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Imagining Unity: The Politics of Transcendence in Donne, Lanyer, Crashaw, and Milton

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ABSTRACT

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"Imagining Unity" investigates how an evolving concept of transcendence in early modern England, influenced by Reformation and counter-Reformation theology, created new ways of responding affectively and philosophically to emerging articulations of national identity in British devotional poetry. My project focuses on a series of politically disruptive moments in the seventeenth century—from the residual trauma of the Protestant Reformation to the Civil War of the 1640's—that troubled England's developing sense of national identity. In the shadow of these troubles, devotional poets reworked ideas of transcendence that they had inherited from medieval Catholicism to provide a sense of national cohesion in the midst of a changing political landscape. This dissertation explores transcendence as it is reconceived by four different authors: John Donne's work translates Catholic iconography to symbolize the ascension of a Protestant England; Aemelia Lanyer's poetry appeals to the exclusivity of religious esotericism as a palliative for the actual exclusion of women from political life; Richard Crashaw's writings reinterpret mystical union to rescue sovereignty from failure; and John Milton's work revises transubstantiation to authorize a new republic.
By investigating how early modern poetry reimagines transcendence in response to political events, my project widens ongoing conversations in political theology and "the religious turn" of literary studies, which are often unilaterally focused on the influence that religion had on politics in the course of an inevitable secularization of culture. My contribution to this work, and the underlying premise to my argument, is that literature provides a forum for rethinking religious concepts at the heart of political organization despite the apparent impulse toward secularization. In doing so, literature serves as a cultural medium for testing the conceptual limits of transcendence—its viability as a tool for inspiring and maintaining social unity. This dissertation ultimately witnesses a concerted effort in the early modern period to extend the life of religious ideas within the political imagination through devotional poetry's insistent recasting of transcendence as central to the formulation of the body politic.
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Introduction

Transcendence, Politics, and Poetry

Transcendence is not an early modern category. The forms of religious experience that this dissertation designates as “transcendent” had a different vocabulary in the Renaissance, one marked by words such as “ecstasy,” “furor,” and “wonder.” While these words provide the expressive script to a highly charged encounter with an infinite God, the conceptual relationship between human and divine implicit in the term “transcendence” was generally invoked in less ecstatic moments of theological contemplation. Milton’s Adam, for instance, gazes heavenward from within his earth-bound Paradise to witness beings “whose excellence he saw / transcend his own,” an observation that sparks the educative conversation of Paradise Lost’s Book V. And one seventeenth-century translation of Augustine of Hippo’s Meditations has the saint longing for his thoughts to “transcend all that which is created.” Augustine’s desire takes on a charming, fantastical appeal as he imagines his mind floating beyond the material realm: “Let it runn, and rise, and flutter, and fly.” These usages of the term acknowledge a distinction between the known and the unknown, the material and the ephemeral; they do not, however, apply that distinction to the intensely emotional experiences that often characterize personal devotion. My use of the term “transcendence” in a study of seventeenth-century devotional poetry—where the encounter with God is highly emotive and experiential—therefore calls for some explanation.

Put simply, I invoke transcendence as a theoretical term to designate the
incomprehensibility of the divine from the perspective of the human. As such, transcendence is a condition of the relationship between God and humanity rather than an ontological claim about the character of God. This important distinction, drawn in part from phenomenology, directs transcendence away from a conceptualized or universal divine, where its association with absolute knowledge, justice, or power has been used as the basis for social and political oppression. Such was the case, asserts Emmanuel Levinas, for colonial history, in which empires frequently cited a transcendent moral good as justification for the paternalist logic that drove the colonialist enterprise. Within this context, transcendence functions as the epistemological basis for empire, a devastating cultural lesson in how “the emancipation of minds can be a pretext for exploitation and violence.” But if transcendence has, in the past, helped to determine the colonialist agenda, in recent years, transcendence has resurfaced in a number of different academic and popular fields, reconceived, as Regina Schwartz points out, “as the ground of humility: epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, and political.” A brief overview of some of the major fields in which transcendence has been reconsidered will help to map how the idea relates to my own work in devotional poetry.

In theology, the return of transcendence can be tracked through the rising popularity of mysticism, with its corollary apophatic theology. Insisting on the unknowability of God, the apophatic tradition does away with the conceptual divine in favor of a God who is approached entirely through an indescribable experience. As Kevin Hart points out, the effect of a transcendent religious experience is not absolute knowledge, but openness: “God takes shape as a question in human experience, not as an answer.” The question formulated within mystical experience leaves devotees with
desire instead of knowledge; mystics emerge from the enlightened moment without the means to understand or even describe it, but with a longing to repeat it.

This longing is what, in phenomenology, is identified as the desire for the Other. Writing from within the “theological turn” of continental philosophy, Jean-Luc Marion relates transcendence to the Catholic icon. He contrasts the icon, which represents the God beyond the image, with the idol, which contains the God within the image. Within his conception, transcendence designates the space between the gazing subject and the divine for which she searches, a space that draws heavily on Levinas’s distinction between the Other and the Same. Far from creating a rift between the two subjects, this space ignites a longing for proximity, a need that is met (although never fully) through love for the Other. In this sense, the icon is understood as a phenomenon that awakens the subject to her own desire for the transcendent divine.

In literary studies, transcendence is related less to experience or phenomenon than to representation, forever frustrated by the unapproachability of the signified. Post-structuralism presents transcendence through aporia or interruption, when the indeterminacy of language calls attention to the unbridgeable chasm between signifier and signified. And yet, even this variation on transcendence has religious dimensions, as the Judeo-Christian designation “people of the book” might indicate. The relationship between icon and God, for instance, is representational, as are the performative words of institution spoken over the host: “This is my body.” In his later work, Jacques Derrida mapped the inadequacies of representation onto an increasingly religious landscape when he turned to a series of affective categories—givenness, forgiveness, mourning, and hospitality—as a means of analyzing the interruption of transcendence into the material
reality that governs interpersonal interaction. 9

The various academic fields under which transcendence has become an object of interest all relate to my work in different ways. Certainly in the context of Reformation England, representation and experience both have a direct and immediate affect on how transcendence might be understood. What does one do, for instance, when the material objects that signify a connection with the divine are suddenly shorn of meaning, or annihilated altogether? This was certainly the case in the Elizabethan period, which witnessed the greatest destruction of religious images in the long and tumultuous history of Christian iconoclasm. 10 I take up the problem of representation in my chapters on John Donne and John Milton, who are concerned with icons and transubstantiation—artistic and embodied representation—respectively. If the Protestant Reformation stripped the altars of representation, however, it opened up the possibilities for personal, individual experience, especially one pitted against institutionalized ritualism. Contrast the case of St. Teresa of Ávila, who for years encountered resistance against her visions, with the words of radical Reformer Valentine Weigel: “you will have to confess that the kingdom of God is within you and all things in Christ, about which it is proper to say no more. Let everyone experience it within himself.” 11 Both Richard Crashaw and Aemilia Lanyer make use of the burgeoning culture of individual experience in their poetry—an unsurprising fact, given the minority status of both, one a recusant Catholic and the other a woman. I explore the unusual political claims they make on the basis of experience in my chapters on their work.

The category of phenomena also deeply informs my thinking on transcendence, but on a more theoretical level. Specifically, phenomenology provides an intellectual
framework for the project through posing a series of questions and interests, rather than supplying an anachronistic “lens” through which to read early modern poetry. Kevin Hart writes that “the main question that preoccupies phenomenology, especially today, is less oriented to the question of the *that* or the *what* than the how . . . How the phenomenon is disclosed will depend on the intentional horizons in which it is concretely embedded.”

Traditionally, understandings of transcendence have been more focused on “the *what*”: what is the character of the transcendent being? Drawing from phenomenology, however, I instead ask a series of questions related more to “the *how*”: How did social change in the seventeenth century affect the way people approached the divine? What venues for transcendence (both literary and theological) were opened or closed as a result of these changes? How did new formulations of transcendence help to shape the social imaginary?

This dissertation explores how four Renaissance poets variously conceived of the responses to these questions by specifically analyzing how they frame the encounter with the transcendent divine. In chapter one, John Donne encounters transcendence through the lost icon of Catholicism, an object that he uses to create solidarity within the Protestant nation of England. In chapter two, Aemilia Lanyer turns to revelation, a form of encounter that, available only to a privileged group of women, creates an exclusive and enlightened feminine community. In chapter three, Richard Crashaw reproduces St. Teresa of Ávila’s mystical union within the hearts of her readers, thereby imagining a disturbingly homogenous England populated by mystic-saints. And in chapter four, John Milton apprehends the transcendent God through a metaphoric version of the Eucharist which, with its emphasis on breaking and sharing, supplies the template for imagining a republican government unified in diversity.
In each of these chapters, I discuss how the moment of encounter establishes not only a religious subject, but also a political subject, where “politics” is understood as the organization of people within society, rather than as the maintenance of state power. Each form of encounter—iconicity, revelation, mystical union, and transubstantiation—provides the basis for understanding how the religious subject might relate to the transcendent divine and, by virtue of that fact, how religious subjects relate to each other. In doing so, it necessarily establishes the conceptual groundwork for imagining how a community might be organized—how it is rendered “political.” Revelation, for instance, posits a close, personal, and unmediated encounter with transcendence. Because it does not require the use of an icon or the knowledge of sacred texts, there are (theoretically at least) no limitations on who might receive revelation. For this reason, it is a particularly effective form of encounter for early modern women, whose illiteracy and social marginalization might otherwise debar them from the religious community. But, revelation is also completely controlled by the transcendent divine, who may bestow or withhold it at will; revelation is not, therefore, a common occurrence. This makes a community based on revelation exclusive in the extreme, as is indeed the case with Lanyer’s community of women.

The politics of transcendence are not related to ethics but to organization. Despite this fact, however, the authors that I study all attempt to use transcendence to answer the inadequacies and oppressions of temporal government by bringing people together under an alternative political structure. As such, they give voice to a desire, common in the early modern period, to enact an “authentic” politics, a utopic society that both anticipates and participates in the eschatological kingdom of God. Within this conception,
the body politic is less an institution such as a state, than an assembly—a group in which all members participate in communal life. This is simply because the community of devotional poetry is always founded on a shared religious experience. While this vision of community demonstrates great potential for formulating an egalitarian society, it is, in the end, ethically ambivalent. In contemporary terms, the communities imagined within devotional poetry can be problematic, as with Lanyer’s exclusivity or Crashaw’s homogeneity, or laudable, as with Donne’s solidarity or Milton’s diversity. While I have attempted to acknowledge these possibilities throughout this dissertation, my concerns are primarily descriptive rather than prescriptive: I do not wish to praise or denigrate any particular political vision so much as I seek merely to understand how religious experience establishes the conditions for communal organization.

The poems I study are also political in the sense that they are produced within a concrete historical moment, and deeply informed by contemporaneous political developments. The early seventeenth century was an infamously instable period in England’s history. The accession of a Scottish monarch to the throne in 1603 undermined the cohesion of a nation still recalibrating its identity in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. This national identity crisis was only intensified by a series of internal disruptions from various religious groups. Donne’s work responds to this instability by encouraging solidarity through communal identification with the icon. Although radical Reformers are usually cited as the main cause for early seventeenth century political discord, they were not the only group upsetting the social fabric of early modern England; the first two decades of the seventeenth century also witnessed an unusual amount of public dissent among women. The “pamphlet war” of 1615-1620 is one late
example of the rising awareness of women’s issues throughout this period. Lanyer’s work, published in 1611, uses this moment to voice her own critique of gender exclusion in her version of transcendence. During the 1640’s, the civil unrest of the earlier seventeenth century finally reached its zenith with the battles waged between Parliament and the King, culminating in the trial and execution of Charles I in 1649. Within this context, Crashaw’s homogenous England is posed as a spiritual counterpoint to the actual failures of the factious government. Culminating in the republican experiment of 1649-1660, England’s civil unrest created an unprecedented period of decentralization.

Although Oliver Cromwell’s title of Lord Protector, conferred in 1653 after the dissolution of the Barebones Parliament, established his de facto rule over a military state, the political imagination in the decade leading up to this event demonstrates a more optimistically democratic sentiment, one that both extolled and was undone by the diverse array of opinions voiced throughout the country, in public houses and Parliament alike. John Milton’s work tracks the arc of this republican sentiment through the metaphor of the Eucharist.

Through bringing together politics and religion, this work is in conversation with “the religious turn” in early modern studies, and particularly those critics most interested in political theology. In literary criticism, political theology most often refers to work that comes out of writing by Carl Schmitt. Jurist for the Weimar Republic, Schmitt posited a legal order that arises from states of emergency, when power is granted to the monarch in the form of the exception. According to Schmitt, the “[s]overeign is he who decides the exception,” and, by residing in some capacity outside of the law, constitutes it. His work defines power from the margins, where sovereignty is “a borderline
concept,"18 and theorists following his footsteps have tended to analyze similar figures situated on the hinterlands of the polis. Walter Benjamin, for instance, analyzes the tyrant-martyr as the central figure of baroque tragedy, while Giorgio Agamben’s focuses on the sacred man of ancient Rome—the criminal outcast who is exiled beyond the reach of the law.19 All of these writers investigate the problematic migration of theological concepts into juridical discourse, a migration that Schmitt dates to the late medieval and early modern periods, when “the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver.”20

Because of their focus on sovereignty, these works are especially relevant to early modern concerns, and are particularly popular in Shakespeare studies.21 The connection between Shakespeare and political theology was made famous by Ernst H. Kantorowicz, who related his theory of sovereignty, known as the doctrine of the king’s two bodies, to Shakespeare’s Richard II.22 According to Kantorowicz, late medieval and early modern European political theory differentiated between the king’s finite physical body and his transcendent mystical body, a differentiation invoked in the phrase “The king is dead. Long live the king.”23 This rift separated the absolute monarch underwritten by divine right (the mystical body) from the constitutional monarch of social contract (the physical body), making visible the path toward modern politics.

While Kantorowicz’s chapter on Richard II has long influenced scholars of early modern political theology, more recent work has turned its attention to questions that stretch beyond Kantorowicz’s study. Julia Reinhard Lupton’s Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology, for instance, turns to the “corpus of citizens implied by political theology rather than its gallery of dead kings,” to analyze power not from the margins, but among the masses.24 Her work follows a line of thought in early modern political
theory that derives citizenship from sainthood, influenced by Pauline notions of
citizenship within the kingdom of Heaven. Lupton’s work tracks how this shift from
citizen to saint was imperfectly accomplished in fits and starts through Marlowe,
Shakespeare, and Milton.

All of these critical works chart the problematic emergence of politics from
religion, enabled through increasing reliance on social contract and the concomitant
demystification of religion in culture’s inevitable progress toward secularization. Known
as the “secularization thesis,” this idea, while popular in modern histories, is not unique
to modern thought; early modern writers also seemed to be aware of this apparent shift,
even while it was occurring. We find the secularization thesis, for instance, most
famously in the mouth of Shakespeare’s Lafeu in All’s Well that Ends Well: “They say
miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar,
things supernatural and causeless.” Bracketing for the moment the question of whether
the secularization thesis is verifiably true, the mere fact that early modern peoples were
aware of an increasing emphasis on scientific materialism at the end of the age of
miracles begs the question: what becomes of religion in the wake of this perceived
cultural shift? This is a question that is often ignored in early modern studies on political
theology, which instead tend to focus on the residual influence of religion in early
modern politics.

By investigating the religious response to particular political developments, my
project suggests that one of the effects of perceived secularism is the increased
malleability of religious concepts, particularly in the face of political change. This
dissertation witnesses transcendence as an idea in flux, one that shifts the moment of
encounter from a personal, private experience to a corporate one. Donne’s icons do not, for instance, enable communion only between soul and God, but also between the various subjects of a Protestant England. Similarly, Crashaw emphasizes that the mystical union of Teresa is not for herself alone, but is instead played out in perpetuity within her community of readers. If transcendence is to maintain any purchase in early modern thought, it does so in the service of the emerging national community.

The authors I survey also evince a surprising willingness to rethink the concept of transcendence well beyond the pale of orthodoxy; rather than demystify outmoded religious concepts, such as transubstantiation, early modern poets simply repurpose them within an alternative political-theological framework. This fact demonstrates not only the malleability of religious ideas in response to political turmoil, but also the persistence of religious thinking despite the apparent impulse toward secularism. Transcendence seems to be embedded particularly deeply in human experience, disappearing from one cultural location only to resurface in another. Regina Schwartz cogently points this fact out in a brief survey of the various sites of transcendence in academic study today:

Even those who claim to be radical materialists rediscover transcendence in new guises: the postmodern notion of transgression, the phenomenological notion of the other, the scientific notion of the impenetrable mystery of an infinite universe, the aesthetic notion of excess, the psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity, the political notion of revolutionary ecstasy.27
The malleability and persistence of religious concepts puts some pressure on the claims of secularism, for they demonstrate that religious thinking is possible outside of the narrow confines of theology, and may, in fact, have been a cultural presence throughout the course of "secularization." In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish "theology" from "religion," where theology might be thought of as a particular set of institutionalized practices and doctrines, and religion is, as Lupton defines it, "a form of thinking," one that is irreducible to culture but that compels action within culture. It is my contention that what the secularization thesis reads as the evacuation of religion from culture is actually the retreat of, specifically, Christian theology from Western politics.

But the argument against the secularization thesis can, in the context of my work, be made on an even more fundamental level. Given the close connection between religion and politics, where both are instantiated at the same moment through the encounter with transcendence, the case can be made the two are inseparable. In politics, as in religion, the most compelling forces that call people into collectivities are largely immaterial. Despite the fact that a state is most readily defined by its quantifiable trappings—its economic, military, and geographic borders—the people within it are frequently held together simply by the belief that they are "deeply, mystically united" to each other. Politics and religion share similar modes of social cohesion, organizing people around a collective mythos, a common history, or a communal identity, and it is this aspect of political theology that I wish to foreground in my thinking on transcendence. My work thus opposes the secularization thesis on two fronts: by demonstrating the iterability of transcendence beyond a theological context, and by demonstrating the inextricability of politics from religion at the founding moment of both.
While these claims may seem to place my work in opposition to contemporary writing on political theology, it actually enters and expands space that has been opened by work that, like Lupton’s, focuses more intently on the center, rather than the margins, of power. It does so by supplementing the line of political theology extending from Schmitt and Kantorowicz in early modern literary criticism with thinkers who, like Levinas, Marion, Hart, and Derrida, are more interested in the community-making possibilities enabled by transcendence. This blend utilizes the phenomenological proclivity for investigating the mechanisms and structures by which people relate to their environs within a historical context provided in part by political theology. In doing so, it ultimately gives an account not of the appearance of secular politics from an archaic religion, but of the perseverance of a religious concept that manifests politically. Put another way, this dissertation ultimately demonstrates a concerted effort to extend the life of religious ideas within the political imagination through devotional poetry’s insistent recasting of transcendence as central to the formulation of the body politic.

Why Poetry?

In “Of Adversity,” Francis Bacon writes that “It is true greatness, to have in one the frailty of a man, and the security of a God . . . [but t]his would have done better in poesy, where transcendences are more allowed. And the poets indeed have been busy with it.” But the question is, why? Why is transcendence “more allowed” in poetry than in any other genre of writing? And how does a literary study of transcendence contribute to a fuller understanding of the political and religious life in early modern England? The
answer, I suggest, lies in the imaginative possibilities that poetry offers, both within a political and theological context.

In politics, imagination supplies the conceptual matrix from which all forms of governance arise. As William T. Cavanaugh defines it, the “political imagination is simply the condition of possibility for the organization of bodies in society.” If, in the early modern period, the political imagination (as manifested in nonfiction treatises) was beholden to particular theological, epistemic, and ontological norms, poetry presented a venue in which to imagine political organization outside of these normative responsibilities. As studies in early modern political theology have demonstrated, the central tenant of the monarchy is divine right, which, in his Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, James I links to the authority conferred upon the kings of Israel by God. Devotional poetry, however, ties its political imagination instead to the promised arrival of a future heavenly kingdom. Because this kingdom is utopic, spiritual, and outside of time, it often features fantastic conceptions of non-hierarchical power, as with Crashaw’s kingdom of saints or Milton’s republican society. The purpose of poetry, therefore, is to provide a venue for presenting political alternatives, an act that ultimately challenges and widens the political imagination.

Similarly, within a religious context, the flexible epistemic boundaries of poetry allow for ideas to be explored outside the limits of traditional theology. As I have noted above, this freedom of thought within the genre allows for the formulation of unorthodox theological content, such as Lanyer’s substitution of Christ’s male disciples with a feminine community. It also, however, allows for unorthodox connections between theology and politics, such as Donne’s compelling use of the icon to unite the nation.
This latter function appears to be more prevalent in early modern devotional poetry, perhaps in part because of the influence of the “metaphysical” genre, with its proclivity for stretching conceptual associations to their outer limits. Beyond the metaphysical conceit, however, poetry in general, with its metaphor, simile, and hyperbole, often ignores the borders governing spheres of knowledge, and this allows for connections to be made between ideas that would, in a sermon or theological treatise, be disallowed.

Political theory and theology both present venues for disciplined forms of imagination; poetry does not. In fact, one of the responsibilities of early modern poetry in particular was simply to idealize. In his “Defense of Poesy,” Sir Philip Sidney notes that poetry functions as a privileged genre for testing the limits of the ideal when he notes that the proper subject of poetry is “the divine consideration of what may be and should be.”

If this sounds to modern ears like hopelessly wishful thinking, it is important to point out that idealism, in the early modern period, held greater social potential than it does today. Debora Kuller Shuger notes that the period is “pervasively concerned with what should be . . . [i]ts premises are based on Aristotelian teleology, which identifies a thing’s nature with its end and perfection so that to ask what, for example, a republic should be and to ask what a republic is turns out to be the same question.” In this context, the effectiveness of the poetic ideal does not lie in its viability as an achievable social order so much as in its potency as a paradigm, as an ideal qua ideal. Early modern poetry is most useful in its affective registers, which enable it to poetically create—and invite its readers to emotionally participate in—an imaginative political and religious life.

There is, therefore, an aspect of the imagined community to my study of seventeenth-century devotional poetry. Circulated among readers, poetry creates the
possibility for a community to self-identify with and through literature. Seen from this angle, perhaps the true transcendence of devotional poetry can be located not in its subject matter, but in the act of communal reading: as early modern poems circulated, they created a social imaginary that exceeded the individual imaginations that contributed to it. Early modern poetry ultimately created a space for cultural fantasy, wish fulfillment, and longing, registering a deep nostalgia for a politic that is eternally obscured behind the alluring and unapproachable sign of transcendence.
Chapter 1

Iconic Patriotism in the Poetry of John Donne

The icon provides one of the clearest visual images of transcendence possible: a believer, looking at the image, finds her gaze directed beyond it. The transcendence of the icon occurs because the images on it represent more than themselves; they represent the God that authorizes them as well as the God that resides in the space beyond them. Jean-Luc Marion remarks how, in this sense, the icon can be distinguished from the idol, which literally contains the divine that it also represents. As such, both icon and idol present “two modes of apprehension of the divine in visibility”: the idol by containing the God within representation, the icon by pointing to the God outside of representation.

In the pre-modern context of widespread illiteracy in Europe, the importance of visual transcendence cannot be underestimated. The medieval Catholic reliance on the spectacle of the visual leant itself to a culture that privileged the image as the site of devotion. In this environment, even literary documents, with their vibrant illuminations, attested to the sacramental valences of the image. Given this cultural milieu, the sixteenth-century Reformation campaign against the Catholic icon was, far from being the liberation promised by the iconoclasts, a cause of deep social trauma. While iconoclasm had removed Catholic icons from the gaze of the Protestant nation, it left, in their place, a spiritual void that could only be filled visually. This chapter witnesses the migration of the icon from the material object of Catholicism to the poetic metaphors of patriotism in the work of John Donne. It argues that Donne divorces the iconic image
from its material matrix, and uses the transcendence of iconicity—the ability of images to represent beyond themselves—to create new "icons" of Protestant nationalism within the metaphors of his poetry.

**Converting England**

The word "conversion," especially in literary studies, almost uniformly signals an internal choice, a drama that, although staged against the backdrop of political and theological change, is played out largely in the realm of the individual. In fact, a number of recent works have investigated the drama of conversion vis-à-vis the actual dramas of the day—Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*, William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, to name a few. While the conversions in these plays take place in the midst of social and political upheaval imagined on the grand scale, the actual moment of change tends to be focused on by critics as a deeply internalized act. For instance, Daniel Vitkus, while recognizing that Tamburlaine's unstable religious identity is underwritten by contemporary anxieties about divine authority, ultimately perceives Tamburlaine's rejection of God as a matter of private ambition, what contemporaries would call an "infirmity of faith."

However inseparable conversion may be from individual experience, the early modern interrelationship of microcosm and macrocosm, of person and society, ensured that the word 'conversion' also applied at the national level. As John Donne notes, "that which is proverbially said of particular Bodies, will hold in a Body Politick." The conversion of early modern England, from Catholicism to Anglican Protestantism, can
therefore be understood and analyzed as a national event as much as a collection of individual ones. In some respects, of course, this national event was the result of the only individual conversion that actually mattered: the conversion of the monarch. But if, at the official level, Henry VIII’s self-proclaimed title of ‘supreme head of the Church of England’ changed the religious identity of an entire nation seemingly overnight, at the level of the populace, England’s conversion was still largely a fiction of the state; national conversion was a Protestant idea and ideal that helped navigate the state through the very real instabilities of the Reformation. As Christopher Haigh writes, the English Reformation produced a “Protestant nation, but not a nation of Protestants.”6 Indeed, as revisionist historians such as Haigh have shown, the achievements of the English Reformation were constantly troubled by sectarianism and the presence of recusant culture even, as Molly Murray notes, “after England’s official Reformation would seem to have been definitely achieved.”7 In the face of such religious disorder, the idea of national conversion provided a fantasy of unity. Although the English Reformation may have been interrupted and usurped by papists and internal divisions, the hopes of the official Protestant state (when it was officially Protestant, that is) remained pinned inexorably on what Ethan Shagan has called “the phantasmagoric goal of ‘national conversion.’”8

In order to authorize this idea of national conversion, England required a “conversion” of another kind; the ideological structures that had their roots in Catholic traditions had to be adapted to a Protestant worldview. This need created a symbolic campaign to rehabilitate the images and texts that had traditionally upheld Catholicism and adapt them to a newly Protestant England.9 It is perhaps no coincidence that the most
famous example of this pilfering from Catholic iconography—the transformation of Elizabeth I into the Virgin Queen—occurred during the reign that did the most to solidify the Protestant identity of the nation. Imaginative literature provided a space in which to translate the philosophies of Protestant apologetics and polemics into affective language, allowing people to connect on an emotional, intuitive level with the idea of a nation whose formerly Catholic practices and symbols now had Protestant valences. This symbolic campaign is what Donne, in the early years of the seventeenth century, continues as his poetry instills Catholic iconography with Protestant meaning as a way of imagining England’s conversion on the large scale.

