"ME THOUGHTS I HEARD ONE CALLING": TALKING TO GOD IN THE POETRY OF JOHN DONNE, GEORGE HERBERT, CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, AND GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

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This study approaches the religious poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, Christina Rossetti, and Gerard Manley Hopkins from the viewpoint of an atheist or agnostic reader who believes that when these poets speak to God they are really speaking to themselves. I draw on the theories of Ludwig Feuerbach and Julia Kristeva to examine the dialogue of the subject with itself in the form of a poem constructed as a prayer. I concentrate on two central aspects of religious poetry: the construction of the self, and the nature of poetry.

Chapter One contextualizes Feuerbach’s idea that God is humanity’s externalization of itself within the history of Christian theology, showing that the four poets differ in the degree to which they regard God as “human” and therefore close to the self, or “Other” and therefore distant and terrifying. The more “human” the poet’s God is, the more likely it is that the poet will inscribe God’s speech and reactions into his or her poem.
Chapter Two tackles the formal qualities of the poetry, drawing specifically on Kristeva’s categories of the symbolic and the semiotic, in an attempt to characterize rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, paradox, puns, and so on as one or the other. It concludes that secular theory cannot exhaust, but can partly illuminate, the meaning of religious poetry.

The third chapter approaches the poetry by means of the theological distinction between agape-love and eros-love, and Kristeva’s distinction between idealistic and narcissistic love. I attempt to demonstrate both the different ways in which the poets express both love and hate towards God, and the way the poets unconsciously use God as a means by which they can achieve self-love, or express self-hate.

The first three chapters concentrate on ways to read the poets against themselves; the fourth and final chapter returns to the poets’ own intentions in examining their attitudes towards the compatibility or otherwise of poetry and religion. It situates Kristeva’s argument, that poetry is always subversive of religion, within the large body of criticism which argues for the close relation of poetry and religion.
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Introduction

Prayer is the self-division of man into two beings,—a dialogue of man with himself, with his heart. (Feuerbach 123)

It is difficult to imagine how any late twentieth-century nonbeliever could disagree with this statement by the nineteenth-century atheist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach. For if there is no God, then who could a man be talking with but himself?

This dissertation is not, of course, concerned with trying to prove the existence or non-existence of God. Rather it attempts to provide some ways in which secular readers, whether atheist or agnostic, can read religious poets who clearly believe that prayer, and their poems that enact prayer, are dialogues not with themselves, but with a living God. When a religious poet talks to God he is really talking to himself.

The title of this dissertation is taken from the end of George Herbert's "The Collar":

But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
At every word,
Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!
And I reply'd, My Lord. (33-36)

As a number of commentators on this poem have pointed out, Herbert's own characterization of God's speech as something that he thought he heard, casts into doubt the objective nature of that speech.\(^1\) Did Herbert actually hear God call "Child!" or did he

\(^1\) Richard Todd, for example, points out that "This comment on his own perceptions, its very carefulness indicative of some clarity of vision, does not tell his reader that he
just think that he did? None of us have any way of knowing for sure, but I approach the poems from the assumption that it is the religious poet, not God, who speaks God's words and writes God's actions and reactions into the poem.

In applying Feuerbach's dictum to religious poetry I am conflating poetry with prayer. In the case of religious poetry written by devout believers, such an identification is valid, perhaps even compulsory. When a Christian poet addresses a poem to God, she regards that poem as a type of prayer. Anything less would be a sacrilegious use of God for the purpose of creating a human work of art. A. D. Nuttall, writing about Herbert, highlights the problems of regarding the religious poem in the same category as other poems, as "from first to last dramatic fictions, with (as commonly) a fictional addressee within the poem--God--and a real addressee outside the poem--the reader" (Overheard by God 9). Nuttall argues that because Herbert offers his poems to God as if they were prayers, his attitude "at once confounds our neat resolution of difficulties whereby God was allowed to be the addressee within the poem while outside it was the reader who was addressed" (18). Following Nuttall, I hold the position that the religious lyric addressed to God has more in common with prayer than with other types of poems. 2 When God

actually heard anything, only that he thought he did, says so, and responds accordingly" (56). Michael Schoenfeldt reads the lines as recording "a lingering solipsism, where inner and outer, imagination and reality, are difficult to distinguish" (108). Richard Strier goes so far as to argue that "Whether the call to which Herbert presents himself as responding is objective or subjective does not matter" (Love Known 226). The existence of this dissertation is evidence of how much I disagree with Strier on that point.

2 Thus my argument that the poet's relationship to God is a relationship to himself does not necessarily have to be extended to secular poetry. When Donne, for example, writes his mistress's reactions into a love poem, he has the memories of the speech and actions of real women before him, even if he departs from those memories in the poem.
speaks or reacts in these poems, he represents the unconscious reaction of the poet to his own prayer. That is, the poems describe or enact a real, not a fictional, experience. They describe the experience of a past prayer, or are themselves a prayer. The Christian and the atheist may agree thus far; they are only forced to part company on the nature of that real experience.

The Christian reader might agree that religious poems are prayers, arguing that the God who speaks to the poet is the real God, actually taking part in the poem. The non-believing reader has to approach the poem somewhat differently. She can take refuge in a purely aesthetic appreciation of the formal qualities of the poem, of course. But many readers want more than beauty from literature; they want "truth," that is to say, a representation of a recognizable human experience. What human experience is described, or enacted, by poems which present an interaction with God? The answer I suggest is that the poem describes the experience of the subject's relationship with itself.

The poets I have chosen to test this thesis are John Donne, George Herbert, Christina Rossetti, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. I have chosen these four poets in

But only the Christian would say that he also has the memory of the real God's speech and actions. Even if the "she" or "thou" of any given love poem is merely a composite of many different women, and many different cultural ideals about women, the poet is still transforming "real" experience into his poetry. Of course it is quite possible that a love poet (or a satirical poet) might consciously or unconsciously create a "thou" who is merely an extension of the "I" of that poem (whether that "I" is identical with the poet or not), but this self-division is not a necessary consequence of secular poetry, as it must, to the non-believing reader, be a necessary consequence of sacred poetry. Moreover, while a love poem may be addressed to a real person primarily and other readers secondarily, it may also be addressed primarily to the public, with the addressee, real or fictional, merely an excuse for the poem's existence. The religious poem, on the other hand, always places God in the position of primary addressee, with the human readers as secondary, and incidental to the poem's existence.
particular for two reasons. First, they are certainly among the most well-known Christian poets in English. Second, the differences and similarities between them serve to usefully complicate my approach. Two are seventeenth-century poets, two nineteenth-century. Donne and Herbert grew up in an age where denominational differences could get people killed; for Rossetti and Hopkins the differences between Catholic and Protestant had begun to pale beside the much greater divide between believers and freethinkers. Three are Anglicans, one Catholic, but two are converts: Hopkins's conversion to Catholicism from Anglicanism parallels Donne's move to Anglicanism from Catholicism. Three were men and priests, one a woman and a member of the laity. Donne and Rossetti wrote secular as well as sacred poetry; Herbert and Hopkins concentrated on religious verse. The differences between the poets challenge any approach which attempts, as mine does, to read them all as enacting the same psychical and artistic process in their poetry.

I engage with these poets through the theories of Ludwig Feuerbach and Julia Kristeva. Feuerbach's central argument in his 1841 *Wesen des Christentums* is that "God" consists of certain human predicates externalised and worshipped: "Man first unconsciously and involuntarily creates God in his own image, and after this God consciously and voluntarily creates man in his own image. . . . the revelation of God is nothing else than the revelation, the self-unfolding of human nature" (118). Feuerbach does not prove that an objective deity does not exist, but merely points out how probable

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3 John Carey has speculated convincingly on the likely psychological effects upon Donne of the fact that his great uncle, Thomas Heywood, and his uncle, Jasper Heywood, were both executed for being Jesuit priests, and his brother, Henry Donne, died of the plague in Newgate Prison after having been arrested for harbouring another Jesuit priest.
it is that the God humanity worships is a reflection of itself. Probability, however, is not proof, as Hans Kün points out: "It does not follow--as some theologians have mistakenly concluded--from man's profound desire for God and eternal life that God exists and eternal life and happiness are real. But those atheists who think that what follows is the nonexistence of God and the unreality of eternal life are mistaken too" (79). Just as Feuerbach's argument says everything about humanity's relationship to God, but nothing about the existence of that God apart from humanity, so too do I concentrate on the ways in which the poets construct a God within the poetry, without attempting to deny that an objective God may well be listening to, reading, or even co-writing that poem.

Feuerbach's psychological brand of atheism was introduced to nineteenth-century England through the 1854 translation by George Eliot (under her real name of Marian Evans), and found its way in disguised form into her novels. Rossetti and Hopkins, therefore, lived in an atmosphere where his ideas about God were known among intellectual circles. Feuerbach has also been enormously influential upon twentieth-century atheism, through the two conduits of Marx and Freud. As Kün puts it: "Like Marx's opium theory at an earlier stage, Freud's illusion theory is grounded in Feuerbach's projection theory" (75). Feuerbach therefore makes a good pair with Kristeva, since his psychological atheism anticipates her psychoanalytic atheism.

Feuerbach's model for examining the relationship of the subject to God is complemented by the tools psychoanalysis provides for discussing the self's relationship to the self. The effort to subdivide and label the self goes back at least as far as Plato whose tripartite structure of appetite, spirit, and reason anticipates Augustine's memory,
knowledge, and will, Freud's id, ego, and superego, and Lacan's real, imaginary and symbolic. Binary divisions of the self, however, are more useful than tertiary division for the purposes of viewing the relationship between self and God as a relationship between one part of the self and another. Such binary, or dualistic, divisions have included body and soul, passion and reason, heart and mind, feeling and intellect. Freud, in addition to his tripartite division, formulated the dualism of conscious and unconscious in his construction of the self. Psychoanalysis, the interpretive method that he founded, has as one of its strengths the ability to embrace and transform previous categories of thought about the complexity of selfhood (the subject). I want to take psychoanalysis as an approach to studying the relationship between God and self in this dissertation, while not forgetting those earlier ideas about self-division. The particular psychoanalytic framework I shall use is that of Julia Kristeva, and her model of the symbolic and the semiotic. I prefer Kristeva's model over Freud's or Lacan's partly because, as I have said, I prefer a binary to a tripartite division, but also because Kristeva is informed by her psychoanalytic predecessors.

Psychoanalysis and Christianity are highly congenial to the study of poetry because in both psychoanalysis and Christianity, there is no such thing as an accidental occurrence. Even minor details are tremendously significant and meaningful. Just as psychoanalysis sees every act or utterance as revealing repressed desire, so too does the Christian see every event as part of God's divine plan. If a poet should create paradoxical ambiguity through a subtle pun, the psychoanalytic critic might read it as proceeding from the poet's unconscious. The Christian, however, is bound to regard it as a contribution by
God to the poem.

My approach to religious poetry, as should be clear by now, constructs an imaginary reader who is an agnostic or atheist. This reader is not entirely a product of my own imagination of course, but makes up a significant proportion (probably impossible to quantify exactly) of both the general reading public, and our undergraduate classrooms. How will these readers approach religious poetry? How should we teach it to them?

I. A. Richards encountered this very problem with his students. He includes some

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4 It is not my purpose in this thesis to discuss the experience of the non-Christian believer in reading Christian poetry, even though, as Gene Edward Veith points out, in the classroom situation the problem "is not that our classes divide themselves into believers and non-believers. Rather, our classrooms are richly pluralistic. There are Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Mormons, Jews, Muslims, and possibly devotees of the guru Mahara Ji" ("Teaching about the Religion of Metaphysical Poets" 56). To study the reactions of non-Christian believers would be a dissertation in itself.

5 Veith's 1990 article refers to a recent Gallup poll which suggests that non-believers make up a very insignificant proportion of undergraduates: "More than ninety percent of college students believe in God; only fifteen percent said that religious beliefs were not important to them" (54). (I am intrigued by the five percent who apparently believe in God but do not find their own belief important to them.) These statistics refer only to the United States; it would be interesting to compare them to other Western countries, where I imagine the rate of non-belief is much higher. It is not only nonbelievers who are challenged by the presence of God's voice in religious poetry, however. Let us imagine, by the side of my atheist student, a Christian reader. What is that person to do with a poem in which God speaks, such as George Herbert's "Dialogue?" If she really believes that God has helped Herbert write the poem, and actually spoken the words that Herbert assigns to him, then surely she must cease to regard "Dialogue" as merely a poem, and raise it to the status of the Bible, a sacred text directly inspired by God. We would then have Christian institutions offering literature-as-Bible courses alongside secular universities offering classes in the Bible-as-literature. If Christian readers have not done this with religious poetry, it must be because they, too, believe that God's speech is somehow filtered through the poet's mind, that religious poetry is, to some extent, a record of the poet talking to himself, and not God talking to the poet.
reactions to religious poetry in his *Practical Criticism* (1929). One reader responds to Donne's "At the round earths imagin'd corners" with the comment "Too religious for one who doesn't believe in repenting that way" (46), another with the opinion that "somehow the poem does not raise as much emotion as one feels it ought to have raised. I think this is because it seems to progress downwards from greater emotion to less. First one has the terror of the Judgment Day: then one has *what is really a selfish fright on the part of the writer, that he personally may be damned*" (47; Richards's emphasis). A vaguely religious poem called "The Temple" by J. D. C. Pellew elicits the following condemnation: "I don't like to hear people boast about praying. Alfred de Vigny held that to pray is cowardly, and while I don't go as far as this, I do think that it is rude to cram religious ecstasies down the throat of a sceptical age" (94; Richards's emphasis).

Richards does not have much patience with these reactions, commenting acidly upon the last that: "The violence which such prejudices can do to poetry will be remarked. Writing a modest piece of verse is hardly cramming religious ecstasies down our throats" (94). But he obviously took the antipathies of these readers seriously enough to respond with his formulations of the question of belief and poetry. The answer he comes up with is his famous distinction between intellectual and emotional belief. A good poem should override our intellectual beliefs, demanding our emotional assent to the beliefs expressed within it:

Coleridge, when he remarked that a "willing suspension of disbelief" accompanied much poetry, was noting an important fact, but not quite in the happiest terms, for we are neither aware of a disbelief, nor voluntarily suspending it in these cases. It is better to say that the question of belief or disbelief, in the intellectual sense, never arises when we are reading well. If unfortunately it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we
have for the moment ceased to be reading poetry and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in quite a different type of activity. (277)

Richards's theory is borne out in the testimony of many non-Christian readers of religious poetry. In the case of George Herbert, for example, twentieth-century readers have tended to give the lie to Coleridge's famous claim that Herbert can only be fully appreciated by Anglican readers:

Herbert is a true poet, but a poet sui generis, the merits of whose poems will never be felt without a sympathy with the mind and character of the man. To appreciate this volume, it is not enough that the reader possesses a cultivated judgment, classical taste, or even poetic sensibility, unless he be likewise a Christian, and both a zealous and an orthodox, both a devout and a devotional Christian. But even this will not quite suffice. He must be an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church, and from habit, conviction, and a constitutional predisposition to ceremoniousness, in piety as in manners, find her forms and ordinances aids of religion, not sources of formality; for religion is the element in which he lives, and the region in which he moves. (Patrides 170; Coleridge's emphasis)

Yet it is clear that not only many non-Anglicans, but many non-Christians, have been moved and delighted by The Temple, thus proving Richards's position rather than Coleridge's. Ilona Bell points out that Herbert's non-Anglican contemporaries had no trouble responding to his poetry: "Everyone seemed to love Herbert's poetry, and many claimed him as a posthumous ally. Herbert was no less an inspiration for the Puritan expatriot Edward Taylor than for the Anglican Henry Vaughan, and many devout English Puritans embraced him" (64). Twentieth century non-Christians have been no less deterred by Herbert's Anglicanism than seventeenth-century Catholics and Puritans. Joseph Summers observes that practising Anglicans like himself make up the smallest group of Herbert scholars (after non-Anglican Christians, and non-believers) and that
religious belief is not an issue for his students: "Among my own students I have been
frequently astonished at the intensity and understanding of the response to Herbert's
poems of readers who came from almost every Christian group, who were believing and
non-believing Jews, and who were agnostics and atheists" ("George Herbert and Anglican
Traditions" 36). Helen Vendler declares that "Herbert's poetry is as valuable to those who
share none of his religious beliefs as to those who share them all" (The Poetry of George
Herbert 4). Chana Bloch, who is Jewish, writes:

Some critics have maintained that in order really to understand Herbert,
you have to believe what he believes, to share his views on doctrine and
ceremony. How, then, can I presume to read The Temple? . . . I have
always read him not only as a great poet but also as a spiritual teacher, and
I've taken his words very seriously. . . . I can only disagree strongly with
the view that says Herbert's best readers must be those who share his
beliefs. ("Response" 5-6)

Elizabeth Bishop, writing to Summers, describes her appropriation of Herbert's poetry to
her own secular vision: "Even if I don't believe in God--I find it right, & I'm afraid I often
cheat on Herbert in this way" (Summers, "George Herbert and Elizabeth Bishop" 57).

If these voices are to be believed, my attempt to find a way of reading religious
poetry which appeals to nonbelievers is unnecessary, since these nonbelievers are quite
happy to believe for the duration of their reading of a poem, to give the poem their
emotional, if not intellectual, assent. But while I personally have great sympathy for
Richards's claim that the reader of poetry should leave behind his intellectual belief
systems while reading, such a view is generally discredited in contemporary critical
practice. Richards's claim that we should not become "moralists" while reading literature
has been denied by those critics who claim that all reading both is, and should be,
inescapably political, and that the desire to leave morality and politics behind is itself a political stance. Feminist and post-colonial criticism, for example, have both occupied themselves with the question of how a reader can engage with a text which expresses belief systems that are totally foreign to her. Why should not an "agnostic" criticism spring up to approach religious texts in the same way that post-colonialism critiques colonial texts such as Heart of Darkness, or feminism attacks the patriarchal assumptions of Paradise Lost?

Ann Baynes Coiro's essay on teaching Donne, in the 1990 collection Approaches to Teaching the Metaphysical Poets, is a prime example of how feminism has transformed the reading and teaching of love poetry. Coiro begins her essay by describing the situation that awaited her at her new job:

I began my teaching career at an old liberal arts college that had recently and painfully gone coed. When I was interviewed for that job, the faculty members wanted to know how I would teach metaphysical poetry to the young women who were appearing in their classrooms so angry with the sexual assumptions of some seventeenth-century poetry (John Donne's "Elegy 19" and Thomas Carew's "Rapture" had precipitated the conflict) that they argued such stuff should no longer be read by politically correct people. (81)

Coiro goes on to describe how her teaching strategy addressed the students' discomfort and made it part of the lesson:

an uncritical first reading of persona in Donne and many other seventeenth-century poets can—indeed, should—alienate the current generation of students, who are beginning to be alert to the male bias of the canon. . . . We need to talk with our students about the gender of any persona, about how we as readers form the persona's gender, about how the gender forms the poem, and about the implied but silent other who is also shaped by the gender of the speaker and by us. (84)

If woman students are justified in feeling alienated by the "male bias of the canon" why
should not atheist or agnostic students also be justified in feeling alienated by the
Christian bias of the canon? However unlikely it might be that such students would
actually call for a ban on religious poetry the same way women students called for a ban
on Donne's "Elegy 19," it would seem in today's climate that they might be justified in
doing so. And if Coiro can continue to teach the love-poetry by foregrounding the poets'
construction of gender, should we not also teach the religious poetry by foregrounding the
poets' *construction* of God? Coiro's vision of well-taught students is that "As one gender
reads, the other gender reads them reading" (88). If love-poetry naturally splits its
audience into male and female, religious poetry splits its readers into believers and
atheists. And if atheist readers, by giving the poem their "emotional belief" automatically
read the Christian reading, then should not Christians try to read the atheist reading, just
as Coiro wants her male students to imagine the experience of a woman reading Donne's
"Elegy 19"? Just as women are no longer asked to give their "emotional belief" to a poem
in which they are constructed as the object, non-believers should not necessarily be asked
to give their "emotional belief" to poetry in which atheism is regarded as evil.6

An essay by Gene Edward Veith, in the same volume, does address the teaching

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6 I find myself here arguing a position to which I do not necessarily give my full
assent. I have little sympathy for Coiro's female students' desire to ban Donne's "Elegy
19" from the canon, and in the unlikely event that non-believing students were to refuse
to read Herbert or Hopkins, I would be reluctant to pander to such close-mindedness. I
believe that the poetry of Donne, Herbert, Rossetti, and Hopkins is of more than sufficient
greatness to carry any moderately intelligent, open-minded reader into a temporary state
of emotional belief in God. But the study of literature is all about the process of re-
reading, of examining and questioning texts after the initial experience of pleasure in
surrendering to them. I believe there is room for openly agnostic readings of religious
poetry that do not demand surrender to the God of that poetry.
of religious poetry to non-religious students. Veith begins by taking God out of the poem, before later putting him back in, a process illustrated in his comments on teaching Herbert's "The Collar":

"The Collar" can be understood, at first, apart from its specifically religious references. Its basic emotional content is universal, even for people with little religious background. Everyone has felt the pressure of obligations and yearned to escape. . . . I want my students to understand the emotional dynamics of the poem, the sense in which dissatisfaction can be transfigured when at the heart of the onerous responsibilities is a loving personal relationship. . . . I then go on to the theological level: Herbert believed that the human being's relationship with God is like that. (55)

I want to go one step further than Veith, to question the nature of "the human being's relationship with God" if that God does not exist. Whereas Veith makes sense of the poem for his nonbelieving students (although since he teaches at a Lutheran college, most of his students are believers) by comparing the poet's relationship with God to the subject's relationship with other people, I want to compare the poet's relationship with God to the subject's relationship with himself.

This dissertation thus allies itself with one of the two traditional types of approach to religious poetry. Since these two approaches have been identified by several seventeenth-century critics as exemplified in the debate between William Empson and Rosemond Tuve over George Herbert's "The Sacrifice," I frame my comments on my own approach here mainly within the context of the criticism on Herbert. Good descriptions of the exchange between Empson and Tuve and its implications can be found in the introductions to Barbara Harman's Costly Monuments and Richard Todd's The Opacity of Signs. Briefly, Tuve reacted to Empson's contention in Seven Types of Ambiguity that Herbert's treatment of Christ's Passion was "unique" (287) arguing instead, in A Reading
of George Herbert, that Herbert was drawing on liturgical traditions of which Empson and other twentieth-century critics were ignorant, and that "a poem is most beautiful and most meaningful to us when it is read in terms of the tradition which gave it birth" (22). Empson replied that Herbert may have been using tradition, but the use he made of it was still his own, and that the task of a critic was more than contextualizing the poem in terms of tradition: "He should entirely concentrate on how the poem was meant to take effect by its author and did take effect on its first readers. But this formula includes the way in which it took effect on them without their knowing it, and that opens an Aladdin's Cave of a positively limestone extent and complexity" ("George Herbert and Miss Tuve" 738).

The conflict between them seems to be over the relative value of scholarship versus criticism. John Roberts saw the debate as also characterizing critical approaches to Donne, employing the terms "re-coverers" and "dis-coverers," coined by Kenneth Burke, in a highly entertaining passage:

Empson and Tuve, I think, are fair representatives of the major split that continues to divide critics on Donne; the recoverers still regard with suspicion the discoverers as dangerously clever, overly imaginative, unscholarly dilettantes, while the discoverers still dismiss with some contempt the recoverers as pedantic, literal-minded, harmless antiquarians who have nothing significant to contribute to the central, important issues of modern criticism. If forced to do so, I rather imagine I could divide the 1000 items in my updated bibliography roughly according to the two major approaches--recovery and discovery. ("John Donne's Poetry" 65)

Since Roberts's updated bibliography covers the years 1968-78 his comments on the opposition between historical and ahistorical approaches are possibly outdated. Criticism today, after the advent of the New Historicism, tends to believe that both approaches are necessary, and should be complementary rather than antagonistic. Criticism has two
tasks: to set the text in its own time, and to reinterpret it for subsequent generations and world-views. My approach is certainly one of reinterpretation rather than contextualization, of "discovery" rather than "recovery," to use Roberts's (and Burke's) terms (although I cannot promise any dangerous cleverness).

Richard Strier, another critic of Herbert, raises an important question about the need for understanding the specifically theological contexts of religious poetry:

Is a full appreciation of Herbert's poetry unavailable to those who do not share its (or any) religious perspective? Is Herbert a great poet or a great religious poet? Must we invoke the special category? Helen Vendler's *The Poetry of George Herbert* . . . has raised these questions sharply. Vendler attempts to distinguish the "human" from the doctrinal context of Herbert's poetry. My study suggests that we can grasp the human content of Herbert's poetry only through, not apart from, the theology. *(Love Known xxii)*

But who is this "we" that Strier refers to? Specialists on George Herbert? Critics of seventeenth-century poetry? Scholars of religious literature? I agree with Strier that readers who belong to those categories need to engage with the theological backgrounds of the poets they are studying. But is Strier suggesting that the general reader, or the undergraduate student, needs to be totally familiar with Luther before he can read Herbert? Where then does the enjoyment evidently experienced by those who read Donne without knowing Augustine, Hopkins without knowing Duns Scotus, or Rossetti without being familiar with Keble, spring from? Surely the pleasure these readers obtain from the poetry is not completely invalid because they do not recognize a specific dramatization of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Clearly, a knowledge of the theology behind the poetry can add to the reader's appreciation of that poetry, but it does not account for all of it. Most readers, on the other hand, know something about self-
conflict, which all these poets dramatize so well.

Strier distinguishes his approach from Helen Vendler's; I take my cue from her reading of Herbert's struggles with God as an internal struggle with himself:

His is the purest intimacy and vulnerability, not clothed in the powerful eroticism of St John of the Cross and of Crashaw, but simply the bare and divested converse of the soul with itself. I say "itself" because for Herbert God does not seem a powerful other existing in a tension with the self comparable to the tension between lover and beloved; he is rather, potentially at least, Herbert himself. (*The Poetry of George Herbert* 152)

Vendler goes on, in an essay on Hopkins, to suggest that the "converse of the soul with itself" can be read in secular, psychological terms: "We may, if we wish, secularize the ethical choice between 'good' and 'bad' selves by using psychological words like 'authenticity' in place of theological words like 'salvation'" ("The Wreck of the Deutschland" 47). Psychoanalysis can, I believe, complement such a psychological approach by examining the forms this "converse of the soul with itself" can take in religious poetry.

In following Vendler's suggestion that "we may, if we wish, secularize," the dissertation departs significantly from the interdisciplinary approach to literature and religion as defined by one of its foremost theorists, David Jasper. Jasper believes that we may not "secularize" as the spirit takes us:

Instead of living dangerously within a creative dialectic—literature and theology—the industry has tended to claim competence in an odd new discipline, "literature and religion," with an apparent desire . . . to abandon theological categories and study religion as a phenomenon within culture, sociological, anthropological, even psychological. . . . The tendency is to banish the entire theological enterprise . . . its philosophy, spirituality and sense of the finite and infinite, to vague terms like "otherness" and "alterity." Religion (and literature) without commitment. (1-2)
I am guilty of using such vague terms as "otherness," as Vendler is guilty of using such a vague term as "authenticity." But Jasper's comments seem directed towards the specifically Christian critic, for why should any other type of critic be expected to possess "religion with commitment"? (Why, for that matter, should a lack of commitment to religion imply a lack of commitment to literature?) This dissertation attempts to "live dangerously within a creative dialectic" between literature and psychology (specifically psychoanalysis), partly because it is not attempting to contribute to the "odd new discipline" of literature and religion as such, but engaging instead in the non-religious analysis of religious literature.

Existing psychoanalytic studies of religious poetry include John Steig and William Kerrigan on John Donne; Donna Moders and James Earl's readings of Hopkins, and John Schad's specifically Lacanian reading of The Wreck of the Deutschland; and some of the criticism on the sexual meanings of Goblin Market, such as that of Ellen Golub (although these do not always treat that poem as specifically religious). These are all articles, not book-length studies. Specifically Kristevan readings of poetry are overwhelmingly concentrated on twentieth-century literature: a survey of MLA books, articles, and dissertations from 1981 to August 1995 which apply Kristevan theory to literary texts yields 88 works on twentieth-century literature, 22 on nineteenth-century and 18 on pre-nineteenth century. Critics have been slow to apply her theories to older literature, probably for the admirable reason that they are cautious and hesitant to read

7 Of those 18, seven are works of English literature, namely The Dream of the Rood, Julius Caesar, Hero and Leander, Paradise Lost, Andrew Marvell’s Unfortunate Lover, Thomas Nashe’s Unfortunate Traveller, and The Four Zoas.
literature in terms that the writers of that literature would not have understood. But psychoanalysis itself is, at least in its Freudian form, ahistorical; it claims to be true for all periods. While I would not go so far as to argue that the psychic processes Freud analysed in nineteenth-century Viennese middle-class men and women would necessarily be identical to those of seventeenth-century English aristocratic poets, I do feel that a psychoanalytic reading of the religious poetry of the past can illuminate the texts for the secular readers of today. Laurence Lerner, who glances at the argument of Rosemond Tuve that "the poetry of the metaphysicals should be related to their poetic, not ours" (137) concludes: "As far as she goes, Tuve is unanswerable, but it is impossible to stop readers from using the practice of modernism to search for elements in earlier poetry that its own poetic did not admit" (138). If it is impossible to stop readers from reinventing poems as they read, then the task of the critic is to make sure that such reinventions be examined alongside the original contexts of the poetry. Such is the aim of my dissertation, in that I try in each chapter to anchor the theoretical and atheistic language of Feuerbach and Kristeva in the theological thought familiar to Donne, Herbert, Rossetti, and Hopkins. Accordingly, I relate the Kristevan concepts of symbolic and semiotic to reason and passion in chapter two, and her categories of idealization and narcissism to the distinction between eros and agape in chapter three.

It cannot be denied, however, that the dissertation is contentious in reading the poetry against the poets' authorial intent. I often, especially in chapters two and three,

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8 See Elizabeth J. Bellamy's essay, "Psychoanalysis and the Subject in/of/for the Renaissance" (1992) for an persuasive defence of the application of psychoanalysis to Renaissance texts.
read the poetry as yielding meanings very different from those the poets intended to express. While reading secular writers against themselves is a contentious issue in itself, reading religious poetry from an agnostic and psychoanalytic viewpoint would be seen as nothing less than sacrilege in the eyes of the poets. Since so many of the theoretical debates about the nature of religious poetry can be found in Herbert criticism (perhaps because Herbert himself foregrounded the issue in *The Temple*), I again cite one of his commentators, Stanley Stewart, on the subject. Stewart recognizes the potential for reading texts against authorial intent: "Did--could--Herbert know what he said? Modern thought permits, but does not compel, us to say that Herbert's poetry expresses ideas and attitudes of which Herbert and his audience were not aware" ("Investigating Herbert Criticism" 145). But he thinks that when critics go too far in that direction, they become reductive, projecting their own agendas onto Herbert's time and his texts: "Does Herbert's espoused belief only hide his sexual embarrassment? Or his guilt? Or his resentment? Or--perhaps more to the point--his atheism?" (155).9

Stewart's use of the word "only" here betrays his misunderstanding of the psychoanalytic approach which argues that Herbert's belief might well hide his sexual embarrassment, his guilt, his resentment, and his atheism, but that it cannot be reduced to

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9 Diane D'Amico and G. B. Tennyson make similar objection to critics of Rossetti's poetry. Tennyson's comment that "The biographical approach to her poetry, the strange, modern view that all longing must be sexual, especially if it is the longing of an unmarried Victorian woman, has obscured the extent to which Christina Rossetti's poetry illustrates not Freud's theory of art but Keble's" (202-03), is echoed by D'Amico: "As a consequence of such [post-Freudian] views, the sincerity of her religious poetry is questioned: the voice we hear in her poetry is not to be interpreted as the soul longing for the Divine Bridegroom, but the voice of a frustrated woman longing for an earthly lover" (274).
them. Belief may hide atheism within it at an unconscious level, but does not thereby cease to be belief. Emotions might contain equal and opposite emotions, but cannot be reduced to them, and are not cancelled out by them. If love contains hate within it, it does not stop being love.\(^1\)

Psychoanalytic approaches should, therefore, discuss the manifest meaning of the text before delving into its latent content. As William Kerrigan says of his own approach: "Although he broadens the usual notion of intentional meaning to include the unconscious, the psychoanalytic critic cannot find this extended intentionality without first having found the customary one: the intended meaning, the minimal possession of all literary study, is the meaning he interprets" \((The\ Sacred\ Complex\ 3)\). Thus I try to avoid reading the texts reductively, bringing each and every poem down to the level of the self, constantly referring to God as a "construct" or "projection," treating the text as if it is there to illuminate the theory, rather than the other way around. Instead, I first approach the poems as the poet's expression of his relationship with God, before I attempt to show ways in which we can read the poems as an unconscious expression of the poet's relationship with himself.

The dissertation falls into four chapters. The first, "The Human God," contextualizes Feuerbach's theory of God as a projection of humanity through a discussion of the ways in which Christian theology has always debated the humanness or

\(^{10}\) Stewart goes on to ask "Well, does the materialist's certainty of doubt merely hide the profoundest depth of yearning for and embrace of belief?" \((155)\). This question would not only be answered in the affirmative by many psychoanalytic critics, but has been so by the many Christian critics who have sought for hidden responses to God in atheistic modernist and post-modernist texts.
Otherness of God. The degree to which a poet conceives of God as similar to or different from himself determines the degree to which he will be able conceive of himself and God in dialogue. Obviously, the more "human" God is, the more vulnerable that God is to the Feuerbachian atheism that reads him as merely a projection of humanity.

Chapter two, "Symbolic and Semiotic: Religion in Poetic Language," applies the Kristevan concepts of the symbolic and the semiotic to the poetry, both in terms of poetic content and poetic form. Although it is my most theoretical and ahistorical chapter, I try to avoid framing the analysis in terms that would be totally foreign to the poets, by comparing the psychoanalytic dichotomy of symbolic and semiotic to oppositions such as reason and passion which the poets themselves would understand. My central claim in this chapter is that the poetic text destabilizes oppositions between symbolic and semiotic, in such a way that the relationship between God and poet can never be designated as exclusively one or the other.

While several critics have discussed the different constructions of love in religious poetry, no one has devoted much attention to the hate that is also expressed by the poets. In my third chapter, "Love and Hate: Ambivalence in Religious Poetry," I examine the ways in which the poet's love and hate for God reflect on her own self-love and self-hate. I draw upon both Feuerbach and Kristeva in this chapter, using them to complement Anders Nygren's classic distinction between eros-love and agape-love.

Whereas the first three chapters read the poets against themselves to a large degree, "The Validity of Religious Poetry," my fourth and last chapter, seeks rather to examine the poets' own feelings about the legitimacy or otherwise of their work. This
chapter is less concerned with providing new ways to look at religious poetry, as the other three are, than with engaging with the large amount of critical attention which has been devoted to the intersection between Christianity and poetry. In particular, it takes up in more detail some of the questions raised at the start of this Introduction, about the status of religious poetry as distinguished from other poetry. Where the rest of my thesis examines the issues involved in reading religious poetry, chapter four looks instead at the particular challenges posed by writing it.

Chapters one and three, therefore, concentrate on the Feuerbachian vision of the relationship between man and God as between man and self, while chapters two and four concentrate on Kristeva’s theories about the incompatibility between religion and poetry. Religious poetry is always about the self, and about itself.11

The dissertation cannot hope to do full justice to Donne, Herbert, Rossetti, and Hopkins as individual writers. Because my focus is on religious poetry as a whole I compare these four practitioners of that poetry much more than I contrast them. The contrasts that I do make from time to time between the poets should be regarded as

11 It is also, of course, always about language, the aspect of religious poetry which has received the most (and the most sophisticated) critical and theoretical attention, with the deconstructionists fighting it out with those critics who point to the incarnational nature of Christian language. Hopkins has received the lion’s share of attention in this area, as Rachel Salmon points out: “The deconstructionist presupposition about the inevitability of a language of absence (metaphor), which predicates an unbridgeable gap between signifiers and signified, challenges the incarnationist or sacramentalist conception of a language of presence (metonymy), which can embody its referent as the relationship between God and man as bodied forth in Christ” (89). Typical representatives of these two schools of criticism would be J. Hillis Miller for the deconstructionists, and Eleanor McNees for the incarnationists. Although I do examine the nature of poetic language, my focus is upon poetic language, rather than poetic language, and the dissertation therefore does not engage in the deconstructionist debate.
suggestive rather than exhaustive. Since I do not attempt to explore the work of each poet in full, the generalizations I make about Herbert, for example, may be based on only a few of the 167 poems in *The Temple*. (Clearly, Herbert and Rossetti suffer more from my more-or-less arbitrary selection of poems for discussion since they wrote much more religious poetry than Donne or Hopkins.) I would argue, however, that for each of the poets, the methods I use to read one of their poems can also be applied to the others. Using twenty poems, rather than two, to illustrate one point would, apart from quickly becoming boring for the reader, tend to focus the analysis on the theory rather than the poetry.\(^1\)

The poetry, indeed, cannot be exhausted in meaning by my Feuerbachian and psychoanalytic theory. I would be horrified if people read these poets only in the ways I suggest. A good reader should be able to believe in the God the poets address when she is reading the poems for pleasure. I offer an agnostic approach as a complement, not a corrective, to other, more receptive, readings of religious poetry which are based on surrender to the poet and belief in his belief.

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\(^1\) I have tried not to discuss poems more than once, even though such complex works as *The Wreck of the Deutschland* could be discussed with profit in each of the first three chapters, although I only examine it in the first and fourth. "Affliction" (I), which I treat in chapter one, would cry out to be looked at in chapter three, "Love and Hate," if it were not for the fact that Helen Vendler has already analysed Herbert's self-hatred in that poem (*The Poetry of George Herbert* 43-48). Poems which I do treat in more than one chapter include Donne's Holy Sonnets 1 (three times) and 7 (twice), Hopkins's "terrible sonnets" (all twice). It is because Donne and Hopkins wrote less religious poetry than Herbert and Rossetti that I am drawn to discuss certain of their poems more than once.
Chapter One

The Human God

Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed.

(Hopkins, The Wreck of the Deutschland, st 5)

Is God a human God? Or is he so above and beyond us that the human mind
cannot grasp the nature of his Otherness? These questions have concerned and haunted
Christianity for two thousand years and they inform my approach in this chapter to the
poetry written by Donne, Herbert, Rossetti, and Hopkins.

Ludwig Feuerbach saw the history of Christianity as a tension between a
conception of God who is human and anthropomorphic, and a God who is so radically
Other as to be beyond human understanding. Feuerbach argues that anthropomorphism
was the starting point of religion, and that in spite of increasing theological sophistication
over the centuries, Christianity could not entirely repudiate its Jewish beginnings: "The
religious consciousness of a later age is no longer satisfied with a Jehovah who is from
head to foot a man . . . Nevertheless, every relation is simply a revelation of the nature of
man to existing men" (207). Religion is caught, he theorizes, between quantitative and
qualitative views of God's difference from humanity: "The difference, however, between
God and man, which is originally only quantitative, is by reflection developed into a
qualitative difference" (217). And whereas religion consciously stresses God's divine
strangeness, it *unconsciously* emphasizes his humanness: "The essence of religion, its latent nature, is the *identity* of the divine being with the human; but the form of religion, or its apparent, conscious nature, is the *distinction* between them" (247).

The history of Christian thought certainly bears out Feuerbach's vision of a religion torn between a human God and a mysterious divinity. The doctrine of the Incarnation, central to this debate, was mired in controversy and heresy from the early days of Christianity, some believers arguing that Christ was not fully human, others denying his divinity.¹ Not until the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451 was the doctrine of the two natures in one person, the belief that Christ was both fully human and fully divine, upheld as orthodoxy.

Clearly, it is easier to grasp the concept of an incarnate God, if we can believe that we are indeed made in God's image, that God is not a completely unknowable Other. Thomas V. Morris writes of the Incarnation controversies that "All other things being equal, it would seem that the more extreme a conception we have of deity, the more trouble we are going to have mapping out a coherent account of a divine Incarnation" (163). The Incarnation seems to contradict our sense of a divinity who is, as Feuerbach puts it, "qualitatively different" from humanity. Morris goes on to say: "But I do not think critics of the Incarnation usually go wrong by having too exalted a conception of

¹ Ebionitism, for example, denied the divine nature of Christ, arguing that he was a normal human being, the son of Mary and Joseph. The opposite heresy, Docetism, held that Christ was totally divine and only seemed to take on human nature. The third century Arius taught that Christ was not fully divine, but rather the first among God's creatures. Appolinarius of Laodicia argued in the fourth century that Christ had a human body, but a divine mind and soul.
divinity. Rather, I think they most commonly come to judge the Incarnation an impossibility mainly on account of an incorrect, metaphysically flawed conception of humanity" (163). Rather than seeing God as too much of an Other to the human self, then, these "critics of the Incarnation" see the human as too much of an Other to God. The problem is still the gap between the human and the divine.

Another theological debate that centres on whether or not God can be conceived of as in any way human is the relation of reason to revelation. Can we know God through the operations of human reason, thus implying that we are indeed made in God's image, or is he so alien from us that we can only know him through what he chooses to reveal to us of himself? Most theologians have taught that we can come to know God through both reason and revelation, but the different emphasis they give to the two categories serves to distinguish between those who conceive of God as human and those who think of him as beyond humanity. The Catholic tradition puts its faith in reason as well as revelation, drawing on the philosophical methods propounded by such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas. Vatican I in the nineteenth century upheld this position, distinguishing "between natural knowledge of God and salutary faith and firmly defend[ing] the power of the natural reason to arrive at certain knowledge of God" (McCool 454). The Protestant Reformers Luther and Calvin, on the other hand, insisted that reason be subordinate to revelation. The Reformation position was to deny "the possibility of natural knowledge of God in man's present fallen state" (McCool 454). Catholicism ranks reason far higher than Protestantism does: "For the Catholic, contact with God does not take place through faith alone. God does not stand over against human reason as the
Wholly Other. Man's nature is intrinsically affected by grace and the theological virtues. Thus he can grow in his intrinsic capacity to know and love God" (McCool 455). The conflict between reason and revelation in Christianity stems directly from conflicting views over God's similarity to, or difference from, the human.

Another theological issue which bears on the question of whether God is human or Other is the debate over whether God exists in time or eternity. Augustine and Aquinas, for example, both argue that God transcends time, existing outside of human time. Such a God does not square very well, however, with the interactive God of the Bible. Morris points out that the atemporalist view "will not allow for a convincing picture of God's acting in response to creaturely developments, creaturely needs and creaturely requests. The Old Testament presents many dialogues between God and human beings. Can any true dialogue be held between an atemporal and a temporal being?" (132; Morris's emphasis). As this last question makes clear, the presence of dialogue in religious poetry implies that the poet must believe, at least while writing the poem, that God can change and respond in time, that God is therefore more human than Other.

Any attempt to divide Protestantism and Catholicism down the lines of belief in a human or Other God is likely to founder on the many complexities involved in gauging the character of each. One could argue, for example, that since the Reformation it has usually been the Protestant church that is most likely to envisage God as Other, through its insistence on the primacy of the Scriptures over theology (that is, of revelation over reason), and through its rejection of good works in favour of justification by faith alone, a
doctrine which implies that humans cannot try to imitate a God who is recognizably also human, but must rely on grace given by a God who would otherwise remain totally inaccessible and alien to them. Moreover, the Protestant rejection of Catholic statues, saints, and the veneration of Mary, serves further to remove Christian worship from the realm of the concretely human.

Yet Catholicism contains aspects that stress God's Otherness just as Protestantism embraces God's humanness. The issue of priests, for example, can be interpreted in two different ways: either the Catholic priest provides a human mediation between believer and God, thus representing the human side of God to the congregation; or the Catholic priest serves to keep the believer at a greater distance from God than the Protestant worshipper, thus reinforcing God's remoteness and inaccessibility. Protestantism can be characterized as human-centred in its emphasis on translating the Bible into the vernacular, suggesting a desire to bring the word of God down to a human level, not to keep it mysterious and Other, only capable of being interpreted by anointed priests.

Even mysticism which is more common, historically, in Catholicism than Protestantism, runs into contradictions. One tradition of mysticism is the via negativa, the practice of defining God only by what he is not, a vision of the divine which sees him as so far removed from the human realm of understanding that he cannot be endowed with any human qualities at all. But the via negativa is balanced, or contradicted, by the

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2 The via negativa tradition presents such problems for Feuerbach's thesis that he goes to the rather extreme length of claiming that the mystics who practice it are God-hating atheists: "The alleged religious horror of limiting God by positive predicates is only the irreligious wish to know nothing more of God, to banish God from the mind" (15). (Of course I too am attributing hatred and atheism to four deeply religious people but I am not
Medieval and Counter-Reformation mystic traditions which approach God in a highly sensual way, envisaging him as bridegroom, father, mother, baby, or other human incarnations. As Arthur L. Clements points out: "Christian mystics paradoxically see God as both transcendent and immanent" (8).

Feuerbach seems to have regarded Protestantism as much more focused on the human aspects of religion than was Catholicism:

Catholic morality is Christian, mystical; Protestant morality was, in its very beginning, rationalistic. Protestant morality is and was a carnal mingling of the Christian with the man, the natural, political, civil, social man, or whatever else he may be called in distinction from the Christian; Catholic morality cherished in its heart the mystery of the unspotted virginity. Catholic morality was the Mater Dolorosa; Protestant morality a comely, fruitful matron. (139)

Indeed, Eric C. Meyer stresses the fact that Feuerbach's attack on Christianity was specifically an attack on Protestantism's focus on the human dimension of religion:

Protestantism has so accentuated the subject of faith, man, that it has neglected the object of faith, God. Besides stressing personal salvation, it ruled out speculative philosophy and good works as avenues to God; it concentrated entirely on the faith of the believer where the revelation of God is near and manifest... Feuerbach could stress how close such an approach to faith brought theology to anthropology and claim that talk about God is really only talk about man. (798)

While it is difficult, then, to designate Catholicism and Protestantism as two separate and different approaches to the nature of God, I would nevertheless argue that the overall trend of Catholicism does seem to be towards a more sensual and human representation attempting, as Feuerbach does, to argue that their negative feelings towards God actually displace their faith in, and love for, him. I assert rather that the two opposing attitudes coexist in the poetry.)
of God, while Protestantism stresses the awe and fear required on the believer's part.  

Can we expect, then, that the Protestants, Donne, Herbert, and Rossetti will all conceive of God as a non-human Other, while the Catholic Hopkins alone will relate to a very human God? Or that the seventeenth-century poets will be more impressed or oppressed by a sense of the Otherness of God than the post-Enlightenment Victorians? Can we look for the influence of specific theologians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, or Calvin, finding in the poetry an attitude to God's approachability or Otherness which mirrors the attitudes of these thinkers? Or does God reflect the temperament of the poet rather than the theology of the poet's time?  

One way of trying to pinpoint the human God in the poetry is to explore how the "personality" of God seems to reflect the "personality" of the poet writing about him. This approach immediately runs into two insurmountable difficulties. The first is that we cannot know the personality of the poet through his or her poetry. The attempt to do so is known as the biographical fallacy. The second problem relates to the Feuerbachian inconsistency of claiming both that God reflects an individual just as he is and that God compensates the individual for all that he is not. Feuerbach claims both that "Such as are a man's thoughts and dispositions such is his God; so much worth as a man has, so much and no more has his God. . . . By the God thou knowest the man, and by the man his  

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3 Peter Homans argues that twentieth-century Protestantism continues this stress on the otherness of God partly by appealing to psychoanalysis: "there is a branch of Protestant thought characterized by emphasis on God's extreme otherness that has its roots in St. Paul and St. Augustine and then in Luther, Pascal, and Kierkegaard. Those theologians who derive from this tradition I call theological existentialists, and it is they who have been drawn to Freud" (15). Homans suggests that while Protestants relate to Freud, Catholics are more attracted to Jung.
God; the two are identical" (12), and that "Religion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself" (33). Therefore, if God appears similar to the poet's own persona in character then we can say God mirrors that poet. But if God is the opposite in character to the poet, we can just as easily say that God complements the poet. In both cases he reflects the poet himself, thus making a Feuerbachian approach impossible to disprove and rather useless.

In Donne's Holy Sonnet 1, for example, God appears both as Donne's mirror and his opposite. In the lines "I resigne / My selfe to thee" (1-2), Donne plays the part of a woman surrendering herself sexually to her seducer, as well as of the son or servant tendering obedience to his father or master. As seducer, God mirrors the speaker of the love poems, the Donne who biographers have speculated was often successful in love affairs. But as the male authority figure, God complements rather than mirrors the biographical Donne, the young man negotiating his way around the authority of older men and father figures such as his wife's father, Sir George More, and his patron Sir Thomas Egerton, not to mention the king himself. Donne also shows God to be both his mirror and opposite in the lines: "Except thou rise and for thine owne worke fight / Oh I shall soone despaire" (11-12). It is really Donne himself who desires to fight for what he knows to be right, yet cannot muster up the strength to do so. God here is totally capable

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4 John Stachniewski draws a biographical connection between Donne's attitude to God and his feeling towards his patrons: "Donne felt his dependence on God to resemble his dependence on secular patronage with its attendant frustration, humiliation and despair" (703). George Parfitt argues similarly, although he focusses on Donne's relationship to his female patron, the Duchess of Bedford: "God becomes the patron: if Bedford was deified in verse letters, her power to refine the poet-figure has passed into God's hands" (John Donne 93).
of fighting to win (unlike Donne) yet inexplicably unwilling to do so (like Donne). God is Donne both as he should be and as he actually is. He has both the strengths and weaknesses of the poet's personality in good measure. If God is both made in Donne's image and made into his opposite, it becomes pointless to try to identify him as Donne's own personality externalized.

The same problem holds true for the other three poets. Herbert often presents himself as the victim of his love, made vulnerable by his desire for God. He certainly gives this same quality to the character of God in his poems, but is just as likely to make God into the bully as the victim. As Michael Schoenfeldt puts it: "Herbert imagines the self not just as the suffering object of divine power but also as the director of artful aggression against God" (157). In "Sion" God needs to be loved very much as Herbert does:

There thou art struggling with a peevish heart,
Which sometimes crosseth thee, thou sometimes it:
The fight is hard on either part.
Great God doth fight, he doth submit. (13-16)

But the apparent equality of the opponents in their struggle actually serves to make God more pathetic. Two mortal opponents, being equally matched, could respect both themselves and each other, but God's omnipotent status makes his occasional submission shocking, an effect heightened by the use of "Great God" in the line that describes his defeat. The fact that God even has to fight for the soul, instead of receiving it as his due, is bad enough, but his liability to defeat makes him a most pitiful victim of love. But in "Discipline," for example, Herbert moves from the idea of God as the sad, victimised lover, to God as the bully who forces him into the victim role. The poet is so faithfully
loving ("Yet I creep / To the throne of grace" (15-16)), and God so cruel with his rod and wrath, that the poet appeals to the earlier state of things when God was the victim of his love for the poet and all other human beings:

    Who can scape his bow?
    That which wrought on thee,
    Brought thee low,
    Needs must work on me. (25-28)

Within the confines of this poem, however, Herbert is unable to bring God to his knees, and is left where he started, the victim of an angry, bullying God, who refuses to let Herbert's own victim-like quality be projected onto him.

