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A glimmering light: reading, writing, mysticism and presence in the religious verse of John Donne

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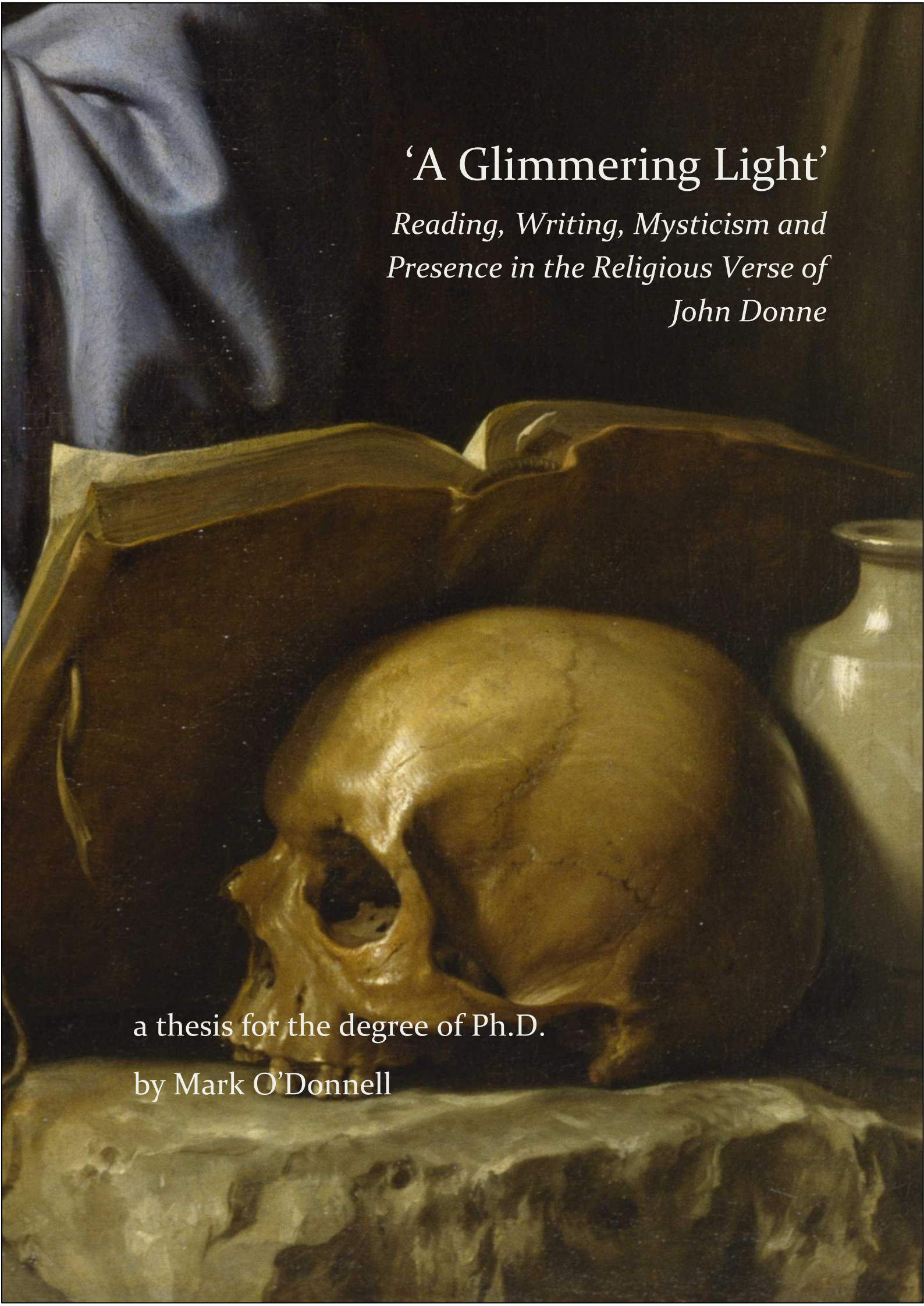

‘A Glimmering Light’

Reading, Writing, Mysticism and Presence in the Religious Verse of John Donne

a thesis for the degree of Ph.D.

by Mark O’Donnell

‘A Glimmering Light’

Reading, Writing, Mysticism and Presence in the Religious Verse of John Donne

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for Dieuw

Through the veile of his flesh, Such beames he cast, as behind those clouds, they might know, there was a sunne

Lancelot Andrewes[1]

[1] *XCVI Sermons* p. 49

A Note on the Text

The typology and spelling of quoted texts have been preserved throughout. Where appropriate I have used English translations of Latin texts that were available in seventeenth-century England, e.g. Nicholas Love's translation of the *Vitae Christi* rather than Bonaventure's original (for details please see bibliography).

In cases where texts would have been read in the Latin I have used more recent academic translations. The exception to this rule is the work of Bernard of Clairvaux whose work was potentially read in the seventeenth century in both languages. As no English complete works exists, I have used a number of different translations and, where necessary, referred to the Latin in footnotes; all sources are clearly indicated in the text.

All biblical quotations are taken from the King James Bible.

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Introduction

Reading, Writing, Mysticism and Presence in the Religious Verse of John Donne

Burn with desire not so much to know as to experience

Bernard of Clairvaux[2]

This thesis is concerned with the pursuit of presence through reading. Concentrating upon a small corpus of John Donne's religious verse, I investigate its engagement with a venerable and essentially mystical tradition that sought to deliver the appropriately attentive reader directly into the presence of God.[3] At the heart of this tradition was a conception of reading as an activity whose value was fundamentally intrinsic to its pursuit; what mattered was not what a reader might derive from a text, but the more holistically registered experience of that text's reading. Striving, in the words of Saint Paul, to move from "the things that are made" to "the Godhead" itself (Romans 1:20), the monastics who pioneered these practices sought not to deduce God *from* his works, but to directly encounter him *within* their readings of them.

Written in the years leading up to Donne's ordination and professed renunciation of poetry in 1614,[4] the poems discussed in this thesis are preoccupied with both the possibilities of religious verse and its limitations. While the sheer fact of these poems' existence argues for Donne having had at least some faith in their usefulness, any such faith is consistently mixed in the texts with hesitations and disquiet. There is, therefore, a reticence in all the poems covered that questions the project to which they

[2] Taken from the first sermon of Bernard's cycle on the *Song of Songs* (translation is from Leclercq's, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* 5).

[3] Though the mystical reading approach which interests me here still retains some importance within the Catholic monastic communities where it first developed, I am principally concerned with its manifestation from the close of antiquity through to the early seventeenth century and it is consequently discussed in the past tense throughout what follows.

[4] On the express request of James I, Donne finally opted to take Holy orders in late 1614 and wrote to his friend Henry Goodyer declaring his intention to quit verse in connection with this step (Gosse ii. 68-69). Donne's professed abandonment of verse after his eventual ordination in January 1615 has not typically been taken entirely seriously (see Oliver 194), and there is clear evidence that a small number of poems were written after this date. Some of these issues will be revisited in my text.

would otherwise seem to belong. While the monastic tradition sought colloquy through reading – a direct and essentially mystical meeting with the divine – such a state is never unambiguously secured in the works I discuss. The divine's legibility is maintained – and these works may thus be seen to be *about* reading the divine – yet the monastic tradition had not restricted itself to the maintenance of reading's effectiveness. Presence in medieval monasticism was not something stated but something read, an experience involving both mental and physical components which happened to a reader in the moment of a text's unfolding. Maintaining that Donne's own verse could be utilised in this way is problematic, and, as I go on to suggest, there are reasons to believe that he himself harboured doubts in relation to the suitability of this procedure in respect to his own poems. What is much clearer, however, is that Donne never doubted his own ability to read in this manner, and it is thus with the unpacking and engineering of such apprehension that I see him to be concerned in all the verse discussed in this thesis.

My investigation begins from a point of relative confidence. Donne in *The Anniversaries* claims to have experienced the divine's "glimmering light" (FirAn 70) and sets out in his verse to reciprocally provide this experience to his readership. It is in the completion of this task, however, that I see *The Anniversaries* – and all the other works I discuss – to struggle. On the one hand, the parallels I outline between these poems and monastic practice clearly suggest Donne to have harboured what might be characterised as a *medieval* faith in reading's possibilities; on the other, however, these poems also suggest that Donne repeatedly struggles to avoid a series of more potentially *reformed* doubts regarding writing. In documenting Donne's striving to reconcile the roles of reader and writer, this thesis ultimately investigates the implications that I see these poems to hold for both religious verse more generally and for wider issues related to textual connection.

As discussed in each of my three chapters, it is Donne's authorship model which most evidently hampers his engagement with an earlier tradition. Monastic authors had typically shown scant concern for originality. Entwining scriptural quotation with the works of their predecessors, they created texts grounded within not only authorial subjectivity but a broader unbroken tradition that stretched back towards Scripture itself.[5] The contrast between this practice and Donne's largely coterie model of

[5] See Duncan Robertson's discussion in *Lectio Divina* (105), but also the whole thrust of Jean Leclercq's *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*.

authorship is stark. Donne's verse was initially read within a context of which he himself was part, a situation even more evident in regard to his religious verse, which, circulating among a tighter circle than his secular works,[6] was often personally addressed.[7] Writing for fame, but also sustenance, Donne, unlike monastic authors, had no call upon or duty of care for his readers, who, on receiving a 'Donne poem', were presented not with monasticism's timeless tradition and direct revelation, but a missive from the author himself, a known and evidently fallen hand which lacked any obvious claim to divine inspiration.[8]

While works of devotion from non-ordained sources had also been composed in the medieval period, these works typically rested on claims of revelation, or – in a more literary mode – an appeal to some form of heavenly muse.[9] None of the Donne poems discussed in this thesis fit either of these models, however, and all are thus at risk of being judged under-determined. Apparently writing under only the fiat of his own wit, Donne's ability – and even right – to produce divine verse neither was, nor is, entirely obvious. Given that the monastic tradition's concern was principally with origins (Scripture ultimately came from God), formalist arguments that demand verse be interpreted without reference to its authorship would have been beside the point for his initial readership. Whether 'John Donne' stood as a friend, a petitioner, or an (in)famous poet, he was – and still is – a figure singularly lacking the kind of divine authority which many would have sought.

Bridging the gap between Donne, a coterie poet seeking patronage, and the inspired monks of medieval practice is a challenge which looms over all the verse I

[6] The precise circulation of most Donne poems is hard to accurately recreate, but the relative dearth of surviving manuscript copies of Donne's religious poems (in comparison to the 'Songs and Sonnets') suggests they were "kept quite close" (Freiman & Marroti 73).

[7] The two Anniversary poems, openly published in 1611/1612, are the exception among Donne's work, yet their status as works explicitly commissioned by the Drury family – which Donne himself had reservations about distributing more widely – clearly places their author and initial readership into a direct relationship (these issues will be further discussed in Chapter Two). "La Corona" – it has been strongly suggested (see Novar, Gardner and Walton) – was initially addressed directly to 'Lady' Magdalen Herbert (see Chapter Three). In the case of "Goodfriday" Stubbs claims (287), following other biographers (e.g. Gosse 2.25), that the poem was first addressed to either Edward Herbert (to whom Donne was travelling on Good Friday 1613) or Henry Goodyer (whose house he had left that day at dawn).

[8] While it is true that works within the kind of the mystical tradition to which I point were also on occasion personally addressed, these works can be seen as originating from the wider monastic tradition and not purely from their addressors.

[9] The rise of lay monasticism clouds the issue of ordination, and many works related to the tradition I discuss were produced by beguines or beghards. Such works, however, typically lent on direct revelation for their fiat. It is also worth noting that, though un-ordained, many of these figures were demonstrably well versed in monastic writers and practices and composed their texts within a pre-existing tradition (see, for example, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Hadewijch of Antwerp).

discuss in this thesis, and it is in this context that I frame these poems as being at their most reformed. Working without either anonymity or the fiat that ordination would have traditionally provided, the switch from *reading the divine* to *writing divinity* requires Donne to fundamentally question his procedures, and – to an increasing extent in each of my three chapters – reassess his own authorial relationship with both Christ and his readership.

What Follows: Presence Lost, Sought and Reformed

Chapter One is a Preamble that presents in more detail the root reading tradition to which I refer throughout. Though some of this material has already been linked to Donne by those who have written on the importance of affectivity and physicality in the early modern period, my focus does not map these concerns. It is not the potential theological role of materiality that forms my core interest, but the way in which the monastic tradition involved both material and intellectual concerns in its experiential conception of reading. Uniting physical and non-physical factors in an essentially phenomenological species of apprehension, readers sought to encounter divine presence within the moment of their reading performance. Having provided an outline of this tradition, I proceed in Chapter One to trace its development through the later middle ages and into the early seventeenth century.

In order to delimitate precisely what I am, and am not, discussing in the chapters which follow, I also reflect in the Preamble on an alternative reading approach that was gaining currency at the time of Donne's writing. While monastics within the mystical tradition had sought divine presence by 'reading to experience', religious devotees in the early seventeenth century were increasingly 'reading for knowledge', a non-mystical approach to texts which was more in sympathy with a number of other Reformation themes. Discussing and delineating these two approaches serves to bring monastic reading techniques into sharper focus, and also helps to highlight the frictions which I go on to illustrate in Donne's own verse.

Chapter Two, Presence Lost, focuses upon *The Anniversaries*, two poems written in commemoration of Elizabeth Drury – the teenage daughter of Donne's then patron. I take *The Anniversaries* to be texts which describe an attempt in the manner of the aforementioned monastic tradition to immanently detect the divine as it persists in Creation. Having apparently read the world in this way, I see Donne, however, to

struggle to recount the fundamentally non-propositional nature of what he has read. Presence, at the point of *The Anniversaries* composition, is lost, and, though Donne tries to recapture its distinctive essence in his verse, it is ultimately unclear whether it can be re-presented at the remove of the poems' past tense.

These issues are further addressed in Chapter Three, Presence Sought, which discusses the sonnet cycle "La Corona" against the background of both medieval passion poetry and the longer, but clearly related genre, of the life of Christ. Strongly linked to the reading techniques of the monastic tradition from which they emerged, both these genres emphasised God's direct expression in the Incarnation in the hope that readers would perform the texts as their own discourse and experience divine presence in the moment of their reading. It is with such a feat that I suggest "La Corona" to be engaged. Downplaying his own authorship in order to aggrandise read performance, Donne hopes that his reader will complete the poem and experience divine presence. While this technique potentially avoids some of the concerns regarding the mediation of the divine which are discussed in Chapter Two, Donne – afflicted by melancholy and lacking the anonymity upon which the tradition had relied – ultimately struggles to prevent himself from becoming the cycle's object of attention. Questions thus remain as to the whether the work can be seen as a success in its own terms.