In the years of the late Elizabethan and early Stuart reigns, the task of instilling Catholic symbols with Protestant meaning was complicated by the traumatic effects of colonization; a changing world meant that many of the patriotic objects that might have been used by the English state as Protestant “icons” were destabilized. The rapidly expanding geography of the world, coupled with burgeoning capitalism, particularly affected two objects that had, in the past, used religious imagery to underwrite the authority of Catholic nations: maps and coins. The renowned T-O maps had for centuries depicted the relationship of the world’s continents centered on the holy cities of Rome or Jerusalem, while coins typically encoded the figure or heraldry of the prince together with images of crosses or angels. By the seventeenth century, however, the settlement of new lands and the consequent imperatives of geographically accurate navigation increasingly made the conceptual cartography of the T-O maps seem outmoded. Similarly, the debasement of monies in early modern Europe as the result of an influx of New World bullion had, by the seventeenth century, undercut the stability not only of the
monetary value of coins, but also of the symbolic value that was supposed be analogous to it. And so, while the official English stance asserted the *fait accompli* of England’s conversion to Protestantism under the auspices of the monarchical head of church and state, the objects that might have been marshaled to lend weight to those assertions were rapidly becoming obsolete in the face of a changing world.

Donne’s poetry rescues maps and coins from this defunct geographic and economic context, giving them a new artistic framework that ultimately resurrects them as icons of a unified Protestant nationality. To accomplish this poetic feat, Donne’s work turns to the mystical union described in the writings of such Catholic theologians as St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Teresa of Ávila in order to reinvigorate maps and coins with spiritual meaning. Specifically, maps and coins become metaphors that convey union on a mass scale in order to imagine not the mystical interior conversion of the Catholic soul toward God, but the communal conversion of a Protestant nation.

This chapter will investigate three of Donne’s poems to discover how each highlights a different aspect of this symbolic project. “A Valediction of Weeping” reveals the centrality of mystical union in reimagining these crumbling representations of the nation; it utilizes coins not as problematic symbols of economic prosperity, but as tools that enable union between lovers. “The Bracelet” highlights nationalism by using Catholic symbols within Protestant patriotism; it focuses on Michael the Archangel, an image that English coinage inherited from Catholic iconography, as the ideal figure for the Protestant nation. And finally, “Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness” expresses the hope that the religious and national cohesion of England might one day extend to the world at large; the poem overlaps images drawn from the Catholic T-O maps with newer,
more geographically accurate references to imagine a union between God and the world that goes beyond doctrinal boundaries.

In relying on mystical union to underwrite the meaning of these metaphors, Donne's poetry attempts to clear away the complications of outer colonial turmoil and, in doing so, creates a symbolism that transcends inner politico-religious division. Even though New World discoveries led to destabilization or debasement in the political sphere, in Donne's poems, these new lands and resources lead to union with a God that mimics their expansiveness. This fact relocates the symbolic meaning of coins and maps, not within the problematic realities of expansion, but within spiritual union. St. Teresa points out that this turning away from the temporal world is one of the hallmarks of the Prayer of Union: "we are all asleep, and fast asleep, to the things of the world, and to ourselves... as someone who has completely died to the world in order to live more fully in God." That is, an awareness of God supersedes any problems that might arise within the material world. Consequently, the nation that these maps and coins symbolize is founded on an immeasurable God capable of unifying England beyond the deleterious effects of popish partisanship and schismatic sects. Unified to a God beyond doctrinal disputes, Donne's poetry imagines an England unified to itself.

For over a century, critics have been aware of Donne's familiarity with Spanish theology; one of Donne's earliest biographers, Edmund Gosse, cites Donne himself, who confessed to having more works by Spanish authors in his personal library than from any other country. However, while the influence of Spanish mysticism has long been a focus for Donne studies, criticism has largely ignored the political context of that influence. Donne's own conversion from Catholicism to English Protestantism has, understandably,
tended to deflect critical thinking toward questions of Donne’s own individual religious identity and away from his poetry’s engagement with conversion. The central question of critical work tends toward the biographical – whether Donne was truly Protestant or secretly Catholic – to create what one critic has termed the “confessionally based rift” of Donne studies.\textsuperscript{13}

In fact, Donne’s own family was deeply invested in questions of conversion. Donne’s grandfather, John Heywood, was involved in a 1542 plot against Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and eventually sought asylum abroad rather than convert to Protestantism. Donne’s great-uncle, Thomas Heywood, was executed for Jesuitism in 1574, and Donne’s maternal uncle, Jasper Heywood, headed a Jesuit mission in England before his capture in 1583. He was condemned for high treason and sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, although the sentence was later commuted to exile. There is convincing evidence that the twelve-year-old Donne visited Jasper during his imprisonment. Even Donne’s own brother, Henry, was imprisoned in 1593 for harboring a priest, and died in Newgate before his trial.\textsuperscript{14} Donne was therefore highly aware of the political ramifications that accompanied conversion, or the refusal to convert.

As John Carey points out, this family tradition of fierce loyalty to Rome contrasts greatly with Donne’s decision to join the Anglican Church. Carey notes that having to face the terrifying possibility of his own damnation as he contemplated apostasy would prompt Donne later to embrace a model of the True Church that was more inclusive.\textsuperscript{15} Donne’s family history of religious persecution, coupled with the personal spiritual trauma of his own conversion, would eventually lead him to embrace a soteriology that ensured all truly “faithful souls be alike glorified,” independent of church affiliation.\textsuperscript{16}
Mystical Union in “A Valediction: Of Weeping”

In Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets*, these political and religious interests remain largely obscured behind the more immediate poetic project: to establish union between lovers. The metaphysical (and, just as often, physical) union in these poems is frequently consummated by means of a proxy, a metaphor that both symbolizes and enables it. In the case of “A Valediction of Weeping,” union is authorized by the tears of the lover, who is about to embark upon a long journey. As the lover stands before his beloved, her image is reflected in his tears, striking a coin that blends their individual identities into one object. Consequently, the coins of this poem are valued not monetarily but by their ability to bring two people together.

Donne’s poetic conceit of loving union struggles to rise above the realities of individuality and separateness that the speaker experiences. In doing so, the poem simultaneously alludes to a contemporary challenge in seventeenth century economics: the problem of reconciling two separate and often incompatible systems of valuing coins. As a result of Tudor economic policies during the sixteenth century, the intrinsic value of coins was intermittently divorced from their face value, a fact that destabilized monetary value in general throughout the period. Previous centuries had valued coins by the precious metal they contained, and England during these late medieval years maintained what economic historian C. E. Challis calls “one of the finest gold currencies anywhere in Europe.” English coins preserved a remarkably stable gold standard of 23 carats and 3½ grains, known as “angel gold.” Throughout the sixteenth century, however, this “old
right standard" suffered from periods of debasement, including most notably the Great Debasement of 1544–1551. During this time, the purity of coinage dropped to as low as 20 carats, even though coins minted at this lower standard were supposed to maintain the same face value of the finer coins that were already in circulation. Additionally, increasing amounts of precious metals from the Americas destabilized the commodity price of bullion, making it even more difficult to link face value and intrinsic value. As Charles P. Kindleberger notes: “Even without the extended wars and the malversation of mint masters and their higher authorities, getting the currency right in this period posed difficulties because of rapidly changing relative supplies of gold, silver, and copper and the opportunities this gave to exercise Gresham’s Law.”

As a result, the value of English money relied intermittently on the power of the monarch to set and enforce it. Scipion de Grammont cogently noted this shift while it was occurring: “Money does not draw its value from the material of which it is composed, but rather from its form, which is the image or mark of the Prince.” Relying on a face value set by the monarch could be problematic, however, as merchants could not always be trusted to uphold face value, especially when it differed significantly from a coin’s intrinsic value.

In response to this economic upheaval, Donne’s poem offers coinage an alternative image—the face of the beloved rather than the monarch—that realigns intrinsic and face value by signaling loving union rather than wealth. The instable valuation of the economic arena thus finds the possibility of an imagined stability in the poetic domain as head of state morphs into head of beloved:
Let me pour forth
My tears before thy face, whilst I stay here,
For thy face coins them, and thy stamp they bear;
And by this mintage they are something worth.

("Of Weeping," lines 1–4)

The metaphor visually unites poet and beloved by combining the substance of the poet's tear with the reflection of the beloved to create a coin. In this sense, the intrinsic value of the coin (the tear) is derived entirely from its face value (the beloved); it is only by the "face" or "stamp" of the beloved that the coins might be considered "something worth." By making intrinsic value contingent on face value, the poem reorganizes the unstable relationship that the two had in the economic arena.

The metaphor capitalizes on the divorce between intrinsic and face values by linking these values to lover and beloved, and then posing the possibility that value systems and people might both be realigned by love. As such, the ultimate value of the coin is predicated on love's ability to bring two people together. As John Carey notes, "a coin, to Donne, was not an object but a relationship." The coin in this poem makes it possible for both beloved and lover to step outside of their separate identities and to become blended together in one image.

By becoming metaphors that enable union, coins in "Of Weeping" approximate the function of meditative images in contemporary mystical treatises. Louis L. Martz notes that the union between God and man imagined by contemporary mystics was often inaugurated by, as Francis de Sales notes, "some similitude, answerable to the matter" of
Similarly, Ignatius of Loyola’s famous “composition of place,” to which we will return, urges practitioners to begin their meditation with a visualization. Mystical devotions incorporate these symbols in order to encourage the soul’s transformation by emotionally and visually identifying with God. While “Of Weeping” has none of the overt theology of mystical treatises, it nevertheless uses the meditative images of mystical union as kind of template for imagining the union of lovers. Thus, the union forged in Donne’s poem reiterates the emotional progression of a mystical conversion experience: the soul identifies with an intermediary image that represents the complete union between self and God (in the case of mysticism) or between lovers (in the case of Donne’s poem). In doing so, the poem seeks to find a language in which to overcome the problems of individuality and separation, to imagine the possibility of a continual internal conversion away from a solitary identity and toward community.

Donne’s poetry is infamously self-destructive, with metaphors that can rarely maintain the conceptual challenges set before them. In keeping with this poetic tradition, the final stanzas in “Of Weeping” witness the gradual dissolution of that union so carefully constructed in the poem’s opening. Ultimately the lovers’ community can only last as long as their tears do. In an attempt to keep this future destruction at bay, the poem’s second stanza reaches beyond itself to find a metaphor large and permanent enough to maintain the union symbolized in those tears. It is not enough that the lovers be unified in a coin; there must also be a world for them to circulate in:

On a round ball

A workman, that hath copies by can lay
An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
And quickly make that which was nothing All;
So doth each tear,
Which thee doth wear,
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow.

(10-16)

Whereas the first stanza of the poem concerns itself primarily with symbolic value, this second stanza struggles to find a place to suit the significance of those priceless coins. As if the image of the beloved on the tears were not enough to generate intrinsic value for the metaphor, the images of these lines reach out to a world beyond themselves, to an “All” that might match the value of the coin. As the images move from coins to continents, globes, and worlds, they create a metaphoric stockpile that ultimately dismantles the symbolic apparatus entirely. The pileup of discarded metaphors finally topples into itself. The tears of the beloved mix with the tears of the lover, drowning any possibilities for union that the poem once held: “thy tears mix’d with mine do overflow /
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so” (“Of Weeping,” lines 17–18).

Although “Of Weeping” employs coins as meditative images that reach toward mystical union, its symbols ultimately fail. This poetic collapse is due to the lack of a metaphor expansive enough to support its own symbolic weight. Tears and coins, for all their value, are insufficient to signify union on the scale that Donne imagines it. The tantalizing possibility offered by the poem, however—the promise that two people might
inhabit the same spiritual space – keeps Donne’s early poems formulating and reformulating the religious valences of these patriotic metaphors.

The Protestant Nation of “The Bracelet”

“The Bracelet” avoids the metaphoric lack that undoes “Of Weeping” through a central image that is both nationalistic and religious. The poem is a versified plea made by a young rapscallion on behalf of his “gold angel” coins, so called because they featured a representation of Michael the Archangel on their obverse. The angel is depicted on the coin defeating a serpent, an attribute inherited from Catholic iconography. Hoping to avoid sacrificing these “righteous angels” to his mistress as reimbursement for losing her bracelet, the unfortunate speaker futilely lobbies that they be spared “the bitter cost” of being illegally alloyed with “vile solder” to create a replacement chain (“The Bracelet,” lines 8–10).

The poem’s central desire – to prevent its coins from being alloyed and reforged—manifests residual anxiety over Henrician debasement and changing bullion supplies. In response, it links the supposed purity of the English coins to religious homogeneity. The speaker asserts that his coins, in their pure form, are Protestant symbols of a nation united to God, imagining an England in which uncorrupted coinage is the physical witness to a unified Protestantism. Unlike the coin-tears in “Of Weeping,” which create a private union between lovers, the coins in “The Bracelet” symbolize a national community. The speaker thus appeals not to his beloved’s compassion, but to her patriotism as he attempts to spare the coins—and the nation—from metaphoric doom.
The poem’s opening brings economics and religion together by using religious language to underwrite the value of the gold angel coins. Specifically, the poem unites the social signs of wealth with the reconciliatory justice of the resurrection, tortuously backloading the central metaphor with spiritual meaning:

Angels, which heaven commanded to provide
All things to me, and be my faithful guide;
To gain new friends, t’appease great enemies;
To comfort my soul, when I lie or rise.
Shall these twelve innocents, by thy severe
Sentence, dread Judge, my sin’s great burden bear?
Shall they be damn’d and in the furnace thrown,
And punish’d for offences, not their own?
They save not me, they doe not ease my pains,
When in that hell they’re burnt and tied in chains.

("The Bracelet," lines 13–22)

Through a backward and implicit logic, the poem retroactively establishes the spiritual value of social climbing by mourning the loss of the coins as a lost salvation. The sacrifice of the innocent Christ, the poem asserts, was intended for the reconciliation of man and God. Far from reenacting that drama of reunion, however, the death of the coins abolish any metaphysical value they might have, for the sacrifice of the “twelve innocent,” doomed to bear the “great burden” of “offences not their own” fails to convey
grace. In fact, grace relocates itself in the passage to the site of social ambition; the poem suggests that the speaker's easy passage through society, enabled by the coins, serves a soteriological function. This ability to save, however, is lost as the coins are consumed by fire.

The religious value of the coins relies on maintaining their intrinsic value—their economic purity. As the poem progresses, it expounds upon this contingent relationship between economic and religious purity by comparing the value of uncontaminated English coinage to that of other, less God-fearing nations:

Were they but crowns of France, I cared not,
For most of them, their natural country rot,
I think, possesseth; they come here to us
So lean, so pale, so lame, so ruinous.
And howsoe'er French kings most Christian be,
Their crownes are circumcis'd most Jewishly.
Or were they Spanish stamps, still travailing,
That are become as catholic as their king.

("The Bracelet," lines 23–30)

The passage denounces the economic, national, and religious impurity of those foreign moneys, with their debased fineness and Jewish/Catholic influences. The corruption of these continental coins contrasts with the spiritual integrity of the English angels, still in "the first state of their creation" ("The Bracelet," line 12). The suggestion
is that debasement itself reflects a spiritual degeneration that occurs on the national level. The sexual pun on the “French disease,” connoted by France’s “natural country rot” (sometimes spelled “cuntry rott”) underscores the infectious threat that the Catholic continent posed to Protestant England.\(^\text{34}\) The passage displays the continental perversions of economics and religion as a warning to both the beloved and to England as a whole; in order to avoid falling into the trap of economic or religious disintegration, it is vital that the coins and the nation both maintain their integrity.

The poem fantasizes about religious homogenization as an extension of economic standardization; the purity of the gold angels constitutes a kind of metaphoric talisman against the degenerative influence of continental Europe. If, in reality, both Protestantism and economics in England were tarnished by popery, sectarianism, and the recent memory of debasement, in the poem at least, the speaker’s gold angels represent the possibility of a “pure” England, unified to itself and to God.

Although the poem fantasizes about a nation that has achieved an untarnished Protestant identity – a “nation of Protestants,” to repeat Haigh’s words – it also manifests anxieties about the nation’s ability to remain wholly Protestant. In answer to the mistress’s assertions that the gold, although alloyed, would remain in the chain, Donne shifts his marker for religious value, from the intrinsic purity of the coins to their unblemished imprint, or form. He tells her that the loss of gold isn’t the only tragedy for the coins, for “form gives being, and their form is gone” (“The Bracelet,” line 76).\(^\text{35}\) In fact, the “form” of the actual gold angel that the poem puns on also links nationalism to religion; while the obverse features Michael the Archangel, the reverse complements it with the image of a royal shield surmounted by a cross and superimposed over a traveling...
ship.\textsuperscript{36} This arrangement of images on both surfaces of the coin bring religious and national emblems together, creating a patriotic icon that would, if not for the mistress’s machinations, bolster the poem’s central claims about the link between the nation’s religious and economic purity. Instead, the speaker surrenders his coins to the mistress, foreclosing the metaphor as a symbol of national unity and the coins lose any possibility they may have had for representing the union of God and nation.

As the inescapable fate of the coins closes in on them, their form, purity, and symbolism begin to shift, regressing rapidly from divine significance to more earthly imagery. The speaker, upon giving up his coins to his mistress, initially grieves in terms that profanely echo moments of the Passion. Bravely acquiescing to his mistress’s demands, he announces, “thy will be done,” a phrase that recalls not only the Lord’s prayer, but also the words spoken by Christ in Gethsemane: “not what I will, but what thou wilt”\textsuperscript{37} (“The Bracelet,” line 79). The speaker then takes on the mantle of Mary as he offers his coins up for sacrifice: “with such anguish, as her only son / The mother in the hungry grave doth lay / Unto the fire these martyrs I betray” (“The Bracelet,” lines 80–82). Any image of the Pietà is fleeting, however, as maternal connotations morph into martyrdom. As the poem’s conceits metamorphose in search of a spiritual significance that might continue to signify despite the destruction of the angels, the coins pass from divine sacrifice to martyrdom, from an iconic singularity to a debased plurality, from a visually unified image of salvation to a symbol of entrapment and display in the chain of the bracelet.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{Mapping Union in “Hymn to God my God”}
In “The Bracelet” and “Of Weeping”, the symbolic systems fail to uphold the weight of the union that they promise. As these poems reach out toward a space beyond coins, they find that the possibility of mystical union is a concept that is simply too big to be sustained. Rather than reject the metaphors of coins as “too small” to hold the largeness of mystical union on a national level, however, Donne’s later poetry simply enlarges the metaphor, ultimately finding that images of patriotic expansion are precisely the ones to convey the expansiveness of union with the divine, and, along the way, underwrite a nationalist religion.

“Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness” turns away from the coins and value systems of earlier poems and toward colonial cartography in order to create a metaphoric map that plots the course to mystical union. In doing so, the poem makes a concerted effort to negotiate a new global geography that threatened to undo the symbolic meaning of medieval T-O maps. The conventional account of early modern cartography holds that medieval mappaemundi supplied a conceptual, and often religious, representation of world geography. Centered, as many of the mappaemundi were, on holy sites such as Jerusalem or Rome, such representations demonstrated both spatially and figuratively the religious origins of human history. By the early seventeenth century, however, such sacred valences were largely supplanted by a Ptolemaic emphasis on abstract space. Although this change was based partially on cultural shifts, early modern global expansion played a large part in the shifting organization of cartographic space; with the advent of New World discoveries, it became necessary to depict geography with more spatial accuracy. If these newer systems of mapping supplied cartographic solutions to
the difficulties of early modern exploration, however, they also created a symbolic
absence by their inability to visualize religion in relation to the actual geography of an
exponentially expanding world. The Ptolemaic emphasis on abstract space, although
suited to early modern expansion, foreclosed the religious conceptualizing of earlier
maps. In much the same way that "Of Weeping" and "The Bracelet" deals with
competing value systems in relation to coins, "Hymn to God, My God" takes advantage
of this contemporary geographic confusion by rehearsing the break between conceptual
and physical mapping and then reformulating a relationship between the two that uses the
poet's own body as a map to mystical union.

Although the poem ostensibly muses on what the speaker believes to be his
imminent death, the first part of the poem is much more concerned with laying out the
genography of the body-map than of dealing with the immediate terrors and uncertainties
of the afterlife. The "fretum februs" of the poet's own body are, for him, less an
indication of a physical state than a spiritual one ("Hymn," line 10). The "physicians,"
transformed into "[c]osmographers" may be more interested in the "februs," the fever,
that harkens the speaker's death; the speaker himself is drawn to the "fetrum," the straits,
that his own body signifies ("Hymn," lines 6–7). As the speaker meditates on the
metaphoric and religious connections between his body-map, an actual world-map, and a
promised resurrection, he turns increasingly to extra-cartographic references to help
manage the symbolic meanings of the map, which would otherwise threaten to undo his
soteriological hopes:

I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;
For, though their currents yield return to none,
What shall my West hurt me? As West and East
In all flat Maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the resurrection.

("Hymn," lines 11–15)

In order to read his own body, the poet must flatten the globe into a finite map, thereby superimposing an artificial beginning and end to the otherwise infinitely circular and repetitious sphere. Flattening an endless circuitry imposes meaning by physically locating the cardinal directions that, on the globe, are conceptual fantasies of place. There is no exact location for "East" or "West" on the globe, for both indicate directions of travel that exclude arrival. As Donne puts it in a sermon that is often cited to gloss this image: "In a flat Map, there goes no more, to make West East, though they be distant in an extremity, but to paste that flat Map upon a round body, and then West and East are all one." Since east and west in the poem are conceptually "off the map," they enable the speaker to imagine a hidden cycle of death and resurrection that lies waiting to be discovered outside of the artificially "flattened" birth-death chronology of life. If east meets west somewhere beyond the flat map, so too does death meet rebirth somewhere outside of the physical boundaries of life.

Before moving into the afterlife, however, the poet gets inexplicably caught up in the geography of his travel:

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?

Any an, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,

All straights, and none but straights, are ways to them,

Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Sem.

(16–20)

The proliferating place-names of straits—Bering, Magellan, Gibraltar—reflect the proliferation of discoveries that had occurred in the previous century, along with the mounting symbolic confusion that they instantiated. The historical and moral imperatives of the medieval mappaemundi, the poem asserts, are unnatural representations of a real world marked by exponentially increasing places. Thus, while the first few lines of the poem attempt to create symbolic meaning out of the world map, the following lines undo that meaning when they begin to account for the new discoveries of early modern exploration. While, according to the symbolic meaning of the T-O maps, the speaker should be able to chart his course to heaven, the presence of these uncharted territories complicate his journey to the afterlife.

The poet finds resolution in the unification of Ptolemaic mapping and religious meaning, reified in the mystical overlap of Eden and Calvary, where it was supposed that “Christ’s Crosse, and Adam’s tree, stood in one place” (“Hymn,” line 23). This image links together the lost land of Eden and the promised land of the New Jerusalem, finding a new location on the map to signal the cycle of death and redemption described in the opening lines. The passage thus recreates the relationship between a religious worldview and the map that helps to construct it; the burden of mapping is to enable mystical union
rather than delineate space.

Ultimately, this new union enables the poet to imagine his own body as the location of resurrection, where the poet might "find both Adams met in me" ("Hymn," line 23). The journey of the poem's metaphor, from maps of space to metaphysical symbols to, finally, union with the divine, creates an understanding of an expanding world that was disallowed both by the religious perspectives of medieval mappaemundi and by the realities of a world engaged in a political struggle for land and power. "Hymn to God, My God" reads infant globalism as a possibility for mystical union; it imagines a world map as a symbol of rebirth that allows the speaker to attain union with the divine.

The specific reference to the union of humanity and divinity within the body imports mysticism into the poetic project. The poem utilizes mystical theology even more specifically, however, in its reference to the mapping of an imaginative place that metaphorically enables that union to occur; like the coins in "Of Weeping" and "The Bracelet," maps in "Hymn to God, My God" function as meditative images that inaugurate union. Contemplative writings draw abundantly from images of place to enable union with God. Ignatius of Loyola enjoins his followers to visualize a mental landscape in preparation for meditation. In his recommendation for the "composition of place," he entreats his readers "to see with the imagination the corporeal place where the thing is that we wish to contemplate [...] for example a temple or mountain, where Jesus Christ or Our Mother is." Similarly, Teresa of Ávila's "prayer of recollection" also makes use of an imaginative place, though rather than a purposeful prelude to prayer, hers appears as a mystical gift provided to the contemplative that "makes one close one's eyes and desire solitude, and without artifice, there gradually appears the building in
which one can make the prayer already described.\textsuperscript{45} The point of the practice is to facilitate union by creating a symbolic topography that will provide a path to contemplation.

Like the map in "Hymn to God, My God," this visualized place in mystical writings, while ostensibly an outer landscape or imaginative edifice, is always located within the body. In his description of the composition, for instance, Loyola calls for two different kinds of imaginative space-making, both of which are closely connected to images of embodiment. The first kind of visualization is a "lugar corpóreo," literally translated, a corporeal place, a physical setting for meditating on visible things. The second, meant for contemplating conceptual things, is an imaginative scene that encapsulates the idea. In a meditation on sin, for instance, Loyola recommends that the practitioner imagine her soul "imprisoned in her body," and her body amid the topography of a valley.\textsuperscript{46}

For Donne's poem, that meditational topography stretches to include an entire world by rendering the globe a symbol of union with God. The merging of the poet's single, distinct identity with a collective world landscape metaphorically imagines an individual conversion that sustains, rather than problematizes, the idea of corporate conversion. As the individual turns to God, the lands on the map are themselves simultaneously transformed into a pictorial representation of that inner change. This individual conversion is an interior turning and a cyclic returning from physical death to spiritual birth, to a divine presence that has always resided within. That is to say, the poem's ideal religious experience moves away from maintaining strict institutional boundaries and toward a capacious religiosity, one that eschews the doctrinal debates in
which the Christian church was embroiled. It surrenders strict classifications in favor of identifying with a God beyond boundaries.