    Rossetti, like Herbert and possibly as a result of his influence, engages in exactly the same dichotomy of making God the rejected lover in some poems and the rejecting beloved in others. The Christ of "Despised and Rejected" (I 178-80), mistreated by the speaker of the poem, bears some resemblance to the Christ of Herbert's "The Sacrifice."

But in "Weary in Well-Doing" (I 182) it is Rossetti who plays the part of the persistent, loving, reasonable, and long-suffering victim, mistreated, as Herbert is in "Discipline," by a perverse and even sadistic God:

    I would have gone; God bade me stay
    I would have worked; God bade me rest.
    He broke my will from day to day,
    He read my yearnings unexpressed
    And said them nay.

    Now I would stay; God bids me go:
    Now I would rest; God bids me work.
    He breaks my heart tossed to and fro,
    My soul is wrung with doubts that lurk
    And vex it so. (1-10)

Like Herbert's, then, Rossetti's God is both the poet's helplessly loving image and her cold
and unloving enemy.

Hopkins, too, makes his God both his double and his opposite. The Hopkinsesque God appears in "The Soldier" where Christ appears drawn to the virility of the soldier in much the same way that Hopkins responds to the male strength and beauty of Felix Randall or the sailors of the Eurydice. The sestet of "The Soldier" begins to present Christ as a soldier, but turns quickly to a Christ who is more of a soldier's sweetheart:

Mark Christ our King. He knows war, served this soldiering through;
He of all can reeve a rope best. There he bides in bliss
Now, and seeing somewhere some man do all that man can do,
For love he leans forth, needs his neck must fall on, kiss,
And cry 'O Christ-done deed! So God-made-flesh does too:
Were I come o'er again' cries Christ 'it should be this.' (9-14)

It is usually women who are pictured hanging on a man's neck, kissing him. Christ is very like the homosexualy inclined Hopkins here. On the other hand, Hopkins also writes of a Christ who is, like Donne's God, a virile male seducer. In stanza 28 of The Wreck of the Deutschland the poet exults in the nun's vision of Christ as her master and hero:

He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her;
Do, deal, lord it with living and dead;
Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph, despatch and have done
with his doom there.

The image of the lord and master riding in his triumph, doing, dealing, lording, despatching, suggests a virile, impatient ravisher of the nun.\(^5\) One almost expects Christ

\(^5\) As J. Hillis Miller says of stanza 30: "Christ's 'having glory' of the nun is also an image of sexual possession" (The Disappearance of God 348). David Anthony Downes suggests that Hopkins sees himself in the place of the ravished nun: "Hopkins, his imagination flooded with his own love of God, here poetically transfuses the feelings of
to swing her up onto his horse with him. Moreover, if we read "Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph" without commas, as "Let him ride her pride in his triumph" the image of sexual conquest becomes much clearer. Hopkins's God, then, is both like and unlike his poetic creator.

It is, therefore, a misguided enterprise to try to prove that "by the God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical," since, at the same time, "Religion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself" (Feuerbach 12, 33). Any quality exhibited by God, therefore, can be counted either as a reflection or an antithesis of the poet and the result is meaningless. We can keep a Feuerbachian approach, however, if we take on his definition of God as a reflection of the human species: "All divine attributes, all the attributes which make God God, are attributes of the species . . . With the Christians God is nothing else than the immediate unity of species and individuality, of the universal and individual being" (152-53). Instead of relating God to the individual poet's personality, therefore, a better approach is to examine the ways in which he takes on or resists the qualities of humanity as a species. Does he appear comforting, easily understood within the concepts of human virtue and human affections, or is he terrifyingly alien and Other?

God's function as "self" or "Other" reveals itself in several different aspects of the poetry. I have already detailed the issues of the Incarnation, reason and revelation, and

the nuns in the shipwreck; his triumphant fulfilment becomes theirs in the poem" (The Great Sacrifice 74). Thais E. Morgan develops the theme of God's "erotic violence" (86) towards the nun and the poet, arguing that Hopkins identifies with both the female who surrenders, and the male who ravishes.
God's relationship to time and dialogue, all of which have implications for the degree of interaction with God expressed in religious poetry. Although God does not speak at all in the majority of the religious lyrics of these four poets, he often appears to act and react in some way, much like the silent auditor in the genre of the dramatic monologue. When the poets attempt to reason with God, they betray their belief that his mind works along the lines of human rationality. When they include his reactions in their poetry they clearly rely on his existing within time just as they do. Even when God seems silent, the poet's approach to him often assumes that he can be susceptible to reason, rhetoric, logic, persuasion, threats, and bribes in the same way that any human subject is. Poems in which these approaches break down reveal the poet's overwhelming sense of God's unreachability and difference.

One other issue I find relevant here is that of gender. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, of course, it is the feminine gender that has been marked as Other. We might

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6 J. Hillis Miller argues that the very existence of an address to God implies the poet's belief in a responsive deity:

> And a prayer or other form of direct address to God might be seen as in some way constraining God, at least in the minimal sense of putting him in the position of having to say yes or no to the prayer . . . Even to address God as "Thou" . . . is to assume God might answer back and to invite or even demand an answer. ("Naming and Doing" 176)

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7 Miller again:

> Moreover, as Augustine long ago recognized in Book Eleven of The Confessions, there is great difficulty in thinking how God's speech, that must have the all-at-once quality of eternity, a time out of time to which all times are copresent, can get translated or transposed into human time where words must follow one another in temporal sequence and where meaning depends on rhythmic differentiations within time. ("Naming and Doing" 179)
expect then that for Donne, Herbert, and Hopkins God functions as a human God when he is acting in a masculine way, but reveals himself as the Other when he takes on a feminine dimension (although for Hopkins this neat equation is problematized by his possible homosexuality), while for Rossetti the whole idea of the feminine as Other is both inescapably present in her cultural heritage, and impossible to sustain fully since for her the feminine is also the self. This equation of masculinized God with humanized God, and feminized God with God-as-Other does not completely work, however. For one thing, any gendering at all of God serves to humanize him at once, since, theologically, God has no sex or gender. For another thing, if a male poet conceives of a male God in a poem which equates spiritual with sexual experience, then he usually has to take on the feminine gender himself with the context of that poem. He might be

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8 See, for example, my analysis of Donne's "What if this present were the worlds last night?" below.

9 Leo Steinburg convincingly demonstrates the way in which Renaissance painters deliberately included the penis of the Christ child in their work in order to stress the Incarnation, that God became fully human precisely because he took on sex.

10 The recent emergence of queer theory poses a significant challenge to my argument here. George Klawitter, for example, argues for a homoerotic reading of Donne's love poetry, a reading Richard Rambuss extends to the religious poetry of both Donne and Herbert, arguing that "Accounts that fashion a paradoxically 'female' or 'bisexed' Jesus often do so at the cost of too quickly effacing the primary maleness of his body and its operations, as well as, perhaps more important, the possibilities a male Christ affords for homoeroticized devotional expression" (38). Against Rambuss's assertion that "compulsory heterosexuality is certainly not the rule in Christian devotional relation to Christ" (46) I would point to the primary importance of the heterosexual Song of Solomon in Christian eroticism. When the poets cast their relationship with God into the language of erotic love, they make that love heterosexual rather than homoerotic, because the tradition of Christian eroticism is based on the love between male and female found in that Biblical poem.
making God more like himself, but he is making the whole experience one that is Other to him. Finally, both masculine and feminine qualities can serve to make God seem Other: the "masculine" qualities of power and strength attributed to God make him transcendent and distant from the weak human worshipper, while the more "feminine" qualities of irrationality and mystery also alienate God from the self. The gendering of God, therefore, is a highly complex attribute of religious poetry. Each poem must be treated on its own merits, in its attribution of gender to God, rather than viewed as part of a consistent trend. In discussing each poet I refer to, when relevant, these issues of reason and revelation, reactivity and silence, gender, and, of course, Catholicism and Protestantism.

**Donne**

The moments in Donne's poetry that are most comfortable with the idea of a human God clearly derive from his early Catholicism. *La Corona* lends itself better than many other Donne poems to a consideration of the way in which the Catholicism in

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11 For example, Richard E. Hughes and Stanley Fish both see Donne's attribution of maleness to God as a displacement of Donne's own love of male power. Hughes writes: "The image that so frequently comes through from the sonnets is not that of a penitent cooperating in his own creation, but that of an actor in a hideous travesty of Petrarchan passion. Donne's voice at times becomes the plaintive voice of the unfilled [sic] woman, compliant, désirous, and frightened; God becomes the male lover, intransigent, elusive, and cruel" (176); while Fish is even more disapproving, claiming that the God Donne creates in his own image is a jealous, overbearing bully, and that "One might almost think that the purpose of the sonnets, in Donne's mind, is retroactively to justify . . . the impulses to cruelty and violence . . . [that] he displays so lavishly in his earlier poetry" ("Donne and Verbal Power" 241). God becomes Other, that is, powerful and frightening, by taking on the characteristics, magnified and distorted, of Donne himself.
which he was raised works to make his idea of God more human than a strictly Protestant approach might do. He humanizes God through his focus on Mary, and his use of Ignatian meditative techniques. In the "Annunciation" stanza Donne catches God up into paradox:

That All, which alwayes is All every where,
Which cannot sinne, and yet all sinnes must beare,
Which cannot die, yet cannot chuse but die. (2-4)

The repetition of "cannot" and emphasis on "must" serves to obscure, even deny, God's omnipotence. Caught in the grip of a duty and destiny which conflict with his qualities, God sounds very like a bewildered and helpless human being. The next line reveals that this humanization is all due to Mary, to whom God, in the Incarnation, will become a prisoner: "Loe, faithfull Virgin, yeelds himselfe to lye / In prison, in thy wombe" (5-6).

Donne's treatment of the Incarnation focuses on Mary's role in making God human.

In the third stanza of the poem, "Nativitie," Donne uses the Catholic technique of meditation, identified and described by Louis Martz, to place himself in the scene:

Seest thou, my Soule, with thy faiths eyes, how he
Which fills all place, yet none holds him, doth lye? (9-10)

The result of this composition of place is a feeling of tenderness on behalf of the poet towards the baby:

Was not his pity towards thee wondrous high,
That would have need to be pittied by thee? (11-12)

The poet can feel pity for God only when he brings himself, by means of Catholic meditation, so close that he can see him in his human reality. Thus the Catholic elements of venerating Mary and engaging in meditation both allow Donne to embrace the human
side of God and to bring God closer to the experience of his own self.

The Catholic focus on Mary also appears, this time indirectly, in "Since she whome I lov'd," where the dead Anne Donne functions in the same way as the Virgin. She figures both as a temptation into idolatry (Donne imputes to God a fear that he, Donne, will give his "love to saints and Angels" (12)), and the mediator who brings Donne to God: "Here the admyring her my mind did whett / To seeke thee God; so streames do shew the head" (5-6). Donne's fear that his love for his wife is idolatrous springs from his Protestant rejection of Marian devotion; his belief that his wife has led him to God originates with the Catholicism of his youth. The Protestant fear of idolatry and rejection of Mary is an attempt to maintain a distance and distinction between God and his creatures: we cannot venerate the merely human because God is so above and beyond the human. The Catholic reliance on the mediation of saints, however, testifies to a belief that humanity is closer to divinity than Protestantism allows.

The gendering of God characterizes Donne's Holy Sonnets 1, 2, 9, and 10, the first of which I have already discussed. In Holy Sonnet 2, "Oh my blacke soul," the speaker first presents himself in the male roles of traitor and thief, as Richard Rambuss points out in an attempt to argue that Renaissance poets did not always characterize the soul as feminine (50). But the last four lines negate Rambuss's use of this poem to prove his point:

Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;
Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white. (11-14)

Donne sees his soul as a scarlet woman, red with sin, who must blush red like a virgin in
order to counteract the scarlet red of the whore. Donne takes on all three of the stages of womanhood in order to experience every type of love for the male Christ: the trusting adoration of the virgin (white), the passionate desire of the lover (red), and the yearning grief and sorrow of the widow (black). God functions here as both a reflection of Donne's self, the male husband and lover, and as a representation of the Other, since he is the opposite sex to Donne's feminine soul. By forcing himself into the role of the Other, the female, Donne creates a sense of the strangeness of his relationship with the divine. He can come as close to God as to a human partner in marriage, but he cannot do this without distancing himself from his own soul by making it female. This sonnet celebrates the human God, but without denying the aspect of Otherness in the relationship of the human with the divine. The same process characterizes sonnet 10, "Batter My Heart," where God is the male ravisher and Donne the female bride.

Holy Sonnet 9, "What if this present," also attributes gender to God, but this time the gender is feminine. Donne, remaining masculine, likens Christ to the women he has loved:

No, no; but as in my idolatrie
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pitty, foulnesse onely is
A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
This beauteous forme assures a pitious minde. (9-14)

These lines certainly serve to make God closer to the human self, implying that he will act just like human beings that Donne is familiar with. In bringing God down to a human level, they echo lines 5-6:

Teares in his eyes quench the amasing light,
Blood fills his frowns, which from his pierc'd head fell. (5-6)

Human tears quench the amazing light of the divine Other; human blood fills the frowns of the distant and severe divine judge. In this sonnet Donne uses the traditionally feminine qualities of beauty, pity, and, incidentally, susceptibility to flattery, to make God more human than divine. The "other sex" is not as Other as is the divine; women are not as different from men as God is from humanity.

The God of Donne's poetry is far less reactive than the God of Herbert, Rossetti, and Hopkins. Herbert and Rossetti both write God's reactions into their poetry, while Hopkins chooses instead to describe the actions of God to which he reacts. Donne makes many requests of God, but never really shows God's reactions to his pleas and demands. In Holy Sonnet 5, "If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree," Donne begins his address to God in the language of logic and reason. Being a good Protestant, of course, he soon rejects his powers of reasoning, backing off with the cry "But who am I, that dare dispute with thee?" (9). John Carey writes of Donne that he, "like every other Protestant of his day, was deeply influenced by Calvinism, but he was an admirer of Aquinas too, and this means that he was caught between two irreconcilable estimates of human reason" (69). The Calvinist attitude to reason wins out in this sonnet, Donne apparently rejecting the whole reason-based octave in the groveling sestet. It is significant however, that reason is not replaced with revelation. It is Donne who has the change of heart all by himself, not God who suddenly appears upbraiding him for his presumption. Donne grovels in fear and remorse before a God who does not respond or react in any way to his near-blasphemous use of reason. Of all four poets he has the weakest sense of God as a
dramatic character. God is quite blotted out by Donne himself. Consequently, the
strangeness, distance, and otherness of God is at its strongest in his poetry. Donne's God
is, out of the four poets, the God least close to the self.

**Herbert**

The exact nature and degree of George Herbert's Protestantism has been the

12 Anthony Low sees Donne's focus on himself as influential on other seventeenth-
century religious poetry:

This focus on relationship as well as object, on the observer, lover, and
worshipper, as well as the God who is worshipped, is, of course,
characteristic of the period. It was Donne, the lover of women, who
turned his poetic eye not so much on them as on his own love and its
interior processes, who gave major impetus to the English devotional
poem. (Love's Architecture 7-8)

While Low's comparison of Donne's religious egotism to his sexual self-centredness is
illuminating, I feel that he does not make enough distinction here between the silent God
of Donne's poetry and the interactive God of The Temple. As Donald M. Friedman points
out, the two poets put a very different value on personal interaction with God:

However relentless in pursuit of the beloved (or damned) sinner, Donne's
God is largely a silent one. . . . Donne does not hear God's voice, nor does
he even listen for it; in fact the word "listen" occurs nowhere in Donne's
poetry, nor does "silent." . . . There is nothing in Donne before he began to
speak from the pulpit to compare with the note of cold despair Herbert
sounds in "Denial!" when he remembers God's "silent eares" (1.2). (141)

13 Even when Donne concentrates on Christ, rather than God the Father, his poetry
still does not celebrate a human God, according to Margaret M. Blanchard, who argues
that Donne cannot see the humanity of Christ because of "Christ's suffering, which,
however human, distorts every other human quality" (41).

For an alternative view of Donne's approach to God, see William Kerrigan's
argument in "The Fearful Accommodations of John Donne" where he argues that Donne
creates God in a human image, employing a "crude anthropomorphism" that is just
"another name for outright blasphemy" (43), part of this blasphemy being the attribution
of human sinfulness to God: "Human terms were the only ones he had. Donne could not
conceive of God without discovering, somewhere in the folds of his conception, human
vice" (47).
subject of very lively debate for some time now, although it seems safe to say that he would probably be considered the most Protestant of the four poets in this study. While we might expect, therefore, that his God would show the most signs of Otherness, the opposite is the case: Herbert's God is the most human of all the poets. Those poems which do stress his Otherness, however, are also poems which are most strongly Protestant. In "To All Angels and Saints," for example, Herbert rejects, reluctantly, the mediating function of Mary and the saints. In this poem the usual Herbertian characterization of God as "friend" and partner in dialogue makes way for a description of a rather remote and powerful king, who stands in the way of Herbert's relationship with the human Mary and other saints. Herbert would like to address his prayers and petitions to them,

But now, alas, I dare not; for our King,
Whom we do all joyntly adore and praise,
    Bids no such thing:
And where his pleasure no injunction layes,
    ('Tis your own case) ye never move a wing. (16-20)

God's only action in this poem is not to act. He does not forbid recourse to the saints, he simply does not bid it. His only qualities in this poem are remoteness and silence. Even the saints in heaven only get to see a strangely impassive and passive God:

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14 See, for example, Gene Edward Veith's "The Religious Wars in George Herbert Criticism: Reinterpreting Seventeenth-Century Anglicanism" (1988) for an overview of the state of debate ten years ago, and Michael Schoenfeldt's 1991 Prayer and Power (279-80 n.48) for a list of the main critics on either side of the debate over Herbert's Anglo-Catholicism or radical Calvinism. As Elizabeth Clarke puts it in her 1997 book: "Within the past thirty years critics have assigned Herbert to every religious and political category from revolutionary Puritan to enthusiastic Laudian" (12). The same debate has been fought over Donne, but not to the same extent.
Oh glorious spirits, who after all your bands
See the smooth face of God without a frown
Or strict commands. (1-3)

God's face is smooth, without emotion. He is not smiling, just not frowning. He does not even give commands. He is defined in this poem only by negatives. It is as if, by rejecting the aspect of human mediation in Catholicism, Herbert loses, for a while, any sense of a human and reactive God. The God of this poem is merely the statue of a king, remote and distant from any human qualities.

"The Holdfast" has been identified by several critics, notably Richard Strier and Gene Veith, as one of Herbert's most radically Protestant, Calvinist lyrics. Every human strategy that the speaker proposes as a way of getting close to God is rejected as useless. He cannot obey God, trust in him, or even confess that he cannot do anything. Hearing that he cannot do anything, the speaker "stood amaz'd at this, / Much troubled" (10-11), lost without his human bearings, troubled by the extreme Otherness of this God. He is comforted by a "friend" who tells him

That all things were more ours by being his.
What Adam had, and forfeited for all,
Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall. (12-14)

It is not that the Redemption grants the qualities of the divine to humanity, giving us immortality and the ability to relate to God and be saved, but that the sacrificial Christ takes all the original gifts of humanity, those forfeited by Adam, unto himself. God subsumes humanity, but humanity cannot even partake of divinity to the slightest degree. The Other embraces the human but remains unknowable and unreachable because the human cannot take into itself any part of the Other. Herbert's Protestant reliance on the
justification by faith alone, and denial of human agency or merit in salvation, brings him to a point where he can only passively position himself in front of a God towards whom he can show no human action at all, a result which is of course denied by most of the poems in *The Temple*.

Like Donne, Herbert attributes gender to God in a number of poems. In "Affliction" (I), for example, he stresses God's maleness, while in "Prayer" (II) and "The Bag" he makes God feminine.¹⁵ In "Affliction" (I) Herbert takes on the persona of a lady seduced and abandoned by a male God. The poem begins with a narrative of a seduction:

> When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,  
> I thought the service brave:  
> I looked on thy furniture so fine,  
> And made it fine to me:  
> Thy glorious household-stuff did me entwine,  
> And 'tice me unto thee. (7-10)

Men are not enticed to women by the splendour of their households; it is women who are wooed, traditionally, through expensive and luxurious gifts. Herbert comes across here like nothing so much as a mistress established in her own little love nest. Terry Sherwood’s investigation into the etymology behind the poem supports this reading of a male God who seduces an innocent female for dishonest ends:

> the language of "delight" and "entice" share the same discoloured etymology: *delectatio* (delight) never works free from its source *delicto* (allurement or enticement from the right path), which in turn recalls

¹⁵ Elizabeth Stambler writes that “Herbert's God appears in *The Temple* very much as the beloved woman appears in the courtly lyrics, characterized indirectly, via the reactions of the protagonist” (330). In concentrating on the Petrarchan tradition, and ignoring the Christian tradition of Christ as the bridegroom of the soul, Stambler misses out on half the equation. God changes from the beloved woman to the male seducer/abandoner and back again.
delicere and lacere (to allure from the right way). The undertones of enticement accuse God of using delight to allure man to his disadvantage, of tricking him into believing that he will reach an immediate, pleasurable end. (108)

Herbert goes on to characterize his soul as explicitly feminine in the lines: "Therefore my sudden soul caught at the place, / And made her youth and fierceness seek thy face" (17-18). But the seducer God proves unfaithful, and neglects his bride. Like a helpless woman, Herbert tries to confront his lord and master only to be condescended to and not taken seriously:

Yet, for I threatned oft the siege to raise,  
Not simpring all mine age,  
Thou often didst with Academick praise  
Melt and dissolve my rage.  
I took thy sweetned pill, till I came where  
I could not go away, nor persevere. (43-48)

Reinforcing the suggestion that Herbert feminizes himself in this poem, is the speaker's longing to be a tree which grows fruit and would provide a household for a bird:

I reade, and sigh, and wish I were a tree;  
For sure then I should grow  
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust  
Her houshold to me, and I should be just. (57-60)

Unlike the tree and the bird, Herbert nurtures no young; he is like an infertile wife who cannot bear her husband children.

The final stanza begins with the speaker's resolution to take refuge in meekness and weakness, exemplary female virtues, before suddenly exploding into rebellion:

Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;  
In weaknesse must be stout.  
Well, I will change the service, and go seek  
Some other master out. (61-64)
But what sort of rebellion is the desire to simply replace one master with another? It is the rebellion of a servant or a courtier, certainly, but it is also the rebellion of a woman who, as much or more so than the servant and courtier, depends for her economic livelihood on being kept by a man. Michael Schoenfeldt, reading the poem as a portrayal of a Renaissance courtier who finds himself "the victim of the capricious will of an inscrutable monarch who rewards devout service with needless suffering" (73), argues that "The speaker mistakenly supposes that there is some other master worth serving" (76). The speaker is not mistaken to suppose that there is another master open to him; the devil is waiting to receive his service should he offer it. Herbert threatens to betroth his soul to the devil, rather than God, following the example of Donne who describes his female soul as held in the bondage of betrothal to a devilish master in "Batter my heart, three-personed God": "Yet dearely I love you, and would be lov'd faine, / But am betroth'd unto your enemie" (9-10).

In "Affliction" (I), therefore, the speaker is a woman, who has been seduced and kept, but neglected, by a man; who is trapped therefore in unhappy dependence; and who must call on the specifically female virtues of passive resignation in order to survive. By portraying his relationship with God as analogous to the relationship between two human beings, Herbert humanizes his God completely. By making God so male, and therefore so human, he is more able to express his anger at the way God has treated him, than if he was reacting to a mysterious and unknowable deity. A man who treated a woman in the fashion described by "Affliction" (I) would indeed be a suitable object for angry and self-righteous reproaches. Towards a mysterious and unfathomable God, however, the only
appropriate response is the resignation of "Thy will be done" ("The Crosse" 36). Herbert makes God into a human male, like himself, in order to express his feelings of rebellion. 

By contrast, in feminizing Christ in "The Bag," Herbert stresses the Otherness, rather than the humanness of God. The second stanza describes the Incarnation as a divine undressing:

Hast thou not heard, that my Lord Jesus di'd?  
Then let me tell thee a strange storie.  
The God of power, as he did ride  
In his majestick robes of glorie,  
Resolv'd to light; and so one day  
He did descend, undressing all the way. (7-12)

By calling the Incarnation a "strange story" and by defamiliarizing it through a parable of undressing, Herbert transforms the doctrine most conducive to imagining God's humanity into a concept that stresses the strangeness of God. The last three stanzas of the poem similarly defamiliarize the well-known story of the Crucifixion by leaving out all mention of the Cross, and describing the wound given to Christ's side as inflicted by one man with a spear, seemingly acting alone. This wound is then somewhat feminized in the penultimate stanza:

If ye have any thing to send or write,  
I have no bag, but here is room:  
Unto my Fathers hands and sight,  
Believe me, it shall safely come.

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16 Helen Vendler reads the God of "Affliction" (1) as not just a humanized deity, but as Herbert himself: "This cruelty of the self to the self continues throughout the rest of Affliction, and though the attacks of the self against itself are projected onto God, they are, to speak psychologically, Herbert's own doing" (48).

17 His feminization of God is therefore deliberate, not, as Robert Graves argues, an unconscious sexual fantasy.
That I shall minde, what you impart,
Look, you may put it very neare my heart. (31-36)

And Christ further stresses his passivity and open availability to all sinners in the next lines:

Or if hereafter any of my friends
Will use me in this kinde, the doore
Shall still be open; what he sends
I will present, and somewhat more,
Not to his hurt. (37-41)

Offering himself to be "used" by anyone, holding open his gaping wound, Christ does seem like a sexually available woman. By making Christ into the other sex, and linking the feminine with the wounds of death, Herbert stresses the Otherness of God, even while his Christ is offering himself as a mediator between the human and the divine. While Schoenfeldt, for one, reads Herbert's feminizing of Christ as a strategy by which "the almighty God of power becomes a vulnerable and compassionate deity" (249), I argue that the feminine Christ also works to shock the reader into considering the Incarnation and Redemption in an unfamiliar light, to evoke from the reader a sense of awe at the strangeness and wonder of the overfamiliar Christian narrative.

In "Prayer" (II) Herbert feminizes God again, but this time to make him more human, more accessible to the human soul. It is only in the first stanza of the poem that God appears acting in a feminine way, but this initial image pervades the rest of the poem:

Of what an easie quick accesse,
My blessed Lord, art thou! how suddenly
May our requests thine eare invade!
To shew that state dislikes not easinesse,
If I but lift mine eyes, my suit is made:
Thou canst no more not heare, than thou canst die. (1-6)

Human prayers "invade" God's ear in an image suggestive of male sexual penetration of the female, especially of a female who is generous with her favours, of "an easie quick accessse." Unlike the lady of the Petrarchan love sonnet convention, this object of desire responds immediately to her lovers, not even waiting for them to put their requests into speech: "If I but lift mine eyes, my suit is made." The final line of the stanza stresses God's lack of power, further removing him from the traditional male qualities of might and strength. God, unable not to hear, is like a captive woman, even a wife sworn to obey. When in the next stanza, therefore, Herbert describes the "supreme almighty power" (7) of a God whose arm "spans the east and west, / And tacks the centre to the sphere!" (8-9), his evocation of God's power is not too overwhelmingly strange and frightening because of the memory of the captive feminine divinity of the first stanza. The second half of the poem concentrates on God's liberality and the value of prayer as a way to access that liberality. Because Herbert establishes God as feminine in the first stanza, his exultation in the power of prayer for easy access gains credibility: God is so like a woman that he is definitely human and understandable, not remote and inaccessible to human prayer.

Schoenfeldt sees Herbert's gendering of God as both male and female as a conscious choice on Herbert's part, meant to show God's excellence: "The presence of masculine and feminine traits in Herbert's deity, then, is a manifestation of divine perfection, not the product of poetic deficiency or psychological confusion" (266). I would argue that Herbert makes God both male and female in order to express both God's
closeness to, and difference from, the human.

Herbert's God is far more reactive than either Donne's or Hopkins, and nearly as reactive as the very talkative God of Rossetti. Helen Gardner writes that "it is rare to find in the seventeenth century either a direct appeal of God to the soul, or dialogues, whether undisguised or disguised as little dramas. In the great majority of religious lyrics the centre is man, shown in prayer, or meditation, or wrestling with temptation" (186). Her description seems to me to hold true for Donne, but not for Herbert.

Herbert's immense desire for a reactive and interactive God is revealed in "Decay" which wistfully evokes the days of the Old Testament in which God was so human that he would physically interact with his creatures:

Sweet were the dayes, when thou didst lodge with Lot,
Struggle with Jacob, sit with Gideon,
Advise with Abraham, when thy power could not
Encounter Moses strong complaints and mone:
        Thy words were then, Let me alone. (1-5)

But now thou dost thy self immure and close
In some one corner of a feeble heart:
Where yet both Sinne and Satan, thy old foes,
Do pinch and straiten thee, and use much art
        To gain thy thirds and little part. (11-15)

Schoenfeldt points out how curious it is that Herbert should prefer the God of Judaism to the incarnate deity of Christianity: "Surprisingly, the obsolete modes of Old Testament devotion seem at once more powerful, and more intimate, than New Testament interiority" (174). The God who is closer to the self by actually dwelling inside that self, seems paradoxically less able to relate to the self, because, it seems, he is overwhelmed by the sinful personality of the soul. Herbert's choice of the words "immure and close" to
describe God's dwelling within the soul betrays his feeling that by coming closer God has actually become more distant and unknowable, has immured himself, and become "close" as in secretive, and "close" as in closed off. The transformation of God from the anthropomorphic Yahweh of the Old Testament to the more mysterious and divine entity who dwells within the soul, but cannot be seen by the human eye, results in the terrifying vision of the last stanza:

I see the world grows old, when as the heat
Of thy great love, once spread, as in an urn
Doth closet up it self, and still retreat,
Cold Sinne forcing it, till it return,
    And calling Justice, all things burn. (16-20)

Herbert regrets God's transformation from Old Testament to New Testament God even though that transformation is an essential part of the Redemption. Herbert's unconscious need for a human God overrides his conscious belief in doctrine, and recalls Feuerbach's dictum that the theological sophistication of Christianity can not entirely repress the anthropomorphism of its Judaic origins.

"The Sacrifice" is the poem in which God gets the most to say, speaking without interruption for 252 lines. As a consequence, the Christ of this poem is very human indeed. I have always found "The Sacrifice" one of the least successful poems in The Temple precisely because Christ sounds too much like a human being feeling sorry for himself. Even the paradoxes he gives voice to, sound, because of the use of the first person, like indignant self-pity. The first stanza, for instance, expresses Christ's dismay over his invisibility to those he died for:

Oh all ye, who passe by, whose eyes and minde
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blinde;
To me, who took eyes that I might you finde:  
Was ever grief like mine? (1-4)

The repetition of the "to me" in line 3, sounds distractingly like human bluster, like an egotist referring everything back to his own situation. Herbert was of course writing from a tradition as Rosemond Tuve points out, but, as William Empson argues, the tradition is his to transform as he will, and I think he fails in "The Sacrifice" to achieve his poetical aim, which was to bring his audience to repentance and remorse based on the shock value of the paradoxes he employs. But it is difficult for any human being to respond to reproaches from another human being, without feeling resentful or suspecting the reproachful one of self-pity. Such a response does not apply to God of course, but Herbert has been unable to make Christ's voice here sound different enough from a human voice to banish the feeling of irritation on behalf of the reader. The stanzas in which Christ describes his pain without also reproaching his audience are far more successful in my opinion. Stanza six, for example, concentrates solely on Christ himself:

Therefore my soul melts, and my hearts deare treasure  
Drops bloud (the onely beads) my words to measure:  
_O let this cup passe, if it be thy pleasure:_  
Was ever grief like mine? (21-24)

The lack of reproach invests these words with the dignity and power we expect to hear from God. Pain and suffering are aspects Christianity has attributed to Christ, endless reproach and self-pity are not. While "The Sacrifice" does succeed in its evocation of the paradoxes that inform Christ's Passion, it also illustrates the risks the religious poet takes when he attempts to appropriate God's voice.

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18 See the Introduction for a more detailed description of this famous debate.
The sonnet "Redemption" is a rare example of a Herbert poem in which the reaction of God to the speaker does not transform his Otherness into an accessibility to the self. As the poem begins God is both unknown and absent. The speaker seeks him at his mansion only to be told that he is gone "about some land" (7). Undeterred by the vagueness of this description, the speaker seeks him everywhere, "In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts" (11). All these places have the glamour of the unknown, the promise of distance, discovery, and adventure. When God is finally found, it is not in the homely and everyday surroundings of the stable and Bethlehem, as we might expect, but in the strange and unfamiliar world of crime: "At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth / Of thieves and murderers: there I him espied" (12-13). This den of thieves has connotations of danger and adventure, which makes it even more daunting and frightening than the great courts the speaker visited first. So far, God has not had a chance to react in any way to the speaker, but has been the passive, and absent, object of the speaker's search, an Other who has been hard to find and impossible to predict or know. But in the last line of the sonnet, God suddenly reacts to the speaker, in both speech and action: "Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, & died" (14). Yet this interaction with God on the part of the speaker does not serve to humanize him, and bring him closer to the speaker, but only to stress his extreme strangeness and Otherness. He both anticipates the speaker's request, and acts on it instantly, without any of the fuss we might expect from a fellow human being. As Schoenfeldt puts it: "God eclipses the social metaphors mortals generate about him" (79). Several critics have commented on the Protestant character of this sonnet, its reworking of the Catholic technique of
meditation so that everything happens so fast that the speaker is left stunned by the arbitrary nature of God's grace, rather than feeling a part of the Redemption by being there in spirit and sharing Christ's experience. "Redemption," by reducing the central action of both the sonnet, and the meditation it alludes to, to the last two words ("and died"), defamiliarizes the Christian story and leaves the reader amazed at the strangeness of its central character, who disappears at almost the exact moment he is finally glimpsed.

Herbert's attribution of human reactions to God usually results in different effects than in "The Sacrifice" or "Redemption." God's direct or implied reactions or speech most often work to make him more human without making him unattractively so, or divesting him of all his divine qualities. "Love" (III), one of Herbert's best-loved poems, presents a very reactive God who becomes human without ceasing to be divine. The action of the poem is simultaneously an allegory of the Eucharist and a vision of heaven. God, called "Love" in the poem, takes the initiative in acting first: "Love bade me welcome." Love, or God, exemplifies many beautiful virtues in this poem: generosity, kindness, tact, humour, and gentleness, all of which spring from Love's very human role of a good host. Love is so understanding and so gentle in his interactions with the

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19 As Martin Elsly writes, in relation to Donne: "Very often in Protestant devotional poetry the focus of attention shifts from the object to the perceiving subject. The center of reformed meditative verse is not just Christ, but Christ as experienced by the meditator" (72). "Redemption" describes the experience of the speaker, not the action of the Crucifixion. And Ilona Bell says of "Redemption" that "In fact, the whole story avoids the traditional language of blood and wounds. In 'Redemption' Christ's Passion is not visualized; and he is seen not as a suffering man but as a gracious redeemer" (80).
speaker that he (or she) does not seem divine at all. In no other poem in *The Temple* do Herbert and God appear so very much on the same level, so very similar to each other. It is fitting that "Love" (III) should be the last poem in a collection which tries so hard to bring the strange and distant God down to the level of the poet and reader.

In spite of such poems as "Redemption" and in spite of being arguably the most Protestant of the four poets in this study, Herbert creates God in the human image. The sense of God's personality is much stronger in Herbert's than in Donne's or Rossetti's poetry, and much more human than in Hopkins's. Herbert's God is a God who can indeed be conceived of as a "friend." Margaret M. Blanchard makes the point that the humanity of Herbert's God is somewhat surprising for a seventeenth-century poet:

Generally it seems easier to see why Donne was more removed from and more fearful of his God than to see why Herbert was not. Numerous seventeenth century [sic] characteristics tended to sever man from God: a theological over-emphasis of doctrinal and intellectual aspects of religion (minimizing the imaginative appeal of Christ's human life); the dogma of justification by faith alone and the resultant stress on steady, unwavering faith (giving rise to despair, guilt and fear of damnation); the sense of the "otherness of God" throughout the Protestant Reformation; the emphasis of the legalistic aspects of God and de-emphasis of His immanence; the loss of the "historical concrete," and particularly the rejection of tradition [sic] Eucharistic dogma, the continuous-incarnational aspect of Christ's presence in time. (49)

The difference between the God of these two seventeenth-century poets, then, seems to come down to something as intangible and difficult to explain as the personality and temperament of the poet.

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20 Several critics have pointed out how Herbert genders Love as female in this poem, thus bringing God into a human sexual relationship with the speaker. See Chana Bloch, Janis Lull, and Michael Schoenfeldt, in particular.
Rossetti

Christina Rossetti, like Herbert, needs her God to be a very human one. She does evoke a sense of Otherness in her poetry, but almost always applies this Otherness to her vision of heaven, rather than of God. Her many poems about the new Jerusalem that awaits the faithful after death dwell on the fantastic elements of gold and precious stones which belong to the least human and most mysterious book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. A good example of Rossetti's poetic treatment of heaven is the untitled sonnet beginning "Lift up thine eyes to seek the invisible" (II 285):

Lift up thine eyes to seek the invisible:
    Stir up thy heart to choose the still unseen:
    Strain up thy hope in glad perpetual green
To scale the exceeding height where all saints dwell.
--Saints, it is well with you?--Yea, it is well.--
    Where they have reaped, by faith kneel thou to glean:
    Because they stooped so low to reap, they lean
Now over golden harps unspeakable.
--But thou purblind and deafened, knowest thou
    Those glorious beauties unexperienced
    By ear or eye or by heart hitherto?--
I know Whom I have trusted: wherefore now
    All amiable, accessible tho' fenced,
        Golden Jerusalem floats full in view.

A tension exists in this poem between Rossetti's need to find heaven an exotic and glamorous place totally different from her current earthly existence, and her reliance on God as knowable and familiar. The Otherness of heaven is stressed in the first quatrain

21 Her vision of Heaven as mysterious and strange is opposed to that of Herbert, whose purpose, in the words of Mary Ellen Rickey, "is to divest Heaven of any shred of exoticism," and who "describes it in terms remarkable only for their earthliness" (168). Certainly "Love" (III) supports Rickey's opinion here, with its vision of heaven as a kind human host, and a comfortable meal.
with the words "invisible," "unseen," and "exceeding height." A heaven which embodies these qualities is clearly unknowable and unimaginable. Because she is a poet, Rossetti tries imagining it anyway, even creating dialogue with the saints who dwell there. Yet the saints who "lean" down to speak to her, do so over "golden harps unspeakable." A barrier still exists between the poet and the object of her imaginative desire. As she asks herself:

--But thou purblind and deafened, knowest thou
Those glorious beauties unexperienced
By ear or eye or by heart hitherto?-- (9-11)

The afterlife is so Other, so unimaginable, that the poet might as well be deaf and blind. And yet Rossetti does not stop here, accepting the mysteries of her religion as unfathomable, but appeals to God himself as the means by which she can comprehend heaven. "I know Whom I have trusted," she announces confidently, placing God in a different realm from that of the distant and elusive heaven. Because of her trust in a humanly approachable God, she can now receive a vision of the heretofore unimaginable dwelling place of that God:

wherefore now
All amiable, accessible tho' fenced
Golden Jerusalem floats full in view. (12-14)

Rossetti's mixed feelings about Christianity are summed up in the phase "accessible tho' fenced." While she needs God himself to be accessible, she can still pay tribute to the mysteries of her religion by transposing them onto a strange and exotic heaven which remains fenced off from her until after death.

"Accessible tho' fenced" also expresses the major doctrinal influence on Rossetti's poetry, the Anglo-Catholic doctrine of Reserve, the belief that, as G. B. Tennyson
summarizes it, "since God is ultimately incomprehensible, we can know Him only indirectly; His truth is hidden and given to us only in a manner suited to our capacities for apprehending it" (45). Believing in this doctrine, Rossetti can relate fully to the human side of God while merely implying his divine Otherness, knowing she does not have to, indeed cannot, comprehend the full nature of God. Sonnet 11 of "Later Life" (II 143) demonstrates Rossetti's use of Reserve in order to shield herself from God's Otherness:

Lifelong our stumbles, lifelong our regret,  
Lifelong our efforts failing and renewed,  
While lifelong is our witness, "God is good:"  
Who bore with us till now, bears with us yet,  
Who still remembers and will not forget,  
Who gives us light and warmth and daily food;  
And gracious promises half understood,  
And glories half unveiled, whereon to set  
Our heart of hearts and eyes of our desire;  
Uplifting us to longing and to love,  
Luring us upward from this world of mire,  
Urging us to press on and mount above  
Ourselves and all we have had experience of,  
Mounting to Him in love's perpetual fire.

The essence of Reserve here is expressed in lines 7-8, which describe the "half understood" promises and "half unveiled" glories of God. Because the glories are only "half unveiled," they serve as a beacon rather than blinding anyone with their light. And because these glories are only mentioned after the reassuring list of God's homely, human concern for his people in giving them "light, and warmth and daily food," they do not in any way overwhelm the Christian soul with fear. The last two lines of the sonnet combine the human and divine aspects of Christianity in stressing that it is as ourselves, with "all that we have had experience of," with all our human experience and qualities intact, that we will be embraced into the divine, God's "perpetual fire." The sonnet bears
witness to the belief that the Incarnation works two ways: that God became human so that humans could become divine.

More than any of the other poets, Rossetti needs a God who is not just a human God with whom she can have a human relationship, but is so close to her that he becomes merged with her, part of herself. Herbert, who is most like her in trying always to make his God a human God, always maintains a distance between himself and his deity, although it is more the distance between friends, than that between God and creature. Rossetti goes further, in desiring a God who is not just a friend but a lover. However, she almost always envisions her union with God as an event which takes place after death, in the exotic heaven which I have just discussed.

In achieving a merging between God and herself, Rossetti relies on the tradition of Christ as bridegroom of the soul, which leads her to often gender God as specifically male, using the pronoun "he" in a sexual, rather than generic, sense. Gender does not play as big a part in Rossetti's poetry as it does in that of Donne or Herbert, partly because she faces less of a conflict than they do. Imagining Christ as the bridegroom of her soul is not difficult for her because she herself is the right sex for a bride. God always appears as "he" in her poetry, but usually his maleness is not an issue. Exceptions include "After Communion" (II 228-29), Sonnet 15 of "Later Life" (II 144-45), and "The Heart Knoweth its Own Bitterness" (III 265-66), where God is specifically gendered as male for a purpose, and "Despised and Rejected," a rare example of a Rossetti poem which attributes feminine qualities, although not the feminine gender, to God. In "After Communion" Rossetti clearly makes God male as a way of making her relationship with him a more
Why should I call Thee Lord, Who art my God?  
    Why should I call Thee Friend, Who art my Love?  
Or King, Who art my very Spouse above?  
Or call thy Sceptre on my heart Thy rod?  
    Lo, now Thy banner over me is love,  
All heaven flies open to me at Thy nod:  
For Thou hast lit Thy flame in me a clod,  
    Made me a nest for dwelling of Thy Dove.  
What wilt Thou call me in our home above,  
Who now hast called me friend? how will it be  
    When Thou for good wine settest forth the best?  
Now Thou dost bid me come and sup with Thee,  
    Now Thou dost make me lean upon Thy breast:  
How will it be with me in time of love?

Rossetti rejects the non-gender-specific term "friend" for the more sexualized "Love."  
She rejects the hierarchically superior and distant "king" for the intimate "spouse."  
She goes on to speculate about the even greater intimacies that will occur in heaven, when she  
is not separated from God any longer: "What wilt Thou call me in our home above, / Who  
now hast called me friend?" (9-10). She contrasts the intimacies of "now," which include  
eating with God and resting on his breast (actions she could perform with a feminine  
figure) with the ecstatic union of the future, in the "time of love," which, placed as it is  
after the preliminaries of eating and gently embracing, sounds very much like intercourse  
after foreplay. In order to make God so close to her that he joins with her, Rossetti makes  
him male in order to draw on the tradition of Christ as the bridegroom of the soul.  

She makes Christ male in sonnet 15 of "Later Life" in order to draw on another  
tradition, this time the characterization of Christ as the second Adam:

    Let woman fear to teach and bear to learn,  
        Remembering the first woman's first mistake.  
    Eve had for pupil the inquiring snake,
Whose doubts she answered on a great concern;
But he the tables so contrived to turn,
   It next was his to give and her's to take;
Till man deemed poison sweet for her sweet sake,
And fired a train by which the world must burn.
Did Adam love his Eve from first to last?
   I think so; as we love who works us ill,
And wounds us to the quick, yet loves us still.
Love pardons the unpardonable past:
Love in a dominant embrace holds fast
   His frailer self, and saves without her will.

The last three lines personify Love, a personification which is clearly gendered male. It is
not just Adam who is embracing his Eve, but Christ who is holding on fast to the female
poet, Rossetti, saving her without her will. That Rossetti can picture herself as the
"frailer self" of Christ reveals her intense need to make God so human that he can join
with her and become part of herself. Moreover, the fact that God is so close to her by the
end of the poem partly negates her stern advocacy of female submission to men. Being
held fast within God's embrace is no inferior position.

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness" contrasts Christ with the speaker's
unsatisfactory male lovers on earth. She describes their inadequacies in terms which
make them sound lacking in masculinity: "You scratch my surface with your pin; / You
stroke me smooth with hushing breath" (33-34). This effeminate fussiness is shown up
for what it is by the passionate desire expressed in the next two lines: "Nay pierce, nay
probe, nay dig within, / Probe my quick core and sound my depth" (35-36). Rossetti
wants to be possessed by a virile masculinity. She will find that surrender to a lover only
in the arms of Christ, whom she evokes at the very end of the poem: "There God shall
join and no man part, / I full of Christ and Christ of me" (55-56). The penultimate line
evokes Christ's words on marriage that "What therefore God has joined together let not man put asunder" (Matt 19:6). In her marriage with Christ, a marriage which will take place after her death, Rossetti imagines a complete interpenetration. Both full of the other, Christ and the soul have merged to so great a degree that they are practically one self.

Rossetti almost never genders God as female. One exception is "Despised and Rejected" (I 178-80), where Christ, while male, takes on feminine characteristics of passivity and helplessness. Dolores Rosenblum argues that the Christ of "Despised and Rejected" bears great similarities to the Victorian woman: "the social suffering of the outcast female is illuminated, as through a stained-glass window, by the suffering of the unheeded Christ" ("Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence" 143). He is lonely, sad, pleading, and powerless. Rossetti gives Christ feminine qualities here in order to make him mirror, rather than merge with, herself. Thus she genders God as male when she wants to make him the bridegroom of her soul, and female when she wants to make him the mirror of her soul. In both cases she brings him down to the human level, but only when he is male does he bring her back up with him to the divine level. Only when he takes on the masculine gender, does he merge with her own self.

God is more reactive in Rossetti's poetry than in that of any of the other three poets. Not only does Rossetti make him take part in many dialogue poems, she also gives him whole poems of his own to speak, a strategy which even Herbert practices only once, in "The Sacrifice." A good example of a dialogue poem is "Love is Strong as Death" (II 164), in which God is quick to react and respond to the speaker's despairing cry:
"I have not sought Thee, I have not found Thee,  
I have not thirsted for Thee: 
And now cold billows of death surround me, 
Buffeting billows of death astound me,—  
Wilt Thou look upon, wilt Thou see 
Thy perishing me?"

"Yea, I have sought thee, yea, I have found thee,  
Yea, I have thirsted for thee, 
Yea, long ago with love's bands I bound thee: 
Now the Everlasting Arms surround thee,—  
Thro' death's darkness I look and see 
And clasp thee to Me."

The first two lines of God's reply in stanza 2 parallel the first two lines of the speaker's cry in the first stanza. "I have not sought Thee" (1), is answered by "Yea, I have sought thee" (7). God's immediate response and aid, couched in the same language and syntax of the human speaker, makes him very reassuring and close. Yet, as so often in Rossetti's poetry, God can only be embraced by the human soul after the separating border of death has been crossed: "Thro' death's darkness I look and see / And clasp thee to Me" (11-12). God may talk like a transformative echo of the speaker, but he still does not clasp her to himself until the moment of death. The human God resides in the non-human realm of heaven.

The sonnet "Surely He hath borne our griefs" (II 203) shows Rossetti wanting, for once, more of a mirror God than a merging God. She concentrates on the comfort that Christ's suffering provides for the Christians who suffer after him:

Christ's Heart was wrung for me, if mine is sore;  
And if my feet are weary, His have bled; 
He had no place wherein to lay His Head; 
If I am burdened, He was burdened more. 
The cup I drink, He drank of long before; 
He felt the unuttered anguish which I dread;
He hungered Who the hungry thousands fed,
And thirsted Who the world's refreshment bore.
If grief be such a looking-glass as shows
Christ's Face and man's in some sort made alike,
Then grief is pleasure with a subtle taste:
Wherefore should any fret or faint or haste?
Grief is not grievous to a soul that knows
Christ comes,—and listens for that hour to strike.

The lines that begin the sestet are rather surprising. Grief makes Christ human enough to mirror the face of man, which is a fairly standard use of the Incarnation to stress God's closeness to, rather than distance from, the human, but Rossetti owns up to finding a pleasure in this mirroring. It is more important to her, in other words, that Christ be human, than that the God she loves should avoid suffering. God's suffering gives her pleasure because it brings him down to her own level.

When God does keep his distance from her, she cannot stand it, as evidenced by the following untitled sonnet (II 205):

Have I not striven, my God, and watched and prayed?
Have I not wrestled in mine agony?
Wherefore still turn Thy Face of Grace from me?
Is Thine Arm shortened that Thou canst not aid?
Thy silence breaks my heart: speak tho' to upbraid,
For Thy rebuke yet bids us follow Thee.
I grope and grasp not; gaze, but cannot see.
When out of sight and reach my bed is made,
And piteous men and women cease to blame
Whispering and wistful of my gain or loss;
Thou Who for my sake once didst feel the Cross,
Lord, wilt Thou turn and look upon me then,
And in Thy Glory bring to nought my shame,
Confessing me to angels and to men?

Rossetti even treats God as she would a human being by asking "Is Thine Arm shortened that Thou canst not aid?" In her need for God to respond to her on her own level, she
stumbles into blasphemy, ascribing powerlessness to an omnipotent God. It is clearly Rossetti who feels that her arm is too short to reach God at his immense distance, but in her customary habit of making God mirror her, she projects her inability onto him. Rossetti declares that she would rather deal with God's anger than his silence (5-6), for at least anger is a more human trait than silence and incomprehensibility. Rossetti feels only frustration and loneliness, not mystic exhilaration, before a God who hides himself from her, amazing in his Otherness.