Donne's doubts regarding divine mediation peak in my fourth and final chapter, Presence Reformed. This chapter focuses on "Goodfriday, 1613 Riding Westwards", a poem which thematically and structurally echoes the medieval works already discussed. In "Goodfriday", however, Donne makes no effort to occlude his own authorship and apparently pulls back from the project of capturing the divine. Noting the manner in which the medieval tradition closely maps the observations of more recent lyric theory, I suggest that "Goodfriday" harnesses the monastic tradition's methods yet shifts its central presumptions and ultimately aspires to present mundane, rather than divine, authorship. Acknowledging his fallen position, Donne, I argue, abandons divine mediation and instead projects his sinful self towards an audience whose experiential reading method – in as far as it is scripted by Donne – still utilises earlier, and potentially mystical, poetic practices.

Chapter 1
Preamble
Medieval Mysticism and 'Reading to Experience'

Prepare Your Jaws!

Bernard of Clairvaux[10]

The procedures in which I am interested sprung from a reading attitude which aimed to move from an exposure to God's works – Scripture, the Incarnation and Creation itself – to the experiencing of God's actual presence as those works' indwelling author. Mystical in that its goal was the attainment of actual divine presence,[11] this procedure was also empirical in that it was the mystics' sensory experience that facilitated their meditative ascent. Such positive, or more properly *cataphatic*,[12] mystical approaches developed throughout the Middle Ages in contra-distinction to a contrasting set of negative or *apophatic* procedures that were also largely pioneered in monastic settings. While cataphatic mysticism has been the subject of more recent historical study (particularly in the wake of Carline Bynum Walker's work, to which I turn to at points throughout), it is apophatic practices which have come to dominate popular conceptions of mystical thought, with the influence of John of the Cross, the interest of authors such as Heidegger and Derrida, and perceived similarities with transcendental meditation all serving to stimulate theological, philosophical and more general interest.[13] Entirely eschewing the empirical to focus wholly upon the otherness of the

[10] "*Parate fauces*"; taken from the opening section of the first of Bernard of Clairvaux's eighty six sermons on the *Song of Songs*. The translation is from Robertson's *Lectio Divina* (180).
[11] Multiple definitions of Christian mysticism exist, but most are anchored in the notion of a direct experience of divine presence. See, for example, the broader definition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.
[12] While the term 'cataphatic' is ancient Greek in origin and was known in the period, it was not necessarily used by these meditative writers themselves, many of whom were less philosophically rigorous than their apophatic counterparts. As such, it does not explicitly feature in the texts substantively discussed in this thesis, even though all of these texts could now be un-controversially described as being broadly within the cataphatic tradition.
[13] This bias is illustrated by the presence of 'apophatic' as a headword in the most recent editions of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* and the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, as well as in the

divine, the adherents of apophatic mysticism also aimed for a direct encounter with God, yet sought this encounter by stripping away the evident world and focusing on God via a process of negation.[14] Whereas apophatic mysticism was thus negative in that it rejected the efficacy of the known and sought God wholly through this rejection, cataphatic mysticism was positive in that it built upon the known in its efforts to reach divinity. A major cataphatic mode of reaching that divinity was a mode of reading: the so-called *lectio divina*.

(i.) *Lectio Divina*

Recent studies of cataphatic practice in the early modern period (discussed in more detail below), have typically sprung from discussions of late-medieval affectivity. The precise strain of cataphatic mysticism which interests me in this thesis, however, revolves around experience, rather than physicality, and has been most commonly discussed in the context of monastic *lectio divina* or 'divine reading'.[15] Aiming to encounter, albeit fleetingly, the presence of the *Word* in the here and now of their own reading experience, the practitioners of *lectio divina* sought – in the enigmatic words of the fifth-century monk John Cassian – to glimpse "the face of Scripture" (qtd. Robertson 85) within their reading practice. This goal, as the influential twentieth-century theologian Henri de Lubac makes clear, involved viewing scriptural texts to be not only divinely inspired, but also divinely sustained:

> [Scripture] is not merely divinely guaranteed. It is divinely true. The Spirit did not merely dictate it. The Spirit immured himself in it, as it were. He lives in it. His breath animates it still.

Encyclopaedia Britannica. Such general curiosity has been rarer in respect to cataphatic mysticism, which, outside of the monastic circles where it was first practised and codified, is now predominantly treated as a historical phenomenon. It is covered in none of the reference sources above, featuring only in the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages*, whose article it shares with a discussion of apophatic meditation.

[14] Names most frequently associated with this procedure are Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross (McGinn 2017 267-269). Truly elucidating this process briefly is hard – the aim was to somehow transcend earthly conceptions through their negation. Focusing on what God was not was thought somehow capable of awarding a glimpse of the divine in terms which would transcend human imagining.

[15] Most influential in respect to this thesis have been Duncan Robertson's *Lectio Divina: the medieval experience of reading* (2011) and Jean Leclercq's classic survey of monasticism *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (first published 1957). The picture of medieval practice in this thesis also owes a great deal to works by Bernard McGinn, Gordon Rudy and Michelle Karnes.

(qtd. Robertson 38)[16].

Understanding the vital force with which Scripture had been first issued to be both retained and available, readers read in the hope of capturing this illocutionary charge.

As Scripture's meaning was sought not in abstraction from but intrinsically within the experience of its reading, monks emphasised the repetitive vocalisation of biblical texts (*meditatio*). This process granted these texts both extension in time and a measure of physicality. Embodying reading in this way enabled the experiences and responses of the reading reader – both mental and physical – to assume a form of hermeneutic role whose aim was less to identify Scripture's meaning than to encounter that meaning in the moment of its reception. It is thus that Jean Leclercq,[17] in his classic study *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (first published in French in 1957), frames such *meditatio* as aiming to "taste" Scripture:

> To meditate is to attach oneself closely to the sentence being recited and weigh all its words in order to sound the depths of their full meaning. It means assimilating the content of a text by means of a kind of mastication which releases its full flavor. It means, as St. Augustine, St. Gregory, John of Fécamp and others say in an untranslatable expression, to taste it with the *palatum cordis* [with the palate of the heart].
>
> (Leclercq 73)[18]

Vocalisation lent heft and form to a sentence, allowing it to be weighed, chewed, and, ultimately, savoured in order that a meditant might "sound the depths" of its full meaning. While the physicality of this description immediately invites metaphorical appreciation, such an interpretation risks neglecting the embodied nature of the practice described. The verbs 'weigh' and 'sound' are commonly used figuratively in the sense of 'understand', yet they here occur in the context of a physical process – the vocalised repetition of a text – rather than an exclusively mental act. Leclercq's

[16] Henri De Lubac, one of the twentieth century's most prominent Catholic theologians, wrote as both a historian and a believer and an official: he was a cardinal. While, as his tense use suggests, he subscribed to the sentiment expressed and saw the tradition as continuing, the quote derives from his work on the monastic reading tradition from antiquity onwards and represents a view both ancient and thoroughly orthodox from both a theological and an historical position. I have preferred Robertson's translation to Sebanc's here (see also De Lubac 82), as it better preserves De Lubac's original tense usage in the final sentence: "Son souffle l'anime toujours" (1.128 of the original French edition).

[17] The situation of Leclercq is in many ways similar to that of his contemporary De Lubac (see note 16); while he seeks to explicate *Lectio Divina* in *The Love of Learning*, as an ordained Benedictine monk he as often writes as if he himself were advocating, or even practising, such a procedure.

[18] The square brackets represent Robertson's gloss from *Lectio Divina* (8). Leclercq's original French preserves the Latin unglossed.

mentions of "meaning" and the "content of a text" hint towards abstracted cognitive understanding, yet the context of physical recital holds out the prospect of preserving a more literal understanding of terms such as *taste*. Accordingly, though language related to meaning and measurement is deployed in the above passage, it is unclear precisely where any line between the literal and the figurative should be drawn. The search for "full meaning" that Leclercq describes is inextricably linked to a search for "full flavor", with both searches pursued through the vocalised repetition of the text at hand.

This characteristic ambiguity runs unresolved through many works on, and in, the monastic reading tradition,[19] and echoes the recently much discussed proximity of the physical and the mental in the medieval period. The heart, the organ mentioned by Leclercq above, was commonly held in the period to act as both the seat of the affections and the intellect, and, as such, tasting with its palate could naturally stimulate both.[20] Through their reading, monks sought an experience in which the physical and intellectual were integrated, and it is thus neither straight-forward nor appropriate to strictly delineate this experience's parts. Merging and blurring boundaries that are now seen as more distinct, monastic reading was inherently, and simultaneously, concerned with both the physical and the intellectual.

Given the importance of *meditatio*, *s*criptural performance and scriptural reception were elements of the same mystical reading activity, whose wider exegetical goal was not the abstraction of meaning from the text read, but rather the tasting of that text in the here and now of the reader's own reading experience. The ambiguous colliding of differing meanings and modes of apprehension that such tasting fostered was entirely inalienable from the reading experience of *lectio divina*, and any attempt to definitively unpack 'tasting' as a metaphor is therefore beside the point. It is not a structural relationship between words that is at hand, but the fully integrated experience of those words as read *in situ*. Leclercq, who saw himself to be writing within the tradition he adumbrates,[21] uses the term *palatum cordis* in the above quotation in a way which is highly symptomatic of these wider aims and methods: his description of this faculty as "untranslatable" is immediately – if inadvertently – challenged by his English translator's subsequent gloss: "the palate of the heart"

[19] See also De Lubac, Robertson and Bernard McGinn's *The Growth of Mysticism*.
[20] See Manning, 'Sacred Heart and Secular Brain'.
[21] *The Love of Learning* was first given as a series of lectures to young monks, with Leclercq speaking from his position as a distinguished Benedictine.

(Robertson 8). The predicament of this allegedly untranslatable, yet evidently translated, phrase gestures towards precisely what is at stake in such reading. While, as Robertson proves, Augustine's Latin can be construed in English, it is not re-construal (the ability to preserve meaning across different languages) that is of importance to Leclercq, who refrains from translating the Church Fathers not because he is incapable of doing so, but because he has no wish to further estrange his readers from his divinely animated target texts.[22] It is not a structural relationship between words – or, in this case, between words in different languages – that is relevant in *lectio divina*, but the relationship between words and their initial, intensely vital, inscription. The medieval meditant's interest lay not with a linguistic system, but with Scripture's illocutionary force: the question asked was neither what words *mean in general*, nor what those words *had once meant*, but what *those words continue to fully mean by virtue of what they had once meant*.

(ii.) The Understanding of Personhood Involved in Cataphatic Practice

The medieval belief in the efficacy of cataphatic meditative practice was strongly wedded to a deeply pre-Cartesian understanding of both the world and the human person. The breadth of the medieval period makes the characterisation of a single detailed paradigm impossible, yet, if there is a dichotomy running through the material upon which this thesis is based, it is derived from a separation between God and man – instigated by the Fall – not an elementary distinction between body and soul. It is true that all orthodox Christian positions in the Middle-Ages were in some sense dualist, yet the manner of dualism implied – particularly in monastic contexts – perfectly mapped neither Neo-Platonic models nor a Cartesian division of body and mind. This is neither to deny Neo-Platonic influence, nor to deny that man was seen as possessing both material and immaterial parts – for the Christian, man was clearly an amalgam of both body and soul – but simply to stress that these parts were not necessarily situated at a fundamental remove.

From the late twelfth century onwards, the proximity of body and soul was given a theoretical basis by the re-discovery of Aristotle in the Christian west and the subsequent reassessment of Greek thought that took place in scholastic circles.

[22] Robertson has nothing to say about his added gloss, which is not repeated in Leclercq's original French. I would suggest that either Robertson, or his editor, felt unable to assume the reader's knowledge of Latin upon which Leclercq implicitly relies.

Aquinas' project of reconciling Aristotelianism with Christianity led to a more definitive rejection of Platonism and the subsequent adoption of *hylomorphism*: the notion that all substances consist of two indivisible components, matter and form. In contrast to more Neo-Platonic metaphysics, such Aristotelian substance ontology denied the existence of form outside of matter and maintained that qualities inhered within substances themselves, not within a separate supra-corporeal realm. The effect of this understanding upon conceptions of the human person was to closely bind man's parts and award the soul, in Aquinas' words, a "borderline"[23] position between spiritual and material existence. This view remained dualistic in so far as it stipulated the existence of the material and the immaterial, but ultimately offered a unitive account of man's being. Characterising this picture, Fiona Somerset has recently described the affections, bodily sensation and the soul as being "deeply mutually enmeshed" (294) throughout the later Middle Ages and further suggests that even in those authors who created taxonomies dividing these aspects, their functioning remained "radically interactive" (294). It is this interactivity that allows the overlapping of bodily, intellectual and affective elements within a procedure whose focus upon divine presence ensured its mystical status.

The relevance to meditative reading of this more integrated conception of personhood becomes explicit in the notion of spiritual sensing, an idea which suggested that the divine could be 'sensed' in a way that bore some manner of relation to sensing as conventionally understood. The spiritual senses, which are directly equitable with the *palatum cordis* mentioned by Leclercq above, were subject to varying conceptions throughout the period and their subsequent understanding has also varied. While some framed the link between spiritual and physical sensing as primarily one of analogy,[24] many authorities – I go on to discuss Bernard of Clairvaux at more length below – were much more explicit in maintaining that man possessed a single unified sensorium which did not clearly delimitate physicality and spirituality. Under such integrated accounts, the difference between physical and spiritual sensing

[23] This terminology comes directly from Aquinas' *Disputed Questions on the Soul* as quoted in Kretzmann (136).

[24] This would appear to be the case in Origen's deeply Neo-Platonic understanding, for example. Origen's work survives in a piecemeal fashion, however, and deciphering his thought on the matter has caused some debate among his interpreters. Gordon Rudy, in *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (17-32), emphasises Origen's Neo-Platonism and sees the relationship between the two sensoriums to be broadly analogical; Mark McInroy, in his essay 'Origen of Alexandria', is more inclined to believe, counter Rudy, that Origen's use of spiritual sensation is more literal in character and bears a closer relationship to the other senses.

was more a matter of extent than essence, with the period's integrated understanding of personhood allowing the enacting of Paul's dictum relating to the Godhead's accessibility via "the things that are made" (Rom 1:20). Man, it was claimed, could sense the divine in a manner that was at once mystical *and* specifically human. It is such spiritual sensing that is at work in the detection of presence throughout this thesis.

(iii.) The Importance of Bernard of Clairvaux

The practical manifestations of *lectio divina* are hard to trace. As a mode of reading rather than writing, the practice did not necessarily create a paper trail, and its status as an essentially mystical procedure gravely problematised any presentation of its results. Notions such as the tasting of the divine are not obviously amenable to being presented analytically and any attempt to record such experiences would create texts which were themselves estranged from the originary divine authorship that the process sought – an issue to which I return throughout this thesis.