**Icons of the Nation**

Donne’s poetry constructs an idea of conversion in which internal change brings the soul into alignment with a collective experience of “one divine truth.” Conversion is therefore registered less as a transfer of religious allegiance than as a reorienting of the self toward God. It is a moment in the process of repentance, a spiritual movement that, in the words of Murray, is always “resolutely inward and upward . . . an interior journey to God made by every Christian soul.” This interior journey leads the convert to union with God and, in doing so, to union with a nation that is itself undergoing the same transformative process. Donne’s England turns from the Catholic Church not in order to embrace the dogmatic truthfulness of Protestantism so much as to realize its own spiritual regeneration; the English Reformation is simply one more page in the long narrative of the country’s religious development.

Maps and coins metaphorize this process, by using a form of representation more commonly seen at the site of the icon. Whereas icons link believer to God through an image of Christ or saint, maps and coins symbolize a nation that has its roots in unification with God. These metaphors reject the limitedness of contemporary monetary value or geographic signification in order to inaugurate a mysticism that enables community. Maps and coins ultimately become the emblems of the nation’s corporate conversion to a religion that moves beyond the boundaries of Reformation upheaval. Of
course, this optimistic portrait of national unity is nothing more than a fantasy. Donne’s poetry envisions an impossible conversion to a non-existent religion, to a Church of England that would be forever in the making. However, even while the realities of England’s continued religious instability gave the lie to this pipe dream, Donne’s poetry offers an imaginative alternative. In the face of actual religious turmoil, his symbolism finally reaches toward a whole church – a True Church – that might be truly embraced by all.
Chapter 2

Esoteric Nationalism in Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*

Whereas Donne locates transcendence in representation—through the icon—Lanyer finds transcendence in experience—through revelation, primarily by means of a dream. As an unmediated encounter with a transcendent other, revelation holds great promise in two ways: by awakening a subject to a transcendent ontological reality and by instantiating a community around that revelation. While, for Lanyer, revelation leads to true knowledge and justice, the community that revelation creates is somewhat more problematic, for revelation, as a means of accessing the divine, also carries political implications. Revelation instantiates a community in secret, a community that is best described under the rubric of esoteric theology.

Esoteric theology creates a community, but only one that is hidden. As a structure of thought that underwrites theology, esotericism operates by means of a sophisticated and complex alchemy of initiation, textual interpretation, and revelation. Certainly this was the case in the early modern period especially, when esotericism blended into magic, when the aristocracy regularly consulted astrologers such as John Dee and Simon Forman, and when Marsilio Ficino’s translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was all the rage. From hermeticism to Gnosticism, from Kabbalah to Sufism, the open secret of esoteric thought is the concealed nature of truth, which lies somewhere just beyond the denotative meanings of a text. And yet, for all its sophistication, as a structure of thought that organizes people, esotericism creates boundaries between people that function as
blunt instruments of community-making, a simplistic and exclusionary way of establishing an “us” and a “them.”

If esotericism marks out its community as a sanctuary from the masses of the unenlightened, however, it does so by means of a fascinating rhetorical move that renders it simultaneously beyond and within mainstream theology. For esoteric thought is frequently formulated not in opposition to exoteric theology, but in an uneasy alliance with it.1 An esoteric hermeneutics will frequently elaborate on, supplement, or critique mainstream theology, and, in so doing, establish an uncommon, uncanny discourse that passes between the very boundaries that it seeks to uphold.

In this chapter, I want to explore how Aemilia Lanyer uses the strange duality of esotericism—simultaneously inside and outside of dominant modes of theology—as a parallel to and commentary on gendered forms of exclusion. While critics have commented on Lanyer’s pro-female, perhaps even proto-feminist, theology,2 my own particular contribution to the critical conversation on Lanyer is twofold: I investigate not the female-centric content of Lanyer’s theology so much as its structure, and I locate that esoteric structure within a remarkably nationalist agenda, one that is layered alongside whatever feminist stakes she may claim.

This chapter makes three corollary assertions. The first is that Lanyer’s political engagement can be adduced at least as much from her poem’s generic elements as it can from its content; that is, Lanyer’s poem is “political” not only because it participates in contemporary debates about women, but also because it frames those debates within a poetic form that critics have almost uniformly overlooked: the epic, a genre deeply inflected by national, indeed, even imperial, concerns. My second assertion is that
Lanyer’s interest in the affairs of the state is presented specifically as a critique of the problematic office of the sovereign. Sovereignty, as Lanyer’s poem intimates, embeds an innate tendency toward tyranny, an inherited trait that Lanyer traces using classical and Biblical allusions from the “matter of Rome” back to the early monarchy of ancient Israel. My third and final assertion is that as a means of thinking past the problems of sovereignty, Lanyer’s poem relies on esotericism to imagine a sacred community of women centered on Christ who represents a more just, if transitory, portrait of power that arises from within dominant forms of government. In doing so, it aligns the exclusionary trends of gender politics with an equally exclusionary theology, creating a vexed “solution” to the problem of tyrannical kingship.

Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*, published in 1611, contains a long poem of the same title recounting the passion of Christ, along with several patronage poems and, five years before Ben Jonson popularized the genre, a country-house poem entitled “To Cooke-ham.” The work is concluded by a short epilogue to assure “the doubtful reader” that the title of the book, and by extension, the authority to write it, were conferred upon her in a prophetic dream. One of the most significant features of her work, and the touchstone of my analysis, is its cast of characters, a group of almost entirely female figures—both patrons and characters that, taken together, have come to be known in critical parlance as her “community of women.” The most notable grouping of these women occurs near the closing lines of “Salve Deus,” which transition inexplicably from the scene of Christ’s resurrection to a list of women culled from the history of Israel, whose “glorious actions did appeare so right / That powerfull men by them were overthrowne” (“Salve Deus,” lines 1465-1467). The list is somewhat eclectic,
includes the fictional women of Scythia who conquered the armies of King Darius; the deuterocannonical Judith, who beheaded the enemy general Holofernes; Deborah the pre-monarchic prophet-judge of Israel, who overthrew Sisera; Queen Esther of Persia, responsible for the trial and execution of Hamon; Susanna, the wife of Joachim, who was unjustly accused of adultery by the elders of the community and whose virtue eventually exposed their lies; and the Queen of Sheba, who left her native land to pay homage to Solomon (“Salve Deus,” lines 1465-1608). While critics have remarked on the gendered disruption of power that these women enact, especially as it relates to Lanyer’s own position as a women writer,⁴ there remains a kind of unaccountable randomness to this assemblage of women, drawn together across time and place. It is, in fact, this very arbitrariness that is evidence of Lanyer’s structural reliance on esoteric thought. Lanyer’s community of women are brought together not by any external similarities such as class status or secular power, but by a shared, and privileged, access to God. Moreover, their disparate locations across time serves to mark the community out as simultaneously beyond and within temporal (both chronological and governmental) structures. Lanyer’s community ultimately presents an exclusive form of political and temporal transcendence, one that momentarily disrupts worldly politics as to comment on an critique it.

The Genre of Nationalism

Although Lanyer’s poem “Salve Deus Rex Judeorum” can loosely be defined as a devotional narrative poem, as many critics have noted, it displays a startling stylistic
eclecticism that makes it difficult to categorize under any single genre. As Barbara K. Lewalski has noted, its generic modes and rhetorical conventions run the gamut from apologia to passion, from encomia to lament. It is alternately valedictory and panegyric, and appears to have affinities with a wide array of poetic forms, including sonnets, epyllions, and, of course, country-house poems. Lewalski is not the only critic to note that, like Jonson's "To Penshurst," Lanyer's "To Cooke-ham" abounds with pastoral language and images. According to Lewalski, "Cooke-ham" borrows heavily from Virgil's Eclogues, especially the First Eclogue, "based on the classical topos, the valediction to a place." In referencing the classical poet, Lanyer embarks on the cursus Virgilii, establishing herself as a professional poet by mimicking the progression of Virgil's career much the same way Spenser had in the previous century. While borrowing Virgil's authority lends her poetry the professional legitimacy that her gender might otherwise deny, it also positions her, like Virgil and Spenser, as a writer of and for the nation: Virgil, a Roman statesman, writes in a pastoral mode that centers on Rome, whose revolutionary politics haunt the beautiful and war-torn land of the Eclogues and the Georgics.

Like Virgil's First Eclogue, which opens on the exile of Meliboeus from his homeland, Lanyer's "To Cooke-ham" begins with the ousting of the poet from the estate: "Farewell (sweet Cooke-ham) where I first obtain'd / Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain'd" ("Cooke-ham," lines 1-2). Bereft of life, the estate is haunted by the ghosts of the recent past, metaphorized by Ovidian references to Philomela and Echo ("Cooke-ham," lines 31 and 199). While the grounds of Cooke-ham are populated by all the classical figures of Rome's sylvan copses, however, it is for all that a specifically
English estate. The poem notes that Cookeham overlooks "thirteen shires," and it invokes the sibling rivalry between England and its continental neighbors by noting that "Europe could not afford much more delight" to the view that Cookeham supplies ("Cookeham," lines 73 and 74). Furthermore, Lanyer's English estate is, or at least should be, inhabited by an English mistress—Lady Margaret, the Dowager Countess of Cumberland. When her husband the Count had died in 1605, he had illegally bequeathed Cookeham to his brother, rather than allowing it to pass to his only heir, his daughter Lady Anne. The bequeathal violated the conditions under which Edward II had granted the estate to the family, which stipulated that it pass down hereditary lines regardless of gender. In 1611, therefore, Lady Anne and Lady Margaret were embroiled in a legal battle over ownership of the estate, and these politics form the backdrop to the poem's valedictory mood. Like Virgil's blending of actual politics with a fantasy of place, the overall effect of Lanyer's use of the pastoral creates an idealized setting that references the specific locus and events of England.

By cutting her poetic teeth on the bucolic matter of "Cooke-ham," Lanyer opens the possibility to find, as Spencer puts it in The Faerie Queene, the "trumpets sterne" of the epic genre, represented elsewhere in her work. While Lanyer's pastoral mode in "Cooke-ham" is well-remarked by criticism, however, there is a paucity of work that notes the remarkable characteristics that "Salve Deus Rex Judeorum" shares with epic poetry. There are several possible reasons for this oversight, including the fact that lyric poetry in the early modern period was considered a more suitable genre for women's writing than the masculine subject matter and professionalized authorship required by the epic. A more fundamental reason however, is likely the poem's brevity: at 1,841 lines,
“Salve Deus” weighs in far beneath the length of a traditional epic. In fact, this length would appear to place it more in the category of the epyllion, a generic term coined in the nineteenth century to describe a brief narrative poem common in Hellenistic and Roman writings, such as Peleus and Thetis, by Catullus. This genre was popular throughout the early modern period, and is represented by such works as Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* or Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*. Lanyer’s work does, in fact, share some generic features with the epyllion, which tends toward more amorous themes than its longer heroic counterpart: her erotic descriptions of Christ as the love-interest to the Dowager Countess certainly bear close resemblances to Shakespeare’s Venus. Like the goddess of love, who in Shakespeare’s account “stains her face” with the “congealed blood” of the dead Adonis, the Countess of Cumberland embraces the “bleeding body” of the dying Christ in her arms, while her “teares of sorrow” fall on his cheeks (“Salve Deus,” lines 1332-1333).

Despite these similarities, however, “Salve Deus” shares more generic features with the epic than the epyllion. It starts, for instance, in media res—in the middle of the Christian Bible—with the Passion, and it’s opening, as well as the patronage poems, contains numerous invocations to the muse. Even her “community of women” may be thought of as an epic catalogue. Presented as an *enumeratio* at the end of “Salve Deus,” the women of Lanyer’s community amplify the number and power of the female characters in earlier lines of the “Salve,” as well as the patronesses to which her work is dedicated. Melanie Faith points out that Lanyer’s subject matter also follows Torqueto Tasso’s “comprehensive epic theory found in *Discorsi del poema eroica*, the preface to *Gerusalemme Liberata*, ‘Allegoria,’ and in their English derivatives.” According to
Tasso, the subject matter for an epic poem must deal with Judeo-Christian history, must treat noble subjects, and must have a hero of unquestionable virtue.¹⁹ As Faith points out, Lanyer’s focus on the Passion, her inclusion of aristocratic characters (and patrons), and her hero, the virtuous Dowager Countess all fulfill these conditions.²⁰ Also in the tradition of Tasso, along with Ariosto and Boccaccio, Lanyer writes “Salve Deus” in ottava rima, the rhyme scheme that, as Faith notes, Tasso considered “the gravest and most perfect of stanzaic forms.”²¹

As with Lanyer’s use of pastoral themes, her participation in epic conventions signals her concern with the nation. While her poem on Cookeham bids farewell to the English estate, however, “Salve Deus” is, in keeping with the genre, more concerned with mythic origins. Tracing the genealogy of Britain through the history of Rome, Lanyer layers classical and contemporary references, imagining a family tree for the British aristocracy that is rooted in the cultural matrix of Greco-Roman mythology. In the dedicatory poem to the Queen, for instance, the narrator swaggeringly assures Queen Anne that, had the judgment of Paris been enacted in seventeenth-century England, the golden apple would surely have gone to the British monarch rather than Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite (“To the Queenes most Excellent Majesty,” lines 7-12). This mythic revision certainly invites strange possible outcomes for the war that supplied the basis for the three great epics of classical literature. More importantly, however, it ties British royalty to the founding myth of European culture: it is not only Rome that rises from the ashes of the Trojan War, but England as well.

The Critique of Monarchy
Lanyer's interest in England as a nation forms the background for a more central concern about the problematic office of the sovereign. This concern is, perhaps, unsurprising in a work whose subject matter is women.22 Even if the Dowager Countess and Lady Anne hadn't needed to contend with the late Count's illegal bequest, Lanyer's focus on sovereignty would still have been in keeping with her middle-class position as a woman whose economic hopes were built on the good patron.23

Good and bad monarchs populate "Salve Deus," while the patronage poems contain numerous references to the characteristics and quality of kingship.24 In conventional early modern fashion, Lanyer praises God as the archetype for all kings. In a prefatory poem to the Queen, God is the "mightie Monarch both of heav'n and earth," while "Salve Deus" declares its main theme to be "The meditation of this monarchs love," a theme that vies for importance with the poem's other ostensible goal, to immortalize the virtuous reputation of the Dowager Countess of Cumberland ("To the Queenes Most Excellent Majesty," line 44; "Salve Deus," lines 153 and 9). And yet, while the poem celebrates the Countess's "never-dying fame" by relating it to the "everlasting Sov'raigntie" of Christ, the bulk of the narrative is nevertheless populated by tyrannous rulers who disrupt the celebratory mode of nation-building. It is this tyranny, injected into temporal forms of sovereignty that ultimately prevents the England from becoming the location for Lanyer's dreams of a perfect political society.

The arch-villain of Lanyer's work is Pontius Pilate, prefect of the Roman province of Judaea, who presides over the trial of Christ. Pilate's wife lays the first charge of tyranny against the ruler by foregrounding his failure in his capacity as judge.
Appealing on behalf of Christ, she begs Pilate to “[l]et barb’rous crueltie farre depart . . .
And in true Justice . . . Open thine eies” (“Salve Deus,” lines 753-55). This rupture in the
legal system continues when, after some fancy syllogistic footwork, Pilate’s oppression
of Christ becomes conflated with his oppression of women—and especially, his disregard
for his wife’s lengthy plea. Her famous defense of women condenses into a few succinct
lines that seek the liberation both of Christ and women:

Then let us have our Libertie againe,
And challenge to your selves no Sov’raigntie;

...why should you disdaine
Our being your equals, free from tyranny?

(“Salve Deus,” lines 825-830)

This passage has often been read as general appeal on behalf of women for freedom from
masculine oppression. Within the framework of the passage, however, it is Pilate alone
who has the power to restore liberty and release Christ. The implications of this passage
therefore reveal two important facets of monarchy: first, the disempowerment of women
is a question of justice that can only be righted by the sovereign, and second, the
sovereign who refuses to address this disempowerment is a tyrant. The charge of tyranny
against Pilate in fact pervades the trial scene: Pilate’s wife claims that her husband’s
judgment of Christ is tainted “[w]ith blood, and wrong, with tyrannie, and might,” and,
after Pilate sends Christ to Herod, questions why he must “reconcile thy selfe [to Herod]
by tyrannie, / Was this the greatest good in Justice meant” (“Salve Deus,” lines 844-945).

Pilate’s tyranny may, of course, be dismissed as a case of individual autocracy, or even merely circumstantial—in the context of a Christian poem, what other epithet can be given to the ruler responsible for the death of Christ? However, Lanyer’s poem intimates that Pilate’s failure as a ruler is the inevitable consequence of the conditions of kingship. She extends the charge of tyranny even to the original kings of Israel, including David, who is generally taken in early modern Biblical interpretations and political theory as the king par excellence, despite his several peccadillos.

The narrative opens the door to Israelite monarchic history in a curious question that Pilate’s wife poses to her husband: “Why wilt thou be a reprobate with Saul? / To seeke the death of him that is so good” (“Salve Deus,” lines 838-839). Pilate’s wife compares the Roman prefect to the first king of Israel, who lost favor with God after unlawfully performing a sacrifice, and who afterwards sought the death of his future successor, David. In referencing Saul, the poem redirects the line of descent for Judaea’s rulers from Pilate, who represents Rome, and toward a Judaic genealogy of kingship while, at the same time, contextualizing the tyranny of the Roman ruler within the history of Israelite monarchy. The opening argument to the first book of Samuel in the Geneva Bible recounts Saul’s rise and fall as the first king of Israel. The failure of this monarchy begins, the passage asserts, with Israel’s misdirected desire for a king.

[The Israelites,] who not content with that ordre, which God had for a time appointed for the government of his Church, demanded a King, to the intent thei might be as other nacions, and in a greater assurance as thei
though: not because thei might the better thereby serve God, as being under
the safeguard of him, which did represent Jesus Christ the true deliverer: therefore he gave them a tyrant and an hypocrite to rule over them, that they might learne, that the persone of a King is not sufficient to defend them, except God by his power preserve and kepe them.27

As the passage rereads the history of Israel, the people were given a tyrant monarch because of their desire to place themselves under temporal governance—to “be as other nacions”—in opposition to spiritual governance—to be “under the safeguard of him, which did represent Jesus Christ.” The temporary church government the passage refers to is the rule of the judges of Israel, who served as prophetic intermediaries between God and the Israelites, particularly in times of war or civil unrest, without wielding the unilateral or hereditary power of kings.28 Tyranny, understood in this passage as unbridled authority, is thus embedded in the original moment of temporal kingship, and intricately tied to Israel’s desire for a governmental order that mimics those of rival nations. The slippage between the words “Church” to describe the governorship of the prophets and “nation” to describe a monarchy is telling, signaling the difference between a people ruled by a divine head of state and those ruled by a man.

In the early modern period, Saul is often represented an archetype of tyranny; indeed, James I opens his “True Lawe of Free Monarchies,” published in 1598 as an apology for kingship, with an analysis of Saul’s reign. James attributes Saul’s downfall to “the corruption of his own nature,” noting that, like Pilate, Saul’s actions transform him into a “monstrous persecutor and Tirant.”29 In contradistinction to James I and in keeping
with the interpretation forwarded by the Geneva Bible, however, Lanyer’s poem reads the Biblical aversion to kingship at face value: the problem with the king is not that he might overreach the extent of his authority, but that the office is itself predicated on an imperfect distribution of power, one that places too much authority in the hands of a single person, and, in so doing, takes it out of the hands of God.

As a result of Saul’s transgression, David is appointed as the replacement for Saul. As the true king, or, as the opening argument to first Samuel phrases it, the “true figure of Messiah,” David ultimately fills the representative role of “Jesus Christ the true deliverer.” As such, the Messianic figure of David, pursued by the tyrant Saul, would seem to correspond perfectly to the Messianic Jesus, condemned by the tyrant Pilate. In “Salve Deus,” however, Lanyer does not accord David this traditional role, and instead asserts that, like Saul, David and his son Solomon also failed in their duties as monarchs:

If for one sinne such Plagues on David fell,
As grieved him, and did his Seed undoe:

If Salomon, for that he did not well,
Falling from Grace, did loose his Kingdome too:
Ten Tribes being taken from his wilfull Sonne
And Sinne the Cause that they were all undone.

(“Salve Deus,” lines 443-448)

Solomon’s fall from grace is, like Saul’s, well known: after marrying wives outside of
Israel, he worshipped foreign gods. The Biblical narrative attributes the fracturing of Israel following Solomon's rule directly to these actions, making him the last of the three kings to rule over united Israel.  

Lanyer's reference to David's "sinne" is slightly more abstruse. According to her editor, Susanne Woods, the reference is to an obscure moment in David's kingship when David elects, contrary to the orders of God, to take a census of the people. Following David's sin, the prophet Gad arrives to deliver a punishment from God: three days of plague. God appears to suspend the plague, however, midway through after witnessing the distress of the Israelites. Woods does not note that the reference may also be to David's dalliance with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah. Although there was no accompanying plague for this sin, his adultery resulted in the death of his son by Bathsheba and his family was cursed with disorder, a consequence that might be read as the undoing of his "Seed." In either case, however, there is no indication that David loses his kingship as a result of his actions, or is in any way complicit with the rupturing of Israel—David's undoing is Lanyer's addition to the Biblical text.

For Lanyer, Christ is not merely an archetypal king, but the only true king, who takes up the legitimate throne of Israel inherited from the problematic line of David. As Gabriel remarks to Mary, "Thou shouldst beare a Sonne that shal inherit / His father Davids throne, free from offence" ("Salve Deus," lines 1051-1052).

Esoteric Community

Wendy Wall notes that Lanyer's work associates women with Christ, and derives
some form of authority from the association.\textsuperscript{34} It is important to point out, however, that the authority granted to these women corresponds more precisely not to Christ’s sovereignty, but to the temporary and conditional authority bestowed on Israel’s pre-monarchic judges; their power is granted as a condition of relationship to the divine, and is only bestowed for specific tasks. Regarding Deborah, for instance, the narrator asserts that “God … gave her power to set his people free,” while Esther also obtains grace from the king of Persia “by God’s power.” Susanna, after being accused of adultery by two lascivious elders in Israel, is vindicated when God “rais’d the spirit of a Child to speake, / Making the powrefull judged of the weake.” If these women overthrow powerful men, it is only by the authority of God that they do so; their work is therefore not the imaginative replacing of oppressive male authority with liberated female authority, but the radical undoing of temporal power structures altogether, symbolized by the gendered political upheaval that these women enact.

The conditionality of the disruptive power wielded largely (although, as I will discuss below, not exclusively) by women is important for understanding how Lanyer’s political vision relates to her theological one, for it is precisely the transitory nature of her community that calibrates the liminality of women with the frustratingly provisional, yet insistently compelling, ideal of a perfect ruler.

In the early modern period, women occupied a political space that was not unlike the hybrid inside/outside community created by esoteric theology. While they could not hold political office, women, and single women in particular, held a political identity that allowed them to intervene in a legal sphere largely dominated by men.\textsuperscript{35} They could pursue legal cases, for instance. In fact, in Lanyer’s later life, she was herself sued by the
landlord of the private school that she ran for back-rent on the property (she countered that the cost of repairs she had made to the building ought to have been deducted from the rent). But perhaps the best example of a feminine community formed within the midst of a dominant male politics is Queen Anne of Denmark’s court, which existed alongside James I’s more male-centered circle.

While the women in Lanyer’s community naturally mimic the political hybridity of women in the early modern period, in order to understand fully how that communal form mimics esotericism, and in the process stages an effective critique of sovereignty, it is necessary to investigate how Lanyer invokes and utilizes esotericism in relation to women.

Throughout her work, Lanyer’s use of esotericism takes the repeated form of obsession over hidden knowledge, beginning in the prefatory poem “The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Margaret the Countess Dowager of Pembroke.” In this dream, the Countess is led into a “sacred spring where Art and Nature striv’d / Which should remain as Sov’raigne of the place” (‘Author’s Dream,” lines 81-82). This “ancient quarrel” is put to right, however, by the ladies, including the Countess, who, unable to choose between them, realizes that the two must coexist in harmonious sharing of power:

But here in equall sov’raignty to live,
Equall in state, equall in dignitie
That unto others they might comfort give,
Rejoycing all with their sweet unitie.

(“Author’s Dream,” lines 93-96)
The “equall sov’raignty” of Art and Nature enact a more perfect balance of power than the tyranny that instills itself throughout the “Salve,” and it also does so by invoking unity, a characteristic of this bower that, the poem insinuates, is borrowed from God. For it is within these woods that Mary Sidney sings her translations of the Psalms, composed by David “Unto the Father of Eternitie; / Before his holy wisedom tooke the name / of great Messias, Lord of unitie” (“Author’s Dream,” lines 118-120). In this light, God incarnate (“great Messias”) invokes the coming together of people, and the end of strife.

By engaging in the idea of oneness, however, Lanyer also deploys an accompanying trope that, especially in an age obsessed with Hermeticism, was often related to mystical theology: esotericism. Mary Sidney’s bower, while Utopic in its vision of a unified community, is also hidden beneath a double obscurity: like the title of her book, the bower is revealed to the author alone in a dream, and is, within the framework of the dream world, only known by certain characters. It is even a “Place that yet Minerva did not know,” which seems odd for the goddess of wisdom (“Author’s Dream,” line 80). Minerva’s lack of knowledge is singularly important, for it circumvents the transmission of learning based in Greco-Roman culture, signified in the medieval translatio studii. The pastoral singing of the psalms within the bower, undertaken by, presumably, those who knew of its existence, instead establishes knowledge under the purview of Biblical history.38

Not only is the place itself revealed by hidden knowledge, but also it is a place where knowledge is given, beginning with the revelation of the dream to the author, who, in turn, extends that revelation to her readers, mimicking the mentor/disciple relationship
that underwrites the acquisition of esoteric knowledge. Privileged access to knowledge is further played out in the scene itself, when the ladies who arbitrate the case between Nature and Art enter “as umpires . . . Judging with pleasure their delightfull case” (“Author’s Dream,” lines 85-86). As judges, they perform the ancient right given to Israel’s pre-monarchic and, more problematically, monarchic rulers, so that the “equall sov’raingty” of the passage is only made possible by dint of access to knowledge, symbolized in the ability of the women to judge.