In reading Rossetti as a poet who desires union with a human God, I am departing from the critical majority. Jerome Bump argues that Rossetti was attracted only to a transcendent God: "The idea of the immanence of God or the Ideal in this world, for instance, is almost completely alien to her" (3). And Rossetti's poetic style is usually read as privileging the Otherness of the divine. Both Jerome McGann and Dolores Rosenblum speak of the empty referent in her verse: "They are human words, but because their referents are finally not human at all, they are emptied of meaning and acquire instead a portentous but obscure import" (McGann, The Achievement of Christina Rossetti 8); "There is a sense, also, in which devotional language is language that has been emptied out: it consists of sacred words and sacred names, but their meaning is less important than their utterance" (Rosenblum, "Christina Rossetti and Poetic Sequence" 152). David Shaw, too, reads Rossetti's language as trying to express a God of Otherness: "Chasms keep opening, and a power she can neither name or comprehend is continually invading and breaking down the refuge of her spare, demanding forms. . . . the instability of the forms generates a sense of mystery" ("Poet of Mystery" 23). I agree that Rossetti's
language is more ritualistic than expressive or denotative. It is not the case that, like Herbert, she can imagine herself engaging in a little witty and gentle conversation with a friend who happens to be divine, but that in being unable to recognize God as immanent, she looks to death as the means by which she can merge with a transcendent God in heaven. Anthony Low describes how Herbert uses the language of sexual love in his poetry as a means by which "to figure forth what we may call the 'courtship' stage of the divine-human love affair, never the consummation or the marriage stage" (The Reinvention of Love 88). Herbertcourts a God that he sees incarnate in the world; Rossetti, lacking this vision, skips the courtship and looks forward to the consummation, conflating the bridegroom Christ with that other bridegroom, Death.

**Hopkins**

Hopkins differs startlingly from the other three poets in that he desires his God to be Other rather than human. He is like Donne in dwelling heavily on God's strangeness and terrifying power, but unlike Donne in exulting in that power. What John Carey says of Donne's sermons, that "it is God's destructive power that Donne particularly relishes dwelling on. . . . It is God as killer and pulverizer that Donne celebrates" (123), is also true of Hopkins's poetry. It is only by the time of the "terrible sonnets" that Hopkins begins to find blankness and despair rather than excitement and ecstasy in the face of

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22 Her dialogue poems are far more ambiguous and impersonal than Herbert's. See my discussion of "Uphill" and others in chapter four.
God's Otherness.23

Hopkins's Catholicism does not seem to make him more responsive to a human God at all. The only poem I could find where Catholic doctrine results in a humanizing of God is "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe." By comparing Mary to the atmosphere, Hopkins sets her up as the protective medium by which we can shelter from a fierce God:

Whereas did air not make
This bath of blue and slake
His fire, the sun would shake,
A blear and blinding ball
With blackness bound, and all
The thick stars round him roll
Flashing like flecks or coal,
Quartz-fret, or sparks of salt,
In grimy vasty vault.

So God was god of old:
A mother came to mould
Those limbs like ours which are
What must make our daystar
Much dearer to mankind;
Whose glory bare would blind
Or less would win man's mind.
Through her we may see him
Made sweeter, not made dim,
And her hand leaves his light
Sifted to suit our sight. (94-113)

This is one of the few poems in which Hopkins confesses that the Incarnation makes God

23 Allison Sullivan points out, however, that in his sermons, if not his poetry, Hopkins imagines God in very human terms: "Sometimes one is left with the impression that Hopkins's Christ, especially in the sermons, is a supernatural college don, handsome to look at before the crucifixion, and afterward, more to be loved and cherished in His apparent downfall than ever before" (Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper 27). Perhaps Hopkins creates a non-human God in his poetry and a human one in his prose because he sees poetry itself as different and Other to mundane human existence and experience.
"much dearer to mankind" (107) than he would have been if he had not taken on humanity. Significantly, it is only through a specifically Catholic focus, the veneration of Mary, that Hopkins is able to express this idea at all. Mary makes the sun the Son, and thus makes God human and accessible to the human self.24

The only other poems where Hopkins truly celebrates God's humanity are "Pied Beauty" and "As kingfishers catch fire." The first of these celebrates the double nature of "dappled things"(1), alluding to the double nature of Christ who is both divine and human. His being is as "couple-colour[ed]" (2) as the skies that Hopkins loves. Yet even in this sonnet Hopkins ends by glorifying the transcendent divinity, rather than the immanent incarnationality, of God: "He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: / Praise him" (10-11). "As kingfishers catch fire" is much more celebratory of the Incarnation, to such an extent that God becomes not only human, but the self, as in so much of Rossetti's poetry:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{I say more: the just man justices;} \\
&\text{Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;} \\
&\text{Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is--} \\
&\text{Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,} \\
&\text{Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his} \\
&\text{To the Father through the features of men's faces. (9-14)}
\end{align*}
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24 Jerome Bump suggests that "it was primarily such a vision of the divine family that led Hopkins to convert to Catholicism. . . . Hopkins must have seen the many statues of the Holy Family in Catholic churches, and his many poems to Mary and Marian figures reveal his need to see the ideal incarnate in the real in women as well as men and children" ("Reader-Centered Criticism" 82). This idea of Hopkins's humanization of God through Mary makes an interesting contrast to John Schad's reading of The Wreck of the Deutschland, in which he sees God figured as the feminine and the maternal: "the unconscious Other of God is thought of in terms of the mother of God. . . . If the unconscious in Hopkins is dominated by one sign it is, it seems, that of Mary or Theotokos" ("Hopkins, Lacan, and the Unconscious" 145-48).
Christ is not only human, he is ten thousand different humans.

Hopkins does gender his God on a number of occasions, but almost always as male.25 (Indeed, the two Renaissance poets are much more likely to attribute femininity to God than are the two Victorians.) I have already discussed, at the beginning of this chapter, his attribution to God of virile masculinity in *The Wreck of The Deutschland.*26 Another poem in which God seems sexually rather than generically male is "Hurrahing in Harvest" where the landscape is gendered, unusually for English poetry, as male: "And the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder / Majestic—as a stallion stalwart" (9-10). God's sexual conquest here is the speaker who is hurled to the ground by the force of his own attraction: "The heart rears wings bold and bolder / And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet" (13-14). Because the gender of Christ is displaced onto nature, however, the characterization of God as a virile and sexually attractive male does not really humanize him at all. His male qualities are those of a stallion, as they are those of a falcon in "The Windhover," not of a human male.27

*The Wreck of the Deutschland* presents God as the Other mainly through

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25 One of the few exceptions is the feminine Christ of "The Soldier," a poem I discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

26 For a detailed analysis of gender in *The Wreck of The Deutschland*, see Thaïs Morgan's essay, "Violence, Creativity, and The Feminine: Poetics and Gender Politics in Swinburne and Hopkins" (1992).

27 See chapter two for my comments on Hopkins's treatment of his own gender before this male God.
Hopkins's Romantic identification of God with the sea and the storm. The first stanza positions God immediately as the speaker's master ("Thou mastering me / God!") and associates him, in the third line, with the ocean that will assert its mastery over all human endeavour in the poem ("World's strand, sway of the sea"). The second half of the stanza sets up the paradox which will inform the rest of the poem, the paradox of a God who is both human and Other:

Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

God first makes the poet, much like a human artist creates his art, than almost destroys him with dread, dread of his Otherness and divinity. The last line combines the image of a transcendent and threatening pointing finger, which hovers "over" the poet, and perhaps evokes the terrifying moving finger which wrote on the wall of Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, with the very different image of a baby grasping his father's finger in a

Jerome Bump reads the storm as a representation of God as the sublime: "Another convention of the representation of the sublime in nature, the emphasis on terror and dread, also served Hopkins' proselytic purposes. He wanted not only to inculcate a sense of God's presence, but especially to call upon that fear of a destructive God which the religious liberals of the time wished to forget" ("The Wreck of the Deutschland' and the Dynamic Sublime" 116). John Shad's reading of the poem emphasizes its Romantic roots: "For the Victorians . . . the heritage of Romanticism, with its privileging of the spontaneous and irrational, means that there is an increasing tendency to identify God with the unconscious" ("Hopkins, Lacan, and the Unconscious" 142). Marylou Motto, on the other hand, argues that Hopkins's sense of God as Other sprang from his rejection, rather than embrace, of Romanticism: "While the Romantic wills himself to know the other through a fusion of the self and the other, Hopkins celebrates God-given otherness"

The story of the writing on the wall can be found in Daniel:

In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote
reflex action. The stanza strains under the tension of equal fear and trust on the poet's part towards his God, a strain which is also evident in the similar paradoxes of stanza 9:

Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm;  
Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:  
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then.

God is both Other and human, both a father and a storm.  

The second stanza goes further in establishing God as the sea, and in stressing God's terror, mastery and otherness. Hopkins reveals an almost masochistic desire to experience the might of God, which he expresses in imagery of sea and storm, therefore linking his own experience to that of the Deutschland:

I did say yes  
O at lightning and lashed rod;  
Thou hearest me truer than tongue confess  
Thy terror, O Christ, O God;  
Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:  
The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod  
Hard down with a horror of height:  
And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress.

God, like a wave, sweeps the poet up and hurls him down again, and the language reflects the poet's excitement at being so treated. "I did say yes," says Hopkins, and that yes

over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.  
Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote against one another. (Daniel 5:5-6)

30 Alison Sulloway argues that Hopkins genders God in such a way that "God is 'master' but he is also a 'father and fond,' and his fatherhood includes what Hopkins usually thinks of--or rather feels archetypally about--as mother love" ("Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Women and Men" 45). Even if God is parental, the fact that he is both father and mother, means that the very humanity of his feelings is still radically different from anything a single-sexed human being can offer.
seems to be not reluctant, but exultant.

And in the first three lines of stanza three, Hopkins goes so far as to equate his terror of God with his terror of hell:

The frown of his face
Before me, the hurtle of hell
Behind, where, where was a, where was a place?

God's terrifying Otherness, symbolized here by his frown, is not a very comforting refuge from the terrors of hell. Hopkins expresses his terror and confusion before this distant and imposing God by stuttering through line three, showing how human language and syntax are inadequate as ways in which to reach God.

Hopkins's answer to God's terrifying frowns is indeed to focus on the Incarnation, which he does in stanzas 6 to 8, but his treatment of it stresses not Christ's reachability as a human being, but the mystery and passion of his human existence. The Incarnation, according to Hopkins, is a

stroke dealt--
Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver,
That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt--
(st. 6)

Guilt is hushed and hearts melt, but this vision of a relaxation and surrender to God's love sits oddly with the idea of being dealt a stroke, especially one which is delivered by such terrifying and destructive storms as the one that wrecks the Deutschland. Furthermore the Incarnation leads straight to the Passion: "The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat: / Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be" (st. 7). For God, experiencing humanity is as "frightful" as Hopkins's experience of God's divinity. The encounter of divinity and humanity is, for Hopkins, one which will always lead to the "swelling" of a
In Part Two of the poem, God is present not only in, but as, the storm. In spite of Hopkins's empathy for the people who were terrified by the sea, the poetry here expresses a delight in the sea's wild power, as in the final lines of stanza 13:

Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivelled snow
Spins to the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps.

The assonance and alliteration of the first line is so overwhelming and skilful that the reader or listener is far more likely to think "how beautiful! how exciting!" than "how awful!" This snow attracts rather than repels.

The same attraction towards the destructive power of the sea is evident in stanza 16:

One stirred from the rigging to save
The wild woman-kind below,
With a rope's end round the man, handy and brave--
He was pitched to his death at a blow,
For all his dreadnought breast and braids of thew:
They could tell him for hours, dandled the to and fro
Through the cobbled foam-fleece. What could he do
With the burl of the fountains of air, buck and the flood of the wave?

The stormy sea plays carelessly with the dead man. "Dandled" suggests a parent playing with his or her child. It is God, in the form of the stormy sea, who almost playfully, and quite blindly, dandles his dead son. Is this a human father, or does the treatment of God in this poem redefine his fatherhood into something incomprehensibly different from our idea of that human relationship?

The God of this poem is predominantly a wild and dangerous master. One of the ways in which he differs from, say, Herbert's God is in the fact that he always wins his
battles with the poet, and by extension with all humanity. Hopkins could not have written "Great God doth fight, he doth submit" ("Sion" 16). In "Carrion Comfort" God does condescend to wrestle with the poet, but he certainly does not submit. The shipwrecked victims of the Deutschland, like the speaker of "Carrion Comfort," fight with God and lose:

They fought with God's cold—
And they could not and fell to the deck
(Crushed them) or water (and drowned them) or rolled
With the sea-romp over the wreck. (st. 17)

The sea romps playfully, and in its amoral joy in its own power the deaths of the Deutschland passengers are reduced to parentheses. Hopkins identifies with God's power and victory, not with the weak victims of that power. This stanza ends with an evocation of the potential for divine Otherness in the human being:

Night roared, with the heart-break hearing a heart-broke rabble,
The woman's wailing, the crying of child without check--
Till a lioness arose breasting the babble,
A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told.

The nun is portrayed as a lioness, a towering prophetess. Although Hopkins will melt into tears of pity for her in the following stanza, in these lines he is firmly in hero-worship mode, praising her for her fierce strength, just as he admires the sea for its wild and vital power. As a "lioness" the nun partakes of the non-human power of God.

The nuns are further made Other in stanza 21, where they are described as

Loathed for a love men knew in them,
Banned by the land of their birth,
Rhine refused them, Thames would ruin them.

As outcasts and exiles, the nuns are deprived of what makes them human, being part of a
Loathed and banned, they have become the Other. It is therefore fitting that the rest of the stanza should extol the non-human quality of the God who accepts them and takes them in:

Surf, snow, river and earth
Gnashed: but thou art above, thou Orion of light;
Thy unchannelling poising palms were weighing the worth,
Thou martyr-master: in thy sight
Storm flakes were scroll-leaved flowers, lily showers—sweet
heaven was astrew in them.

Suddenly God is no longer part of the storm, but far above and beyond it. However, he is not the less Other because of this move, but rather changes from being part of the nature-Other to being a truly transcendent God. Hopkins achieves an amazing change in tone, pace, and volume in these lines, as he removes both God and reader from the gnashing storm of the natural elements to a silent and remote height where God's smiting hand becomes a thoughtfully weighing hand, where the whirling snow becomes softly falling flowers. Although God has lost all the violence and passion that he possessed as part of the storm, his very remoteness and dispassion in seeing the harmful storm flakes as beautiful and gentle flowers underlines his distance from human experience. This God might be beautiful in his Otherness, but he is even more difficult for the human being to relate to than when he is as threatening and violent as the storm at sea.

Stanza 34 turns again to the Incarnation:

Now born, new born to the world,
Double-naturèd name,
The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled
Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,
Mid-numberèd he in three of the thunder-throne!

The language used to describe the Incarnate Christ does not evoke any human
associations at all, but exults in its own strangeness and in the beautiful strangeness of the second person of the "thunder-throne!" It is partly because of the originality and strangeness of Hopkins's poetry, that the subject of his poetry, God, is always so strange and wonderful. The last lines of this stanza do attempt to distance God from the storm, but only to associate him again with nature:

Not a dooms-day dazzle in his coming nor dark as he came;
   Kind, but royally reclaiming his own;
   A released shower, let flash to the shire, not a lightning of fire hard-hurled.

Even though God approaches the human category of a kind and gracious king in these lines, the kindness is pictured only in terms of natural, rather than human, gentleness. The final stanza of the poem attempts to develop the analogy of Christ as King, but the syntax of the final line belies the language used to humanize God:

   Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's throng's
       Lord. (st. 35)

The list of possessives makes the journey to the subject, God, so long and difficult, that it is clear that he is far from our hearts and thoughts, that he is the cooly wondrous "master-martyr" of stanza 21, unreachably transcendent and powerful, and not a kind and human friend sitting by our hearth. David Anthony Downes poses the question of whether "the Christian spirit of the poem [is] submissive and fearful, or . . . assertive and joyous?" His answer is that "The Christian vision has a Good Friday which involves submission and fear. It has an Easter Sunday, individual and joyous. There is no dichotomy, only a paradox, which is throughout all the gospels" (The Ignatian Personality of Gerard Manley Hopkins 54). I would suggest, rather, that the joy of the poem does not co-exist
with the fear, alternating with it in a Christian rhythm, but is instead the result of that fear. *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a poem in which the fear of God is something not to avoid, but to exult in. Hopkins wants his God to be Other.31

The "terrible sonnets," however, show an intense change in attitude on Hopkins's part. Suddenly he approaches God's Otherness not from the position of celebratory awe and ecstatic admiration, but from panic and despair. This change is due to the fact that in *Deutschland* and the other poems God's Otherness is expressed through nature, and the post-Romantic in Hopkins exulted in that nature. But the "terrible sonnets" are, as Daniel Harris has pointed out, attempts at Ignatian meditation which fail because they cannot achieve colloquy. The elements of absence, distance, and non-responsiveness which make up part of God as Other, and which Hopkins is able to sidestep in the poetry that makes God immanent in nature, come to the fore when he confronts a God who should be immanent in himself, but is not. In "Carrion Comfort" Hopkins does succeed in imagining God as part of nature, this time as a lion, and consequently, in spite of his terror of this lion-God, he is able to come to some sort of recognition of God's presence in his life by the end of the sonnet. God is indeed very frightening in his non-human aspect of the lion:

31 The more Other God is, the easier it may be for the non-Christian reader to relate to him. Paul Mariani writes of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* that it "demands at least a momentary (fictive) assent to what it says or else the emotional intensity is bound to strike the reader as not only strange but wearying and even repulsive" (48). But I do not think this assent is required if the reader takes the poem as a description of the sublime and terrifying aspects of a storm at sea. Because Hopkins describes a God who is part of impersonal nature rather than a human and personal God, the emotional intensity seems an appropriate response to the terrifying and beautiful forces of nature.
But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me?
scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruisèd bones? and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee
and flee? (5-8)

(Note the return of God-as-storm in line 8.) Where in "The Windhover" Hopkins delights
in the power of a bird of prey, he now cowers before another fierce carnivore. But the
poem does not merely chart the distance Hopkins has come in realizing the full
implications of God's distance from the human; it turns on itself to make God part of the
poet's human self, and make that more terrifying than the lion-limbed deity. Hopkins
suddenly realizes that he is not sure whose side he is on in the struggle between himself
and God:

Cheer whom though? The hero whose heaven-handling flung me,
fōot trōd
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one? That
night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!)
my God. (12-14)

The transformation of God from a lion to a human hero with whom the human Hopkins
can wrestle disturbs the poet greatly, because he suddenly cannot distinguish between
himself and God. God is so like him and so close to him that he cannot make out whose
limbs are whose in tangle of the wrestling bodies, and if he cannot distinguish between
himself and God, then maybe God is nothing more than himself.

"I wake and feel" also shows Hopkins struggling with the hidden implications of
the previously attractive Otherness of God. God is so Other, so removed from Hopkins,
that he is unable to make any contact with him:
And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away. (6-8)

God is so far from the human self of Hopkins that the result is, paradoxically, an overwhelmingly strong sense of that self on the part of the poet:

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. (9-14)

Because God cannot be part of his self, Hopkins feels that the self is totally unredeemed and unbearable. Only God's redemption of humanity by his taking on of a human self, can redeem the "lost" from being "their sweating selves," but in this sonnet the Incarnation might as well have never taken place. Hopkins realizes that God's Otherness, which he previously celebrated, has a very dark side and terrible implications for himself.

The answer to the question of whether the poets' emphasis on the humanness or Otherness of God springs primarily from their denomination, or religious context, would appear to be no: the seventeenth-century Protestant Donne and nineteenth-century Catholic Hopkins both stress God's Otherness, Donne in fear and Hopkins, for the most part, in ecstasy; while the seventeenth-century Calvinist Anglican Herbert and the nineteenth-century high Anglican Rossetti both reveal an intense desire to relate to a
human God. The attraction to a human God depends upon an individual poet's temperament more than upon his or her theology. In this sense, if in no other, Feuerbach's proposition that "Such as are a man's thoughts and dispositions, such is his God" (12) is indeed true.

32 In comparing Donne to Hopkins and Herbert to Rossetti I am doing nothing new; many critics pair them up in exactly this formation. Jerome McGann is one example: "At the back of Hopkins's 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire...' are the pyrotechnics of Byron or Donne... In sharp contrast, Rossetti's poetry is always nonpersonal (not exactly impersonal) in the moderated style of Herbert, just as its address is simple, cool, even at times severe" (The Achievement of Christina Rossetti 5); David Shaw is another: "If one finds the art too ingenuous, then one simply does not care for Rossetti's kind of poetry. But then one would not, I think, care for George Herbert either: one would prefer Hopkins or Donne" ("Poet of Mystery" 55). These are just two of many instances.
Chapter Two

Symbolic and Semiotic: Religion in Poetic Language

Art thou all justice, Lord?
    Shows not thy word
More attributes? Am I all throat and eye,
    To weep or crie?

(Herbert, "Complaining" 11-14)

Kristeva introduces and defines the two terms "symbolic" and "semiotic" in Revolution in Poetic Language (1974). She deals first with the semiotic\(^1\) which consists of the bodily drives which move through the infant's body: "Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such." (25). The subject is "not yet constituted as such" because the infant has no sense of existing apart from, or separate from, the mother. In a pre-Oedipal state, then, the human being is entirely semiotic, a site of conflicting and undifferentiated drives. Kristeva calls this place, this collection of drives bounded by the infant's physical body, the chora: "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. . . . an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (25). In the course of an infant's development, physical drives and energies "are arranged according to the

\(^1\) In naming this modality "semiotic" Kristeva usurped the word's established theoretical meaning of "field of signs." She claims that she uses it in its original Greek sense of trace or imprint (Revolution 25).
various constraints imposed on this body—always already involved in a semiotic process—by family and social structures" (25). This arrangement of drives according to social structures is the symbolic.

The symbolic occurs chronologically after the semiotic and is fixed in place during the acquisition of language, as the child separates itself from the mother. A subject can never be totally semiotic or symbolic. Both people, and the language they form themselves through, function within the intersection of the two. But this intersection is by no means a peaceful, harmonious one. Kristeva states that all discourse "moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it" (Revolution 26). We have to suppress our sense of feeling a dozen different impulses at once, or seeing ten different meanings in a sentence, if we are to get anything accomplished, but if these meanings were to vanish completely, we would feel nothing, mean nothing, and, in fact, die. The semiotic is the energy that lets us make or do anything; the symbolic is the societal structures that channel our making or doing into something "useful" or "understandable" by others. While human society does need both, they are always in conflict.

Before I approach the poetry itself, I want to address an important issue regarding the use of the semiotic and symbolic to analyse religious poetry: the difference between the semiotic as poetic content and poetic form. Kristeva does not make a clear distinction in Revolution in Poetic Language between the semiotic operating as a theme, or as a mode, in artistic practice. Do texts talk about or through the semiotic? For example, when she says that "in 'artistic' practices the semiotic--the precondition of the symbolic--
is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic" (Revolution 50), she does not indicate whether it destroys the symbolic by making the language not make sense, or by attacking symbolic structures like patriarchy, the unified subject, or theology, through language. I believe she means both. The semiotic is at its most powerful when it attacks society's structures at the same time as attacking grammar and logic, but it is possible to find the semiotic drives in the content as well as the form of a text.

In this chapter I analyse the semiotic in poems in terms of both form and content, suggesting ways in which they can be read in light of the Kristevan categories of symbolic and semiotic, while at the same time attempting to show how this schematic dichotomy is not always adequate to analyse the poetry. I should stress that I am not calling Kristeva herself schematic in her own analyses of poetry (she does not exactly err on the side of clarity and reductiveness), but rather I am suggesting that the employment of her categories of semiotic and symbolic can lead to a mechanical approach to different poems in the case of the critic, if he is not careful.

Without the attention to poetic form, the Kristevan dichotomy of symbolic and semiotic might well be abandoned in favour of more traditional thematic oppositions, such as reason and passion, intellect and imagination, the Apollonian and the Dionysian.²

² While Freud owes much to Nietzsche, he must have balked at Nietzsche's equation of the Apollonian with dreams: "To reach a closer understanding of both these tendencies, let us begin by viewing them as the separate art realms of dream and intoxication, two physiological phenomena standing toward one another in much the same relationship as the Apollonian and Dionysiac" (19; Nietzsche's emphasis). From a psychoanalytic point of view, dreams surely belong primarily to the Dionysian realm.
or even sanity and madness. Curiously, however, in Kristeva's own analyses of poetry, she responds much more to what is said by the poet, than to the way he says it. Indeed, her commentaries read more like poetic responses than critical exegeses. Nowhere in her writing does she supply an exhaustive list of poetic devices which come under the category of symbolic, and those which qualify as semiotic. In this chapter I attempt to supply that list, although, like Kristeva, I aim to be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

Kristeva's pre-eminent semiotic poetic device is rhythm; she defines the semiotic *chora* as "rupture and articulations (rhythm)" (*Revolution* 26), and claims that "Poetic rhythm does not constitute the acknowledgement of the unconscious but is instead its expenditure and implementation" (*Revolution* 164). Symbolic meaning is destabilized by poetic metre: "the unity of reason which consciousness sketches out will always be shattered by the rhythm suggested by drives: repetitive rejection seeps in through 'prosody,' and so forth, preventing the stasis of One meaning, One myth, One logic" (*Revolution* 148; Kristeva's emphasis). The key word here is "repetition": Kristeva identifies those poetic devices that rely on repetition as semiotic. For that reason she links rhythm with alliteration, as in her definition of the semiotic in *Tales of Love*: "an economy that privileges orality, vocalization, alliteration, rhythmicity, etc." (16).

Presumably other repetitive devices such as assonance and rhyme would also, then, qualify as semiotic. Kristeva's stress on the sound of poetry might lead us to define the

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3 See, for example, her analyses of Mallarmé at the end of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and of Baudelaire in *Tales of Love*. Her discussion of Nerval in *Black Sun*, is the best example of a Kristevan reading which *does* consider such formal devices as alliteration (161-62) and puns.
poetic semiotic as the experience a person might have who is listening to a poem read aloud in a language she does not understand.

Yet Kristeva does not stop at sound, but goes on to discuss aspects of the semiotic in the text's meaning. She identifies metaphor, a poetic device which relates to the text's content rather than sound, as semiotic:

> Phonic (later phonemic), kinetic, or chromatic units and differences are the marks of ... stases in the drives. Connections or *functions* are thereby established between these discrete marks which are based on drives and articulated according to their resemblance or opposition, either by slippage or by condensation. Here we find the principles of metonymy and metaphor indissociable from the drive economy underlying them." *(Revolution 28; Kristeva's emphasis)*

Kristeva follows Lacan here, in equating Freud's categories of dream displacement ("slippage") with metonymy and dream condensation with metaphor. Both, therefore, because of their connection with dreams, are semiotic.

Kristeva identifies syntax and grammar as symbolic and those devices which disrupt them as semiotic. She writes of "the inseparability of the thetic and syntax" *(Revolution 55)*, and argues that the text functions to upset that syntax:

> We shall see that when the speaking subject is no longer considered a phenomenological transcendental ego nor the Cartesian ego but rather a *subject in process/on trial* *(sujet en procès)*, as is the case in the practice of the text, deep structure or at least transformational rules are disturbed and, with them, the possibility of semantic and/or grammatical categorical

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4 Lacan's categories themselves depart from those of Roman Jakobson, who was the first person to compare metaphor and metonymy to the Freudian theory of dreams. Jakobson argued that both condensation and displacement correspond to metonymy, while Freud's concepts of "identification" and "symbolism" resemble metaphor. See David Lodge's notes to Lacan's essay "The insistence of the letter in the idea of the unconscious" in Lodge's *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Jakobson's essay on "The metaphoric and metonymic poles" is also part of Lodge's reader.
interpretation. (Revolution 37; emphasis is Kristeva's and editorial addition is her translator's).

Poetic devices which disturb syntax, then, indicate the presence of the semiotic.

The following lists of symbolic and semiotic devices can be schematized, following these general comments by Kristeva. Symbolic: grammar, syntax, argument. Semiotic: unspecified (by Kristeva) devices for disrupting syntax; devices of repetition such as rhythm, metre, alliteration, assonance, rhyme; and metaphor (characteristic of dreams and therefore the unconscious). These lists are both problematic in themselves and far from complete. Before reassessing Kristeva's categories, however, I would like to first suggest some more poetical terms which might belong in these lists.

Symbolic aspects of poetry, those that work syntactically to build an argument and clarify meaning might include (and it is telling that I can find only one item for this list) the hypotactic style "in which extensive subordination takes place, thereby allotting a major role to logical or temporal sequencing." 5

Poetic devices which semiotically work to disrupt grammar, syntax, and clarity of meaning include: parataxis, the opposite of hypotaxis, which refers to "a relative paucity of linking terms between juxtaposed clauses or sentences"; anacoluthon, a "term of grammar designating a change of construction in the middle of a sentence that leaves its beginning uncompleted"; aposiopesis, a "speaker's abrupt halt midway in a sentence, accountable to his being too excited or distraught to give further articulation to his thought"; asyndeton, the "omission of conjunctions between phrases or clauses";

5 This definition, and the subsequent definitions of poetical terms, are taken from The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (1993).
hyperbaton, the "alteration of normal (that is, prose) word order"; and tmesis, the "[i]nsertion of a word within another word or phrase."

Poetic devices that come under the general category of repetition include: anaphora, the "repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, sentences, or lines"; chiasmus, "[a]ny structure in which elements are repeated in reverse, so giving the pattern ABBA"; and polysyndeton, the opposite of asyndeton, the "repetition of conjunctions, normally and." Anaphora, chiasmus, and polysyndeton would then all qualify as semiotic.

Terms related to metaphor include: simile, pun, paradox, and oxymoron, all of which can be found in dreams and all of which serve to express meaning in surprising, and possibly unconscious, ways. All of these tropes, then, qualify as semiotic.

Kristeva's categories, however, are highly problematic. It should be clear, for one thing, that some devices of repetition, supposedly semiotic, can work to enforce, rather than destroy, syntax, which would thus make them symbolic. Anaphora, chiasmus, and polysyndeton, for example, can all work to strengthen the syntactical movement of the argument, as well as to weaken it. Anaphora, states the New Princeton Encyclopedia, can "be seen as one form of parallelism which uses the repetitions to bring the metrical and syntactic frames into alignment." Making metre align with, rather than eclipse, syntax is surely an example of the Kristevan symbolic. The Princeton cites one opinion that

6 While I imply here that parallelism is a device of the symbolic, Maria R. Lichtmann, who sees it as the basic structural principle of Hopkins's poetry, describes it in terms which suggest the semiotic: "For [Hopkins], parallelism struck deep into the souls of readers and hearers, tapping into preconscious rhythms" (3). Yet, as she goes on to say, parallelism is a way of strengthening and supporting meaning: "Because it embodies
chiasmus is a device which "focus[es] attention on syntax" and "emphasizes both meaning and grammar." Polysyndeton can work both to indicate "a sense of breathlessness" and excitement (the semiotic), and "by slowing down a sentence . . . add 'dignity' to it" (the symbolic). It is clear, then, that some poetic devices must be examined in the context of a particular text before they can be identified as working in a symbolic or semiotic way.

Some of the terms which Kristeva does explicitly identify as semiotic can also, I would argue, operate in the service of the symbolic. The rhythm of a poem, for one thing, gives pleasure not only to the semiotic dimension of the reader or listener who hears the movement of her own oscillating drives, but can function as a controlling and regulatory device keeping the poet's overflow of words and emotions under order and restraint. Rhythm cannot be solely classified as semiotic, surely, or we could make no distinction between a poem that employs perfectly regular iambic pentameter, and one in which the metre is different in every line. Alliteration and assonance might bear witness to the likeness in form as it communicates likeness in meaning, parallelism exemplifies the incarnational ideal of matter as spirit" (5). A re-enactment of the Incarnation implies the "theological" nature of parallelism, thus bringing it back into the realm of the symbolic. But it does not end there, for a further comment by Lichtmann serves to suggest the semiotic again: "In conformity with his poetics, Hopkins' poems, written with a kenosis of intellect in their parallelism and simple connectives, invite not meditation but contemplation" (5). So parallelism does not stimulate the intellect, which suggests that it is not a symbolic device. This short summary of Lichtmann's theory of parallelism in Hopkins should serve to illustrate how difficult it is to label poetic devices as either symbolic or semiotic.

This difficulty in assigning rhythm to one side of the symbolic/semiotic dichotomy is due in part to the complexity of the Kristeva's theory of the semiotic. On the one hand, she characterizes the semiotic as the pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal state of the infant, defined by the rhythms of its mother's heartbeat, of its own sucking at the breast, of being rocked to
unconscious desire for repetition, but they also link words together which the poet wishes to emphasize as meaningful, as part of his argument.

One more question which Kristeva's theory raises is that of authorial intent. If the poet deliberately employs such semiotic devices as hyperbaton or irregular metre in order to mirror the conflict of mind he is trying to express in a certain poem, does that mean that because he employs them consciously, he is placing them at the service of the symbolic, that is, the creation of meaning? Or is it only if these devices serve to create unconscious tensions and ambiguities in the poem's meaning, that they can be called "semiotic"? These questions relate to a third difficulty, that of deciding whether a religious poet deliberately intends to express ambivalence towards God, a question I face in the next chapter, "Love and Hate." I do not attempt to answer the first two questions here, because I think they deserve a whole study to themselves. My approach in this chapter will be to look at what the text reveals about itself, not about the poet's conscious intentions.

Keeping in mind the slipperiness of poetry, I propose the following three lists of

sleep. Such rhythms have connotations of security, regularity, and comfort. On the other hand, however, Kristeva points to the semiotic as both the force which destroys the illusory comfort of the individual's enunciatory "I" (the thetic), and the social revolutions which violently overthrow law and order. This seemingly contradictory nature of the semiotic is due to the "extremely provisional" (Revolution 25) nature of the infant's rhythms. The baby does not always feel safe or secure, but exists in physical sensations that are "as full of movement as [they are] regulated" (Revolution 25). In other words the semiotic itself is always fighting a battle between order and chaos, between stasis and movement. (The order of the symbolic is a different kind of order from that of the semiotic, one founded on meaning, language, and law, rather than on the rhythm of breath or the heartbeat). Poetic rhythm, then, is semiotic both when it is regular and when it is irregular. But that still leaves us with the problem of the poet's use of regular or irregular metre for different purposes.
poetic devices: symbolic, semiotic, and those which can function in both ways and must be analysed in context. Symbolic: argument, syntax, hypotactic structure. Semiotic: anaclathon, aposiopesis, asyndeton, hyperbaton, parataxis, trnesis (devices which disturb syntax); and metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, paradox, pun, (devices which create mystery in meaning). Symbolic or semiotic, depending on context: alliteration and assonance, rhythm, rhyme, metre, anaphora, chiasmus, polysyndeton, (all devices of repetition).

This list invites challenges, does not pretend to be exhaustive, and will not be applied in its entirety to the poetry. In fact, I tend to concentrate in my analyses on metre, alliteration, hyperbaton, and puns.

**Donne**

"As due by many titles" and "Thou hast made me" both show Donne presenting his sinful self as torn by conflicting passions, opposed to a God who is an authority figure and a unified source of meaning and order. In Kristeva's terms, these two sonnets express the rebellion of the semiotic against the symbolic.

Holy Sonnet 1, "As due by many titles," relies heavily on hypotactic syntax,
suggesting that Donne feels God is best addressed in the language of logical argument, of cause and effect. But the demands of poetic repetition and rhythm work, as Kristeva's theory suggests, to subvert Donne's own argument and betray his ambivalence over submitting to divine rule. The speaker's first statement is that he submits himself to God: "As due by many titles I resigne / My selfe to thee, O God" (1-2). The assonance in "titles I resigne / My" emphasizes the word "I," betraying Donne's concentration on himself rather than on God. The rhythm which demands a line break after the fifth iamb of the first line works against the assonance to separate "I" from "myself," mirroring the inner conflict within the speaker, the split between two aspects of his personality (the ego and the id perhaps?). This line break is echoed in lines 7-8 where the speaker declares how "I betray'd /My selfe."

The poem contains a pun in its second line which also suggests a semiotic revolt on the part of the speaker. Donne declares that "first I was made / By thee" (2-3). "Made" is a pun on "maid" which contrasts God's lack of passion (he makes, and leaves, Donne a virgin) with the devil of lines 9-10 who takes sexual possession of the speaker: "Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee? / Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right?" The rhyme scheme links "made" with "decay'd" (3) and "betray'd " (7), suggesting strongly, and against the ostensible meaning of the sonnet, that the speaker prefers the devil's passion to God's standoffishness, since he feels his virginity is a betrayal and results in sterile decay. I would argue that the assonance linking the fourth rhyme word, "repaid," with "paines," in the line "Thy servant whose paines thou hast still repaid" (6), works against the manifest meaning to suggest a repressed meaning of "re-
pained' as in "Thou hast kept increasing my pain, pain upon pain," thus making "repaid"
a word which is just as negative as its rhyme words "decay'd" and "betray'd."

The final couplet also employs the repetitive, and, in this case, semiotic, devices
of assonance and alliteration to imply that Donne is more enamoured of Satan than of
God: "That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not chuse me, / And Satan hates mee, yet is
loth to lose mee" (13-14). God's lack of passion for Donne (that is, Donne's lack of
passion for God) is emphasized by the fact that the words in line 13 are linked by no
resemblance in sound, whereas the final line, describing Satan, revels in the pleasure
given the ear by the assonance of "Satan hates" and the alliteration and near-assonance of
"loth to lose."

Insofar as the text echoes in sound and movement the speaker's passionate self-
conflicts and reveals his hidden meaning, that it is he who rejects God, rather than God
who abandons him, the text is semiotic. But I do not mean to suggest that this sonnet
only expresses the speaker's resentment at God's coldness unconsciously; on the contrary,
Donne skilfully incorporates his sense of an authoritarian and passionless God into his
manifest meaning. He employs a pun on "by" for example, to enforce his characterization
of God as a participant in the human economic system:

As due by many titles I resigne
My selfe to thee, O God, first I was made
By thee, and for thee, and when I was decay'd
Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine. (1-4)

"By" is a (grammatically unsupportable) pun on "buy" which anticipates "bought," and is
thus an example of the poet consciously punning to support his meaning. That meaning
is still, however, that God functions within the symbolic realm of economics (even God's
blood functions as money). The sonnet expresses, therefore, both the conscious
resentment and unconscious rejection of a passionate man against an unfeeling God.9

"Thou hast made me" also sets up a conscious contrast between a God of order
and stability (corresponding to Kristeva's symbolic) and the poet's sins of passion (which
 correspond to the semiotic), but differs from "As due by many titles" in that God seems
much more attractive, on the surface, than the devil. God can save the speaker from the
terror of death and hell, and is hence seen as an object of desire rather than a duty. Donne
presents his dilemma in this poem as a sexual quandary: he is torn between two lovers,
the masculine (and hence wholesome and sound) sexuality of God, and the feminine (and
hence deathly and dangerous) sexuality of the devil. The poet's sexual embrace with
death, "I runne to death, and death meets me as fast" (3), leads to impotence: "my feebled
flesh doth waste / By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh" (7-8).10 Donne shrivels
and droops, until revived by God into male potency and strength: "Onely thou art above,
and when towards thee / By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe" (9-10).11 But this entry
into the symbolic realm by means of the potent phallic is threatened by a devil who
employs the female arts of subtlety, so that Donne cannot sustain his metaphorical

9 Robert S. Jackson suggests that this poem can be read as illustrations of the way in
which "the speaker seems to some degree to discover the unconscious in the persona of
the devil. . . . that he finds this devil to be the persona for the unconscious is the sign that
he is still in an improper relationship to himself" (105-06).

10 Thomas Docherty points out, in his analysis of this poem, that the word "hell" was a
euphemism for the vagina in Donne's day (135).

11 See Leo Steinberg's The Sexuality of Christ (197-98, 317) for sources of the
Renaissance joke on the "risen flesh" as applying both to the resurrection of Christ (or, in
the case of this sonnet, the resurrection of the soul after death), and to penile erection.
erection: "But our old subtle foe so tempteth me, / That not one houre I can my selfe sustaine" (11-12).

Co-existing with this opposition between God and the Devil as different lovers, is a distinction between the two as contrasting artists. Donne begins the poem by setting God up as his craftsman-creator: "Thou hast made me, And shall thy work decay?" (1). God is an artist who, Donne suggests, does not wish to see his work change in any way, even after he has finished with it. God functions for Donne as the guarantee of permanence, or in the formulation of Thomas Docherty "a solid, unchanging love . . . a kind of guaranteed perpetual erection, a res-erection rather than a resurrection. The Word or language in this case becomes entirely phallogocentric" (135; Docherty's emphasis). But the devil is also an artist, one who keeps working away at his material, constantly chipping away at it, never letting it rest. The last couplet, by means of a pun on "draw," pulls together the sexual and artistic metaphors: "Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art, / And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart" (13-14). Donne desires to be transformed into iron, a hard and potent male who is thus drawn into the symbolic realm by his equally potent "adamant" God, but he also wants God to draw him (inscribe upon him, within him) an iron heart that will be impervious to the devil's sculpture. At the

12 It might be illuminating to view this distinction alongside the distinction made by Roland Barthes between "work" and "Text." Barthes points out that the work is finished, it can "be held in the hand" whereas the Text is never finished, and can be "experienced only in an activity of production" ("From Work to Text" 157; Barthes's emphasis). Donne sees himself as the "work" of God, finished and circumscribed, able to change only in the sense of decay, while under the hands of the devil-artist he is what Barthes might call a Text, (and Kristeva might call a sujet-en-procès), an unfinished art work, capable of change in any direction.
same time, however, by means of an exploitation of the various connotations of the word "iron," Donne implies that his "iron heart" is keeping him from God, that he is too hard-hearted to respond to God's love. Donne is saying, in effect, three different things: "draw a strong iron heart on--and in--me, and the devil will have no power over me"; "like a magnet, draw my true iron heart to you"; and "destroy my hard iron heart by drawing me to you in love." As Murray Roston comments, this final line expresses "the strange possibility that the stubbornness of his iron heart, which seems to disqualify him for redemption, may prove eventually to be the very quality making it susceptible to the magnetic force of divine love" (156; Roston's emphasis). Donne's confusion over whether the iron hardness that constitutes male sexuality and power is the way to salvation or damnation betrays the unconscious semiotic ambivalence of the poem.

These two sonnets are examples of Donne's positioning of himself as a passionate sinner in opposition to God as a principle of order and control. This opposition is the usual structuring device of his religious poetry, but he does write a few poems in which God rivals him in degree of passion. Two examples of God functioning as a semiotic force are Sonnet 7, "Spit in my face, yee Jewes," and "A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany."

"Spit in my face yee Jewes" begins with violence, as the speaker commands the Jews to beat him as they did Christ. The metre stresses Donne's masochistic excitement in the violence, for while the meaning of the first two lines is "Spit in my face, pierce my side, crucify me rather than Christ, for I deserve it and he did not," the three first person pronouns all take a weak stress in Donne's lines instead of the strong stress that the
meaning seems to require. The strong stresses in each foot fall instead on the verbs of violence, supporting John Carey's claim that "It is the envy of the crucified Jesus, rather than pity for him, that thrills in that cry" (48). This desire to be the object of verbs of violence links the speaker of this sonnet to the similarly masochistic speaker of Holy Sonnet 10, "Batter My Heart," who asks to be battered, bent, broken, and burnt, not to mention raped.13

The second quatrain introduces some extreme hyperbaton: "But by my death cannot be satisfied / My sinnes" (5-6). This twisting of the syntax serves another purpose than that of ensuring the rhyme scheme: the line break between verb (be satisfied) and subject (my sinnes) makes that subject, for an instant, ambiguous. If a reader was presented with the first five lines only he might well think that it is God who cannot be satisfied by the speaker's death. Such a reading would be correct theoretically,14 but it would also emphasize the extreme nature of God's demands: he cannot be satisfied by the law of exchange, an eye for an eye, a death for a death. This God is so vengeful and cruel that he demands more than a death; put in Kristevan terms, his desire is in excess of the symbolic economy. The hyperbaton allows for the hidden presence of God as the subject of the verb "satisfied" and suggests that it is indeed God that Donne is addressing, rather than the Jews. Moreover, Donne puns again on "by" and "buy" in "But by my death

13 Both Terry Sherwood (107) and Michael Schoenfeldt (130-31) emphasize Donne's masochism by contrasting it with Herbert's fear and dislike of pain.

14 As a Protestant, Donne believes that nothing we can do, no merit on our part, can "satisfy" God, not even martyrdom. The sinner's role is to humbly accept God's grace, not to try to wipe out his sins by dying.
cannot be satisfied," denying, in effect, the analogy of the Redemption as payment: "But I am not satisfied by your 'buying' of my death." God did, in a metaphorical sense, "buy" us from death, by his own death, but Donne refuses to accept this metaphor (one that he accepts wholeheartedly in Sonnet 11, "Wilt thou love God, as he thee!"), preferring, in this sonnet, a God of passion and excess to a deity who works within the structure of the human economic system.

My reading of these lines gains support from the final four lines of the sonnet:

And Jacob came cloth'd in vile harsh attire
But to supplant, and with gainfull intent:
God clothed himselfe in vile man's flesh, that so
Hee might be weake enough to suffer woe. (11-14).

These lines set God up as a contrast to Jacob, who acts rationally in order to profit from his actions. But Donne seems not to realize the fact that God did have a "gainfull intent" in the Incarnation, the intent of gaining human souls through "supplanting" the rule of sin and death. Instead he unconsciously suggests that the Incarnation was impelled by a masochistic desire which echoes the speaker's masochism in the first two lines of the sonnet. God does not buy souls from sin and the devil, but rather desires pain with irrational passion. Like the speaker, he operates within a semiotic, not symbolic, framework. In this sonnet, Donne desires a God who cannot be known through human structures such as reason or the economic system.

"A Hymne to Christ at the authors last going into Germany" equates God with death, and death with a state of pre-consciousness, like that of an infant in its mother's arms. The first four lines set God up as a place of safety only to immediately transform him into danger:
In what torne ship soever I embarke,
That ship shall be my embleme of thy Arke;
What sea soever swallow mee, that flood
Shall be to mee an embleme of thy blood. (1-4)

Donne transforms his rickety ship into the ship of Church, of which Noah's ark is a type, and the sea in which he might drown into Christ's blood. But while the second line in each couplet negates the threat of the first, when the four lines are taken as a whole, another, hidden meaning emerges: the sea that the ark shall save Donne from, is the sea of Christ's blood. By putting his trust in the ship, he implies his fear of being drowned by the sea, of being "swallowed" by God. The Old Testament covenant with a God who saves, by means of Noah's ark, gives way to a New Testament surrender to a God who overwhelms and destroys (thus reversing the traditional Christian view of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.) But God does not swallow Donne as the whale swallows Jonah, destroying him in powerful indifference; instead he surrounds him with his own blood. If God kills Donne, it is only because Christ himself has been killed first.

Such a God may show anger, but never indifference:

Though thou with clouds of anger do disguise
Thy face; yet through that maske I know those eyes,
Which, though they turne away sometimes, they never will despise.

(5-7)

God, then, is the storm at sea which may kill Donne, but Donne welcomes such a passionate death.

The God of this poem is an agent of separation, breaking the human and societal bonds which the speaker has formed:

I sacrifice this Iland unto thee,
And all whom I lov'd there, and who lov'd mee;
When I have put our seas 'twixt them and mee,
Put thou thy sea betwixt my sinnes and thee. (8-11)

Donne wants God not only to separate him from his society, but to split him off from himself (by cutting him off from his sins). Donne is sacrificing not only his island, but his "I-land," and he sees in God a destructive force strong enough to break him. In the second half of this stanza the protean God, who has moved already from sea to sky, now makes his presence felt underground:

As the tree's sap doth seek the root below
In winter, in my winter now I goe,
Where none but thee, th'Eternall root of true love I may know.
(12-14)

God is death, but also the warm grave of mother earth welcoming her son back for a nourishing love which precedes and remains stronger than the societal bonds he has formed on his island. God represents a return to his "roots," the preconscious bliss of the infant's union with the mother, before the loneliness of consciousness sets in.

After the third stanza, in which Donne demands from God a totally exclusive relationship, expressing the paradox that "Who ever gives, takes libertie" (20), he returns to his request that God sunder him from all the facets of human society which have given his life meaning:

Seale then this bill of my Divorce to All,
On whom those fainter beames of love did fall;
Marry those loves, which in youth scatter'd bee
On Fame, Wit, Hopes (false mistresses) to thee.
Churches are best for Prayer, that have least light:
    To see God only, I goe out of sight:
    And to scape stormy dayes, I chuse an Everlasting night.
(22-28)

To seal a divorce is a paradoxical action, since to seal something is to make it permanent
and binding, but a divorce shatters bonds and denies permanence. Donne looks to a God who can be both a figure of authority and stability, and a destructive force; after the divorce he desires a new marriage, a new curtailment of his liberty. The last three lines are rich in ambiguity, that hallmark of the semiotic. Donne declares that he chooses death and God in order to escape "stormy days," but God has throughout the poem been imagined in terms of a storm, from the swallowing sea of blood to the clouds of anger in the sky. God wears two faces of death: the terror and strife of the moment of death (if it is a violent one, like drowning in a storm at sea); and the dark and peaceful grave. God is the pursuer and the refuge. Donne's ambivalence over the power of this God of death is perhaps echoed in the syntactic ambiguity of the previous line. The line can be read in three different ways: "To see God and nothing else, I go out of sight (die)"; or "I would not have to go out of sight (die) if it were not for God--he is the one and only reason I am going to die"; or "It is only I, I alone, who has to die in order to see God." The metre and punctuation support only the first two interpretations of course, but I believe the text supports all three as a means of expressing Donne's own stormy and confused emotions over the stormy God he is both fleeing and pursuing.

God can be both reason and passion, both distant and grasping, both judicious and violent in Donne's poetry, a conclusion supported by the textual complexities of the poetry which attempts to express him. For while it is possible to read the poetry as enacting a semiotic revolt against a symbolic religion, it is just as possible to read the poetry as an act of irrational and passionate faith. Whereas Eleanor McNees supports the second of these positions in declaring that Donne "forces the reader to exchange an
intellectual logic of reading for a sensuous logic of sound and rhythm that eventually leads to a logic of faith" (73). Anthony Low stresses the rationality of Donne's religious verse: "In the post-Freudian era, many would prefer to say that poetry and religion are products of the unconscious, or reflect irrational currents in the cultural background. . . . Most authorities in Donne's time would say that emotion is a subsidiary element of devotion and that it should be controlled by the higher faculties of reason and will" (Love's Architecture 3). Both McNees and Low are right, because both Christianity and poetry thrive on such contradictions.

**Herbert**

In my discussion of Donne's poetry, I was able to make clear distinctions within each sonnet between the symbolic and the semiotic. I could pinpoint different poetic devices as expressing one or the other. In my discussion of Herbert, I have chosen three poems that resist to a much greater extent any effort to impose such a schematic reading. "The Storm," "Conscience," and "The Collar" illustrate the way in which poetical ambiguity problematizes Kristeva's theoretical categories.

