) when reading and recognizing "that no room is here for writers left, / But to detect their ignorance or theft" (ll. 29-30).<sup>161</sup> With *Paradise Lost*, Milton has covered every poetic topic conceivable,

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<sup>160</sup> The labels for these disability stereotypes are not my own invention, but are largely paraphrased from the following sources: Paul Longmore, "Screening Stereotypes: Images of Disabled People in Television and Motion Pictures," *Social Policy* 16 (1985): 31-7; David Hevey, *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Martin Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994); and finally, Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, "Introduction: Disability Studies in Commotion with Performance Studies" in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005), 1-12.

<sup>161</sup> Nigel Smith glosses Marvell's explicit declaration of jealousy in line 18 as referring to concern over Dryden's "less skillful hand" (l. 19) adapting *Paradise Lost* into a stage

and Marvell's admission of professional envy and even anxiety over this fact, frees him to praise the "gravity and ease" (l. 36) with which Milton sings. Eventually Marvell appears to overcome his jealousy by figuring Milton as a fantastic bird of paradise soaring far above regular "human flight" (ll. 37-40). In this portrayal, Milton requires neither touch nor sight; his verse, and vicariously Milton himself, "never flags, but always keeps on wing" (l. 40). Such an imaginative comparison provides a significant transition from the sensual and sensory-impaired Samson groping his way towards revenge. In sharp contrast, Milton is here described as a bird capable of transcending earthly matters altogether.<sup>162</sup>

After such ample praise, Marvell turns briefly back to wonder at Milton's astounding and undeniable ability. He does so by posing questions both personal and professional: "Where couldst thou words of such a compass find? / When furnish such a vast expanse of mind?" (ll. 41-2). Marvell's questions account for both space (where) and time (when). He wonders when and where Milton could have furnished his mind with both the words and images capable of creating a poem set against such an expansive

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production and thus ruining it (Smith, 183). This is certainly the immediate context of ll. 18-22, but I would contend that while ll. 29-30 extend Marvell's concern over Dryden's adaptation, they do not disqualify Marvell from the community of writers overshadowed by the poetic genius and grand scale of *Paradise Lost*. In fact, as a fellow writer who was publicly associated with Milton it is hard to imagine that Marvell would not feel some anxiety of influence in relation to Milton. I borrow the idea of such anxiety, of course, from Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997).

<sup>162</sup> Angelica Duran reads this "positive bird imagery" as directly countering animal imagery deployed by Milton's adversaries that describe him as beast-like or invoke "negative snake imagery." She also notes that Milton invokes the same avian imagery in the invocations of Books 1, 3, 7, and 9 of *Paradise Lost*, and he gradually adapts the imagery surrounding the titular character in *Samson Agonistes* from animals that walk to those who soar ("The Blind Bard" 152-3).

interstellar backdrop, and his answer appears in a final simile meant to firmly shape our consideration of the “blind, yet bold” poet. Marvell declares: “Just heaven thee, like Tiresias, to requite, / Rewards with prophecy the loss of sight” (ll. 43-4). The final comparison between Milton and the great blind seer of antiquity remaps the initial Samson comparison entirely. Marvell initially presents Milton as an avenging artist using *Paradise Lost* and the poetic fame that would surely come from such a feat as payback against his enemies, particularly those who publicly attributed his blindness to a sinful or sensual nature. In Marvell’s last depiction, however, Milton is, like Tiresias, “requited” for the loss of his sight with the gift of prophecy. The poetry isn’t payback against God; it is payment from Him for the devotion and service that ultimately cost Milton his sight. This is by far the most complimentary image of Milton’s blindness in the entire poem, and as such it appears to serve its congratulatory purpose. However, it also helps to clarify why Marvell would place blindness and all of its negative associations at the forefront of our readerly attention in a poem meant to praise a man he claimed as a friend. The verb “to requite,” means to repay something owed, but it can also mean to retaliate or avenge (*OED* 1a, 2a). Ultimately, Marvell issues praise for Milton’s poetic accomplishments, but he cannot relinquish the seductive association between Milton and Samson, two avengers whose blindness can either be interpreted as a marker of divine favor and exceptionality or punishment and rejection.

Despite these sometimes-contradictory images of Milton’s blindness, what is readily apparent in “On Mr. Milton’s *Paradise Lost*” is that Andrew Marvell reads and responds to *Paradise Lost* from the dominant position of the sighted community. As such, Marvell anxiously projects a set of relatively stale disability scripts onto his friend’s

disabled body. Such prescriptive scripts are, as Bree Hadley argues, “designed not to tell us what it means to be disabled, but, rather, what it means to be able” (126).<sup>163</sup> Marvell is discomfited by Milton’s absolute otherness precisely because his blindness supposedly reveals his soul writ large. As a result of his incredible talents, the blind John Milton fits into only one of two available disability categories: the divinely punished sinner seeking vengeance against both God and the godly, or the divinely inspired prophet whose blindness unlocks otherworldly talents. Deploying these conventional scripts throughout the poem, and often in direct opposition to each other, reveals disability’s potential to disturb socially constructed bodily norms as well as the popular conviction that seeing is knowing. Marvell sees Milton, but he cannot know precisely what it is he sees. As a result, he attempts to position himself as the all-seeing spectator within the space of his poem, but ultimately the unknowability of Milton’s disability thwarts him to such an extent that he is only ever able to depict blindness as an incredible lack, either in the form of a single physical disability or a multi-layered instantiation where lack of grace manifests in physical impairment. The formulation of blindness as lack accentuates Marvell’s own position as a whole, able-bodied member of the sighted community. As a result of his own commitment to visual efficacy, Marvell struggles with the illegibility of the disabled body. To counteract the unknowability of Milton’s body and blindness, Marvell presents himself as a true “double spectator,” not just of *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Lost*, but also of the relationship between Milton’s body and soul. And he invites readers of *Paradise Lost* to do the same.

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<sup>163</sup> Bree Hadley, “(Dia)logics of Difference Disability, Performance and Spectatorship in Liz Crow’s Resistance on the Plinth,” *Performance Research* 16.2 (2011): 124-31.