Secret knowledge and revelation, as concepts at play in Lanyer’s mystic ontology, appear at particularly pivotal moments in both “Salve Deus” and “Cooke-ham.” Knowledge acquisition, for instance, plays a naturally major role in “Eve’s Apologie,” Lanyer’s radical retelling of the fall of humanity, as imagined by Pilate’s wife. In the episode, Pilate’s wife exculpates Eve by establishing, among other things, Adam’s superior understanding of, and therefore responsibility for, the consequences of eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He receives the injunction against eating “from God’s own mouth,” and “he knew” that the punishment for ignoring the prohibition “was present death” (“Salve Deus,” lines 787-788). In contrast, Eve “had no power to see, / The after-coming harme” that her transgression would entail (“Salve Deus,” lines 765-766):

That undiscerning Ignorance perceav’d
No guile, or craft that was by him intended;
For had she knowne, of what we were bereav’d,
To his request she had not condescended.
Kari Boyd McBride and John C. Ulreich point out that Lanyer’s argument relies heavily on the contribution made by the gnostic Henricius Cornelius Agrippa to the *querelle de femmes*. Agrippa’s argument has a long contextual history, stretching back to Augustine’s gloss on 1 Timothy 2:13-14: “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” For Augustine, this verse indicates that Eve’s sin was predicated on ignorance rather than willful disobedience, a fact that conflates sin with the state of being deceived. Consequently, Augustine reasons, because Adam is cognizant of his actions, they cannot constitute a similar transgression and instead merely reflect his kinship with and sympathy toward Eve. In response to Augustine and in contradiction of 1 Timothy, Agrippa asserts that Eve’s ignorance in fact mitigates, rather than establishes, her sin; Agrippa distinguishes between Adam’s knowledge (*certa scientia*), which caused him to sin (*peccavit*), and Eve’s ignorance (*ignorans*), which caused her to err (*erravit*). Agrippa’s argument, according to McBride and Ulreich, posed the counterpoint to the Augustinian reading of the Fall in the querelle, a counterpoint that Lanyer’s work seeks to uphold.

While Eve’s moderated culpability helps to establish Lanyer’s pro-female, perhaps even “proto-feminist,” stance in the querelle, I argue that it also importantly lays the groundwork for her thinking about knowledge. Whereas the passage begins with Adam’s superior knowledge, established by virtue of his direct access to God, it ends with Eve bestowing knowledge on mankind: “Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke / from Eves faire hand, as from a learned Booke” (“Salve Deus,” lines 807-808). In
a configuration that substitutes knowledge for Christ as the fortunate consequence of the felix culpa, Lanyer rereads not only Eve's role in the fall, but also the moral value of the knowledge that is bestowed. The conditions of the fall imply that sin inheres within the knowledge of good and evil, making knowledge itself potentially problematic. Lanyer's work holds no such view, however, and instead rehabilitates the knowledge bestowed at the fall by positing a continuous relationship between it and the knowledge that Adam had in prelapsarian Eden: "what [Eve] tasted, [Adam] likewise might prove, / Whereby his knowledge might become more cleare" ("Salve Deus," lines 803-804). In Lanyer's cosmology, to live in ignorance as Eve does is to dwell in a life that only partly reaches its fullest potential. In this light, Eve's ignorance does more than merely mitigate her actions: it motivates them. As Pilate's wife reminds her husband: "If Eve did erre, it was for knowledge sake" ("Salve Deus," line 797). Lanyer's poem thereby recasts sinful Augustinian ignorance as a lack, and one that demands to be compensated.

Eve's overreaching desire for knowledge can be thought of as a function of her desire for proximity to God, who the narrative establishes as the source of knowledge. Despite Eve's apparent Promethean dissemination of that knowledge at the fall, it remains only imperfectly revealed in the world, an idea that is expressed in the parallel somnolence of the vision of Pilate's wife and in the hidden bower of "The Author's Dream." Pilate's wife, like the author Lanyer, receives a revelation through a dream-vision, which inspires both to write: Lanyer pens her poem, and Pilate's wife writes her apology in defense of, simultaneously, women and Christ. "Eve's Apologie" thus functions simultaneously as a lengthy narrative digression and as a revelation to Pilate, whose actions, his wife intimates, demonstrate his essential ignorance of the "true"
understanding of the fall. This concealment of the truth correlates hidden knowledge to
the essential obscurity of God himself, who “in the water laies his chamber beames / And
clouds of darknesse compasse him about” (“Salve Deus,” lines 99-100). From within his
watery abode, God “searches out the secrets of all mindes,” because, as the poem
rhetorically asks, “who is more wise? Or who can be more sage?” (“Salve Deus,” lines 85
and 171-172).

The hidden nature of knowledge bears a double conceptual burden. On the one
hand, it functions to contain knowledge within gendered boundaries, inherited by women
from Eve. On the other, however, it also ensures that Christ’s incarnation of that
knowledge as the embodiment of the logos would occur without any potential
philosophical dissonance that might arise from a cosmology that links knowledge to sin.
And, indeed, Christ is a figure whose arrival is posed as the perfect redemption of Eve’s
transgressive actions. In the crucifixion scene, for instance, the guards tasked with
arresting Jesus fall at his feet because

When Heavenly Wisdome did descend so lowe
To speake to them: they knew they did not well

How blinde were they could not discerne the Light!
How dull! if not to understand the truth.

(“Salve Deus,” lines 500-506)

Despite the inability of the guard to grasp the “Heavenly Wisdome” that Christ embodies,
Christ sees through their plans, or, as the narrative puts it, he “could their learned Ignorance apprehend . . . Who no resistance makes, though much he can, / To free himselfe from these unlearned men” (“Salve Deus,” lines 546-553). The guards’ hesitation at the moment of revelation (“they knew they did not well”) reveals a momentary lapse in their “learned Ignorance,” that is, the command to arrest Christ.

This is a key moment that helps to reveal the poem’s stake in knowledge. For, while the guards have been tasked with actions in accordance with temporal legality, the moment of revelation demands adherence to Heavenly justice, which would condemn the oppression of “this innocent Dove” (“Salve Deus,” line 994). In Lanyer’s poem, true knowledge activates true justice. Given this relationship between knowledge and justice, it may be understood that the tyranny that puts Christ to death, a tyranny enacted by all the kings of Israel, is a tyranny that is born and mained away from God, beyond access to his “Heavenly Wisdom.”

The Gender of Justice

Throughout Lanyer’s work, select women, rather than men, tend to have access to a justice-bearing capacity for knowledge, as already evidenced in the bower scene, where the Countess judges between Art and Nature. The connection between knowledge, justice, and women is especially true of Lanyer’s “community of women,” where the conditional power that women receive is granted, as has been noted, to accomplish a specific task, and one that, moreover, inevitably serves justice at the behest of a revelation or commission from God. “[W]ise Deborah that judged Israel” successfully
overthrows Sisera when “God did his wille reveale” (“Salve Deus,” lines 1481-1483).
And Judith beheads Holofernes “that the just might see / What small defence vaine pride,
and greatnesse hath / Against the weapons of Gods word and faith” (“Salve Deus,” lines 14856-1488). Hester’s character is made, “by God’s power,” a foil for Hamon’s, thereby
revealing his “malice, envie, guile” (“Salve Deus,” lines 1505-1510). And, as B. R.
Siegfried notes, “the sheer strength of Susanna’s reputation for virtue becomes the
touchstone which reveals the corruption of civil authorities who are then executed.”

While this community creates a power structure that upends the traditional
gendering of models of power, this fact is somewhat complicated by the surprise
inclusion of a male presence within the bounds of this otherwise all-female community.
Amid the enumeratio of women, Solomon makes something of a cameo appearance as,
this time, the unproblematic ruler of Israel. He exists as a mirrored counterpart to the
Queen of Sheba, who travels away from her native Ethiopian lands “[t]o heare the
Wisdom of this worthy King” (“Salve Deus,” line 1578). In an address to God, Solomon
had famously asked for “an understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern
between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy mighty people?” Thus, despite
the earlier criticism of Solomon’s kingship, Lanyer’s poem later includes him among the
“community of women” on the basis of his ability, like the women, to enact justice
conferred on the basis of knowledge bestowed by God. As a judge, his access to
knowledge mimics the Queen of Sheba’s, where “Wisdome to Wisdome yielded true
content” (“Salve Deus,” line 1585). As if to underscore the ability for men to be included
within this community, Lanyer’s final lines switch from the women of pre-Christian
history to the martyrs of the early church, including Stephen, Lawrence, Andrew, Peter,
and John the Baptist ("Salve Deus," lines 1745-1824). Like the women (and Solomon) before them, these men stand against the "Tyrants storms" of temporal authority ("Salve Deus," line 1759).

The inclusion of men in Lanyer’s "community of women" resists a reading of Lanyer’s vision for community that relies solely on sex. In response, many critics have argued that her community is gendered—a "feminine community," rather than a "community of women." This reading is bolstered by what has often been read as a feminized Christ.47 Like early modern women, Christ has no voice to raise in his own defense, relying instead on Pilate’s wife to speak at this trial. Furthermore, the beauty of Christ is a feminine beauty, described in an embedded blazon that celebrates his "cheeks like scarlet," "[h]is curled lockes," that are "blacke as a Raven in her blackest hew," and his lips like "the sweetest honey dropping dew" ("Salve Deus," lines 1305-1320). Most importantly, however, he associates and aligns himself with women, particularly at his trial where, when he finally does speak, he directs his words to the weeping women of Israel rather than his accusers ("Salve Deus," lines 969-984).

Rather than establish a spiritual community in which all members are either women or feminine, however, I believe that Lanyer’s poem instead employs femininity in order to imagine feminine exclusion as a marker of the esoteric quality of knowledge and justice. In doing so, she redefines not only femininity itself—as that which is more inclined to have access to the hidden knowledge of God—but also exclusivity as a mode of community-building. Lanyer’s poem is not afraid of boundaries, and this fact sits uneasily on the conscience of a reader who might expect Lanyer’s radical theology to tear down the iron curtain standing between women and their access to political power. While
early criticism of Lanyer’s poem focused on her celebration of female authority, critics have more recently sought to understand how that authority silently allies itself to racial and class hierarchies, demolishing gendered lines of exclusion only to reinstate them within other social localities, often as part of an authorial bid for power. Given this problematic approach to oppressive social constructions, what, one might ask, is the ultimate political efficacy of Lanyer’s communal vision?

By way of answering this question, I want to resituate it within Lanyer’s national genealogy, with its tyrannical set of kings and its frustrated desires for justice. The exclusivity of her community emphasizes the rarity of justice and the conditionality of sovereign power. Put simply, exclusivity, for Lanyer, highlights two important characteristics of ideal governance: sovereignty resides only with God (who bestows it only conditionally), and the ends of sovereignty are always justice. Seen from this angle, the sparse assemblage of women who represent the esoteric nation comes into focus not only as a placeholder for the exclusivity of her community, but also as a set of arterial points that reveal the transhistorical pulse of Lanyer’s communal-driven imagination. Taken together, they form an account of authority that resists any readings of power bound up in bloodlines or inheritance. Indeed, they resist any notion of teleological accumulation whatsoever; rather, their repetitious appearance in the final sections of the poem replay the moment of revelation—which is also always a moment of justice—across time and place.

Mythic Time
The appearance of Lanyer's community establishes a rift within chronological history that indicates the atemporal existence of another kingdom. This historical vision demonstrates close kinship with the idea, expressed by Benedict Anderson via Walter Benjamin, of "Messianic time," a mythic time that exists alongside and in opposition to the plodding chronology of lived experience. The anachronism of Messianic time is suggested not only in Lanyer's poem, but also in other early modern works. As Carl Schmitt points out, it is especially conjured into existence in Hamlet's rhetorical question: "What is Hecuba to me?" By posing the possibility that Hecuba does, indeed, mean something to him, Hamlet opens the door to the same kind of transhistorical relationships between people that Lanyer's community attempts to forge. Like the enlightened men and women of "Salve Deus," both Hamlet and Hecuba occupy exceptional positions in the midst of political chaos. This inextricable link between the two characters stitches the time of falling Troy to the time of rotting Denmark, and thereby suggests a temporality that exists beyond the artifice of sequential history.

As the representative ruler of this anachronistic nation, Christ's coming to earth is meant as its fullest revelation, a fact that gives the Countess more direct access to God than any of the pre-Christian members of Lanyer's community. For this reason, the Countess wages "farre greater warre . . . against that many headed monster Sinne" than either Deborah or Judith, and is motivated by Christ's "Love, not Feare . . . to fast and pray" like Hester ("Salve Deus," lines 1489-1490 and 1521). The love Sheba bore for Solomon is "but a figure of [the Countess's] dearest Love" ("Salve Deus," line 1610), for, as the poem elaborates, Solomon's "wisdome, tending but to worldly things" merely foreshadowed "that heav'nly wisdome, which salvation brings," manifested in "the Sonne
of righteousnesse, that gives true joyes” ("Salve Deus," lines 1620-1623). Just as the members of Lanyer’s community are given a power for knowledge and justice by God, Christ’s coming bestows power on the Countess: “These are those Keyes Saint Peter did possesse, / Which with a Spirituall powre are giv’n to thee” ("Salve Deus," lines 1369-1370). And, in fact, this is the very power that not only the Countess, but also Lanyer herself, as author, hopes to claim. She asserts this possibility in the invocation by relying on the wisdom of Christ to inform her poem, asking Christ to “t’illuminate my Spirit, / And give me Wisdom from his holy Hill, / That I may Write part of his glorious Merit” ("Salve Deus," lines 321-323).50

By positing herself and the Countess—two English women—as the fullest culminations of a nation headed by Christ, Lanyer’s poem finally illuminates the parallel histories of England and Israel, both of which feature two competing formulations of nationhood. On the one hand, there is the temporal formulation of power, manifested in the vexed office of the king, who always inherits the problematics of hierarchy and oppression that inheres in all monarchies. On the other, however, there is the ahistorical nation that links Israel and England together by relating figures, such as the Countess, Lanyer, and the “community of women” together. This nation is ruled conditionally, rather than absolutely, by an assemblage of people who are granted conditional access to knowledge of God.

Appended at the end of “Salve Deus,” “To Cooke-ham,” makes clear the need for such a spiritualized reconstruction of leadership. The political background of the poem—the Count’s imperious bequeathal of Cookeham to his nephew and the subsequent eviction of the Dowager Countess from the estate—supply the central “tyranny” of the
poem. In response to this tyranny, "Cooke-ham" follows "Salve Deus" in grounding the communal life of its characters in a kind of fantastical spiritual world, nestled within the nationalist geography of the estate. The Countess spends her time walking the grounds with Christ and his Apostles, philosophizing with Moses and singing with David ("Cooke-ham," lines 81-82 and 85-88). The setting of the estate in fact provides a fantasy of place for a spiritual nation that otherwise would have no home to call its own. And yet, temporal politics intrude into this ideal landscape, forcing the Countess out of her spiritual community. As the Countess takes her leave of Cookeham, the house and grounds react by entering into a state of profound decay; flowers droop at her impending departure, briars tug at her skirts in a vain attempt to force her to stay, Philomela and Echo both die, and the house covers itself with Dust and Cobwebs ("Cooke-ham," lines 189-202). To put it, as the narrator does, succinctly: "All desolation did there appeare" ("Cooke-ham," line 203).

In the face of this loss, it is tempting to look for evidence of the lingering existence of a "true" community somewhere beyond the borders of Cooke-ham. And, indeed, the poem conventionally asserts that the estate will continue to live in verse form, echoing the desire for poetic immortality that many early modern lyrics express: "When I am dead, thy name in this may live" (line 206). But, given the death that surrounds the final lines of the poem, it is doubtful just how much life the estate might lay claim to. Here is no welcoming home replete with warmed hearth and well-trimmed gardens, but an abandoned dwelling, sunk into a state of eternalized, irreparable decay. In the end, whereas "Salve Deus" celebrates the transhistory of an eternal nation, "Cooke-ham" witnesses the fundamental elsewhereness of the ideal state, a nation that, while insistently
imagined as a real collection of individuals, is ultimately fated to exist, like Thomas More’s Utopia, nowhere.

It is important to note, however, that this foreclosure does not unsettle the ideal; Lanyer’s nation persists, despite its lack of time and place. This curious persistence, the tenuous balance Lanyer’s work maintains between ideal and real, ultimately illuminates the relationship between the temporal and the spiritual nation. For, while her most ideal nation arises from an imaginative matrix that lacks chronology and geography, it is not posed in opposition to the temporal nation—either Israel or England—but is the most perfect formulation of it, a fact that is invoked in such moments as the rise to temporal leadership of Deborah, prophet-judge of Israel, or the English setting of Cookeham, in which the Countess communes with Biblical figures. Lanyer’s epic genre does not, therefore, attempt to tell the history of a nation that exists beyond the boundaries of England, but rather traces the origins of a “true” England, a hidden kingdom that is embedded within the temporal geography and problematic government of the island nation, and that comes into focus, like the members of her community, only at select moments and locations. Lanyer’s politics of exclusion, underwritten by her esotericism, might finally be thought of as a vexed structural necessity for a poetry that wishes not to draw boundaries between people, but between this world and another. The ideal nation that Lanyer imagines is not intended to exist either entirely outside the grasp of humanity, nor are English politics eventually meant to morph into a Christian government; rather, her community crystallizes only in moments of revelatory justice, when her anachronistic nation breaks into and reveals humanity’s struggle with its own temporal hierarchies.
Chapter 3

Mystical Sovereignty in Richard Crashaw’s “The Flaming Heart”

Richard Crashaw’s poetic vision centers on mystical union as the moment of encounter with transcendence. While this is the case most famously in his poem “The Flaming Heart,” a poetic account of the mystical union of St. Teresa of Ávila, many of his works extol the coming together of God and human in a moment of ecstasy. Crashaw’s interest in mystical union is not merely spiritual, but also political. Mystical union calls for a commingling of human and divine, a transformative relationship in which self becomes reoriented toward God. Crashaw mines the political possibilities of this relationship to imagine how power might, in an ideal context, be determined by an original expression of love for the other.

In contemporary writings on transcendence, mystical union is often understood as the basis for ethics. Such work founds this assertion on the desire, frequently expressed in writings by mystics, to reproduce the moment of union. This longing for return is, for instance, what Emanuel Levinas draws from when formulating his notion of the desire for the Other, a desire that can only be filled by love. The demand for sympathy made by the Other constitutes what Levinas calls “the ethical signification of transcendence,” making it a useful lens for examining Crashaw’s political imagination. Crashaw does not, however, posit the ethics of transcendence without some complications. In “The Flaming Heart,” the encounter with the divine is always a reproduction of the union of St. Teresa. Because of this, mystical union tends to have a homogenizing effect; anyone who
participates in Teresa’s mystical union becomes, essentially, like her. While, for Crashaw, this homogeneity establishes non-violent community, it jars against contemporary ideals of robust diversity. Understanding Crashaw’s ethical vision, therefore, requires full awareness of its historical context in order to appreciate the nuanced political life that it imagines.

For Crashaw, mystical union with the divine is always mystical union with the sovereign, and this fact establishes Crashaw’s entrance within the context of early modern politics. However much actual monarchs may have drawn on the theological force of a divine sovereign to justify royal prerogative, it remained the case that kingship in seventeenth-century England was a contested political office. The decade leading up to the execution of Charles I in 1649 particularly amplified Renaissance anxieties surrounding the sovereignty of the king. This chapter investigates how the poetry of Richard Crashaw sought to negotiate these anxieties by reformulating ideas of sovereignty within his work. By taking up Crashaw as a political poet, this chapter simultaneously seeks to reinvigorate critical understandings of the poet, who has been largely pigeonholed as an apolitical mystic. As a poet who is not generally associated with the political, Richard Crashaw has remained outside the purview of studies in early modern political theology. This chapter will argue, however, that the poet’s work in fact demonstrates deep concern with questions of sovereignty and how it functions, in terms that are both political and theological, to bring a community together. Through utilizing the political aspects of mystical in “The Flaming Heart,” Crashaw reorients sovereignty away from legal questions and toward a model of power based on mutual affection between human and divine. To understand how “The Flaming Heart” takes on its political
connotations, this chapter will discuss the poem in the context of Crashaw’s early political poetry, which has gone largely unremarked by criticism. By illuminating the political project embedded within Crashaw’s theological vision, this chapter accomplishes a two-fold critical purpose: to explore how early modern sovereignty functioned as an affective, rather than legal, political-theological category, and to revise critical understandings of Crashaw’s ethical and political engagements.

A sampling of the past 150 years of writing on Richard Crashaw reveals a multiplicity of critical positions that tend to characterize the poet’s work in any possible number of ways. Critics have produced equally plausible evidence for his baroque Catholicism as for his High Anglican Protestantism. They have found his metaphors to be far-fetched and strained, while, nonetheless, conceding that his imagery “spiritualizes the senses.” His conceits, while littered with “encrusted grotesquerie,” also participate in a “flamboyantly sexual” celebration of the body. Feminist critics have persuasively argued that Crashaw’s unconventional use of gender and sexuality provokes questions of female agency, while queer theorists have investigated male homoeroticism as a site that correlates sexual and spiritual pleasure. Despite the astonishing variety of what John R. Roberts and Lorraine M. Roberts have called the “vagaries” of Crashaw’s critical assessments, it is surprising to note that the one thing Crashaw is never accused of is being overly political.

In fact, Crashaw wrote a number of political poems that give the lie to the assumption that he was somehow unconcerned with the social questions of the day. Out of Crashaw’s eighty-two “secular” poems, sixteen are on specifically political themes—nine that were recovered in manuscript form, and seven that were published in gratulatory
volumes released by the university on particularly felicitous royal occasions, most often the birth of a child (see table 1 at the end of this chapter). Because of their occasional nature, most of these poems may be dated with some accuracy to between the years 1631 (the year of the birth of the Princess Mary) and 1640 (the year that Prince Henry was born). These poems were therefore almost certainly written during Crashaw’s tenure at Cambridge, first as a student at Pembroke College, to which he was matriculated in 1631, and then at Peterhouse, where he was elected as a Fellow in 1635. There are, however, five poems that cannot be dated precisely—two on the coronation of King Charles I and three on the Gunpowder Plot. Because of their style and subject matter, these poems are generally considered to be written sometime before 1631. Taken together, these gratulatory and occasional verses reveal a patriotic concern with Britain’s stability and future that deserves to be folded into critical understandings of the poet’s larger work.

This political poetry provides an illuminating context for “The Flaming Heart.” Written in the shadow of England’s civil upheaval and in all probability while Crashaw was in exile on the continent between 1644 and 1649, “The Flaming Heart” echoes the political language of his earlier poetry to convey nostalgia for an idealized Britain that never arrived and, at the same time, to transfer hope for the future of an imagined nation from a temporal to a spiritual field. The poem is thus informed by a project begun in his political poetry—the project of envisioning a state in which love, both romantic and filial, dictates the terms of sovereignty.

“The Flaming Heart” has a well-known plotline: it opens on a painting of St. Teresa of Ávila’s transverberation and, dissatisfied with the depiction, trades out the roles of the two protagonists, giving Teresa the angel’s darts (and the masculine gender that
accompanies them), and the angel, her monastic veil. Teresa shoots her darts into the hearts of her readers, creating “nests of new Seraphims here below.” To understand how “The Flaming Heart” frames its political desires, this chapter will examine how these two conceits within the poem—love, represented by arrows, and reproduction, represented by nests—correlate to and are informed by similar schema in his earlier political poetry. The first portion of this study will investigate the similarities between Teresa’s darts and the Petrarchan dart imagery in Crashaw’s political poetry. This section will suggest that the idea of a wounded monarch formed a powerful catalyst for imagining a compassionate nation. The second section compares nesting imagery in “The Flaming Heart” with similar imagery in Crashaw’s political poems to show how Crashaw extends the responsibilities of the reproductive monarch to potentially all subjects of the state. The final section of this chapter explores the relationship between the imaginative state of “The Flaming Heart” and the contemporary politics that form the backdrop to the poem. It investigates how the poet’s famous desire to “leave nothing of my SELF in me” expresses a poignant longing for a reversal of roles between art and reality that might sacralize statehood (“Flaming Heart,” line 105). This longing attunes the desires of the poem with the biography of Crashaw himself, who, living in the shadow of a ruptured England and a failed monarchy, poetically imagined the reunification of his country under the auspices of a shared experience of God.

Sovereign Love

The poem’s opening bemoans the egregious misrepresentation of Teresa’s
transverberation, which could have been avoided had the painter’s “cold pencil” kissed Teresa’s instructive “PEN” (“Flaming Heart,” line 20). Instead of “some weak, inferior, woman saint,” the painter would have colored her with the hues of “love’s manly flame,” rendering her angelic, “SERAPHICALL” (“Flaming Heart,” lines 24-30). Exposure to the words of Teresa would have awakened the artist to her true identity, an identity that, since spiritual, is not immediately evident in the body of the saint. Since the painting does not adequately capture the essence of Teresa, the poem must, and begins by appropriating the masculinity of the angel for her (“Flaming Heart,” lines 11-12).

The most notable accouterment of Teresa’s new embodiment is “that fiery DART” (“Flaming Heart,” lines 34). This polyvalent metaphor weaves masculine agency together with Petrarchan literary conventions and medieval mystical traditions. The account of the actual St. Teresa de Ávila’s transverberation is found in her Vida, in which she describes the experience of being repeatedly struck through the heart by an angel’s arrow and thereby joined in ecstatic union with God. Her description of her mystical marriage with Christ follows in the tradition of such writers as Bernard of Clairvaux and Catherine of Sienna who, inspired by the Song of Songs, wrote in erotic terms about the soul’s union with God. Erica Longfellow notes that in post-Reformation Europe, the erotic description of a soul’s marriage to God, known as “bridal mysticism,” occurred exclusively in Catholic writings, as Protestants tended to shy away from the more grossly embodied aspects of mystical marriage theology.