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15 McNees's judgment is similar to that made by Michael McCanles, who argues that: One of the main notes which all have recognized in Donne's poetry in general is its tendency to carry a given idea, metaphor, or assertion out to its logical extreme. . . . this extension of the logical argument has as its primary purpose the pushing of a given argument to the point where its inadequacy for reflecting reality becomes fully recognizable. As such it then becomes an 'alarum to truth,' as Donne says, and requires the mind of the reader to take a new look not only at the reality but also at its own capabilities for grasping that reality. (227)

Where McNees concentrates of Donne's poetic form, McCanles focuses on his poetic argument. Both, however, see his poetry as disruptive of the rational.
On a first reading, "The Storm" seems to lend itself well to a Kristevan reading of a semiotic subject who mounts a passionate assault upon a transcendent (and hence symbolic) God:

If as the windes and waters here below  
Do flie and flow,  
My sighs and tears as busie were above;  
Sure they would move  
And much affect thee, as tempestuous times  
Amaze poore mortals, and object their crimes.

Starres have their storms, ev'n in a high degree,  
As well as we.  
A throbbing conscience spurred by remorse  
Hath a strange force:  
It quits the earth, and mounting more and more  
Dares to assault thee, and besiege thy doore.

There it stands knocking, to thy musicks wrong,  
And drowns the song.  
Glorie and honour are set by, till it  
An answer get.  
Poets have wrong'd poore storms: such dayes are best;  
They purge the aire without, within the breast.

The first challenge to a schematic Kristevan reading comes right at the beginning of the poem. Herbert desires his tears and sighs to be as passionate as the winds and waters, but those elements come from God. If Herbert wants to be stormy, it is only because God himself is a splendidly tempestuous storm. God does not necessarily need to be moved by sighs and tears, if the winds and waters (sighs and tears writ large) represent his own cosmic passions.

The second stanza describes the progress of a "throbbing conscience," surely in Kristevan terms almost an oxymoron since the conscience is part of the symbolic—in Freudian terms the repressive superego—while the verb "throb" perfectly describes the
intense ebb and flow of semiotic drives. Should we read this phrase then as suggesting that Herbert has disingenuously manipulated the different parts of his personality in order to make his attack upon God, as A. D. Nuttall thinks: "In the moral background of this poem there lurks the repellent and ultimately self-refuting idea of artificially inducing emotions because emotions are non-artificial and may therefore turn out to have influenced God" (Overheard by God 65; Nuttall's emphasis)? Or does it suggest, rather, that Herbert is transforming the reasonable part of himself, his conscience, into a physical sensation in order to defy rationality and reach his God through feeling, as Richard Strier argues: "The Reformation rejection of apathia as an ideal for either God or man is made explicit here. . . . Herbert is not afraid of the conception of God being 'moved.' He is not concerned with God's dignity. God is tender--and 'quick.' . . . 'The Storm' is the clearest statement in Herbert's poetry of the privileged indecorousness of genuine emotion" (Love Known 186-7)?

A further problem presents itself in the third stanza, where Herbert describes his conscience as making such a racket that it completely drowns out God's music. Kristeva argues that music is more semiotic than symbolic (Revolution 24), but for a Renaissance poet such as Herbert, music would have suggested order. John Hollander, in his study The Untuning of the Sky (1961), demonstrated that the classical conception of harmony involved "an idea of relative proportion, of an order that consists in the ratios of quantities to each other, rather than of a notion of blending that depends on the

16 The conscience did not necessarily belong to "reason" rather than "passion" for Herbert however; see my discussion of "Conscience" below.
simultaneous effects of separate or even warring elements" (27; Hollander's emphasis). It is the "blending . . . of warring elements" that Kristeva probably understands as harmony and it is that, as much as music's "nonverbal" (Revolution 24) status, that leads her to call it semiotic. For Herbert though, music was likely to embrace characteristics of the Kristevan symbolic. In this poem it functions to suggest a God of order, harmony, and decorum, a God who is shaken out of a musical complacency by Herbert's loud knocking. It is by disrupting music, not by employing it, that Herbert forces his God to abandon the hierarchical trappings of glory and honour and respond to his own urgent desire.

The last two lines, however, challenge this reading of unrestrained passion overcoming a God of order and control. Herbert announces that poets have "wrong'd" storms, suggesting an anticipation of Romantic delight in tempestuous nature. But Herbert defends storms as a means to an end, in the same way that, as Rosemond Tuve

17 In "Church-musick" Herbert declares that music enables him to escape the materiality of his body: "Now I in you without a bodie move, / Rising & fallinge with your wings" (5-6), and that it "know[s] the way to heavens doore" (12). He characterizes music as a system of knowledge, a means to an end, and an escape from physicality, all aspects of the Kristevan symbolic. On the other hand, Hollander sounds as if he is describing a semiotic process when he declares that "It is as if the image of music were always running along beneath the surface of all of Herbert's poems, breaking out here and there like the eruption of some underground stream, but exercising always an informing, nourishing function" (294).

18 It is essential, therefore, when applying Kristeva's theories to poetry to take into account the historical context of that poetry, something Kristeva herself is always very careful to do.
demonstrates, Renaissance poets subordinate imagery to argument.\textsuperscript{19} That end is a "purging" of sin, a process which has connotations both of repression and of violent turmoil, and which Kristeva might therefore ascribe to either the symbolic or the semiotic register. "The Storm" cannot then be read as a straightforward example of a throbbing, clamouring, semiotic poet beating down the barriers which separate him from a transcendent and decorous God.

"Conscience," which seems on the surface to be Herbert's most unambiguous rejection of asceticism and repression, nevertheless expresses a simultaneous desire for order and control. The poem begins with a very effective alliteration of the explosive consonant \textit{p} in "Peace pratler," suggesting a speaker spluttering in his rage and frustration, and thus enforcing the theme of a passionate man fighting his repressive conscience. And yet, the mention of music once again introduces, as it does in "The Storm," a troubling new dimension to this struggle between reason and passion:

\begin{quote}
Peace pratler, do not lowre;  
Not a fair look, but thou dost call it foul:  
Not a sweet dish, but thou dost call it sowe:  
Musick to thee doth howl.  
By listning to thy chatting fears  
I have lost both mine eyes and eares. (1-6)
\end{quote}

Conscience transforms music into a howl, drowning it out with its "chatting fears." Just as in "The Storm," then, music seems to symbolize order, and another "throbbing conscience" personifies disorder and cacophony. Herbert ranges symbolic harmony and semiotic sensual pleasure (his eyes and ears) against semiotic disruption and symbolic

\textsuperscript{19} She sees Renaissance poets as "men who thought of images as irrevocably parts of meanings" (\textit{Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery} 76).
asceticism, an opposition which does not fit tidily with the symbolic/semiotic dichotomy.

Herbert develops the theme of music in the second stanza:

Pratler, no more, I say:
My thoughts must work, but like a noiseless sphere;
Harmonious peace must rock them all the day:
No room for Prattlers there.
If thou persistest, I will tell thee,
That I have physick to expell thee. (7-12)

The paradox of a noiseless harmony refers to the music of the spheres, a "central image in Christian musical thought" (Hollander 28-9), and suggests an impossible ideal state, while the desire to be rocked in silence seems to arise from a wish to be reunited with the mother, either at the breast or in the womb. When Herbert tells his conscience that there is "no room for prattlers there," that is in his paradoxically silent yet musical peace of mind, he is deliberately echoing the "no room at the inn" of the nativity story.20 In an ingenious application of Biblical typology,21 Herbert transforms himself into the antitype of that exclusionary inn, except that he excludes conscience, and welcomes the Christ-child in. Just as harmonious peace rocks his thoughts, Mary rocks her baby, leaving no room for conscience in this inn. Herbert longs for a religion in which the relationship between God and the soul is the same as that between mother and infant, before language

20 "And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:7).

21 Barbara Lewalski points out how much Protestant poets like Herbert applied typology to themselves. As she says, "Herbert's The Temple is a medley of voices which derive from and play off against biblical voices. And Herbert's speaker often presents himself as a New Testament version of (antitype of) various biblical poets" (245-6). In "Conscience" Herbert presents himself as the antitype not of a biblical person, but of a biblical building.
and law enter the subject in the form of conscience.

And yet the remedy Herbert turns to for attacking conscience is, again, a purgative act:

And the receit shall be
My Saviours bloud: when ever at his board
I do but taste it, straight it cleanseth me,
And leaves thee not a word;
No, not a tooth or nail to scratch,
And at my actions carp, or catch. (13-18)

As in "The Storm" where the semiotic tempest performs the symbolic function of cleansing and removing impurities, the semiotic blood here acts as a medicine, ejecting the scratching, carping conscience. Not only is it difficult to apply Kristevan categories here, it is almost impossible to identify sin with passion and virtue with reason, or vice versa: Christ's blood surely calls to mind the passion of the Passion, yet it works to restore order and stasis; conscience would seem to represent reason and rationality, but its prattling and physical violence suggest passion. Indeed, the conscience for Herbert did not necessarily carry the connotations of repression which it does to the twentieth-century reader, trained to identify the conscience with the super-ego. Sidney Gottlieb's reading of the poem as a dramatization of the conflict between the moderate forces of the Anglican church and the Puritans who threatened it, suggests that Herbert was more likely to associate the conscience with the forces of social revolution than with repression:

"Herbert personifies conscience as a non-conforming, radical Protestant, a danger not only to one's peace of mind but also to one's church and society" (113-14). The same Puritans who attacked church and state, however, also attacked music and merriment. Conscience, then, seems to be both revolutionary and repressive.
The poem ends with a paradoxical invocation of violence to restore peace:

Yet if thou talkest still,
Besides my physick, know there's some for thee:
Some wood and nails to make a staffe or bill
For those that trouble me:
The bloudie crosse of my deare Lord
Is both my physick and my sword. (19-24)

The previous stanza has just promised that Christ's blood will stop conscience's violence, its scratching and carping, but in these lines Herbert makes Christ's bloody cross into a weapon of violence. While the sword can also function as representative of the State, the sword that defends and keeps the peace, Herbert's concentration upon the materiality of this particular sword, made of blood-soaked wood held together with blood-soaked nails, serves to eclipse the image of the gleaming steel sword of law-and-order. Is Christ, then, a force for order, removing the perverse and semiotic inner voice of conscience, as his function as "physick" seems to suggest? Or does Christ represent a passionate, violent, and physically felt revolt on the part of the poet against the restrictive constraints of a symbolic religion, as indicated by his cross becoming a sword? Since the answer seems to be both, the conclusion to be drawn is that the paradoxes of religious poetry continually escape the efforts of secular theory (at least this particular secular theory) to contain and quantify them.

"The Collar" is equally difficult to analyse in a schematic way. The first fifteen lines do not seem to present much of a problem: obviously this speaker is in revolt against his repressive religion. The self-assertion of the speaker is reinforced by the poetry, for example, the assonance in lines 3-4 where the repeated i in "sigh and pine," "lines and life," emphasizes the speaker's focus upon his own desires, his exaltation of "I" above
God. And yet even in this sustained expression of passion, ambiguity creeps into the text in lines 10-12:

Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.

Are sighs and tears marks of the semiotic, the perversity of the melancholic who refuses to eat and drink, to sustain his body? Or, alternatively, are Herbert's sighs and tears indications of an asceticism which denies the sensual pleasures of wine and corn? Is his rejection of life (and also of the Eucharist) a rejection of the symbolic by the semiotic, which is what the context of the lines seems to suggest, or of the semiotic by the symbolic, which is what the end of the poem, with its capitulation, expresses? Critical attention has long focussed on the Eucharistic meaning of these lines, the way in which the bread and wine of Communion are present behind the corn and wine. Michael Schoenfeldt points out how opinion has been divided as to whether the poet's intent here is a blasphemous perversion of the Eucharistic elements or an acknowledgment that God is present with him during the duration of his rebellious riot, dwelling in the corn and wine. He offers the solution that the poem "swerves indecisively between both possibilities, allowing the terrifying possibility of blasphemy to supply the vehicle for submission" (106). Following Schoenfeldt, I would argue that semiotic rebellion coexists with symbolic submission; neither interpretation wins out over the other.

Richard Strier identifies line 17 as the turn of the poem, the change from the voice of passion to the voice of reason, arguing that it is the voice of reason that Herbert finds a greater threat to his religion: "The striking feature of the second narrated voice in 'The
Collar' (lines 17-32) is its commitment not to passion but to reason. . . . [The Collar' dramatizes] the way in which reason can attempt to corrupt the heart by building upon its perfectly intelligible and 'natural' frustrations and desires. Natural desire is not what frightens Herbert; natural reason is" (222-23). Strier's reading is persuasive, especially since the imagery seems to support it. Herbert rejects his religion as a "rope of sands" (22), a paradox which suggests a miraculous compromise between stability and fluidity behind the more ostensible meanings of time running out in an hourglass, and a useless and impossible enterprise. It is Herbert's own thoughts, not God, which have made this rope into "Good cable, to enforce and draw, / And be thy law" (24-25), rather than the ladder to heaven which Herbert extols in "The Pearl":

Yet through these labyrinths, not my groveling wit,
But thy silk twist let down from heav'n to me
Did both conduct, and teach me, how by it
   To climbe to thee. (37-40)

Herbert then tells himself to "tie up thy fears" (29), which again suggests that his sin is one of reason, attempting to deny and repress any emotion which does not suit its agenda.

Is it God, or sin, who makes the rope of repression?

The poem ends with a capitulation:

But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
   At every word,
   Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!
   And I reply'd, My Lord. (33-36)

Apparently the rebel is back in his collar. But is he still in his choler? Is this a happy or unhappy ending? Presumably Herbert would say "happy," while Kristeva would take the opposite view, that the symbolic order of religion always represses the semiotic vitality of
the subject searching for self-fulfilment. One way to argue against that interpretation would be to remember that a child has two parents. Is God calling "child" like a father making a stern reproach, or like a mother full of tenderness and love? The poet's response appears to be one of resignation but could also resemble the exhausted and trusting snuggling of a child who has just had a temper tantrum and is allowing himself to be held again. As Chana Bloch says, "This one word offers both rebuke and comfort: 'You are a child, not an adult'; 'You are my child, not a stranger" (Spelling the Word 166). I would argue that the first of these sentences is spoken by the father, the second by the mother. "The Collar" is a poem in which Herbert's revolt against God fails, but it does not conclusively tell us whether that revolt is one of semiotic feeling against symbolic reason, or a revolt by symbolic reason against semiotic feeling, nor whether this failure is a happy or bitter one.

Herbert's religious poetry expresses an experience which cannot necessarily be reduced to a scheme or paraphrase. His God is both law and licence, both purgation and excess, both order and chaos, while sin can be both reason and passion, both restriction and liberty.  

22 Michael Schoenfeldt reads the ending in this way: "In 'The Collar,' the voice of God dispels the stultifying illusion of independence and privacy, resulting in a genuinely gratifying claustrophobia" (109). The idea of a "gratifying claustrophobia" suggests the pre-Oedipal semiotic. Schoenfeldt makes a brief reference to Kristeva in his notes: "I have learnt much from this suggestive book [Powers of Horror] and from Kristeva's Tales of Love" (328 n. 111).

23 Herbert is the only poet whom I have not analysed in terms of sexuality in this chapter. While I believe that he does use the tropes of sexuality in poems such as "Affliction" (I) and "Prayer" (I), which I discuss in chapter one, and "The Glimpse," which I look at in chapter three, I agree with Lewalski and Low who both argue that
In Rossetti's poetry the conflict between symbolic and semiotic often plays itself out on the field of sexuality. When Rossetti writes about the need to renounce passion and desire in order to submit to a God of law, she often makes that passion and desire explicitly or implicitly sexual. On the other hand, when she expresses the ways in which her love for God transforms her rigid self-control into warmth and vitality, she consistently uses erotic tropes (such as the imagery of the Song of Solomon). Two poems which employ sexuality with radically different results are "Thou, God, seest me" (II 190-91) and "I Know you not" (III 31-32), while "The Convent Threshold" (I 61-65) problematizes the relationship between sexuality and religion with greater complexity. "I Know you not" is a poem that mostly fits a framework of symbolic religion vanquishing semiotic desire:

O Christ the Vine with living Fruit,
The twelvefold fruited Tree of Life,
The Balm in Gilead after strife,

Herbert does not picture his relationship with God in sexual terms as much as other poets do. Lewalski posits that "'The Church' is in some respects a new version of the Song of Solomon . . . Herbert, however, transcends the Bridegroom-Bride relationship into an association of loving friends" (292). Low states that Herbert often employs the language of sexual love in his poetry, but . . . always uses it to figure forth what we may call the 'courtship' stage of the divine-human love affair, never the consummation or the marriage stage . . . In its place . . . he introduces another, apparently incompatible, love relationship, which is embodied in another traditional biblical trope--the trope of father and son. (Reinvention of Love 88)

Schoenfeldt, on the other hand, argues that "Throughout The Temple, Herbert's courtship of God plays on a complex set of homologies between social and sexual courtship. . . . erotic longing affords Herbert a resonant vocabulary for expressing religious passion" (16). I believe, as I try to show in chapter four, that Herbert turns to the sexual to express his relationship with poetry more often than to represent his relationship with God.
The valley Lily and the Rose:
Stronger than Lebanon, Thou Root,
Sweeter than clustered grapes, Thou Vine;
Oh Best, Thou Vineyard of red Wine
Keeping Thy best Wine till the close.

Pearl of great price Thyself alone
And ruddier than the ruby Thou,
Most precious lightening Jasper Stone,
Head of the corner spurned before;
Fair Gate of pearl, Thyself the Door,
Clear golden Street, Thyself the Way,
By Thee we journey toward Thee now
Thro' Thee shall enter Heaven one day.

I thirst for Thee, full Fount and Flood,
My heart calls Thine as deep to deep:
Dost Thou forget Thy sweat and pain,
Thy provocation on the Cross?
Heart pierced for me, vouchsafe to keep
The purchase of Thy lavished Blood;
The gain is Thine Lord if I gain,
Or if I lose Thine Own the loss.

At midnight, saith the parable,
A cry was made, the Bridegroom came:
Those who were ready entered in;
The rest shut out in death and shame
Strove all too late that feast to win
Their die was cast and fixed their lot,
A gulph divided heaven from hell,
The Bridegroom said, 'I know you not.'

But Who is This That shuts the door
And saith 'I know you not' to them?
I see the wounded Hands and Side,
The Brow thorn-tortured long ago:
Yea, This Who grieved and bled and died,
This Same is He Who must condemn;
He called, but they refused to know,
So now He hears their cry no more.

The first stanza addresses Christ in terms drawn from many different books of the Bible,
but which all contribute to the same effect of luxurious sensuality. Christ is like wine, the
great remover of inhibitions and facilitator of love and pleasure. The next stanza is a
reiteration of the adoring epithets of the first, but this time the imagery has changed; from
being associated with flowers, plants, grapes and wine, Christ is now imagined in terms
of jewellery and precious metals. He has moved from sensual softness to glinting
hardness, from Dionysias to Apollo, and from erotic satisfaction to economic power, in
an anticipation of the move from the third to the fourth and last stanzas.

The third and central stanza is the only personal one in the poem, the only place
where the poet speaks in the first person. She asks for Christ to fulfill her desire, but her
request is couched in terms of bargain and exchange. She first reminds Christ of the pain
he has invested on her account and then tries to persuade him into saving her out of self-
interest: "The gain is Thine Lord if I gain / Or if I lose Thine Own the loss" (23-24). The
stanza transforms the sweat, pain, and pierced heart of Jesus into the currency of the
economic contract: Christ's "lavished Blood" becomes the money with which he
purchases the speaker's soul.24

The fourth stanza seems at first to be taking us back to the erotic register, evoking
the parable that casts Christ as the Bridegroom to the soul, but by the fourth line, "the rest
shut out in death and shame" (28), we realize that the focus is on the "gulph divid[ing]
heaven from hell" (31), not on the celebration of marital or spiritual ecstasy. Christ is

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24 This translation from the body to money has been noted as a significant theme in
*Goblin Market* also. Angela Leighton, for example, points out how Lizzie's payment of a
gold coin to the goblins, where Laura paid a gold curl, shifts the terms of exchange "from
the Semiotic Order of the female body to the Symbolic Order of money" (136).
transformed suddenly from ardent lover to stern judge. Rossetti seems to suggest that Christ is bound by the law of the contract, the same law she invokes in stanza three in order to plead for her own salvation, when she writes that "This Same is He Who must condemn" (38; my emphasis). Christ is constrained by the exchange which has taken place in the past, when "He called, but they refused to know" (39). The ending is both shockingly unexpected and deeply chilling after the beauties of the first stanza. The strangeness of the poem betrays an ambivalence on Rossetti's part over the uncompromising attitude of the doctrine of hell, but she nevertheless comes down on the side of law, the side of the glittering gem-God, rather than the intoxicating and permissive wine-God of her opening, perhaps because only a God of law can ensure her own salvation. She employs the marriage trope but keeps only its connotations of a contract, not its suggestions of erotic love. The poem describes the suppression of the erotic and semiotic side of Christianity by its contractual and symbolic dimension.

In "Thou, God, seest me" Rossetti uses imagery of erotic love, specifically that of the Song of Solomon, to create a poem which moves in exactly the opposite direction from "I know you not." In this poem, a dialogue, the speaker repeatedly stresses God's distance from her, his frightening sternness, and her state of abjection before him, but each time God refuses to be thus characterized, and redefines himself in terms of erotic and maternal love, what Kristeva would point to as the semiotic. In the first stanza the speaker expresses her fear of God in the terms of a woman fearing sexual possession by a man, only to have God assure her that surrender to him will result in glory for her:

Ah me, that I should be
Exposed and open evermore to Thee!--
"Nay, shrink not from My light,
And I will make thee glorious in My sight
With the overcoming Shulamite."--
Yea, Lord, Thou moulding me. (1-6)

The second stanza shows God taking on the role of the mother, rather than the lover:

... Without a hiding-place
To hide me from the terrors of Thy Face.--
"Thy hiding-place is here
In Mine own heart, wherefore the Roman spear
For thy sake I accounted dear."--
My Jesus! King of Grace. (7-12)

Paradoxically, God offers to hide her from himself; where his face is stern and terrifying, his body offers a warm, dark refuge, like the mother's womb is to the fetus. Rossetti puts into God's own mouth a rejection of his role as judge in favour of a much more instinctual human relationship.

Stanza three returns to the wedding trope:

... Without a veil, to give
Whiteness before Thy Face that I might live.--
"Am I too poor to dress
Thee in My royal robe of righteousness?
Challenge and prove My Love's excess."--
Give, Lord, I will receive. (13-18)

Here God states that he is beyond the human capacity to quantify, that he can meet any demand that the human imagination can conceive of, that he can fulfill any human desire, because he is excess. It is paradoxical that he should express this excess in the language of human economics, promising to buy his beloved a new dress.25 His statement

25 In fact God resembles Rochester in chapter 24 of Jane Eyre, buying his bride clothes far more luxurious than she wishes: "Mr. Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk
"challenge and prove my Love's excess" would have been welcome to the damned bride-souls of "I Know you not"; if Rossetti had included it there she would have come up with a very different poem.

Finally the last stanza challenges the speaker's ideas of purity and cleanliness:

. . . Without a pool wherein
To wash my piteous self and make me clean.--
"My Blood hath washed away
Thy guilt, and still I wash thee day by day:
Only take heed to trust and pray."--
Lord, help me to begin. (19-24)

Rossetti employs the familiar Christian paradox expressed so well in John Donne's "Oh my blacke Soule!," that the blood of Christ "hath this might / That being red, it dyes red soules to white" (13-14), but stresses the endless process of this cleansing. God washes the soul in his blood everyday, redemption is an ongoing process, the subject is never finished but always in the process of becoming (the sujet-en-process), of needing God's help to continually begin again. Whereas in "I Know you not" Rossetti stresses that the actions of the past are binding even on God, here she opts instead for an open-ended and dynamic religion, one which grants the subject liberty to constantly renew and redeem itself. If the marriage relation between Christ and the soul is seen as legalistic and hence symbolic in "I Know you not," it is expressed in "Thou, God, seest me" as erotic, maternal, and semiotic.

The differing attitudes to sexuality in these two poems clash within "The Convent

warehouse: there I was ordered to choose half a dozen dresses" (296). But while Jane cannot "bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester" (297), because of the degradation implied, the Christian soul in Rossetti's poem is delighted to receive the gift of a divine bridegroom.
Threshold." The ostensible theme of the poem is that the Christian duty is to renounce desire and sexual pleasure in favour of the future life in heaven. The first six lines set up this opposition most effectively:

There's blood between us, love, my love,
There's father's blood, there's brother's blood;
And blood's a bar I cannot pass:
I choose the stairs that mount above,
Stair after golden skyward stair,
To city and to sea of glass.

The blood between the lovers suggests both murder and incest, both of which mount a challenge to the patriarchal control of father and brother. But the speaker declares herself unable to follow through on her transgression; ironically the blood which symbolizes instinct and passion now becomes a bar, a prohibition. Unable to move horizontally, in a relation without hierarchy or control, the speaker decides to move vertically, to try to transcend the physicality of her blood. Instead of a sea of blood she chooses a sea of glass, a calm, cold mirror which gives her her reflection, and thus gives her distance from herself. The reflective sea of glass anticipates the image of the split self which recurs towards the end of the poem:

If now you saw me you would say:
Where is the face I used to love?
And I would answer: Gone before;
It tarries veiled in paradise. (137-40)

The speaker's own face no longer belongs to her, but exists in a realm beyond death. It is not only the reunion with her love that she looks forward to, but the reunion with herself. Her face is the main site of the struggle between renunciation (the symbolic) and sexual love (the semiotic). She describes her rejection of her lover as a turning away of her face
from him:

I turn from you my cheeks and eyes,
My hair which you shall see no more--
Alas for joy that went before,
For joy that dies, for love that dies.
Only my lips still turn to you,
My livid lips that cry, Repent. (61-66)

It is an impossible wrenching that allows cheeks and eyes to turn in one direction, and lips in another; the speaker is literally breaking up into Picasso-like pieces. That her lips turn to her lover when all else has turned away suggest for a moment her desire for his kiss and his touch, but the next line denies that desire by making the lips form a warning rather than a kiss. These bloodless lips, echoing the speaker's desire to escape from blood in the first stanza, become the agents of repression rather than eroticism. If we can imagine the lover hearing these lines we can imagine his leap of hope at the line "Only my lips still turn to you," and his chilling disappointment at the line that follows.

The poem betrays the speaker's inability to make a pure renunciation of human passion, however, in lines 17 to 45 which contrast heaven with earth:

Your eyes look earthward, mine look up.
I see the far-off city grand,
Beyond the hills a watered land,
Beyond the gulf a gleaming strand
Of mansions where the righteous sup;
Who sleep at ease among their trees,
Or wake to sing a cadenced hymn
With Cherubim and Seraphim;
They bore the Cross, they drained the cup,
Racked, roasted, crushed, wrenched limb from limb,
They the offscouring of the world:
The heaven of starry heavens unfurled,
The sun before their face is dim.

You looking earthward, what see you?
Milk-white, wine-flushed among the vines,
Up and down leaping, to and fro,
Most glad, most full, made strong with wines,
Blooming as peaches pearled with dew,
Their golden windy hair afloat,
Love-music warbling in their throat,
Young men and women come and go.

You linger, yet the time is short:
Flee for your life, gird up your strength
To flee; the shadows stretched at length
Show that day wanes, that night draws nigh;
Flee to the mountain, tarry not.
Is this a time for smile and sigh,
For songs among the secret trees
Where sudden blue birds nest and sport?

The irony here is that heaven is merely a somewhat distorted reflection of the sensual and erotic world which the speaker ostensibly renounces. The righteous in heaven sleeping among their trees and waking to "sing a cadenced hymn" (23) are suspiciously similar to the carnal lovers on earth who sing "love-music" (36) among the vines, and "songs among the secret trees" (44). The speaker cannot escape the sensuality of earthly existence. Her eyes are looking earthward just as much as her lover's are. As Anthony H. Harrison puts it: "The speaker's intuition of her lover's vision here is more sympathetic and nostalgic than derisive. Indeed, her agonized quest to sublimate the sensual and aesthetic inclinations this vision reflects, and to repress the erotic passion that is their corollary, is designed primarily to ensure a transposed perpetuation of both sensual and passionate experience in the afterlife" (139).

Lines 85 to 109, the dream of the spirit who rejects knowledge for love, are to me the most baffling part of the poem, raising questions that I have not seen satisfactorily answered in criticism, and have trouble answering myself:
I tell you what I dreamed last night:  
A spirit with transfigured face  
Fire-footed clomb an infinite space.  
I heard his hundred pinions clang,  
Heaven-bells rejoicing rang and rang,  
Heaven-air was thrilled with subtle scents,  
Worlds spun upon their rushing cars:  
He mounted shrieking: "Give me light."  
Still light was poured on him, more light;  
Angels, Archangels he outstripped  
Exultant in exceeding might,  
And trod the skirts of Cherubim.  
Still "Give me light," he shrieked; and dipped  
His thirsty face, and drank a sea,  
Athirst with thirst he could not slake.  
I saw him, drunk with knowledge, take  
From aching brows the aureole crown--  
His locks writhed like a cloven snake--  
He left his throne to grovel down  
And lick the dust of Seraphs' feet:  
For what is knowledge duly weighed?  
Knowledge is strong, but love is sweet;  
Yea all the progress he had made  
Was to learn that all is small  
Save love, for love is all in all.

Is the spirit Lucifer, the lover, or the speaker? Most critics do not address the identity of the spirit, and thus fail to account for the significance of this dream to the whole poem.26 The spirit's desire for light, his relentless climb higher and higher in heaven, and his locks that writhe like a snake suggest that he is Lucifer. But the speaker's assertion that she dreamt of her lover twice suggests that this is the first dream, and that the spirit is her lover. Meanwhile the fire-footed climbing echoes the speaker's own intention to "mount

26 Dolores Rosenblum is an exception, equating the spirit with the speaker: "Overtly the beloved, this Faustian spirit stands for the speaker's own aspirations. At one pole are the blood and mire that pull downward, at the other, pure energy, cosmic power that expands through the universe to stop short at the moral limit" (The Poetry of Endurance 192).
the kindled stair" (16), while the "transfigured face" (84) resonates with the other references to her transformed and distorted visage. The question of the spirit's identity is part of the larger problem of the meaning of the spirit's progress and how it relates to the rest of the poem. Is the spirit's ascent a sinful exhibition of self-assertion and the desire for knowledge and power? Such a reading would suggest that his grovelling to love is an act of Christian humility and self-surrender. But the rest of the poem is a description of the speaker's attempt to climb higher, to receive "more light" (93) from the sea of glass and the kindled stair of heaven, to reach to angels, to gain knowledge, in which case the spirit's leaving of his throne to grovel before love implies the speaker's own backsliding, her unconscious renunciation of her renunciation. Lines 69 to 76 describe her vision of her future self in heaven sitting uncomfortably in her own throne:

How should I rest in Paradise,
Or sit on steps of heaven alone?
If Saints and Angels spoke of love
Should I not answer from my throne:
Have pity upon me, ye my friends,
For I have heard the sound thereof:
Should I not turn with yearning eyes,
Turn earthwards with a pitiful pang?

Like the spirit, the speaker seems to wish to leave her throne to descend into love.

Is the spirit's "progress" of line 107, then, a genuine progress, or does it ironically imply the opposite, a falling away? The semantic ambiguities of this passage pervade the poem, casting the speaker's attitude to her own renunciation in doubt, as well as calling into question Rossetti's own feeling about the story she is telling.

The climax of the struggle between symbolic renunciation and semiotic desire is reached in the penultimate stanza:
For all night long I dreamed of you:  
I woke and prayed against my will,  
Then slept to dream of you again.  
At length I rose and knelt and prayed:  
I cannot write the words I said,  
My words were slow, my tears were few;  
But thro' the dark my silence spoke  
Like thunder. When this morning broke,  
My face was pinched, my hair was grey,  
And frozen blood was on the sill  
Where stifling in my struggle I lay. (126-36)

These lines express a central ambiguity towards the whole process of renunciation. When the speaker declares that she prayed against her will, does she mean that she had to force herself to pray against her natural inclination which is to dream of, and indeed return to, her lover? Or is she suggesting that prayer swept her like a passion she could not resist, that prayer is as irresistible an activity as the sexual enjoyment she has renounced? The first meaning is surely the one intended by the lines, but the second meaning is supported by the sensual vision of heaven which I argued for above. Prayer seems to be an experience which is less accessible to symbolic representation than dreams are, since the speaker is able to describe her dreams, but cannot write the words of her prayer. Those words are slow, and indeed the prayer seems to consist mostly of a passionate silence which cannot be represented. The "frozen blood" that results from the speaker's prayer indicates that the process of renunciation is not merely a straightforward translation of erotic love to the spiritual plane, but that the effort to move from the present satisfactions of earth to the future hopes of heaven almost destroys the speaker's sanity, and leaves her a broken, faceless woman, frozen in a living death. Rossetti employs the opposition between sexuality and religion in this poem to suggest that such an opposition cannot be
sustained without resulting in the breakdown of meaning (the first dream passage) and the fragmentation of the self.

**Hopkins**

Hopkins, like Donne, has long been a critical favourite (especially in the case of the New Critics) because of his virtuoso use of poetic language to create ambiguity and complexity. I argue that he employs hyperbaton, alliteration, metre, and, especially, puns, in order to emphasize the intensity of his relationship with God, who is sometimes symbolic and sometimes semiotic. In fact, I would argue, Hopkins's God almost always occupies a position in the poetry corresponding to the "semiotic," a position which also embraces the idea of God as Other which I discussed in chapter one. But since this chapter is meant to demonstrate the versatility of God in religious poetry, and not to provide a survey of all the poets' complete work, I have chosen for discussion two poems in which God appears to be symbolic, "To seem the stranger" and "Thou art indeed just, Lord," and one, "The Windhover," in which God suggests the semiotic. Like Herbert though, these poems defy any neat theoretical scheme meant to reveal their meaning. And like Rossetti, they all employ some suggestion of sexuality, with differing results.

"To seem the stranger" constructs a speaker whose desires and creativity appear to be thwarted by a repressive God. On the whole, the form of the poem very much supports this meaning, while also sometimes serving to undercut it. In the first line, for

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27 Elisabeth Schneider points out, for example, how this sonnet differs from what she calls Hopkins's "baroque" poems, which express the "language of elation, cheer, high confidence" (177). In "To seem the stranger," on the other hand, "Severity of style and
example, the three words "seem," "stranger," and "lies" work, because of their close proximity to each other, to suggest that the speaker's religion has caused him to become untrue to himself, to "seem" rather than to be, to be full of strange "lies," to feel estranged from himself ("stranger" suggests both strange and estranged). But lurking beneath this meaning is a suggestion that maybe the whole complaint of the poem is a lie, the inauthentic vision of a sinner who cannot see the truth, precisely because he is not truly himself as he writes the poem.

The next semantic complexity arises in line 4: "And he my peace / my parting, sword and strife." "Peace" is totally opposed to the other three nouns in the list, an opposition that Hopkins emphasized in the manuscript with the downward stroke he places between the alliterated "peace" and "parting." That typographical stroke (signifying a sword stroke?) serves to part the two p-words into two different pieces, thus revealing the pun peace/piece, and suggesting that the parting is not just the separation from family, but the splitting into parts of the speaker himself. The line then stresses Hopkins's outrage that the God who is supposed to be his peace is actually the complete opposite. But here we run into a problem, trying to distinguish the semiotic poet from the symbolic God, for a God who destroys the poet's peace and sense of unified being, who parts him into pieces, who functions as the violence of sword and strife, resembles the disruptive semiotic rather than the unifying symbolic.

condensation here reach their extreme limit. There is scarcely an adjective, scarcely an image, scarcely any metaphor; and there is not one vividly descriptive or sensuous word" (190). Although Schneider makes a valid point, I think she overstates the case, as should be seen in my analysis of the poetic complexities of the sonnet.
The next quatrain introduces the trope of the marriage, although on this occasion Hopkins does not apply that trope to himself and God, but to himself and England:

England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife
To my creating thought, would neither hear
Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I wear-y of idle a being but by where wars are rife. (4-8)

Hopkins would surely be aware here of his own culpability in his lack of inspiration, since instead of wishing England, a secular subject, to be the wife to his masculine "creating thought" he should submit himself as wife to the masculine creator, God. It is not for him to be the male creator. The pleading which Hopkins does not make and England would not hear even if he did make it, is usually read as his desire to convert his mother country to Catholicism, a reading which certainly fits with his lamentation that his own family remains outside his church. But behind this meaning lies another which builds more closely on the marriage trope, that of Hopkins pleading with his wife for the rights of the marriage bed, or rather not even bothering to plead because she would not respond to him even if he did. In this context the words "pleading, plead" serve to emphasize the sexual meanings of the two words which come later in the poem and rhyme with "plead" (without being part of the rhyme scheme): "breeds" (12), and unheeded" (14):

I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third
Remove. Not but in all removes I can
Kind love both give and get. Only what word

Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwart. This to hoard unheard,
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began(9-14)

Hopkins cannot breed poetry because his wife will not join him in procreation, and his
words are unheeded by heaven just as his sexual pleading is unheeded by England. "[D]ark heaven's baffling ban" (12) may not be so baffling after all, if we realize that Hopkins, in his refusal to take the feminine role, denies heaven its chance to impregnate him with inspiration. Daniel A. Harris argues that Hopkins embraces a feminine role here in order to develop "the theme of a broken heterosexual love between the speaker and the 'dearest him' that is implied in 'I Wake and Feel!'" (119), but I read the poem as throwing the blame upon the speaker rather than upon God. It is not that God deserts Hopkins-as-wife, but that Hopkins is unable to make himself into a wife in the first place. He refuses to "kind love both give and get," in that he is unable to receive (get) in a passive, feminine way (he refuses to let God "get" him with child), desiring only to bestow (give) in an active, masculine manner. While a superficial reading, therefore, may yield the interpretation that Hopkins's religion leaves him both sexually and creatively frustrated, a closer look reveals that it is Hopkins who does not "heed" the sexual "pleading" of a God who is prepared to act as a "creating thought." It is as a result of the poet's reluctance to access creativity through femininity (through the semiotic?) that his language becomes so "wear/y" that it begins to peter out into nothing.\(^{28}\)

"Thou art indeed just, Lord" is less ambiguous in its meaning: God is the distant

\(^{28}\) Hopkins does manage to take on the female role in one of his last poems, "To R. B.,” in which he describes the mind as "a mother of immortal song" (4), but that this particular humbling of himself before God came hard to him is shown by his infamous comments on the "maleness" of the poetic gift: "Now this is the artist's most essential quality, masterly execution: it is a kind of male gift and especially marks off men from women, the begetting of one's thought on paper, on verse, on whatever the matter is" (30 June 1886, Selected Letters 229). The mastery of the male artist sits awkwardly with the obedience and surrender required of the Christian poet who awaits inspiration from his master, God.
and unmoved master of the highly frustrated poet, whose passions God thwarts at every turn. The formality of the poet's address to God, based on a verse of the Old Testament, and preceded by the Latin translation of that verse, all serve to stress the hierarchical nature of the relationship between God and poet. Significantly, perhaps, this sonnet is one of the very rare Hopkins poems that actually addresses God, the other exceptions being *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and the disguised address in "Carrion Comfort."

After the intense colloquies of *The Wreck*, it seems as if Hopkins somehow lost his nerve in addressing God directly (Janet Denford points out how "he speaks to Him most often in brief emotional asides or short addresses that are a form of commentary" (12) rather than addressing whole poems to God) so that he hides behind disguise ("Carrion Comfort") or the extreme formality of this sonnet. The first line of the sonnet contains a pun on "indeed," suggesting that God is just "in deed" that is, in the letter of the law, but not the spirit. Hopkins cannot claim that God is unjust according to the law, but he desires a kinder, more loving God who places mercy before justice, a New Testament Christ rather than an Old Testament Yahweh.

The sexual trope makes its appearance at line 6 and continues to the end of the sonnet:

> Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
> Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
>
> Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
> Now, leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again
> With pretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
>
> Them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
> Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
> Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain. (6-14)
As in "To seem the stranger" Hopkins rejects the implication of the sexual trope when applied to God, which is that he is supposed to take on the female role. Instead he remains obstinately male, making sexual puns on "spend" and "strain" and attributing his creative failure to his failure in male sexuality, his status as a eunuch. As a result, he cannot see that the "sots and thralls" of lust are succeeding where he is failing precisely in their passive surrender to their desires. I am not saying that the text argues that Hopkins needs to surrender to his sexual desire in order to write poetry (although Hopkins himself is manifestly glancing at that possibility), but that the latent suggestion of the poem is that Hopkins needs to access his feminine side in order to surrender to a possession by a semiotic God.

The male self-assertion that the poet displays in this sonnet links him, in my view, to Milton's Satan. C. S. Lewis, in A Preface to Paradise Lost, points out how every time Satan is about to lose himself in the contemplation of the beauties of God's creation he

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29 In reading Hopkins as reluctant or unable to take on the female role before God, I am in total opposition to James W. Earl who argues that "The most obvious component of his relation to Christ throughout the poems [is] his feminine abjection before Christ's mastery" (555), and that "Hopkins's accommodation to loss, which Freud would call his castration complex, results in a distinctly feminine sexuality, as fully repressed as the feminine sexuality of the period was supposed to be, and fully accustomed to the abjection that postmodern feminists like Kristeva are now analyzing in men as well as women" (557). Neither do I agree with Donna Moder who sees Hopkins as drawn to androgyny: "many poems from all phases of Hopkins' career project a psychical fragmentation of gender in the speaker, a compulsion to vacillate between masculine and feminine identifications" (2). I would argue that Hopkins achieves this feminization of himself only intermittently, agreeing with Alison Sulloway who suggests that "It is one thing for an imperious embattled Oxford undergraduate to want to follow the sacrificial way, but it is quite another for him to undertake without stress the role of Christ's handmaiden" ("Hopkins, Male and Female, and the 'Tender Mothering Earth'" 37-38). Like Donne, Hopkins found it difficult to see his soul as the female bride of a male God.
resists this surrender and turns to dwell on himself, like a true egoist: "He sees the Sun; it makes him think of his own position. He spies on the human lovers; and states his position. In Book IX he journeys round the whole earth; it reminds him of his own position. The point need not be laboured" (102). I see the same process in Hopkins, who delights for a moment in the "fretty chervil" and "fresh wind" of nature, only to break off in line 10, in a bitter return to his own situation: "birds build--but not I build; no, but strain." In fact, the poem works here through puns to suggest that the speaker never really loses sight of himself at all in the description of nature, and that the sight is poisoned to him by his own bitterness and jealousy. When Hopkins cries "See, banks and brakes / Now," he is employing a secondary sense of the words, so that they become verbs of hindrance, rather than simple nouns. "See" he cries to God, "how you bank up my creativity, and put the brakes on my desires" (with another pun on break, as in "break me"). The adjectives "leavèd" and "lacèd" also contain double meanings, although without changing their grammatical role: Hopkins is saying "Look how I am left (leavèd) forlorn, and how you have laced me so I cannot act or breathe (no fresh wind for me)."

These puns bear witness to the semiotic conflicts within the poet, but at the same time they emphasize what at the beginning of this paragraph I called Hopkins's male self-assertion, a quality which is difficult to assign to either the semiotic or the symbolic, since it involves self-centred desire (semiotic) but also masculine power and control

30 "Banks" is a complex word indeed in this sonnet; Marylou Motto sees in it a pun on commercial banks, linking it to the pun on "spend" in line 8, so that "the negative vocabulary of business slips away, displaced by the generative nature to which it leads" (90).
(symbolic). The poem thus refuses a schematic reading which attempts to identify the poet with the semiotic and God with the symbolic.

"The Windhover," even more than the two sonnets I have just discussed, destroys distinctions between the symbolic and the semiotic. If the bird of the octave is divine (and I shall argue later that it most certainly is), then this God clearly belongs in the realm of the instinctual, the kinetic, the rhythmical, of amoral jouissance, in the realm, that is, of the semiotic. And yet the diction of royal hierarchy, (minion 1), dauphin 2), and a pun on "caught" (1) which makes the poet "court" the bird) along with the poet's vision of the bird in "the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!" (8), places the bird in the area of symbolic power relations.

Hopkins expresses his response to Christ in the language of sexuality in the lines, "My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!" Critics have speculated for decades as to why the poet's heart is in "hiding"; I suggest it is partly because Hopkins has managed in this poem, as he has not in "To seem the stranger" and "Thou art indeed just, Lord," to take on the role of the female to Christ's male. His heart is in "hiding" because a modest woman should remain in the background, admiring the male prowess of her lover from a distance. My reading here is in agreement with those of Alison Solloway who holds that "the feminine 'heart in hiding' and the humble earthly function of the plow are deliberately contrasted with the free-wheeling falcon's archetypally masculine 'achieve of, the mastery of the thing!"' ("Hopkins, Male and Female" 50); and Charles Lock who points to the word "chevalier" as a marker of gender: "If in 'The Windhover,' . . . Christ is addressed as 'my chevalier,' the poet must be
assuming a female persona, but sensing embarrassing implications, ears do not hear" (134). For once, for Hopkins, the implications of playing female to Christ's male were not too embarrassing for him. If God can submit to the humiliation of becoming human, then he can buckle under the humiliation of becoming female.

Since I read the infamous "Buckle!" (10) in the sense of "submit, collapse under pressure" I am faced with the problem of whether the bird's sacrifice is an act of the semiotic or the symbolic. The tercet runs as follows:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! and the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier! (9-11)

It seems at first that the list of qualities which Hopkins ascribes to the bird in line 9 are most certainly the qualities of the semiotic, in all its "brute beauty," in which case the sacrifice called for is one of denying passionate self-assertion in favour of service, surely a move required by the repressive dimension of that symbolic system, religion. But, on the other hand, these qualities could just as easily specify the subject's "pride" in his wholeness, his status, his sense of himself as in control over his own destiny (the diabolic, Luciferian qualities which Sulloway and Emily K. Yoder both see in the bird), in which case the buckling is a surrender of a false consciousness of power and autonomy to an authentic experience of the fragmented self in process, a surrender, in other words, to the truth of the semiotic. Both meanings coexist, for it is the Christian paradox of sacrifice that Hopkins wishes to make vivid: that in denying ourselves the realization of our passionate selves we break through to a new passion, a fire more lovely and more
dangerous.  

Many critics have argued, however, that the falcon is not a symbol or embodiment of Christ, and that even if it is, its "buckling" does not represent any sacrifice. Yvor Winters, for example, makes the scornful claim that "there is no essential difference between my dog and Hopkins' bird; the bird has the advantage merely of the Romantic and sentimental feeling attached to birds as symbols of the free and unrestrained spirit" (49). Michael Sprinker argues that "If the bird in the poem has a referent outside the poem itself, it is not so much the kestrel as all those birds so preternaturally present in the Romantic lyric: Keats's nightingale, Shelley's skylark, Tennyson's eagle, Hardy's darkling thrush, Yeats's falcon and golden singing bird, and Stevens's blackbird" (6). Both Winters and Sprinker, in their concentration upon "The Windhover" as a Romantic poem, ignore the implications of the bird for a Christian poem. In Christian symbolism, the bird suggests not the Romantic "spirit," but the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity who is traditionally represented in the form of a dove. The windhover therefore represents or embodies not just Christ, but the Holy Spirit as well.

Robert Boyle argues that even if the falcon is Christ, it does not represent Christ's sacrifice: "The crumpled bird, in the context of this poem, cannot be a symbol of Christ on the cross. Christ on the cross is beautiful because of the hidden, infinite, and life-

31 John M. Warner argues convincingly for a reading of the poem which celebrates the falcon's synthesis of power and restraint: "it is the particular combination of freedom and bondage that is shown by the bird's hovering upon the wind which attracts the speaker. . . . from the beginning the speaker perceives the bird's symbolic value not as that of simple unrestraint . . . but as a blending within itself of freedom and submission" (129-30; Warner's emphasis). Thus the falcon expresses neither the semiotic nor the symbolic exclusively, but exists within the tension between the two.
giving love which bursts out from His death, freely accepted but not self-inflicted, to give life to the world" (89; Boyle's emphasis). Where I depart from Boyle is in reading the bird's act of buckling as a re-enactment not of the Crucifixion, but of the Incarnation. Much Hopkins scholarship over the years has been devoted to demonstrating the centrality of the Incarnation to Hopkins's faith, and delineating the extent of his debt to Duns Scotus who argued that the second person of the Trinity became incarnate before the creation.32

I therefore read the falcon's buckling as re-enacting the Incarnation. The central action of the poem, in my view, is the dive of the falcon. Many critics argue that the bird does not dive at all, and among those who do read "buckle" as a dive, some, such as Winters and Denis Donoghue, argue that this dive is very far from approximating a divine action:

the dive is not an act of self-sacrifice, it is an attack on the bird's prey. . . . it would be unfair to Hopkins to read into his poem a meaning for which the poem offers no evidence and which, once it is there, ruins the poem. (Winters 46)

The falcon can easily be accepted as a conventionally adequate post-Romantic symbol of Energy, but I see no reason why we should sidestep the obvious fact that it is Energy at its most destructive, most vicious. To accept the windhover without sheer blasphemy as a symbol of Christ one would have to ignore the plain fact that the bird is a bird of prey, that when it dives it does so not just for the sheer "ecstasy" of animal activity. (Donoghue 97)

But I see no problem with the poem's comparison of God to a bird of prey if we read "The

32 Walter Ong's gloss is helpful here: "The creation of the universe and of humankind followed as a consequence of the design to have the Son take on human nature. Adam's sin, calling for redemption as it did, gave the incarnation a special urgency but not its real raison d'être" (108).
Windhover" in the context of the destructive God in The Wreck of the Deutschland, and the lion-limbed predator God of "Carrion Comfort." I think, however, that as the falcon buckles into a dive it metamorphoses into a very different type of bird, a dove.