### **The Blind Bard Stares Back, or Milton Crips *Paradise Lost***

In an earlier chapter I described Thomas Traherne's confident construction of a devotional subjectivity that positioned himself as an exhibit desiring the gaze of a transcendental spectator who also desires to look at him. When John Milton sits down to write *Paradise Lost*, however, his position as an exhibit subject to a range of interested gazes has already been decided for him. Like the entire created world, he is the object not only of God's divine gaze but also of a national and international community of spectators intent on interpreting his blindness as evidence of God's judgment. Thanks to Marvell's deliberate invocation of popular disability scripts to frame the second printing of *Paradise Lost*, readers from the second edition onward are encouraged to approach the poem as conscientious spectators ready to judge Milton's soul by deciding which narrative of disability they prefer to project onto his blindness.

He will be either sinner or supercrip, and in this sense his access to the able-bodied and godly community rides entirely on the prosthetic capacity of *Paradise Lost* to supplement the lack and limitations of Milton's supposedly deviant body. Given his options, Milton understandably invokes a supercrip persona in *Paradise Lost*, but in addition to positioning his disability as positive in nature, Milton utilizes the prosthetic potential of *Paradise Lost* to remap the rules of bodily normalcy altogether. Just as a medical prosthesis "occupies and occludes a disturbing middle ground, disrupting the clear mediation of subject and object" (White 173), *Paradise Lost* similarly blurs the boundaries between blind narrator and blind poet, effectively inserting the material reality

of Milton's blindness into the otherwise metaphoric plain of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>164</sup>

The initial invocation in Book 1 both draws readerly gazes to Milton's blindness and also styles Milton's blind speaker in the position of a supercrip by positively rendering his visual impairment as a vehicle for divine light. Milton's speaker implores the heavenly muses to give him the ability to "assert eternal providence, / And justify the ways of God to men" (1.25-6).<sup>165</sup> This initial figuration grounds the epic to come in a general desire to explain and make sense of the human condition, a desire not uncommon amongst epic narrators. However, the speaker's accompanying request to "illumine" that which is dark within him (1.22-3) moves relatively quickly from interest in the general human condition to the specific and immediate condition of a narrator who suffers from blindness, and as such exhibits an unusual relationship with the divine that grants insight otherwise unavailable to the able-bodied.<sup>166</sup> The speaker is a supercrip, as evinced by the disparity between his insufficient earthly sight and all-encompassing divine sight. The speaker's physical disability is pointedly developed in the accompanying directive for the muses to "Say first, for Heav'n hides nothing from thy view / Nor the deep tract of Hell, say first what cause / Moved our grand parents..." (1.27-9). Given the language of

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<sup>164</sup> Allon White, *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing: Collected Essays and Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993).

<sup>165</sup> This and all subsequent references to *Paradise Lost* are taken from William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen Fallon, eds., *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (New York: Modern Library, 2007).

<sup>166</sup> According to Jan Grue, one of the most defining characteristics of a supercrip narrative is the "rationalization and legitimization of impairments as *positive attributes*" (205). In "The Problem of the Supercrip: Representation and Misrepresentation of Disability," in *Disability Research Today: International Perspectives*, ed. Tom Shakespeare (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 204-18.

illumination undergirding the speaker's request for both knowledge and ability, the immediate and repeated directives to "say first" stand out in their reliance on sound over sight. While Milton acknowledges the necessity of transcendental sight to his project, his speaker does not desire to be shown a vision as Adam is granted in Book 11; instead, he both articulates and desires speech as the preferred mode of communicating knowledge. Prophetic insight might be the focus of this first invocation, but the emphasis on sound over sight stresses the reality of the speaker's physical condition as a blind man while also setting the stage for an explicit engagement with the physical reality of blindness throughout the poem. At the very least, this initial construction of meaning-making as an activity grounded in the sensorium reminds readers of Milton's own sensory limitations, their interpretive responsibility to decipher the meaning of his blindness, and also the poet's interest in mediating that act of interpretation. *Paradise Lost* is the space where all of these desires meet.

The distinction between blindness as a narrative trope signifying divine exceptionality and blindness as an actual physical condition are quickly muddled by the poem's early concentration on satanic vision. For instance, immediately after Milton presents a physically blind but spiritually enlightened narrator in Book 1 we meet the opposite in the form of a sighted but apostate angel assessing his newly fallen position:

for now the thought  
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain  
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes  
That witnessed huge affliction and dismay  
Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate:  
At once as far as angles ken he views  
The dismal situation waste and wild,  
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible

Served only to discover sights of woe,  
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes  
That comes to all (1.54-67).

Readers take on Satan's perspective, following the gaze of "baleful eyes" that haphazardly dart about acquiring visual data that leads to better comprehension of his physical situation. As Satan begins to discern the hellish landscape his vision is described in terms of extramission, where light from within the eye must be projected outward in order for sight to occur. William John Silverman reads this figuration as reminiscent of the Greek philosopher Plotinus's description of extramission wherein he argues, "That huge illumination... pouring outwards comes at last to the extreme bourne of its light and dwindles to darkness; this darkness, now lying there beneath, the soul sees and by seeing brings to shape" (orig. cited in Silverman 22). Silverman notes that the darkness described by Plotinus "sounds like the object of vision, and the description of seeing by the darkness at the edge of the light points toward Milton's 'darkness visible'" (22). Indeed, Satan's first vision of Hell directs readers to consider not just the imagined scene before them, but the very mechanics of vision.

Milton's emphasis on extramissive vision complicates the nature of light and darkness as they are introduced from the outset of the poem. The speaker's earlier request to have his internal darkness illuminated (1.22-3) appears to operate symbolically, as he expresses a desire to alter an internalized metaphoric blindness of the soul that is both personal and also understood to be shared to some extent by all postlapsarian people. However, this purely symbolic reading is immediately subverted by the concepts of extramission that inform Satan's sight. Milton's description of Satan subjected to a darkened dungeon punctuated by a flaming furnace that emits no light of

its own reads uneasily like a description of real physical blindness where the same eye that once discharged streams of light is now left impotent, catching shadowy reflections with no inner furnace to produce its own flames. Satan's active extramissive eye demands that readers of *Paradise Lost* account for physiological blindness as much as the metaphoric. Readers are prompted "to resist," as Stephen Hequembourg claims, "the temptation to read metaphorically what Milton is insisting can be understood as literally and physically true" (2). The fit reader will be able to trace how this collapse into the literal upends the either/or constructions that set external/internal, physical/spiritual and sighted/blind in opposition to each other. In Milton's construction, the metaphoric slides into the literal and then back again, a narrative strategy that motivates readers to abandon interpretive strategies and epistemological systems that rely on such insufficient dichotomies altogether.