Although Crashaw’s celebration of Teresa’s thoroughly Catholic transverberation might therefore appear to reinforce the poet’s early reputation for esoteric spirituality, his use of mystical marriage in fact conceals deep affinities with the political imperatives of
his earlier poetry. Within these sixteen poems, arrows take on more Petrarchan overtones as they appear within a romance between nation and monarch that at once symbolizes Britain's internal peace and its imagined ascendancy over the rest of Europe. In “Upon the King’s Coronation (‘Strange Metamorphosis’),” for instance, a newly-crowned Charles I conquers the Catholic continent with the sheer force of his amorous gaze:

The lustre of his face did shine soe bright,
That Rome's bold Eagles now were blinded quite,
The radiant darts, shott from his sparkling eyes,
Made every mortall gladly sacrifice
A heart burning in love.

(“Upon the King’s Coronation [‘Strange Metamorphosis’],” lines 33-37)

The radiant darts shot by the King draw heavily on the Petrarchan tradition to recast patriotism as love. National sentiment is a fairly regular feature of the Petrarchan mode; Petrarch’s sonnets to Laura are not merely love poems, they also recount, as William J. Kennedy notes, Petrarch’s “identification of his native Italy, his awareness of being Italian, and his sense of belonging to a community larger than a local or regional one.”24 This sense of national belonging, Kennedy argues, has been variously adopted by Petrarch’s poetic inheritors throughout Europe. In England, the presence of a female queen during the boom of Petrarchism in the 1590s meant that sonneteers (who were also courtiers) could write to a female love-object who represented several “beloveds” at once: the fictive beloved of the sonnet sequence, the poet’s actual beloved, and the
sovereign beloved. Given this literary history, it is noteworthy that Crashaw, who wrote numerous poems to and about women, including Queen Henrietta Maria, would choose the king, rather than the queen, as his Petrarchan beloved. There was, of course, some precedent in England for this gender reversal, including many of Shakespeare's own Sonnets, published in 1609, which were written to an unidentified male youth. While critical analyses of these sonnets tend to focus on the homoerotic affection they display, and while Crashaw's poetry certainly contains homoeroticism, the presence of a specifically sovereign male beloved in the coronation poem seems to require further discussion of the politics of kingship as it is expressed within the generic conventions of Petrarchism.

In substituting king for queen, Crashaw's coronation poem invokes all the militaristic duties associated with a male monarch. This association of militancy with masculinity is no doubt due in some portion to traditional gender roles, but it is also important to note that, unlike during Elizabeth I's reign, the Caroline period saw the presence of both king and queen on the throne. While Elizabeth I may have styled herself as the military head of the nation, for Crashaw, the national role of Queen Henrietta Maria is primarily maternal, while the role of Charles I is primarily military. The militancy of Charles I is underlined by the fact that the king's arrows hit the heart of not only a solitary lover-speaker in the poem, but "every mortall," especially those mortals residing beyond the boundaries of Britain. Crashaw evokes the violence of conquest in order to shift its site away from literal militarism and toward a poetic field in which violent acts might be reframed as love. By framing the male monarch's power in terms of romance, Crashaw shifts the rules of engagement for foreign conquest from the
battlefield to the bedroom, or, more properly, from militancy to romance. The language of the poem itself conveys this shift. The reference to “Rome’s bold Eagles,” for instance, is actually a double reference to both the Catholic Church and to the eagle that adorned the military standard under which ancient Roman legions marched. As such, the metaphor operates on two levels; on the one hand, it pits England against Rome, while, on the other, it fires Cupid’s arrows against an ancient symbol of imperial domination.

Crashaw’s political poetry does, occasionally, describe the royal family in more literally militant language, but it is telling that these descriptions are reserved almost exclusively for the royal children, and are often less effective than conquests made in the name of love. In fact, the only instance of physical violence in Crashaw’s political poetry occurs in the “To the Queen,” when the toddler Prince Charles (the future Charles II) spears an embroidered lion on a tapestry in a make-believe battle:

If any lion brought to life in embroidered rages stands
in these halls, which the needle mimicked with its clever point,
O ho! He is an enemy . . .

... .

Then the heavy spear rages against the foe (the spear is a rod);
soon the false breast gapes with a real wound.
The lion stands, just as if stunned, pierced through by such an enemy;
as if he should fear or love something in these eyes,
so fiercely they flash.

(“To the Queen,” lines 13-21)
Unlike most epic verse extolling the military might of kings, the actions of this prince are mitigated by his childhood: only the lion is conquered here, and even he admits that this manifestation of the warlike Mars within the Prince is still one that “could easily be loved” (“To the Queen,” line 23).

“To the Newborn Princess” undermines military hostility even more explicitly by connecting it to childhood; in this poem, the Princes Charles and James are “a small pair of smaller thunderbolts,” who team up to “rattle the whole / Bosporus from shore to shore,” and “shake / the Ottoman Moors with unfeigned fear” (“Newborn Princess,” lines 4-11). While this description might register an awareness of England’s self-conscious desire to gain power on an international stage, the overall military effect is somewhat lessened by the fact that Charles and James were six and three years old at the time of the poem’s publication. For these poems, military might is mere child’s play—sound and fury that, to borrow from Macbeth, signifies nothing. Indeed, even those two small thunderbolts never actually take over North Africa; the poem leaves the “Ottoman Moors” trembling in their boots with no invasion to fight. The might of the princes is finally overshadowed by the princess, who is tasked with “other battles ... which peace will not have to fear” (“Newborn Princess,” line 12). Her “well-aimed arrows ... fly on haughtier wing,” hitting the “many hearts” of foreign suitors who are her “devoted enemy” (“Newborn Princess,” lines 11-14).

Although it was common practice in early modern literature to pit Venus against Mars, or to imagine a monarchical romance with the nation, Crashaw’s monarchs seem incapable of maintaining power in any other way. The point of this metaphor...
maneuvering is ultimately to demilitarize invasion. By gaining power over hearts rather than bodies, Crashaw’s poetry fantasizes about a Britain that achieves dominance without the violence and turmoil that, on the actual international scene, had resulted in a spate of poorly-executed military operations, including, most notably, the disastrous Cádiz Expedition of 1625.

By using romance as a trope for the expansion and strengthening of the nation, Crashaw’s poetry reconstitutes subjecthood not as a legal category, but as an affective one; the subject becomes a subject only when he or she is “conquered” by her sovereign’s love. For Crashaw’s poetry, such an approach to sovereignty has clear advantages over other models of power not only because it takes the proverbial sting out of military invasion, but also because it carries positive implications for subjects themselves. Rather than submit to the tyrannical declarations of a monarch who presides over a police state, Crashaw’s subjects willingly surrender to the monarch as their bride-groom: “Who would not be a Phaenix,” he writes, referencing the animal chosen to represent Queen Henrietta Maria, “and aspire / To sacrifice himselfe in such sweet fire? (“Upon the King’s Coronation [‘Sound forth’],” lines 35-6).

Despite its aversion to physical violence, Crashaw’s political poetry still maintains an aggressive dynamic between a beloved sovereign who brandishes the weapons of love and a loving subject who is pierced by them. This essential passivity of the subject puts him or her in a vulnerable position: if, as is the case with Petrarchan love, the beloved-sovereign does not requite the lover-subject, then the subject risks the danger of enslavement, and, as Sidney’s Astrophel does, calling it “praise to suffer tyranny.”30 This unbalanced power dynamic is redressed, however, in Crashaw’s sacred poems,
where the pierced body of Christ supplies the archetype for a different kind of sovereign. Although, like Charles I, Christ inflicts wounds that inspire the love of the subject, they are wounds that mimic the crucifixion; the pain of Christ is the original pain of love. By foregrounding mutual pain in his sacred poetry, Crashaw establishes reciprocity between lover and beloved. In “Sancta Maria Dolorum,” for instance, Mary’s heart is pierced by the vision of her son in anguish, and he, in turn, is penetrated by her pain:

His Nailes write swords in her, which soon her heart
Payes back, with more than their own smart;
Her SWORDS, still growing with his pain,
Turn SPEARES, and straight come home again.

(“Sancta Maria Dolorum,” stanza III)

Petrarchan love in this passage gives way to a mutual and erotic wounding between mother and son. In doing so, it rewrites the Petrarchan balance of power; rather than feature a lover under the tyrannous rule of his beloved, this poem instead understands love as a process of mutual pain that leads to self-identification with the suffering other:

and in his woes
And Paines, her Pangs and throes.
And each wound of His, from every Part,
All, more at home in her owne heart.

(“Sancta Maria Dolorum,” stanza I)
In a moment that might reside comfortably alongside Adam Smith’s theory of moral sentiments, the pain of Christ becomes the pain of Mary. Thus, the pain of love, which Crashaw’s verse inherits from Petrarchism finds a decidedly un-Petrarchan resolution in the sympathetic gaze. While, for Smith’s theory, that sympathetic identification with the suffering other is the foundation for ethical political action, for Crashaw’s poetry, it is the foundation for a new kind of political order altogether—one in which suffering becomes the central means of social identification. Throughout the poem, the poet desires to enter into this economy of pain, “to bleed with him,” or “to weep with her” (stanza IX). He wants to “mix / Wounds” with Mary and Christ, and, in so doing, “become one crucifix” (stanza X). As with the wounded lover-subjects of Crashaw’s political poems, the lovers of these poems, Mary and the poet are drawn together not by legal, ethical, or cultural measures, but by dint of their mutual affection for Christ, creating a corporate identity. Crashaw’s poetry demonstrates the hope that, like the arrows of Christ’s suffering, those arrows shot by the royal family might enter the “hard, cold Heart” of Europe’s population, causing them to “relent, and prove / Soft subject[s] for the seige of love” (stanza V).

“The Flaming Heart” enfolds this political longing and pseudo-Petrarchism within the mystical marriage theology that makes up the bulk of the poem’s source. Using language that is more reminiscent of the sonnet tradition’s God of Love than of Christianity’s loving God, the poet addresses the angel as “lover” and “fair youth” (“Flaming Heart,” lines 44-48). Even the mother/son relationship between Teresa and the angel reproduces not only the Mary/Christ relationship of “Sancta Maria Dolorum,” but
also the Venus/Cupid pairing of Petrarchan imagery.

Like Charles I and the Princess Anne, Teresa also uses her darts to hit not a single beloved, but multiple targets:

Sends she not

A SERAPHIM at every shott?

What magazins of immortal ARMES there shine!

Heaven’s great artillery in each love-spun line.

(“Flaming Heart,” lines 53-56)

This armed force is a key addition to the Saint’s original account, because it translates her individual experience into a corporate one. The poem seeks to transform the singularity of the soul’s ecstatic union into a communal initiation rite that echoes not only the love affair between the mystic’s soul and God, but also between subjects and sovereign.

Teresa’s conquest substitutes God for monarch and soul for subject, thereby trading the temporal nation for a spiritual one. This substitution does not ignore the political troubles of the day so much as it offers an answer to them. Written against the backdrop of a monarchy that was in ruins, “The Flaming Heart” borrows from Catholic theology to imagine a communal structure that organizes people not by military enforcement or juridical decrees, but by a common experience of love. In doing so, it discloses a deep longing for a political organization that might transcend the realities of Britain’s tumultuous politics.

As is the case with the crucified Christ, Teresa is both pierced and piercing, with a
heart that is “bigge alike with wounds and darts,” and Teresa’s status as the original casualty of love supplies the foundation for a reciprocal relationship between her and her readers (“The Flaming Heart,” line 76). In order to become a subject of Teresa’s spiritual nation, her reader must first apprehend and identify with her pierced body. As the poet muses, “[t]he wounded is the wounding heart” (“The Flaming Heart,” line 74). By taking up the figure of the sacrificial other, Crashaw imagines how a nation might be born of sympathetic identification, unified around the figure of the wounded monarch.

**Maternity and the Mystical Nation**

While the love affair between monarch and soul register Crashaw’s interest in the subject’s affective relationship to the state, his poetry also displays a concern over the overarching structures that form and maintain statehood. This interest in governmental superstructure is invoked by the metaphor of childbirth; the subjects of Crashaw’s spiritualized nation are metaphorically “born” into it by reading Teresa’s work. Their entrance into subjecthood is made possible, somewhat paradoxically, by the fact that Teresa is given a set of arrows and a masculine gender to accompany them. As the poem famously admonishes, its readers are to “read Him for her, and her for him / And call the Saint the Seraphim” (“The Flaming Heart,” line 11).

There is a kind of flashy ambiguity to Teresa’s gender transformation; while she may not be “pricked” out in Shakespeare’s famous literal usage, there still remains the question of why masculinity should be imputed to a character whose body is otherwise all woman, or even, to borrow from the title of “A Hymn to the Name and Honor,” “more
then a woman." While critics such as Maureen Sabine and Paul Parrish have supplied important readings about the agential and spiritual implications of Teresa’s masculinity, the ultimate irreducibility of the question of engenderment, the fact that Teresa defies any binary categories, itself supplies an intriguing subject of study.

As has been shown above, the ambivalence of Teresa’s body—indeed, of virtually all bodies in Crashaw’s work—is precisely what enables their interpenetration. It also, however, allows for a reading of gendered embodiment that is not, as Richard Rambuss puts it, “wholly containable within the soft contours of the merely androgynous.” In his assessment, Teresa’s body is not merely multiply-gendered, it is ultra-gendered, a fact that coincides with the other excesses that overrun Crashaw’s poetry: the boundlessness of mystical union and the illimitable pleasure of ecstasy.

While Teresa’s excessive embodiment and the question of her gendered status lend themselves to compelling critical analyses, it also tends to obscure the fact of her fecundity. It is my contention that, for Crashaw, the excessiveness of her gendered and sexual subjectivity corresponds to excessiveness in her ability to bear children as well; in both its political and spiritual valences throughout his poetry, the metaphoric child appears as the figure of increase beyond accounting: a growing family, an expanding nation, an infinite heavenly kingdom.

In “The Flaming Heart,” Teresa’s newly-endowed body enables her maternity and, in doing so, defies the normative biology of procreation, rendering her motherhood already beyond the reach of binary gender categories:

Give Him the vail; that he may cover
The Red cheeks of a rivall’d lover.
Asham’d that our world, now, can show
Nests of new Seraphims here below.

... . . .
Say and bear witnes. Sends she not
A Seraphim at every shott?

("Flaming Heart," line 43-54)

Teresa’s masculinity, which is both accompanied by and visually symbolized in the dart, ultimately enables her to build these “nests of new Seraphims,” a metaphor that Crashaw uses repeatedly to indicate maternity. In “An Apologie upon the foregoing hymn,” for instance, Teresa’s work “breaks . . . into the wondering reader’s brest; / who feels his warm heart hatched into a nest” (“An Apologie,” lines 24-26).

In Crashaw’s political poems, this language of childbirth is used exclusively for that “Virgin Pheonix,” Queen Henrietta Maria (“Upon the King’s Coronation [‘Strange Metamorphosis’],” line 30). Taking his cue perhaps in part from the Queen herself, who, like Elizabeth before her, was represented by a phoenix, Crashaw’s images of the Queen’s motherhood revolve around aviary themes. In “A Panegyrick Upon the Royal Family,” which bears the apt subtitle, “To the Queen, upon her numerous progeny,” Queen Henrietta Maria births a “nest of Heroes” that resonates with Teresa’s “nests of seraphims.” Elsewhere in the poem, the Queen is a “fair Halcyon, on a sea of balm,” whose “faithfull womb” produces not one Pheonix, but “a brood / a brood of phenixes . . . we have Brother / And sister-phenixes, and still the Mother” (“A Panegyrick,” lines 104-
Taken together, this brood of royal children indicates national abundance, growth, a state in excess of itself. In fact, the opening lines of this poem draw a direct connection between an expanding state and an expanding royal family:

Stretch thyself (fair Isle) and grow; spread wide
Thy bosom, and make room. Thou art opprest
With thine own glories: and art strangely blest
Beyond thyself, for (lo) the Gods, the Gods
Come fast upon thee; and those glorious ods
Swell thy full honours to a pitch so high
As sits above thy best capacities.

(“A Panegyrick,” lines 2-8)

In this passage, it is the nation itself, not the Queen, who is pregnant with its own children, a “strange” blessing indeed for a country whose literal expansion is already foreclosed by the boundaries of its island topography; there is effectively nowhere for that “fair Isle” to expand. By invoking the royal family, however, the metaphor of expansion holds forth; the empire is assured by the royal children, who each represent a nation that emanates from the union of Charles I and Henrietta Maria. The poem exuberates over England’s children, each of whom might “glad the sphere of any nation” (“A Panegyrick,” line 14). Beneath the metaphoric slippage from family to government, from island status to empire, the subtext of the poem speculates that with enough
children, England might eventually produce enough rulers to seat an English monarch on every throne in the world.

Anne Baynes Coiro notes that the royal family’s ability to metaphorically underwrite Britain’s greatness had only recently reemerged into literary discourse after nearly a century of monarchs that had troubled stable familial categories: “in a country that had not seen a functional royal marriage for generations and that had lived through the dire consequences, the idea of a fertile marriage and the stable dynasty it could produce must have seemed enormously desirable.”

Contemporary political rhetoric demonstrates a keen awareness of this fact. When James I ascended to the throne in 1603, he and his wife, Anne of Denmark, already had three children. It is therefore no coincidence that when he called his first Parliament in 1604, *The Journal of the House of Commons* reflects in its opening introduction an explicit connection between the state and the family that was designed to strengthen his claim to the throne:

Order, the Lustre of Nature, guided by a First Essence, put all Government into Form: First, in Two, who, by Procreation, according to the Rule of Power (increase and multiply) made a Family, with One Head; by Propagation, a Tribe, or Kindred, with One Elder, or Chief; by Multiplication, a Society, a Province, a Country, a Kingdom, with One or more Guides or Leaders, of Spirit, aptest, or, of Choice, fittest, to govern.  

Because the government is based on the model of the family, its very nature is toward growth, “by Procreation . . . by Propogation . . . by Multiplication.” Thus, the
expansion of England’s chief family—the royal family—ensured the peaceful continuance of government itself.

Crashaw’s constant calling forth of children reiterates political structure according to this narrative of reproduction. That is to say, Crashaw’s poetry de-emphasizes the responsibility of the military or the law in protecting and maintaining the state, and instead deputizes a domestic scene of parenting as the cultural matrix best suited to body forth a kingdom. In hanging its hopes on the promises of a future literally embodied by children, Crashaw’s poetry casts its gaze toward a political future that is already present, symbolically contained in the person of the royal child.

Lee Edelman notes that in modern democracies, the child is often invoked to justify or denigrate political decisions.40 The timeworn imperative to create “a better future for our children”41 is in fact a political one that entrenches heteronormative reproduction at the heart of state decisions. As Edelman puts it, “the Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics.”42 This projected fantasy of the future embodied in children may be related to a similar set of early modern political imperatives that also revolved around the family. But while “the Child” of Edelman’s analysis remains a phantasm to be invoked and protected in political rhetoric, the royal child of Crashaw’s context is a flesh-and-bone assurance of the future state. In a monarchy, reproduction is the primary site of state-making; the body of the royal child contains not only the promise of the continuance of the king’s unbroken line (the “body natural”), but also the continuance of the office of the monarchy (the “body politic”).43 The princes and princesses of England were the future state incarnated in the present moment, or, as Crashaw more poetically put it, “our future now” (“On Hope,” line 1).44
In the relationship between family and government, early modern discourse privileges men as the progenitors of the nation. As Kevin Sharpe writes, “[t]o be a father, in early modern England, was to be a king, and the reverse was also true.” In striking contrast, Crashaw’s verse calls upon female characters to deliver the nation’s future. By doing so, his work attunes the maternity of both Teresa and Henrietta Maria to the Virgin Mary—the mother nonpareil of his verse. Anglican Protestantism had, despite Laudian reforms, largely divested Mary of her role as mother of the Christian Church, opening the way for other women (including, notably, Elizabeth I) to take on that role. By encoding this slippage between Mary, Henrietta Maria, and Teresa, Crashaw’s poetry subtly transforms the role of motherhood itself into a political office from which originates the spiritual state.

While, in Crashaw’s political poems, the responsibility for maintaining the state rests squarely with the royal family, the “sons” of Teresa represent an indiscriminate gathering of the population. Crashaw’s sacred poetry effectively expands the role of sovereignty, making it available for all members of the state. The desire behind this expansion is for the exponential increase of the state as all citizens—not merely one family—continues Teresa’s work and, in their role as “new Seraphims here below,” conquer an infinite number of hearts for the nation (“The Flaming Heart,” line 46). “The Flaming Heart” extends to the general populace the hope that Crashaw’s political poetry reserves for the royal family: that the sovereign “[m]ayst in a son of His find every son / Repeated, and that son still in another, / And so in each child often prove a Mother” (“A Panegyrick,” lines 148-150).

In conferring the maternal duties of the sovereign onto the populace, mystical
union in “The Flaming Heart” serves as a kind of leveling mechanism, undermining the hierarchy upon which centralized authority is based. If all people share in the role that is originally bestowed upon Christ or Teresa, then no one person can claim unmitigated authority. For Crashaw, the mystical encounter with the other underwrites community and ensures that the organizing structure for that community is interconnectivity rather than a unidirectional flow of power.

In much the same way that mutual wounding allows Crashaw’s poetic characters to identify with an other, the ability to be both mother and child instantiates equitability between the two. The crowns of Teresa’s children—those “thousands of crown’d souls”—in fact carry a double meaning: as crowns that Teresa has herself earned, and as royalty in their own right, mother-queens who themselves create more Crowns to populate, and rule, Heaven.

**Crashaw’s (Historicized) Ethics**

The closing lines of “The Flaming Heart” (lines 85-108) were most likely added sometime during Crashaw’s final year of life. In them, the poet begs for his own transformative union with God, one that would reorient him away from self-identity and toward a religious otherness:

Leave nothing of my **SELF** in me.

Let me so read thy life, that I

Unto all life of mine may dy.
Given Crashaw’s stylistic tendency toward erotic metaphors, it is difficult not to read an embedded pun in the final word, “dy” that releases the speaker in both spiritual and sexual terms. The erotic connotations of the word underlines the fact that the death of the self is not so much a self-abnegation as it is a commingling of persons; the poet finally hopes to lose himself entirely in the rapture of God. Ultimately, the union with the transcendent other enacts deep change in the self, that, as Levinas remarks, “is conceived radically as a movement of the Same toward the Other which never returns to the Same.”

For Crashaw, that movement signals the advent of a new kind of subject and a new kind of nation. Founded on a sovereign who is wounded with love and pregnant with the nation’s future, this political structure calls subjects beyond themselves, inviting them to step into an alternative political and religious subjectivity. For Crashaw, community is ultimately cultivated within the unfamiliarity of mystical union, a strange and shared subjectivity that draws people closer to the divine, and to each other.

“The Flaming Heart” posits an experience of love that breaks across boundaries of self and other, resulting in a power that is diffused among peoples. Whereas, in Crashaw’s more political modes, sovereignty tends to be consolidated around the royal family, in “The Flaming Heart,” it flows through an interconnected community, symbolized by the capacity that both Teresa and her readers have to penetrate and be penetrated, to give birth and to be born. As such, this spiritual state, Crashaw’s own City of God, can only maintain its conception of civic life by refusing to erect any borders that might stem this continual flow of power.
It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the political world of Crashaw’s poetry imagines a state without the problematic boundaries of territory. In the earlier “An Apologie for the Fore-Going Hymne,” which was written to justify his laudatory hymn to Teresa, the speaker imagines a kind of transnational communality to mediate the dissonance that might otherwise arise from a love affair between an English soul and a Spanish saint:

Souls are not Spaniards too, one friendly floud
Of Baptism blends them all into a blood.
Christ’s faith makes but one body of all soules
And love’s that body’s soul, no law controwlls
Our free traffique for heav’n.

(“An Apologie,” lines 15-19)

Although the “free traffique” that these lines imagine unwittingly foreshadows modern understandings of global capital flows, this poem seeks not so much to establish lines of contact between nations as it looks for an organizing structure that supersedes them. As this chapter has argued, it finds this structure in mutual spiritualized affection, directed through erotic metaphors of kinship.

Crashaw’s imaginative nation trades out juridical categories for affective ones, which allows the formation and maintenance of the state to be cast as a transformative relationship between people rather than as a series of institutional regulations. This shift—from law to love, from militancy to motherhood—calibrates its political-
theological longings against the poet's own experience of political violence. "The Flaming Heart" was most likely written between 1646 and 1648, sometime after Crashaw had been run out of Cambridge by Cromwell's New Model Army. He had, along with Queen Henrietta Maria, taken up refuge on the continent, where he converted to Catholicism. Although the Queen wrote the Pope to request a position in the Church for Crashaw, none materialized for several years, by which time poverty and disease had worn the poet down; he died in obscurity in August of 1649, a few months after the January execution of Charles I. Crashaw's spiritual nation can therefore be read not as a mere by-product of the poet's mystical proclivities, but as a longing for a religiosity that might overcome the violent differences that Crashaw himself had faced in real-world politics.

Crashaw's insistent idealism coupled with his vision of a homogenous ethical community render his imaginative politics only partially palatable to contemporary tastes: our current multicultural and postcolonial milieu generally calls for more diverse and practical political theorization. And yet, the poet's desire for a peaceful society and his turn toward otherness to make that society possible resonate deeply with current political trends. This uncanny relationship between modern and early modern political ideals results in a discomforting reading experience. While it may be tempting to sum up Crashaw's political vision in either laudatory or derogatory terms, truly engaging his worldview requires us as critics to accept the poet's work as simultaneously familiar and strange. Crashaw's political vision is, in the end, its own kind of historical "other" to the postmodern "self."

Attending to Crashaw's work requires us to step outside of the priorities formed
by our own temporal moment and engage with ideas across the historical divide.

Approaching the other therefore can be, and often is, an act that transcends time. Levinas remarks that the response to the other is “a liberation from my time . . . [i]t is an action for a world to come, a going beyond one’s epoch.”49 For Crashaw, moving beyond temporality is an undertaking that is essentially hopeful, that acknowledges the “absent presence” of an ideal future poised constantly on the horizon, what he calls “[t]he entity of things that are not yet” (“On Hope,” lines 70, 12). Reading early modern literature ultimately invites the critic into this extra-historical space, where a reader is called beyond his or her epoch to fully engage with historical ideas, and where, by attending to the other in history, a reader might begin to participate in the ethics of a future that is yet to come.