My reason for seeing a dove where Hopkins mentions only a falcon, is that the bird catches on fire as it dives ("the fire that breaks from thee then" (10)). Geoffrey Hartman argues that this fire must be a literal one: "whereas a lesser poet than Hopkins might have used "fire" in a purely figurative sense, in Hopkins the figurative sense is always derived from physical phenomena" (62). Hartman suggests that the fire is "light flashing from an uneven breastplate" (62), but I argue that the flash of flame is that of a meteor which ignites as it enters the earth's atmosphere.33 The Holy Spirit enters the earth's atmosphere in two forms, according to the Gospels. The first is that of a bird: "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway [sic] out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him" (Matt 3:16). The second form is the fire which descended on the apostles at Pentecost: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:3). Like the meteor, the Holy Spirit bursts into flame as

33 In Fire in the Sky (1998) Roberta J. M. Olson and Jay M. Pasachoff convincingly demonstrate the nineteenth-century fascination with meteors: "The scientific investigation of comets and meteors, which first occurred in earnest during the period in question [the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries], dovetailed with the inherent British interest in nature and a strong literary tradition of comet/meteor symbolism" (1). They go on to point out that "a knowledge of science and astronomy became one of the hallmarks of a British gentleman" (3). As both a literary figure and a gentleman, Hopkins might well have used the image of the meteor in "The Windhover," as indeed he used the image of the comet in "I am like a slip of comet," a poem Olson and Pasachoff include in their book.
he descends to earth. The dove in flames is an image Hopkins employs elsewhere. In *The Wreck of the Deutschland* he describes his own heart as a dove flying into the fire of God:

My heart, but you were doveling, I can tell,
Carrier-witted, I am bold to boast,
To flash from the flame to the flame then, tower from the grace
to the grace. (III 6-8)

And in "God's Grandeur," written only two or three months before "The Windhover," Hopkins also pictures God in terms of fire ("The world is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out" (1-2)) and a dove ("Because the Holy Ghost over the bent /
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings" (13-14)). As Paul Mariani says, we have to see this dove as literally "on fire" with the sun: "It is only when we see that the Paraclete is the dawning sun--its breast the warming sun, its wings the spreading rays--that the immediacy and force of the image strike the reader" (92). The bird of "The Windhover" is another bird literally on fire. In falling, in the act of buckling and sacrificing itself, the falcon metamorphoses into a dove which erupts in flame, thus moving from the first person of the Trinity to the third, while simultaneously re-enacting Christ's surrender of his falcon-like transcendence for a dove-like immanence (the dove in "God's Grandeur" is immanent in the world), in the Incarnation.34

The last tercet celebrates the mysterious beauty of everyday sacrifice, such as that

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34 The image is similar to T. S. Eliot's vision of the Holy Spirit appearing during the London air-raids of the 1940s, described in the "Little Gidding" section of *Four Quartets*:

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error. (IV, 1-4)
of Hopkins himself, which expresses itself in the "sheer plod" (12) and "blue-bleak" (13) drudgery of human existence. While these actions are not as spectacular as the bird catching on fire as it plunges through the sky, they can still partake of that lovely and dangerous flame, still "shine" (13), still "gash gold-vermilion" (14). Sacrifice, which appears to secular theory to be the submission of semiotic desire to the symbolic, reveals itself to be, in Hopkins's Christian vision, a mystery beyond the power of either human desire or human reason to fully comprehend. David Anthony Downes argues that the difficulty of "The Windhover" lies in its insistence on the mystery and paradox of the sacrificial Incarnation: "What is so difficult in this poem for many readers, and justly so, is the grounding of the 'falcon' Christ in the dust and ashes of the 'sheer plod' Christ. Of course, there is no answer for this paradox except the mystery of the Incarnation (and by extension all Incarnationalism)" (Hopkins' Sanctifying Imagination 66). Mystery characterizes both Christianity and psychoanalysis, in the end. As Robert Rehder says: "Although we do not completely understand the poem, we accept its greatness. That we are strongly moved by what we cannot explain suggests that what occurs is unconscious communication" (174).  

35 On a somewhat facetious note, I was interested to discover that in transcribing Rehder's words, I had at first typed "greatness" instead of "greatness." Could this be the presence of the semiotic, revealing itself through the materiality of the text, suggesting to my conscious self that I find the poem much more difficult, more of a "mess" than my logical, symbolic, side realizes? Or am I just an inaccurate typist? The danger of a psychoanalytic approach, of course, is that it is a deterministic view of the psyche, where nothing happens by chance and everything is overdetermined. But then that is also the view of a Christianity which believes that God pays as much attention to my typing as he does to the fall of a sparrow. A psychoanalytic reading of a Christian poem, therefore, is likely to be guilty of, while at the same time being justified in, reading significance into anything and everything.
"unconscious" because the human mind cannot consciously grasp the greatness of God.

Both in form and content, then, religious poetry simultaneously invites and resists a Kristevan analysis. In the end, it is the paradoxes so beloved by both Christianity and poetry, and especially, therefore, by Christian poetry, which throw into confusion any attempt at a schematic analysis. While Christianity structures itself to a large degree around oppositions (good and evil, body and soul, sin and grace, etc), the poetry inspired by it often works to demolish those oppositions, as it does the opposition between the symbolic and the semiotic. A Kristevan approach, therefore, can help to illumine, but cannot hope to exhaust, the mysteries of Christian poetry.
Chapter Three

Love and Hate: Ambivalence in Religious Poetry

I love and love not: Lord, it breaks my heart
To love and not to love.

(Rossetti, "Dost Thou Not Care?" 1-2)

Christian poets hate the God they love. Because they can never escape from ambivalence, they also love the God they hate. Take God out of the poetry and we are left with unconscious expressions of self-love and self-hate. I approach each poet's work in terms of his or her love/hate relationship with God, before attempting, in the conclusion to the chapter, to suggest interpretations of the poems which assume that God is a projection of the poet's self. This is not to say that I take the poets entirely at their word for the body of the chapter; on the contrary, in looking for signs of repressed hatred or resentment towards God I often read the poets against their intentions. On the other hand, Donne, Herbert, Rossetti, and Hopkins do not shy away from writing about the dark side of their struggles with God; they all have too much integrity, both as poets and believers, to pretend that the course of true love always runs smoothly.

Any discussion of Christian love benefits enormously from incorporating the distinction between *agape* and *eros* formulated by Anders Nygren in his classic 1932 book *Agape and Eros*. Nygren defines *agape* as a disinterested, unmotivated love which is given freely to the beloved, however unworthy that beloved is; while *eros* is a desire,
which is aroused by the attractive qualities of beloved. Nygren argues that Platonic *eros* was the dominant motif in the Hellenistic world, while *agape* was formulated by St Paul, and dominated the vision of the early Christians. The history of the idea of Christian love is, according to Nygren, the history of the interaction of *agape* and *eros*: "Almost everywhere in the history of the Christian idea of love we find Eros and Agape most intimately connected with one another, and it is therefore difficult to escape the impression that this connection is natural and necessary" (32). Certainly the poetry I discuss in this chapter expresses a love in which these two modes are inextricably combined.

*Agape* is a theocentric love, the love of God for his creatures. He does not love us because we are lovable, or worthy; rather we become worthy because he loves us. The human response to being loved in this way by God is meant to be one of gratitude and faith, of surrender to the force of God’s love. Humanity cannot love God through *agape*: since he is completely worthy of love it cannot be an unmotivated gift; and since he is our creator and our judge it can hardly be disinterested. It is, however, possible and indeed necessary to love others with *agape*.

*Eros* is an anthropocentric love, the love of humans for God. *Eros* is motivated by the desirability of the object, which in the case of God is overwhelming since he is the

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1 Nygren’s definition of *eros* is not solely that of sexual love. While *eros* subsumes sexual desire, it is not totally defined by it. All sexual love is *eros*, but not all *eros* is sexual. As Nygren says of *eros*: "Deep as the sensual roots of Platonic love may be, its whole tendency is to seek deliverance from the merely sensual" (51).

2 "Anthropocentric" is Kristeva’s term, which I prefer to Nygren’s term, "egocentric."
supreme good, the locus of ultimate truth and beauty. The human subject attempts to
purify itself and rise up in order to merge with and possess the beloved object, God. Can
God also love us through *eros*? The early Christians, believers in *agape*, would say no,
that we are completely undesirable in ourselves. But there is a place in Christianity for
believing God does love us through *eros*, a point of view which I shall discuss below.

Nygren associates *agape* and *eros* with certain strands of Christian doctrine and
practice. *Eros* is associated with mysticism, the striving of the soul to become one with
God, while *agape* puts its faith in revealed religion, the obedient following of a God who
always remains above and separate. *Eros* fosters a belief in the efficacy of works; *agape*
relies on faith alone. *Eros* inspires both the aesthetic and ascetic strands of Christianity:
the aesthetic *eros* is attracted by the beauty of God, while *agape* responds only to God's
love; the ascetic *eros* believes that sin belongs to the body, while *agape* attributes it to
"perversion of the will" (223). *Eros* tends to be found in Catholicism, and *agape* in
Protestantism.

The most important difference between *agape* and *eros* for my exploration of love
and hate in this chapter is the difference in the attitude to the self. Nygren states: "*Eros
starts with the assumption of the Divine origin and worth of the soul. . . . Agape, on the
other hand, starts with the conviction of one's own lack of worth" (222; Nygren's

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3 It is not a simple matter, however, of characterizing the Protestantism of Donne and
Herbert as focussed solely upon *agape* at the expense of *eros*, since, according the
Nygren, "*the Renascence takes up the Eros motif; the Reformation the Agape motif*" (669;
Nygren's emphasis). Since Donne and Herbert were poets of both the Reformation and
the Renaissance, they were influenced by both ideas of Christian love, both *agape* and
*eros*. 
emphasis). He provides an historical context for this difference, citing Paul's argument that God loves us in spite of our unworthiness. Paul's view is in "opposition to all that can be called 'self-love'" (130; Nygren's emphasis). Early Christianity, however, soon came under the influence of Hellenistic Gnosticism which viewed God's love not as a gift but as "downward-directed desire—that is, vulgar Eros" (303). God could desire the soul because of the soul's divine origin, another of Gnosticism's beliefs. St. Augustine, coming under these influences, attempted to synthesize agape and eros into caritas. In doing so, he provided a positive answer to the question I asked above: can God love us with eros? According to Nygren, Augustine argues that God loves us with desire because we reflect him: "When God loves us men, it is in the last resort nothing but Himself in us that He loves: Eros has compelled Augustine to provide this motive for God's unmotivated love" (556). Such a love makes God into a narcissist, loving us for the reflection he sees in us of his own goodness and beauty.

Like Nygren, Kristeva also distinguishes between two modes of loving, which she calls narcissism and idealization. In narcissism, "Its Highness the Ego projects and glorifies itself," while in idealization it "shatters into pieces and is engulfed, when it admires itself in the mirror of an idealized Other--sublime, incomparable, as worthy (of me?) as I can be unworthy of him, and yet made for our indissoluble union" (Tales of Love 6-7). Idealization, the opposite of narcissism, often leads to self-hatred. Most love-relationships are a complicated mixture of narcissism and idealization, just as Nygren would argue that they are a complicated mixture of agape and eros. Narcissism results from being the object of agape, while idealization results from being the subject who
loves with eros, although, as I shall argue, the poetry complicates this neat equation.

Kristeva, following Freud who argued that object-love is male and narcissism
female,\(^4\) genders the different ways of loving, arguing that women can love through eros,
but only by becoming, to some extent, masculine: "That the libido, hence Eros, be male
does not absolutely prevent the woman from placing her loves in it. Through a more or
less painful identification with man" (*Tales* 80).\(^5\) If men are drawn to eros, then women
are more inclined to achieve narcissism through being the object of love, whether that
love is eros or agape.

A large part of *Tales of Love* is given over to the history of Christian love, in
which Kristeva concentrates on narcissism, ignoring idealization for the most part. In this
she departs somewhat from Feuerbach who argues that Christianity causes both
narcissism and self-hate in the human subject. God, according to Feuerbach, enables the
subject to achieve narcissism: "It is . . . pleasanter to know oneself beloved by God than
merely to have that simple, natural self-love which is innate in all beings; pleasanter to
see oneself imaged in the love-beaming eyes of another personal being, than to look into
the concave mirror of self, or into the cold depths of the ocean of Nature" (140). And yet
God is also a burden, an impossible model to live up to: "The conception of the morally

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4 "Complete object-love of the attachment type is, properly speaking, characteristic of
the male. . . . Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that . . . women love with an
intensity comparable to that of the man’s love for them" ("On Narcissism" 88-89).

5 Immediately after this paragraph, she does speculate on the possibilities of a
"female libido" and "an erotics of the partly feminine" (*Tales* 80), which she says only
occur in situations of androgyne and lesbian love. Compare Freud’s "I am ready to admit
that there are quite a number of women who love according to the masculine type and
who also develop the sexual overvaluation proper to that type" ("On Narcissism" 89).
perfect being is no merely theoretical, inert conception, but a practical one, calling me to action, to imitation, throwing me into strife, into disunion with myself; for while it proclaims to me what I ought to be, it also tells me to my face, without any flattery, what I am not" (47). According to Feuerbach, then, loving God can result in both self-love and self-hate on the part of the believer.

Kristeva, however, concentrates on the Christian God as a source of self-love rather than of self-hatred. She posits God as the first Narcissus:

Consider this mirrorlike motion: my desire will be fulfilled through Him, for He has fulfilled his own by creating me in his image. . . . We meet again with a kind of "primary narcissism," surmountable only through the positing of an Other who is supposed to have existed before us and who is not unaware, on his part, of that longing for self-gratification and total gratification. (Tales 160)

The Christian God loves himself through the Other (the human soul). To God, then, we are all mirrors, reflecting his love and goodness back to him. The converse of this Augustinian viewpoint is that God is our mirror, reflecting our potential love and goodness back to us.

As I argued above, God can love the soul with either agape or eros; the soul can only love God with eros. In religious poetry these three actions, God loving with eros, God loving with agape, the soul loving with eros, each have a combination of possible outcomes.

When the poet loves with eros, for example, one of four things can happen, one of which involves love, the other three of which involve hate. First, the poet can achieve happiness and love for himself and God simply by exulting in the pleasure that his own adoration gives him. Second, if the poet senses no response from God he can end up
hating both God, for his coldness, and himself, for his own weakness in persisting with an unrequited desire. Third, the poet can continue to adore God but despise himself as being so far beneath divine perfection, the process Kristeva calls idealization. And fourth, the poet can angrily reject an unresponsive God while regarding himself with self-pity or self-righteous approval.

Similarly, if God loves with agape, the poet's responses can also take one of four forms, one of love and three of hate. First, she can achieve a narcissistic self-love based on her status as the object of God's love. Second she can hate herself for not being worthy of this love. Third, she can hate God for demanding a surrender which she feels unable to make, for placing upon her obligations and guilt under which she feels oppressed. And fourth, she can angrily resent God for not loving her with eros, with the desire that would suggest she is actually worthy of love in herself, resenting the agape that makes no comment on her own desirability.6

But if God does love the poet with eros, then the poet is always happy, often picturing the love between himself and his God in terms of an ecstatic and satisfied sexual relationship.

It is not my intention to apply these distinctions rigorously to the poetry, since I believe that on the whole the poets were not formulating to themselves the differences between eros and agape, but were rather trying to work through the subtleties of love and

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6 As C. S. Lewis puts it: "No sooner do we believe that God loves us than there is an impulse to believe that He does so, not because He is Love, but because we are intrinsically lovable" (The Four Loves 180). Lewis's rueful insight illuminates the reason why the poets often try to turn God's feeling for them from agape-love into eros-love.
ambivalence in a deeply emotional and personal way. While I refer to eros and agape, idealization and narcissism, I try to treat each poem on its own merits, as a cry from the heart.

Donne

Donne's primary reaction to God seems to be one of fear, rather than of love, as I argued in chapter one. Donne's central problem in treating the love between himself and God is that he desires God to love him with eros rather than agape, a problem which may be related to his conversion from Catholicism to the Calvinist Anglicanism of the Elizabethan church. When he feels that he is loved with eros, he is able to achieve narcissism. When he feels that God's love for him is based on agape, on the other hand, he responds with resentment and hostility towards God and hatred of himself.

Holy Sonnet 9, "What if this present," illustrates the process of God's love resulting in the poet's narcissism. The poem has come under much critical attack for the speciousness of its argument, in comparing Christ to the poet's "profane mistresses" (10). I would add to these criticisms the observation that the faultiness of the analogy springs from a confusion on the poet's part (whether deliberate or not) between agape and eros. Christ's love for his enemies, his praying for "forgiveness of his foes fierce spight" (8), is

7 P. M. Oliver, for example, points out that "if the speaker knows he was lying to his 'profane mistresses' when he used this argument to get them into bed, he must realise that it is even more fallacious as an argument for being saved" (114). But whereas Oliver concludes that the faulty argument means "we are not in the presence of high seriousness" (115), I read the poem as a very serious effort on Donne's part to understand the nature of the love he should have for God.
clearly *agape*, a love unmotivated by the worthiness of its object. Donne then proceeds to liken Christ's love for him to that of his human lovers who take "pitty" (11) on him. *Agape* is certainly a love that involves pity, rather than admiration. But it is clear that the human love Donne describes is not based on *agape* at all. In asking his mistresses to take pity on him, he is clearly working within the Petrarchan tradition whereby the woman does not desire, but rather takes pity on, the man. But that pity is a response to the man's desire, his *eros*-love. God's *agape* is not a response to man's desire, but rather a love which itself demands a response. It is not anthrocentric, in other words, but theocentric. The Protestant Donne should know that he cannot equate the crucified Christ's pity for him with that of his mistresses whose pity is mainly a response to his own flattery. His relationship with his mistresses was based on *eros*-love, and, while many of Donne's poems show him clearly desiring that God also love him with *eros*, theologically he knows he must be happy with God's *agape*.

Donne's attribution of an *eros*-love to Christ allows him to achieve a level of narcissistic self-love in this sonnet. His equation of Christ with his mistresses allows Donne to picture Christ as physically beautiful and attractive. This beautiful Christ dwells in Donne's own soul, thus implying that the poet is suffused with Christ's beauty from within, and becomes beautiful himself. The lines that describe Christ's own transformation from divine sternness, frightening to look upon, to human beauty, thus also imply the poet's transformation: "Teares in his eyes quench the amasing light, / Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell" (5-6). Christ's tears well up in Donne's own eyes, his blood wells up in Donne's own face, making him fair to look upon.
And if Donne is beautiful, then, by the logic of his own argument, he must also be good:

"To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd, / This beauteous forme assures a pitious minde" (13-14). If he is beautiful and good, then he can take pity upon himself, just as Christ and his mistresses do, and achieve narcissistic self-love. Donne's attribution of *eros*-love to Christ is the means whereby he can love himself.

In "Since she whom I lovd," Donne makes the difficult move from wishing to love God with *eros*, to becoming the object of God's *eros*-love, a change he is not entirely successful in performing. The octave describes how the speaker's love for his wife leads him to a love for God:

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Since she whome I lovd, hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soule early'into heaven ravished,
Wholly in heavenly things my mind is sett.
Here the admiring her my mind did whett
To seeke thee God; so streames do shew the head,
But though I'have found thee,'and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yet. (1-8)
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Both his love for his wife and his love for God are based on *eros*. As his wife's soul is taken up into heaven, his mind follows in the upward movement which characterizes *eros*. He seeks God, and finds him, like a desiring lover taking the active role. And yet his desire remains unsatisfied. The turn of the sonnet from octave to sestet is based on the poet's realization that he must surrender the role of lover to God, and take on the role of beloved himself: "But why should I begg more love, when as thou / Dost wooe my soule, for hers offring all thine" (9-10). Only by allowing himself to be wooed, instead of trying to woo, will Donne be able to escape the unsatisfied nature of his own desire for both his wife and his God. Yet the last four lines show the poet unable to hold onto this
realization, as he attributes the qualities of *eros*-love to God:

And dost not only feare least I allow
My love to saints and Angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Least the World, fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out. (11-14).

It is *eros* which is prone to jealousy and exclusiveness, while *agape* does not know jealousy and is totally inclusive. Donne projects onto God his own feelings of jealousy that his wife has given *her* love to saints and angels, and things divine, now that she has been "ravished" into heaven. He can only imagine God loving him in the same way that he loved her, through *eros*. Theresa Di Pasquale is right to notice the gender implications in these lines: "The idea of a jealous God is of course an Old Testament commonplace; but insofar as God's fears reflect the poet's own jealousy over Anne's ravishment, they testify to a persistent masculinity of perspective which is--in the spiritual order of things--Donne's most serious problem" (53). *Eros*-love, as Kristeva argues, is a masculine love, active, ambitious, based on desire. Donne must learn to play the role of the feminine beloved to God's masculine lover, if he imagines God loving him with *eros*. Only in the glimpse of a possibly female and maternal God who feeds his thirst as a mother breast-feeds her child, does he achieve, for a moment, an alternative vision in which he can be the object of a divine love based on *agape*, not *eros*. But as Carey argues of Donne's love-poetry: "his ego reaches too eagerly after objects beyond itself to be narcissistic: it is goaded by its incompleteness" (99). Donne's need is to love, rather than be loved. It is difficult enough for him to accept being loved with God's *eros*, rather than loving his wife with *eros*, let alone to also make the change from a vision of love based on *eros* to one of
love based on *agape*.

"Good Friday 1613. Riding Westward" enacts Donne's difficult progress in achieving self-love through God's *agape*. He begins the poem by running away from God's love, feeling burdened by the obligations it places upon him: "Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see / That spectacle of too much weight for mee" (15-16). It is the action of looking on which all the poet's anxieties focus, for in looking at God, he becomes God's reflection. The spectacle is of too much weight for him not only because he feels inadequate to respond to such great love on God's part, but also because God's look defines him as God's reflection. As he says in the next lines: "Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye; / What a death were it then to see God dye?" (17-18). The implication in the first of these lines, is that seeing God's face results in a death which is merely a prelude to a resurrection, to a renewed and more beautiful self, reflecting back to God the glory of his own gaze. But seeing God die is a different matter. It is glorious to be the reflected face of a glorious God, but terrifying to become the reflection of a dying Christ.9 Donne's description of nature's reaction to the Crucifixion is a projection of his

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8 The psychoanalyst might interpret this poem as the description of a successful substitution of narcissism for the lost love object. Donne uses his belief in God to allow him to redirect the *eros* invested in his wife onto himself. Because of his faith, he is able to mourn without melancholia.

9 Donne's reluctance to look into the face of a wounded Christ is echoed by the speaker of Rossetti's "Despised and Rejected" (I 178-80) who refuses to look upon the Christ who calls to her with these words:

"My Feet bleed, see My Face,
See My Hands bleed that bring thee grace,
My Heart doth bleed for thee,
Open to Me." (45-48)

To gaze into this God's face would reflect the speaker as equally broken, injured, and
own desire not to look: "It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke, / It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke" (19-20). It is Donne who "shrinks" away from gazing at God, whose eyes "wink" because they cannot look. It is the imaginary mirror he makes out of himself, as he reflects God, which "cracks" under the strain. Instead of looking, then, Donne intellectualizes his approach to the Crucifixion: "Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye, / They're present yet unto my memory" (33-34). Such a distancing of the experience is not acceptable, Donne realizes, because while he refuses to look at Christ, Christ persists in looking at him: "For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards mee, / O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree" (35-36). Christ transforms the distancing third person pronouns of "that" and "them" into the immediate second and first person pronouns "thou" and "mee." In asking God to beat him in the following four lines,

I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity, (37-40)

Donne seems to recognize that facing the gaze of Christ in his Passion requires him to be a reflection of Christ. Unlike the voyeur, he is implicated in his own looking.

needy, rather than as equally glorious, adorable, and lovable as the victorious God in Heaven. Christ's offer of love is rejected because the speaker cannot bear to look upon herself in a narcissistic relationship with this wounded, bleeding deity, just as Donne cannot look at Christ on the Cross. Ironically, her refusal leaves her eternally bleeding: "and on my door / The mark of blood for evermore" (57-58). W. David Shaw says of Rossetti's "Twice" (T 124-26) that "When the devotional poet stops looking at her brokenness and looks instead at the wholeness of Christ, she has already set the conditions for her recovery" ("Poet of Mystery" 56). But in "Despised and Rejected" Christ is not whole but broken, and looking at him would not help the poet recover, unless she embraces the paradoxes of Christianity.
The poem ends with the poet about to turn to look into the face of his God:
"Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace, / That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face" (41-42). As he does so, he ceases to speak and the poem ends. It is indeed true, then, that "Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye" (17) for the poem dies as Donne turns his face, but it is a death to the old deformed and sinful self, a death to desire, a death to the separation from God that makes it necessary to address him in words in the first place. Donne becomes the mirror "image" (41) of Christ; they gaze at each other in the classic image of narcissism. There is no need for the poem to continue when the poet has reached such completion, such satisfaction of the desire to love and be loved.

Love, however, is not the central note struck by Donne in the description of his relationship with God, as most readers have noticed. Instead, Donne tends to respond to God's agape with either resentment of the obligations it places upon him, anger that God does not love him with eros, or despair at his own unworthiness to be the object of any love at all. In other words, Donne often responds to God's love with both hatred of God and self-hatred.

Holy Sonnet 1, "As due by many titles," depicts an angry rejection of God's agape. The first line shows the poet making the correct response of total surrender to God's love, although the hint of reluctance in the word "resigne" betrays Donne's resentment at being placed under the obligation of many claims and titles. In the second quatrain, however, Donne turns from his focus on God's actions of creation and redemption to listing his own qualities in relationship to God. When he tells God that he is his son, servant, sheep, image, and temple, he appears to be advertising his desirable qualities. He wants God to
love him with *eros*, rather than *agape*, because if he is loved with *eros*, it means he is desirable, whereas being the object of an *agape* love does not reflect at all on his own qualities. The son/sun pun in line 5, "I am thy sonne, made with thy selfe to shine," locates this *eros/agape* conflict in one word. As God's *son*, Donne is the object of his *agape*, the love that *descends* from the father to his small child. But as God's *sun*, Donne receives the upwardly directed desire which *ascends* from the man who turns his face up to the source of light and heat. Donne justifies his claim to be God's *sun*, the object of God's desire rather than his *agape*, by admitting that his light is just a reflection of God's: "made with thyself to shine," and goes on to call himself God's image and the temple in which God's spirit dwells. This list is designed to appeal to God's narcissism. Donne hopes that God will love him because he shares in God's divinity, because he reflects God back to himself. Donne seems here to reject the Calvinistic emphasis upon the worthlessness of the human soul, in favour of the Augustinian view that God loves us because he sees himself in us.

The poem transfers the "many titles" of the first line from God's claims to Donne's love, to Donne's claims upon God. Once this switch takes place, Donne's tone becomes much more agitated and hostile towards God. "Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee?" (9) he demands, as if accusing God of betraying him to the enemy, when in fact he has just admitted that he betrayed himself. "Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right?" (10) he asks, slyly upgrading himself from an object that can be stolen to a bride who can be raped (and who should be the subject of her husband's *eros*).

Donne's hungry ego then causes him to distinguish himself from the rest of
humanity. He complains that God "lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse me" (13). Refusing to be loved as part of humanity, Donne rejects his status as one of the many objects of God's generous and undiscriminating agape, demanding instead that he be chosen, singled out as special and desirable in himself. Donne both hates and desires God in this poem: he hates God for the obligations, the "many titles" God's agape places upon him, while at the same time he desires God to desire him. It is an ambivalence which he displaces onto Satan in the paradox which ends the poem: "And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee" (14). In truth, it is Donne who hates God, and yet is loth to lose him. Donne's ambivalence in his religious poetry reflects his ambivalence about all love, including the love of self.

God's agape in Holy Sonnet 7, "Spit in my face yee Jews," also results in hatred and hostility on the part of the poet, but this time it is directed inward, at himself rather than at God. The poem is an example of a departure from the equation of agape leading to narcissism. Instead of feeling lovable and secure because God loved him so much that he died for him, Donne instead falls into what Kristeva would call idealization: he keenly feels his inability to live up to the standard God sets, and consequently hates himself for it. As A. L. French puts it: "God is ... by definition, perfect; so that in writing about Him, you can only celebrate His perfections or your own shortcomings. ... If the problem is that of a certain one-sidedness, isn't there a chance that a man might feel some resentment (however unconscious), some hostility?" (123–24). This sonnet answers French's question in the affirmative.

The first two lines neatly combine the effort to compete with God and the self-
hatred and masochistic desire for punishment that results from the poet's failure in this competition. It is not the Jews who are beating the poet, but himself.\(^\text{10}\) Donne forces both his own self-hate, and his hatred of God for outperforming him, onto the Jews who beat him and Christ and thus satisfy by proxy his aggressive instincts against both himself and God. As in "As due by many titles," the volta signals a change, this time from hatred to love. Having exhausted himself with violence and punishment, and hatred of God, himself, and the Jews, Donne turns to the positive side of the idealizing equation, the glorification of God, rather than self-denigration. "Oh let mee then, his strange love still admire" (9), he says. The attitude is idealizing rather than narcissistic here, the poet placing himself at a distance from God's love, which remains "strange" to him, which he admires rather than partakes of. Donne does not achieve self-love in this sonnet.

Holy Sonnet 10, "Batter my Heart," teeters perilously close to expressing hatred for both the speaker and God. The conflict in the poem is born from Donne's conflation of \textit{eros} with \textit{agape}. He loves God with \textit{eros}, describing his desire in terms of a pining woman, employing sexual puns in "batter my heart" (1) and "labour to'admit you" (6)\(^\text{11}\) and desiring ravishment. "Yet dearely'I love you, and would be lov'd faine" (9) he cries, full of his desire to possess God and God's love.

Possessing God's love, however, is no easy matter. Donne wants both God's \textit{eros}...

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\(^{10}\) Of course, in chapter two I argue that it is not the Jews, but God who is beating Donne. There is no contradiction here since I argue that God is only a projection of Donne himself.

\(^{11}\) William Kerrigan points out that "heart" is seventeenth-century slang for the vagina ("The Fearful Accommodations of John Donne" 43). The OED cites childbirth as a meaning of the verb "labour" since 1454.
and his agape. The two modes of love converge in the word "ravish" (14). On the one hand ravishment implies a man filled with desire to possess a woman. On the other hand it also implies rape, the overcoming of another person's will. The former meaning belongs to eros; the latter to agape. Donne wants God to want him as a man wants a woman. But he is not able to give himself freely to his lover. In consequence, he also wants God to take him over completely, sweep away his will, and "imprison" (12) him in agape. Nygren describes agape as a force which demands the surrender of the beloved: "The unconditional nature of the love he has experienced makes the demand for his surrender to it also unconditional" (91-92). The problem is that God does not appear to be forthcoming with either agape or eros: "for, you / As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend" (1-2), complains Donne, characterizing God as an ineffectual craftsman, fiddling almost indifferently with one of his possessions. As a result of God's unresponsiveness, Donne imagines the relationship between them as one of violence. He expresses his aggression towards God in the many imperatives he uses. These imperatives are verbs of violence to be directed at the speaker, but some of them, breaking free from their surrounding syntax, could actually have God as their object. For example, if we take the lines "That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee'and bend / Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new," and remove the subordinate clause, "That I may rise, and stand,"and all references to the object of the violence, the "me" of the speaker, we have the line "Bend your force to break, blow, and burn." Donne desires God to bend his force back on himself so that he, God, breaks and burns. Donne's self-hatred which arises, in this poem, from the absence of a narcissistic love with God, erupts
in a violence which shatters the boundaries of its intended direction (against Donne), to include the unresponsive and unloving God.

The sonnet describes a fierce love-hate relationship. Donne hates himself for not loving God enough, but he also hates God for not loving him enough. In the final image of rape Donne conflates the love of the sexual act with the hatred involved in physical violation to project upon God the ambivalence of his own soul. While he loves and desires God enough to imagine their union as a ravishment in the sense of being filled with ecstasy or delight, he hates and resents him enough to cast him in the role of violent rapist.

Donne, who desires both to love and be loved with *eros*, has difficulty in accepting the Protestant view of the nature of God's love as *agape*. It is hard for him to realize that he cannot simply substitute God for his wife or mistress and love him in the way that he loved them, that his love for God must be a response, rather than an active courtship. But it is even more difficult for him to accept, once he has taken on the traditionally feminine role of the beloved, that God's love is not motivated by his own merit or desirability, as a man's love for a woman is. Donne's difficulties in relating to God's *agape* result in most of the Holy Sonnets expressing fear rather than love.

**Herbert**

Herbert is much more engaged in the process of loving than Donne is. Critical attention has reflected this fact, responding in detail to the treatment of love in *The Temple*, partly as a result of Rosamond Tuve's influential 1959 essay, "George Herbert
and *Caritas,* in which she states: "Herbert, like ourselves but certainly more deliberately, faced a whole set of questions concerned with love of God in relation to love of self -- *amore Dei* and *amor sui*" (169). While Elizabeth Stambler argues that *The Temple* "resembles a volume of courtly love poetry" (329) with Herbert as the lover who woos God, Helen Gardner sees Herbert as the one who is wooed:

> But, as Professor Tuve pointed out in a brilliant paper on "George Herbert and *Caritas,*" if we are going to speak of the religious poems of the seventeenth century as love poems addressed to God, they must be recognized to be love poems of a very curious kind. For, whereas in most love poetry it is the wooer who speaks and pleads with his mistress to reward his loving service and love him in return, here the speaker is not pleading to be loved and protesting his own loyalty and service. He is, and has been, and knows that he is, and has been, loved. . . . The seventeenth-century poet rarely attempts to follow the medieval poets in presenting the love of God directly in the wooing of man's soul. He prefers to present the wooed rather than the wooer; and the wooed is often reluctant and unwilling and ungracious. (Religion and Literature 183)

Whereas Gardner assumes that most seventeenth-century religious poems describe a theocentric *agape* relationship, I argue that many of the most powerful poems by Donne and Herbert, as well as those by Rossetti and Hopkins, express an anthropocentric *eros* quite similar to that found in secular love poetry. Richard Strier also draws on Tuve, arguing that her emphasis on George Herbert's celebration of *agape* proves the extent of Herbert's Protestantism, and glancing at ambivalence in his commentary on Herbert's "Confession" when he writes: "Man . . . constantly uses his ingenuity to create a place where he can be happily 'curved in upon himself,' free from the demanding attentiveness of God's love" (33). My approach to Herbert and love is perhaps closest to that of Arnold Stein who argues that Herbert's poetry illustrates both "a movement away from love, an effort to escape" and "a movement toward, aiming to force love" (120). Like Stein, I concentrate
on Herbert's ambivalence, demonstrating how he expresses both happiness and despair as
the lover of God through *eros*, both gratitude and resentment as the beloved object of
God's *agape*.

The love of "The Starre" is pure *eros*; God does not make any move of love
towards the poet, but exists at a height, at a distance, surrounded by stars, as the supreme
object of desire and admiration. That Herbert is writing in the tradition of *eros*-love is
also signalled here by the simultaneous moves on the part of the speaker towards
aestheticism and asceticism. Nygren describes *eros* as having "a markedly aesthetic
character. It is the beauty of the Divine that attracts the eye of the soul and sets its love in
motion. Hence 'beholding,' 'contemplation,' 'vision,' are important words in the sphere of
Eros" (223). It is certainly the beauty of the vision of God's face surrounded by stars
which Herbert dwells upon at the beginning of the poem:

Bright spark, shot from a brighter place,
Where beams surround my Saviours face,
Canst thou be any where
So well as there? (1-4)

Herbert's appreciation of the star is decidedly aesthetic in character.

Paradoxically, perhaps, *eros* is ascetic, as well as aesthetic, in nature. Nygren
declares that "the ethics of Eros tend to be of an ascetic character. Evil lies in the
downward direction, looking towards the things of sense, while good lies in the upward
direction, towards things spiritual," while for *agape*, "Sin has nothing essentially to do
with the bodily or sensual nature. Sin is the perversion of the will, ungodliness,
disobedience to God; it is man's self-centred rebellion against God" (223). Herbert
reveals the ascetic nature of his love when he asks the star to purge him of sin:
First with thy fire-work burn to dust
Folly, and worse than folly, lust:
Then with thy light refine,
And make it shine:

So disengag'd from sinne and sicknesse,
Touch it with thy celestial quicknesse,
That it may hange and move
After thy love. (9-16)

Whereas agape considers evil to be a matter of the will, Herbert's immersion in the eros-motif in this poem allows him to call lust (a sin of the body) worse than folly (a sin of the intellect or spirit). His asceticism is also behind his equation of sin with sickness, and his desire to become bodiless in imitation of the star's celestial quickness. He looks upward, towards the spiritual stars with their "trinitie[s] of light, / Motion, and heat" (17-18), rejecting the material heaviness of his sinful body.

Yet the fires of asceticism do not burn away the poet's aesthetic appreciation. He imagines his adoration of God as a rather sensual dance:

That so among the rest I may
Glitter, and curle, and winde as they:
That winding is their fashion
Of adoration. (25-28)

And the poem ends on an image of satiety, satisfaction, and sweetness:

Sure thou wilt joy, by gaining me
To fly home like a laden bee
Unto that hive of beams
And garland-streams. (29-32)

Herbert has not banished sensuality, but translated it to a higher plane, the usual result of the tension between aestheticism and asceticism in eros. Indulging in eros-love is its own reward in "The Starre." Herbert achieves narcissism simply by revelling in the pleasure
of his own desire.

"The Glance" also celebrates Christian narcissism, but in this poem Herbert plays the role of the beloved rather than the lover. He responds to God's love with delight and pleasure partly because he has skillfully incorporated in that love aspects of both eros and agape. The first stanza contains some of the most erotic lines Herbert ever wrote:

When first thy sweet and gracious eye
Vouchsaf'd ev'n in the midst of youth and night
To look upon me, who before did lie
    Welring in sinne;
I felt a sugred strange delight,
Passing all cordials made by any art,
    Bedew, embalme, and overrunne my heart,
And take it in. (1-8)

Although Herbert's response to God is entirely one of surrender to God's love, he describes that surrender not as an act of faith and obedience, but as a reaction to erotic seduction. I do not mean to argue that the poem slips over into the eros-motif entirely by endowing God with what Nygren would term downward directed desire. It is clear that God "vouchsafes" his glance of his own free will, and that Herbert, "weltring in sinne," is hardly the object to provoke desire in anyone. As Richard Strier says of "The Glance": "This is agape, unmotivated by its object, and transforming it" (134). But Herbert's response is to feel as if he has been looked at with desire. In a way, God tricks him into love.

His enchanted response to God's agape allows Herbert to feel strong and centred in a narcissistic love. In the second stanza he describes how "many a bitter storm" (9) and "surging griefs" (15) attack his sense of self, but are vanquished by his knowledge that God loves him:
But still thy sweet original joy  
Sprung from thine eye, did work within my soul,  
And surging griefs, when they grew bold, controll,  
And got the day. (13-16)

Because God loves him, he need not shatter under the pressure of his own self-destructive passions. This narcissism is fully sustained by the loving look between God and poet, that will blossom from glance to gaze after death: "When thou shalt look us out of pain" (21). Looking, like Narcissus, at his divine reflection, or rather having that reflection look at him, allows Herbert to love himself and feel immune to the storm and surging passions which threaten to shatter his psychic unity.

The speaker of "The Dawning" moves, or attempts to move, from self-hate to self-love by means of God's love for him. The "sad heart" (1) whom Herbert addresses, suffers from a religious melancholy that can only accept Christ's death, not his resurrection, like the Kristevaan viewer of Holbein's "The Dead Christ" (Black Sun 107-38): "But thou dost still lament, and pine, and crie; / And feel his death, but not his victorie" (7-8). The depressed speaker can only move to joy and hence self-love by means of a narcissistic relationship with Christ. He must give up the security of his solipsistic depressive state, opening himself up to God's love: "Unfold thy forehead gather'd into frowns" (3), and must look up to gaze upon Christ: "Take up thine eyes, which feed on earth" (2), rejecting the non-reflective surface of the earth for the reflecting face of God (what else would he see when he looks "up" but the risen Christ?). The love the risen Christ is offering here is clearly agape; no one would find such a depressive person, such a "wet blanket," desirable in his own right. The final image, that of drying tearful eyes on Christ's burial cloth, indicates the claustrophobia of the narcissistic
relationship the depressed heart seeks with Christ:

> Arise, arise;
> And with his burial-linen drie thine eyes:
> Christ left his grave-clothes, that we might, when grief
> Draws tears, or bloud, not want a handkerchief. (13-16)

One "buries" one's face in a handkerchief, an image of suffocation which is likely to be increased if that handkerchief is the size of a shroud. Herbert transforms Jesus into the narcissistic mother, enveloping her crying child in swaddling clothes and holding it close to her breast. Herbert's vision of narcissism in this poem is inextricably entwined with death.

"Unkindnesse," "Mattens," "Even-song," "Deniall," and "Longing" are five examples of poems where Herbert expresses hostility towards God. In the first Herbert ruefully recognizes his hostility, while in the following two his anger is disguised, even unconscious, since it arises from a resentment towards God's love. In "Deniall" and "Longing" Herbert openly reproaches God for not showing him enough love.

"Unkindnesse" acknowledges the perversity of human nature which makes the beloved scorn and reject the lover. Herbert recognizes that he treats those friends who mistreat him much better than he treats the God who loves him. The final stanza alerts us to the reason behind Herbert's rejection of God:

> Yet can a friend what thou hast done fulfill?
> O write in brasse, My God upon a tree
>  His bloud did spill
>  Onely to purchase my good-will.
> Yet use I not my foes, as I use Thee. (21-25)

It is because of, not in spite of, God's sacrifice on his behalf, that Herbert treats God as his worst enemy. The agape of the cross puts too great a burden on him, and his guilt and
sense of obligation result in the opposite of gratitude.

In "Mattens" the hostility towards God's agape lies beneath the surface of the text, easily missed on a first reading, and yet undeniably present in the ambiguity of the language. The first stanza is a prime example of such ambiguity. It appears as if Herbert is praising the solicitousness of God's love:

I cannot ope mine eyes,  
But thou art ready there to catch  
My morning-soul and sacrifice:  
Then we must needs for that day make a match. (1-4)

And indeed he is thankful for this love, but it is a gratitude that co-exists with exasperation and resentment. The first two lines could easily be rephrased as "I can't even turn around without falling over you!" while the verb "catch" suggests that God is the hunter and Herbert his prey. The use of verbs of necessity in "must needs" also suggests that Herbert is compelled, not willing, to have God love him. The tone of the third stanza is similarly ambiguous:

My God, what is a heart,  
That thou shouldst it so eye, and wooe,  
Powring upon it all thy art,  
As if that thou hadst nothing els to do? (9-12)

Herbert seems to be running down himself here, but implied in the low valuation of the human heart is scorn for the God who wants it so much. "Don't you have anything better

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12 Tuve comments upon the pervasiveness of gratitude in The Temple: "gratitude is in these poems the primary constituent of man's love for God. It is far more ubiquitous than an emphasis upon desire for . . . rest or peace in God, or upon hope of ultimate full happiness, or upon mystical union" ("Herbert and Caritas" 184; Tuve's emphasis). The obligation of being constantly grateful, an obligation laid upon those Protestants who stressed God's agape, is likely to result, in my opinion, in occasional moments of weariness and resentment.
to do?" Herbert asks, raising the suspicion that he might be denigrating himself in an
effort to get God to leave him alone, the way some people break up with their lovers by
announcing, "You are far too good for me anyway." Herbert cannot accept God's agape,
the disinterested love unmotivated by any worth in its object. And it is clear to him that
God cannot love with eros, since the human heart is so undesirable. In the last stanza
Herbert betrays his desire to love God in a more active, eros-centred way than by
surrendering quietly to God's agape:

Teach me thy love to know;
That this new light, which now I see,
May both the work and workman show:
Then by a sunne-beam I will climb to thee. (17-20)

Herbert desires to ascend to God's height and light just as he does in "The Starre." But as
a good Protestant, and the author of "The Holdfast," he knows that such climbing is not
for him. He is faced with a love that demands his full surrender, and yet does not allow
him to act on his own initiative, nor flatter his vanity and invest in his narcissism. No
wonder he cannot help a note of ambivalence creeping into his hymn of praise for God.

"Even-song" reacts to God's agape by turning the poet's hostility upon himself.
The first eight lines praise God for his goodness, his agape. The speaker then proceeds to
ask what return he has made to God, and concludes that his response was wholly
inadequate.

I ranne; but all I brought, was fome.
    Thy diet, care, and cost
Do end in bubbles, balls of winde;
    Of winde to thee whom I have crost,
But balls of wilde-fire to my troubled minde. (12-16)

Guilt and self-hate cause Herbert to think of himself as wind and foam, without centre or
solidity. This sense of the self falling apart and losing all coherence brings to mind Kristeva's description of idealization: "Its Highness the Ego . . . shatters into pieces and is engulfed" (Tales 6-7). Herbert's solution to his own inadequacy is to surrender himself to God's agape, as a child surrenders itself to its mother's love:

Yet still thou goest on.
And now with darknesse closest wearie eyes,
   Saying to man, It doth suffice:
   Henceforth repose; your work is done.
   Thus in thy ebony box
   Thou dost inclose us, till the day
   Put our amendment in our way,
   And give new wheels to our disorder'd clocks.

I muse, which shows more love,
The day or night: that is the gale, this th'harbour;
   That is the walk, and this the arbour;
   Or that the garden, this the grove.
   My God, thou art all love
   Not one poore minute scapes thy breast,
   But brings a favour from above;
   And in this love, more then in bed, I rest. (17-32)

Herbert successfully makes the move from idealization to narcissism. He learns to "rest" in God's love. But for once I disagree with Helen Vendler who argues, "Like all the greatest of Herbert's late poems, ['Even-song'] is a poem of final self-acceptance" (161). The imagery associated with this narcissistic self-acceptance suggests that all may not be well. When God turns motherly he (or she, rather) "closest wearie eyes," and "incloses" the poet and others in his "ebony box" of night, gathering the poet's fragmented self and pulling him in tight and safe into an enclosed space. That "box" is like both the womb, or
breast, of the mother, and like a coffin. This linking of the mother's embrace with death recalls Donne's "Hymne to Christ at the author's last going into Germany," a poem I discussed in chapter two.

God's love therefore incites the poet first to idealization and self-hate and then to narcissism and self-love. But narcissism, associated with the feminine in both Freud and Kristeva, takes its name from the young man who died from loving himself too much. The narcissistic mother and child relationship can be smothering and annihilating, according to Kristeva: "The jubilatory vanishing of identity at the heart of a nostalgic love for a maternal embrace is nevertheless felt by the adult as a loss, even as a mortal danger" (Tales 223). Herbert's imagery unconsciously suggests that giving into God's agape can result in the death of the self.

Herbert writes many poems in which his frustrated eros-love results in hostility towards God, himself, or both. Rosamond Tuve is surely wrong when she says that "Herbert is so entirely convinced and aware of a boundless love received from the one he loves that this is a datum in the most unhappy, the most tormented of poems" (178). Unhappy and tormented poems in which Herbert does not seem convinced of God's love include: "Deniall," "Longing," "Affliction (I)," "The Search," "Sighs and Grones," and

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13 Gene Veith places "Even-song" in its Reformation context by stressing the Lutheran concept of resting in God that lies behind it: "Luther distinguishes between 'active righteousness,' that of the law, and 'passive righteousness,' in which the believer simply allows Christ to work in him. 'Resting in Christ' is difficult, since the self perversely insists upon law, desiring to be justified through its own efforts, bearing its own guilt" (Reformation Spirituality 77). The difficulty of achieving such a passivity, when activity is so much more attractive, could be likened to a spiritual death, a death to the old sinful self.
"Affliction (IV)." I shall only look at the first two of these.

"Denial" revolves around eros-love and its frustrations. Herbert desperately tries to reach a God who is either indifferent, absent, or both. Herbert does all the work and all the suffering. The first stanza, for example, shows him turning to the imagery of military aggression in an effort to take God by storm:

When my devotions could not pierce
    Thy silent ears;
Then was my heart broken, as was my verse:
    My breast was full of fears
    And disorder. (1-5)

The result of God's silence before Herbert's desire is an idealizing love on Herbert's part. He falls completely to pieces:

My bent thoughts, like a brittle bow,
    Did flie asunder:
Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,
    Some to the warres and thunder
    Of alarms. (6-10)

And Herbert points out that it is not just his ego that is shattered, but his language, his poetry: "Then was my heart broken, as was my verse" (3). He cannot make his lines rhyme. In Black Sun, Kristeva considers the difficulty depressed people have in using language, describing depression in terms that exactly approximate the sentiments expressed in "Denial":

The linguistic signifier, which was a seeming, is then swept away by the disturbances like a sea wall by ocean breakers. . . . My sadness affect is the ultimate yet mute witness to my having, in spite of all, lost the archiac Thing of omnipotent ascendancy. That sadness is the final filter of aggressiveness, the narcissistic restraint of a hatred that is unacknowledged. . . . (64; Kristeva's emphasis)

Herbert's hatred of God is unacknowledged, resulting in his sadness and the collapse of
his verse (linguistic signifiers). Herbert turns his hatred towards God into self-pity, a
form of narcissistic sadness:

As good go any where, they say,
    As to benumme
Both knees and heart, in crying night and day,
    *Come, come, my God, O come,*
    But no hearing. (11-15)

This assertion of his own righteousness is followed by an indignant attack on God's
unreasonableness:

    O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
    To crie to thee,
    And then not heare it crying! (16-18)

We begin to get the sense that maybe this perverse God is not worth all this love and
suffering.

Herbert's sense that he is not loved with *eros* results in the imagery of sexual
impotence in the fifth stanza:

    Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
        Unturi'd, unstrung:
My feeble spirit, unable to look right,
    Like a nipt blossom, hung
    Discontented. (21-25)

Like the Petrarchan lady, God withholds his favours, refusing to grant Herbert's requests.
Like the Petrarchan lover, Herbert seems much more loving, and more worthy of being
loved, than the object of his desire.

*Eros* fails Herbert again in "Longing," which begins with the image of the
desperate poet looking up to God for help that never arrives:

    With sick and famisht eyes,
    With doubling knees and weary bones,
To thee my cries,  
To thee my grones,  
To thee my sighs, my tears ascend:  
No end? (1-6)

Herbert's tears ascend in the way of *eros*, but he is unable to ascend with them, to reach his goal. And no love descends from God in the way of *agape*. Herbert tries to force God into engaging in a narcissistic relationship with the poet by playing the mother and child card again:

> From thee all pitie flows,  
> Mothers are kinde, because thou art,  
> And dost dispose  
> To them a part:  
> Their infants, them; and they suck thee  
> More free. (13-18)

God refuses to indulge Herbert in this way, provoking a real outburst of undisguised hate on the poet's part:

> Thou tarriest, while I die,  
> And fall to nothing, thou dost reign,  
> And rule on high,  
> While I remain  
> In bitter grief: yet am I stil'd  
> Thy childe. (55-60)

God's neglect of his child is certainly met with bitterness. This hate results in part from the idealizing love of the poet which is signalled by his description of himself as fragmented and abject:

> Behold, thy dust doth stirre,  
> It moves, it creeps, it aims at thee:  
> Wilt thou deferre  
> To succour me,  
> Thy pile of dust, wherein each crumme  
> Sayes, Come? (37-42)
Lord Jesu, heare my heart,
Which hath been broken now so long,
    That ev'ry part
    Hath got a tongue!
Thy beggars grow; rid them away
To day. (73-78)

Herbert's reliance on eros leads him into idealization, bitter anger at God (note the slightly threatening tone of "Behold, thy dust doth stirre, / It moves, it creeps, it aims at thee" (37-38)), and total scorn for himself. Diana Benet points out how the poet's unrequited love results in a "sense of incoherence," a fragmentation that recalls Kristeva's description of idealization: "Literally, his center does not hold: eyes, knees, bones, heart, soul, and other members break their silence to proclaim their individual agony" (55). The poem ends on a more pessimistic note than "Deniall" which seems to come to some sort of peace with the final hopeful vision that God will respond:

    That so thy favours granting my request,
        They and my minde may chime,
        And mend my ryme. (28-30).

The final plea of "Longing," by contrast, revolves around a much less optimistic rhyme:

    Pluck out thy dart,
        And heal my troubled breast which cryes,
        Which dyes. (82-84)

If "Deniall" ends on a rhyme, "Longing" ends with a death. Herbert's bitter complaint against God has to wait until the first line of the following poem, "Away despair! my gracious Lord doth heare" ("The Bag"), for any response. "Longing," considered as an autonomous text, is one of the darkest indictments against God in The Temple.