There is, however, a broad critical consensus that *lectio divina*'s clearest, and perhaps also superlative, exposition is to be found in Bernard of Clairvaux's twelfth-century sermons on the *Song of Songs*.[25] In these texts, which were produced over a period of years, Bernard offers an in-progress reading to his audience that reflects both the possibilities and idiosyncrasies of monastic practice and exemplifies the way in which the notion of experience could encompass physicality and affect as well as intellectual cognition. As Gordon Rudy observes, for Bernard: "the sensory language of the *Song* is not simply to be explained away"; it is not language "that actually refers to the intellect", but should rather be seen as an attempt to break down barriers between the physical and the spiritual (45-46). The period's integrative conceptions of personhood thus find particular expression in Bernard: "comingled" in a "close union" body and soul form "one being" ("The Three Cominglings" 108-112), which Bernard goes on to directly link with the detection of the divine. As Rudy insists, Bernard "does not sharply divide [the human person's] spiritual and bodily aspects. His concept of the human person has dualist elements, but it is in many respects integral: the human person who loves, knows, and achieves union with God is a unified individual, soul and

[25] The importance of Bernard's sermons on the *Song* is broadly acknowledged, particularly by Leclercq, who devoted much of his life to the Saint's exposition; also see Robertson.

body" (45). Taking this position to its logical conclusion, Bernard goes as far as to exclude the soul working alone from any role in the perception of God, a prohibition which he saw as persisting even after bodily death with the beatific vision being controversially withheld until the re-integration of man's parts at the end of time. In *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, Caroline Walker Bynum acknowledges the somewhat controversial nature of this view, but, citing his sermons for the feast of All Saints, is categorical: "[for Bernard] Souls cannot receive the beatific vision until they regain their bodies at the end of time" (164). The manner of argument cited by Bynum resurfaces in Bernard's first sermon on *The Song*, which explicitly lauds the body's capabilities in respect to the perception of the divine: "only through the body does the way, the ascent to the life of blessedness, lie open to us" ("Sermon 5", Evans 226). Spiritual sensing in Bernard is thus a faculty named on account of its target rather than its nature. The detection of God involves not, as in Origen, a separate sensorium existing in a purely analogical relationship to those of the body (see note 24 above), but conventional senses being pushed to their limits in a quest for the divine.[26]

That Bernard's lauding of sensory perception occurs in a work which sought to teach monks how to read demonstrates the integrated nature of *lectio divina*. Alongside conventional interpretative tools, such as linguistic knowledge and Biblical cross-reference, Bernard's conception of personhood allows him to advocate the use of what he terms the "book of experience" while reading ("Sermon 3" Evans 221). This "book of experience" is conceived as a constantly evolving, and entirely personal, hermeneutical source which enables the reader to involve his or her own emotional responses and sensations in a search for the divine. Entering *The Song*, Bernard adopts the position of the Bride, and exegetically utilises his own real-time reading experience in an attempt to taste the book's in-dwelling authorship. Actively seeking God's active involvement in this way, Bernard's aim was not to ascertain the divine's description – he is not primarily interested in what the text is about – but was instead concerned with the divine's manifestation, an indwelling presence which, as the quote at the head of this introduction makes clear, was to be experienced rather than understood.

[26] My position on Bernard here is present in Gordon Rudy's above mentioned work, but is also visible in Bynum's *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, and is broadly supported by McGinn, in his recent essay 'Late Medieval Mystics' (2011), which stresses the difficulty of drawing any clear division between "bodily sensing" and "the inner activation of a set of purely spiritual senses" (192) in Bernard's work. While McGinn is coy about ultimately classifying Bernard's views, he explicitly characterises Bernard as a "forerunner" (191) of later mystics whom he sees as unambiguously experiencing the divine physically.

It is principally through Bernard's work that I engage with the monastic tradition in this thesis. The strength of my focus reflects a number of broadly linked factors. Though his work was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of monasticism, Bernard still exerted a profound pull on the seventeenth-century Church of England, and, more particularly, had a demonstrable – if under-investigated – influence on Donne's own theological positioning (Donne's surviving sermons refer to Bernard on 136 separate occasions).[27] This influence upon both Donne and his period more widely is discussed further below and is returned to throughout this thesis. My focus on Bernard also reflects, moreover, upon his role as an innovator whose devotional practices and example saw the production of works that were themselves envisaged as being cataphatically read. As discussed in Chapter Three, Bernard, and those who followed his example, produced texts which ultimately brought *lectio divina* into vernacular contexts. Attempting to institute their readers into real-time Gospel narratives, these texts inspired both medieval Passion poetry and the so called 'meditative lives' of Christ, a genre whose immense popularity persisted within the religious mainstream into the mid-seventeenth century. Bernard's work represents, therefore, both a millennium of accreted monastic practice, and an opening that took experiential reading practices into the less explicitly institutional settings that shaped cataphatic mystical thought into the Reformation and beyond.

A corollary effect of my emphasis on Bernard is that less space is devoted in this thesis to a number of other Christian figures – particularly (pseudo) Dionysus and Augustine – who are more typically referenced in studies of both mystical thought and John Donne.[28] It is not my intention to suggest that these figures were in any way peripheral. Dionysus' work was central to a renewal of interest in apophatic mysticism from the twelfth century onwards, with his work having had a demonstrable influence on John of the Cross – who has dominated more recent discussions of Christian mysticism. Augustine's importance to Christian theology cannot be overstated, and his specific influence on Donne has been a topic of keen interest.[29] It is the experience of cataphatic mystical reading upon which this thesis focuses, however, and it is thus to

[27] See Reeves' index. Specific allusion is made to Bernard's classic of mystical reading, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, to which I refer throughout this thesis (see for example 3:318).
[28] It is to negative theology and Dionysus that the advocates of a more 'mystical' Donne have tended to turn. Regina Mara Schwartz explicitly discusses Dionysus' influence on Donne (103) and David Marno's concept of intransitive meditative attention (10) is deeply evocative of apophatic thought.
[29] See particularly Katrin Ettenhuber's *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* and David Marno's *Death Be not Proud*.

Bernard not Augustine to whom I constantly refer throughout. Emphasising factors which are either less pronounced or absent in Augustine, materiality in Bernard's work is surrounded with a positivity that both feeds into, and stems from, his experiential emphasis. More phenomenological than neo-Platonic, Bernard integrates the intellectual and the physical in a manner to which Augustine never quite aspires.[30] Including himself in his own hermeneutic circle, Bernard emphasises that the experience of the divine in which he is interested is not to be separated from the person who has read. *The Song of Songs*, he stresses, is a work in which he, as reader, is intimately involved. It is the affinities which I see between this distinct reading attitude and Donne's verse that fuel this thesis.

Early Seventeenth-Century Meditation and 'Reading for Knowledge'

Before highlighting the persistence of monastic reading practices in the early seventeenth century, it is helpful to address a contrasting set of religious currents that have typically been more prevalent in discussions of Donne's religious verse. Introducing these currents here enables me to be precise about what exactly I am – and am not – talking about in what follows, and also helps elucidate instances where Donne's practice deviates from that of his monastic forebears. While this thesis stresses an essential continuity with medieval practice, I do not wish to suggest that the devotional trends more commonly associated with Donne are either illusory or irrelevant. It is 'reading to experience' that forms my central interest in this thesis, yet early seventeenth-century Christians were increasingly 'reading for knowledge' in devotional contexts. This distinction turns on the attitude taken towards textual usage. Those who read to experience saw reading's value to be intrinsic to its pursuit; reading for knowledge, however, viewed reading instrumentally, with value residing not in the experience of reading but in the message that reading conveyed. The growing

[30] In his intellectual biography of Bernard, Leclercq contends that the Abbot of Clairvaux's understanding of the human person was Biblical rather than Neo-Platonic (78), a distinction which seems designed to separate him from Augustine and those other early Christian sources (Dionysius and Origen, for example) who leaned heavily on Greek sources. Precisely pinning down differences between Bernard and Augustine is not my purpose here. I see any clash between the two, however, to play out at the level of tone rather than doctrine. Bernard lifts much of the negative language surrounding the body that permeates Augustine's work, as each emphasises a different aspect of Pauline theology: while Bernard looks to Paul's declaration that things unseen could be deduced from things seen (Rom. 1:20), Augustine is more inclined to point out that we necessarily saw the things of the world "as through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

importance of this fundamentally differing aim entails that Donne, to some extent, was forced to react to its precepts. It also entails, however, that subsequent critics have tended to emphasise its relevance at the expense of other factors in their readings of Donne's verse.

As I discuss below and throughout this thesis, my division between reading to experience and reading for knowledge does not explicitly follow the wider Reformation fault line between Catholicism and Protestantism. In the particular context of early seventeenth-century England, moreover, it is even hard to map where areas of difference and similarity lie. Many aspects of doctrine, and the terms used in their discussion, were fluid at the time, with Anthony Milton suggesting that the period presents "innumerable problems of definition for the historian" (10). Although it is not my aim to explicitly engage in debates over characterisation and terminology – I am not seeking to pronounce on the confessional identity of either Donne or his reading practices – it is impossible to entirely skirt issues of denominational labelling. Throughout what follows I have tried to frame my discussion broadly, making use of the term 'reformed'[31] or, where necessary, 'Protestant'.[32] In discussing the other side of the Reformation divide, I have tried to follow early seventeenth-century English usage and refer to the 'Church of Rome'. Entirely avoiding the term Catholic has proven difficult, however,[33] particularly in discussion of other authors who themselves make use of the term.[34] Other terms such as Lutheran, Calvinist, Puritan and Conformist are used only occasionally and in defined contexts.

(i.) Reading and Learning

Religious reform, scriptural translation and increasing literacy in the period all had an unavoidable impact upon textual consumption. Reformed doctrine had largely

[31] Reformed thought was not monolithic and in reflection I have not capitalised. I use the term to describe positions which are, in modern parlance, non-Catholic.
[32] Protestant is somewhat anachronistic in terms of the earlier seventeenth century (Milton 378-379 & Ryrie 4-5) – a reason why I have preferred reformed – but its usage by other writers and wider recognition in modern use makes it all but impossible to ignore. Both Milton and Ryrie use the term on the grounds of practicality.
[33] 'Catholic' with its suggestion of linkage to the early Church was a term claimed by many distinct denominations (Milton 1 & 378-379). I have used the term only where its use by other authors demands, or where it is clear that I am discussing it in its later modern sense.
[34] Similarly, in my discussion of Louis Martz and those who have commented upon his work, I have used the term Counter-Reformation.

removed institutional means of salvation, placing instead an onus on the individual believer's cultivation of a relationship with God. In the eyes of Luther, these changes required "an indissoluble connection between evangelical Christendom and education" (Schilling 373) which found its clearest expression in his call for universal literacy.[35] In England the established church acknowledged a similar need[36], with the prayer book and a series of approved sermons being designed to provide the newly reformed mainstream church with first-hand knowledge of its faith.[37] Documenting the manifestations of this growing movement for education, Alec Ryrie argues that "the didactic aspect of printed prayer – and indeed public prayer – became one of its dominant functions in this period" (223), a situation which he frames as "a dramatic reversal of the pre-Reformation pattern" (223). The Latin mass could not didactically engage with its overwhelmingly vernacular audience, as attendees were expected to partake rather than understand. This shift in prayer's function is most dramatically illustrated in Luther, who explicitly called for the funding of universal education through the suspension of monastic practices such as "indulgences, requiem masses, fraternities and more such swindles" (qtd. Schilling 373). Systems which had previously fostered involvement thus made way for a new, more strongly knowledge–based, form of worship.

In line with such institutional changes, Reformation England saw a dramatic increase – Ryrie speaks of a "torrent" (219) – in the production of pious works that directly sought to assist the lay reception of Scripture. While pre-Reformation commentaries had been monastic affairs that layered the text itself with further prayer,

[35] Luther's *To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* is seen as the key document pushing for this change (see Schilling's discussion 371).
[36] See Ryrie's discussion of the importance that religious reform placed on education in *Being Protestant* ('Literacy and Learning' 259-270).
[37] Determining precisely the point from which we can speak of a 'newly reformed Church' is perilous. Though the legislative underpinning of the established Church was Present from 1559 (the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity), as Collinson maintains, such centralised political steps did not immediately translate into change: "the Protestantization of a nation accustomed to the old ways and beliefs, had in 1559 hardly begun" ("English Reformation" 5). As Elizabeth's rule continued into the 1570s, however, what Collinson describes as "the political clout and patronage of of the Protestant elite" began to effect more concrete change as "Protestantism began to make significant headway in the localities, and in hearts and minds" (6). Questions over the extent and character of the established Church can still be raised after this date – the rise of so called avant-garde conformism under James' rule is a case in point (Milton 8-9) – yet with the ratification of the *Thirty-nine articles of Religion* by Queen and Parliament in 1571 it becomes more or less possible to trace the lines of a distinctively reformed Church whose "institutional customs and practices" would become "normative for centuries to come" (Kirby 68).

observation and Biblical cross-reference, Reformation works were often more openly didactic. Rather than elucidating Scripture for its concurrent reading, these texts sought its summation through the use of explanatory paraphrase. Works such as *The Doctrine of the Bible*, one of early seventeenth-century England's most popular texts[38], distilled Scripture in its entirety into a simpler and much more nakedly comprehensible form. The 1,533 verses of *Genesis*, for example, were condensed into eleven short pages, which – using a catechismal question and answer format – sought to inform the reader of the book's most salient content. The differences between this approach and monastic experiential reading are stark. While Cassian, for example, had called upon the devotee to read the Psalms in order to glimpse "the face of God" (see above), *The Doctrine* approaches this same material in a stridently doctrinal mode. Opening with the question: "What is the generall doctrine of the Psalms?" (65), it proceeds to neatly summarises the Psalter almost entirely without recourse to direct quotation.[39] While monks had sought Scripture's *taste*, the reformed Christians that formed the audience for works such as *The Doctrine* read principally to *know*.