To further this aim, the description of Satan viewing "as angels ken" (1.60) heightens the interpretive pressure placed on readers trying to discern whether Milton's intention is for them to think about literal or metaphoric light and sight. "Ken" variously describes a range of sight (*OED* 2a), the capacity to see (3), and also mental perception or recognition (4b). Readers are asked to follow Satan's gaze and take stock of the "darkness visible," but a visual range is a slippery and imprecise measurement of distance that is only further complicated by the fact that we are meant to consider the scope of angelic sight. Exactly how far is the average angel's visual range, and can a postlapsarian reader really make sense of this? Milton's attention to issues of sight and sightedness invites an epistemological relation between seeing and knowing, but this relation is immediately undercut by the indistinct nature of visual measurements and also

the mutability of physical sight itself. Readers are directed to assess and understand the world visually. Milton's layering of metaphoric and physical descriptors of vision, however, encourages them to take note of how subjective and unreliable these visual assessments are.

There is, perhaps, no better example of the eye's undependable nature than the infernal similes Milton uses to ground the spatial dimensions of his poetic universe. The first of these similes demonstrates the visual challenge Milton erects for readers quite nicely. Satan is described as having his "head uplift above the wave, and eyes / That sparkling blazed, his other parts besides / Prone on the flood, extended long and large / Lay floating many a rood" (1.193-6). In the setup of the simile to come, Satan's eyes are the only active bodily element; all of his other parts lie "prone," in either a physically stationary position or a state of mental readiness (*OED* 2). In either case, Satan assesses the world visually first and foremost, and so too do readers who once again find themselves confronted with vague visual cues to ground the imagined scene. Satan is "long and large," and he takes up "many a rood," a variable unit of length measuring approximately five to eight yards and primarily used to appraise property lines (*OED* 6A). With such vague descriptive prompts, it is no wonder that T.S. Eliot famously accused Milton of lacking "visual imagination" and writing "English like a dead language" (158, 159). Eliot even went so far as to claim that Milton was largely responsible for the "disassociation of sensibility" in much of the poetry from the 1600's onward (173).<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> To be fair, Eliot brands Dryden as sharing in this unwelcome legacy with Milton. Eliot's accusation, while certainly bombastic, has met with general critical dismissal, and

Milton's reliance on archetypal imagery has similarly lent itself to the suggestion that his verse lacks lively visual detail.<sup>168</sup> In this instance the challenge to more precisely pinpoint the size and scope of Milton's Satan increases with the infernal simile listing a number of mythical monsters to compare Satan against. The archfiend is described as being:

... in bulk as huge  
As whom the fables name of monstrous size,  
Titanian, or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,  
Briareos or Typhon, whom the den  
By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea beast  
Leviathan, which God of all his works  
Created hugest that swim th' ocean stream (1.196-202).

The stack of comparisons certainly serves the poem's epic vision, but it does very little to provide readers with a clearer sense of what exactly it is we are meant to see and understand. The speaker relies on amplification as each additional monster is meant to magnify the intended sense of awe and horror at the sight of such a devil. The recurring correlating conjunction "or" that strings the whole sequence together, however, complicates the intended amplification. "Or" modifies the images previously listed by offering additional, even varying perspectives. Given the classic and biblical provenance of these monsters, the scale, though obviously quite large, is difficult to pin down. Precisely how big is the "hugest" (1.202) creature in all of God's creation? Rather than strengthening the set of correspondences presented by Milton's speaker, they grow increasingly hazy.

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Eliot himself revises this severe judgment in his second essay on Milton. See: T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (1943; New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009).

<sup>168</sup> William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, ed. Gordon Campbell, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1.594.

According to Steven Hequembourg, Milton's the sense of spatial scale brought about by the infernal similes are often characterized by the "frequent addition of a third-person human perspective" that reinforces Milton's refusal to simply "allow metaphors to die off into literalness," but instead provides a "context in which they are resurrected into a new literal life – a space in which metaphors, like everything else that exists in a monist materialist cosmos, take place" (8-9). This alternate perspective that gives shape and substance to the symbolic realm comes to bear in this particular passage when Milton describes how sailors often mistake a slumbering Leviathan for an island that offers secure mooring for a safe night's rest on the open sea (1.204-8). The sailor's visual failure to distinguish safe harbor from a dangerous sea monster invites readers, here at the very outset of *Paradise Lost*, to begin the challenging interpretive work of turning away from unreliable, and very often actively deceptive, external signifiers that tempt us with their seemingly easy analysis. Even properly functioning eyes, Milton deftly reminds us, can still deceive. The epic simile comparing the great-deceiver Satan to the specious image of an island that is actually a dangerous sea-beast simultaneously encourages active reading practices while also emphasizing how physical sight is an unreliable mechanism for knowledge. The image of Leviathan is thus rich and resonant with symbolism. The epic comparison turns our gaze away from Satan onto a sea monster who is described variously in the Bible as the recipient of God's punishment and also symbolic of God's creative power.<sup>169</sup> Just as Milton is either a sinner or supercrip, readers are presented with the choice to interpret Leviathan as *either* a monster *or* an image of God's incredible power. This either/or scenario offers Milton an opportunity to

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<sup>169</sup> See Isaiah 27:1 and Job 41 respectively.



adapt the binary disability scripts available to him by offering a third, perhaps less obvious interpretation brought about by the sailor's third party perspective. The vague visual cues surrounding Leviathan encourage readers to consider their aptitude for seeing and truly knowing. Leviathan may have a monstrous outside, but Milton has given readers good reason to doubt visual efficacy. As a result, Leviathan could very well be a blurry mix of *both* positive *and* negative images, the horrendous monster and also the ultimate sign of God's creative force. In crossing these interpretive boundaries, Milton invites readers might do away with the dualism altogether.