Table 1: Political Poems of Richard Crashaw50
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<th>Volume / Occasion</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>Upon the King's Coronation (&quot;Strange Metamorphosis!&quot;)</td>
<td>Bodleian MS. Tanner 465.</td>
<td>As early as 1626 (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upon the King's Coronation (&quot;Sound forth&quot;)</td>
<td>Bodleian MS. Tanner 465.</td>
<td>February 1634/5 (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Gunpowder-Treason</td>
<td>Bodleian MS. Tanner 465.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upon the Gunpowder Treason (&quot;Reach me a quill&quot;)</td>
<td>Bodleian MS. Tanner 465.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upon the Gunpowder Treason (&quot;Grow plumpe&quot;)</td>
<td>Bodleian MS. Tanner 465.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Natales Mariae Principis</td>
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<tr>
<td>On the Birth of the Princess Mary</td>
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<tr>
<td>In faciem Augustiss. Regis à Morbillis Integram</td>
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<tr>
<td>On the Face of the Most Majestic king recovered from the small pox</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ad Reginam</td>
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<tr>
<td>To the Queen</td>
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<td>In Serenissimae Regnae Partum Hyemalem</td>
<td>Carmen Natalitatum Ad Cunas (1635); on the birth of Princess Elizabeth</td>
<td>1635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Delivery of the Fairest Queen in Winter</td>
<td>In Serenissimae Regnae Partum Hyemalem</td>
<td>1635</td>
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<td>Principi Recensis Natae Omen Maternae Indolis</td>
<td>ΣΥΝΩΙΤΑ, Sive Musarum; on the birth of Princess Anne</td>
<td>1637</td>
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<tr>
<td>To the Newborn Princess, as Sign of her Mother’s Nature</td>
<td>In Reginam, Et sibi Academiae semper parturientem</td>
<td>1640</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upon the Queen, Continually Delivering Both Her Own and the University</td>
<td>In Reginam, Et sibi Academiae semper parturientem</td>
<td>1640</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Panegyricke [upon the Royal Family]</td>
<td><em>Votes Votivae</em> (1640); on the birth of the Prince Henry. An earlier version also appears in <em>Steps to the Temple</em> (1646); rev. version in <em>Steps</em> (1648).⁵⁶</td>
<td>1633-1635 (?) \ rev. 1640</td>
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Chapter 4

Eucharistic Republic in John Milton’s *Areopagitica, Paradise Lost, and Samson Agonistes*

Following the dissolution of the monarchy in 1649, the mystical body of the king who underwrote the health of the nation in English politics transformed into the mystical body of the people. It is for this reason that John Milton, apologist for the puritan Republic and famous iconoclast, utilizes transubstantiation as his primary marker of transcendence. Transubstantiation appears most famously in *Paradise Lost* in the midst of a shared meal between Adam and the angel Raphael. Milton’s angel interacts remarkably closely with Adam’s material world, compelled by the force of “real hunger” to join Adam in his meal, and engaged in an act of eating that the poem classifies as “transubstantiate.”¹ This moment of transubstantial eating, however, represents a literal representation of Milton’s more symbolic thinking on the subject, thinking that turns the Catholic sacrament into a metaphoric exercise in community formation. While this metaphor necessary draws from the original theological association between the Eucharist and the unity of the church, it also relates that unity not to the ecclesiastical body of Christ, but to the political body of the republic.² This chapter will investigate Milton’s use of transubstantiation as a metaphor that underwrites republican sentiment from *Areopagitica*, his early treatise against censorship, through the post-Restoration *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* to discover how his initial optimism toward transubstantiation dissolves into pessimism at the close of the republican government.
The theology of transubstantiation generally relates the transcendence of God to his immateriality, mysteriously manifest in the substance of the bread. In so doing, the bread becomes the sign capable of transferring the transcendent characteristics of the divine to the celebrant, most notably the life of Christ. For Milton, however, God is not present in the bread of communion, only remembered: “That living bread therefore which Christ calls his flesh, and that blood which is drink indeed, can be nothing but the doctrine of Christ’s having become man in order to shed his blood for us.” As such, the bread symbolizes not the presence of Christ in the world, but the absence of Christ from it, for, resurrected and ascended, his body cannot be brought again to earth. Thus, whenever the transubstantial body is present in Milton’s work, it initiates a search for the absent God. This search constitutes the activity around which the republican community might form, and also marks out absence as the primary characteristic of God’s transcendence. Milton takes seriously the apophatic idea of God’s utter inaccessibility, and uses it as the precursor for community.

Milton conceives of the search for God as holy work. Throughout his writing, metaphors of the body are accompanied by images of labor, particularly construction. His early work overlaps the search for God with the building of the church, while, in his later poetry, images of broken bodies commingle with broken edifices. Milton’s writing derives this connection between body and building in part from Paul’s assertion in 1 Corinthians that the body is a temple. But the connection is also related to the slippage between Church and church—the body of believers and the building in which that body meets. Therefore, his work demonstrates not only an interest in the transcendence of God, but also in humankind’s response to it. Milton’s work is ultimately triangulates three
enterprises related to the transcendence of God: transubstantiation, which manifests
God’s transcendence as absence; labor, which constitutes humanity’s proper response to
that transcendence; and edifices, which metaphorically represent the community that is
the end-result of the encounter with the transcendent divine.

The Body Remembered

This chapter begins not with a poem, but with a treatise—Areopagitica—that,
despite its status as political tract, nonetheless contains a metaphor so extended as to rival
the most elaborate of Milton’s epic similes: truth as body. That I begin with a treatise
rather than a poem is perhaps an indication of a singular generic shift in England amid the
rise of republican sentiment, during years that witnessed a fervent uptick in the
imaginative thinking related to the nation. So enmeshed was the dream of republicanism
in a particular cultural and religious fantasy that the kind of politicized wishful thinking
that, in earlier years, tended to occur in the realm of poetry wound its way in the 1640s
into more solidly realistic venues. Areopagitica certainly contains an exuberant
optimism surrounding God and politics, and uses this optimism to confidently assert the
possibility of a self-governed nation guided by public debate and civic cooperation.

Milton’s argument against censorship in Areopagitica hangs on the nature of
truth: what responsibilities it demands from humanity, and how those responsibilities are
upheld in the act of publication. Throughout the work, the feminized truth takes on
myriad forms, all entangled in the fabric of early modern social and political life, from
the somewhat strained familial relations invoked by her status as the stepdaughter to
Order, to the burgeoning scene of international trade, in which she participates as “our richest Merchandise.” But perhaps no single metaphor for truth has such potency for Milton’s work, or receives more attention in Milton’s argument, as the metaphor of the divine body:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her Divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when He ascended, and His Apostles after Him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb, still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master’s second coming; He shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection . . . . [we] continue to do our obsequies to the torn body of our martyred saint”

(Areopagitica, p. 30)

In the narrative world that Milton constructs around truth, her metaphoric incarnation arises from the revelation of God to man in the embodied Christ. It
makes good sense that truth should arrive, like Christ, in a body, for the body is
the only object that mediates God’s appearance to humanity. This fact highlights
the incarnation as a moment that tends toward immanence, and corresponds to
truth’s whole and complete form, her “perfect shape most glorious to look on.”

Following the ascent of Christ and the death of his Apostles, however, truth’s
dismemberment is the founding act that reinstates the transcendence of the divine;
the missing limbs of the incoherent body metonymically standing in for the
invisible characteristics of an incomprehensible God, a God who no longer dwells
within the world.

Milton’s metaphor derives from Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris.* Plutarch’s
account, like Milton’s, links the search for truth with a fundamental desire for the
gods, a desire that helps to illuminate humanity’s proper response to the
transcendent God:

> Therefore the effort to arrive at the Truth, and especially the truth about
the gods, is a longing for the divine. For the search for truth requires for its
study and investigation the consideration of sacred subjects, and it is a
work more hallowed than any form of holy living or temple service; and,
not least of all, it is well-pleasing to that goddess whom you worship, a
goddess exceptionally wise and a lover of wisdom, to whom, as her name
at least seems to indicate, knowledge and understanding are in the highest
degree appropriate. For Isis is a Greek word.

The transcendence of the gods necessitates a search, one initiated by their persistent,
perpetual absence. What we do not know about the gods, we do not know about truth, and education is therefore a pursuing after the sacred. For Milton, then, the transcendence of God, connected to the nature of truth as parsed by Plutarch, is represented as an unrelenting, eternal call for knowledge: “The light which we have gained was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge” (Areopagitica, p. 31). 8

If the gods have abandoned humanity, however, they have not left without a trace. It is no accident that the trace of Christ takes the form of a body in pieces; Milton’s metaphor calls up not only Plutarch’s broken body of Osiris but also the corpus Christi, the body of the Eucharist. Critics have largely tended to ignore the Eucharistic aspects of Milton’s metaphor, although Nigel Smith and Lana Cable have remarked on the connection between reading and eating that pervades the text. 9 Building on their work, John D. Schaeffer notes the Eucharistic trends of Areopagitica that relates the spiritual and physical functions of writing: “Books are Eucharistic for Milton not just because they are consumed but because their spiritual contents, human reason as image of divinity, enter the mind of the reader through the body by means of their materiality, paper, print, etc.” 10 It is important to note, however, that Milton’s utilization of the religious trope also subtly changes it, a change that Milton himself generously welcomes.

Elaborating on the metaphor of truth as light, Milton further asserts that the point of discovering new truths is to continually revise theological understanding. He notes that it is not enough for the Reformation to have defrocked a priest, or unmitred a bishop, but asserts that “if other things as great in the Church . . . be not looked into and reformed, we have looked so long upon the blaze that Zuinglius and Calvin hath beaconed up to us,
that we are stark blind” (*Areopagitica*, p. 31). His references to two theologians who deeply impacted Protestant models of the Eucharist, embedded in a call to revise their work, follows directly on the heels of the account of the dismembered Osiris. The effect is an ingenious renegotiation of the Eucharistic controversy, one that ultimately comes to bear on the intricate connection between *Areopagitica*’s unique understanding of transcendence as absence and the Miltonic desire for community—what he expresses in *Paradise Lost* as a universal “all in all” (*Paradise Lost*, III.341).

The history of the Eucharistic debates can be seen as a shift between two poles represented in the two foundational Biblical texts most often used to explicate the meaning of the sacrament. The first, of course, are the words of institution, spoken by Christ at the Passover supper before the crucifixion, and translated by the King James Bible as “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.” Based on this passage, the sacrament performs the same memorializing function as the Passover feast, and, moreover, invites the celebrant into unity with Christ by literally incorporating the divine. In a later passage, however, Paul points out that communion instantiates unity not only with Christ but also among believers: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” From these two passages derive the two major purposes for the Eucharist: communion with Christ through memorializing, and communion with others through corporate eating.

Patristic writers almost entirely emphasized the Pauline function of the Eucharist, so much so that the presence of Christ in the accident of the elements was unnecessary
for the meaning of the sacrament. “In this conception,” notes Edward J. Kilmartin, “Christ, in various roles, was present in the whole of the ceremony: officiating as priest, partaking as communicant, and unifying as bread through a mystery.”¹³ In this tradition, steeped in the Byzantine and early Latin culture of the image, the body of Christ was implicitly archetypal; the community that the sacrament instantiated, however, was immanently real.¹⁴ Throughout the high Middle Ages, however, the theology of the Eucharist grew increasingly Christological. This can be seen in part as a result of scholasticism’s meticulous categorization and obsessive tendency toward syllogism, which underwrote a continual effort on the part of theologians to deduce the precise relationship between Christ and the communion elements.¹⁵ A number of distinctions and definitions arose during this period, not the least of which was the word “transsubstantiare,” first used in the middle of the twelfth century by Rolando Bandinelli to indicate the transformation of the substance of the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ, a word that only received official approval at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.¹⁶ The effect of this trend toward defining the body of Christ in the was a tendency to elide the aspects of church unity: “Thus the (formerly dominant, overarching) ecclesiological aspect of the eucharistic sacrifice is inserted into the Christological aspect, or rather is absorbed by it.”¹⁷

Reformation theology inherited from its medieval antecedents this tendency to emphasize the Christological aspects of the ceremony over the communal. For the radical reformer Huldrych Zwingli, the parallels between communion and community were so subordinate to the question of Christ in the elements that his commentary on the subject seems to imply that the creation of a community is an auxiliary function to the unity
attained between God and man in the ceremony: “He that would take part in this public thanksgiving should prove to the whole Church that he is of the number of those who trust in the Christ who died for us. Hence, also the Eucharist is called Communion or Communication by Paul.” 18 Zwingli’s account unearths commonality: a history of Eucharist’s Pauline name (communion), linked to its public and declarative aspects (communication) that constitute its secondary function (community). The act itself, with its ritualistic baking and breaking, supplies a metaphoric basis for the relationship between communion and community, a relationship that rises (as it were) from Paul’s explication of the ceremony. Zwingli, ever attuned to the symbolic overtones of the sacrament, elaborates: “Thus, it becomes clear that Christ wished to give us bread and wine as food and drink, because as these two are combined each into one body from numberless grains or atoms of flour or drops of the juice of the vine respectively, so we come together into one faith and one body.” 19

While the emphasis on real presence subsumed the union of the Church into union between Christ and believer, it also added a strange tendency to attribute a life-giving function to the ritual. For Luther, Calvin, and even, on a different register, Zwingli, the transcendent life of the bread passes, either physically or symbolically, to the communicant. This assertion remained remarkably stable despite the different position each took on the actual doctrine of transubstantiation. Luther and Zwingli may be read as opposite ends of a Reformation continuum, with Lutheran consubstantiation taking a position closest to Catholic models of transubstantiation, 20 while Zwingli, even as he insists on the merely symbolic function of the Eucharist, nonetheless maintains that partaking the bread constitutes “eating of faith,” an activity that doesn’t merely represent,
but also imparts life. Calvin, who is often understood as a mediating voice between them, takes issue with Zwingli precisely on the basis of the Eucharist’s life-giving quality. He asserts that Zwingli’s extreme symbolism is unconscionable because it disallows the transmission of immortality through the physical act of eating. Calvin makes no bones about the fact that communicants “are quickened by the true partaking of him, which he designated by the terms eating and drinking, lest any one should suppose that life which we obtain from him is obtained by simple knowledge.” Calvin perhaps has Zwingli’s followers in mind when he writes against “those hyperbolical doctors, who, according to their gross ideas, fabricate an absurd mode of eating and drinking, and transfigure Christ, after divesting him of his flesh, into a phantom.” While Calvin strenuously rejected a purely symbolic reading of the Eucharist, he nonetheless voiced a sentiment regarding the Eucharist that, in its emphasis on life, explicates the significance of the ritual for all three theologians: “The flesh of Christ is like a rich and inexhaustible fountain, which transfuses into us the life flowing forth from the Godhead into itself.”

The Reformation insistence on real presence (if not transubstantiation) demonstrates the insistent need that the bread take a particularly embodied form. For, following the failure of the presence of Christ’s body in bread, whether real or symbolic, what other forms of divine incarnation might also break down? For theologians arguing over the Eucharist, the host supplies not only the conduit through which humanity obtains its own immortality (signaled in Calvin as “quickening”), but also the guarantee that the mystery of God-in-man might be possible at all. Whether it is the commingling of divine and human natures in Christ, or the immortality of the Resurrection, God meets humanity in the body, and this assertion lies behind the insistence that body be manifest in its
signifier, bread.

This was an issue that stood at the heart of debates over transubstantiation, in part because real presence problematically begins to uncouple signified and signifier, body and bread. In early modern England, as Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher have noted, this created the "problem of the leftover, that is, the status of the material remainder." If Christ merely inhabits, rather than transforms, the bread, then what does that make the bread? And at what point does consecrated bread cease to contain Christ's body (hopefully prior to digestion—a decidedly profane activity)? The real presence ultimately creates a rift between signified and signifier that leaves behind not only a material leftover but also a symbolic surplus. For, if consecrated bread can attain and then lose the real presence of Christ, then that real presence might also be relocated, contained in other signs. Regina Schwartz has tracked this very issue in Milton by relating the sacral activities of eating and digestion to Milton's thought on the natural world, conveyed within his poetry. As she relates, the Reformation loss of the Catholic sacrament scatters symbolic leftovers throughout Protestant poetry, where, circulated among readers, it creates a different kind of communal unity—a push toward an Enlightenment (and enlightened) revision of the original mystical church body.  

In his thinking on transubstantiation, Milton lies closer to Zwingli than any of his other Reformation counterparts; he insists on communion as a symbolic, rather than literal, act of eating. For him, the doctrine of transubstantiation raises the unpalatable possibility that the substance of the Eucharist, bearing the physical body of Christ, would necessarily serve a soteriological function for any who eat it. He imagines a strange doctrine of salvation in which pests and rodents receive entrance to Heaven alongside
men who, he asserts, would be equally unworthy: “Were it, as the Papists hold, his literal flesh, and eaten by all in the Mass, the consequence would be that the very worst of the communicants (to say nothing of the mice and worms by which the eucharist is occasionally devoured) would through the virtue of this heavenly bread attain eternal life” (De Doctrina, p. 441). Milton evicts the bread even of its real presence, and, in doing so, leaves in its place an absence. Unlike Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, who extol the presence of Christ as the life-giving property of the elements, Milton insists that the Eucharist is an act of remembering only, an act that calibrates the absence of Christ in the bread to the absence of Christ on earth. In Areopagitica, this contribution to the Protestant project, the body of Christ signaled as absence rather than presence, persists even as it transfers from one sign, Eucharist, to another, embodied truth.

Milton’s invocation of the Eucharist features a series of uncanny correlations between communion and writing that demonstrate a strong interrelationship between the two while at the same time stopping short of strict analogy. In keeping with Milton’s rejection of the soteriological possibilities of Eucharist, the body of truth does not confer immortality on its authors. It does, however, provide an assurance in the form of the written word, a kind of security placed upon future immortality. In one of Areopagitica’s most famous quotes, displayed over the entrance of the main reading room of the New York public library, Milton notes that “a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life” (Areopagitica, p. 27). Milton’s shift from real presence to figural absence effectively relegates immortality to the condition of promised futurity—a “life beyond life”—rather than an embodied present. In doing so, it also redirects the primary function of the Eucharist itself back
toward the original Patristic emphasis on community.

For Milton the absence of Truth, which initiates the search, also brings men together to complete it:

To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneal and proportional), this is the golden rule in theology as well as in arithmetic, and makes up the best harmony in a church; not the forced and outward union of cold and neutral, and inwardly divided minds.

(*Areopagitica*, p. 31)

Unity comes not from identity—marked out in the Eucharist by the singular body of Christ—but from the search for it. The singularity of Truth, externalized from the body of believers, is indeed divided, may even perhaps appear disparate, but those fractures do not shatter the cohesive vision, or central function, of the Church. Milton’s return to community, a repetition with a difference, deterritorializes the purview of Eucharistic meaning, available now not in the ritual of communion, but in the ritual of writing. But, although deterritorialization might indicate affinities with a kind of liberal, open-minded embracing of all members into this Eucharistic community, there are several key aspects of Milton’s communal vision, related to nationalism, diversity, and labor, that insist on a particularly English republican version of community.

If Milton’s work rejects transubstantiation as the territory for Eucharistic meaning, it reinstates that territory firmly in Britain, a country that, Milton believes, is
particularly suited to the eternal search for truth:

Lords and Commons of England, consider what Nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are governors: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point, the highest that human capacity can soar to . . . Why else was this nation chosen before any other, that out of her, as out of Sion, should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all Europe?

(Areopagitica, pp. 31-32)

Milton fantasizes over England as the source of true reform, hammered home somehow prior to the moment when the Ninety-Five Theses were nailed to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg. As his reference to Zion, taken from Psalms 50:2, might indicate, to make this politicizing move, Milton appeals in part to England’s connection with Israel as a chosen people: “what does He then but reveal Himself to His servants, and as His manner is, first to His Englishmen?” (Areopagitica, p. 32). In part, however, Milton also creates an intellectual genealogy that roots ancient wisdom within Britain’s early history: “writers of good antiquity and ablest judgment have been persuaded that even the school of Pythagoras and the Persian wisdom took beginning from the old philosophy of this island” (Areopagitica, p. 31). But ultimately, Milton does not need to stretch England’s intellectual heritage back so far to predate Protestantism; he only need reference the Lollard movement to find the aborted first birth of the Reformation: “had it not been the
obstinate perverseness of our prelates against the divine and admirable spirit of Wickliff, to suppress him as a schismatic and innovator, perhaps neither the Bohemian Huss and Jerome, no nor the name of Luther or of Calvin, had been ever known: the glory of reforming all our neighbours had been completely ours" (Areopagitica, p. 32).

Far from surprising, Milton’s impulse to relocate the Eucharist within the boundaries of the political is not uncommon in Protestant thinking, a consequence of the trend to de-link the ritual from materialism. As Schwartz notes, “when the theological doctrine of the Eucharist was the most spiritualized, it was most politically manifest in the state. With the real material body of Christ denied, it is “substantialized” in the body of the nation.” Milton’s body of truth metonymically enacts this claim, situating civic republicanism within Reformation theology, so that England might take the central role in a future “reforming of Reformation itself” (Areopagitica, p. 32).

There is a political efficacy to Milton’s reconceptualization as well, and one particularly suited to England’s republic of letters. For, as any academic might be able to attest, a community centered on the search for truth must allow for a diversity of opinion: “While there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making” (Areopagitica, p. 32). The agonistic tension that Milton imagines pervading his community matches the particular brand of sectarianism that, in 1643-44, characterized England’s political milieu. Within this context, Milton mediates between the divided sects of Britain by distinguishing between, as Schaeffer puts it, “unity and unanimity.” Milton castigates men who rail against “schismatics and sectaries; as if, while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the
cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built” (*Areopagitica*, p. 33). He goes so far as to suggest that there will never be full agreement among the Church: “And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that, out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure” (*Areopagitica*, p. 33). In fact, Milton asserts, the only division that might be truly detrimental is the cutting off or prevention of ideas—a division of truth from itself. He writes: “We stumble and are impatient at the least dividing of one visible congregation from another, though it be not in fundamentals; and through our forwardness to suppress, and our backwardness to recover any enthralled piece of truth out of the gripe of custom, we care not to keep truth separated from truth, which is the fiercest rent and disunion of all” (*Areopagitica*, p. 37).³⁰

The final characteristic of Milton’s community that distinguishes it from the corpus mysticum of the communion ritual is the role of its members, who, as Milton’s extended construction metaphor above might indicate, are less communicants than laborers.³¹ Milton’s references to writing as hewing, squaring, and cutting echo other metaphors that coalesce around the body of truth, where authorship is similarly imagined as work. Milton engages the fruitful possibility of knowledge as a harvest field: “What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers” (*Areopagitica*, p. 32). In another place, England is a “city of refuge,” where authors
“fashion out the plates and instruments of armed Justice in defence of beleaguered Truth.” This passage imagines the industriousness of pre-industrial Europe as the busy occupation of knowledge acquisition, with some authors “sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas,” and “others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement” (*Areopagitica*, p. 32).

The end result of nationalism, diversity, and labor for Milton’s *Areopagitica* is that the Eucharistic valences of community are made legible only under the sign of the English republic. Milton’s treatise against censorship is, after all, a treatise against the censorship of a particular kind of writing, done by a particular kind of man: a Protestant (likely Puritan) reformer who labors in service of God and country. Milton thus marshals the sacramental valences of the Eucharistic metaphor to underwrite the patriotic unity of his religious republic.

**The Body Constructed**

While *Areopagitica* emplaces the body of the Eucharist within England’s body politic to imagine an industrious, self-governing community, *Paradise Lost* makes use of the metaphor in a more private mode. In book five, the poem finds the angel Raphael sitting with Adam over the paradisal dinner table, partaking of the offered fare in a kind of heavenly communion:

...So down they sat,
And to their viands fell, nor seemingly
The angel, nor in mist, the common gloss
Of theologians, but with keen dispatch
Of real hunger, and concotive heat
To transubstantiate, what redounds, transpires
Through Spirits with ease.

(Paradise Lost, V.433-439)

The importance of angelic eating, not “in mist,” but with “real hunger,” is a product of Milton’s concept of transubstantiation, which, properly belonging to the prelapsarian world, indicates the upward spiritual mobility of all substance. Milton imbues his vision of Paradise with an understanding of transubstantiation that reverses the direction of transcendence prevalent in Eucharistic theology; whereas, in the postlapsarian Eucharist, God descends to earth to inhabit bread, in the prelapsarian transubstantiation, bread, like all matter, sublimes toward God. As Raphael relays to Adam:

...what he gives
(Whose praise be ever sung) to man in part
Spiritual, may of purest Spirits be found
No ingrateful food: and food alike those pure
Intelligentia substances require
As doth your rational . . .
And corporeal to incorporeal turn.

(Paradise Lost, V.404-412)
As Raphael eats, he demonstrates the literal physicality of his promise that substance moves from “corporeal to incorporeal”; the fantastic transubstantiation of their “viands” from physical food into spiritual sustenance constitutes the evanescence of materiality itself. As he later assures Adam: “All things proceed, and up to him return” (Paradise Lost, V.470). Food, changed into sustenance, eventually “transpires,” sublimates, through the very air that surrounds Raphael.

The prelapsarian transcendence of matter, rather than presenting certain evidence for Milton’s monism, instead relates more directly to the literal transubstantiation of Paradise, where God is less absent than sublime—available somewhere just above Adam’s material being. Perhaps watching the Raphael as he eats reminds Adam of this fact, prompting him to think about the phenomenon of upward mobility, for it is following their meal together that Adam begins his lengthy theological dialogue with Raphael. Adam seems to gain knowledge of God’s transcendence through first-hand witness rather than through the perception of an absence:

...sudden mind arose

In Adam, not to let th’ occasion pass

Given him by this great conference to know

Of things above his world, and of their being

Who dwell in heav’n, whose excellence he saw

Transcend his own so far.