(ii.) The Idea of a Distinctively Protestant Meditation

The growth of didactic reading links well with the idea that the period gave birth to its own, specifically Protestant strain of devotional activity. Barbara Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* influentially argues that it is a distinctive, and distinctively reformed, species of meditation which finds expression in the verse of Donne and his contemporaries. While this meditative scheme – like the kinds of medieval practice which interest me in this thesis – was largely based on the reading of Scripture, Lewalski draws a clear division between seventeenth-century practice and its antecedents. A dichotomy is posited between a newer reformed set of *applicative* practices and an older, and essentially traditional, *participative* model. For Lewalski, someone who participates in Scripture:

> imagines a scene vividly, as if it were taking place in his presence, analyses the subject, and stirs up emotions appropriate to the scene or event or personal spiritual condition. The typical Protestant procedure

[38] *The Doctrine* ran through more than twenty five editions between 1604 and 1640, and was far from alone in offering such material (see Ryrie 277).
[39] It is impossible to know precisely what Bernard would have made of such an attitude, but it is worth reflecting on his advice in respect to the *Song of Songs*: "Only he who sings it hears it, and he to whom it is sung" ('Sermon 1' Evans 215)

> is very nearly the reverse: instead of the application of the self to the subject, it calls for the application of the subject to the self – indeed for the subject's location in the self.
>
> (*Protestant Poetics* 149)

The central distinction in this shift is not between involvement and non-involvement – both procedures were strongly concerned with the meditant reader – but rather lies in the idea that while participation mobilises the reader in regard to the text, application utilises the text in regard to the reader. For Lewalski, Protestant meditative activity was abstractive; its aim was to ascertain what a scriptural text meant, and then to understand how this meaning was of consequence to the meditants themselves. Accordingly, while the Middle Ages had sought to engage with Scripture on an experiential level, for Lewalski the meditative exercises of a new generation of Christians were increasingly shaped by a desire for self-knowledge. The Bible was still felt to be personally addressed, yet its message was to be deduced through a cognitive meditative process. Reading itself thus became increasingly instrumental, with persisting relevance replacing indwelling presence as the procedure's ultimate goal.

The drawing of a distinction between application and participation does not coincide with any particular movement away from affectivity, even though Lewalski herself seems at points to characterise it in this way with her claim that Protestant application "did not stimulate the senses" (149). 'Applying the subject to the self', to paraphrase Lewalski, could be expected to launch a raft of affective responses, and there is ample documentary evidence that such responses were both welcomed and cultivated across the reformed spectrum.[40] The distinction I draw between 'reading to experience' and 'reading for knowledge' is similarly not one between the affections and the intellect. Under an applicative or knowledge-based paradigm, emotion could feature as a fitting reaction to a biblical message that had been applied to the self. A clear example is my discussion in Chapter Three of weeping in connection to Christ's Passion. Bishop Hall disavows any suggestion of co-suffering with Christ, but does advocate weeping to his congregation in terms of their own sin and culpability. An

[40] See particularly Ryrie on "Cultivating the Affections" (*Being Protestant* 17-20) and Susan Karant-Nunn's *The Reformation of Feeling*, which, though broadly documenting a move away from physicality in German reformed religion (see particularly her concluding remarks about the heart in reformed contexts (250)), presents neither Lutheran nor Calvinist congregations as wholly turning away from the affections. Her discussion of the use of dramatic and emotive Passion meditations by both Luther himself (79) and his followers (83-89) provides concrete examples of the continuance of notably affective practices.

identical sentiment is outlined by Karant-Nunn in a series of Lutheran divines, who made use of an almost identical language. Compassion was admonished, but the presence of self-accusation entailed that the process did not become emotionally sterile (246). Where the medieval reading tradition differs from this approach is in its treatment of emotion as an intrinsic part of an experience that sought God within its own boundaries.[41] *An applicative approach saw a cognitive state trigger an affective response; participative reading, however, did not stagger the cognitive and the affective, with both being valued as parts of a single presence seeking event.*

The emphasis on devotional pluralism found in more recent historical studies (discussed below) has tended to nuance conceptions of the Reformation in England in ways which have called the stridency of Lewalski's terminology and categories into doubt. For many critics, however, this nuance has not necessarily discredited Lewalski's basic view, which has been subsequently recast as a direction of travel that is only partially taken up by the period's poets. Particularly prevalent among those who have written on Donne, this understanding involves an acceptance of Lewalski's shift, but produces readings which place specific texts only falteringly within the movement away from participation. Michael Schoenfeldt's ""That Spectacle of too much weight": The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton" (2000) and Regina Mara Schwartz's *Sacramental Poetics At the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (2008) both adopt variations of this view. Lewalski's wider turn against meditative participation is accepted, but the completeness and strength of Donne's own support for this move is questioned, as Schoenfeldt and Schwartz document the ways in which his verse deals with a set of contrasting imperatives. Engagement with these ideas will be central to my argument in this thesis.

(iii.) The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola and the Separation of Meditation from Mysticism

[41] Meditative participation is not Lewalski's focus, and she thus devotes little space to its elucidation. While it is ceremonial participation – rather than monastic reading – which she takes to be at its heart, the reading procedures I go on to discuss are clearly implicated, particularly the re-creation and inhabiting of biblical scenes (150). There are clear grounds, therefore, to associate Lewalski's contrast between 'meditative application' and 'meditative participation' with my contrast between 'reading for knowledge' and 'reading to experience'. Lewalski picks out her contrast principally in terms of a shift from the physical to the mental. While I do not follow this position – as argued above, medieval practice integrated physical and intellectual concern – Lewalski also documents a shift away from immersive reading towards a more abstractive form of practice (149-150). I see this second shift to capture precisely the kind of movement I am trying to describe.

Critics arguing against the influence of a distinctively Protestant meditative practice on seventeenth-century verse have rarely done so with the intention of explicitly pressing the role of earlier devotional procedures. Typically, in fact, such arguments have also focussed upon meditative innovation and charted the influence of distinctly Counter-Reformation practices on seventeenth-century devotion. Though long established in early modern studies – Louis Martz's foundational *The Poetry of Meditation* was published in 1956 – this view still retains real currency, and, at points in what follows, I discuss works by Helen Brooks (1995, 2000), R.V. Young (2000), Francesca Knox Bugliani (2011) and David Marno (2016), all of whom argue for the influence of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* in England.

The specific practice around which this interest has centred is the imaginative re-enactment of Gospel scenes, a procedure which – as I discuss at length in Chapter Three – also stood at the heart of Bernardine *lectio divina*.[42] That these practices are medieval in origin has been broadly acknowledged by advocates of Counter-Reformation influence, but such acknowledgement has been consistently phrased with the caveat that these practices only reached seventeenth-century verse via the mediation of Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. The relevance of this claim to my investigation lies in the way in which Ignatius' work fundamentally changes the role of such practices: Jesuit influence, this argument runs, serves to reframe scriptural re-enactment away from a quest for presence, and towards a programme of self-examination. Meditating in the Jesuit mold involved the envisaging of one's self alongside Christ, yet this was done less to experience the Incarnation than to effect genuine personal change.

The essential aim of such meditants was the (re)alignment of the tripartite soul: the *understanding*, which processed the scene, and the *memory*, which conjured it, were brought into line with the *will*, which would itself be directed towards Christ through the correct performance of the procedure at hand. Aligning the soul in this way made the meditant "one with Christ" (Rom 6:5) and accordingly allowed for a deepening of the spiritual life that was seen to be of fundamental benefit to the meditant. Aiming to "Conquer oneself and regulate one's life" (*Exercises* 11), meditants

[42] The exception here is David Marno's work which highlights Ignatius' cultivation of 'holy attention' against a wider tradition of intransitive attention, rather than the re-creation of biblical scenes. What interests Marno is not an attentiveness *to* something (the life of Christ for example), but a more fundamental openness to the divine, which prepared the believer to be filled with God. Marno's interests mean that his work does not track the cataphatic path I follow in this thesis.

took their place at the foot of the cross, first to participate but ultimately to learn. Participation was advocated through the ancient practice of emotionally responding to Scripture, yet – in the eyes of the sources discussed in this thesis – such participation was designed to deepen an involvement which aimed for intellectual, rather than experiential, goals.

Though advocates of Jesuit and Protestant meditation are arguing from opposing sides of the Reformation divide, there are real areas of similarity in both approaches. This is particularly clear in the work of Martz's more recent interpreters, who have argued less vehemently against Lewalski's work and are much more open to notions of shared origins.[43] Francesca Bugliani, for example, reads Ignatian analysis in terms deeply redolent of Protestant application (87) and Helen Brooks explicitly draws connections between the devotional approaches of Ignatius' early followers and the *Alumbrados* (an heretical Spanish mystical movement that has often been linked to Lutheranism and Protestant meditative practice).[44] The focus on self-analysis and mental development pressed by both Reformation and Counter-Reformation meditative schemes – as well as the period's already mentioned emphasis upon didacticism – suggests that rather than identifying points of confessional division, Martz and Lewalski's respective arguments express a degree of devotional overlap. This manner of argument is fundamental to David Marno's work, which, bemoans the tendency to read Donne in purely confessional terms: "If in Martz's *Poetry of Meditation* Donne and his contemporaries appear as exercitants of Catholic spiritual meditations, in Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics* they are often reduced to spokespeople for Protestant doctrine" (31). Describing this situation as "unfortunate" he traces a path between these two writers to focus on devotional and cognitive practices that could be equally pursued under either a Catholic or Protestant paradigm.

In marking out an intellectual meditative trend in England, those who have argued for the prominence of Reformation and Counter-Reformation meditative practices have in effect separated meditation – defined as devotional self-analysis – from mysticism – defined as a quest for divine presence. This is particularly clear in Martz, who is explicit about the non-mystical nature of seventeenth-century poetry and

[43] Martz and Lewalski both to some extent pitched their work polemically against each other (see for example Martz's 'Meditation as Poetic Strategy: Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski' and Lewalski's introduction to *Protestant Poetics*).
[44] See Brooks' "'When I would not I change in vowes, and in devotione': Donne's 'Vexations' and the Ignatian Meditative Model" and Mcginn *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain 1500-1650* (46-47, 66).

draws a distinction between the Ignatian approach, as defined above, and contemplation as a fundamentally apophatic mystical practice involving the pursuit of divine presence. Martz's understanding here – as he acknowledges in the introduction to *The Poetry of Meditation* – owes a great deal to sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism, and particularly the rigorous definitions of John of the Cross, who codified apophatic practice in ways which dominated Catholic conceptions of the subject in later centuries (McGinn 2017 238). It should be noted, however, that Martz is relying upon the pre-existence of a definitional clarity which he himself elsewhere admits was largely absent in the period (13-14). The terms 'meditation' and 'contemplation' pre-dated Spanish mysticism and were often used interchangeably in both the medieval and early modern periods, with McGinn describing usage, even in the seventeenth century, as "porous" (2016 226). Though some figures undoubtedly drew typologies – Guigo II's influential *The Ladder of the Monk's* for example – these typologies often saw meditation and contemplation as related aspects of what was essentially the same practice[45], with contemplatives understood to be meditating, and successful meditants taken to be involved in contemplation. This situation is further attested to by the synonymous usage of 'meditation' and 'contemplation' in a number of the medieval works which I go on to discuss in the body of this thesis.[46]

Though the notion of an intellectually oriented meditation is questioned in many of the sources that I discuss, there remains a reluctance amongst the critics with whom I engage in this thesis to explicitly dub Donne a mystical poet. I see this reluctance as emanating from the more or less exclusive association of mysticism with apophatic practice that Martz expresses. Felicia Wright McDuffie, for example, keenly pushes for the importance of the corporeal to Donne, yet is explicit in offering a clear denial of his mystical status: "suspicious of traditional mystical experience and of the private revelations of the spiritualists of his day" Donne, she stresses, believed "that God revealed himself openly, through clear and material means" (150)[47] For McDuffie,

[45] *Meditatio* and *contemplatio* formed, alongside *lectio* and *oratio*, the four stages of *lectio divina*. Such division does not necessarily prevent these stages from being treated independently, yet, in practice they are hard to separate and a number of influential sources within the period clearly treated them as being synonymous.

[46] Nicholas Love's hugely popular English translation of the Bonaventuran *Vitae Christi* – a key text in my second and third chapters – illustrates this trend in its interchangeable use of both terms in its prefatory material (see, for example, 10-16).

[47] David Marno also issues an outright denial (200), but his discussion of intransitive attention (not attention *to* something – which would be cataphatic – but a more general receptiveness that hopes to filled by the divine) brings Donne into the vicinity of apophatic theology. There are some partial exceptions to this practice. Regina Mara Schwartz does not argue for the mysticism of Donne's religious

it would appear, "clear and material means" preclude discussion of "traditional mystical experience" and, thus, while her wider argument is to press the efficacy of the material in the sacred realm, this efficacy is not taken by her to be mystical in character. Focussing on distinctly cataphatic mystical practice, I strongly dispute this conclusion in connection to Donne. Though Donne may not fit everyone's conception of what a mystical poet should be, it is his relation to mystical practices that is at issue throughout this thesis.

Devotional Plurality and the Continuing Possibility of Mystical Reading in Seventeenth-Century England

Recent historical studies of England in the Reformation period have highlighted continuity as well as change, and particularly emphasised diversity within the reformed and Roman positions[48]. In the context of these studies, I see little justification for the imposition of a strict barrier at the Reformation which would divide the two reading approaches which I have set out above. While change was undeniably afoot in the period, such change did not, of itself, preclude experiential reading in devotional contexts.

Neither Calvin nor Luther saw their rejections of Rome as blanket disavowals of tradition, with both lionising earlier figures who they saw as echoing their own theological emphasis.[49] This tendency to look back to an earlier Church was also evident in early seventeenth-century England, which openly worked to promote extra-Biblical authority: as Lancelot Andrewes preached before the King in 1613, the English

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verse, but, citing Bernard, describes his secular works in "quasi-mystical" terms (89); she makes no links with *lectio divina*, however, and her understanding of mysticism – similarly to Marno's – is more apophatic in nature. Bernard McGinn's 2016 *Mysticism in the Reformation*, discusses the English seventeenth-century religious poets as explicitly mystical (223), but it is notable that the sources he references wrote exclusively in the first half of the twentieth century (Itrat Husain (1948) and Helen White (1936)). In his conclusion, and in specific relation to Donne, McGinn partially rows back on his previous affirmation, maintaining that while Donne may be a mystical poet, he remains a "troubling figure" who is "too complex" to fit in a conventionally mystical "straight-jacket" (228).

[48] The basic historical picture against which this thesis has been written is expressed in Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992) and Patrick Collinson's *The Reformation* (2006). In connection to the precise period in which Donne wrote, I have also taken much from Anthony Milton's *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought 1600-1640* (1996), which focuses in detail on Donne's active years in the early seventeenth century. In specific relation to the history of religious practice, I refer throughout to Alec Ryrie's *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (2013), Deborah Kuller Shuger's *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance* (1990). Both these works support the picture of continuity and change to be found in Duffy, Collinson and Milton.

[49] For McGinn, Luther "never lost his respect for Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard and some other monastic mystics" (McGinn 2015 55); he goes on to also discuss Calvin's 'respect' (56) for Bernard and Augustine.