The monist rejection of dualism inherent in Milton's portrayal of satanic vision becomes even more apparent with Stephen Fallon's suggestion that Satan's entrance to the poem as Leviathan alludes to Thomas Hobbes's opus of the same name.<sup>170</sup> The lumbering weight of Satan's immensity, remarks Fallon, underscores Milton's departure from the quasi-Cartesian dualism embraced by Hobbes (Fallon 207). Indeed, Satan and his cohort of fallen angels tempt readers into committing the sin of separating the spirit from the flesh entirely, of viewing the self as either/or rather than both/and. Milton's early emphasis on Satan's excellent physical vision establishes this temptation, as Satan *appears* to perceive things exactly as they are. For example, Satan's visual assessment of Beëlzebub's fallen and altered exterior as seeming entirely distinct "from him, who in the happy realms of light / Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine" functions as a synecdochic description of the entire horde (1.85-6). While Satan recognizes their physical transformation, and even acknowledges how he too has "changed in outward luster" (1.97), he rejects this physical reality as an authentic representation of identity.

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<sup>170</sup> Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, especially 206-22.

Instead, he proffers a wholly internal and immaterial notion of true selfhood, declaring for himself “A mind not to be changed by place or time” (1.253).<sup>171</sup> Satan goes on to use this construction of selfhood to express the ultimate freedom of the mind to exist as “its own place” (1.254), and therein lays the temptation.

Satan might claim that he is “still the same” (1.256) as he was in heaven, but to the fit reader fully ensconced in the postlapsarian world and with foreknowledge of biblical history, he is ontologically out of touch. Satan’s ontological misperception is most evident when he first encounters his daughter and former lover Sin, along with their offspring Death. Shocked at their horrific appearance and recoiling against the sight of Sin’s “double-formed” body, Satan proclaims: “I know thee not, nor ever saw till now / Sight more detestable than him and thee” (2.741, 744-5). While this is the newly fallen Satan’s first encounter with Death, he claims to have no prior knowledge of Sin. Even without Milton’s subsequent explanation of Sin’s spontaneous eruption from Satan’s head, thus materializing his wicked thoughts, the godly reader knows full well that Sin is Satan’s bedfellow. The sights Satan finds so utterly detestable in the narrative present of the poem are in fact, as Sin herself shortly reveals, the product of his own immoral thoughts and deeds. Sin is quite literally a physical manifestation of Satan’s interior. Recognizing her father’s and former lover’s rejection, Sin addresses Satan’s failure to see beyond her physical form when she wonders aloud, “...and do I *seem* / Now in thine eye so foul, once deemed so fair / In Heav’n” (2.747-9, my emphasis). Hers is a question not of identity, but of perspective. Sin knows who she is and what she was, as evinced when she describes both her external and internal condition at birth as being so “Likest to thee

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<sup>171</sup> Stephen Fallon identifies this construction of the satanic self as Cartesian in nature: see *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 203-4.

in shape and count'nance bright" (2.756). In fact, upon first seeing her in Heaven, Satan himself could not help but find "Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing" (2.764). Sin's origin story once again emphasizes the relationship between seeing and knowing in its attention to the disparity between what Satan sees and believes to know right now and what he previously saw and knew prior to his fall from grace. In the present context of the poem, however, Satan fails to recognize the truth so readily perceptible to readers: this double-formed foul woman who births mewling hellhounds continues to be a perfect mirror image of his truest self (2.741). Fallen readers who are already familiar with the realities of sin, death, and Satan's handiwork in the postlapsarian world have a much firmer grasp of Satan's identity than he appears to. Satan, in contrast, is caught up in what *seems*, not in what is so.<sup>172</sup>

Despite temporary recognition of his own transformation, Satan embraces willful misrecognition of his essential nature throughout the remainder of *Paradise Lost*. In his efforts to tempt Adam and Eve, he both styles himself and believes himself to be a liberating force offering freedom from the yoke of ignorance. Occupying the privileged position of all-knowing and all-seeing spectator in the poem, Milton's fit reader observes that Satan's image of self is just that, an imagined construction of selfhood divorced from the reality of his fallen physical condition. Through the astounding power of rhetoric, Satan fashions a "fixed core self, imagined to be located in the mind," but readers know this to be a false construction (Lewiecki-Wilson 157).<sup>173</sup> Not only has Sin shown us what

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<sup>172</sup> William John Silverman offers a thorough account of the ways in which the verb "to seem" influences Milton's sensory landscape (149-58).

<sup>173</sup> Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, "Rethinking Rhetoric through Mental Disabilities," *Rhetoric Review* 22.2 (2003): 156-67.

Satan truly is, but readers know from earthly experience that it is not so easy to entirely separate the material from the immaterial aspects of the self. Satan's crucial misreading of self is accommodated entirely by a rejection of the interrelation between body and mind, which in turn serves as a powerful, if implicit, assertion of the indivisibility of these elements. Milton's monism thus appears in soft and subtle reminders that fallen readers cannot authentically know or understand themselves if they ignore the reality of living in fallen, sinful, and imperfect bodies. If they reject this truth they risk falling into the same dualist misapprehension of the self that Satan does.

Of the many temptations Satan presents in *Paradise Lost*, the most paramount to readers is thus the temptation to dismiss the fallen body altogether. Milton's early and consistent emphasis on sightedness as an unstable mechanism for knowledge reminds readers that some degree of visual impairment is a legitimate reality for most postlapsarian peoples.<sup>174</sup> Satan's misreading of the relation between his material and immaterial states thus serves Milton's larger agenda of drawing readerly attention to the ways in which the fallen and imperfect body requires interpretation rather than complete dismissal. However tempting the retreat inward to an entirely immaterial concept of the self might be to a politically disenfranchised and disabled poet, Milton meticulously

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<sup>174</sup> To be sure, Milton's blindness left him unequivocally aware that physical sight was not a reliable constant, but he was far from alone in that understanding. Edward Wheatley's ground-breaking study *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of Disability* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 2010) asserts that "varying degrees of visual impairments must have been so widespread as to be unremarkable, especially before the Italian invention of eyeglasses for the nearsighted in the 1280s and for farsightedness in about 1450" (8). Additionally, Stuart Clark and William John Silverman both convincingly demonstrate that the early modern era saw a vigorous debate about the nature and reliability of vision that expanded out from the medical field and into natural philosophy: see Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

crafts a world where material realities intrude upon the immaterial and metaphoric. For Milton, to deny the material altogether is to fall into satanic self-deception. In his deployment of blindness as both a trope and also a physical reality, Milton's verse thus fashions the disabled body as a spectacle to gaze upon, but it also trains readers to discern a hidden wholeness that resides within, but not apart from the body itself.