(Paradise Lost, V.452-457)
In Paradise, transubstantiation functions not to make God's body earthly, but to make earthly bodies heavenly, a fantastical desire that takes on more insistently spiritual overtones than his treatise against censorship. While Milton's poetic genre and subject matter make this shift into the realm of religious fantasy possible, both treatise and poem share a similar connection between transcendence and truth. While, in Areopagitica, the close relationship between transcendence and truth causes Milton to rail against suppressing any possible work that might contribute to the re-membering of truth's metaphoric body, in Paradise Lost, the communion meal is the centerpiece and occasion for the educational conversation that occurs between Raphael and Adam. As Regina Schwartz points out, "Instead of the words of institution or a sermon, there is . . . a conversation with the angel—a conversation whose subject is, of all things, the nature of transubstantiation." 35

It is particularly fitting that Milton should feature transubstantiation at the center of education at this particular moment in England's history. Paradise Lost was published amid the failure of the republican experiment, when Milton's original hope for public debate registered in Areopagitica was overshadowed by the oppression administered by licensors, newly installed at the hands of the reinstated monarch. While dating the composition of the poem is always problematic, Milton was likely working on his epic throughout the waning years of the republic and during the opening years of the Restoration, finishing perhaps as early as 1663. Critics have noted the political difficulties that he faced during this period and in the following years. 36 Having been briefly imprisoned and released in 1659, Milton waited anxiously to hear whether his
anti-royalist actions throughout the interregnum would result in legal prosecution, or whether he might receive pardon with others under the 1660 Act of Free and General Pardon, Indemnity, and Oblivion.37

Six years later, when Milton sought the license for his poem from the episcopal licensor Thomas Tomkins, he was apparently subject to the very censorship that he had argued against some twenty years earlier. Milton’s early (and occasionally unreliable) biographer John Toland reports that Tomkins had nearly suppressed “the whole Poem for imaginary Treason in the following lines”:

...As when the Sun new risen
Looks thro the Horizontal misty Air
Shorn of his Beams, or from behind the Moon
In dim Eclipse disastrous Twilight sheds
On half the Nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes Monarchs.

(I.594-599)38

It is possible to see how Milton’s lines, with their reference to the eclipse and the incumbent instabilities related to the monarch, may have touched a nerve with Tomkins, author of a treatise entitled The Inconveniencies of Toleration (1667). In his treatise, Tomkins rails against the “hideous Heresies, Schisms, and Scandals” that had resulted in a lack of “Uniformity” of the nation,39 a uniformity that Tomkins hoped to restore by means of uniform speech through censorship. Tomkins’s logic presents a stunning
counterpoint to Milton’s, who embraces the relative freedom of sectarianism in his vision of a multi-voiced public conversation.

Amid the increasing censorship of the early years of the Restoration, Milton’s Paradise presents a portrait of the search for truth that bridges the gap between the different ways that *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost* conceive of transcendence. While the poem may host a fantasy in which earthly bodies literally transubstantiate, the treatise takes a more pessimistic viewpoint of the postlapsarian access to God’s body. Both, however, maintain that the transubstantiated body is accompanied by and accomplished through truth, gained through open, thoughtful conversation.

Milton uses the accouterments of the Paradisal meal—fruit, table, chairs, plants—to describe in detail not only the spiritual process of transubstantiation, but also the work that goes into becoming a host. Eve, preparing the meal, crushes “for drink the grape.” she “tempers dulcet creams” from “sweet kernels,” planning carefully how best to arrange the dishes, so that, rather than serving dishes with clashing flavor palates, she might serve a meal that “taste after taste [would uphold] with kindliest change” (*Paradise Lost*, V.331-348). She even prepares the ground for Raphael, not by sweeping away dust but instead strewing the grass “with rose and odors from the shrub unfumed” (*Paradise Lost*, V.350). The only thing that Eve does not arrange is the table itself, which seems to have sprung of its own volition from the earth: “Raised of grassy turf / Their table was, and mossy seats had round” (*Paradise Lost*, V.391-932). Eve’s labor is, of course, a classic example of Milton’s vexed portrayal of gender roles, but it is also part and parcel of Milton’s larger understanding of the role of labor in Paradise.

Both Adam and Eve participate in work, which, for Milton, imbues them with
human dignity even as it tames the land:

Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his dignity

... And at our pleasant labor, to reform
Yon flow’ry arbors, yonder alleys green,
Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown,
That mock our scant manuring, and require
More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth:
Those blossoms also, and those dropping gums,
That lie bestrewn unsightly and unsmooth,
Ask riddance, if we mean to tread with ease.

(Paradise Lost, IV.618-632)

For Milton, the plants of paradise require no incentive to grow, but instead only lack harvest. Milton’s paradise is characterized by excess, and this excess renders Adam and Eve’s labor utterly dissimilar to agrarian practices today. Any farmer would be hard pressed to find fields that “by disburd’ning grows / More fruitful,” as occurs in Paradise (Paradise Lost, V.319-320). There are no orchards in the postlapsarian world where fruit of “All seasons, ripe for use hangs on the stalk,” waiting only to be plucked (Paradise Lost, V. 323). Indeed, even Eve’s hospitable work, for all its careful planning and tending, seems almost to accomplish itself. When Raphael greets Eve, he does not recognize her
work as her own, but instead as the work of God:

Hail mother of mankind, whose fruitful womb
Shall fill the world more numerous with thy sons
Than with these various fruits the trees of God
Have heaped this table.

*Paradise Lost, V.388-391*

Eve’s work of hospitality, tied to her work of maternity, is elided as the “trees of God” gain the credit for having not only supplied the feast, but also placing it on the table.

If Adam and Eve have only to pluck food from plants that supply it without care or tending, can their activities properly be classified as work? At the very least, it cannot be said that the work of Adam and Eve is one of production—creating from scarcity—but rather of removal—trimming excess. As such, the image of work presented in Paradise contrasts greatly with the labor represented in *Areopagitica*; certainly Paradise does not contain the same resounding chords of industry that echo through Milton’s treatise.

In order to find, in *Paradise Lost*, a scene of industry reminiscent of the metaphors of architecture and defense in *Areopagitica*, it is necessary to descend into Hell, and the construction of Pandemonium:

...And here let those
Who boast in mortal things, and wond’ring tell
Of Babel, and the works of Memphian Kings,
Learn how their greatest monuments of fame,
And strength and art are easily outdone
By Spirits reprobate, and in an hour
What in an age they with incessant toil
And hands innumerable scarce perform.

(Paradise Lost, I.690-699)

The architectural construction of Pandemonium is made possible by mining the earth for its precious metals. The demons “Opened into the hill a spacious wound / And digged out ribs of gold,” while “a second multidue / With wonderous art founded the massy ore” and “a third as soon had formed within the ground a various mold,” filling it with the mined ore (Paradise Lost, I.688-689). The construction of Pandemonium is remarkably reminiscent of Milton’s earlier portrait of the industrious church, with its hewing, cutting, and squaring. The metalworking of the demons similarly recalls the activities in Areopagitica’s “city of refuge;” where, as noted above, authors use “anvils and hammers” to create those “plates and instruments,” that function “in defence of beleaguered Truth” (Areopagitica, p. 32).

Of course, there may be some danger of mixing metaphors in comparing Paradise Lost and Areopagitica: the demons of Hell may not be said to be searching for truth, and the authorial community of Areopagitica are certainly (or at least probably) not fallen angels. But the two nonetheless manifest a close connection; there is something fundamentally similar about the two metaphors, both related to the work of producing, that is simply not present in the labor of Adam and Eve. While the demons engage in a
kind of mass delusion that results in the breathtaking beauty of Pandemonium, the authors of truth similarly engage a communal imagination in their reconstruction of the body of truth. *Paradise Lost* manifests a split perspective on the relationship between labor and education. If paradise connects the easy work of hospitality to educative conversation, Hell parodies that connection by putting its demons to work to build a council house. The question then becomes: why does the productive labor of *Areopagitica*—the communal endeavor of building that revitalizes the political body of England—show up, in Milton’s epic, among the hordes of the damned?

The answer lies in the absence of God. In the postlapsarian world of *Areopagitica*, this absence is an uncomfortable reminder of the distance between fallen man and God. In hell, however, that absence is reified into a persistent, irretrievable loss. In Milton’s cosmology, God is the source of all creative activity, and it is for this reason that paradise, which tends toward upward spiritual mobility, continually renews itself. The overabundant fertility of the land is sparked by its own innate ability to transcend, a constant subliming that draws upon and forever repeats the creative act.

In contrast, the demons, like fallen man, must use whatever raw materials they can find—words or ore—to produce the structures they build. It is no coincidence that the demons are miners in particular: ore lies within the earth, causing the demons to literally move downward in their search for construction materials. The demonic tendency toward descent, rather than ascent, is inherent to their condition; Mammon in particular has “looks and thoughts” that “[w]ere always downward bent” (*Paradise Lost*, I.681-81). The poem plays on the fall of the angels by relating even the materials of their construction to their spiritual course. With their misapprehension of the role of nature, it is little wonder
that they abuse natural materials. Rather than gather up the abundance of the earth, they instead “[r]ansacked the center, and with impious hands / Rifled the bowels of their mother earth / For treasures better hid” (Paradise Lost, 1.686-688).

Paradise Lost brings out the tensions in the metaphor of productive construction, and particularly architecture, that Areopagitica leaves hidden. For, if one might use construction to build a church or a “city of refuge,” as authors do in Areopagitica, one might also use it to build an idol, a pagan temple, or a tower, reminiscent of the one raised in Babel. The Genesis account of the Tower of Babel foregrounds both labor and unity as central features of the construction, a building that represents a single name and location: “And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”41 Milton’s awareness of the tower is, of course, prevalent in Paradise Lost, where his poem gives voice to the iconoclastic fear that Pandemonium, like all buildings, might “act as loci to which idolatry, over time, will fundamentally adhere.”42 But the dangers of creative production also apply to Areopagitica, where the construction of the Church functions as a compromise in a postlapsarian world in which God is not, and may never be, “all in all.”

And this is why the body of God is so important: it gives purpose to the building. The church is inhabited not by an idol but by recovered truth. More than that: the body of God serves as a blueprint by which authors might “piece” together truth as they rediscover her. And yet, Milton’s calm assertions in Areopagitica that God’s body is
capable of delivering on these promises is subtly undermined by the possibility that truth, broken and obscured from humanity, may not ultimately ever emerge in the recognizable form of God’s body. Milton attempts to sidestep this possibility by insisting on a whole and corporate form in a quote that, although examined above, bears repeating here: “To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneal and proportional), this is the golden rule in theology as well as in arithmetic” (*Areopagitica*, p. 31). While Milton insists that each piece of the body will inevitably fit, the parenthetical assurance of a “homogeneal and proportional” body functions as an ominous interruption within that sentiment, for it raises the possibility that the body may, in fact, be heterogenous and incoherent.

Lurking behind this possibility is the myth of Osiris itself, which features a key detail that Milton, conveniently, omits from his account: the missing member. In Plutarch’s narrative, the grieving Isis is unable to locate Osiris’s penis, which, Plutarch speculates, was thrown into the Nile and eaten by the fish. In an attempt to complete the re-membering of the murdered Osiris, Isis creates a golden phallus for him, a symbol that, translated to Milton’s metaphor, stands in as the representative absence, the piece of the body that renders truth forever incomplete. Milton himself recognizes truth’s permanent state of incompletion when he cheerfully admits that there is no end to gathering the scattered limbs of truth: “We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master’s second coming; He shall bring together every joint and every member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection” (*Areopagitica*, p. 30). And yet, this reassurance seems to have a counter-productive effect, by encouraging its listeners to continually engage in their
search while awaiting the seemingly endless deferral of its completion. Milton reminds his listeners that truth will remain indefinitely incomplete, the final piece forever hidden—perhaps in the belly of an uncongenial fish.

There is something monstrous about an incomplete body. Something about the disarticulated Osiris conjures up endless disjointing, either in the form of continual decrease, a finite body that atomizes into ever smaller constituent parts, or (what is worse), an infinite body, one that continually produces dislocated limbs to be magically incorporated. Milton ultimately leaves his audience with two choices: either there is no end to the division of the body, or there is no end to the body itself. Of course, these possibilities remain, like the missing member of Osiris, hidden deep within the rhetoric of Areopagitica. But they are resurrected later in his career, only five years after the publication of Paradise Lost, with the appearance in 1671 of Samson Agonistes.

The Body Disarticulated

Published as an addendum to his “brief epic,” Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes gives metaphoric form to the failure of the Eucharistic body as a symbol of community, conversation, and truth. Certainly its co-publication with a work that ostensibly seeks to recount humanity’s story of its recovered redemption might seem to lend contradictory force to the eulogizing overtones of Samson Agonistes. And yet, even Paradise Regained, centered not on the passion and resurrection but on the temptation of Christ, is largely concerned with scarcity, metaphorized as hunger—Christ’s physical hunger for bread, and the reader’s spiritual hunger for knowledge of God.⁴³
While the public discourse of Areopagitica, as well as the conversation between Raphael and Adam in Paradise Lost might seem to indicate that that this spiritual hunger might be satisfied through conversation, Paradise Regained evinces a pessimistic attitude toward the efficacy of public debate. While this fact might be foreshadowed by the fact that debate, in Paradise Lost, is located in hell, the debate in Paradise Regained occurs between Christ and Satan, inviting the possibility that Christ might somehow use the forms of disputation to conquer his tempter. But the conversation between the two is instead infamously unenlightening, less dialogue than two overlapping monologues. Northrop Frye notes that the scene has its closest affinities "with the debate and with the dialectical colloquy of Plato and Boethius ... [but] these forms usually either incorporate one argument into another dialectically or build up two different cases rhetorically; Milton's feat of constructing a double argument on the same words, each highly plausible and yet as different as light from darkness, is, so far as I know, unique in English Literature." In Paradise Regained, the spirit of public debate is completely suppressed beneath the solitary logic of a Christ who refuses to directly answer Satan using any form of recognizable disputation.

Samson Agonistes elaborates on the failures of public discourse differently. Unlike the dialogue between Christ and Satan, the conversations that Samson has with his various interlocutors are anchored solidly in the realm of debate. Samson eloquently resists every visitor he speaks with: Manoa, who seeks to comfort Samson with rationalizing; Dalilah, who begs forgiveness with emotional pleas; the giant Harapha, who taunts Samson with boasting; and the officer, who commands Samson to perform in front of the Philistines. But, strangely, it is not through conversation that Samson
ultimately lights on his final plan of action, and the culmination of the poem. His decision to tear down the Philistine temple of Dagon, thereby destroying both the worshippers and himself, remains hidden from characters and audience. Samson makes this choice privately, as an individual, and he guards it in silence. In doing so, Samson Agonistes, like Paradise Regained, stages the failure of discourse as a means of arriving at truth.

Samson Agonistes accompanies this failure with a final image that uncannily recalls the dismembered Osiris: a striking portrait of the mangled dead that are destroyed in the wake of Samson’s actions. By ending his poem on this somber note, Milton suggests the failure of his optimistic republican dreams by enmeshing his protagonist among the stones and bodies of the destroyed temple in a scene that tragically reiterates the broken body of Osiris, and the broken edifice of the Church.

The center of the action in the dramatic poem is no cathedral or city of refuge, nor even a council house, but instead a pagan temple, where “[d]runk with idolatry, drunk with wine . . . Chaunting their idol” the Philistines call for Samson to entertain them.45 The temple itself is described with the same elaborate attention to detail as Pandemonium, a place that provides seats for the spectators at the feast:

The building was a spacious theatre,
Half round on two main pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the lords, and each degree
Of sort, might sit in order to behold.

(Samson Agonistes, lines 1606-1609)
The temple therefore provides a theater for what might be thought of as the only true “action” the play—the feats of strength that the Philistines command Samson to perform, and the destruction of the temple that Samson himself accomplishes. 46

While the poem casts the destruction of the temple as a form of genuine labor, the feats of strength that Samson is forced to do are pantomime rather than authentic work. In fact, because it is labor performed not for God, nor even for food, but for the pagan god Dagon, it is worse than mere pantomime: it is idolatry. Samson tells the chorus that, while he does not object to working for the Philistines as a slave, he refuses to translate that labor from a civil to a religious sphere by performing at the temple. He maintains that he will participate in Philistine society:

Not in their idol-worship, but by labour
Honest and lawful to deserve my food
Of those who have me in their civil power.

(Samson Agonistes, lines 1366-1368)

Work for the civil authorities is devoid of sacral connotations, and therefore lawful to Samson, while the feats of strength would merely expend his energy in pagan spectacle. But the effort of making this claim taxes Samson, creating a labor of the mind. The Chorus sympathizes with him, noting that the feast day of Dagon “hath been to thee no day of rest, / Labouring thy mind / More than the working day thy hands” (Samson Agonistes, lines 1297-1299). Samson himself follows this line of logic that separate physical from mental labor when, as he responds to the Philistine officer, he insists that
his “corporal servitude” to the Philistines has not tired his mind so much that he will give in to the request that he perform in the temple (Samson Agonistes, line 1336). By exerting his “labouring” mind, Samson seeks to maintain the spiritual integrity of mind and body.

Samson decides to go to the temple, however, once he realizes that he can perform destructive labor that will align his mental and physical self in a way that productive labor will not. This realization happens almost instantaneously, not as the result of careful consideration through conversation, but as the byproduct of “[s]ome rousing motions” in him. (Samson Agonistes, line 1382). After resolving to go to the temple, Samson confides in no one—not audience, chorus, or semichorus (and certainly not officer). This reticence makes for a puzzling reading experience, rendering his action abrupt, seemingly baseless and without reason. Samson’s individual decision and death leave a number of unanswered questions, both for the reader and for the characters of the poem. Because of this indeterminacy, any statements that the characters later make to justify his actions seem less retroactive logic than pitiful attempts to make sense out of a deep and unalterable confusion. The lack of insight into Samson’s rationale defies the reader to understand Samson’s actions: conversation not only fails to illuminate Samson’s rationale, it also makes it impossible to gauge Samson’s actions as just, right, or even reasonable.

This irrationality instills itself throughout the speech of the messenger, who arrives only after the destruction of the temple to relate what has happened. The messenger describes how, at the temple, Samson had gamely taken up the actions commanded of him, a simulacra of the work that they were symbolically meant to register: “to heave, pull, draw, or break, he still performed / All with incredible,
stupendous force” (*Samson Agonistes*, lines 1626-1627). It isn’t until they lead him to the core of the building, “the arched roof [that] gave main support,” however, that Samson decides to perform his true labor:

...straining all his nerves, he bowed

As with the force of winds and waters pent

When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars

With horrible convulsion to and fro

He tugged, he shook, till down they came.

(*Samson Agonistes*, lines 1646-1650)

Samson’s labor here is the labor of destruction, the trembling columns mimicking the movement of his tugging and shaking, body and building momentarily caught up in symbiotic continuity, until both lie broken on the ground. The Chorus’s commentary on Samson’s actions immediately foreground them as genuine labor:

Living or dying thou hast fulfilled

The work for which thou wast foretold

To Israel, and now liest victorious

(*Samson Agonistes*, lines 1661-1663)

In a poem obsessed with the labor that Samson accomplishes as the captive slave of the Philistines, the word “work” takes on the double connotations of manual labor and life
work. But if this work is Samson's crowning achievement, it comes at a price, for it leaves him entangled among the dead:

> Among thy slain self-killed;
> Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
> Of dire Necessity, whose law in death conjoined
> Thee with thy slaughtered foes, in number more
> Than all thy life had slain before

*(Samson Agonistes, lines 1664-1668)*

The image of destruction is one that resists comprehension. Indeed, it is recounted by a messenger who seems unable to relate the scene; the opening argument to the poem points out that he begins "confusedly at first, and afterwards more distinctly" to relate "the catastrophe" *(Samson Agonistes, p. 6)*. This confused relating derives from the tableau of confused bodies, intertwined, incoherent, and indistinguishable, with Samson utterly lost, "conjoined" to the dead.

The tragedy for the poem lies not in the destruction of idols or idol-worshippers, but in the entanglement of the Hebrew protagonist among them. As the messenger relates: "Samson, with these inmixed, inevitably / Pulled down the same destruction on himself" *(Samson Agonistes, lines 1658-1659)*. Once enmeshed in the pile of broken bodies, how is it possible to distinguish Samson from the rest? How can the dead identify itself as distinctly belonging to any nation or religion? Because it cannot speak for itself, a dead body is a thing only: neither more, nor less, than a dead body. Remarking on the image of
the dead, Gordon Tesky notes that Samson is:

led back not to his God, not to the Law, not to his nation, not even to himself, seated on that bank where his mind is tormented with remorse as soon as his body can rest. He is being guided toward the scene that sticks to our eyes: his physical entanglement with the bodies of those he has slain. We are ourselves involved in what I would call the aesthetics of the heap of the dead, the psychological impact of the sight of dead bodies heaped up and entangled with one another, so that it is very nearly impossible to see any one body as a whole. Every body we see there has parts which, when examined more closely, actually belong to another.47

It is worth noting that this image of incoherent embodiment is one that the poem has already forecast in its description of Samson himself. On viewing Samson early in the poem, the Chorus identifies his body as a jumble of undifferentiated corporeality: “See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused” (Samson Agonistes, line 118). For all of his supposed action, the description of Samson’s posture throughout much of the poem is a constant reminder that he is bound, broken, his body already spent, evocative of such images as Michelangelo’s Pieta or Picasso’s The Guitarist.

The “heap of the dead” is a metaphoric memory, a residual artifact of the endless disarticulation of truth. Samson Agonistes brings out the possibilities that merely haunt the margins in Areopagitica, presenting the reader with the terrifying specter of the failure of the republican experiment. While Milton’s earlier work hopes for a
transcendent body that might be pieced into wholeness, his later work views the corporate body as a confused mass of broken pieces. This latter image presents not a continuous community of diverse authors, as Milton had hoped for in *Areopagitica*, but a muddle of disparate voices vying for royalist and republican attention, a cacophony of dissent that royal licensees such as Tomkins ultimately sought to wrestle into some form of singular politico-religious identity through censorship. Milton imagined that the body of truth might brilliantly emerge from public discourse, and the licensees sought to shape the body of truth through silence, but both failed to account for the remains, those voices that do not fit, those limbs that correspond to no body in particular.

And yet, even while Samson lies “tangled in the fold” of disarticulation, the poem struggles with the symbolic meaning of the act, ending finally with his father Manoa’s enigmatic pronouncement that “Samson hath quit himself / Like Samson,” hanging desperately to the name that no longer relates to a body. He asserts that Samson acted “[w]ith God not parted from him, as was feared,” and determines to rescue Samson’s body, cleaning it from the stain of pagan blood:

Let us go find the body where it lies
Soaked in his enemies’ blood, and from the stream
With lavers pure, and cleansing herbs wash off
The clotted gore

(*Samson Agonistes*, lines 1725-1728)

For Manoa, the care of the dead requires not only that Samson’s body be distinguished
from the others, but also that it be memorialized. He replaces Samson’s body with a kind of funereal prosthetic: a monument.

...There will I build him
A monument, and plant it round with shade
Of laurel ever green and branching palm,
With all his trophies hung, and acts enrolled
In copious legend, or sweet lyric song.

(Samson Agonistes, lines 1733-1737)

While the monument might preserve the “acts” of Samson, it does so with the problematic construction of a building. Here, Manoa imagines, virgins and young men will visit “on feastal days” to remember the man who, on the day of a feast, destroyed the pagan Dagon (Samson Agonistes, line 1741). In Samson Agonistes, the monument does not replace the temple with a “true” church building any more than the bodies symbolize transcendent community or transubstantiated matter. Rather, it reinscribes a cycle of meaningless labor and idolatrous temples that the poem associates with humanity’s entrapment within its own materiality.

The Failure of Transcendence

Milton began his career by positing the possibility that a community might be based on the absence of God. In doing so, he hoped to revalue the fractures forming
between people as sectarianism increased in the dawning years of republicanism. The space between people merely mimicked the space between humanity and God, a void that called for increased literary production, a lack that brought people together. But, in his utopic fervor, Milton did not consider the possibility that, while the incomplete body of God renders it transcendent, an incomplete political body renders it incoherent. His later works registers this differentiation by taking up the absence of God on a more profound, pervasive level. Shifting the mood from euphoric to elegiac, Milton contemplates the distance between a withholding God and a community in need: a God who holds out a tantalizingly unapproachable promise for wholeness, and a community that fruitlessly seeks its fulfillment.

Milton’s work represents an increasing trend in the latter half of the seventeenth century to de-link religion from politics. Many have seen this as the beginning of the modern demystification of religion, when a gradual process of secularization evacuated culture of a phantasmagoric God. Milton’s work demonstrates, however, that “secularization,” at least in this period, was less demystification than disillusionment: a God who is not invented, just ineffective. As such, Milton’s late poetry does not push toward a secular culture, but instead ponders the unspeakable possibility of a hidden God, a God who has no role to perform in the political life of the country. In doing so, Milton ultimately stages the failure of transcendence as a basis for community-building, mourning the loss not only of the republic that transcendence was meant to uphold, but also of the political God that the republic was meant to embody.
Conclusion

The (Political-Theological) Afterlife of Transcendence

The early modern period famously witnessed the death of Christendom, when Christian theology became a decreasingly viable option for political theorizing. Concurrent with this shift was the apparent retreat of transcendence from the nationalized public forum and into a more privatized space. Seen through the lens of early modern poetry, it is apparent that this privatized version of transcendence still held powerful possibilities for imagining the nation, even if in the poetic space of cultural fantasy. But what about the fate of transcendence in the political realm of the state, or the civil space of religion? Although the majority of this dissertation has been concerned with the imaginative possibilities offered by transcendence, the concept has also had an afterlife in these more practical realms, and I will attempt here to sketch out a brief history of that afterlife, as well as make a few assertions regarding the place of transcendence in society today.

While the flight of theology from politics cannot be viewed as a simplistic matter of Western culture’s “secularization,” it is important to note that the separation of the two nonetheless created the perception of impoverishment in both church and state, especially notable in the twentieth century. In politics, that impoverishment is best understood as the loss of meaning at the site of the public community as a result of the migration of religion to the realm of inward, personal conviction. This void is famously filled in American civil religion with the nationalist trappings of patriotism—the anthem, the pledge, the flag—
that lend religious meaning to a secularized state.¹ Within Christian theology, the
impoverishment of secularism is understood as the loss of a public forum for
understanding and enacting the political aspects of theology. While I will return in the
latter portion of this chapter to the question of political impoverishment, I want, for the
moment, to look at how perceptions of theological impoverishment have determined the
course of modern Christian political theology, with an eye toward understanding the role
that transcendence has played in shifting formulations of church-state relations in recent
history.