Church was founded upon "One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period" (qtd. Shuger 15). Andrewes' expression, which actively embraces large amounts of traditional teaching, was entirely uncontroversial [50] and, by 1613, represented a well-established opinion which dated back to John Jewel's 1561 defence of the Elizabethan settlement.[51]

Though the expressions of support above are largely restricted to the early (pre-medieval) church, what Jewel describes as "ancient purity" (116) was enthusiastically added to by successive writers who expanded the boundaries of acceptability to include a wide range of medieval figures. This movement culminates in Richard Field's 1606 *Of The Church*, which claims an unbroken continuity between the Church of England and the original teachings of Christ. Field maintains that throughout the patristic and medieval periods, the western church had held a broad legitimacy. During this time, however, it had been engaged in a constant internal battle with heretical papist forces that represented an existential, although often covert, threat to its entire legitimacy. The Reformation, Field argued, equated to a rejection not of the western Church, but merely of the heretical faction which it had hitherto harboured, with the remaining Church of Rome only taking the definitive step towards error with the council of Trent.

Field's theory accordingly envisaged the Church of England as collecting the baton of Catholicism – discarded by the post-Tridentine Church of Rome – from its medieval and ancient forebears and claiming an unbroken line of descent through Luther and the Middle Ages back to the earliest days of Christianity. Popular and influential in itself (Milton 286-295), Field's work was not alone in proposing unbroken continuity, with George Carleton, Bishop of Chichester and Chaplain to the Future King Charles, developing an essentially identical lineage in his *Directions to Know the True Church*, and William Crashaw – father of Richard – claiming in *A Manuall for True Catholikes* that much of the medieval church was of a basically reformed character (see Milton 288). These lineages created a large amount of space

[50] See Milton's *Catholic and Reformed* 14-15 for a discussion of the Puritan Andrew Willet's exhortation of patristic study and for a wider discussion of the issues surrounding the discussion of the Church of England's roots (270-321).
[51] See the *Defence of the Churche of Englande*. Jewel, a notable theologian as well as a Bishop during the reign of Elizabeth, was particularly associated with arguments for continuity by his issuing of an influential challenge in 1559 to any Roman Catholic who could prove that the Church of England contradicted writings of the Church fathers (see Craig's *ODNB* article).

for early seventeenth-century writers to make use of Pre-Reformation material, even where this material lay outside of Andrewes' first "five centuries".

The early seventeenth-century reception of Bernard of Clairvaux reflects the picture above. Twenty-four separate editions of Bernard's work were openly published in England in the period,[52] and the scale of his influence is evident from John Panke's 1618 *Collectanea*, which conducts its argument for the conformity of the English Church solely through translations of the Saint's work.[53] Later sources than Bernard also held their sway in the period, and a number of late-medieval monastic works still found wide audiences. Thomas à Kempis' fifteenth century *The Imitation of Christ*, for example – a work deeply embedded in the practices of imaginative meditation – is described by Ryrie as having crossed "the Reformation barrier as if it did not exist" (Ryrie 288), and Joseph Hall's hugely influential *The Arte of Divine Meditation* (1605), begins with a statement of debt to a "namelesse monke" (The Epistle Dedicatory),[54] whom Hall cites as his primary inspiration. The devotional climate that allowed for this plurality is perhaps best captured in Alec Ryrie's more quantitative study of the period's devotional publishing. Demonstrating the many instances of overlap – and the general availability and acceptance of notionally Catholic works in the England – Ryrie is emphatic in concluding that: "Early Modern British Protestants had, for want of a better word, Catholic tastes in devotional writing" (284).

In line with the overlapping of devotional sources, there are clear suggestions that the intellectual structures which had supported the development of *lectio divina* survived, and, in some cases, even flourished within the Church establishment. Mainstream reformed theology continued to treat Scripture as something alive that would be able to physically move its readers and early Protestants lacked neither physical response nor affective passion in their devotional activities.[55] These traits were also explicitly connected to instances of devotional reading. The bishop Lewis Bayley, for example, was clear: "The books of the Bible are not 'matters of Historicall discourse', but Letters or Epistles sent downe from God out of heaven unto thee… Reade them… as if God himselfe stood by, & spake these words unto thee" (qtd. Ryrie 279). Bayley's argument here, of itself, does not directly conflate reading and presence.

[52] *Early English Books Online* lists 24 works attributed to Bernard as appearing between 1550 and 1650.
[53] Panke's only other source in this work is Gregory the Great.
[54] This figure has been identified as Jan Mombaer (also known as Jean Monbaer and Mauburnus) whose *Rosetum* first appeared in 1494 (Huntley 26).
[55] See Ryrie on the cultivation of the affections in Protestant contexts (17-27).

His “as if” adds ambiguity, and indeed Lewalski’s applicative meditative scheme also saw Scripture as being personally addressed. What Bayley illustrates, however, is the sense in which the act of scriptural reading retained a sacred character. While texts such as *The Doctrine* were being read for the extrinsic knowledge that they offered, there is clear evidence that for many the reading moment itself retained a potential importance.

The particular influence of Bernard was also strong in this area, with Lancelot Andrewes directly citing the saint in the context of his own reading procedures. In echo of Bernard, and *lectio divina* more widely, Scripture, Andrewes insists, is alive and should, accordingly, be read, not for its distillable essence, but for the plenitude of its meaning. As Deborah Kruller-Shuger argues in *Habits of Renaissance Thought* (47-63), exegesis for Andrewes is “not a question of finding the meaning but the fullness of meaning”, a “mystical density of signification” which was to be secured “non-analytically” (53). Andrewes’ procedure, which is documented extensively in many of his surviving sermons, is consequently that of George Herbert’s speaker in “The Holy Scriptures” whose stated concern in reading is less the discernment of evident structure (15-22) than to “suck ev’ry letter” to extract its “hon[e]y gain” (2). Texts for Andrewes and Herbert were not to be interrogated with pre-existing questions, but sampled experientially with a view to their ‘taste’.

For Shuger, this reading practice could be found even in what she styles as the Church’s more rationalist wing, with Richard Hooker – a normally reliable advocate for reason – ultimately arguing that man “trusts in God despite the evidence and believes ‘against all reason,’ because he ‘tastes’ God’s goodness and falls in love” (Shuger 43). This ultimately phenomenological hermeneutic, which strongly emphasises a devotee’s experience of the divine, echoes that of *lectio divina*, and is, again, particularly reminiscent of Bernard’s demand that it is experience, not knowledge, that must be engaged in a quest for God’s presence. It is this precise manner of engagement that I see in all the verse that forms the focus of my following chapters. Picking up on various facets of cataphatic reading, Donne both advocates and challenges a set of practices, which, though ancient in origin, still featured strongly in early seventeenth-century England.

Chapter 2
Presence Lost
The Anniversaries and the Reading of Creation

All things did come with voices
Thomas Traherne[56]

Donne's two "Anniversary" poems commemorate the first and second anniversaries of the death of Elizabeth Drury, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Donne's friend and patron Sir Robert Drury. Published jointly under the title *The Anniversaries* in 1612, the poems are didactic texts whose speaker directly conveys an apparently privileged knowledge of the world's past and present states. Further embellishing the poems with a vision of heaven – Elizabeth's current home – this voice claims to have experienced the divine in Creation and it is upon this experience that it rests its picture of past, present and future. It is the nature and source of the authority upon which this picture is based that forms my central concern in this chapter.

While the fiat that propels the poems' speaking voice is very much at issue in what follows, I associate the identity of this voice throughout directly with Donne himself. This assumption is strongly supported by the circumstances of *The Anniversaries*' composition. Though, almost uniquely amongst Donne's poetic output, *The Anniversaries* were published during Donne's lifetime, they originally stemmed from a coterie setting similar to that of rest of his verse. Having written explicitly for the Drury family, Donne was not just a known, but also a desired author, who had been directly engaged to write for an audience with whom he stood in a close relationship.[57]

The way in which the speaking voice presents itself within the poems does nothing to qualify this picture. The voice is authorial and makes no effort to adopt any other identity or persona. While publication, which occurred only under the initials

[56] "Dumbness" (66-67).
[57] Though the precise terms of any commission are impossible to recover, Donne's dependence on Drury's patronage in 1610-1612 is clear. He was in the full employ of Drury at the time of the poems' composition and his family had moved into a house owned by Sir Robert on Drury Lane soon after the death of Drury's daughter.

"J.D.",[58] might have altered this situation, it did little in practice to veil the works' origin, with correspondence from the time showing that significant sections of the poems' post-publication audience continued to approach the texts in the light of their knowledge of both Donne and Drury.[59] Donne wrote *The Anniversaries*, therefore, for readers whom he knew and to whom he was known, and his original and intended audience read his work in this context. Acknowledging these facts unites the issue of the speaker's fiat with the issue of Donne's own basis for writing. It is thus not the ultimate origin of *The Anniversaries* that is at hand in this chapter, but the origin of their author's claim to have experienced divine presence.

The world presented in *The Anniversaries* is a decaying carcass, which, "putrefied" (FirAn 56)[60] and "worme" riddled (SecAn 56), apparently stands beyond all hope of salvation. This picture is constantly contrasted throughout both poems, however, with a now lost vision of what this world once was. Creation, Donne tells us, was formerly alive, and – graced with every manner of perfection – exhibited "records for God" (SecAn 506) that spoke of its divine origin. At the dividing line between these two worlds stands the recently deceased Elizabeth Drury. Described throughout in exclusively superlative terms, it is Elizabeth, Donne claims, who formerly animated the world, and it is her death that has apparently precipitated the world's own.

At the heart of the epistemology that generates the above visions are two, apparently inimical, propositions. The first of these is that the current fallen world is beset by a radical inconsistency that precludes its knowing (FirAn 213, SecAn 389-400). Entirely forsaken, Donne insists that Creation lacks any foundation upon which knowledge may be based. The second proposition is that, despite this lack of consistency, the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth had been capable of disclosing the divine in a way which apparently preserved Creation's legibility. We are told, moreover, that this legibility has in some qualified sense survived Elizabeth's death, with Donne's damning criticism of Creation never quite managing to repress a subsisting fascination with material reality. On the one hand, therefore, God is entirely absent from the fallen

[58] Publication took place at Drury's behest and against Donne's wishes. In correspondence from the time, Donne describes his eventual acquiesce as being against his better judgement (see Gosse 273-277 and Stubbs 270-277).
[59] See Gosse 273-277 and Stubbs 270-277. In surviving correspondence to friends Donne bemoans the personal criticism that his work had received and worries about the potential effect of *The Anniversaries* on his other patrons.
[60] With reference to *The Anniversaries* I have used the abbreviations and line numberings of the 1995 *Variorum* edition.

world; on the other, Donne's experience of Elizabeth holds out the possibility of a continuation of divine presence.

Any contradiction between the above positions has typically been reconciled by insisting that Elizabeth, as the source of all that is positive within the poems, should be held substantively apart from the rest of fallen Creation. Readers have tended to note that, outside of their prefatory material, *The Anniversaries* never directly name their central figure, with the actual description offered being surely incompatible with any mortal fifteen-year-old girl.[61] 'She', the "First Anniversary" claims, was the "measure of all symmetree" (310) and someone in whom all beauties "voluntary grew" (362); her breath bestowed perfume on the Spice Islands and her eyes gilded the West Indies (229-234). Additionally, as the origin of "Magnetique force" (221), we are told that she formed the "compasse" to mankind (226) and was the "best, and first originall / Of all faire copies" (227-228). The "Second Anniversary" adds to this heightened description: 'She' was an "Immortal Mayd" (33) to whom paradise "adhear'd" (77), and who possessed immense intellectual gifts: having read "all libraries" (303), she had become "our best, and worthiest booke" (320) and was thus in all things "More Antidote, then all the world was ill" (378). Notwithstanding the period's – and particularly Donne's – predilection for extreme flattery,[62] the bulk of commentators from Ben Jonson onwards[63] have argued that it is simply not credible that the figure of the historical Elizabeth could justify the above hyperbole. Taken literally, critics have held, Elizabeth's apparent perfections place an entirely untenable weight upon the slightest of shoulders, and she must, therefore, be understood in primarily figurative terms. Read in such a way, Elizabeth in the poems becomes 'She', not a teenage girl, but a fundamentally immaterial Platonic-type form or theological concept that has enabled Donne to circumvent his fallen state and allowed him to glimpse what he describes as "records for God" (SecAn 506) in Creation.

The argument that I make in this chapter runs contrary to such readings. Pointing to the monastic reading practices outlined in my introduction, I maintain that

[61] The *Variorum* gives a full account of such readings (293-317). Notable examples are Patrides (*Variorum* 315) and Jordan (*Variorum* 316-317) who view 'She' as a manner of Platonic form, and Martz and Lewalski who take the girl at the poem's heart to symbolise the redeemed image of God in man (*Variorum* 295). I return to some of these arguments in my text.

[62] The addresses and dedications of many early-modern works demonstrate this predilection well. In the particular case of Donne, extravagantly fulsome praise is evident in many of his verse letters, especially those written to the noble ladies whose patronage he actively cultivated (see Adlington's "Donne's Desperate Ambition?" for a general discussion of this topic).

[63] Jonson felt Donne's characterisation would be more fitting of the Virgin Mary (*Variorum* 240).

Donne adopts a cataphatic mystical approach to Creation which enables him to reconcile the Fall and Elizabeth, without suggesting that she herself substantively differs from the rest of the world. What is pertinent, I suggest, is not what Donne reads, but how this reading has been produced. Fixing his sights not upon an intellectual construct, but traces of divine presence as registered in an essentially 'normal' 15-year-old girl, Donne does not construct an argument for God, but rather locates him immanently within his experience of Elizabeth.

It is not only the manner in which Donne claims to have read Creation which occupies me in this chapter. Donne's declared didactic aim of outlining the world's present and past states involves him in the reciprocal presentation of that which he claims to have read. Propositionally conveying his former experience of the world does not sit comfortably, however, with the sceptical critique that his search for immanence has been designed to negotiate. Distinctively lost by the time of its composition, presence in *The Anniversaries* is an exclusively past-tense phenomenon, with the "records for God" (SecAn 506), to which Donne would point, subsisting at his time of writing as an only "glimmering light" (FirAn 70). *While Donne claims in the poems that God has been immanently experienced, it is far from clear that immanence recounted at writing's remove remains immanent.*

In the final part of this chapter, my focus shifts entirely to Donne's attempt to overcome these restrictions and write the divinity which he claims to have read in Elizabeth. I argue that the *Anniversaries*' generative epistemology – the means by which Donne has read the world – is ultimately related to the epistemology upon which he strives to base their legibility. While ambiguity remains as to whether Donne has really escaped his own scepticism, there is, I will argue, a closing sense in both poems that successfully reading the world and successfully reading *The Anniversaries* are activities that share a fundamental sympathy.