### **Prolepsis and Prosthesis**

For Milton, immanence broods in the collapse between the allegorical and the real, but it falls on readers to meaningfully engage in the practice of spiritual reading to recognize that when Milton slides between these two realms something sacramental occurs. In his intertwining of literal and figurative blindness, Milton certainly plays the part of the supercrip, but his supercrip persona does not appear to be interested in overcoming or transcending the disabled body. In all of his poetic and public representations of his personal blindness Milton never requests divine restoration of his lost sight. After all, such a request could be interpreted as recognition that his disability is in fact divine punishment. For instance, in "Sonnet 19" Milton's blind speaker comes close to questioning God's reason for inflicting the blindness that leaves him "in this dark world" (l. 2) having been "light denied" (l. 7). Immediately, though, "patience to prevent / that murmur soon replies" (ll. 8-9) and swiftly attenuates the speaker's frustration by reminding him to "bear his mild yoke" (l. 11). Milton alludes to the frustration of living with disability, but ultimately he concludes the sonnet with the now famous image of a blind poet who serves God best by patiently standing and waiting. Milton conscientiously styles himself as a willing recipient of God's loving rod, as in Sonnet 22,

when he firmly declares, “Yet I argue not / Against Heaven’s hand or will, nor bate a jot / Of heart and hope, but still bear up and steer / Right onward” (11. 6-9). Following An Collins in her refusal to ignore the lived reality of disability, Milton compels readers to stare at his disabled body, and in doing so engage in the same type of devotional spectatorship and sacramental seeing that Crashaw and Traherne also ask of their readers. This interplay between the real and the metaphoric, as Hequembourg suggests, will take place “not so much on the page as in the mind of the fit reader” (8). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton positions his disabled body as the object of both God’s divine gaze and also the vessel through which readers come to see and then know devotional desire. But in order to see and know the sacred within them, readers must first acknowledge the mutability of physical vision, then close it off, and finally come to see not just the poem in front of them but their truest and most faith-filled selves reflected back in the process of the interpretive work required of spiritual reading.

The sense of an immanent divine presence within readers of *Paradise Lost* is largely produced by Milton’s persistent use of prolepsis and analepsis to actively merge the diegetic time-space of the poem with the actual world occupied by both Milton and his readers.<sup>175</sup> This merger of space and time invests Milton’s poetic utterance with real

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<sup>175</sup> Milton’s penchant for disturbing the temporal space of his poetry with prolepsis has met with a fair amount of critical attention. David Quint identifies prolepsis as a crucial feature in “The Nativity Ode.” Marshall Grossman and Charles Huttar both describe the proleptic vision of *Paradise Regained*, and most recently Ryan Netzley has convincingly demonstrated the proleptic production of sacramental immanence in *Paradise Lost* and also *Paradise Regained*. See Quint, “Expectation and Prematurity in Milton’s ‘Nativity Ode,’” *Modern Philology* 97 (1999): 195-219; Grossman, “‘In Pensive trance, and anguish, and ecstatic fit’: Milton on the Passion,” in *A Fine Tuning: Studies of the Religious Poetry of Herbert and Milton*, ed. Mary A. Maleski (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts Studies, 1989); Huttar, “C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and the Milton Legacy: ‘The Nativity Ode’ Revisited,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*

meaning, as his descriptions of blindness form a threshold between the literal and the imagined. In the present contexts of his poem, Milton's blindness should have no bearing, but it does—it is insistently present, and readers are ever reminded to take stock of their blind narrator, their blind author, and their interpretive task at hand. This presence is most evident in Book 3, when Milton's most metaphoric invocation of light collides with the most autobiographical and intimate portrayal of his blindness in all of his poetry. The invocation begins with Milton's speaker summoning a "holy light" that is either "offspring of Heav'n first-born, / Or of th' Eternal coeternal beam" (3.1-2). In this initial construction, the light might be physical, the first created element in the universe, or God Himself.<sup>176</sup> Milton's speaker readily acknowledges the difficulty of expressing God's nature by requesting that he goes "unblamed" for the failure of language to properly relay divine truth (3.3). To account for the lack inherent in fallen speech, Milton turns to the metaphoric to describe such a dazzling, uncreated and unapproachable light. Declaring that "God is light" (3.3), Milton seems to position the entire passage as operating on the figurative level alone, but this purely metaphoric realm of divine presence is quickly disturbed by the intrusion of a disabled body that cannot detect

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44. 3 (2002): 324-48; and Netzley, *Reading Desire and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011).

<sup>176</sup> Some of the most influential arguments debating the nature of this light, particularly the extent to which the distinction Milton apparently draws reflects his theological Arianism, are as follows: Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's "De Doctrina Christiana" as a Gloss upon "Paradise Lost"* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1941) claims that the proem to the third book of *Paradise Lost* is an invocation "to light in a physical sense" 95-6; in "'Hail Holy Light' and Divine Time in Paradise," *JEGP* 68 (1969): 45-56, Albert Cirillo argues that light is meant only "as the traditional metaphor for the higher, nonphysical light" (51); and William Hunter, C.A. Patrides, and J.H. Adamson collectively claim that this light is meant to symbolically represent Christ in *Bright Essence* (Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1971), 55-6, 66-8, 72-77, and 149-51.

physical light. God's interminable divine light is figured as the "vital lamp" of the sun that penetrates all of creation, but fails to revisit "these eyes, that roll in vain / To find thy piercing ray" (3.22-4). This abrupt transposition from the purely immaterial and spiritual realm of God's presence to Milton's literal circumstances demands readerly attention as they are called to do more than passively observe the temporal disruption affected by such an autobiographical insertion.