While Herbert is certainly more comfortable than Donne in being the object of God's agape, his treatment of the love between God and the soul is not restricted to this
one position, as it perhaps should have been were he the strict Lutheran-Calvinist Protestant that some critics have called him. Instead, Herbert explores his experiences of both loving and being loved, of both *agape* and *eros*, of both love and hate.

**Rossetti**

Rossetti is decidedly happier when she figures the relationship between herself and God as one of *eros*. The pervasive presence of The Song of Solomon in her religious lyrics testify to her desire to figure her relationship with God in the terms not only of *eros*, but of the erotic. If she feels God fails her in his relationship as lover, a repressed hatred is the result. While the poems which express God's *eros* also express blissful happiness, her reactions to God's *agape* are more ambivalent, resulting in both love and hate.

Rossetti's short lyric, "Lord, what have I that I may offer Thee?" (II 192-93), and her "Advent Sunday" (II 211-21) both dramatize the Christian's realization that she can love herself because God loves her. In the first poem, God's love is clearly *agape*, since Rossetti stresses her inadequacies as an object of desire:

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Lord, what have I that I may offer Thee?
Look, Lord, I pray Thee, and see.--

What is it thou hast got?
Nay, child, what is it thou hast not?
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14 A. D. Nuttall is one of those who stress Herbert's Calvinism, but his hypothesis that "The great suppression of moral hostility to God under Calvinism may have been far more violent psychically, than the nineteenth-century suppression of sexuality charted by Freud" (91) provides one way of reconciling the Protestantism of both Donne and Herbert with their ambivalence towards God's *agape*. 
Thou hast all gifts that I have given to thee:
Offer them all to Me,
The great ones and the small,
I will accept them one and all.--

I have a will, good Lord, but it is marred;
A heart both crushed and hard:
Not such as these the gift
Clean-handed lovely saints uplift.--

Nay, child, but wilt thou judge for Me?
I crave not thine, but thee.--

Ah, Lord, Who loveth me!
Such as I have now give I Thee.

The poem is very similar to Herbert's "Dialogue," but with a more positive, less ambiguous ending. Rossetti is truly accepting and happy, not broken hearted like Herbert, at God's insistent love for her. Through the poem she protests that she has nothing to offer God except "a heart both crushed and hard" (10). She can only conceive of being the object of an eros-love, one based on the desirability of the object. And since she knows she has nothing that could attract God's desire, she knows she cannot be lovable. But God tells Rossetti that his love makes her lovable: "Thou hast all the gifts that I have given to thee" (5). By accepting her status as a worthless object made worthy of God's love by God's love, Rossetti simultaneously turns her back on vanity and pride, and allows herself to be loved, thus entering into narcissism. "Such as I have now give I thee" (16), she declares, accepting her low value in the objective scale of things ("such as

15 Herbert's "Dialogue" ends with the lines:

That as I did freely part
With my glorie and desert
Left all joyes to feel all smart--
   Ah! no more: thou breaks't my heart. (29-32)
I have"), and yet knowing that the gift of herself will be welcome to God.

Where "Lord, what have I that I may offer thee?" dwells on divine agape, "Advent Sunday" (II 211-12) celebrates God's eros:

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go ye out
With lighted lamps and garlands round about
To meet Him in a rapture with a shout.

It may be at the midnight, black as pitch,
Earth shall cast up her poor, cast up her rich.

It may be at the crowing of the cock
Earth shall upheave her depth, uproot her rock.

For lo, the Bridegroom fetcheth home the Bride:
His Hands are Hands she knows, she knows His Side.

Like pure Rebekah at the appointed place,
Veiled, she unveils her face to meet His Face.

Like great Queen Esther in her triumphing,
She triumphs in the Presence of her King.

His Eyes are as a Dove's, and she's Dove-eyed;
He knows His lovely mirror, sister, Bride.

He speaks with Dove-voice of exceeding love,
And she with love-voice of an answering Dove.

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go we out
With lamps ablaze and garlands round about
To meet Him in a rapture with a shout.

The poem is inspired, like so much of Rossetti's religious poetry, by the Song of Solomon, a text which Kristeva posits as profoundly narcissistic: "The hymn of love at once confesses its source, its object, and its addressee--Solomon the king, at the same time author and loved one, is also the one to whom the text is addressed" (Tales 88). The narcissism of "Advent Sunday" makes its appearance at lines 8-9: "For lo, the
Bridegroom fetcheth home the Bride: / His Hands are Hands she knows, she knows His Side." The bride-soul knows the Christ-bridegroom's hands and side not only in the sense of savoir, knowing them as a fact revealed in scripture, but also in the sense of connaître, recognizing them as objects she has always been aware of. This familiarity results from the mirroring relationship between Christ and soul. The bride unveils slowly, as in a "recognition scene" from drama:

Like pure Rebekah at the appointed place,
Veiled, she unveils her face to meet His Face.

Like great Queen Esther in her triumphing,
She triumphs in the Presence of her King. (10-13)

The recognition between the two is the recognition of one's own reflection: "His Eyes are as a Dove's, and she's Dove-eyed; / He knows His lovely mirror, sister, Bride" (14-15).

To emphasize the mirror relationship, Rossetti uses the rhetorical device of chiasmus in lines 14-17. Christ is unmistakably Narcissus here: not only does he gaze lovingly at a bride-mirror (mirror-bride), he also speaks to an Echo, the "love-voice of an answering Dove." Rossetti takes Christ's narcissism as a justification for the soul's self-love. The poem celebrates the soul's eros-love for God, God's eros-love for the soul, and the narcissism of both. God clearly functions in this poem as the subject's ideal reflection. Being the subject of God's eros allows for a self-love of an ecstatic, auto-erotic nature.

Rossetti gazes at herself gazing at herself with delight. There are more mirrors in "Advent Sunday" than she consciously intended to create.

16 Rossetti might also have intended the sense of carnal knowledge. The bride "knows" the bridegroom in the Biblical sense.
From three poems celebrating love, I now turn to three poems which express hate.

"Out of the Deep" (III 285) shows Rossetti responding to God's *agape* with self-hatred.

The octave of this sonnet is given over to blaming God for being absent, for making the speaker feel alone and unloved:

> Have mercy, Thou my God; mercy, my God:
> For I can hardly bear life day by day:
> Be I here or there I fret myself away:
> Lo for Thy staff I have but felt Thy rod
> Along this tedious desert path long trod.
> When will Thy judgement judge me, Yea or Nay?
> I pray for grace; but then my sins unpray
> My prayer: on holy ground I fool stand shod. (1-8)

But the sestet reveals that it is not God's love that is wanting after all, but the poet's:

> While still Thou hauntst me, faint upon the cross,
> A sorrow beyond sorrow in Thy look,
> Unutterable craving for my soul.
> All faithful Thou, Lord: I, not Thou, forsook
> Myself; I traitor slunk back from the goal:
> Lord, I repent; help Thou my helpless loss. (9-14)

The movement of the sonnet is the exact opposite of Donne's "As due by many titles." He begins with a loving and demanding God, admits he betrayed himself, then suddenly accuses God of leaving him at the mercy of the enemy. Rossetti begins by accusing God of having no mercy upon her, before admitting that it was she who "forsook / Myself," and shrinking before the *agape* God offers her. This *agape* is a burden of guilt upon her.

The words "haunts'tt" and "craving" are surely weighted somewhat negatively in the stanza, suggesting the reluctance of the poet to surrender herself to this demanding love.

She cannot expiate her guilt by matching God's love for her. Not only can she not love him as much as he loves her; she cannot even love herself as much as he loves her: "I, not
Thou, forsook / Myself; I traitor slunk back from the goal." Her love for God is clearly idealization: she measures her love against his, finds her own wanting, and experiences a shattering of her ego, expressed in the lines "I fret myself away" and "I pray for grace; but then my sins unpray / My prayer."

If Rossetti responds to God's eros with love and his agape with self-hatred, she responds to his apparent lack of love for her with hatred of him. But since she cannot express her hostility to God openly, the most powerful instances of her resentment appear disguised in the form of her apparently secular narrative poems, Goblin Market and The Prince's Progress, rather than in her devotional lyrics. In both these poems Rossetti constructs an seemingly clear Christian allegory, which is underlaid by a subversion of the Christian story.

Goblin Market has, since its publication, been read as an allegory of the fall and redemption of humanity. Several critics have seen Lizzie as a female Christ, and have often gone on to interpret her gender as part of a feminist agenda on Rossetti's part. Marian Shalkhauser, writing in 1956, identifies Lizzie as Christ and Laura as "Adam-Eve and consequently all of sinful mankind" (19), concluding her brief study with the statement that Rossetti created "a Christian fairy tale in which a feminine Christ redeems a feminine mankind from a masculine Satan" (20). Shalkhauser does not explicitly draw a feminist moral here, but Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt, who makes reference to Shalkhauser's reading, does: "there appears within the work a conscious effort to turn biblical and Miltonic myth with its misogynistic intent, into heroic affirmation of the female, Christ-like principle of loving self-sacrifice and creative self-assertion through rebirth or
resurrection" (41). Other critics who see Lizzie as a female Christ include Angela
Leighton, who reads the poem as a "religious allegory, of a tempted Eve who becomes a
saintly Christ" (138), and Linda H. Peterson who reads the poem in terms of typology:
"Although Rossetti's tale may not reproduce typology strictly, her poem does operate
within--and extend--a recognizable typological mode in that an individual woman
reiterates, through a selfless act of sacrifice, Christ's life. Lizzie becomes a correlative
type, in Barbara Lewalski's terminology, as she repeats Christ's sacrifice. . . . Rossetti
does not introduce a male figure to save Laura" (219-20). In their concentration upon
Lizzie's femaleness, these critics join others who see the poem as a feminist celebration of
sisterhood.

I believe that the focus on Lizzie as female obscures the fact that she is, first and
foremost, human. It is not the fact that she is a female Christ-figure that is audacious, but
the fact that she is a human one. I suggest that Lizzie represents Adam rather than Christ,
and that Goblin Market is a blasphemous rewriting of the Genesis myth, one which
presents humanity saving itself, without need of God. To recast Shalkhauser's formula,
then, I read Goblin Market as an atheist fairy-tale in which a human Adam (Lizzie)
redeems a human Eve (Laura), without the aid of God, and I believe that Rossetti wrote it
as a submerged, perhaps unconscious, act of hostility and anger towards a God that she
felt did not love her.

The key to my reading is a focus on Goblin Market as a retelling of Paradise Lost
rather than of Genesis. Most critics, in focussing on the Bible, have neglected to see how
closely Rossetti follows Milton and how radically she departs from him. Gilbert and
Gubar refer to only one scene of *Paradise Lost*, that of Eve's eating of the apple in Book IX (567-68). Shurbutt does draw some parallels, but not in any depth. D. M. R. Bentley is far more intensive in making connections between the two texts, and in fact identifies the key aspect of *Paradise Lost* which Rossetti rewrites: "As Lizzie watches Laura's spiritual and physical decline, her sympathy for her sister prompts her to consider sharing her sorry plight (ll. 299-301), a road that, if taken, would have seen her following in Adam's footsteps after the fall of Eve, and, in effect, letting all go by placing human love above spiritual duty" (73). Lizzie's refusal to fall with her sister, in the way that Adam falls, in more ways than one, for Eve, is the most important moment in Rossetti's rewriting of *Paradise Lost*. In effect, Rossetti leaves God no role in the redemption of humanity; her celebration of human love hides a rejection of divine love.

That Rossetti had pondered on the possibility of Adam refusing to accompany Eve into sin is shown in her poem "Eve" (I 156-58), in which the forlorn mother of mankind bemoans her husband's fate:

Hadst thou but said me nay,
Adam, my brother,
I might have pined away;
I, but none other:
God might have let thee stay
Safe in our garden,
By putting me away
Beyond all pardon. (18-25)

This poem, composed some five and a half years after *Goblin Market*, transforms Adam and Eve into siblings, just as the earlier poem does, with the difference that Lizzie and Laura are sisters, Adam and Eve brother and sister. Lizzie represents Adam nonetheless, departing from him only in saying "nay" to Laura, as can be seen from a reading of the
The poem begins with the sisters facing temptation together, but separates them almost immediately. Laura's failure to accompany Lizzie out of the glen at twilight echoes Eve's ill-fated decision to wander away from Adam in Book IX of Paradise Lost. As Adam says (and as any twentieth-century viewer of horror films knows), bad things happen when people split up: "But other doubt possesses me, least harm / Befall thee sever'd from me" (251-52). Or as Sean Grass puts it, the separation of the sisters is "a situation that we feel inevitably leads to Laura's fall" (364), just as, I would argue, we feel the inevitability of Eve's fall in her separation from Adam.

At this point in the poem the goblins are described:

One had a cat's face,
One whisked a tail,
One tramped at a rat's pace,
One crawled like a snail,
One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry. (71-76)

Shurbutt compares the goblins to "Milton's serpent before being cursed by [God] to slither forever legless," (41), but to me they bring to mind both the animals who appear "frisking" (340) before Adam and Eve in Book IV, (also, incidentally, in the evening, and beside a stream):

Sporting the Lion rampd, and in his paw
Dandl'd the Kid; Bears, Tygers, Ounces, Pards
Gambold before them, th'unweildy Elephant
To make them mirth us'd all his might, and wreathd
His Lithe Proboscis; (343-47)

17 Bentley also points to "Eve," commenting that "it is tempting to see in both 'Eve' and Goblin Market a residue of the Romantic penchant for writing Milton" (73, n. 35).
and, much more significantly, the multifarious society of devils in Hell, as they appear in Book X, a collection of different snakes and serpents, writhing and tumbling in what might easily be called a "hurry skurry":

\begin{verbatim}
dreadful was the din
Of hissing through the Hall, thick swarming now
With complicated monsters, head and taile,
Scorpion and Asp, and Amphibana dire,
Cerastes hornd, Hydrus, and Ellops drear,
And Dipsas . . . (521-26)
\end{verbatim}

The goblins, then, recall the Edenic animals in their comic, endearing quality, and in their variety, while resembling the devils in the way their physical grotesqueness mirrors their evil natures.

Lizzie eats the fruit offered by the goblins as Eve eats the fruit offered by Satan, and falls into despair. Jerome J. McGann, and Sean Grass after him, attempt to reject the reading of the poem as a Christian allegory by arguing that after eating the fruit Lizzie does not immediately suffer any evil consequences. McGann asks us to "Notice how tenderly Laura and Lizzie are presented together after Laura's 'fall'" ("Christina Rossetti's Poems" 249); while Grass states that: "The experience of eating the goblin fruit and the results of that experience mark the poem's most significant departure from the Genesis story, for Laura does not immediately suffer any consequences for her transgression. Unlike Adam and Eve, Laura is not overburdened with either a feeling of guilt . . . or a knowledge that she has done evil" (369). The poem may depart from Genesis at this point, but it most certainly does not depart from Milton. Adam and Eve, after eating the fruit in Book IX, suffer no immediate guilt, but instead make love, after which they fall asleep together:
Her hand he seis'd, and to a shadie bank,
Thick overhead with verdant roof imbowrd
He led her nothing loath; Flours were the Couch,
Pansies, and Violets, and Asphodel,
And Hyacinth, Earths freshest softest lap.
There they thir fill of Love and Loves disport
Took largely, of thir mutual guilt the Seale,
The solace of thir sin, till dewie sleep
Oppress'd them, wearied with thir amorous play. (1037-45)

Milton, in spite of stressing the sin involved in this lovemaking, nevertheless emphasizes the pleasure of it, among all the lovely flowers. It is only after they wake, as it is only after Laura awakes from her innocent sleep with her sister, that they feel oppressed by the sense of sin:

Soon as the force of that fallacious Fruit,
That with exhilerating vapour bland
About thir spirits had plaid, and inmost powers
Made erre, was now exhal'd, and grosser sleep
Bred of unkindly fumes, with consious dreams
Encumberd, now had left them, up they rose
As from unrest. . . . (1046-52)

When Laura wakes, she too is encumbered with "conscious dreams":

Early in the morning
When the first cock crowed his warning,
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetch'd in honey, milked the cows,
Aired and set to rights the house,
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
Talked as modest maidens should:
Lizzie with an open heart,
Laura in an absent dream,
One content, one sick in part;
One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
One longing for the night. (199-214)\textsuperscript{18}

Both Adam and Lizzie have to face the fall of their beloveds, but Rossetti departs from Milton's epic, by making Lizzie refuse the fruit and try to redeem Laura, a quest in which she triumphantly succeeds. On returning from the goblins, Lizzie calls to her sister in the notorious passage:

> She cried "Laura," up the garden,
> "Did you miss me?
> Come and kiss me.
> Never mind my bruises,
> Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
> Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
> Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
> Eat me, drink me, love me;
> Laura, make much of me:
> For your sake I have braved the glen
> And had to do with goblin merchant men." (464-74)

The eroticism of these lines has been much commented upon, of course, but no one has compared them to the passage in \textit{Paradise Lost} where Adam invites Eve to make love after eating the fruit:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste,}
\textit{And elegant, of Sapience no small part,}
\textit{Since to each meaning savour we apply,}
\textit{And Palate call judicious; I the praise}
\textit{Yeild thee, so well this day thou has purvey'd.}
\textit{Much pleasure we have lost, while we abstain'd}
\textit{From this delightful Fruit, nor known till now}
\textit{True relish, tasting; if such pleasure be}
\textit{In things to us forbidden, it might be wish'd,}
\textit{For this one Tree had bin forbidden ten.}
\textit{But come, so well refresh't, now let us play,}
\textit{As meet is, after such delicious Fare;}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} This passage also echoes Eve's dream in Book V, in which Satan tells her all about the glories of the night, the "pleasant time" (38-47).
For never did thy Beautie since the day
I saw thee first and wedded thee, adorn'd
With all perfections, so enflame my sense
With ardor to enjoy thee, fairer now
Than ever, bountie of this vertuous Tree. (IX 1017-1033)

Both couples embrace and kiss with lips still moist from the juice of forbidden fruit. The two passages are therefore linked by the equation of fruit with physical embraces, but differ in that Rossetti's eroticism is in the service of redemption, Milton's of the Fall.

The clear echoes of Milton in Rossetti's poem strongly suggest that she meant Lizzie to represent Adam rather than Christ. Why, then, did she make her Adam female? She could have had a brother-sister pair enacting the drama of Goblin Market, but decided against it, for, I believe, two important reasons. The first is that by having a brother save a sister, she would be making her Godless retelling of Milton and Genesis too obvious. The second is that she wished to avoid the complications of sexual love between male and female that Milton so vividly brought into play, choosing instead to symbolize humanity's redemption of itself through a non-sexual and universal love. Thus she rewrites the fallen sexual liaison between Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost as a physical, but non-sexual, embrace between sisters at the moment of redemption. Where Adam falls through eros, Lizzie redeems through agape.

It is ironic that Rossetti, writing within a cultural milieu which did not consciously recognize lesbian sexuality, is now read as expressing lesbian eroticism in this scene. To her, it must have seemed that the fact that she has two sisters embracing automatically precluded any hint of eroticism from the physical expression of love. Jerome McGann senses Rossetti's intentions when he writes that "the scene introduces a negative
fulfilment into the work: Laura is released from the spell of erotic illusions. . . For passion and erotics are substituted feeling and sympathy, and for men are substituted women and children, the 'little' ones of the earth" (249-250). While Milton makes Adam's sexual love for his wife humanity's downfall, Rossetti turns Lizzie's non-sexual love for her sister into humanity's redemption.

McGann argues against a Christian meaning for *Goblin Market* by pointing out that Rossetti never placed it among her "Devotional Poems" ("Christina Rossetti's Poems" 251), but if I am right in my reading, she obviously wished to disguise her radical rewriting of Milton in which the first Adam makes the second Adam obsolete and unnecessary. Dorothy Mermin, like McGann, reads the poem as a feminist celebration: "it is not a poem of bitter repression but rather a fantasy of feminine freedom, heroism, and self-sufficiency and a celebration of sisterly and maternal love" (108), an assessment with which I would have to disagree. *Goblin Market* is indeed a poem of bitter repression, but what is repressed is not sexual desire but anger and doubt towards a God who is not responsive to Rossetti's spiritual desire.19 *Goblin Market* is a fantasy, but of human, rather than feminine, freedom, heroism, and self-sufficiency.

Rossetti's resentment towards the God who neglects her is even more marked in *The Prince's Progress*. Critics have had a good deal more trouble relating this poem to Christian allegory than they have had with *Goblin Market*. As Dawn Henwood says in

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19 Mermin herself notes that "As in much of Rossetti's poetry and that of others in the Pre-Raphaelite circle, desire here has no end or final object" (108). Desire without an object, Rossetti would argue as a Christian, is desire that has not yet realized its fulfilment is in the divine. The free-floating, objectless desire of *Goblin Market* is Rossetti's own desire for God.
her recent analysis of the poem, it is "a text in which it is surprisingly difficult to gain a
critical foothold" (87). As Henwood argues, the poem takes a familiar Christian allegory,
that of Christ as the bridegroom to the soul, and distorts it out of all recognition. The
poem does not allow us to read either the Prince as Christ and the Princess as the soul, or
the Prince as the soul journeying to the Princess as Christ, while at the same time
irresistibly suggesting both of these interpretations. My reading of the poem is that
Rossetti employs a slippery and inconsistent allegory in order to disguise a suppressed,
perhaps repressed, anger at the divine bridegroom, Christ, who has not come for her.

_The Prince's Progress_ rewrites _The Song of Solomon_, a source that Rossetti
returns to often in her devotional lyrics, casting Christ as the Bridegroom and herself as
the Bride, in an ecstatic vision of the love she hopes to experience with God after death. I
have already examined two of these poems, "Thou, God, seest me" in chapter two, and
"Advent Sunday" above.

"Advent Sunday" (date of composition unknown), contains many similarities, in
fact, to _The Prince's Progress_. The almost identical first and last stanzas of the poem
describe the Bride's attendants (who, with their "lighted lamps" recall the ten wise
virgins), going out to greet the Bridegroom with a shout of joy:

> Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go ye out
> With lighted lamps and garlands round about
> To meet Him in a rapture with a shout. (1-3)

These attendants are mirrored negatively by the Bride's women in _The Prince's Progress_

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20 Mary Arsenau identifies in some detail these Biblical echoes, stressing the irony in
Rossetti's use of the allusions in her article, "Pilgrimage and Postponement: Christina
Rossetti's _The Prince's Progress_" (1994).
who go out to meet the Bridegroom with reproaches rather than rapture. The Bride of

"Advent Sunday" is both veiled and royal, like the Princess:

Like pure Rebakah at the appointed place,
Veiled, she unveils her face to meet His Face.

Like Great Queen Esther in her triumphing,
She triumphs in the presence of her King. (10-13)

These lines echo the stanza in *The Prince's Progress* in which the union of the two protagonists is imagined:

Fling the golden portals wide,
The Bridegroom comes to his promised Bride,
Draw the gold-stiff curtains aside,
   Let them look on each other's face,
She in her meekness, he in his pride--
   Day wears apace. (463-68)

The difference in the poems is that one marriage is consummated, the other is not. One is a poem of joy, the other of despair. They are both, however, very personal poems, in that Rossetti identifies her soul with the Bride in each case. Whereas "Advent Sunday" celebrates God's *eros*-love for her, *The Prince's Progress* castigates his failure to desire her.

Critics have of course noticed that the Prince is identified with the tradition of Christ as bridegroom, but few of them have known what to do with this discomforting fact. Linda Peterson comments that "At the beginning of the poem, Rossetti surrounds the Prince with so many biblical types and allusions that he seems--though only seems--to be a Christ figure" (220). Peterson does not attempt to explain why Rossetti should set the Prince up as a Christ figure and then make him so woefully inadequate to fill that role, except to say that Rossetti's use of negative typology serves to undercut "patriarchal
assumptions that male figures are the heroes" (220), but Rossetti is hardly likely to lump Christ in with the generic figure of the male hero. Nor is she likely to be absentminded in identifying the Prince with Christ and then somehow forgetting that she has done so. She is more likely to be blasphemous than careless. Henwood argues that both the Prince and the Princess shade in and out of representing Christ: "the poem's basic plot simultaneously invokes and distorts the Biblical myth of Christ's apocalyptic reunion with his cherished Bride, the Church" (87); "The Princess appears to embody, on one level, a female representation of Christ, the patient, grieving lover of the pilgrim soul" (88). At the same time, however, both figures also represent the Christian soul: "Thus it seems that both the Prince and the Princess are misguided seekers who represent two different attitudes towards the Christian crux of worldly experience" (91). Joan Rees also sees the two characters as representing different aspects of the human soul: "What the poem gives us . . . is a picture of two kinds of spiritual testing side by side: one test consists of a call to effort and the test is failed; one is a call to suppress normal human yearning and to

21 Henwood's reading of the Princess as morally compromised by the text springs partly from her assumption that the Bride represents the Church. Margaret Johnson also identifies the Bride as the Church:

the hero is Christ, coming to claim his bride the church. From this latter perspective, what would otherwise be little more than a moral tale becomes instead a critique of the apocalyptic myths concerning the second coming, and a criticism of Christ's dilatoriness in human time . . . the implications of such a reading appear to go against the tenor of Rossetti's belief. (109-10)

But the Song of Solomon has been traditionally read two different ways: in one, the Bride symbolizes the Church, but in the other she represents the individual soul, and it is clearly the second tradition that Rossetti writes from in her devotional lyrics. The Prince's Progress is not a criticism of a lukewarm Anglican Church which neglects its duty to actively seek God, but a heartfelt description of Rossetti's own feelings of spiritual barrenness and helplessness as she patiently awaits God's grace.
live and die in hard-won patience" (69). While I agree with Henwood that both figures move from divine to human roles, I cannot find in her account a convincing explanation of why Rossetti would be so impious, or careless, as to allow the Prince to suggest Christ so strongly, and yet fail so miserably to measure up to him. My explanation of the Prince's disturbing failure to fulfil his role as Christ is that Rossetti was angry at God, seeing herself as the patient, suffering Princess, whom he does not arrive to rescue, and that her anger and resentment led her into disguised blasphemy.22

One parallel between the Prince and Christ which has not been noticed, probably because it is so blasphemous, is the way in which the Prince's quest mirrors Christ's temptation in the wilderness. Both Christ and the Prince undergo three temptations. Christ resists all three, while his distorting mirror, the Prince, succumbs each time. For each, the first temptation involves sustenance. Jesus fasts "forty days and forty nights" (Matt 4:2) before the devil tempts him with bread, a temptation he refuses. The Prince, on the other hand, has "journeyed at least a mile" (59) before he accepts a drink of milk from the milkmaid, who is clearly the devil in disguise, as intimated by both the apple tree she lolls beneath, and the "shining serpent-coils" of her hair in which she ensnares the Prince.

22 Here I depart very far from Henwood who reads Rossetti's description of the Prince as indulgent and gentle: "The narrator's tendency to treat the Prince's character with playful irony does not in any way excuse his failings, but it does invite the reader to indulge in identification with this very human hero" (85). Henwood makes a good point here, but I feel that the frighteningly uncompromising and unforgiving greeting that the Prince is given at the Princess's funeral procession, overwhelms any of the earlier humour on the narrator's part. Perhaps Rossetti, scared at her own anger, was more able to express it through the words of the Princess's women, than those of the narrator.
After failing his test with the milkmaid, the Prince journeys through a nightmarish desert which suggests the wilderness of Christ's forty days and nights. The second temptation that Jesus faces in his desert involves defying death:

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. (Matt 4: 5-7)

Unlike Jesus, the Prince does not have the wisdom to accept death as an inevitable part of life: he joins the Alchemist in his quest to concoct the Elixir of Life, who promises him that "I will give you life if you crave" (212). Like the milkmaid, the Alchemist is a somewhat diabolical figure:

The veriest atomy he looked,
With grimy fingers clutching and crooked,
Tight skin, a nose all bony and hooked,
    And a shaking, sharp, suspicious way;
Blinking, his eyes had scarcely brooked
    The light of day. (181-86)

But the Alchemist is more complex than the milkmaid. Rossetti describes him as "fool or knave / Or honest seeker who had not found" (261-62). If he is not a "knave" (the devil) he might, as a "fool," or an "honest seeker," represent the Christian who has rejected worldly happiness for a chance at eternal life which may not exist; that is, he might represent Rossetti herself.

The final temptation of Christ in the desert is the temptation of power, luxury, and ease:

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And
saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (Matt 4:8-10)

The Prince is also offered a little kingdom of his own, tended and loved by the women who save him from drowning:

While overhead bird whistles to bird,
And round about plays a gamesome herd:
"Safe with us"—some take up the word—
"Safe with us, dear lord and friend:
All the sweeter if long deferred
Is rest in the end." (349-54)

Jesus is offered the pleasant position of ruler over all the rich and luxurious cities of the world, an offer he rejects. The Prince is offered his own little community of adoring women, and succumbs.

The Prince then, while he certainly does represent the Christian who must save his immortal soul, also represents, on a deeper and perhaps less conscious level, the God who comes too late to make the long-suffering Rossetti his Bride. As Henwood points out: "Given the poem's inescapable mythical context, its closing funeral lament gives voice, we realize, to the deepest, darkest spiritual despair" (92). Henwood is right in identifying the poem's underlying tone as one of spiritual despair, but I would go further than she does, in arguing that the despair is due to Rossetti's perception that God has failed to love her with the eros a Bridegroom owes to his Bride. The words of the Princess's women to the Prince are the words which Rossetti desires God to overhear: "Her heart was starving
all this while / You made it wait" (489-90).23

Hopkins

Hopkins, more than any of the others, and perhaps partly as a result of his Catholicism, describes his love for God as an active eros, rather than a passive response to God's agape. Exceptions to this rule, such as The Wreck of the Deutschland and "Carrion Comfort," picture God's agape as the destructive actions of a terrifying predator, suggesting just how difficult it is for Hopkins to submit to be the beloved rather than the lover. Alison Sloway suggests that "From his schoolboy days, Hopkins was in love with love" ("Hopkins, Male and Female, and the Tender, Mothering Earth" 53), and he certainly seems happiest when revelling in his own desire and enthusiasm for God, when trying to rise above the earth, and out of himself, to achieve a mystical union with Christ. When he doubts that Christ is willing to receive him however, as he does in the terrible sonnets, his love turns to hate, for both himself and his God.

In "God's Grandeur" Hopkins celebrates the greatness of God, asking nothing of

23 Of course, it might be possible, therefore, to read The Prince's Progress as Rossetti's rejection of a human bridegroom in favour of the divine husband. Read this way, the Prince's failures on the quest would serve merely to contrast with Christ's successes in the desert, he would represent Christ's foil rather than Christ himself, and the motivation behind the poem would be the same as that behind "The Heart knoweth its own bitterness" (II 265-66) in which the speaker decides that Christ makes a better lover than any human male. But a reference by Rossetti to the poem in a letter goes against this pious reading: "I am glad you like my reverse of the Sleeping Beauty: except in fairy land such reverses must often occur; yet I don't think it argues a sound or grateful spirit to dwell on them as predominantly as I have done. Bessie Rayner Parkes' last volume, with its healthy cheerfulness, has rebuked me" (October 1863, Letters 184). Rossetti recognizes that her poem expresses ingratitude and an unsound spirit, which she would hardly have felt if her poem had been an exaltation of Christ over human lovers.
God on his own behalf, but merely content to worship him. His love for God is awakened by his aesthetic appreciation of nature; it is God's beauty, seen in nature, that inspires him with *eros*. Hopkins achieves self-love in this poem by identifying himself with that nature. He moves from an understanding of the potential divinity of nature: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" (1), to an accusation that humanity has spoilt nature: "And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil" (6), to a realization that God's forgiving, nurturing love, God's *agape*, redeems soiled nature and makes it lovable again, as expressed in the sestet. Just like nature, the poet too is charged with the potential to be Godlike, becomes degraded because of fallen human nature, and then becomes lovable again through being clasped in the warm embrace of the Holy Spirit.

To a greater extent than many other poems, "God's Grandeur" invites us to read God as a projection of the poet. Just as God stands apart from humanity, watching it spoil the beauty he has created, so too does Hopkins, the poet who celebrates and glorifies nature, stand apart and above from the mass of humanity which desecrates it. And just as God's love redeems both nature and humanity, making the one beautiful again and forgiving the other, so too does Hopkins's vision of "the dearest freshness deep down things" (10) keep nature beautiful for him and allow him to end the poem not on a note of bitterness against humanity, but with an image of all-embracing love for both the world and the people in it. The world is charged with the grandeur not just of God's love and creation, but of Hopkins's love and perception.

The *eros*-love of "Hurrahing in Harvest" shows itself immediately in the poet's rapturous gaze upwards at the sky. Hopkins strains up towards God as he identifies with
the soaring birds: "barbarous in beauty, the stooks rise / Around" (1-2). The two lines that open the second quatrain describe the process of eros perfectly, in their stress on ascent and desire: "I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes, / Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour" (4-5). And God responds to this love, allows himself to be "gleaned," through nature: "And eyes, heart, what looks, what lips yet gave you a / Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder replies?" (7-8). God's response to Hopkins's eros-love sends the poet into ecstasy: "The heart rears wings bold and bolder / And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet" (13-14). The imagery here is erotic in both the spiritual and sexual senses of the word: the bold rearing of the heart suggests the male's physical response to desire, while the falling of the poet implied by the hurling of earth "off under his feet" evokes the feminine swoon of surrender to desire. "Hurrahing in Harvest," like Herbert's "The Starre," glories in the aesthetic and emotional rewards of the poet's eros-love. Both poems fit Feuerbach's thesis: "The divine nature which is discerned by feeling is in truth nothing else than feeling enraptured, in ecstasy with itself--feeling intoxicated with joy, blissful in its own plenitude" (9).

There could hardly be found a religious poem more explicit on the nature of God's own narcissism than "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame." Hopkins celebrates the selfhood of all creatures in his octave, claiming that everything was created precisely so that it could express itself and its own essential nature:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves--goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I do is me: for that I came. (5-8)

If God created us to be our selves, then we can surely love ourselves unreservedly. But in
the volta of the sonnet, Hopkins goes further than this in claiming that God also created us in order to be himself through us:

Í say more: the just man justices;  
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is--  
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces. (9-14)

God the Father and God the Son appear to be using the human soul as a way of gazing at each other as if in a mirror. Hopkins writes here in the tradition of St Augustine, believing that God can love us with _eros_ because he sees himself in us, and that this _eros_-love of God's allows us to love ourselves for who and what we are. Hopkins's understanding that God uses us as a way to love himself, corresponds inversely to Kristeva's argument that the human subject uses God as a way to love itself. Kristeva argues that Christianity imagines God using people as his mirror, as a way to love himself, a view she finds scriptural support for in the Gospel of John: "Johannine love sketches out the space of a relationship between I and You, Son and Father, an exclusive, absolute one in which They--third parties--are only intermediaries" (Tales 148). But if there is no God, the exact inverse of this process takes place: we love ourselves through the "intermediary" of God. An atheist reader simply turns Hopkins's poem on its head.

Hopkins probes the darker side of his relationship with God in his terrible sonnets. At times, as in "Carrion Comfort," Hopkins finds God's love too much for him, seeming to imply that he might be better off, or at least safer, without it. But in "No worst, there is none" and "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day," it is the absence of love on God's part that sends Hopkins to the edge of hate and atheism.
In "Camion Cornfort" Hopkins cowers before a terrifying predator who turns out to be the God of love in disguise. In the first quatrain Hopkins addresses Despair who represents the worst sin a Christian can commit:

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry I can no more. I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be. (1-4)

But the inverted Eucharistic imagery of the first line suggests that Despair is actually God in disguise, a reading supported by the ambiguity of Hopkins's addressee in the second quatrain:

But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee? (5-8)24

These lines link the first address to Despair to the sestet which describes the actions of God, thus suggesting that the lionlimbed "terrible" is both Despair and God:

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, chéer.
Cheer whom thou? The hero whose heaven-handling flung me, fóot tród
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one?
That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!)
my God. (9-14)

24 As Alan M. Rose says "That difficulty, which begins the quatrain, has concerned almost every commentator on the poem: Is the antecedent of 'O thou terrible' what at first encounter it seems to be—Despair?' Rose goes on to suggest that the "apparent vagueness of the pronoun . . . was exactly Hopkins' intention" (213).
Just as Hopkins's chûîflies, leaving his grain clear, so too does God shed the "chaff" of his false skin to reveal the "grain" of his divinity within.

Hopkins's conflation of God with suicidal Despair teeters on the edge of blasphemy. Certainly the first quatrain constructs the speaker as a man of integrity and courage, refusing to surrender his will to Despair. But if Despair is a disguised God, the speaker's stand changes into one of perversity and disobedience. He asserts his selfhood, indeed his manhood, in the face of God. In asserting that he can do "something" Hopkins denies that before the power of God he can do nothing.

If, by that last point, I am making Hopkins sound like the Herbert of "The Holdfast" that is because I believe this sonnet to be Hopkins's reaction to the Protestant ideal of agape. Eros is Catholic and agape is Protestant, according to Nygren, and Hopkins seems to prove his point by embracing eros and rejecting agape. The correct response to divine agape is complete surrender, an act the speaker is incapable of, as shown in his declaration that he can hold himself together, and his revelation that he has been wrestling with his God. Hopkins presents himself in his other poems, such as "Hurrahing in Harvest," as a Christian who wishes to actively offer up his love for God; he has great difficulty in being asked to passively surrender to that love. He would rather consume God in the Eucharist than be consumed by the "darksome devouring eyes" of that same God. Whereas the Protestant Herbert of "The Holdfast" accepts his powerlessness before God's agape, Hopkins insists on his power to resist the annihilation of himself before this same agape which falls upon him like a lion, like despair.

Because he has such difficulty accepting the role of beloved rather than lover (a
difficulty which relates to his habitual reluctance to take on the passive feminine role before God, a characteristic I examined in chapter two), Hopkins reacts by questioning God's very existence. His gradual revelation that Despair is God invites the opposite reading that Despair is in fact just despair, and it is God who is Despair in disguise, not Despair who is God. The final four lines question the very existence of God as an entity separate from the speaker: "Cheer whom though?" Hopkins muses, "O which one? is it each one?" (13). If it is "each one" that he is cheering, then he supports God to exactly the same degree that he supports himself, in the struggle between them. If his feeling for both is identical, then perhaps they are identical. Hopkins struggles not with God, but with himself, as Geoffrey Hartman suggests: "the concern [in "Carrion Comfort"] is merely that of all his poems in its extremity: in my actions, in my perceptions, is it God I feel and credit, or myself?" (54). Just as the octave might lead us to believe that Despair is the devil, before the sestet tells us that he is God, the poem in its entirety collapses devil, God, and poet into one being. Hopkins is unable to "avoid thee and flee" (8) because it is impossible to flee from oneself. God's love is so effectively disguised in this poem that it ceases to exist as love, leaving Hopkins alone under the threat of an angry atheism. Hopkins's revenge against God for depriving him of his eros-love and forcing agape upon him, is to reject his love by denying his existence.

I do not mean to argue that anger, hate, and atheism are the dominant emotions in this sonnet which clearly ends on a moment of wonder and reconciliation: "(my God!) my God" (14). Rather, the purpose of my reading is to point to the repressed feeling hidden in the text, thus paying tribute to Hopkins's honesty in expressing the submerged tensions
that underlie his attempts to love his difficult and mysterious God.  

Hopkins writes a similar atheism into "No worst, there is none," this time in revenge for God's apparent refusal to reward his love or respond to him at all. The opening statement, "No worst, there is none," functions, in one sense, as a denial of absolute value. If there is a God, there must be a best and a worst; in a Godless, relativistic universe there is neither. Hopkins's greatest explicit accusation against God, "Comforter, where, where is your comforting?" (3), also serves to cast doubt on God's existence. If he is a comforter, then comforting is his essential nature, so if he does not comfort, then he cannot exist. Hopkins might have said "Father, where is your fathering?" or "Lover, where is your love?" instead. They all equate to "God, where is your God-ness?" (which in turn implies "God, where is your goodness?") and evoke the Scriptural passage where Jesus accuses sinners of being like salt which has lost its saltiness: "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet of the dunghill; but men cast it out" (Luke 15: 34-35).

Having cast doubt on God's very existence in the octave, Hopkins turns in the sestet to the only thing left, himself. And he is terribly afraid of himself. If he is not loved by God, then he is hell:

25 Paul Mariani also points to the ambivalent nature of Hopkins's feelings in this sonnet: "The questions at once show the anger of someone deeply frightened, something of the erotic admiration for a champion . . . and a pervading tone of respectful awe. . . . The ambivalence of the speaker's feeling, oscillating between terror and fawning, is admirably caught in the nervous, staccato alternating exclamations and questionings" (231-32).
O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. (9-11)

Hopkins's horror of solipsism is graphically represented by the opposition he creates between a gigantic self big enough to contain mountains and the tiny, puny, insignificant self who hangs off one of those mountains. He stretches himself out to encompass the universe, since there is no God to circumscribe this monstrous, formless swelling, and crushes himself to a tiny figure within that space. If he looks outside himself for God he sees only the universe of Self; if he looks within himself for God he sees only the little human figure of Self hanging there. His only solutions to his suffering, death or sleep, further betray his hidden atheism. It is only ourselves that we can escape in death or sleep; neither can shelter us from God. Hopkins's resentment at God might lead him into atheism, but that atheism results in a hatred and horror of himself. Hatred of God and hatred of self are one and the same thing.

The repressed atheism of "No worst" surfaces again in "I wake and feel," but significant differences exist between the two darkest of the dark sonnets. In both, an unrequited eros leads Hopkins to self hate, but in "I wake and feel" he never turns his hatred toward God, to whom he refers as "dearest him that lives alas! away" (8). In fact the dominant tone of the octave is one of pity and tenderness. He addresses himself with tenderness and solidarity: "What hours, O what black hours we have spent / This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!" (2-3). There is no self-conflict here; Hopkins and his heart are in this together.

It is the sestet that really makes this poem worthy of the title "terrible sonnet." As
in "No worst," but far more explicitly, Hopkins declares that hell resides in the self:

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. (9-14)

The worst thing God can do, his "most deep decree" (9), is simply to leave Hopkins to
himself.

I have tried to show how God's love or lack of it leads the poets into self-love or
self-hate. But if the poet loves a God who does not exist, who or what loves him back?
Feuerbach would suggest that it is the poet himself. Freud and Kristeva would go further
in positing a split-subject and identifying God as one part of the poet's self. A Freudian
approach might identify God with the super-ego and the poet with the ego. Freud
theorizes that the ego is always trying to obtain the love and approval of the super-ego,
and that when this love is withheld, depression is the result: "during a melancholic attack
[the] super-ego becomes over-severe, abuses the poor ego, humiliates it and ill-treats it"
(New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 61). Thus a poem such as Hopkins's "No
worst, there is none" dramatizes the depressive poet's ego beaten on the anvil by the
vicious super-ego. Freud identifies the super-ego as the subject's internalization of his
parents, especially his father, which seems to be how Kristeva sees the split-selves of

26 "But now that we have embarked upon the analysis of the ego we can give an
answer to all those whose moral sense has been shocked and who have complained that
there must surely be a higher nature in man: 'Very true,' we can say, 'and here we have
her patients: "The analytic subject, or analysand, in substance says the following: 'I am suffering from a primitive trauma, often sexual in nature, a deep narcissistic injury, which I relieve by displacing it onto the analyst. Here and now the omnipotent author of my being or malady (my father or mother) is the analyst" (In the Beginning Was Love 2). (Whereas Freud emphasizes the importance of the father in the subject's psyche, I think Kristeva would rather emphasize the mother.) From the point of view of psychoanlysis, then, God, "the omnipotent author of my being," is nothing else than the subject's parents, who never, of course, gave her enough love. (Kristeva's statement, which posits the analyst as God, suggests an interesting possibility for an approach to religious poetry which imagines the poet as the analysand and God as the analyst.)

If we do read God as part of the poet's own psyche, then we can read the poems as attempts by the poets to achieve self-love or to express and confront self-hate. On some unconscious level, the poet knows that he should love himself in spite of all his unlovable qualities. But sometimes his vanity rejects this self-agape. He wants to love himself because he is desirable, hates himself for being undesirable, and resents the fact that he should love himself anyway, with agape. The subject wants to love himself with eros, does not succeed, and succumbs instead to self-hatred. At other times, however,

that higher nature, in this ego ideal or super-ego, the representative of our relation to our parents. When we were little children we knew these higher natures, we admired them and feared them; and later we took them into ourselves" (The Ego and the Id 36). "The psychoanalysis of individual human beings . . . teaches us with quite special insistence that the god of each of them is formed in the likeness of his father, that his personal relation to God depends on his relationship to his father in the flesh and oscillates and changes along with that relation, and that at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father" (Totem and Taboo 147)
Christianity's stress on *agape* allows the subject to accept that while she may not be objectively desirable to herself, a *decision* to love herself makes her worthy of love. 

Believing in a loving God allows the subject to move from an involuntary primary narcissism to a secondary, voluntary narcissism. As Kristeva says of Christianity:

"Henceforth, love of self is an error only to the extent that one forgets one is a reflection of the Other (the Lord)" (*Tales* 122).

The atheist reader can turn all of these poems upside down by removing an external God from the love or hate relationship, and viewing the poet as loving or hating himself. But even if we leave God in the poems, we can appreciate the complexity of the poetry better if we acknowledge the extent of the ambivalence, the inescapable co-existence of attraction and repulsion, that the poets experience towards God. Without hating him, they cannot truly love him. By expressing, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, the messy ambivalence of their feelings for God (or themselves), they guarantee the validity of religious poetry as art.
Chapter Four

The Validity of Religious Poetry

When wee are mov'd to seeme religious
Only to vent wit, Lord deliver us.

(John Donne, "A Litany" 188-89)

The religious poet faces different issues from the secular poet. Christianity can both discourage and inspire the writing of poetry about God. First and foremost in the list of encouraging factors is the existence and example of the Bible, especially the "poetic" books like the Song of Solomon and the Psalms, which bear witness to the divine inspiration of the poet whose words are then sanctioned as sacred. Secondly, and connected to the Bible, is the possibility that religious poetry may teach, inspire, comfort, and even convert its readers. Thirdly, the Gospel of John tells us that God created the world through the Word, the Divine Logos: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). If God is the Word, then what better way to praise him than with words? The nature of Christ as Word or Logos is related to one of the most central justifications for religious poetry, the Incarnation. As Charles Lock writes:

If Christianity provides the potential for the world's redemption, for the undoing of the consequences of the Fall, then the Christian poet is specifically privileged with the task of redeeming language, undoing the consequences of Babel. Sacramentalism—word made flesh—is not the given condition of language after the Incarnation, but a potential absolute for which the Christian poet can aim. (140)
A number of critics have concentrated on the significance of the Incarnation for the poetic theory and practice of individual poets. Raman Selden argues that Donne is able to combine the spiritual and the carnal so effectively in his poetry because the "poems often turn upon one transformation or another of what I wish to call his *incarnational conviction*" (59; Selden's emphasis). Richard E. Hughes says of Herbert that he "did not merely write *about* the Incarnation: he saw poetry itself as a microcosm of the Incarnation. The doctrine provided Herbert, not only with subject, but with form, technique and meaning" (54; Hughes's emphasis). J. Hillis Miller argues that Hopkins was inspired as a poet by the Incarnation because "[Christ] is the ultimate guarantee for the validity of metaphor. It is proper to say one thing is like another only because all things are like Christ" (*The Disappearance of God* 313).

Finally, the existence of so much secular poetry addressed to aspects of God's creation (a beloved man or woman, nature) inspires the Christian to use his or her poetic talent towards the glorification of God. While Donne and Rossetti both seem comfortable writing secular and sacred poetry, Herbert and Hopkins exalt their religious poetry by denigrating the profane output of their poetic contemporaries, a strategy that I shall return to below, when discussing each poet in turn.

Powerful justifications exist, then, for the writing of Christian literature. But the reasons against the writing of religious poetry are also powerful. The two central issues are inspiration and self-assertion. If the poet's words are divinely inspired, then the question soon arises of whether the poem is obsolete—whether the poem addressed to God is not in fact written by God, thus resulting in God talking to himself. A. D. Nuttall
asks this question about Herbert's poetry: "If the poem comes from God, are we to suppose that God prays to God?" (57). The poet can counter this problem by addressing himself, or the reader, or no one in particular, rather than addressing God. Or the poet can conceive of his or her poem as a kind of mirror for God's self-communing, as Hopkins conceives of humanity in "As Kingfishers Catch Fire":

\[\text{For Christ plays in ten thousand places,}
\text{Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his}
\text{To the Father through the features of men's faces. (12-14)}\]

If the poet believes that his or her poetry is \textit{not} divinely inspired, then she is faced with the problem of self-assertion. The Christian should be silent, self-negating, and listening, not noisy and loud, involved in the self-assertion and ego-gratification of speaking his or her mind.\textsuperscript{1} The Christian is caught between the two poles of poetic practice described by John Keats in his distinction between the "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" (157) and "\textit{Negative Capability}" (43; Keats's emphasis). Should the Christian poet concentrate on exploring the fascinations of her own personality (even the examination of one's own conscience can become a type of self-absorption, or spiritual pride, as Tennyson illustrates in "St Simon Stylites"), or try to negate herself in the manner of Keats' "poetical Character" (157), which Keats describes in terms reminiscent of negative theology: "it is not itself--it has no self--it is every thing and nothing--It has no character" (157)? But then we can hardly expect the religious poet to take "as much delight in

\textsuperscript{1} Clearly, these qualities have implications for the issue of gender and religious poetry, a concern I will tackle when I discuss Christina Rossetti.
conceiving an Iago as an Imogen" (157).²

Moreover, poetry involves the use of the creative faculty; in imitating the creation of God, the poet may inadvertently set himself up as God's rival. As W. David Shaw asks, in relation to Hopkins: "But how can the poet divide the Word into words without also annihilating the Word?" ("Incomprehensible Certainties" 72). J. Hillis Miller, also writing about Hopkins, argues that the religious poet is tempted to denigrate his or her work because of "a fear that his poetry might really be performatively efficacious. . . . His poetry might perhaps even be sacrilegious or blasphemous" ("Naming and Doing" 177). Considered from the viewpoint of Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence, we can see the poet very afraid indeed to struggle with and reject the God who is both his divine and poetical father (God is the poet who writes the Bible, and the artist who creates the world). This is one Oedipal conflict which cannot end in the son's (or daughter's) victory. One way to counter these dangers is for the poet to concentrate on her prophetic or priestly role, regarding the poetry primarily as a tool placed in the service of God for the means of reaching a human audience. Herbert, who worries so much in his poetry about the validity of that very poetry, arrives at this solution on his deathbed, delivering his poems to Nicholas Ferrar with the following famous speech:

Sir, I pray deliver this little book to my dear brother Ferrar, and tell him he shall find in it a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master, in whose service I have now found perfect freedom; desire him to read it: and then, if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any

² The notable exception to this statement is Milton's vivid presentation of Satan in Paradise Lost. None of my poets, however, give much attention to the devil, or other figures of evil, in their religious lyrics.
dejected poor soul, let it be made public; if not, let him burn it; for I and it are less than the least of God's mercies. (Izaak Walton 310-11)

Whether or not Herbert ever actually said anything like this, the speech still serves well to illustrate one tactic the religious poet might use to escape the charges of useless self-aggrandizement and self-indulgence. He offers the poems up as a possible help to "any dejected poor soul," who might need more than the Bible and the Church by which to negotiate his or her own "spiritual conflicts."