The Rejection of the World and a Continuing Attachment to Materiality

From Coleridge's declaration that *The Anniversaries* are the "strangest caprices of genius on record" (*Variorum* 241) to their more recent evaluations as "precarious" (Patrides 108), "jagged" (Sherwood 92) and "bracingly unusual" (Targoff 80), the poems have largely eluded easy characterisation. Strictly in terms of their

epistemology, however, a broad and, until recently, broadly unchallenged consensus has been maintained. This understanding, which emerges strongly from the 1995 *Variorum* edition of the poems, treats Donne's reading of the world as having only been negatively successful. Faced with a "spent" earth (FirAn 209) whose very "frame" is "Quite out of ioynt" (FirAn 191-192), Donne is felt to abandon his empirical anatomy in frustration and replace it with some less material – and hence more appropriate – form of inquiry. *Donne is taken to have learnt from looking at the world, but what he has learnt is that the world itself can produce no learning*.

The Anniversaries' bipartite structure has been seen to broadly support this position. The anatomy of the world that fills much of the first poem is less prevalent in the second, which focuses instead upon the attempt of Donne's soul to follow Elizabeth to heaven. Such weighting has encouraged readers to frame the poems within the ancient *contemptus mundi* tradition. The first poem's intrinsically flawed, wholly debased and essentially material world is pitted against the entirely perfect, effusively lauded and essentially immaterial heaven of the second poem.

In contrast to such readings, I argue throughout this chapter that the reading project Donne recounts in *The Anniversaries* has been productively successful. While both poems challenge certain uses of the material world, I see neither to conclusively rule-out sensory discovery, and I accordingly would situate them at a remove from the *contemptus mundi* tradition. Rejecting stronger conceptions of dualism, *The Anniversaries* criticise empiricism yet advocate an epistemology which remains fundamentally empirical.

(i.) *The Anniversaries*' Continuing Attachment to Material Creation

In line with the more recent emphasis upon materiality in early modern studies, a number of critics have begun to dispute the broad consensus surrounding *The Anniversaries* and highlighted the ways in which the poems refuse to entirely desert material Creation. Though these critics acknowledge that both poems are, in parts, inescapably damning of physicality, they note that *The Anniversaries* are ultimately much more equivocal works, whose central voice – apparently irrespective of its reservations – remains stubbornly wedded to its material condition.

These arguments are foreshadowed in Terry G. Sherwood's book-length study of Donne, *Fulfilling The Circle* (1984). Though Sherwood largely retains the dualism

of earlier accounts: "the poem recommends memory of Elizabeth Drury and ignorance of the world as requisites to the fulfilling progress towards joy" (88), he also draws attention to the difficulties attached to this view. While Elizabeth's example is "spiritual", she is, he notes, clearly "invested in a material world" which is itself presented as "an important element in the reader's spiritual diet" (90). In line with this observation, Sherwood criticises earlier readings of the poems, which he sees to "underestimate" (93) the body's pull on the soul and unfairly downplay the scope of materiality within the poems. Highlighting what he terms *The Anniversaries*' "countertension" (93), he notes that, while the "Second Anniversary" in particular focuses upon the soul and its heavenly journey, the soul actually described is surprisingly reluctant to abandon its material home. Heaven is effusively lauded, yet the poem constantly returns to corporeal affairs, as Donne's soul – despite repeated pleading (see for example SecAn 321, 339 & 435) – stubbornly refuses to leave its bodily situation. This "gravitational pull" (93), Sherwood maintains, prevents any outright rejection of the body in *The Anniversaries*, and injects an ambiguity into the text which he takes to be typical of Donne's work more widely.

It is this ambiguity that is central to Ramie Targoff's reading of the poems. Challenging what she sees as the Platonic consensus in *The Anniversaries*' reception (*John Donne: Body and Soul* 81), Targoff situates the text within a contrasting Aristotelian substance ontology and claims that the "Second Anniversary" in particular "does not ultimately celebrate the soul's ascension", but instead "portrays the unnaturalness of separating the two parts of the self" (88). Positing a profoundly integrated understanding of personhood, very much in line with that forwarded in my introduction, Targoff explicates what Sherwood terms as *The Anniversaries*' "gravitational pull" by pointing to the inextricably linked nature of body and soul in the poems. As Targoff notes, the soul in *The Anniversaries* is not one pole of a dualistic self, but a fundamentally integrative mechanism, and it is in this sense that its heavenward flight in the "Second Anniversary" is begun:

> But ere shee [the speaker's soul] can consider how shee went,
> At once is at, and through the Firmament.
> And as these stars were but so many beades
> Strunge on one string, speed vndistinguish'd leades
> Her through those spheares, as through the beades, a string,
> Whose quicke succession makes it still one thing:
> As doth the Pith, which, least our Bodies slacke,

> Strings fast the little bones of necke, and backe;
> So by the soule doth death string Heauen and Earth,
>
> (SecAn 205-213)

Upon release from the body, the soul flies upward not by way of escape, but to "string Heauen and Earth" and fundamentally bridge the primary Christian dualism between Creation and creator. Elsewhere in the poems described as the world's "subtilst immateriall parts" (FirAn 247), souls in *The Anniversaries*, Targoff maintains, are delicately poised between the physical and non-physical, a station which is much more similar to their borderline status in Aquinas and Bernard (see Chapter One) than Descartes' later conception of an independent "thinking thing" (*Meditations* 49). Situated within Creation and often described, as above, in highly physical terms, the soul is not aligned with one half of a material/immaterial division, but rather shares in both states in order to facilitate their mutual recognition.

Targoff's call for a more integrated account of body and soul does serve to explain much of the poems' attachment to an allegedly discarded materiality. The soul's ability to unite the material with the divine does not of itself redeem the world, however, and her more positive vision of physicality clashes strongly with elements of the critique issued in the "First Anniversary". Acknowledging this issue in her own conclusion, Targoff moves to prioritise the second poem over the first and glosses any contradiction by suggesting that *The Anniversaries* as a whole carry an agenda other than that which they most obviously profess. While their "ostensible purpose" (103) is to advocate a Platonic-type dualism, this purpose, Targoff argues, only "masks what [Donne] actually wants to represent" (103). Framing the poems as texts which have, in some sense, "slipped" their author's conscious control (103), she claims that while they pay lip-service to a then fashionable dualism, they ultimately betray Donne's own semi-cloaked attachment to matter and enduring belief in the essential unity of body and soul (102).

While the general tenor of Targoff's work flows through my own argument in this chapter, I do not follow her positioning of *The Anniversaries* as conflicted texts. For Targoff the poems provide "Donne's most significant challenge to a philosophical and theological dualism that unequivocally privileges the spiritual over the material self" (103). Though this may well be the case, the question is where exactly this "challenge" lies. Though the model of self Targoff identifies clearly clashes with both Plato and Descartes, its challenge to the understandings of personhood actually

espoused in the period is much less clear. Targoff rationalises the poems' vagaries by suggesting veiled intention, yet I detect no reaction to dualism, semi-conscious or otherwise, in the poems' understanding of man's composition. *The Anniversaries*' conception of body and soul is a consistently maintained element of a distinctly pre-Cartesian world view, which Donne would have felt little need to conceal.

The same material covered by Targoff also emerges in Felecia Wright McDuffie's *To Our Bodies Turn We Then* (2007), which similarly highlights a thriving respect for matter in both Donne and other Reformation sources. Unlike Targoff, however, McDuffie's concern is less the disputation of dualism than the elucidation of the Fall. As such, her account begins not with discussions of personhood, but by drawing attention to the ancient distinction between a neo-Platonic fall *into* the body and a much more explicitly Biblical fall *of* the body. Reading Genesis in a more figurative manner, the fall *into* the body links imperfection directly to the assumption of matter, and suggests, therefore, that material man is in some sense intrinsically sinful; the fall *of* the body, on the other hand, follows the Biblical creation narrative more closely and maintains that material man was created good and only subsequently fell, a shift of status which holds sin – not matter – to be responsible for our degraded state.[64] McDuffie convincingly argues that Donne, in all his works, strongly propounds a biblical, and potentially Aristotelian, substance ontology that specifically allows for matter's perfection: "[Donne] clearly subordinates Platonic elements in his representations of the fallen body to those which are clearly biblical… both the human body and soul are originally innocent… and both are intended for heaven" (32-33).

The consequence for McDuffie of Donne's emphasis is the wide efficacy that it potentially grants to materiality. An essentially "good" (Gen. 1:31) creation of God, matter is fundamentally legible and thus may, for the suitably attuned observer, form an avenue whereby divinity may be approached. Taking this understanding to be an expression of Romans 1:20, "[…] the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead", McDuffie places matter's readability at the heart of both Donne's theology and his poetry, with *The Anniversaries* forming a particularly prominent example (105-127). Pointing to ancient philosophy, the hermetic medieval tradition and hints from Donne's own sermons, McDuffie casts the world in Donne's imagining

[64] Though both positions have been expressed to some extent within Christianity since its inception, the strongly Platonic fall *into* the body was most readily amenable to heretical forms of Gnosticism.

as being wholly pervaded by a system of divinely keyed correspondences which enabled an essentially deductive movement between microcosm to macrocosm. Man, in Paul's terms, progresses from the "seen" to the "unseen" on the grounds that the former essentially pre-figures the latter. God, in McDuffie's reading of Donne, "figures forth his existence and attributes in the more poetic sense of representing them through the signs of the world and the body" (113). Divinely patterned in this way, Creation becomes legible in a manner which leads directly to the "Godhead" itself.

In this light, McDuffie casts *The Anniversaries* not as examples of the *contemptus mundi* tradition, but as advocates for the epistemological possibilities of matter. Elizabeth, she argues, stands as a microcosm of Edenic perfection from which we are invited to enter the wider macrocosm of the non-fallen world and, potentially, God himself. For McDuffie, it is thus not Sherwood's "gravitational force" which constantly returns the poems to earth, but epistemological necessity. God's persisting material traces allow – or at least allowed (Elizabeth is dead) – Donne to work from this world to the next, an understanding which enables her to frame *The Anniversaries* in an ultimately successful light. The poems for McDuffie thus stake out a system whereby we may deductively 'read for knowledge': careful observation enables the discovery of revealed truth, as correspondence and symbol lead incrementally to the divine. Creation, McDuffie maintains, ultimately explains itself via the markers which its author has distributed for that very purpose.

Much like Targoff, however, McDuffie makes little space for the "First Anniversary" in her work. This lacuna is particularly problematic for her reading, however, as it is precisely McDuffie' deductive epistemology that I see to be the subject of the first poem's critique. Any movement between microcosm and macrocosm is fundamentally problematised in the "First Anniversary" which undermines the very notion upon which such movement is based. Persisting similarity, the principle that for McDuffie allows for the divine to be approached, forms the poem's primary aim: correspondence (SecAn 399-400), coherence (FirAn 213) and consistency (FirAn 347) – all qualities presumably required of a legible world, or any other system of signs – are explicitly highlighted as the precise elements which the fallen earth lacks and it is thus hard to see how McDuffie's reading can survive in their absence.

The awareness of *The Anniversaries*' treatment of materiality that both Targoff and McDuffie bring to their readings is key to my understanding of Donne's own reading practice. Where the argument of this chapter parts from their work, however,

is in respect to the manner in which the reading of the world is felt to take place. While McDuffie's conception of Creation's legibility struggles with the first poem's approach to matter, I believe that a closer examination of the actual critique in the "First Anniversary" does leave space for the world's empirical perception. In the section below I discuss in detail *The Anniversaries*' approach to matter and seek to show how it can co-exist with a reading methodology that continues to maintain Creation's epistemological efficacy.

The Precise Nature of *The Anniversaries*' Critique of Worldly Knowledge

As noted, *The Anniversaries*' uncompromising critique of the world has been at the heart of arguments that have placed them within the *contemptus mundi* tradition. The strength of these arguments exists as a stumbling block for those who have challenged the poems' alleged dualism, with the possibilities of the body which are hinted at elsewhere in the text being apparently quashed by the fierceness of Donne's attack on existing Creation. What I understand this critique to challenge, however, is not materiality itself, but the specific method by which that Creation was increasingly being read in the seventeenth century. *The Anniversaries*' true target is not empirical method *per see*, but a particular form of *experimental* enquiry that has typically been related to the then burgeoning 'new science'. In this section, I argue that carefully recounting exactly what is, and what is not, allowed to matter in the poems opens a way of rationalising the apparently contradictory attitudes recorded by Sherwood and Targoff.

The experimental method of new science is of particular relevance to Donne in *The Anniversaries* because it shared his essential reading goal. Though science is now a secular pursuit, entirely divorced from theological claims, the deeply pious pioneers of the 'new' science were, like Donne in *The Anniversaries*, principally concerned with Creation's legibility. Inspired by the idea that the world, in the words of the botanist Henry Power, bore the "incomparable stenography of providence" (Harrison "The book of Nature" 23), its fledgling method was a self-conscious attempt to explicitly read God through the study of his works. Pointing to Paul's insistence that God himself is empirically perceptible – "clearly seen" in the things "that are made" (Romans 1:20) – men such as Francis Bacon and Robert Boyle understood their reading of the book of

nature in explicitly theological terms[65] and the movement they fomented was thus – in Cunningham's influential formulation – wholly concerned with "God's achievements, God's intentions, God's purposes, God's messages to man" (384).

While no one argued that the world was immediately transparent – all sources agreed that both it, and our means of perception, were fallen – the writers of the incipient scientific revolution believed that, with the assistance of techniques such as experiment, microscopy and dissection, creation would yield its secrets to persistent and methodical investigation. For Bacon, for example, banishment from Eden amounted to "a privation of part of the virtue of the first creation", yet such privation did not prevent man's study of what he describes as the "constant and everlasting laws, which we call Nature" (7.211-212). While God – the primary, or first, cause – had withdrawn, the secondary causes of natural law remained "next unto the senses" from where they offered "themselves to the mind of man" (3.267-268). If such secondary causes were dutifully followed, Bacon maintained, the inquiring Christian would come to see "the works of Providence" and begin to understand that "the highest link of nature's chain must needs be tied to the foot of Jupiter's chair" (3.268). The world, Bacon therefore argued, ultimately discloses its author, whose inimitable design has outlasted the Fall and remains legible through the tracing of "secondary causes".