The transition between divine metaphoric light and Milton's actual inability to discern physical light is accomplished via a dizzying set of temporal shifts. In the present space of Book 3, Milton's speaker addresses divine light as being immanently present, proclaiming, "Thee I revisit *now*" (3.13, emphasis added). Rather than staying in the present frame, however, Milton's speaker immediately flashes back to the previous two books where he was

Taught by the Heav'nly Muse to venture down  
The dark descent, and up to reascend,  
Though hard and rare: Thee I revisit safe,  
And feel thy sov'reign vital lamp; but thou  
Revisit'st not these eyes... (3.19-23)

The temporal structure of this passage is dizzying: he descends into the darkness of "eternal Night" (3.18), *re*-ascends, and is thus able to *re*-visit a God who is described as pure light. The speaker's analeptic reflection on his sojourn through darkness appears to deeply trouble him, as line 19's enjambment contrasts sharply against the sense of relief that accompanies the firmly end-stopped images of *re*-ascending and *re*-visiting a realm of divine light. This sense of relief is but momentary, however, as the speaker's sensory awareness of God's emanating light is intruded upon by the recognition that while the speaker *now* revisits God, He will not *re*-visit "these eyes" (3.23). Milton's emphatic repetition of the prefix *-re* in this passage triangulates between the narrative past, the



narrative present, and Milton's own insurmountable visual impairment.<sup>177</sup> In rhetorical terms, the prefix *-re* does more than simply enable an assessment of current light and previous darkness—it serves as a prosthesis that supplements the sensation of lack the speaker expresses in his analeptic gaze backward.

The temporal disruption accommodated by the prosthetized text provides Milton with space to depict a present blindness that is difficult if not impossible to distinguish from his narrator's. The pre-biblical and prelapsarian past of the narrative moment collapses into the postlapsarian present, as Milton's blindness, which occupies a narrative future, is presented as though it has already occurred. "These eyes, that roll in vain" expresses a present progressive action, seemingly endless and ongoing, but the present sense is modified with the past-tense construction of the following declaration, "So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs, / Or dim suffusion veiled" (3.25-6). By using contemporary medical terminology to describe complete and total blindness as a foregone conclusion, Milton places the physical reality of a disabled body at the forefront of readerly attention. What is more, the slide between literal and real is further heightened

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<sup>177</sup> Milton makes a similar rhetorical move in Sonnet 23 when his poetic speaker first expresses joy at seeing his recently deceased wife appear to him through the "fancied sight" (l. 10) of a dream vision, but then despairingly invokes the reality of blindness when, upon waking, finds that "she fled, and day brought back my night" (l. 14). Milton's speaker could certainly be describing his sensation of loss and suffering as a metaphoric "night." However, it is difficult to read this poem as purely metaphoric, given that even the dream vision prevents total, unmediated sight of the deceased spouse; she appears with her face veiled. Having gone completely blind in 1652, Milton, like the speaker of Sonnet 23, could have only ever hope to see his second wife, Katherine Woodcock, through the veil of his imagination. As in the poem, "full sight of her...without restraint" (l. 8), could only ever come with their reunion in Heaven. For more on the disability subjectivity at the heart of Sonnet 23 see Sara Van Den Berg, "Full Sight, Fancied Sight, and Touch: Milton's Sonnet 23 and Molyneux's Question," *Ben Jonson Journal* 16.1-2 (May 2009) 16-32.

when we consider that this is the selfsame diagnosis Milton references to describe his own blindness.

The immediacy of Milton's blindness in *Paradise Lost* is startling, particularly at the exact moment that readers transition from observing Satan traversing the infernal and chaotic landscapes of Books 1-2 to first witnessing the transcendental gaze of God in Book 3. The proleptic presence of Milton's blindness places interpretive pressure on readers precisely because, as Ryan Netzley asserts, prolepsis "forces us to reimagine the activity of reading" by "negat[ing] its own temporal figurative pointing: treating events in the future as if they had already happened translates, at the level of interpretation, into the somewhat odd notion that the figurative, future meaning—the issue of an interpretive procedure—has already occurred as well" (165-6). This is certainly true for the events narrated in *Paradise Lost*. Readers already know how the essential points of the story at the heart of Christianity will unfold: Adam and Eve will sin; Satan will be punished; and God will offer the possibility for redemption in the form of Christ's loving sacrifice.<sup>178</sup> To some extent, however, Milton's proleptic flash-forward indicates that his blindness has also already been interpreted, and the prosthetized text *Paradise Lost* simply provides

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<sup>178</sup> Stanley Fish's study of reader-response in *Surprised by Sin*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: MacMillan, 1997) focuses almost exclusively on the ways in which Milton, via the archangel Michael, teaches Adam the art of interpretive reading. Likewise, Sharon Achinstein's work on the relation between political activism and reading in the seventeenth-century also focuses largely on Adam's education: see *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994). David Ainsworth, in contrast, focuses entirely on the ways in which Milton's later works, and particularly the later books of *Paradise Lost* reveal an interest in teaching the spiritual reading practices incumbent on the godly in seventeenth-century England. See Ainsworth, *Milton and the Spiritual Reader: Reading and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

material evidence that Milton is a supercrip, and readers need only complete the interpretive work set out for them to fully discern this.

The result is Milton himself entering the poem as a very real third-party human perspective who invests the poetic language with real meaning, as is appropriate in a monist and vitalist universe where the words produced by godly authors and interpreted by fit readers are just as weighty as body and souls. In this way, Milton's poetic strategy to merge the allegoric and the real becomes evident, as Steven Hequemborg elaborates,

The two-term formula, "A is like B," is a flat line: A is real, present, acting in the poem before our eyes, while B is not. Milton's "A is like B as seen by C" changes the shape of things. Three points create narrative space; analogy becomes story, and the third term makes all three seem to exist equally, interdependently.... The reader is constantly surprised by space - as the outlines of the seemingly immaterial become clearer and condense into physical objects. (9-10)<sup>179</sup>

In the contexts of Book 3's proem, the "A is like B as seen by C" formula is modified as readers see blindness as it is seen by both Milton's imagined narrator but also Milton himself. This slippage between the world of the poem and the world of Milton and his readers continues as Milton persistently juxtaposes his supercrip persona with the reality of living with physical blindness. First, readers are presented with the supercrip whose poetic gifts are supercharged by his physical disability. "Smit with love of sacred song" (3.29), Milton's narrator imagines himself walking in shady groves with immortal muses and visiting with the blind prophets of old who are "equaled with me in fate, / So were I equaled with them in renown" (3.34). He imagines himself a nocturnal bird ensconced in