William T. Cavanaugh writes that “[i]n one way or another, all political theologies
at the end of the twentieth century can be read as so many attempts to come to grips with
the death of Christendom without simply acquiescing in the privatization of the church.”²
While this statement might apply in some way to the writings of Carl Schmitt,
Cavanaugh is thinking more specifically of a slightly different group of twentieth-century
theologians, including such thinkers as Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, and Johann Baptist
Metz. This branch of political theology can be distinguished from the Schmittian branch
as more interested in the practical, rather than theoretical, relationship between church
and state. Schmitt considered his work to investigate the “systematic structure” in which
theology and politics were inextricably linked,³ hence, any practical application arises as
a condition of the interrelationship between the two. Barth, Moltmann, and Metz,
however, are all concerned with the immediate effect that the church might have on state.

In the context of a secular state, the appropriate place of the church is, according
to modern political theology, civil society.⁴ Cavanaugh elaborates: “Even for most
theologians who do not accept the Enlightenment story of secularization, the end of
Christendom is to be accepted as the proper separation of the church from worldly power."5 Following this separation, the function of the state is to maintain the freedom required for the various populaces within civil society to pursue their own individual interests. The function of the church, however, is up for some debate. It is acknowledged that, as an institution of civil society, the church has some voice in the formation of the state. But, far from reinforcing a conservative moral order or reinstituting a Christianized state, that voice is raised with the understanding that all politics are institutions of society or culture, rather than religion. Karl Barth notes in “The Christian Community and Civil Community”:

By making itself jointly responsible for the civil community [state], the Christian community participates—on the basis of and by belief in the divine revelation—in the human search for the best form, for the most fitting system of political organisation; but it is also aware of the limits of all the political forms and systems which man can discover (even with the co-operation of the Church), and it will beware of playing off one political concept—even the “democratic” concept—as the Christian concept, against all others.6

Barth cautiously accepts the church’s role as an active agent for political change among the many other agents within civil society, but he does not, however, permit that role to include overpowering the state, a move that is common among modern political theologians.
In Latin American liberation theology, the church takes even less of an active role in the formation of the state, participating in politics instead through supplementing the shortcomings of a secular state by rendering aid to the disenfranchised. As Gustavo Gutiérrez points out in *A Theology of Liberation*, this is less an attempt at finding an ideal politics and more a way of presenting a “critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word.”7 Based on Christ’s treatment of the poor, social justice as Christian practice has grown in popularity in recent decades in North America as well, evidenced by such grass-roots Protestant undertakings as New Monasticism, a movement that establishes religious communities as venues of hospitality in impoverished, typically urban, locales.8

Within this conception, the political role of transcendence is largely eclipsed by its soteriological role: the encounter with the transcendent divine largely establishes individual salvation, rather than community. It is true that the encounter with transcendence might heighten awareness of the spiritual kingdom of God, or (in the case of liberation theology and New Monasticism) Christ’s political vision of helping the poor, but the kingdom of God exists only in an eschatological sense; it cannot be said to inhabit any temporal region.9 Barth cautions against mistaking political achievements for spiritual ones, admonishing his readers not to “regard any such achievements as perfect,” because, “[i]n the face of all political achievements, past, present, and future, the Church waits for the ‘city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.’”10

In recent decades, however, there has been a shift in modern political theology that has begun to relocate transcendence at the site of the community. Specifically, this shift involves reconfiguring politics within a theological framework in order to
understand the church as, itself, an alternative political body to the state. It is important to note here that “church” is not taken to mean an institutional body, but an assembly, a return to the early modern ideal of an authentic politics. The politics enacted by this body are, as is the case with the politics of early modern devotional poetry, closely linked to the eschatological kingdom, thought to exist on earth through the material activities of the church. In this sense, Cavanaugh argues, “the church itself bears the fullness of God’s politics through history,” creating a body of Christians that has political efficacy only as a community. This vision of the church as polity is contrasted with that of earlier twentieth-century political theology, which posited “a disembodied Christianity that serves only, in a Gnostic fashion, to inform the consciences of individual citizens occupying an autonomous political space.”

The polity of the church body as described by recent political theology sounds remarkably like many of the radical Protestant sects of the Reformation. Indeed, theologians John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, two major proponents of the “church as polity” model, have even been said to participate in a “Contemporary Radical Reformation.” Their vision of a transcendent community (rather than the individual transcendence of salvation) resonates particularly with the Anabaptist movement of the Reformation. As Daniel Liechty describes it, the Anabaptists sought transcendence primarily through the communal body of Christ:

Christ was actually experienced in an incarnate form through the gathered assembly of believers. This gathered assembly was the actual body of Christ in the world and to participate in this assembly was to participate in
the body of Christ. Therefore, for the Anabatists, the *unio mystica*, the mystical union of the believer with Christ, was found in participation in the gathering together of believers.¹³

The question is, why has theology in the latter half of the twentieth century returned to a seemingly premodern conception of political transcendence? I suggest that this return has much to do with the persistence of transcendence as a specifically political, rather than merely theological, concept.

By calling transcendence political, what I mean here is that it lies at the heart of how people imagine their own communities. In this sense, it functions as a form of communal self-identification: the transcendence of the community beyond a grouping of individuals. This possibility for political transcendence is frequently obscured behind the urge to use transcendence as the basis for ethics. Such is the case, for instance, in Charles Taylor’s “A Place for Transcendence?,” in which Taylor maps out the various social locations where he believes transcendence might have value following the end of Christendom. His list includes the political, as manifested in the capability of transcendence to answer the humanitarian crisis by, in a Levinasian fashion, cultivating love for the other that goes beyond civic responsibility. And yet, when it comes to identity, the place for transcendence is not communal, but individual, even interior. He notes that transcendence can also find a place in the formation of the “modern subject,” who “is no longer open to the universe as were those that lived in an enchanted world,” but is instead formulated within “an impassable membrane” that “separates the realm of the spirit—interior—from that of physical reality—exterior.”¹⁴ And yet, is not the
political community itself one variation of a transcendent reality that is exterior, perhaps even physical?

This possibility is exploited in the popular use, mentioned above, of patriotic items to create religious sentiment regarding the secular nation of America. It is also, however, invoked in the context of burgeoning globalism with the phrase “the global village.” In this designation, what is transcendent is no longer the divine, but the collective. Paired with the adjective, “global,” the village transcends national, cultural, and racial boundaries; it even transcends the localized connotations of the word “village” itself.

Without the aid of literature to understand this phenomena, the political aspect of transcendence as communal identification might seem merely dogmatic, a code by which the nation-state might enforce unanimity (in the case of American civil religion), or by which individuals might create meaningful identity from the bare fact of capital trade in the global market. But a literary study of transcendence exposes the origins of communal identity instead at the level of the imagination, the matrix in which the possible conditions for both political and theological communities are formed. It is for this reason that transcendence, in both its theological and non-theological forms, might be said always to have a place at the heart of community.

Of course, this fact says nothing about the kinds of organizations that might arise within a community based on transcendence. In order to understand that, I suggest that it would be necessary to survey, as this dissertation has, the various means by which the transcendent community is made legible to its members. What are the avenues through which people apprehend their own communal identity? How is one made aware, for
instance, of one’s citizenship? What are the objects, the words, the metaphors that inspire national sentiment? If, as early modern poetry demonstrates, the encounter with transcendence underwrites the political organization of the community, then the answer to these questions might be a way to help understand how transcendence, in a modern sense, continues to inform how we organize society today.
Notes

Notes to Introduction


2 Augustine, *The Meditations, Soliloquia and Manual of the Glorious Doctor S.*


7 Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago:

8 Levinas, pp. 6 and 52.


1993).

15 *Half Humankind*, pp. 16-18.

16 England was only one of many countries that dealt with increasing diversity. For an overview, see *Living with Religious Diversity in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist, and Mark Greengrass (London: Ashgate, 2009).


20 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 36.


22 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*

23 See especially the introduction to Kantorowicz, pp. 2-6.


28


30 These philosophers are not, it is worth pointing out, always completely comfortable with the designation “political theology,” and do not necessarily appear in the list of academics, usually modern theologians, grouped under that category. Levinas, for instance, strenuous rejected the designation of “theology” as it applied to his work, while Marion, despite his interest in the icon, is somewhat uncomfortable with the ontological
categories that theology implies. For more, see Horner, p. 64.


33 James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies: Or, the Reiprock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a King and His Naturall Subjects* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Waldegrame, 1598).


35 Shuger, *Political Theologies*, p. 3.


**Notes to Chapter 1**


2 On Elizabethan iconoclasm, see chap. 1, n11.

3 As the names of these plays suggest, most of these works concentrate on contact between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. See Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1–44; Shankar Raman, *Framing ‘India’: The Colonial Imaginary in Early Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Richard Barbour,

4 Vitkus, Turning Turk, p. 51.


8 Shagan, Popular Politics, p. 7. For Shagan, historians ought to reject the assumption that any nation is capable of ‘converting’ in this sense. However, this chapter holds that the fantasy of ‘national conversion’ still bears investigation as a compelling idea for early modern peoples.

To some extent, this symbolic rupture was as much the fault of court culture as political upheaval. See Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England*, pp. 34–36. It is also worth noting that the addition of Scotland to Britain in 1603 may have further destabilized national identity.


15 Carey, Life, Mind and Art, pp. 15–36.

16 Holy Sonnet 16, “If faithful souls,” line 1; all subsequent references to John Donne’s poetry will appear parenthetically in the text by line number and are from Donne, John Donne’s Poetry, ed. Daniel R. Dickson (New York: Norton, 2007). See also Carey, Life, Mind and Art, p. 28.


19 Challis, Tudor Coinage, pp. 257 and 303.


24 Qtd. in Foucault, Order of Things, pp. 174–175.

25 For an example of illegal currency trading during Irish debasement, see Challis, Tudor Coinage, pp. 268–274.


28 Qtd. in Martz, Poetry of Meditation, p. 28.

30 Of course, “The Ecstasy” is the poem where this mystical union is most fully achieved in *Songs and Sonnets*. See Merritt Hughes, “Some of Donne’s ‘Ecstasies’”, *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 75, no. 5 (1960): 509–518; and Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 87–116. In a later sermon, Donne would use coins more explicitly to imagine the union of God and humanity: “And then it [repayment of sin’s debt] was lent in such money as was coyned even with the Image of God; man was made according to his Image: That Image being defaced, in a new Mint, in the wombe of the Blessed Virgin, there was new money coyned; the Image of the invisible God, the second person in the trinity, was imprinted into the human nature.” Donne, *Sermons*, 4:288. See also Carey, “Donne and Coins,” pp. 156–157.


32 Challis, Tudor Coinage, p. 167. See also Rev. 12:7–9.

33 See Helen Gardner’s unnumbered note in Donne, The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets, p. 113n.

34 See Gardner’s unnumbered note in Donne, The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets, p. 114n; and John T. Shawcross’s unnumbered note in Donne, The Complete Poetry, p. 43n.


36 Challis, Tudor Coinage, p. 167.

37 Mark 14:36.


41 One of the most beneficial consequences of the Ptolemaic map was its ability to
accommodate new discoveries. Since Ptolemaic maps were proportional, new lands could simply be added in without “‘stretching’ or extending the map.” Woodward, “Cartography and the Renaissance,” p. 13.


45 Ávila, *Castillo Interior*, p. 100.


48 Murray, *Poetics of Conversion*, p. 12. Murray notes that this kind of conversion has its roots in medieval *conversio*, and was displaced by the early modern emphasis on institutionalism.


**Notes to Chapter 2**


5 See especially the essays in Marshall Grossman (ed.), *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*.


9 Spencer, the “English Virgil,” is the poet who most often invokes this common Renaissance idea of the poetic profession, explicated in part by lines that are sometimes attributed to Virgil and, according to William J. Kennedy, appended to Renaissance editions of the Aeneid as a four-line proemium:

\begin{quote}
Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus avena
Carment, et egressus silvis vicina coegi
Ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono,
Gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis’
\end{quote}

(I am he who, after singing on the shepherd’s slender pipe and leaving the woodside for the farmlands, urged the plowed lands ever so much to obey
their eager tenant; my work was welcome to the farmers, but now I turn to the sterner stuff of Mars.)


through other means, including identifying women with Christ (Wall, “Our Bodies/Our Texts?”), and claiming Biblical authority (Guibbory, “The Gospel According to Aemilia”)


12 Lady Anne wasn’t granted the estate until 1643, after her uncle’s only son had died without heirs. Lewalski, “Lady of the Country House,” p. 267; D.J.H. Clifford, introduction, xi.


These are three among ten qualities of the epic that Faith identifies from Tasso’s works, all of which are adhered to by Lanyer’s poem. See Faith, “Epic Structure,” p. 106.


In her later life, Lanyer would face her own legal battle against a landlord who, she asserted, demanded unwarranted fees for his building, which she used as a school. See Susanne Woods, introduction to The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer.


See especially “To the Queenes Most Excellent Majestie,” lines 7-18. Lanyer follows dominant early modern theories of monarchy in locating the power of temporal kingship in the divine King of Heaven, but is quick to point out that Christ, as king, gave up his power. See “To the Queenes Most Excellent Majestie,” lines 43-49.

1 Samuel 13 and 19. Woods also notes that it could be a reference to Saul of Tarsus, later Paul, who presided over the martyrdom of Stephen and who was instrumental in the early oppression of the Christian church. See Woods’s unnumbered note in Lanyer, Salve Deus p. 87n.
26 See especially “Salve Deus,” lines 919-920.

27 The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 121r. Since Lanyer’s work was published in 1611, all Biblical quotations pertaining to her work are from this edition, rather than the KJV.

28 As rulers who arose during times of political disruption, the Israelite judges constitute an uncanny rendition of Schmitt’s sovereign as he who decides the exception. See Carl Schmitt, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1985).

29 James I, The True Lawe of Free Monarchies: Or, the Reiprock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a King and His Naturall Subjects (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Waldegrame, 1598).

30 The Geneva Bible, p. 121r.


32 1 Chronicles 21.

33 1 Chronicles 22:7-8; 2 Samuel 12.


35 Although common law held that married women could not pursue legal suits, city laws and loopholes in contract law often allowed married women to pursue litigation. See Mary E. Weisner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, 2nd ed., New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 37.

36 See n22 above.

On the pastoral singing contest, see McBride, “Remembering Orpheus,” p. 95.


42 See especially Wendy Miller Roberts, “Gnosis in Aemelia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*,” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 59, 2 (2005): 11-28. Roberts views Lanyer’s revaluation of knowledge has been used in part as an argument for Lanyer’s apparently Gnostic theology, an argument bolstered by her connection to Agrippa. As I see it, however, Lanyer’s theology lacks some of the more central themes of Gnostic thought, including the idea of a demiurge creator, and that a more useful and appropriate term is, therefore, “esoteric.”

43 On Lanyer, dreams, and poetic authority, see n11 above, especially Reinstra.


46 1 Kings 3:9.


50 On Lanyer and authorial power, see n10 above.


Notes to Chapter 3


2 See especially James I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies: or The Reciprock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a Free King, and His Naturall Subjectes* (Edinburgh: Printed by
Robert Waldergrave, 1598), Early English Books Online STC (2nd ed.) 14409.

3 See, for instance, George Buchanan’s reply to James I, *De Jure Regni apud Scottos, or, a Dialogue, Concerning the Due Priviledge of Government in the Kingdom of Scotland, Betwixt George Buchanan and Thomas Maitland by the Said George Buchanan; and Translated out of the Original Latine into English by Philathes* (1680), Early English Books Online, Wing B5275. This dialogue between king and subject was paralleled by Charles I and Milton one generation later. See [Charles I?], *Eikon Basilike: The Portraicture of His Sacred Majestie in Solitudes and Sufferings* (London, 1649), Early English Books Online, Wing (2nd ed.) E299A; and John Milton, *Eikonoklastes, in Answer to a Book Intitl’d Eikon Basilike, the Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in His Solitude and Suffering* (London: Printed by Thomas Newcomb, 1650), Early English Books Online, Wing (2nd ed.) M2114.


5 To my knowledge, the only sustained work on Crashaw’s political poems is Anne Baynes Coiro, “‘A Ball of Strife’: Caroline Poetry and Royal Marriage” in Thomas N. Corns (ed.), *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp. 26-46.


9 Coiro, ‘Ball of Strife’, p. 28.


13 These poems span from number 337-419 in George Walton Williams’s edition of Crashaw’s works.

14 Crashaw did not appear to write poems on the births of Prince Charles in 1630, or of
Henrietta Anne in 1644.


16 See Williams's editorial notes and introductions to these poems in Crashaw, *The Complete Poetry*, pp. 453-455 and 458-563. Especially noteworthy is "Upon the King's Coronation ('Strange Metamorphosis!')," which, Williams asserts, may date to as early as 1626, when Crashaw was fourteen years old.

17 The poem appears in the second edition of *Steps to the Temple* in 1648, but is not included in the first edition in 1646, indicating that it was most likely written between these two years. See Williams's introduction to "The Flaming Heart" in Crashaw, *The Complete Poetry*, pp. 61-2. See also Praz, *The Flaming Heart*, pp. 261-262; and Warren, *Baroque Sensibility*, pp. 141-144.

18 This tendency to fantasize over a spiritual nation is one that was common in post-Reformation England. See Christopher Hill's influential *The World Turned Upside-Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972).

19 Richard Crashaw, "The Flaming Heart" in Crashaw, *Complete Poetry*, pp. 61-65, line 46. Subsequent references to Crashaw's poetry are to this edition and will be cited paranthetically in the text by the name of the poem and line or stanza number.


22 Erica Longfellow cites "descriptions of love drawn from Hosea 1-3, the Psalms,
Ezekiel, 1 Corinthians 7, Revelation 22, Ephesians 5, and especially the Song of Songs,” all read through the lens of Ephesians 5, which “likens the love of Christ for the Church to the love of a man for his wife.” See Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), p. 2 and 19.


29 The poem was published in the first Cambridge volume congratulating the birth of the Princess Anne on 17 March 1637. Charles was born on 29 May 1630, James on 14 October 1633. See Williams’s unnumbered footnote to the poem in Crashaw, p. 565n.

Maureen Sabine notes that this identification links the pain of childbirth to the pain of

There is, of course, no way to draw a clear distinction between “Petrarchan” darts and
“mystical marriage” darts in Crashaw’s poetry. This is due in part to the fact that no one
knows for certain when Crashaw first came into contact with Teresa’s writing. Williams
notes that “Crashaw was ‘excellent’ in Spanish and Latin,” and that the *Vida* was first
published in Spanish in 1588, with English versions appearing in 1611, 1623, and 1642
(*Complete Poetry*, p. 59n7). Other critics favor later dates for Crashaw’s familiarity with
Teresa’s work, particularly since the 1642 translation of the *Vida* by Sir Toby Matthew
bears striking titular similarities to “The Flaming Heart”; it was published in Antwerp as
*The Flaming Hart or the Life of the Glorious St. Teresa.* A.F. Allison claims that
“between 1640 and 1645 his [Crashaw’s] mind and art were profoundly affected by the
mystical writings of St. Teresa.” See Allison, “Some Influences in Crashaw’s poem “On a
1947): 34-42, 34. In the end, there may be less difference between *cupidas* and *caritas*
than critics have traditionally assumed. See Thomas P. Roche, *Petrarch and the English

Shakespeare, Sonnet 20, “A woman’s face with nature’s own hand painted,” in

Crashaw, “A Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable Sainte Teresa, Foundresse
of the Reformation of the Discalced Carmelites, both Men and Women; A Woman for
Angelicall Heigth of Speculation, for Masculine Courage of Performance, More then a

35 See especially Sabine, Feminine Engendered Faith, p. 229; and Parrish, “‘O Sweet Contest,’” p. 164.

36 Richard Rambuss, Closet Devotions, p. 42.

37 Rambuss and Sabine both note Teresa’s maternity in passing. See Rambuss, Closet Devotions, p. 42; and Sabine, Feminine Engendered Faith, p. 229.

38 Coiro, “‘Ball of Strife,’” p. 27.


41 Indeed, the phrase “a better future for our children” is so ubiquitous that one early-twentieth-century independent political party in Australia simply adopted it as an appellation. “A Better Future for Our Children” did not, however, last long enough to witness the future that it lauded. See Rodney Smith, Against the Machine: Minor Parties and Independents in New South Wales 1910-2006 (Sydney: Federation Press, 2006), pp. 110.

42 Edelman, No Future, p. 3.

43 See Ernst Kantorowicz’s introduction to The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 3-23.

44 Crashaw is writing more generally here on hope. Robert Ellrodt notes that in Crashaw’s verse, hope tends to blur “the distance between the present and the future” (Seven Metaphysical Poets: A Structural Study of the Unchanging Self [Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2000], p. 146).


46 Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” p. 49.

47 On these dates, see n18 above.


49 Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” p. 5.


51 This is an usually early date; Crashaw would have been fourteen years old. See Williams’s note in Crashaw, *Complete Works*, ed. Williams, p. 453n.


53 See also Gosart (ed.), 2:333n1.

54 Williams (ed.), p. 568-569.

55 Grossart, following Crashaw’s nineteenth-century editor W. B. Turnbull, incorrectly believed the poem to mark the birth of the Princess Mary in 1631. See Grossart (ed.), 2:346n1.

56 Williams (ed.), p. 673n369. See also Grossart (ed.), 2:259n1, 2:267n.
Notes to Chapter 4


2 On political bodies and physical bodies in the Renaissance, see Susanne Scholz, *Body Narratives: Writing the Nation and Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England* (London: Macmillan, 2000).


4 Christopher Hill most usefully charts the optimism—and the politically disastrous effects that Milton later writes about—in his classic work, *World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972).


8 In this sense, I agree with Stanley Fish’s basic interpretation of *Areopagitica’s* understanding of truth as indeterminate. See Fish, “Driving from the Letter: Truth and Indeterminacy in Miton’s *Areopagitica,*” in *Re-membering Milton: Essays n the Texts and Traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York and London:}


10 John D. Schaeffer, “Metonymies We Read By: Rhetoric, Truth and the Eucharist in Milton’s Areopagitica,” Milton Quarterly 34, no. 3 (2000): 84-92, 87. Schaeffer asserts that Milton’s Eucharistic reading of publication supplies the primary force of argumentation against censorship. This reading compellingly directs criticism on Areopagitica, notoriously divided over the rationality, logic, and ethics of Milton’s argument, toward the literary forms that underline it: “Milton's success in Areopagitica depends not on the effectiveness of his argument, nor on whether the work can accommodate our own post-modernist paradigms, but on the way it successfully altered our concepts of reading, printing, and censorship. Those concepts are not drawn from the work’s argument, even though we like to think of freedom of the press as a unique contribution of Enlightenment rationality. Rather those concepts are drawn from religious metaphors, indeed the most profound religious symbol of Christianity” (p. 91).

12 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.


24 Calvin, Institutes, p. 561.


26 See n9 above. On Milton and the Eucharist, see n33 below.

27 Schwartz, Sacramental Poetics, p. 22.

28 On the historical context of Areopagitica, particularly the licensing controversy, see especially Abbe Blum, “The Author’s Authority: Areopagitica and the Labour of Licensing,” in Re-membering Milton, pp. 74-96.

29 Schaeffer, “Metonymies We Read by,” p. 89.

30 Of course, it bears acknowledging that the disputed terms of what constitutes the “fundamental” status of “brotherly” thought or ideas “not vastly disproportional” opens the possibility for justifiable concerns over the ethics of Milton’s vision. Milton’s community does not allow for Catholic thought, which lies beyond the “fundamental” Protestant vision. Furthermore, Milton’s argument may remove the boundaries of oppressive censorship from the state governance only to re-erect them within the realm of gendered and classed privilege, where a group of highly-educated, bourgeois men constitute the “brotherly” inhabitants of the writing republic. On Areopagitica and the Reformation, see William Kolbrenner, Milton’s Warring Angels: A Study of Critical Engagements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the bourgeoisie, see Francis Barker, “Areopagitica: Subjectivity and the Moment of Censorship,” in John Milton, ed. Annabel Patterson (New York: Longman, 1992), pp. 65-73.

31 On Milton’s Areopagitica and labor, see Sandra Sherman, “Printing the Mind: The Economics of Authorship in Areopagitica,” English Literary Heritage 60, no. 2 (Summer


Of some note is the gap between the apparent completion of *Paradise Lost* and its publication. For more, see especially Nicholas von Maltzahn, “The First Reception of Paradise Lost (1667),” *The Review of English Studies*, new series, 47, no. 188 (November 1996): 479-499.


John Toland, biography in *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton, both English and Latin, with some papers never before Published* (Amsterdam [London], 1698) 1:40-41.

Thomas Tomkins, *The Inconveniences of Toleration, or, An answer to a late book intituled, A proposition made to the King and Parliament for the safety and happiness of the King and kingdom* (London, 1667) p. 6.


Genesis 11:3-4.


See especially *Paradise Regained*, II.331-377.


by line number.

46 Because of this destruction, Samson Agonistes has, in recent years, been cited as a problematic example of religious violence akin to terrorism. See the essays in Michael Lieb and Albert C Labriola, eds, Milton in the Age of Fish: Essays on Authorship, Text, and Terrorism (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006). See also Feisal G. Mohamed, “Confronting Religious Violence: Milton's ‘Samson Agonistes,’” Publications of the Modern Language Association 120, no. 2 (March 2005): 327-340; and Michael Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). In recent years, critics have also been concerned with the historical and theological specificities of the poem’s context. See Joseph A. Wittreich, Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting “Samson Agonistes” (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002).


Notes to Conclusion


3 Carl Schmitt, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, trans.


5 Cavanaugh, “Church,” p. 393.


8 On New Monasticism, see Shane Claiborn The Irresistible Revolution (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

9 There is some room for debate here. New Monasticism, for instance, might be said to seek to create an alternative political society that is intimately connected to the eschatological kingdom of God. It’s focus on social justice (rather than self-identification), paired with its status as an emerging populist movement, however, make it difficult to categorize its political theology with any certainty. Liberation theology has, in its turn, been criticized by some as politics in disguise. But Cavanaugh rejects this idea, pointing out that participating in political actions is the same as constituting a polity, what he calls a “political ecclesiology.” See Cavanaugh, “Church,” p. 402.


11 Cavanaugh, “Church,” p. 403. For a longer treatise on this subject, see also Cavanaugh, Theopolitical Imagination (London and New York, T & T Clark, 2002); Oliver O’Donovan, The Desire of Nations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996);

12 Rasmussen, *Church as Polis*, p. 16-17.


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