Bacon's confidence in the ability of patient reading to yield knowledge went on to be influentially shared by Boyle, who ultimately also saw patterns in his experimental perception of the world: "The book of nature is a fine and large piece of tapestry rolled up, which we are not able to see all at once, but must be content to wait for the discovery of its beauty, and symmetry, little by little, as it gradually comes to be more and more unfolded, or displayed" (*Works* 6.796). Though perception was impaired by the Fall, diligence, Boyle believed, would ultimately be repaid as experiment carefully "unfolded" the divine. This faith in discoverable order was to some extent also visible in contemporary rationalist movements, which also framed their investigations in terms of divine legibility. Holding himself and his fellow astronomers to be "Priests of the most high God, with respect to the book of nature" (qtd. Harrison *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* 198), Johannes Kepler, for example, understood mathematical certainty as being expressed

[65] Boyle, for example, places the passage at the heart of his work, using it to fundamentally justify his own approach and, with explicit reference to Bacon, asserting its wider importance to the entire experimental method (*The Christian Virtuoso* 8).

in the movement of the heavenly bodies, with reasoned observation reflecting correctly derived theory and methodical investigation thus slowly bringing the world's God-guaranteed consistency to light.[66]

The essential aim of Bacon, Boyle and Kepler is hence broadly identical to Donne's own as he sets out to read the world (FirAn 60) and grasp "records for God" (SecAn 506) within it. Irrespective of this congruence, however, it is precisely the means by which new science pursued this goal which Donne attacks in *The Anniversaries*. While the poems clearly and directly engage with both astronomical and proto-scientific debates, they frame both mathematical astronomy and experimentalism as incapable of yielding real benefit. While Boyle, for example, was effusive about the possibilities of a method such as dissection to reveal "the inimitable workmanship of the omniscient architect" (*Works* 2.7), Donne's anatomy uncovers no such thing: the object of the "First Anniversary's" inquiry is a lifeless carcass (75 & 439) which, being lamed (238), ugly (326) and putrefying (56), is at risk of not lasting out (439) for the completion of his dissection.

It is glib scepticism which initially greets new philosophy in the "First Anniversary":

> And new Philosophy cals all in doubt,
> The Element of fire is quite put out;
> The Sunne is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit
> Can well direct him, where to looke for it.
>
> (205-208)

Contemporary challenges to the Ptolemaic model are dealt with lightly, as speculation concerning the existence of the sphere of fire is met with a pun, and we are told that both the earth and the sun – in contrast to their apparently manifest reality – are "lost" beyond the "wit" of man. The playfulness of this mocking tone proves unsustainable, however, as attention shifts in turn to the confusion that new philosophy sows:

> And freely men confesse, that this world's spent,
> When in the Planets, and the Firmament
> They seeke so many new; they see that this
> Is crumbled out againe to his Atomis.
> 'Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence gone;
> All iust supply, and all Relation[.]

[66] In the words of Harrison: "Mathematics was more than merely a framework for the construction of useful fictions to be used in calculating the positions of celestial bodies", and "mathematical astronomy could be directly mapped onto physical reality" ("The Book of Nature and Early Modern Science" 24).

(209-214)

Though empirical evidence challenges received opinion, this evidence is itself at risk of being overturned, as newly found certainty is equally fated to crumble in the face of further observation. Donne, it is important to stress, is not maintaining that empirical observation is impossible, but merely that the experimental pursuit of its readings is intrinsically flawed. Past observation cannot be relied upon to produce present truth as the procedure which has led to the discovery of new heavenly bodies is ultimately fated to call those bodies too "in doubt" (205). Accordingly, it is not empirical sense perception that is the focus of the poems' attack, but the earth's underlying consistency. *Donne's quarrel with the new science is not epistemological, but metaphysical – the problem is less our means of perception than the fallen world's fundamental inconsistency*.

While the new science of the seventeenth century acknowledged our fallen state and, in its face, counselled persistence, the speaker of *The Anniversaries* deems such persistence to be fundamentally misplaced. The experimental mind-set, Donne claims, is doomed to promote only a self-perpetuating complexity:

> We thinke the heauens enioy their Sphericall
> Their round proportion embracing all.
> But yet their various and perplexed course,
> Obseru'd in diuers ages doth enforce
> Men to finde out so many Eccentrique parts,
> Such diuers downe-right lines, such ouerthwarts,
> As disproportion that pure forme. It teares
> The Firmament in eight and fortie sheeres,
> And in those constellations there arise
> New starres, and old do vanish from our eyes[.]
>
> (251-260)

Ingenuity may be applied to amend 'scientific' models and maintain an appearance of heavenly decorum, yet these efforts only serve to perpetuate an ever increasing elaboration. The "Eccentrique parts", "diuers downe-right lines" and "ouerthwarts" of contemporary astronomy are fabrications, Donne stresses, whose imposed order will, in time, also be found wanting, as further observation generates further complexity. Mankind, Donne declares,

> [...] hath weau'd out a net, and this net throwne
> Vpon the Heauens, and now they are his owne.
> Loth to goe vp the hill, or labor thus
> To goe to heauen, we make heauen come to vs.

(279-282)

Astronomy, for Donne, is a science of domestication, yet, as the lines following this passage make clear, such domestication is futile: we may "spur" and "raine" (283) the stars, but they are, we are told, engaged in a "race" of their own, and, are thus only "diuersly content t'obey our pace" (284). For Donne, the search for order represented by the budding sciences exists primarily in the mind of man, and hence finds no counterpart in the pockmarked (300) fallen world, whose essential "proportion" (308), Donne demands, is fundamentally "dead" (306).

The conclusion of the "First Anniversary" is picked up and confirmed in the "Second Anniversary", which further links its criticism directly to experimental method:

> Be not concern'd: study not why, nor whan;
> Do not so much, as not beleeue a man.
> For though to erre, be worst, to try truths forth,
> Is far more busines, then this world is worth.
>
> (51-54)

As with the "First Anniversary", criticism here is not based on the idea that the empirical data gathered by the new scientists is wrong. Donne's complaint is rather that such data cannot persevere; trying "truths forth" does thus not even merit disbelief, as such a procedure can never lead to the form of certainty that such science seeks. Observation may be correct, but the world is unstable and observation is, hence, always only provisional.

What is equally clear, given that the passage above occurs in the midst of a reprise of the "First Anniversary's" carcass theme, is that it is the Fall which has undermined – and is continuing to undermine – the kind of patterning searched for by new science. The world's fundamental lack of stability, we are told, is entirely pervasive:

> Poore couse'ned cose'nor, that she, and that thou,
> Which did begin to loue, are neither now.
> You are both fluid, chang'd since yesterday;
> Next day repaires, (but ill) last daies decay.
> Nor are, (Although the riuer keep the name)
> Yesterdaies waters, and to daies the same.
> So flowes her face, and thine eies, neither now
> That saint, nor Pilgrime, which your louing vow

> Concernd, remaines; but whil'st you thinke you bee
> Constant, you'are howrely in inconstancee.
>
> (388-400)

The process of decay that disrupts experimental discovery afflicts the world more widely, with the Petrarchan lover confounded by the same mechanism as the star-seeking astronomer. Donne's scepticism is thus apparently complete; all the world, including its observer, is in a state of flux, which, driven by an inescapable entropy, drags everything inevitably downwards.

Were empiricism to be understood strictly in terms of new science's experimental method, it would be hard to disagree with the traditional view of *The Anniversaries*' anatomical project as a failure that leads to another type of inquiry. New science's underlying assumption that coherence has withstood the Fall forms the very basis of the poems' attack, with Donne stubbornly insistent that a world whose "whole frame" is "out of ioynt" (FirAn 191-192) necessarily resists the kind of structural explanation which it looks to provide. In order to avoid this critique, McDuffie places her understanding of *The Anniversaries*' epistemology at a remove from that of the new philosophy (147-149), yet her arguments relating to the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm are reliant upon a fundamentally similar set of processes. Though McDuffie references medieval theology rather than a secular project, the new science, as stressed above, remained a theological enterprise, which, in the first half of the seventeenth century at least, represented a continuation rather than a cessation of the tradition she highlights. While it was typically a chain of causes, not an analogy between microcosm and macrocosm, which lay at the heart of the new science, these notions were linked in many sources. As John Henry maintains, the belief that the world was empirically readable united both pioneers of experimental method and medieval practitioners of alchemy and hermeticism, who typically pointed to a "Great Chain of Being" which causally link natural phenomena to the hand of God. "The natural-magic tradition", Henry writes, "had a profound influence on the origin of modern science. [...] The leaders of the Scientific Revolution, like the magicians, developed and extended the experimental method to make it one of the most fruitful means of investigating nature" ("Magic and the Origin of Modern Science" 23).[67] An explicit example of the operative link between science and symbolically based medieval

[67] Also see Harrison's discussion of signatures in "The Book of Nature and Early Modern Science" (19-20). Though he argues that symbolic readings would fade as the seventeenth century progressed, he provides a number of examples of their continued use within experimental contexts.

readings can be found in Boyle's *Occasional Devotions* which complements a discussion of causes and natural order with a still essentially analogical understanding of Creation. "Example" and "analogy" (47), Boyle argued, would lead us:

> by the hand to the discovery of divers useful Notions, especially Practical, which else we should not take any notice of. And indeed, the World is the great Book, not so much of Nature, as of the God of Nature, which we should find ev'n crowded with instructive Lessons, if we had but the Skill, and would take the Pains, to extract and pick them out: The Creatures are the true Aegyptian Hieroglyphicks, that under the rude forms of Birds, and Beasts, &c. conceal the mysterious secrets of Knowledge, and of Piety.
>
> (47)

As this quote shows, Boyle's pioneering of the experimental method did not prevent him from seeing the world as a divinely keyed sequence of signs. While his mention of the "mysterious secrets of Knowledge" echoes a hermeticism that is now largely opposed to scientific endeavour, distinctions between such knowledge and empirical science were yet to be fully formed and the fields remained complementary for much of the seventeenth century.[68]

The notion that the microcosm could be utilised to read the macrocosm was part of an empirical project that sought to read the divine by picking up on its material traces. Though not identical to the experimentalism of new science, it similarly suggested that structures can be isolated, abstracted and reapplied to the world from which they came in a manner which renders that world comprehensible. It is to this tradition that *The Anniversaries* stand in clear contrast. All 'likeness', they hold, has been undermined by the decay that sits at the heart of worldly change, and thus any search for structure will necessarily fail to locate the divine order required for the expansion of positive knowledge. While we can, and do, perceive the world, what we see is never constant; observation may tell us something, but its lessons are at best transitory and experimental method is hence only capable of illustrating – not circumventing – our fallen state. The knowledge-seeking reading procedures that

[68] A second well known case of such merging can be found in Newton's work, where the methods and language of 'new' science are pursued in parallel to older medieval practices ("Magic and the Origin of Modern Science" 23).

would become science, *The Anniversaries* stress, do not advance our quest for knowledge, but merely serve to document the Fall.

Looking for Life in a World that is Dead

In opposition to most critical work on the poems, and in direct contrast to the sentiment of the argument above, I do not see *The Anniversaries* as abandoning their empirical reading project in the face of the world's inconsistency. While, as we have seen in the previous section, the origins of new science lay in part in the medieval traditions of reading the book of nature, these traditions were various in process and approach and need not be understood in the essentially deductive terms of secondary causes and microcosm/macrocosm distinctions. The root of the notion of 'the book of nature' originated not from a comparison between natural philosophy and reading – which it pre-dates by at least a thousand years – but a direct equivalence between Creation and Scripture. God had produced two revelatory books and both could potentially be read in similar manners.

In the extant writings of many Church Fathers, texts such as Romans 1:20[69] support an understanding of matter that leads, not to the analytical Christian science of Bacon and Boyle, but to a mystical, cataphatic method of reading. Monasticism, as already discussed above, was liable to approach Scripture in a non-instrumental fashion. Reading did not extract knowledge from texts – it did not ask nakedly what the text was about – but rather sought a wider, more embodied, form of understanding within the experience of those texts' reading. It is a process akin to this – a reading method that seeks experience, not knowledge – which surfaces in the approaches of some Church Fathers to Creation.

While perfectly consistent with Romans 1:20, the mystical conception of the world's reading finds its clearest expression in Psalm 19, a text in which the world is understood as speaking of the divine:

> The heavens declare the glory of God;
> and the firmament sheweth his handywork
> Day unto day uttereth speech,
> and night unto night sheweth knowledge.
> There is no speech nor language,

[69] Psalms 8 and 19 (see below) and Job 12:7 are commonly discussed in this context.

where their voice is not heard

(19:1-3)

Explaining mystical readings analytically is inherently difficult, yet it is clear in the above that the heavens take an active role in the revelation of God. Declaring God's glory, they possess a voice which – though conveying knowledge – is constitutive of, rather than purely derived from, language. The psalmist does not experience the stars symbolically in terms of Boyle's representational "Hieroglyphicks", but more actively, in terms of a present tense, and somehow proto-linguistic, voicing. Reading, in this sense, does not involve the pursuit of symbolic traces, but rather requires that the believer listen to a voice that still speaks to those who wish to hear.

Picking up on the sentiment of Psalm 19, "the world", Irenaeus of Lyons maintained, "manifests him who set it in order" (*Against Heresies* 114), and it is thus a search for God himself that the Christian undertakes when he turns to Creation. We do not approach the world with a series of 'why' questions, but with a hope of directly locating the divine. This aim is even more explicit in Origen, who argues first for the "spiritual" reading of Scripture and then for a similarly "spiritual" reading of the world – an equally ordered creation of God (see Benjamins 18-19). The cosmos, Origen maintains, is "a body animated by God" (qtd. Groh 25) whose principal becomes visible when "perceived spiritually" (qtd. Groh 26). The appropriate apprehension of the cosmos thus allows, not for the inference of God from his Creation, but for the actual experience of God within his Creation. As in Psalm 19, approaching the world spiritually offers the mystic not a sign that 'God was here', but a deeper sense of his remaining presence.

This kind of understanding of nature also features in the respective *Hexaemerons* of Basil and Ambrose and receives perhaps its superlative statement in Gregory the Great's treatment of Creation as a direct route to mystical experience: "All things are in the divinity, and the divinity is in all things" (qtd. Clement 59). The kind of mystical oneness that Gregory ascribes to nature and divinity awards the world a value that is experiential rather than didactic. Creation, as the many medieval writers who echo Gregory affirm, does not explain God, but, in some mystical sense, contains him.[70]

[70] Notable examples include Meister Eckhart, "all things are in God, and God is in all" (207) and Julian of Norwich, "The fulhed of joy is to beholde God in alle" (229).

None of the above is to argue that the world was not also being read for knowledge in the medieval period, yet this material illustrates that such an approach was far from inevitable. Equating Creation and Scripture, the mystically inclined sought real presence within a world which they approached not with rational deduction, but with faith and a fully acting sensorium. Saint Bonaventure, in a verse heading the second chapter of his *The Soul's Journey into God*, sets out how, alongside more symbolic associations, it is possible to sample God's indwelling presence experientially:

> Concerning the mirror of things
> Perceived through sensation,
> We can see God
> Not only through them as through his vestiges,
> But also in them
> As he is in them
> By his essence, power and presence
>
> (69)

Bonaventure does not work towards God through his "vestiges", but is firm in his maintenance that God's presence is also available directly within the world. The means by which this perception may take place are also detailed:

> Open your eyes,
> Alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips
> And apply your heart
> So that in all creatures you may
> See, hear, praise, love and worship, glorify and honour
> Your God
>
> (67-68)

The process proposed is not experimental. Creation is not seen as a system of signs that points towards God and no detailed observation takes place over time. Employing the senses spiritually, Bonaventure forwards a participative method that involves the reader in the direct apprehension of the divine. Creation, Bonaventure demands, presents God immanently as he exists within it.