Dr Johnson and Julia Kristeva seem an unlikely pair of names to couple together in one sentence, but their respective comments illumine the central issues involved in religious poetry. Dr Johnson claims that religion is too powerful a truth to be expressed in poetry:

Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator and plead the merits of his Redeemer is already in a higher state than poetry can confer. . . . Poetry loses its lustre and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. All that pious verse can do is to help the memory, and delight the ear, and for these purposes it may be very useful; but it supplies nothing to the mind. The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestick for ornament. (291-92)

Kristeva argues more or less the opposite, that poetry is such a powerful force for rebellion that it destroys dogma as soon as it tries to express it:

Mimesis and the poetic language inseparable from it tend . . . to prevent the thetic from becoming theological; in other words, they prevent the

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3 The "thetic" is Kristeva's term for the position of judgment from which the subject says anything: "All enunciation, whether of a word or a sentence, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects" (Revolution 43). The semiotic threatens the thetic by destroying its sense of separateness and position.
imposition of the thletic from hiding the semiotic process that produces it, and they bar it from inducing the subject, reified as a transcendental ego, to function solely with the systems of science and monotheistic religion. (Revolution 58)

poetic language and mimesis may appear as an argument complicitous with dogma—we are familiar with religion's use of them—but they may also set in motion what dogma represses. In so doing, they no longer act as instinctual floodgates within the enclosure of the sacred and become instead protesters against its posturing. (Revolution 61)

Thus for Johnson religion is too great for poetry, while for Kristeva poetry is too good for religion.4

What Kristeva and Johnson have in common is their shared assumption that religion and poetry are antagonistic towards each other. It is, however, just as possible to hold the opposite view, that they have more in common than otherwise. Laurence Lerner argues that Kristeva's view of religion does not take into account its potential for

4 Kristeva's attitude to Christianity is more complex than can be seen from these two quotations from her work. She distinguishes between theology and dogma, the symbolic aspects of religion, and holiness and mysticism, its semiotic dimension. Elizabeth Grosz cites Kristeva's attribution of subversive power to "madness, holiness and poetry" (52) and goes on to say:

These are the three privileged domains in process or where the semiotic gains a position of dominance over unity or the symbolic. The semiotic explodes in an excessive, uncontrolled jouissance of madness (the madness of the psychotic or the fetishist, who refuse the father's law and retain their semiotic, pre-ocedipal maternal attachments); of the "holiness" of transgressive ecstasy (of which Lacan makes St Theresa of Avila the most striking example); and of poetry, which is at its most subversive in the writings of the avant-garde. (52)

Yet Kristeva only considers religion and poetry compatible when the religion is "subversive" in the first place. The orthodox writings of the gentle Herbert exalting the via media, for example, would probably strike her as dogma attempting to make use of poetry, and either failing (in which case the poetry is good), or succeeding (thus resulting in bad poetry). It is this aspect of Kristeva's writing on religion and literature that I wish to tackle.
expressing the irrational and declares, "By associating religion with ambiguity rather than with rational control, I propose that Kristeva's theory can be stood on its head" (144).

David Jasper makes the case that, far from being fundamentally opposed to each other, religion and poetry are drawn together by deep similarities: "For the ambiguities and paradoxes of theological expression should not be battered into slogan and abstractions, but should be recognized as allied to literary conceits, as devices of expression and sources of inexhaustible meanings" (34). Frank Burch Brown argues that the human mind needs both theology and poetry (or, rather, theological and poetical ways of thinking), to come to a good understanding of the world:

Paraphrasing Kant, we might say that, as a mode of conceptual understanding, theology tends to be empty in its clarity of vision and in its generality, and thus to need metaphoric and experiential interpretation. As a mode of metaphoric understanding, poetry (in the broadest sense) tends to be blind in its experiential fullness, and so to need conceptual clarification, criticism, and generalization. In dialogue, however, poetry and theology play a vital role in the unending process of understanding faith and transforming life. (181)

Translated into Kristevan terms, Brown is saying that theology is symbolic and poetry is semiotic, but that they complement rather than oppose each other in the human mind (and, by extension, in religious poetry). And, finally, Michael Edwards makes a sophisticated case for the scriptural anticipation of the psychoanalytic view of the destabilized subject and an empty or "fallen" language:

[The Bible] may imply that the subject, beyond our experience of it, is a unity in the sight of God; yet its teaching is quite concordant with the notion that, from where we are and in our fallen state, the subject is indefinitely displaced, unknowable apart from the signifiers in which we refer to it. In fact, it goes much further: the subject is not only in a state of perpetual otherness: it is lost. The vocabulary of Lacan in particular, in which the subject is "decentred," or "extraneous to itself," and experiences
"lack," "gap," "division," could be seen as the translation into a contemporary psychoanalysis of the terms by which Christian writers have named the self as involved in original sin. (130)

In Edwards's view, the theological concept of the Fall itself works against the view of language and literature that Kristeva would label "theological."

Debates about the nature of religious poetry made up part of the context in which both seventeenth and nineteenth-century poets were writing. Both Louis Martz and Joseph Summers point to the Jesuit poet Robert Southwell as an influence on the seventeenth-century desire to exalt sacred over profane poetry, while Elizabeth Clarke suggests Giles Fletcher as another, more important, example for Herbert. Barbara Lewalski complements Martz's examination of the Counter-Reformation influences that Southwell represents by revealing the degree to which the Protestant writers of the seventeenth century were able to turn to the Bible as their example and guide in the writing of religious poetry: "Looking to the Bible itself for theoretical principles, many Protestants found in two Pauline verses the starting point both for a biblically sanctioned poetics of the religious lyric, and for the theory of biblical genres" (37). William Stull

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5 See Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (184-85), for a detailed description of Southwell's works, including Saint Peters Complaint and Marie Magdalens Funeral Teare, the first of which was printed in London eleven times between 1595 and 1636, the latter printed in London eight times between 1591 and 1636, and both containing strong attacks on profane literature and encouragement to poets to turn their hands to religious verse.

6 Lewalski identifies the two Pauline verses as:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:19)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)
traces the history of the religious sonnet in the sixteenth century, concluding that "By the turn of the seventeenth century, divine 'Sonnets made of thee' were legion in England, as they had long been in Italy and France" (135). (Stull is quoting from Herbert's sonnets to his mother, which I discuss below.) Robert L. Entzminger argues that seventeenth-century Protestantism worked both to encourage and discourage writing upon religious subjects:

Luther's doctrine of justification by faith calls into question the value of all human work from a divine perspective, but the dilemma is especially pointed with respect to preachers: given the increased emphasis on human depravity, how could they presume to give voice to divine truths? . . . If Luther's concept of justification seems on the one hand to disqualify human speech as an agency of divine truth, his emphasis on the Word on the other hand empowers the preacher, making the pulpit much more central in Protestantism than it had been in the mediaeval church. (37)

Most significant, perhaps, is Clarke's claim that "There is no discourse of literary theory separate from that of theology in the early seventeenth century" (24). 7

For the Victorians, the status of religious poetry was somewhat different, mainly because they were not able to assume, as Donne and Herbert could, that their audience would share their faith and love of God. On the other hand, Raoul Granquist argues in his book on the reputation of Donne that the Victorians moved away from Johnson's disapproving attitude to religious poetry. When they did attack it, it was for different reasons than his, as illustrated in the words of an anonymous reviewer of George Herbert's poetry in The Christian Remembrancer in 1862: "Religious poetry is seldom of

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7 Interestingly, David Jasper claims that contemporary literary theory is also pervaded by theology, although by the absence, rather than the presence, of God: "much twentieth-century literary theory seems to take its origins from a theological anxiety" (2).
the highest order. The subject transcends human capacity: and the religious poet is liable to the danger of having his sensuous perceptions dimmed by the superior brightness of the immaterial world" (Patrides 253). The reviewer is concerned about the poet's "sensuous perceptions"; he clearly thinks a sensory rather than otherworldly approach to the world is what good poetry is made of. Where Dr Johnson disapproves of religious poetry because he fears it does not do justice to religion, the Victorian reviewer disapproves of it because he fears it will not do justice to poetry. In fact, this reviewer is closer to Kristeva than to Johnson.

Moreover, the Oxford Movement, which exerted a huge influence on both Rossetti and Hopkins, was deeply concerned with the relationship of poetry and Christianity. Both Keble and Newman were poets themselves, and they both believed in the religious nature of poetry and the poetical nature of religion. Hilary Fraser, who declares that the "traditional disposition to relate religious and aesthetic experience was unusually pronounced in the nineteenth century" (2), argues that both men felt that poetry gives imaginative life to religion as religion transports the imagination to spiritual spheres. Poetry is the best vehicle of religious utterance because it reveals itself through a symbolical structure: it re-enacts, as it were, the processes of religious experience, of Revelation, and understanding through faith by analogy. (27)

Rossetti and Hopkins had not only the example of the Bible and of poetic predecessors such as Donne and Herbert themselves before them, but could also look to their own immediate predecessors and contemporaries, Keble and Newman, who were their spiritual, as well as poetical, leaders and role-models, to justify for them the writing of their religious poetry.
On the other hand, Alison Sulloway argues for a negative attitude on the part of many Victorians towards art itself: "[Hopkins] was as ambivalent about art, nature, and the aesthetic life as many of his contemporaries, and he shared with the gloomier Victorian prophets a sense of impending doom, so that art seemed frivolous at times, if not actually immoral, and nature no longer a comfort" (Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper 2). Like Ruskin, Sulloway argues, Hopkins "saw the role of the artist as divinely sanctioned, and at the same time, a threat to salvation: sometimes the artist appears as the interpreter of God's will, sometimes as the man most likely to flout it" (77). Considered in the context of such an ambivalent attitude towards art itself, Victorian religious art, specifically religious poetry, is likely to reveal extreme anxieties about its own legitimacy.

The question of audience must also be considered historically. Rosemond Tuve argues that Renaissance poems always thought of their poems as directed towards a human reader: "no one seems to hit on the solution of thinking of poems independently of readers" (Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery 180), a fact also pointed out by Joseph Summers: "the primary purpose of [Herbert's] poems was not what we understand as self-expression. . . . the self to Herbert was not the valuable thing which it became to a later age" (George Herbert: His Religion and Art 84); while the Victorians were writing in a post-Romantic age, in which a poem could be written as an expression of the poet's feeling or vision. M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp argues that Renaissance poets tended to believe in the pragmatic theory of poetry, that their purpose as poets was "to teach and to please" (16), while the Romantics believed that poetry was "the overflow,
utterance, or projection of the thought and feelings of the poet" (21-22). The Victorians had to deal with both these traditions of poetry; the Metaphysicals only the first.

Donne and Herbert had a very different idea of audience from Hopkins and Rossetti. Seventeenth-century gentleman circulated their poetry in manuscript among members of their own courtly class. Donne, indeed, published the two *Anniversaries*, but not entirely willingly, according to Bald, who reports that pressure was put on him to publish and he consented with "some reluctance" (243). The issue of audience does, however, cross the boundaries of time in some respects. Marion Meilaender stresses that religious poets find their main difficulty in "the devotional poet's need to mediate simultaneously between God and his soul and between himself and his readers" (31), a difficulty that faces poets in every era.

In this chapter I deal with each poet separately, looking at the evidence from their poetry and, in the case of Rossetti and Hopkins, their extra-poetic statements to ascertain their beliefs and practices about religious poetry, and examining the poems to see where belief and practice conflict. Two key differences between the poets serve to complicate the comparison between them. First, the idea of vocation as a poet takes on a different colouring for the three male poets who also had vocations as priests, than for the laywoman Rossetti. Second, and closely related to the first point, is the issue of gender. Did being a woman make the writing of religious poetry different in any way for Rossetti? I take these questions into consideration in my attempt to discuss the three issues of validity (is religious poetry valid? and if so, how important is it, compared to other ways of serving God?), inspiration, and audience.
Donne

John Donne's pronouncements on religious poetry are to be found mainly in the poetry itself. *La Corona* foregrounds itself as poetry from the very first line, "*Deigne at my hands this crown of prayer and praise,*" which is also the last line. Stanza one works to persuade God that he should accept this poem, by stressing the poem's validity. In the second line, "*Weav'd in my low devout melancholie*" (2), Donne emphasizes that the poem is composed in humility and seriousness, and does not involve the egoistic motivations of pleasure, pride, or self-fulfilment. God should not refuse what is given with such pure motives. In the next two lines, Donne implies that God is in any case the source of the poem, which would make refusing it absurd: "*Thou which of good, hast, yea art treasury, / All changing unchang'd Antient of dayes*" (3-4). Since a low, devout melancholy is unquestionably a good thing for a Christian to possess, it must therefore come from God, the source of all good. And if the poem springs from this devout melancholy, then the poem too is directly inspired by God. In the next quatrain, Donne indicates what he wants in return for the gift of the poem:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{But doe not, with a vile crowne of fraile bayes,} \\
&\text{Reward my muses white sincerity,} \\
&\text{But what thy thorny crowne gain'd, that give mee,} \\
&\text{A crowne of Glory, which doth flower alwayes. (4-7)}
\end{align*}
\]

Donne states that he does not want a poetic reward (the crown of bayes), but a religious reward (the crown of salvation), indicating that he sees *La Corona* as primarily a religious rather than literary object, a prayer before it is a poem. The asking for any reward at all suggests that Donne sees his writing of religious poetry as part of a bargain he wants to
make with God: if he uses his God-given talent for poetry towards the glory of God, God will reward him as in the Scriptural story of the Parable of the Talents. Such an attitude indicates a total belief on Donne's part in the validity of religious poetry. In line 9, however, Donne stresses that the poetry is only acceptable if the motivations behind it are truly pure: "The ends crowne our workes, but thou crowns't our ends." If the "end" of Donne's poetry had actually been poetic fame on this world, in the form of the "vile crowne of bayes," then he could not have expected God to reward him with salvation after all. The sonnet concludes with one further tactic by Donne to make his poetry seem acceptable. In the line, "'Tis time that heart and voice be lifted high" (13), Donne makes his poetry seem both impersonal (and therefore lacking in any egotistic motivation), and an obligation. God cannot turn down a poem written out of a sense of religious duty.

Stanza one is the only stanza to foreground the poem in this way. But parts of stanzas two, six, and seven also seem to glance obliquely at poetry, even while ostensibly concentrating on the life of Christ. The second stanza focuses on the Annunciation, and the Incarnation of Christ. As I have pointed out, the Incarnation was a trope by which Christians could justify religious poetry. If Christ, the Logos, became human in order to raise humans to his level, then human language could also incarnate the divine. The last quatrain in particular seems to relate the Incarnation to the poem celebrating it:

Whom thou conceiv'st, conceiv'd; yea thou art now
Thy Makers maker, and thy Fathers mother;
Thou'hast light in darke; and shutst in little roome,
Immensity cloysterd in thy deare womb. (11-14)

Just as God first conceived the woman who now conceives him, so too did God create and inspire the poet who now becomes his "Makers maker" by creating God within the
poem. And just as Christ lies in the Virgin's womb, so too does he lie within the small enclosed space of Donne's sonnet: "Immensity cloysterd in thy deare wombe."

*La Corona* ends with the "Ascention" stanza, in which Donne imagines not only Christ, but also his poem rising up to heaven: "And if thy holy Spirit, my Muse did raise, / Deigne at my hands this crowne of prayer and praise" (13-14). If God was in fact the inspiration behind the poem, if the Holy Spirit did raise the Muse, then he should accept the poem. Donne firmly believes *La Corona* is inspired by God, and therefore a valid devotional act. As a whole, the poem is a prime example of what Louis Martz has identified as a poem of meditation: Donne focuses on scenes from Christ's life in an effort to feel true devotion. The poem truly is a crown of prayer, therefore, and as such Donne has no real doubt that God will deign to accept it.

"A Litany" introduces some doubt into Donne's faith in his poetry as acceptable to God. The relevant stanzas here are: VIII "The Prophets," IX "The Apostles," XIII "The Doctors," XXI, XXIII, and XXVII. In the first of these, "The Prophets," Donne reveals himself a practitioner of the "Protestant poetics" identified by Barbara Lewalski, in that he clearly regards the Biblical writers as models and justifications for his own writing of religious poetry:

> Those heavenly Poëts which did see  
> Thy will, and it expresse  
> In rhythmique feet, in common pray for mee,  
> That I by them excuse not my excesse  
> In seeking secrets, or Poëtiquesnessse. (68-72)

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1. Donne's juxtaposition of the Muse and the Holy Spirit seems to anticipate Milton's merging of the two in the Urania of *Paradise Lost*. 
Yet on a closer look, it becomes clear that Donne does not wish to use the prophets as his own justification: "That I by them excuse not my excesse." He feels that his poetry hardly lives up to the standard of the divinely inspired "heavenly Poëts" of the Bible, and therefore asks them to pray that he does not come to think too highly of his own poetry. Donne does not necessarily doubt the validity of religious poetry as a practice, here, but rather his own efforts in that practice. His fear that his poetry is not divinely inspired, but instead seeks for secret knowledge and poetic effects, leads him directly to doubt whether his poetry is in fact legitimate.

Another stanza in which Donne seems to run counter to Lewalski's argument that the Bible justified religious poetry for Protestants such as himself is "The Apostles."

Donne affirms that the Biblical writings of the Apostles "are divine" (78), (that is, divinely inspired), but asks for help in reading these books:

> May they pray still, and be heard, that I goe  
> Th'old broad way in applying; O decline  
> Mee, when my comment would make thy word mine. (79-81)

Donne here reveals his distrust of both his originality of interpretation, and the assimilation of another text into his own poetic voice (although he may well be ostensibly thinking of his role as preacher rather than poet in these lines), activities which Harold Bloom argues are essential for poets, in favour of a humble orthodoxy. In being afraid to make God's word his, he seems to reject the idea of the Bible as inspiration for religious poetry.

In "The Doctors" Donne reveals a strong sense of the responsibility that the writer on religious matters has to his audience:
pray for us there
That what they have misdone
Or mis-said, wee to that may not adhere;
Their zeale may be our sinne. Lord let us runne
Meane waies, and call them stars, but not the Sunne. (113-17)

The Doctors of the church attempt to interpret God's word, just as Donne himself does in his religious poetry. His fear that they might distract their audience from the true word of God in the Scripture, and might even cause harm by misreadings or misinterpretations, suggests that he might also worry about the possible harm his own poetic interpretations, inspired at least to some degree by the Bible, might have on his audience. This stanza clearly shows a Protestant sensibility in its distrust of the theological traditions of Christianity and its turn to the Scriptures. It might well be easier for a Catholic priest than an Anglican one to feel he has the right to compose religious poetry, since he would also have a greater right to mediate between his congregation and the word of God.

Stanza XXIII glances at the issues of inspiration and audience. Donne asserts, in these lines, that God is both:

Heare us, for till thou heare us, Lord
We know not what to say.
Thine eare to'our sighes, teares, thoughts gives voice and word.
O Thou who Satan heard'st in Jobs sicke day,
Heare thy selfe now, for thou in us dost pray. (203-07)

Donne seems to be saying here that God speaks to himself through the sinner's prayers, implying that his own religious poems are also a record of God talking to himself. These very lines, indeed, would be spoken by God, addressing himself as "Lord" and "Thou."

Donne writes himself out of his poetry quite as radically as Stanley Fish, in _Self-Consuming Artifacts_, claims Herbert does. But in doing so, he claims the highest
possible legitimacy for his poetry, since it is God, and not he, who writes it. The other audience, the readers, the "us" that Donne (or rather God) is praying for, had better give the poem their full attention and whole-hearted assent.

The final stanza in "A Litany" which glances at religious poetry is XXVII:

That learning, thine Ambassador,
From thine allegiance wee never tempt,
That beauty, paradies flower
For physicke made, from poysen be exempt,
That wit, borne apt, high good to doe,
By dwelling lazily
On Natures nothing, be not nothing too,
That our affections kill us not, nor dye,
Heare us, weake ecchoes, O thou eare, and cry. (235-43)

Learning, beauty, wit, and the affections are all faculties which create and inspire poetry. Donne reveals his anxiety that they will all lead him away from God, that the learning involved in his poetic allusions, the beauty of his words and images, the wit of his conceits, and the affections which cause him to write in the first place, will become ends in themselves, rather than means by which to love God. Perhaps Donne is here thinking more of his secular love poetry than his religious poetry. But in the writing of both, the concentration upon the poem itself might well distract the poet from the object of that poem, whether that object be his mistress, or God.

Out of the Holy Sonnets, only "If faithful soules be alike glorified" can be read as glancing obliquely at the anxieties involved in religious poetry. The sonnet is concerned with the gap between appearance and reality, or, in linguistic terms, between the signifier and the signified. Donne uses the word "signes" in contrasting the two:

But if our mindes to these soules be descry'd
By circumstances, and by signes that be
Apparent in us, not immediately,
How shall my mindes white truth to them be try'd? (5-8)

How, also, can the readers of his poetry ascertain the poet's sincerity? Might they not accuse him of the sins which Donne lists in the next lines:

They see idolatrous lovers weepe and mourne,
And vile blasphemous Conjurers to call
On Jesus name, and Pharisaical
Dissemblers feigne devotion. (9-12)

These sins correspond to particular pitfalls of poetry: the writing of idolatrous secular love poetry, of which Donne is certainly guilty; the wandering into blasphemy in the effort to understand God through poetry rather than orthodox doctrine; the conjuring up of Jesus's name as a way of making a poem effective; and the Pharisaical, or insincere, use of religion to make good poetry (which last is perfectly expressed in the epigram to this chapter).

If the history of Donne criticism is anything to go by, Donne was quite right to fear such accusations. Mario Praz points to Donne's exaltation of wit over sincerity: "He was like a lawyer choosing the fittest arguments for a case in hand; not like a searcher after a universally valid truth" (68). Stanley Fish says of this very sonnet that "Not only is he trying to convince readers of his ultimate sincerity—of his mind's white truth—he is trying to convince himself" ("Masculine Persuasive Force" 245). The most thunderous accusations against Donne are those made by John Carey, who seems at times to be in agreement with Donne's contemporaries when he describes them as regarding Donne as "a blatant careerist, who had no right to be in holy orders at all" (89); and accuses him of valuing wit over sincerity: "Donne was the least consistent of mortals, and he never felt
that an idea had been properly exploited until he had tried it out backwards as well as forwards" (164). The most recent expositor of Donne's insincerity is P. M. Oliver who sees in his poetry an "absence of any indication that Donne was concerned, other than aesthetically, with the image of God which he was portraying" (9).

Of course, all religious poets are open to charges such as these. T. S. Eliot, writing about Herbert rather than Donne, introduced the fascinating issue of sincerity and the religious poet:

All poetry is difficult, almost impossible, to write: and one of the great permanent causes of error in writing poetry is the difficulty of distinguishing between what one really feels and what one would like to feel, and between the moments of genuine feeling and the moments of falsity. There is a danger in all poetry: but it is a peculiarly grave danger in the writing of devotional verse. (Patrides 334)

But Donne's religious sincerity is questioned far more than that of Herbert, Rossetti, or Hopkins. No one accuses them of merely playing around with theological concepts, or separating themselves from the deeply religious speakers of their poems. Donne's solution to the problem of readers questioning his motives is, in this sonnet, to reject his human readers and write his poems for an audience of one, God:

Then turne
O pensive soule, to God, for he knowes best
Thy true griefe, for he put it in my breast. (12-14)

In these lines Donne intimates, once again, that God will understand and accept the poem, because it was he who put it into the poet's mind in the first place, it was he who wrote it.

The Holy Sonnet sequence as a whole reveals Donne's attitude towards the issue
of audience. The sonnets vary as to whether they are addressed to God, to Donne himself, to various other audiences, or to a mixture of these three. This variation in the audience makes some of the sonnets seem a good deal more personal than others. "Oh my blacke Soule!" is one of the most personal and self-absorbed. The poem is entirely addressed to the poet's own soul. He is his one and only audience here. But whereas the octave is both ostensibly, and truly, self-addressed, the sestet, while still ostensibly addressed to the soul, actually turns towards a second audience, God. "Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke" (9), begins Donne, still addressing his own soul, before suddenly posing a question that the soul cannot supply an answer for: "But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?" (10). The soul is not supposed to answer here, God is. The answer, which is not given in the poem, is of course God, who is supposed to come rushing along, waving his hand and calling out, "Me, me! I will!" God is the assumed audience of this poem.

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9 Donne certainly did think of his audience while composing these poems, according to Ted-Larry Pebworth, who points out that "three distinct version of his 'Hymn to God the Father' circulated during his lifetime and shortly thereafter; and he prepared and released three distinct sequences each of his epigrams and his holy sonnets, along the way discarding some of the original poems, adding new ones, and making textual changes in the poems that were retained" ("Early Audiences" 135). The human audience, then, was clearly never absent from Donne's mind.

10 Louis Martz, however, reads these lines differently: [Donne] attempts to comfort his "blacke Soule" with the traditional thought: "Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke." So the Old Church believed, but now, in the New Church, Donne must ask the strange and overwhelming question: "But who will give thee that grace to beginne?" No one is there to administer the sacrament of Confession: it is no longer a sacrament. How then does one repent? It is as though this speaker stands in an immense empty space. ("Vehement Grief and Silent Tears" 23)
Holy Sonnet 4, "At the round earths imagined corners" does not, at first, seem a personal poem in any way. Donne addresses the angels and the "numberlesse infinities" (3) of the dead, focussing on the end of the world, from what seems, at first, like an impersonal distance. But once again, the turn from octave to sestet turns the poet to another audience, and once again, that audience is God. Donne turns from the future to the present in his panicked cry: "But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space" (9). The rest of the sestet is then addressed solely to God, with the one significant exception of lines 11 and 12: "'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace, / When wee are there." The change from "I" to "wee" draws in the reader, who realizes that the poet is praying for him or her, as well as himself, and that the poet intends the reader to follow his lead in begging for God's mercy. The sonnet therefore addresses three separate audiences.

In Holy Sonnet 5, "If poysonous mineralls," Donne seems to address his questions in the octave to no one in particular. Perhaps these questions lack a specific audience because he knows, even while he asks them, that they are unanswerable. Of course, the switch to addressing God in the sestet implies that he was the audience for the octave all along. Donne acts as if he is yanked back from his blasphemous questions by realizing that God has been "overhearing" his thoughts, which makes him instantly grovel for mercy: "But who am I, that dare dispute with thee / O God" (9-10). But whereas Donne the speaker hurries to "take back" the impulsive questions that burst from him in the octave, Donne the poet leaves them in there forever. The repudiation of the questioning

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I believe that Donne fills this space immediately with God. He is not afraid of no one hearing him.
in the sestet is only half sincere. If Donne had really repented of his blasphemous questions, he would have destroyed the poem.\textsuperscript{11} Donne intended God as the audience for the whole poem, not just the octave. He would, indeed, like the answers to those questions, and he knows that the answer to the question "But who am I, that dare dispute with thee" is "a poet."

Holy Sonnet 11, "Wilt thou love God, as he thee!" is another example of a poem which seems to address one audience, but in fact addresses another. But whereas in "Oh my blacke Soule!" Donne ostensibly addresses himself while clearly meaning God to overhear him, in this sonnet he uses himself as a substitute for his intended audience, his readers. The first line runs, "Wilt thou love God as he thee! then digest," and we would expect the next line to begin "My sermon" or something similar. The poet seems to be also the preacher, giving his reader, the "thou" that he addresses, some help in his spiritual journey. But the second line begins with the surprising words, "My Soule," thus turning the poem inwards, by addressing the poet's own self. However this sonnet never turns as personal as "Oh my blacke Soule!," which also begins by addressing the poet's soul. Instead, the poem develops a "wholsome meditation" (2) on the Incarnation,

\textsuperscript{11} The objection to my reading here is to argue for a distinction between the poet and the speaker. Donne may have devised the questions as means to show the sinfulness of the speaker, not as issues which were bothering his own mind. But even P. M. Oliver, who finds evidence of Donne's ironic distance from his speakers everywhere, concludes that in this sonnet they are one and the same:

This is one of the rare moments in the Holy Sonnets when one feels that Donne's "I" and "me" are representative pronouns: his speaker stands for a generation of souls painfully conscious of their sinfulness and yet unwilling to accept that a loving God can be so cruel as to have arbitrarily damned them before they even possessed the option of sinning. (124-25)
wholesome precisely because it is unsullied by personal emotion or egotistic desires. The true audience, the human reader for whom Donne is a priest as well as a poet, is alluded to towards the end of the sonnet: "The Sonne of glory came downe, and was slaine, / Us whome he'had made, and Satan stolne, to unbinde" (11-12). The sonnet is a poem about "us," not "me."

Donne, then, is reasonably confident in the legitimacy and importance of his own religious poetry as an instrument for the greater glory of God, and is so largely because he finds his poetic vocation analogous to his priestly one. Even in his most personal sonnets he has one eye out for his audience, hoping to scare them into conversion the same way he tries to do in his sermons. Roger B. Rollin writes that "the Holy Sonnets, like so many of Donne's secular poems, seem to be written mainly for their shock effect (or, in this case, as shock treatment). . . . they are sick poems in the service of preventative medicine" (131). George Parfitt also stresses Donne's orientation towards his human audience:

it is seldom if ever accurate to think of an audience of one in connection with Donne's work. We may be tempted to do this with his religious lyrics, defining their audience as the poet himself or God, but this is misleading. This so partly because . . . Donne's most private scrutinies have a social dimension. (69-70)

At the same time, however, Donne is well aware of the dangers of religious poetry, of his own tendencies towards blasphemy and insincerity as he tries to approach the God who terrifies him.
Herbert

Possibly the greatest and most thorough poetical treatment of religious poetry in English can be found in The Temple. Not only does George Herbert write great poems which specifically comment on themselves and his artistic/religious dilemma ("Love" I and II, "Jordan" I and II, "The Quidditie," "A true Hymne," and "The Forerunners"), he also, in many other poems not specifically about poetry at all, glances obliquely at the rewards and problems the genre brings.

Walton's Life tells us that Herbert was preoccupied with the writing of religious poetry by "the seventeenth year of his age" (275). Walton quotes a letter that Herbert wrote to his mother which included two sonnets, in both of which Herbert defines himself as a religious poet by rejecting the main alternative of the day, the Petrarchan love sonnet and other erotic poetry. But it is the object of erotic love, not the love itself, that he rejects, substituting an immortal God for a mortal woman:

My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee,
    Wherewith whole shoals of Martyrs once did burn,
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
Wear Venus Livery? only serve her turn?
Why are not Sonnets made of thee? and layes
    Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove
Out-strip their Cupid easily in flight?
    Or, since thy ways are deep, and still the same,
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name?
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might
    Each breast doth feel, no braver fuel choose
Than that, which one day Worms may chance refuse?

Sure, Lord, there is enough in thee to dry
Oceans of Ink; for, as the Deluge did
Cover the earth, so doth thy Majesty:
Each Cloud distils thy praise, and doth forbid
Poets to turn it to another use.
   *Roses and Lillies* speak thee; and to make
A pair of Cheeks of them, is thy abuse.
Why should I *Women's eyes* for Chrystal take?
Such poor invention burns in their low mind,
   Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go
To praise, and on thee Lord, some *Ink* bestow.
Open the bones, and you shall nothing find
   In the best *face* but *filth*, when, Lord, in thee
The *beauty* lies in the *discovery*.

Herbert's linking of sex, the feminine, and death at the end of each sonnet, while a traditional trope, seems to cry out for a psychoanalytic reading *à la* Kristeva. Such a reading might argue that Herbert's rejection of the sexual in favour of the divine, is really a rejection of poetry in favour of religion. But, as I have just argued, Herbert does not reject erotic love, but rather directs it towards a different object. (These sonnets, incidentally, posit God as the object of *eros*, rather than the subject who loves with *agape.*) What Herbert *does* reject is the feminine. The first sonnet relies heavily on fire imagery, fire being a masculine element, while the second begins by stating that God can dry up liquids, the "oceans" that traditionally represent the feminine. Herbert's manifesto in these early sonnets is that religious poetry is superior to love poetry because its superior object, God, allows it to escape the corruptions of feminine sexuality and death, remaining purely masculine and spiritual. The poetry of *The Temple* proves him wrong.

The earliest poems in *The Temple* to treat the subject of religious poetry are "Love" (I) and (II), sonnets very similar to the two in the letter to Magdalen Herbert. Herbert once again asserts the validity of religious poetry by deriding love poetry. *The Temple*'s first word on religious poetry, then, is a wholehearted, uncomplicated,
endorsement of its validity, importance, and merit in the eyes of God.

"Jordan" (I), which follows "Love" (II) at a remove of only two poems, also asserts the validity of the religious poem, but this time it does so by running down the style, rather than the content, of contemporary secular poetry. Herbert equates "fictions" with "false hair" in the first line, again linking deviation from truth and purity with femininity. He then suggests that over-elaborate verse is found in the genres of pastoral and love poetry:

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves  
And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?  
Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves? (6-8)

He goes on, in the last two lines of the poem, to equate simplicity with the genre of religious poetry: "Nor let them punish me with losse of rime, / Who plainly say, My God, My King" (14-15). As many critics have pointed out, there is, in fact, no "loss of rhyme" in this stanza since "king" rhymes with "spring" in line 13. Herbert is suggesting, I think, that because religious poetry takes the expression of truth, rather than the creation of a good poem, as its end and object, the poetry will then take care of itself; the rhyme (and other aspects of a poem) will fall into place because the best poetry is, in fact, a gift from God, not the result of long work and craft from a human mind. Herbert asserts the validity of religious poetry by pointing to its divine inspiration.

In "The Quidditie" Herbert asserts that his poetry has no value at all if it concentrates on subjects other than God. When he writes

My God, a verse is not a crown,  
No point of honour, or gay suit,  
No hawk, or banquet, or renown,  
Nor a good sword, nor yet a lute (1-4),
he is saying, in part, that his poetry cannot treat kings, courtiers, banquets, sword fights, and the like. It can only write about God and when it does, it becomes the most valuable gift he has: "But it is that which while I use / I am with thee, and most take all" (11-12). Once again, Herbert's strategy for claiming the validity of religious poetry is to reject as useless and unworthy all other possible poetic subjects and themes.

"Jordan" (II) turns upon the poet's previous arrogance and complacency and pounds them into humility. Where "Jordan" (I) claimed that only non-sacred poetry ran the risk of blotting its truth through too-elaborate language, "Jordan" (II) admits that the problem lies in the nature of poetry itself, and that religious poetry is not immune after all. Anticipating Kristeva, the poem seems to suggest that poetry about God ends up celebrating itself rather than God, that the poet, regardless of his desire to serve, becomes an unwitting rebel against the bonds of religion. The first stanza concentrates on the poet's arrogance and self-assertion, using the language of both aggressive male sexuality, "My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell" (4), and aggressive economic activity, "Decking the sense, as if it were to sell" (6). The second stanza shows the poet trying to rectify this self-assertion in its stress on the word "service": "Thousands of notions in my brain did runne, / Off'ring their service, if I were not sped" (7-8), but soon the poet's desire to serve God well, rather than just to serve him, cancels out the momentary attempt at humility:

I often blotted what I had begunne;
This was not quick enough, and that was dead.
Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
Much lesse those joyes which trample on his head. (9-12)

Herbert finds himself unable to break free of the traps of religious poetry by himself. As
in many other poems he leaves the last word to God:

As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,
So did I weave my self into the sense.
But while I bustled, I might hear a friend
Whisper, How wide is all this long pretence!
There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd:
Copie out onely that, and save expense. (13-18)

As Stanley Fish says:

The question, quite simply, is, how does a poet (or anyone else)
weave himself out of the sense?
Herbert's answer is to make the experience of his poems the
discovery of their true authorship. That is, the insight to which a particular
poem brings us is often inseparable from the realization that its source is
not Herbert, but God. . . . Rather than affirming (and therefore denying)
that God's word is all, the poem becomes, quite literally, God's word.
("Letting Go" 478-79; Fish's emphasis)

But Joost Daalder reads these lines differently, asserting that Herbert is not condemning
his own self-assertion at all, but rather making his poetry into a sacrifice: "But I am not
sure that his reaction to his former self is only one of condemnation. After all, it is
possible to see the self in these lines as a sacrifice on God's altar, burning away as a
victim; and Herbert is referring to an upward movement, not one towards Hell" (27). 12

12 Daalder's reading of these lines certainly corresponds to Rossetti's use of winding
flames, as in "An Immurata Sister" (II 120-21):
Sparks fly upward toward their fount of fire,
Kindling, flashing, hovering:--
Kindle, flash, my soul; mount higher and higher,
Thou whole burnt-offering! (25-28)
And in Sonnet 11 of Later Life (II 143), she speaks of God
Luring us upward from this world of mire,
Urging to press on and mount above
Ourselves and all we have had experience of,
Mounting to Him in love's perpetual fire. (11-14)
That another religious poet uses the image of flames as a sacrifice to God serves to
strengthen Daalder's reading, although Herbert seems to be using the sacrifice image
am more inclined to follow Fish's reading here, that Herbert cannot find a way to write
poetry that does not involve a reliance on his own talent and personality, and that does not
result in pride over the finished result. He manages to circumvent the sinfulness inherent
in religious poetry by claiming that God is his inspiration. God writes the poems; Herbert
only copies them down,\(^{13}\) like the divinely inspired authors of the Bible.

Yet Herbert is unable to rest in his own solution, returning again to the question of
religious poetry later in The Temple.\(^{14}\) "Dulnesse," for example, is a poem in which
divine inspiration is both absent and very sorely missed. Herbert contrasts the difficulty
of divine inspiration by claiming that God is his inspiration. God writes the poems; Herbert
only copies them down,\(^ {13}\) like the divinely inspired authors of the Bible.

\(^{13}\) Bloch argues with Fish's reading:
But is the friend really whispering "Sit back in silence and let God write your lines"? "Onely" refers not to "copie" ("You need only copy, a
mechanical task equivalent in effect to silence"), but rather to "love" ("Copy out only sweet love, nothing else, certainly not the foolishness you
have been wasting your time on"). The poet is instructed to change not the
task but the object. (Spelling the Word 154; Bloch's emphasis)

Bloch's reading might be convincing if applied to Donne or Rossetti, both of whom write
poems celebrating secular love as well as the love of God, but Herbert has only written
sacred poems. Why should he feel that he has to change the object of his poetry? It is not
"onely" which is the key word here, but "copie." Even if the lines say "Copy out only
sweet love," they still say *copy* it, not think up new ideas about it. In the context of The
Temple it seems clear that Herbert is concerned about the temptations and pitfalls of
poetry *per se*, not about profane poetry which he seems to have never wasted time on.
His sonnets to his mother declaring his rejection of profane in favour of sacred poetry
were written when he was only seventeen.

\(^{14}\) I agree with Daalder's argument against the existence of any consistent theory about
poetry in The Temple: "I feel uncomfortable with any attempt to impute to [Herbert] some
supposed 'poetic theory' as something which he consistently adhered to. . . . I do not
believe that we can locate more than momentarily held positions in any of the poems. No
poem is any more final and definite, as a statement of Herbert's 'poetic theory' than any
other" (18; Daalder's emphasis).
of writing religious poetry with the seeming facility lovers have in writing secular love poetry. The fifth and sixth stanzas of the poem concentrate on the difference between the two genres:

Where are my lines then? my approaches? views?
Where are my window-songs?
Lovers are still pretending, & ev'n wrongs
Sharpen their Muse:

But I am lost in flesh, whose sugred lies
Still mock me, and grow bold:
Sure thou didst put a minde there, if I could
Finde where it lies. (17-24)

The "But" beginning stanza six seems curiously illogical. Surely it is precisely because they are "lost in flesh" that the lovers find it so easy to write poetry. It is not that Herbert's body overwhelms his mind so that he cannot write love poetry to God, but because his mind tries to deny this body, seeing it only as a source of "lies." That Herbert seems to be unconscious of the logical contradictions in this poem, plays right into the hands of the twentieth-century critic steeped in psychoanalysis. Yes, we might say, Kristeva is correct: poetry must spring from the semiotic realm of sexuality, and Herbert unconsciously realizes this when he contrasts his poetic barrenness with the productiveness of secular poets. But it is equally possible to imagine an eighteenth-century critic following Dr Johnson in claiming that Herbert's unwitting attraction towards the sugared lies of the flesh shows that he, or any other sinful human, is incapable of keeping human weakness and sin out of sacred poetry.

"A Parodie" is Herbert's answer to the problem of religious poetry's seeming less fertile than secular poetry. He simply takes over the love poem by substituting God for
the woman as the object of the poem. This bold stroke means that all the puzzling issues
surrounding religious poetry simply melt away since the only difference from standard
love poetry is the identity of the addressee, not the nature of the love expressed, or the
attitude of the lover. And by addressing God in the same way that love poets address a
woman, Herbert does not simply take over the inferior genre of love poetry, but pays it
the tribute of embracing sexual desire as a legitimate inspiration for poetry. Of course the
explicit "A Parodie" occurs towards the end of The Temple after many poems in which
Herbert implicitly casts himself and God in the role of lovers. Examples include
"Whitsunday," "The Starre," "Prayer" (II), "The Search," (where a "male," or aggressive
Herbert woos a "female," or passive, God); and "Affliction" (I), "The H. Communion,"
"Mattens," and "The Glance" (in which a "female" or passive Herbert responds to a
"male" or active God). The Temple suggests, therefore, that sacred poetry is an imitator
of, rather than model for, secular poetry. "Jordan" (II) and "A Parodie" are poems about
inspiration.

"The Posie" and "A true Hymne" are both poems which deny the importance of
the religious poem to either the poet or God. Both work by repeating a simple refrain:
"My joy, my life, my crown" in "A true Hymne," and "Lesse then the least / of all thy
mercies" in "The Posie." These refrains take on the nature of a formula and thus point to
liturgy, with its set prayers repeated every Sunday. Herbert simultaneously claims for his
poetry the same status and validity as the liturgy, and rejects the self-assertion involved in
poetic creation in favour of the humility of the Christian praying within the set forms. In
"The Posie" he dismisses all the qualities a poet can be proud of: "Invention rest, /
Comparisons go play, wit use thy will" (9-10). In "A true Hymne" he explicitly compares his poetry to components of the liturgy: "The finenesse which a hymne or psalme affords, / Is, when the soul unto the line accords" (9-10), and drives his point home by invoking, in the last two stanzas, the many Biblical passages in which God is said to crave an offering of the heart rather than a blood-sacrifice:15

He who craves all the minde,
And all the soul, and strength, and time,
If the words onely ryme,
Justly complains, that somewhat is behinde
To make his verse, or write a hymne in kinde.

Whereas if th'heart be moved,
Although the verse be somewhat scant,
God doth supplie the want.
As when th'heart sayes (sighing to be approved)
_"O, could I love! and stops: God writeth, Loved._ (11-20)

Just as God, by his _agape_, takes away the human inadequacy to love, so too does he, by writing the last word of the poem, absolve the poet from the anxieties of writing.

All of the themes expressed in these poems can be found in "The Forerunners."

Like the sonnets addressed to his mother, "Love" (I) and (II), and like "Jordan" (I), "The

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15 These passages include:

And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. (Proverbs 21:3)

And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Mark 12:33)

The common theme here is that God requires love before sacrifice, an idea that Herbert modifies to suggest that God prefers love over poetry, that poetic sacrifice must be offered with love, or the lines are empty and useless before God.
Forerunners" claims legitimacy for religious poetry by attacking secular love poetry:

Lovely enchanting language, sugar-cane,
Hony of roses, wither wilt thou flie?
Hath some fond lover tic'd thee to thy bane?
And wilt thou leave the Church, and love a stie?
    Fie, thou wilt soil thy broider'd coat,
    And hurt thy self, and him that sings the note. (19-24)

However, just like in "Dullness" and "A Parody," Herbert unintentionally reveals the origin of the poetic impulse in human sexual drives, by admitting that he took poetry from brothels in the first place.

    Farewell sweet phrases, lovely metaphors.
    But will ye leave me thus? when ye before
    Of stews and brothels onely knew the doores,
    Then did I wash you with my tears, and more,
        Brought you to Church well drest and clad:
        My God must have my best, ev'n all I had. (13-18)

Poetry's desire to "leave the Church, and love a stie" (22) is really only the need to return to its natural home. As in "A true Hymne" and "The Posie" Herbert turns from defending the legitimacy of religious poetry by using a refrain, in this case "Thou art still my God," to play down its importance, leading, in the end, to a resolve to sacrifice his poetic gift should such a sacrifice lead him closer to God:

    Yet if you go, I passe not; take your way:
    For, Thou art still my God, is all that ye
    Perhaps with more embellishment can say.
    Go birds of spring: let winter have his fee;
        Let a bleak paleness chalk the doore,
        So all within be livelier then before. (31-36)

"The Forerunners" is filled with ambivalence and contradictions. It is, as Louis Martz argues, with the "Jordan" poems, "The Quidditie," and "A true Hymne," a poem which attempts "to exorcize that constantly besetting temptation—to show off his brilliant power
as an artist. It is a temptation as unruly as Donne's sexual appetite—and as serious a threat
to the soul" ("Vehement Grief and Silent Tears" 30). Herbert is torn, as Michael
Schoenfeldt argues, "between the desire to devote to God the best of his abilities and the
need to repudiate the self-display inherent in such an otherwise pious desire" (171).

Most of the criticism concerning Herbert's audience has argued strongly for his
sense of a human reader. Vincent Buckley is rather a lone voice in declaring that,
compared to Donne, Herbert "solves his own problems, he makes no demands on us" (36;
Buckley's emphasis). Almost every critic of Herbert has followed Joseph Summers's lead
in arguing that Herbert's poems were written for an audience, rather than for self-
expression. Stanley Fish has probably been the most influential advocate of Herbert's
reader-centeredness in his reading of Herbert as a catechist:

how is it possible to say, without contradiction, that The Temple is firm,
secure, and complete, and yet is also precarious, shifting and unfinished?

. . . One need only replace the catechist and his pupil with the poet and his
reader: to one belongs the stability of prior and controlling intention, and
to the other belongs the realization of that intention, a realization which
will be preceded by uncertainty and arrive in the form of a surprise.
("Doing Scholarship" 1-2)

George Parfitt concentrates on Herbert's role as priest as well as poet, taking his cue for
this interpretation from the title of The Temple:

The Temple thus offers interplay between the poet-figure and the
architecture and furnishing of the church building, and this involves a
congregational element which is rare in Donne. Such interplay is clear in
poems like "Redemption" and the last of the lyrics called simply "Love,"
where the parabolic use of the poet-figure generates a sense of poet as
representative Christian, so that the poem becomes both an act of worship
and an object which can be used by others in contemplation of their deity.
(English Poetry of the Seventeenth Century 53)

Christopher Hodgkins, discussing the "didactic strategy" of the poetry, echoes Parfitt's
point about the poet standing in for the reader:

[T]hese lyrics are unified by a didactic strategy. This strategy generally works, not by stating explicit precepts, but by dramatizing crucial scenes along the protestant spiritual pilgrimage, scenes in which the reader can find his experience mirrored and thereby gain comfort or learn vicarious lessons. The individual speaker of the poems, while not the protestant everyman, nevertheless is typical of the "church" as a whole—that is, the invisible church, the entire body of the elect struggling to trust God in the face of a hostile world. (467; Hodgkins's emphasis)

Some critics have concentrated more particularly on the type of audience Herbert had in mind. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, for example, read "The Familie" as a public, as well as a private, poem, directed specifically at the elements in English Protestantism that would fracture the Church and bring about Civil War in the near future:

But as a public poem, the house of God is not the speaker's heart but Bethel (Genesis 28: 17-22), the visible Church, which is here beset by loud dissidents who respect neither rules nor ears. The speaker petitions God to expel the wranglers who defile His seat, to control ecclesiastical disputes by imposing peace and silence, to uphold the traditional order of set forms and hours, and to inculcate humble obedience. ("The Politics of The Temple" 6-7)

Of course, in petitioning God, Herbert is also petitioning, or warning, his human readers. Summers and Pebworth are careful to stress that because "The Familie" has this public dimension, it does not therefore lack the personal element; rather the two work together:

Precisely because he recognized in himself the temptation to noisy dissidence does he pray for God's harsh judgement on the wranglers. The external threat posed by the Puritans corresponds to an equally dangerous internal potential for disorderliness. In this sense, the public and private dimensions of "the Familie" are truly inseparable. (12)
The critical consensus, then, is that Herbert was very aware of his human audience.\(^{16}\)

What seems clear to me is that Herbert usually has two audiences in mind for any individual poem. When he addresses God, he has one eye out for his fellow sinners who might read the poem and benefit from it, while in the poems ostensibly addressed to his readers, he clearly means his words of exhortation to be overheard by God.\(^{17}\) The preeminent example of the first of these is "Obedience," the last stanza of which was so famously answered by Henry Vaughan:

How happie were my part
If some kinde man would thrust his heart
Into these lines; till in heav'ns Court of Rolls
They were by winged souls
Entred for both, farre above their desert!\(^{18}\) (41-45)

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\(^{16}\) A notable exception to this focus on Herbert's audience is Helen Vendler, who writes that "To approach such private poetry as an exercise in public communication with an audience is to misconstrue its emphasis" (5).

\(^{17}\) As Chana Bloch puts it: "Herbert's 'thou' is often directed not only to himself but also to his fellow sinner. . . . Nor is it possible to separate poems to God from poems to himself and others. . . . Indeed, in that very conjunction—the expressive inseparable from the didactic, the expressive in the service of the didactic—we recognize the spirit of Scripture" (Spelling the Word 171-74).

\(^{18}\) Vaughan's reply is contained in the first stanza of his poem "The Match":

dear friend! whose holy, ever-living lines
Have done much good
To many, and have checkt my blood,
My fierce, wild blood that still heaves, and inclines,
But is still tam'd
By those bright fires which thee inflam'd;
Here I joyn hands, and thrust my stubborn heart
Into thy Deed,
There from no Duties to be freed,
And if hereafter youth, or folly thwart
And claim their share,
Here I renonce the pois'nous ware. (1-12)
The two "Antiphon" poems invite the reader to join in the exhortations written down for
them and are clearly meant to rise to God's ears as the incense of praise. The parable or
narrative poems like "Humilitie," and "Love unknown," are obviously addressed to the
reader, inviting him or her to try to make sense of the story, in the same way that
Protestantism asked every Christian to interpret the stories of the Bible for himself. I
want to look at four poems which to some degree problematize the issue of audience in
Herbert.