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<sup>179</sup> Ultimately, Hequemborg argues that Milton's slippage between literal and metaphoric is an essential component of his monist cosmos, where everything has material weight metaphors fade into the literal.

a darkness made bearable by his own sacred songs that are capable of reaching out of his personal darkness via the light of divine inspiration. The darkness facilitates superior song, and thus propels the speaker toward his true fate: renown equal to the great seers of Greek mythology. In this supercrip construction, Milton invites readers to consider not just his speaker's access to divine light, but how divine light is available both then and now, in the body of the text and also his own. Milton's slippage between the metaphoric and the literal demonstrates the supplemental power of language to alter a disabled body that could otherwise be deemed lacking.

The isolating effects of real, physical blindness, however, swiftly mitigate this sense of achievement. Despite his ability to sing, Milton's narrator still laments his inability to physically see:

But cloud instead, and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair  
Presented with a universal blank  
Of Nature's works to me expunged and razed,  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out. (3.45-50)

The emotional weight of this passage falls on feelings of being cut off and ultimately shut out from both the world of godly men and also the world God has created for mankind. Following the popular epistemological construction of seeing as knowing, the speaker bemoans his inability to read and interpret the world around him for signs of God's presence. The speaker's pain at being removed from the material world foreshadows a fallen Adam's anxiety that leaving Eden means he will be deprived of the sight of God. Adam thus worries,

This most afflicts me, that departing hence,  
As from his face I shall be hid, deprived  
His blessed count'nance; here, I could frequent,  
With worship, place by place where he vouchsafed

Presence Divine....  
In yonder nether World where shall I seek  
His bright appearances, or footsteps trace? (11.315-19, 328-9)

Adam, like the fallen speaker, is concerned with physical sight. In this moment of sudden knowledge of what it really means to be fallen, “the reader,” David Ainsworth asserts, “has superior knowledge to Adam, having presumably been forced to seek God in that ‘nether World’ for a lifetime” (103). Adam, like Milton’s despondent narrator, feels fully human in this moment. Both recognize the importance of seeing as the primary mode of acquiring knowledge, and both recognize God’s infusing and immanent presence in the Book of Nature, but both must turn to find inward what they previously looked for without.

While Adam receives the assistance of the archangel Michael to clear his fallen sight long enough to properly see visions of a fallen but ultimately hopeful world to come, Milton and his narrator use the prosthetic power of the devotional text to confirm the divine desire and also immanent presence that fuels their poetic vision. Immediately following reminders of the despair and isolation that often accompany his disability, Milton concludes the proem with the following assertion:

So much the rather thou celestial light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight. (3.51-5)

In this most crucial moment, where Milton reasserts and claims for himself the ability to see solely through spiritual eyes and sing a heavenly song, readers are once again confronted with the material intruding upon what seems to be wholly immaterial. The

language of divine purgatives is both bodily and also fully connects this scene with that in Book 11 when Adam also learns to see with his inward eyes. In this scene,

Michael from Adam's eyes the film removed  
Which that false fruit that promised clearer sight  
Had bred; then purged with euphrasy and rue  
The visual nerve, for he had much to see;  
And from the Well of Life three drops instilled.  
So deep the power of these ingredients pierced,  
Even to the inmost seat of mental sight,  
That Adam now enforced to close his eyes,  
Sunk down and all his spirits became intranced. (11.412-20)

In the following visions that make up all of Book 11, Adam learns that divine presence is accessible in the fallen world, but only to those who submit to the perpetual work of spiritual interpretation. In order to “discover within himself the hand of God,” Adam must “learn to interpret the world spiritually” (Ainsworth 103). However, Milton’s description of Michael’s divine purgative as primarily working on the visual nerve and being composed two medicinal herbs used in Milton’s time to treat visual impairments injects the real, the material, and the imperfect reality of fallen bodies into the epic convention of a god clearing mortal sight.

My point in comparing Adam’s eye-clearing with Milton’s ultimate desire to “see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight” (3.54-5) is to emphasize that while Milton might craft a speaker capable of soaring between heaven and earth, he is also invested in adapting the disability scripts he inherited from his culture. Metaphors of disability have long been employed to provide a “tangible body” to textual abstractions (Mitchell and Snyder 56). The world of *Paradise Lost* is certainly abstract, but the eye’s mutable nature and the physical reality of blindness that undergird much of Milton’s universe remind readers of material truths that cannot be denied. Fallen bodies are not perfect—

bodies break and sight fails, but as we see in both the visions of Book 11 and also our own postlapsarian experience this does not mean that God abandons us.<sup>180</sup> The supercrip persona Milton develops in Book 3 is, like Adam, fallen and broken, but not damned precisely because Milton's narrator is deeply conscious of the indivisibility of body and soul. While he might struggle with the realities of the body, ultimately he knows that there is "a paradise within," a place of weight and substance, that can be accessed by devotional desire properly attuned to reading the relationship between body and soul. Milton's insistent autobiographical references blending truth and trope make it difficult to read blindness as either wholly literal or wholly figurative in *Paradise Lost*. This poetic strategy assures readers that Milton himself does not suffer from satanic self-deception—when confronting his blindness, he does not retreat into an immaterial realm of the mind, but sees his body and soul as intimately joined and available for viewing via the prosthetized pages before us. As a result of Milton's proleptic presence in the poem, it becomes possible to interpret blindness as *both* a textual abstraction and also a "tangible body" precisely because Milton's disabled body oscillates between lingering in the background and forcefully inserting itself into the reader's purview. The sacramental seeing Milton thus invites readers to engage in does not deny the disabled body; *Paradise Lost* is not a poem interested in transcendence. Instead, the disability subjectivity embedded at the heart of *Paradise Lost* reveals the fleshiness of metaphor to reveal a hidden wholeness encased in the prosthetic power of the devotional text.

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<sup>180</sup> For Adam's first vision of disease and deformity see 11.471-96.