"Miserie" begins by telling God just how badly he is treated by humanity, but the
question at the start of stanza two, "How canst thou brook his foolishnesse?" (7), is
strictly rhetorical. Herbert does not wish God to follow his advice when he says: "Man
cannot serve thee; let him go, / And serve the swine" (43-44). On the contrary, he wants
God to go on being tolerant; it is the behaviour of his human audience that he is trying to
change. In no other poem does Herbert come across so strongly as a wrathful Old
Testament prophet—misanthropic and furious at his own errant Israel. But Herbert
changes direction several times in the poem. In stanza six he suddenly switches pronouns
from "he" and "they" to "we" in "The sunne holds down his head for shame, / Dead with
eclipses, when we speak of thee" (33-34), including himself rhetorically for the first time
in his sarcastic denunciations, an exception that Stanley Fish misses when he says that
"nowhere in the body of the poem does the speaker acknowledge his complicity in the
sins he is indicating" (Self-Consuming Artifacts 180). But this touch of humility lasts
only two stanzas and by stanza eight he is back to excoriating "Man" (43), making him
into the enemy of a righteousness symbolized by both his own real-life profession of
preacher, and his role of preacher within the poem: "These Preachers make / His head to shoot and ake" (47-48). Then, immediately after opposing "man" (his readers) to the "preacher" (himself), he switches his address from God to man, addressing his readers directly: "O foolish man! where are thine eyes?" (49). The last five stanzas alternate between describing "man" to no one in particular, and addressing "man" directly. The end of stanza eleven opposes the speaker-as-poet to the rest of humanity: "Ah wretch! what verse / Can thy strange wayes rehearse?" (65-66). This opposition between the preacher-poet and the stupid wretch that neither sermons nor poetry can reach makes the sudden reversal at the end of the poem all the more wonderfully shocking:

But sinne hath fool'd him. Now he is
A lump of flesh, without a foot or wing
To raise him to a glimpse of blisse:
A sick toss'd vessel, dashing on each thing;
Nay, his own shelf:
My God, I mean my self. (73-78)

(Note how the "My God" could be an address or an exclamation, as Fish points out in *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (181-82), anticipating the last line of Hopkins's "Carrion Comfort"). Suddenly we realize that, with the exception of the very last "My God," Herbert has been addressing himself all along. The poem is so marvellously satirical, sarcastic, and vitriolic because it is fuelled by self-loathing. The human reader may feel released by the thundering Herbert's sudden turning away into himself, but only for a moment. Herbert knows that the reader is more likely to have shared the speaker's disdainful heights during the denunciations than fancied himself the target of them. Thus when the speaker pulls the rug out from under his own feet, he carries the reader right along with him. It is not just the sin of Phariseeism that has fooled the reader, but the
skill of the poet.

Where "Miserie" addresses its audience in uncharacteristically harsh terms, "The Invitation" represents a more usual attitude on Herbert's part to his readers. In both poems the speaker is clearly a preacher figure, addressing his words to a congregation at the same time that he addresses his poem to a reader. But whereas in "Miserie" the Old Testament prophet denounces his hearers, his readers, and himself, in "The Invitation" a priest of the Eucharist welcomes a multitude of sinners to a feast of love, forgiveness, and grace. He names four types of human weakness and instead of denouncing them, argues that God can fulfil a sinner's desires far better than the world can. Gluttons are assured that they will feast on "God, in whom all dainties are" (6). Drunkards are offered blood instead of wine (7-12). The debauched and worldly ("All, whom joy / Doth destroy" (19-20)) are promised a greater joy in God, while lovers are bribed away from their human loves with a love which "After death can never die" (30). Only the people addressed in the third stanza, those "whom pain / Doth arraigne" (13-14) are offered a destruction, rather than an intensification, of their affliction. 19 Herbert throws all his power of

19 My reading of "The Invitation" is in agreement with Richard Strier's:
It would seem, then, that Herbert does not participate at all in the Counter-Reformation cultivation of ecstasy, in the campaign to "change the object, not the passion." There is, however, one important exception to this generalization. In "The Invitation," Herbert seems to present sinners, especially those indulging in sensual excess "as people with all the right instincts" who are simply seeking satisfaction in the wrong places--"yet sucking natures teate." The poem presents the Eucharist as the ideal fulfilment of the passions involved in sinning. The objects, not the passions, need to be changed. ("Changing the Object" 28)
It is surprising that Strier reads "The Invitation" in this way, but does not mention "A Parodie," which, as I argue above, seems to suggest exactly that the object of love, rather than the passion of love, should be changed. Herbert perhaps participates in "the
seduction and bribery, of appealing to his audience's self-interest (a tactic he usually employs on God himself), into persuading his listeners and readers to come to Christ. The last stanza is addressed to God, and shows Herbert reversing his direction. Whereas in the previous stanzas he uses God as a bribe to draw in his human audience, he now uses that audience, that congregation, to bribe God into appearing:

Lord I have invited all,
    And I shall
Still invite, still call to thee:
For it seems but just and right
    In my sight,
Where is All, there All should be. (31-36)

Just as the priest invites God to the Eucharist to nourish the congregation, so does the poet invite God into the poem to bestow grace on the reader. For his poetry to work, Herbert needs all present: himself and his poem blissfully situated between his human readers and his divine audience. A poem that appeals to both God and man is indeed both "just and right," a very good poem indeed.

Herbert clearly thought long and hard about the issues involved in the writing of religious poetry, probably more than any of the other three poets in this study. His solution to the problems of self-assertion and sin inherent in the writing of poetry was to foreground those problems in poems which could then be offered up to God. It is poetry in general, rather than specifically religious poetry, that Herbert found hard to reconcile with his Christianity; he seems to have decided that it was better, in the words of St Paul, to marry than to burn, that is, to write sacred rather than profane poetry if he had to write

Counter-Reformation cultivation of ecstasy" to a greater extent than Strier gives him credit for.
poetry at all. Once the poems were written, he seems to have left it up to God whether or not they should do God's work by being published and attaining a human audience.  

Rossetti

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar tackle the issue of Christina Rossetti's attitude to her own poetry in their landmark study of nineteenth-century women writers, The Madwoman in the Attic. In Rossetti's case, they concentrate on her gender at the expense of her religion. The only time they explicitly consider the influence of Christianity on her poetry is to dismiss it as a harmful influence, claiming that Rossetti "elected an art that glorified the religious constrictions of the 'convent threshold'" (83). Where Gilbert and Gubar argue that Rossetti hesitated to write because of her sex, I contend that she felt emboldened to write because of her religion. Whereas Donne, Herbert, and Hopkins felt that the masculine values of boldness, self-assertion, and pride involved with publishing poetry came into conflict with the more feminine virtues of quietness, modesty, and resignation to fate that characterize Christianity, Rossetti was able to do the opposite, to counter the constraints of her gender with the imperatives of her religion. 

Gilbert and Gubar look first at Maude, arguing that "the moral of this story is that the Maude in Christina Rossetti—the ambitious, competitive, self-absorbed and self-

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20 This attitude is identical to Hopkins who wrote that "a very spiritual man once told me that with things like composition the best sacrifice was not to destroy one's work but to leave it entirely to be disposed of by obedience" (29 October 1881, Selected Letters 162). While the "very spiritual man" was probably a fellow Jesuit, Hopkins could also have been influenced by the spiritual man described in Walton's Life of Mr. George Herbert; certainly his action in leaving his poems to Robert Bridges after his death is remarkably similar to Herbert's surrender of his poems to Nicholas Ferrar.
assertive poet—must die, and be replaced by either the wife, the nun, or, most likely, the kindly useful spinster" (552). What this statement does not seem to recognize is that in Rossetti's actual life she remained an ambitious, competitive, and self-assertive (if not self-absorbed) poet. Unlike Donne, Herbert, or Hopkins, she made consistent efforts to get her work published. She cheerfully and openly admitted her pleasure upon succeeding: "you may think whether I am not happy to attain fame (!) and guineas by means of the Magazine" (8 April 1861, Letters 146). Far from welcoming any lack of success as a corrective to unfeminine ambition and vanity, she bewailed disappointing sales: "Truth to tell I was disappointed at drawing no more funds or fame from the Magazine" (7th January 1863, Letters 172). In addition to her ambition, she also openly admitted competitiveness:

Miss Proctor I am not afraid of: but Miss Ingelow... would be a formidable rival to most men, and to any woman. (1 December 1863, Letters 189)

I have just received a present of Jean Ingelow's 8th edition: imagine my feelings of envy and humiliation! (21 December 1864, Letters 208)

(It is notable, however, that she only mentions rivalry in conjunction with other women, not with any male poets.) When she does belittle her status as a woman poet, she sounds disingenuous. In a letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti she writes:

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21 Sharon Smulders reads Maude differently from Gilbert and Gubar, arguing that "the 'burnt-offering' at the end of Maude provided her with a metaphor to communicate her spiritual commitment. The imagery of conflagration used to symbolize the soul's devotion to Christ she used not only in 'An Immurata' Sister,' but in 'Soeur Louise de la Miséricorde' and 'The Convent Threshold'" ("A Form that Differences" 164). Smulders links the image of the burnt-offering to Hopkins, but it also works well for the contested lines about winding flames in Herbert's "Jordan" (II). See notes 12 and 27.
It is impossible to go on singing out loud [sic] to one's one-stringed lyre. It is not in me, and therefore it will never come out of me, to turn to politics or philanthropy with Mrs Browning: such many-sidedness I leave to a greater than I, and having said my say may well sit silent. . . . Here is a great discovery: "Women are not Men"—and you must not expect me to possess a tithe of your capacities, though I humbly—or proudly—lay claim to a family likeness. (April 1870, Letters 348)

Her exaltation of her brother over herself appears to be a tactic to distract him from attempting to dictate her poetic subject matter to her, in other words an assertion of the superiority of her poetic judgment over his. 22 Moreover, when she declares herself unable to match his abilities, she is merely bracketing him in with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was of course a woman poet just like Rossetti herself.

Rossetti did believe that, theologically, women were hierarchically subordinate to men. She argues this position in "A Helpmeet for Him" (II 169), and Sonnet 15 of Later Life (II 144-45) which begins, "Let women fear to teach and bear to learn." But she herself was not at all afraid to teach. On the contrary, she seemed to feel that God had called her to that very task, through her gift for poetry. As she grew older, and more established as a poet, she became more confident in the belief that God sanctioned her role as a public voice. She writes of her devotional book Seek and Find: "It is of course, but a simple work adapted to people who know less (!) than I do: but I took a keen interest in writing it, and I hope some may feel an interest in reading it" (25 July 1879, 250)

22 Christina Rossetti did, however, rely strongly on her brother as the chief critic and editor of her poems. As Jan Marsh points out, "there was no one else whose judgement she trusted more" (323), and "Christina welcomed and used his interventions because they were founded on a firm belief in her talent, which in many respects he rated above his own; she had, he told their mother later, more natural talent than himself" (326). Rossetti's knowledge of her brother's respect for her work makes her avowal of his superiority over her because of his sex sound somewhat disingenuous.
Family Letters 80). The exclamation mark reveals her ambivalence about proclaiming her superiority, but nevertheless she does not seek to deny that superiority or its likely salutary effect on her audience. Rossetti valued her role as a religious teacher higher than that of her position as a major poet: "I don't think harm will accrue from my S.P.C.K. [Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge] books, even to my standing: if it did, I should still be glad to throw my grain of dust into the religious scale"23 (1 January 1881, Family Letters 92). In her willingness to sacrifice her poetry to the greater religious good, she resembles Hopkins: the difference between them being that she felt that it was possible to combine her poetry with her religion in a way that Hopkins did not.

Rossetti was able to reconcile her identities as a woman and a poet by subsuming both under her identity as a Christian. Perhaps because the conflict between gender and poetry was present for her as it was not for Donne, Herbert, or Hopkins, it totally overwhelmed for her any conflict between religion and poetry. Religion, for her, was a justification for writing, rather than a barrier. A passage from Time Flies reveals how Rossetti justified her poetry to herself by classifying it under that supreme feminine and Christian virtue of her time, duty:

Suppose our duty of the moment is to write: why do we not write?-- Because we cannot summon up anything original, or striking, or picturesque, or eloquent, or brilliant. But is a subject set before us?--It is.

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23 That Rossetti incurred no harm from her religious activities is proven by the excellent sales of her religious poetry during her lifetime and after her death, as detailed by Diane D'Amico: "Rossetti's status as a devotional poet during her lifetime and for approximately thirty years after her death in 1894 was exceedingly high. The first edition of her devotional volume, Verses (1893), was sold out approximately ten days after publication" (269).
Is it true?—It is.
Do we understand it?—Up to a certain point we do.
Is it worthy of meditation?—Yes, and prayerfully.
Is it worthy of exposition?—Yes, indeed.
Why not then begin?—"From pride and vain glory, Good Lord, deliver us." (22)

It is, therefore, the refusal to write poetry that involves unwomanly and un-Christian vanity. Betty S. Flowers points out how the "Victorian ideal woman exactly matched the Victorian ideal of the obedient Christian—dutiful, self-sacrificing, always attuned to the needs and wishes of others" (163). By regarding her religious poetry as a duty, Rossetti was able to retain her sense of herself as both a good woman and a good Christian. The presence of this attitude seriously throws into doubt Gilbert and Gubar's reading of *Goblin Market* in which they argue:

what Lizzie is telling Laura (and what Rossetti is telling herself) is that the risks and gratifications of art are "not good for maidens," . . . Young ladies like Laura, Maude, and Christina Rossetti should not loiter in the glen of imagination, which is the haunt of goblin men like Keats and Tennyson—or like Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his compatriots of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. (573)

In fact, as a Christian poet, Rossetti may well have felt she had even more right, in spite of her sex, to "loiter in the glen of imagination" than did the agnostic male poets of her acquaintance.24

Poetic evidence for Rossetti's belief in the validity of her religious poetry is to be found in "The Lowest Room" (I 200-07). In this poem the speaker, a not-so-young

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24 Rossetti saw in her own family a gender division between Christian and freethinker: her mother, sister Maria, and herself were all devout, while her brothers Dante Gabriel and William Michael rejected Christianity. With such a family pattern before her, she may well have felt that, judged by the standards of Christianity, women were superior, rather than inferior, to men.
woman, argues with her younger sister over the comparative merits of Homer and the Gospels. The sisters have very different characters. The older says of herself that she suffers from

A silent envy nursed within,
A selfish, souring discontent
Pride-born, the devil's sin. (170-72)

Gilbert and Gubar would recognize this self-portrait as that of a frustrated woman poet, trying to renounce literature because it involves "the devil's sin" of unfeminine pride. This is the voice of the poet who, according to them, wrote *Goblin Market* as a renunciation of poetry. The second sister is the ideal Victorian woman, docile, tender, and gentle:

For mild she was, of few soft words,
Most gentle, easy to be led,
Content to listen when I spoke
And reverence what I said. (161-64)

The speaker exalts the Homeric heroes as the ultimate in human excellence, comparing them favourably with the people of her own time: "They hated with intenser hate / And loved with fuller love" (59-60). Her sister replies:

Homer, tho' greater than his gods,
With rough-hewn virtues was sufficed
And rough-hewn men: but what are such
To us who learn of Christ? (153-56)

She asserts that the literature of the Gospels and New Testament is superior to that of Homer. The speaker makes an attempt to counter this argument, by noticing similarities between Homer and the Old Testament:

Beneath the sun there's nothing new:
Men flow, men ebb, mankind flows on:
If I am wearied of my life,
   Why so was Solomon.

Vanity of vanities he preached
   Of all he found, of all he sought:
Vanity of vanities, the gist
   Of all the words he taught.

This in the wisdom of the world,
   In Homer's page, in all, we find:
As the sea is not filled, so yearns
   Man's universal mind. (177-188)

Her sister once again replies by unfavourably comparing the voice of Ecclesiastes with that of the Gospels:

   She scarcely answered when I paused,
      But rather to herself said: "One
   Is here," low-voiced and loving, "Yea,
      Greater than Solomon." (196-200)

Rossetti contrasts the two women in this poem, one restless and discontent, the other ideally gentle and docile, and makes the less threatening, more praiseworthy one the upholder of the superiority of Christian over secular literature. While she writes that "The Lowest Room is" one of her least personal poems (14 December 1875, *Family Letters* 55), it is personal insofar as it affirms both that Christ is the greatest subject literature can tackle, and that a woman can comment on (and by extension add to) Christian literature without losing one ounce of her femininity or compromising her desirable fate as a happy wife and mother (even if that was not to be her own fate).

Rossetti employs a wide range of voice and audience in her religious poetry. Many of her best and most famous religious poems correspond to the classic form of religious lyric in which the speaker addresses God directly, focussing on the pain, joy, or
desire felt by the "I" of the poem. "Good Friday" (I 186-87) and "A Better Resurrection" (I 68) are outstanding examples of Rossetti focussing on God as her only audience.

Another substantial portion of Rossetti's poetry addresses God directly, but uses "we" instead of "I," as in, for example, Sonnets 3 and 8 in _Later Life_ (II 139, 141-42). By using "we" instead of "I" as in the first three lines of sonnet 3,

Thou Who didst make and knowest whereof we are made,  
Oh bear in mind our dust and nothingness,  
Our wordless tearless dumbness of distress,  

Rossetti achieves two things: she makes herself, through her poetry, into the intercessionary priest standing between God and humanity that both her gender and her Protestantism prevented her from being; and she pulls her reader into her prayer, making him share in the petitions or praise she makes to God.

Rossetti, far more than the other poets, addresses her readers directly, as the primary audience of her poetry. Whereas Donne and Hopkins, for the most part, present their personal experience and let the reader learn from that, and Herbert addresses the reader directly in only a few of his poems, Rossetti's addresses to the reader make up a very large proportion of her religious poems. David A. Kent points out that "while we value her personal lyrics of joy and despair, Rossetti's voice generally speaks in imperatives or exhortations more often than it is overheard in colloquy with God. Her awareness of the reader as fellow pilgrim might be attributed to a consciousness of the sizable Victorian audience she was addressing" ("By thought, word, and deed" 272). In

25 "The Church-porch" and "Superliminare" are obvious examples; others are "Sinne" (II), "The Church-floore," and "Divinitie."
almost all of these exhortatory poems, Rossetti uses the pronoun "we" rather than addressing her readers as "you," thus constructing a compassionate and humble, rather than didactic, voice. In "Advent" (I 68-70) she goes so far as to introduce direct speech by "we," that is, herself and, presumably, her readers:

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This Advent moon shines cold and clear,
These Advent nights are long;
Our lamps have burned year after year
And still their flame is strong.
"Watchman, what of the night?" we cry
Heart-sick with hope deferred:
"No speaking signs are in the sky,"
Is still the watchman's word. (1-8)
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The poems in which she does use "you" also leave open the possibility that she is addressing herself rather than, or in addition to, her reader. In the following untitled lyric (II 334), for example, she employs the intimate and singular "thee" rather than the public and plural "you," and the tone of exasperation and harshness seems to belong more to Rossetti's self-loathing and sense of sin than to an Old Testament misanthropy:

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O foolish Soul! to make thy count
For languid falls and much forgiven,
When like a flame thou mightest mount
To storm and carry heaven.

A life so faint,—is this to live?
A goal so mean,—is this a goal?
Christ love thee, remedy, forgive,
Save thee, O foolish Soul.
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The reader, however, is certainly at liberty to believe herself the foolish soul and join in the prayer for forgiveness as she reads the poem. The next poem but one (II 334-35), however, is unambiguous in its address to a multiple audience, employing the pronoun "you," speaking of "faces" in the plural, and adopting an encouraging tone in its
exhortation:

The goal in sight! Look up and sing,
Set faces full against the light,
Welcome with rapturous welcoming
The goal in sight.

Let be the left, let be the right:
Straight forward make your footsteps ring
A loud alarum thro' the night.

Death hunts you, yea, but rest of sting;
Your bed is green, your shroud is white:
Hail! Life and Death and all that bring
The goal in sight.

Rossetti sounds here like the priest before his congregation that she could never be.

Out of the four poets, Rossetti is also the most confident user of God's voice. She writes many poems in which either God and poet are in dialogue, or God himself speaks the entire poem, although, ironically, her poetry seems the least conversational in tone, the least close to the natural rhythms of speech. Neither Donne nor Hopkins ever make God speak directly, while Herbert has only "The Sacrifice" in which God speaks the whole poem, only "Dialogue" in which God and poet get equal time, and only a few poems, such as "Jordan" (II), "The Collar," and "The Pulley," in which God's speech is reported. That a female poet should be so much more comfortable appropriating God's voice than these three great male poets is another fact that sits untidily with Gilbert and Gubar's theories about Rossetti-as-Maude.

The complexity of audience in the dialogue poems is emphasized by those dialogues in which the identity of the speakers is ambiguous, as in "Uphill" (1 65-66),

26 Christ does speak in "The Soldier," but in reported, rather than direct speech.
which is structured along question and answer lines:

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?  
Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?  
From morn to night, my friend. (1-4)

Who is speaking here? Is the poet asking the question, and God responding? Or is it the reader, or a faceless figure that represents the reader who asks and the poet who responds? Both seem to be happening spontaneously, which means that neither the reader, the poet, or God has to be excluded from being directly addressed by the poem.

"Amen" (I 90-91), "The Master is Come, and Calleth for Thee" (I 226), and "When my Heart is Vexed I will Complain" (II 303-04) are all similarly ambiguous dialogues. Unlike "Uphill" it is certain that God does not speak in these poems since he is referred to in the third person, but it is just as difficult to tell whether Rossetti sees herself as the questioner or the answerer in the dialogue. The last of these poems begins with the following exchange:

"The fields are white to harvest, look and see,  
Are white abundantly.  
The full-orbed harvest moon shines clear,  
The harvest-time draws near,  
Be of good cheer."

"Ah, woe is me!  
I have no heart for harvest time,  
Gown sick with hope deferred from chime to chime." (1-8)

Does Rossetti see herself here as giving comfort to her readers, or as receiving comfort from someone else, perhaps an angel, or a Herbertian "friend?" As in "Uphill" the ambiguity surrounding the speakers allows Rossetti to be both the teacher and advisor of
her reader, and the humble seeker before God.

Rossetti writes poems that fit none of the above-mentioned categories: poems addressed to no one in particular but simply expressing the feelings of the speaker, the "I" of the classic lyric poem, as in "A Birthday" (I 36-37); the narrative or parabolic poems (e.g. "From House to Home" (I 82-88)); poems addressed to a specific addressee who is not God, such as the world, flesh, and devil in "The Three Enemies" (I 70-72); and dramatic lyrics, such as "By the waters of Babylon" (III 282-83) and "A Prodigal Son" (II 118) where the speaker is clearly not Rossetti herself.

Christina Rossetti, then, is the least worried, and the most confident, of the four poets on the issue of writing religious poetry. Her belief in the legitimacy of the genre, and her own ability to write it, spring directly from her gender and from her lack of priestly vocation. Because she was already practising the Christian virtues of silence and self-negation as a woman, she did not feel the need to also practice them as a Christian poet. And because she could never stand in the pulpit and preach, she found in poetry a replacement for, rather than a distraction from, or a cause of conflict to, a vocation as priest. (While Donne and Herbert both wrote many of their religious poems before they took orders, they did have the vocation before them as a possibility, even a probability, from an early age.) Where the male priests worried that their religious poetry was excessive and self-indulgent, the female laywoman felt that her poetry was the best thing she could give by way of service to God and her fellow Christians.
Hopkins

Most of Hopkins's attitudes to religious poetry can be gathered from his letters to fellow poets Robert Bridges and Richard Watson Dixon. His explicit comments in these letters find implicit echoes here and there in his poetry, but he did not take poetry itself as a poetic subject in the same way that Herbert did. Of all in the poets in this study, Hopkins tends to be the most dismissive about the importance of religious poetry and the most genuinely confused (as opposed to ambivalent, like Herbert) about whether he should be writing it.

Hopkins does not make many statements about the rights and wrongs of writing religious poetry; he is far more concerned about the rights and wrongs of publishing it. Only three passages from his letters deal directly with his attitude to writing. The first is a famous and much cited passage from a letter to Richard Dixon:

You ask, do I write verse myself. What I had written I burnt before I became a Jesuit and resolved to write no more, as not belonging to my profession, unless it were by the wish of my superiors; so for seven years I wrote nothing but two or three little presentation pieces which occasion called for. But when in the winter of '75 the Deutschland was wrecked in the mouth of the Thames and five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany by the Falck Laws, aboard of her were drowned I was affected by the account and happening to say so to my rector he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint I set to work and, though my hand was out at first, produced one. . . . After writing this I held myself free to compose, but cannot find it in my conscience to spend time upon it; so I have done little and shall do less. (5 October 1878, Selected Letters 107-08)

Sharon Smulders writes of this episode that: "Unlike Rossetti at the end of Maude, [Hopkins] did not find symbol and metaphor expedient to reconcile poetic and religious aims. Converting figure to fact, Hopkins felt constrained to make of his poetry a 'burnt-offering.' He thereby unwittingly literalized the metaphor Rossetti first employed at the end of Maude" ("A Form That Differences" 170). See notes 12 and 21.
Hopkins's fear of writing religious poetry stems not from any doubt about the validity of religious poetry in itself, but from concern that he personally, as a Jesuit, should not waste his time and energy upon it, that he would be unprofessional to do so. (He does not seem to have felt that Canon Dixon was wrong to write religious poetry.) His reservations and restrictions are external, rather than internal as in the case of Donne and Herbert, although it often seems as if Hopkins uses the Society of Jesus as an excuse, an externalization of some inner reluctance to write. Norman MacKenzie argues convincingly that Hopkins's non-production stemmed from himself, not from the Jesuits: "An attitude which began in a desire to 'seek first the Kingdom of God' . . . became entangled in his human frailty, his lack of self-confidence" (32). Janet Denford provides some examples of this human frailty, arguing that Hopkins "was always mistrustful of the public" and that "he experienced the perfectionist's reluctance to let the finished work leave his amending hand" (6). Alison Sulloway looks beyond Hopkins's personality to his culture, suggesting that it was the Victorian in Hopkins, as much as the Jesuit, that held him back from writing: "Hopkins's ambivalence in the matter of fame and art was as much a part of Hopkins, the ex-tractarian, Hopkins, the scholar of Jowett, Balliol and Oxford, Hopkins, the Ruskinian aesthetcian, and Hopkins, the paradigm of the new Victorian gentleman, as it was of Hopkins, the convert to Catholicism and Jesuit priest" (Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper 102).

There is certainly no evidence that his fellow priests would have wished him to abstain from verse, as he himself indicates in a letter to Bridges: "Our society cannot be blamed for not valuing what it never knew of. . . . It always seems to me that poetry is
unprofessional, but that is what I have said to myself, not others to me. No doubt if I kept producing I should have to ask myself what I meant to do with it all; but I have long been at a standstill, and so the things lie." In this same letter Hopkins admits that a fellow Jesuit, admittedly of his own rank, appreciated his poetry: "Fr. Francis Bacon, a fellow novice [sic] of mine, and an admirer of my sermons saw all and expressed a strong admiration for them which was certainly sincere" (21 August 1884, Selected Letters 200-01). Moreover it seems clear that Deutschland and Eurydice were rejected by the editors of The Month because of questions of poetic merit, not religious appropriateness.

The second major statement Hopkins makes reveals more about his opinions on the validity of religious poetry:

I cannot in conscience spent [sic] time on poetry, neither have I the inducements and inspirations that make others compose. Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse and the only person that I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly and when he does I cannot always "make capital" of it, it would be a sacrilege to do so. (15 February 1879, Selected Letters 117)

Hopkins reveals an objection to "using" his relationship with Christ for the purpose of creating art. He would agree with Dr Johnson here: theology is too great for poetry.

In Hopkins's third important statement on the subject, however, he reverts to the validity of his writing of religious poetry:

This I say: my vocation puts before me a standard so high that a higher can be found nowhere else. The question then for me is not whether I am willing . . . to make a sacrifice of hopes of fame . . . but whether I am not to undergo a severe judgment from God for the lothness I have shewn in making it, for the reserves I may have in my heart made, for the backward glances I have given with my hand upon the plough, for the waste of time the very compositions you admire may have caused and their preoccupation of the mind which belonged to more sacred or more binding duties, for the disquiet and the thoughts of vainglory they have given rise
to. . . . I destroyed the verse I had written when I entered the Society, and meant to write no more; the Deutschland I began after a long interval at the chance suggestion of my superior, but that being done it is a question whether I did well to write anything else. (29 October 1881, Selected Letters 161-62)

It is always the process of writing that Hopkins criticizes, never the finished product itself. He fears the distraction from his priestly duties, not that his poems, once written, will do any damage to the cause of his religion by being too inadequate to express the full glory of God. Indeed, I can only find very few expressions of doubt in the poetic (as opposed to religious and ethical) validity of his work, and they occur in the poetry:

Beyond saying sweet, past telling of tongue,
Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm.
Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then. (st. 9)

The poet admits that the mystery of this "past all / Grasp God" (st. 32) is too much for even the sweet saying of poetry to express, but he goes on to try anyway, by the expedient of piling magnificent paradoxes on top of each other.

Hopkins may not treat the issue of validity directly in his poetry, but he does write about inspiration in such a way as to directly imply the legitimacy of his work. In his letters he has this to say on the subject of inspiration:

I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will. . . . So with me, if I could but get on, if I could but produce work I should not mind its being buried, silenced, and going no further; but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget. (1 September 1885, Selected Letters 214-15)

It is now years that I have had no inspiration of longer jet than makes a sonnet, except only in that fortnight in Wales: it is what, far more than direct want of time, I find most against poetry and production in the life I lead. . . . Nothing comes: I am a eunuch—but it is for the kingdom of heaven's sake. (12 January 1888, Selected Letters 268)
The first of these passages makes the traditional claim that the poet is merely the instrument for an external inspiration which cannot be denied. It seems significant, maybe even ominous in sight of the despair of these sonnets, that Hopkins does not specifically claim that this inspiration comes from God. In the second passage he claims that his lack of inspiration is part of God's plan for him, thus revealing his belief that poetic inspiration does come from God and is his to give and take away.

Hopkins is more forthcoming about inspiration in his poetry. Michael Sprinker, who reads all of Hopkins's works as poems about poetry, concentrates upon *The Wreck of the Deutschland* as "an autobiographical poem about the birth of the poet [as] can be shown from evidence within and outside the poem" (100). As the first major poem Hopkins wrote in seven years, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* invites a reading which sees it as, in part, a celebration of its own inspiration. Since the subject matter was not solely of Hopkins's choosing, but suggested to him by a superior, it is possible that some of the emotions he invests in the shipwreck are actually displaced feelings about the fact that he is writing a poem once again, and with the approval of his order. In stanza five Hopkins suggests that his poetry is a manifestation of his love for God:

> I kiss my hand  
> To the stars, lovely-asunder  
> Starlight, wafting him out of it; and  
> Glow, glory in thunder;  
> Kiss my hand to the dappled-with-damson west:  
> Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder,  
> His mystery must be instressed, stressed;  
> For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand.

The poem itself is an instressing of God's mystery, and is literally "stressed" within Hopkins's sprung rhythm. The last line of the stanza could be paraphrased: When he
comes to me he inspires me and I respond with a greeting in the form of a poem.

Hopkins describes the irresistible quality of his poetic inspiration in stanza 18:

Ah, touched in your bower of bone,
Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
Do you!—mother of being in me, heart.
O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth,
Why, tears! is it? tears; such a melting, a madrigal start!

In these six lines he manages to make three large claims: that he is not really responsible
for his poetry, in that his heart, the irrational part of him, makes the words break from
him (note how describing himself as "all alone" suggests that he is the victim of an
assault); that his poetry has the same emotional authority as heart-wrung tears, springing
from the soul rather than the brain; and finally that his poetry has prophetic and revelatory
power since the heart that inspires his words is "uttering truth."

In stanza 28 Hopkins telescopes his own searching after poetic inspiration with
the scramble of the Deutschland passengers to find something to rescue them:

But how shall I . . . make me room there:
Reach me a . . . Fancy, come faster—
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
Thing that she . . . There then! the Master
Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head.

Both the nun and the poet are rewarded with the same vision, Christ the Master, who will
inspire the nun to her prophetic cry of faith and the poet to his prophetic poem of faith.

*The Wreck of the Deutschland*, in the words of Lori-Ann Burnstead, "clearly voices
Hopkins's poetic ambitions and ideals" (82). 28

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28 J. Hillis Miller, however, argues that the poem is about the failure of poetry, in that
it "recognizes that there is no word for the Word, that all words are metaphors . . . . The
"Pied Beauty," a poem about the glories of the natural world, also glances at Hopkins's own artistic practice. After the first five lines, concentrating on nature, Hopkins switches his focus to the productive activities of humanity: "And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim" (6). The writing of poetry could be considered a trade, especially in the eyes of such a craftsman as Hopkins, and the following line could certainly be interpreted as describing Hopkins's particular brand of that trade: "All things counter, original, spare, strange" (7). Behind the praise of God's natural creation lies a defence of Hopkins's own "strange" and "original" poetry which is inspired by God: "He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change" (10). In this reading of the poem the very last line, "Praise him," is not only an imperative but a justification of the aims of Hopkins's poetry, which continually praises God.

Two of the dark sonnets, "To seem the stranger" and "Thou art indeed just" treat the subject of the lack of inspiration. In doing so, they both angrily accuse God of not providing that inspiration. By locating the source of his poetic inspiration in God, and then expressing anger when it is not forthcoming, Hopkins indirectly asserts the validity of his religious poetry in a way that he is not prepared to do in his letters. "To seem the stranger" ends with the lines:

Only what word
Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
Bars or hell's spell thwart. This to hoard unheard,

Wreck of the Deutschland,' like all the great poems of Hopkins' maturity, turns on a recognition of the ultimate failure of poetic language" (The Linguistic Moment 264-65). Miller holds that this recognition is largely unconscious on Hopkins's part; I am more concerned in this chapter with the conscious intentions of the poets.
Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began. (11-14)

Heaven is both dark and baffling here; the poet gives no indication that Heaven's ban might be justified, or that his lack of inspiration is "for the kingdom of heaven's sake."

And if it is hell that thwarts his inspiration, then not writing religious poetry is clearly antagonistic to God. In "Thou art indeed just" Hopkins returns to his favourite image of being a spiritual eunuch, but this time he unambiguously puts all the blame for his infertility on God:

birds build--but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes. (12-13)

He ends with a plea that God will rectify his poetic dryness with the inspiration that only he can provide: "Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain" (14). Since the poem is revealed to be about poetry and the lack of inspiration at its end, new light is shed, on a second reading, upon the earlier lines that compare the poet's situation with that of sinners. "Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must / Disappointment all I endeavour end?" (3-4) may well refer to Hopkins's poetic contemporaries who were not writing religious poetry but still managed to produce more good work than he did. The lines

Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,

Sir, life upon thy cause (7-9)

attack those poets that write about sexual love (Hopkins may well have had Swinburne in

29 Indeed, Daniel A. Harris reads these lines as an angry accusation on Hopkins's part: "Thus, when Hopkins changed 'some ban' to 'dark heaven's baffling ban,' and thereby ascribed the failure of colloquy to God, he made the most radically heterodox gesture of his poetry" (117).
mind) and who have the "spare hours" in which to write that the Jesuit priest lacks.

Finally, "To R. B." likens poetic inspiration to the Incarnation itself. The first quatrain evokes the image of the Holy Spirit coming down upon Mary and impregnating her:

The fine delight that fathers thought; the strong Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame, Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came, Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song. (1-4)

Hopkins ends by saying that the Holy Spirit, the "Sweet fire the sire of muse" (9) does not alight upon him, and that therefore his poetry lacks the true creative inspiration that mirrors God's creation: "The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation" (12). This sonnet then, stands as a final testament to Hopkins's belief that poetic inspiration comes from God and mirrors God's own creative power.

The aspect of his poetry that Hopkins seems most conflicted over is his audience, or lack thereof. While he continued to write poetry from 1875 until his death in 1889, he attempted to publish very little of it. One of his earliest statements on the question of audience reveals both his rejection of, and desire for, a readership. He tells Robert Bridges: "I cannot think of altering anything. Why shd. I? I do not write for the public. You are my public and I hope to convert you" (21 August 1877, Selected Letters 91).

Surely, if by his poems he hoped to convert Bridges, it must have crossed his mind that a thousand converted readers would be better than one. He admits as much eight years later:

By the bye, I say it deliberately and before God, I would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless
The true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works. What are works of art for? to educate, to be standards. Education is meant for the many, standards are for public use. To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known, if known widely known, the wider known the better, for it is by being known it works, it influences, it does its duty, it does good. We must then try to be known, aim at it, take means to do it. (13 October 1886, Selected Letters 237)

If "to produce is of little use unless what we produce is known," why then did Hopkins so resolutely refuse to publish his own work? Part of the answer can be found in this extract itself when he calls fame "one of the most dangerous things to man." This phrase echoes a longer meditation on the perils of fame written in a letter to Dixon in 1878:

When I spoke of fame I was not thinking of the harm it does to men as artists: it may do them harm, as you say, but so, I think, may the want of it . . . But I meant that it is a great danger in itself, as dangerous as wealth every bit, I should think, and as hard to enter the kingdom of heaven with. And even if it does not lead men to break the divine law, yet it gives them "itching ears" and makes them live on public breath. (13 June 1878, Selected Letters 102-04)

In his fear of being corrupted by personal glory, he echoes Christina Rossetti, but unlike her, he actively avoided the temptation.

Hopkins presents himself as satisfied with an audience of two, Bridges and Dixon, because "a poet is a public in himself" (19 January 1879, Selected Letters 109). But he also reveals a very strong sense of Christ as his main audience. To Dixon he describes Christ as a literary critic: "The only just judge, the only just literary critic, is Christ, who prizes, is proud of, and admires, more than any man, more than the receiver himself can, the gifts of his own making" (13 June 1878, Selected Letters 104). He writes to Bridges: "As I am criticising you, so does Christ, only more correctly and more affectionately, both as a poet and as a man" (22 February 1879, Bridges 73). Since Christ is both critic and
audience (which, incidentally, serves to validate the genre of religious poetry most emphatically), he can also take on the role of publisher:

Now if you value what I write, if I do myself, much more does our Lord. And if he chooses to avail himself of what I leave at his disposal he can do so with a felicity and with a success which I could never command. And if he does not, then two things follow; one that the reward I shall nevertheless receive from him will be all the greater; the other that then I shall know how much a thing contrary to his will and even to my own best interests I should have done if I had taken things into my own hands and forced on publication. (1 December 1881, Selected Letters 163)

Hopkins almost totally rejects the idea of having a large audience while he lives:

I shall, in my present mind, continue to compose, as occasion shall fairly allow, which I am afraid will be seldom and indeed for some years past has been scarcely ever, and let what I produce wait and take its chance; for a very spiritual man once told me that with things like composition the best sacrifice was not to destroy one's work but to leave it entirely to be disposed of by obedience. But I can scarcely fancy myself asking a superior to publish a volume of my verses and I own that humanly there is very little likelihood of that ever coming to pass. And to be sure if I chose to look at things on one side and not the other I could of course regret this bitterly. But there is more peace and it is the holier lot to be unknown than to be known. (29 October 1881, Selected Letters 162)

Like Herbert, he was happy to have his poems read after his death, if they might do any good. When he does write with an audience other than Christ or his fellow poets specifically in mind, it has, he claims, an adverse effect on his poetry: "Both ['May Magnificat' and 'Silver Jubilee'] of course are 'popular' pieces in which I feel myself to come short" (9 April 1879, Bridges 78).

Hopkins's actions in this matter of publishing, however, do not always echo his words. He desired a Jesuit audience, at least at first, as evidenced by his submitting the Deutschland and the Eurydice to The Month. Most surprising, however, is his action in 1881 of sending three sonnets to Hall Caine for consideration, on the suggestion of Dixon
(Norman White 324), whose previous encouragements to Hopkins to publish he had continually rejected, sometimes with rebuke.

Hopkins's attitudes to his poetry coalesce in the figure of the chief nun from *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. She emerges magnificently as a voice which drowns out all the others:

Night roared, with the heart-break hearing a heart-broke rabble,
   The woman's wailing, the crying of child without check--
   Till a lioness arose breasting the babble,
   A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told. (st. 17)

By calling the nun a prophet, Hopkins links her with the tradition of religious poetry as prophecy. Paul Mariani points out a further way in which the two are linked: "Hopkins too is a virginal tongue telling the significance of the shipwreck" (60). In stanza 29 Hopkins presents the nun not so much as the prophet who speaks, but the visionary who sees, the truth:

Ah! there was a heart right!
   There was single eye!
   Read the unshapeable shock night
   And knew the who and the why;
   Wording it how but by him that present and past,
   Heaven and earth are word of, worded by?--
   The Simon Peter of a soul! to the blast
   Tarpeian-fast, but a blown beacon of light.

Just as the nun sees her vision and "words it" by the Word of God, the Logos who is Christ, so too does the religious poet speak the word of truth. The next stanza, as does his much later poem "To R. B.," compares the nun's vision (and hence the poet's inspiration) to Mary's conception of Christ:
Jesu, heart's light,
Jesu, maid's son,
What was the feast that followed the night
Thou hadst glory of this nun?--
Feast of the one woman without stain.
For so conceivèà, so to conceive thee is done;
But here was heart-throe, birth of a brain,
Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright. (st. 30)

The nun is a figure for Hopkins himself and in her vision, her prophetic words, her
elevation to the status of Mary, and the effect of her words upon her audience (in this case
Hopkins himself), she triumphantly ensures the legitimacy and importance of Hopkins's
own religious poetry.

Hopkins may have despaired of an audience in the real world, but many of his
poems seem motivated by the possibility of readers other than God and himself. J. Hillis
Miller provides a good breakdown of the difference types of audience Hopkins's poetry
calls for. As he says, some poems "are addressed boldly and directly to God," some to
personifications such as "Peace," others to particular people such as "Margaret" and
Robert Bridges, some to himself, and some to the reader, for example "As Kingfishers
catch fire" and "To what serves Mortal Beauty" ("Naming and Doing" 183).

Certain poems present more complicated issues of audience. One of these is "The
Loss of the Eurydice." Hopkins is almost belligerent in the first line, calling God to
attention in no uncertain terms: "The Eurydice—it concerned thee, O Lord." God, then, it
seems, is the audience for the poem. But the poet almost immediately veers off into the
impersonal narrative style, which suggests God is not his primary audience since God can
be persuaded, cursed, praised, and apologized to, but does not need to be informed of
events. The reader, then, is Hopkins's primary audience. But in three of the last four
stanzas, Hopkins turns his attention to a very specific group of readers, the mothers, wives, and sweethearts of the drowned sailors. Since Hopkins offered to poem to *The Month* it seems that he hoped these specific people would read and take comfort from his poem. He even instructs these women in how to pray to God, giving them the very words they should use:

But to Christ lord of thunder  
Crouch; lay knee by earth low under:  
'Holiest, loveliest, bravest,  
Save my hero, O Hero savest.

And the prayer thou hearst me making  
Have, at the awful overtaking,  
Heard; have heard and granted  
Grace that day grace was wanted.' (109-16)

At the end of the poem, then, Hopkins makes true his opening statement that the poem concerns God, by addressing God through the readers that the poem addresses. Hopkins makes part of the poem into an actual prayer, uttered by both himself and all his readers.

Among the six terrible sonnets, the most terrible have usually been taken to be "Carrion Comfort," "No worst, there is none," and "I wake and feel." It is one of these three, according to critics, that Hopkins must have "written in blood." The precise chronology of these poems is uncertain, but taken together, along with "To seem the stranger," they show a clear progression from addressing God to ignoring him. In "Carrion Comfort" Hopkins spends the octave in an address to Despair, who turns out to be God in disguise. The direct address to God, returned to very briefly in the parenthesis in the last line, "I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God" (14), thus constitutes over half the poem. By contrast, in "No worst" only one line is spoken to God and one to
Mary: "Comforter, where, where is your comforting? / Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?" (3-4). Unanswered, the poet turns at the end to addressing himself, as a grim version of the "comforter" he invoked in vain:

Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep. (12-14)

"To seem the stranger" and "I wake and feel" do not bother to address God at all, knowing such an invocation would only be another "dead letter" ("I wake and feel" 7). Instead, Hopkins begins "I wake and feel" by addressing his own heart, only to end it by despising and lamenting his solipsism:

I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse. (12-14)

The three sonnets chart a progression from most to least hopeful. "Carrion Comfort" offers good reasons for the speaker's suffering and ends on a note of wonder; "No worst" slumps into confusion and can offer only sleep or death as a refuge from suffering; "I wake and feel," in invoking insomnia and damnation, negates those comforts, and is the most bleak and despairing of the three. Corresponding to the dwindling of hope and faith in this small sequence, is the progression from addressing God as the primary audience in "Carrion Comfort," to the lack of any attempt to do so in "I wake and feel." As Daniel Harris argues, "the vocative mode nearly vanishes" (77) in the terrible sonnets, and "Translated into the terms of Ignatian meditation, the elimination of the vocative amounts to an omission of colloquy with God, the central and climactic occasion towards which
the entire meditative exercise should move" (80). The absence of God as an addressee suggests a growing, if unconscious or unwilling, atheism on Hopkins's part.

Like a true post-Romantic, Hopkins believes in the holiness of poetry, and he seems to have believed that sacred poetry was the best and holiest poetic genre. His conflicts over poetry stem almost entirely from his vocation as a Jesuit priest. While it may be true that, as Donald Walhout argues, he could not have written his poetry without the inspiration and discipline of his calling, that calling caused him to devalue the importance of his poetry, doubt whether he should be writing it at all, and shun a human readership for it during his lifetime.

Feuerbach argued that "Temples in honour of religion are in truth temples in honour of architecture" (20), and that "the power of religious music is not the power of religion, but the power of music" (142). The existence of many non-Christian readers who enjoy religious poetry without feeling the need to convert seems to prove him right. But it appears to have been only George Herbert who was gravely worried by this issue; Donne's concern about his own personal salvation outweighed any anxiety about the effect of his poetry, Rossetti clearly believed that God would work through her poetry to bring readers to himself, and Hopkins believed the road to converting his fellow men lay in his work as a Jesuit, not as a poet. The tension that exists between Christian and poet in all their work, however, bears witness to the way in which the conflict between religion

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30 "Remove this Christian experience and its concrete Catholic and Jesuit embodiments which Hopkins felt it entailed for his own life, and the content of the poetry, let alone its very occurrence, would seem to be impossible" (20).
and art results not in failed poetry, nor distorted Christianity, but in great literature and a fascinating and compelling portrayal of the relationship between the soul and God.
Conclusion

Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint. In so far as in any age there is common agreement on ethical and theological matters, so far can literary criticism be substantive. In ages like our own, in which there is no such common agreement, it is the more necessary for Christian readers to scrutinize their reading, especially of works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards. The "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards. (T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature" 97)

My approach in this thesis has been "literary criticism . . . completed by criticism from a definite . . . theological standpoint," but unlike Eliot, my standpoint has been agnostic rather than Christian. I have argued throughout for a reading of the poetry which sees the poet relating to himself, rather than to God. In doing so, I have tried to provide one answer to the question posed by Jerome McGann with reference to Rossetti: "But suppose for a moment you wanted to convince a non-Christian Japanese friend of the power of Christina Rossetti's poetry or--perhaps better--a humanist scholar from the Soviet Union--or simply any non-believer. What line would you take? What would you say?" ("The Religious Poetry of Christina Rossetti" 128). McGann seems to me to avoid answering his own question, since he comes to the conclusion that "to read Rossetti's religious poetry with understanding (and therefore with profit and appreciation) requires a more or less conscious investment in the peculiarities of its Christian orientation, in the social and historical particulars which feed and shape the distinctive features of her work"
(132; McGann's emphasis). It seems to me that the Japanese and Soviet readers would simply shrug their shoulders and walk away if offered this answer. My thesis has come up with two different answers.

The first is one that all secular critics of religious poetry have to some degree offered, that the power of religious poetry lies simply in its power as poetry, in its formal literary merit and beauty. In chapters two and four I argue that the formal qualities of poetry can be enhanced, not destroyed or neutralized, by a Christian theme or investment. These two chapters both argue against Kristeva's belief that poetry only works when it destroys dogma: chapter two by engaging Kristeva on her own terms, chapter four by constructing possible answers to her objections by the poets themselves. Religious poetry can delight the secular reader.

The second answer is that religious poetry powerfully and beautifully expresses self-conflict. While nonbelieving readers might be tempted to dismiss religious poetry as a record of an inauthentic and delusionary experience, they are likely to find it a convincing account of the subject's attempts to come to grips with itself, if they are shown ways in which they can read "God" as part of the psyche. Chapters one and three concentrate upon the poetry as a document of self-knowledge and self-construction: chapter one by looking at the ways in which the subject constructs itself as familiar or strange, chapter three by examining strategies of self-love and self-hate. Religious poetry can teach, as well as delight, the secular reader, by presenting to her different ways in which she can relate to her own self.
The thesis, then, attempts to prove wrong "the great majority of people" for whom, in Eliot's words, "religious poetry' is a variety of minor poetry: the religious poet is not a poet who is treating the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit, but a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject matter: who is leaving out what men consider their major passions, and thereby confessing his ignorance of them" ("Religion and Literature" 99; Eliot's emphasis). By reading religious poetry in some sense independently of God, I hope I have shown how the religious poet indeed treats the "major passions" of love, hate, fear, sexuality, resentment, desire, depression, and joy; that the religious poet indeed treats "the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit," rather than relegating himself to the status of a minor poet of "limited awareness" ("Religion and Literature" 99). Religious poetry is inevitably about the self and about poetry, two of the most major, most central, subjects of all poetry.

And yet, in spite of my agnostic approach to religious poetry in this thesis, I would offer McGann's non-Christian readers a third answer, that the power of the poetry of Donne, Herbert, Rossetti, and Hopkins, springs from the God that they create in their poetry. Anthony Low writes that the particular challenge that criticism of religious literature faces is that "To begin with God is to violate the normal rules of modern literary discourse; not to begin with him on such a topic, however, is at least to violate the suppositions of such writers as Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan" ("The Problem of Mysticism" 183). If to begin with God is to violate the rules of criticism, then to end with him must be even more transgressive, but that is what I feel compelled to do. In the end, good religious poetry resists as well as invites a secular reading. The four poets in this
study believed in God. They loved him and hated him. They wrote poetry to, about, and because of him. Whether or not he truly exists in reality, he most definitely exists within the lines of their poetry.

I wonder what the poets themselves, should they reside in the heaven they believed in, would think of the ways in which their poetry was read today. Would they be dismayed by the amount of non-Christians reading their poetry solely for aesthetic pleasure? Would they be upset at those who read it in order to learn about humanity rather than about divinity? Or would they be grateful for the power of their poetry to seduce the unbeliever into at least a temporary and fictive belief in God? Is a purely literary attraction to God better than no attraction at all?

The power of great religious poetry does lie, in the end, in its religion as much as in its poetry. Just as the Christian reader will get more out of a work such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* if he surrenders himself to the atheistic vision expressed there, so too will the agnostic or atheist reader find himself rewarded if he can suspend his own disbelief. He will obtain a great degree of satisfaction if he reads the poetry for what it can tell him about humanity, as I have tried to show, but, whatever his own beliefs, he will obtain even greater delight from the poetry if he reads it for what it can tell him about humanity's relationship with God.
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