## CONCLUSION

### **Incarnational Technology: Putting the Prosthesis to Work in Early Modern Devotion**

If our artifacts do not act on us, there is no point in having made them. We make material artifacts in order to interiorize them: we make things so that they will in turn remake us, revising the interior of embodied consciousness.

—Elaine Scarry<sup>181</sup>

In the epigraph above, Elaine Scarry suggests that in the process of producing the various things that populate our world, our sense of self is reconstituted. The very artifacts that we bring into being, in turn, re-create and refashion the way we see our selves as ourselves. Indeed, as I sit here at my desk typing on my laptop and humming along to a personalized playlist of music streaming from a cellular phone that rarely leaves my side, I am distinctly aware of technology's capacity to shape the way I experience and see myself in the world. What is more, with the range of fitness applications provided by wearable technology that track, among other things, heart rate, calories burnt in a day, and sleeping patterns, I can achieve something close to Thomas Traherne's dream of peering into the numinous recesses of my own body. These "auxiliary organs," as Freud would call them, certainly do appear to have transformed postmodern humans into "a kind of prosthetic God" (44). However, far from generating ontological wholeness, as Freud and Scarry both point out, these artifacts demand stringent and near-constant reconsideration of the self. In this process of seemingly ceaseless reconstruction, subjective wholeness seems an almost impossible ideal.

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<sup>181</sup> Elaine Scarry, "The Merging of Bodies and Artifacts in the Social Contract," in *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, ed. Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckrey (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1994), 97.



Throughout this dissertation I have proffered the claim that early modern devotional texts operate as prosthetic devices whereby the technology of the text provides the framework upon which the material and immaterial collide to formulate a necessarily complicated, but perhaps more authentic, vision of the self. Insofar as prostheses are material artifacts actively engaged in a reconstitution of the individuals who employ them, Scarry's assertion about the embodied but also internal relationship between human beings and the things we produce holds true. Early modern devotional texts are undoubtedly engaged in this process of re-creation. For men and women living and writing in post-Reformation England, devotional writing provides a medium through which they might begin the process of recreating the self by "theoriz[ing] how the relationships between divine and mundane worlds are registered at the level of affect" (Kuchar *Poetry of Religious Sorrow* 2). The prosthetized devotional text thus materializes a vigorous and unresolved set of exchanges between the immaterial/spiritual aspects of self and the reality of material/bodily existence in a postlapsarian world. As I demonstrate by providing a range of devotional voices writing from various social positions, early modern devotional texts, like prostheses themselves, sometimes fail to achieve but are always striving toward holism.

In order to parse out the tricky interpretive work occasioned by the prosthetized devotional text, I have focused a great deal on the body of the text and also the ways in which bodies are represented within devotional texts. In this attention to the material relations between the bodies that produce devotional writing and the embodied work of devotion, I hope to have demonstrated the presencing power of religious verse to cross binary constructions of the self by materializing the immaterial realms of spirit, desire,

and divinity. To the extent that religious verse is interested in constructing and ultimately converting spiritual desire into divine presence, language achieves materiality in its devotional contexts. For authors as confessionally and politically divergent as John Milton, Richard Crashaw, Thomas Traherne, and An Collins, poetic utterance, especially sacramental or incarnational speech, has the power to reconstitute fallen bodies into celestial flesh. Each author examined in this dissertation uses somatic expression as a conduit to access the divine, but in doing so confronts the problem that the very bodies where faith and belief are written are both the subjects and objects of earthly desire—particularly, the state’s desire for control, stability, and silence. When placed in conversation with each other, these texts articulate a set of competing desires over *how* the devotional body is figured, both in print and in person, as each of these authors attempt to use the language of the body to access a desired, but distant God, while a proximate state/church reads embodied devotional language as potentially dangerous.<sup>182</sup>

The confounding amalgam of spiritual desire and material presence presented by early modern devotional texts make legible a pervasive interest in embodying both appropriate and authentic devotional reading and writing practices. By drawing attention to the various ways somatic speech interacts with and also shapes devotional subjectivity,

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<sup>182</sup> In making such a claim, I cannot help but think of Peggy Samuels’ “Labor in the chambers: *Paradise Regained* and the Discourse of Quiet,” *Milton Studies* 36 (1998): 153-176. In her nuanced reading of Arminian cleric Benjamin Laney’s 1665 crown-sponsored sermon conjoining political as well as religious quiet with godliness, Samuels suggests that Laney’s insistence on public quiet is an effective attempt to “close the borders” (166) between the public and private realms and thus govern the devotional labor at work in each sphere. This interest in disciplining and governing the devotional body both at home and abroad is underscored by Thomas Edwards’ immensely popular heresiography *Gangraena, or a Catalogue and Discovery of many Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Secretaries of this Time* (1646) wherein Edwards expresses outrage that men were not whipped for their devotional errors.

this project demonstrates how seventeenth-century authors use the prosthetized devotional text to transverse contemporary constructions of embodied states like disability and gender within socially acceptable frameworks. By applying current Disability Studies perspectives to early modern devotional verse authored by both able-bodied and disabled individuals I attempt to meaningfully engage with David Mitchell's and Sharon Snyder's call to develop "a new historicism of disability representations" (*Narrative* 25). My attention to the prosthetic impulse of early modern devotional writing is, in this context, necessarily incomplete, as the process of devotional self-fashioning and subjective re-creation is never fixed, just as the prosthesis itself defies fixed categories of identification.

This project only begins to articulate the ways in which disabled or non-normatively gendered bodies are themselves cultural artifacts embodied within the discursive aesthetics of early modern devotional writing. These bodies require recovery. When disabled poets like An Collins and John Milton actively invite readers to gaze on and even celebrate their disabled bodies, or when Thomas Traherne and Richard Crashaw construct sacramentally rich relationships with a hermaphroditic Christ figure that actively contravenes the largely phallogocentric discourses of seventeenth-century devotion, literary critics must engage in ethical reading practices that account for the ubiquity of ableist perspectives, then and now. My interest in bringing together disability discourses and the "turn to religion" in early modern literary criticism thus initiates an excavation of the ways in which the prosthetized devotional text not only exposes, but also actively substantiates and corporealizes the intersectional relation between bodies, belief, and the construction of the self in early modern England.

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