(i) Experientialism and Experimentalism in Seventeenth-Century England

Specifically in connection with seventeenth-century England, the idea of the world's reading has been dominated by discussion of the new science. There are strong grounds for this emphasis. Feeling that the book of nature was ultimately more transparent than

Scripture – a belief Harrison describes as "common" ("The Book of Nature and Early Modern Science" 11) – those involved in scientific discovery tended to hold that more mystical forms of reading were simply unnecessary. Such attitudes were also shared by more rationalistic thinkers, with Kepler, for example, explicitly rejecting mystical forms of apprehension and arguing instead that "in the pages of the book of nature, we encounter the 'clearer voice' of God" (qtd. "The Book of Nature and Early Modern Science" 11).

Those still working within the analogical tradition also tended towards the view that nature's correspondences were ultimately more transparent. The seventeenth century saw the production of many popular works of extempore or occasional meditation, which avoided the detailed and obscure language of the alchemists and astrologers (see p. 49-50 above) and turned instead to a simpler set of instructional correspondences. Starting from the observation of an actual phenomenon in the world, these works extrapolated to deliver a moral or theological lesson which the meditation's author felt to be signified therein. Termed 'meditative', though not in the experiential sense discussed in my introduction, these works were fuelled more or less entirely by a mix of sign recognition and analogy. Joseph Hall's *Occasional Meditations* (1630) – one of the genre's most popular examples – illustrates their basic procedure well: Hall finds the sight of a long road (40-41) to be reminiscent of the path to salvation, a heedlessly barking dog (57-59) to show that he too complains unjustly, and the singing of birds (89-91) to put him in mind of thankful prayer. In a manner entirely typical of this genre, these scenes move from the world to divinity, yet the movement involved is *applicative* (in Lewalski's sense), with actual presence never being at issue. The world possesses an explanatory power by virtue of its authorship, yet it is not this authorship which is actually experienced, as the value of the procedure lay in the extrapolation of the moral lesson.

The experiential approach to Creation was not, however, altogether lost in the seventeenth century. There are passages in Hall's *Meditations* where instruction gives way to a sense of "wonder" (7) more evocative of divine apprehension. Looking upon "a fair prospect" (12), a "bright skie full of starres" (244) or a lily "more lovely than any earthly king" (211), Hall begins to give voice to something approaching immanence. While Hall's *Meditations* is ultimately too practical a work to dwell upon these feelings alone – Hall is always careful to draw applicative lessons from these moments of what

he describes as “exquisite contentment” (236) – these instances do point towards the continuing possibility that man could directly experience the God in Creation.

Though rare in Bacon, Boyle and Hall, moments of immanence feature much more prominently in the period’s verse. Works by Thomas Traherne – whose ‘Blindness’ is quoted at the head of this chapter – George Herbert and particularly Henry Vaughan, all strive at points to capture a felt divine presence which is much more in line with the medieval strain to which I have pointed. Arthur Clements, for example, relates Vaughan’s poetic project directly to the late medieval English mystic Julian of Norwich, whose aim to “behold God in everything”[71] (164) acts for Clements as a creed which underlies Vaughan’s work as a whole. Pointing to “The Retreate”, Clements emphasises how Vaughan’s soul spies “shadows of eternity” in “those weaker glories” of “some gilded Cloud, or flowre” (12-14) and reminisces how in the “early days” of his “angel-infancy” (1-2) he might glimpse God’s “face” (10) and feel “through all this fleshly dresse / Bright shootes of everlastingnesse” (19-20). The concerns of Vaughan’s speaker here are empirical, in the sense that he depends upon sensory experience; his project, however, is clearly mystical rather than scientific. Vaughan’s “Bright shootes of everlastingnesse” are not a result of long observation, but an essentially fleeting experience which belonged to a more innocent time. The clear suggestion is that, in youth at least, God was not to be deduced from the world, but directly experienced within it.

George Herbert, though much less obviously a nature poet, also engages with an identically mystical approach. In “The Elixir”, for example, Herbert takes up the challenge of Gregory the Great: “Teach me, my God and King, / In all things Thee to see” (1-2), and outlines the hoped-for character of such seeing:

> A man that looks on glass,
> On it may stay his eye;
> Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
> And then the heav'n espy.
> (9-12)

Herbert’s analogy is telling. It is not glass’s strict form, but its transparency that is emphasised and it is not, therefore, representation that allows God’s sensing: in order to “espy” divinity, Herbert looks not *at*, but “*through*” the world, a formulation that maintains the world as his focus, yet equally stresses that divinity is not to be located

[71] “The fulhed of joy is to beholde God in alle” (Julian of Norwich 229).

in its surface features. The accomplishment of Paul's task of locating God in "the things that are made" (Romans 1:20), requires not the seeking of patterns or significations, but a somehow more direct attempt to experience the divine.

This manner of method is further reinforced in "The Agonie", which opens – much like *The Anniversaries* – with a critique of both experimentalism and the preoccupations of natural philosophy:

> Philosophers have measur'd mountains,
> Fathom'd the depths of the seas, of states, and kings,
> Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n, and traced fountains:
> But there are two vast, spacious things,
> The which to measure it doth more behove:
> Yet few there are that sound them; Sinne and Love.
>
> (1-6)

The quantifications and classifications of "Philosophers" are criticised in the suggestion that they fail to disclose that whose measurement "it doth more behove". As becomes clear in the stanzas which follow, such sounding requires the actual experience of the divine. The "few" who are prepared to adopt this task are then charged with the approaching of Christ himself:

> Who would know Sinne, let him repair
> Unto mount Olivet; there shall he see
> A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
> His skin, his garments bloudie be.
> Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain
> To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein.
>
> Who knows not Love, let him assay
> And taste that juice, which on the cross a pike
> Did set again abroach, then let him say
> If ever he did taste the like.
> Love is that liquour sweet and most divine,
> Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine.
>
> (7-18)

Herbert in the above urges engagement with a medieval reading tradition to which I will return at length in the following chapter. The divine (in this case quite literally Christ) is sought directly within the world through a real physical encounter that takes place in the present tense and stimulates multiple senses (the reader is called to both "see" (8) and "taste" (14) Christ). *Sounding* (6) in this context is achieved not via measurement, experiment or analogy, but mystically, through an holistically-

envisaged and fundamentally participative form of experience that searches for the actual presence of Christ. Though it is a scriptural reading method that is recommended in "The Agonie", it is a fundamentally identical reading method which I see to be operative in *The Anniversaries*.

(ii) Donne and 'the Book of Nature'

Looking at Donne's work more widely, it is clear that he too sought divinity within the 'book of nature'. As McDuffie discusses at length, both the sermons and *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* explicitly stress God's readability. Downplaying a more Calvinist insistence on fallen man's dependence upon revelation,[72] Donne emphasises the world's persisting legibility (141-146). For Calvin the reading of the fallen world required the "spectacles" of Scripture, which "gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds… clearly shows us the true God" (*Institutes* i.6.1). In a 1621 sermon, Donne, on the other hand, makes a radical claim for the precedence of the "booke of creatures":

> There is an elder booke in the World then the Scriptures; It is not well said, in the World, for it is the World it selfe, the whole booke of Creatures; And indeed the Scriptures are, but a paraphrase, but a comment, but an illustration of that booke of creatures [.]
>
> (*Sermons* 3.264).

For Donne, Calvin's order of precedence is inverted as he glorifies Creation at Scripture's expense. Though this claim is not repeated elsewhere in his work,[73] McDuffie takes his wider oeuvre to be largely consistent in its stress upon both Creation's importance and its legibility. For Donne, she argues, the world and his own material being were essential avenues through which the divine might be read.

What the 1621 sermon quoted above lacks is any detailed reflection upon how this "elder booke" of the world is to be read. Latching on to Donne's much quoted statement that his God is a "metaphorical God" (142), McDuffie relates his reading to the hermetic tradition and argues that his understanding of the world's legibility is

[72] Calvin is also clear in regard to the precise form that this revelation takes: "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures" (*Institutes* i.6.1)

[73] Donne's earlier *Essayes in Divinity* also stresses the importance of the book of nature but asserts a more conventional order with it standing "subordinate" to the Scriptures (6-7).

fundamentally symbolic in this sense. While this stance undoubtedly suits some of Donne's pronouncements, a more experiential approach to the divine's perception is also present in both his verse and prose. In Donne's "Second Prebend Sermon" of 1625, for example, he reveals his trust that the man who reaches heaven will recognise it when he arrives:

> That soule that goes to Heaven, meets Heaven here… As my soule shall not goe towards Heaven, but goe by Heaven to Heaven, to the Heaven of Heavens, So the true joy of a good soule in this world is the very joy of Heaven; and we goe thither, not that being without joy, we might have joy infused in us, but that as Christ sayes, *Our joy might be full*, perfected, sealed with an everlastingnesse [.]
>
> (*Sermons* 7.71)

Heaven in the above is not postulated or deduced, but recognised as familiar, a conviction that apparently stems from the surety of Donne's belief that the divine may be experienced in the world. Recognition is not a function of pre-embodied memory, as would be the case in Platonic models, but something which is secured against a life that has been lived by the "way of Heaven". To argue that we "goe by Heaven to Heaven" is to maintain a fundamental consistency in Creation, with earthly joys apparently lacking only the seal of "everlastingnesse" which resurrection promises. While the "Second Prebend Sermon" is suggestive – and I return to it below – it is in *The Anniversaries* that I see Donne to engage most fully with the possibilities of experiential apprehension. Their dissection of the uneven fallen world rejects the deduction of God but does not dismiss sensory experience in its entirety as it empirically seeks divine presence in our immanent experience of the world.

"Thou shouldest for life, and death, a patterne bee": The Source of Donne's Authority

Resigned to the fact that the world's individual constituents are incapable of structurally signifying their workings within the whole, Donne does not build his case for God's legibility in *The Anniversaries* upon signs or patterns, but – in a way highly suggestive of *lectio divina* – focuses instead on a search for immanence within his direct experience of Creation. Donne's critique of the world has attacked its coherence (FirAn 213) and consistency (FirAn 347), but it has never actually outlawed the veracity

of sensory experience in the moment of its grasping. Transposing the monastic reading practices discussed above to the 'book of nature', I see Donne in *The Anniversaries* as having searched his world for an experience which holds a charge that speaks of authorial presence. It is this experience from which his license to speak in the poems is derived.

Though experiential reading, as argued above, was in line with both an ancient tradition and the poetic practice of some of his peers, in *The Anniversaries* it is Elizabeth herself from whom Donne most immediately takes his epistemological inspiration:

> [Elizabeth] with Gods presence was acquainted so,
> (Hearing, and speaking to him) as to know
> His face, in any naturall Stone, or Tree,
> Better then when in Images they bee:
>
> (SecAn 451-454)

In a passage suggestive of Cassian, Elizabeth, Donne maintains, saw God's "face" within his "natural" creation, and, thus "acquainted", had no need to deduce him from symbols or correspondences. "Images" (454) were rendered unnecessary for her as God's presence allowed for an epistemology which – much like that of *lectio divina* – relied upon an actual experienced presence rather than a representation thereof. Specific parallels between Elizabeth's practice and monastic technique are strengthened in the passage above by the explicit reference to stones and trees, a formulation first used by Bernard when declaring that in the context of a search for God "Trees and stones will teach you what you cannot learn from masters" (qtd. Churton 336).[74] For both Elizabeth and Bernard, therefore, the world seemingly demonstrated something which could not be taught, as both sought the divine immanently within their world.

The result and seal of Elizabeth's epistemology is the claim that her current heavenly knowledge conforms to that which she had formerly received on Earth:

> Shee, who in th'Art of knowing Heauen, was growen
> Here vpon Earth, to such perfection,

[74] The quotation is taken from an often quoted letter to the English Cistercian and Archbishop of York Henry Murdac (*Epistle CVI* in Leclercq's *Opera*: "Ligna et lapides docebunt te, quod a magistris audire non possis" (7.266)). Bernard makes a similar point in the sermon *On the Conversion of Clerics*: "you consult books without purpose; you need experience instead" ("sine causa paginum consulis; experimentum magis require" (*Opera* 4.99)).

That shee hath, euer since to Heauen shee came,
(In a far fairer print,) but read the same
(SecAn 311-314)

Given that in life she did not infer God, but directly read him, the beatific vision of heaven (SecAn 441) – a venue where we are elsewhere told that one "straight know'st all" (SecAn 299) – is fundamentally familiar to Elizabeth. Her 'new' knowledge has been in some sense expedited – it is delivered in "fairer print" (this is discussed further below) – yet Heaven's perfections remain, we are told, essentially indistinguishable from those which she had already experientially accessed on earth. It is this belief in Creation's facility from which I see Donne's own authority in *The Anniversaries* to stream. Experience of the world has provided Elizabeth with "records for God" (SecAn 507) in creation, and it is a similarly empirical – though not empiricist – method that I see as having fuelled Donne's own production in both poems.

Maintaining that everything Donne asserts in *The Anniversaries* is experientially sourced differentiates my reading from the consensus view that the poems possess a distinct non-material focus.[75] Though I see the passage quoted above in relation to Elizabeth's earthly knowledge to make this point clearly, at moments in the "Second Anniversary" Heaven's "fairer print" (SecAn 314) is glossed in a way that apparently supports a more substantive distinction between earthly and heavenly knowledge:

In this low forme, poore soule what wilt thou doe?
When wilt thou shake of this Pedantery,
Of being taught by sense, and Fantasy?
Thou look'st through spectacles; small things seeme great,
Below; But vp vnto the watch-towre get,
And see all things despoyld of fallacies:
Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eies,
Nor heare through Laberinths of eares, nor learne
By circuit, or collections to discerne.
In Heauen thou straight know'st all, concerning it,
And what concerns it not, shall straight forget.
(290-300)

Raymond-Jean Frontain's reading of the above clearly illustrates the neo-Platonic position that has proved almost inescapable in discussions of *The Anniversaries*. Taking Donne to have reached a point of "ecstasy" where his rapt soul is "far removed

[75] See *Variorum* (505-509) for a summary; the essence of these readings, however, is captured in Frontain's reading discussed in detail below.

from the base earth, concentration on which would throw it into lethargy" (127), Frontain holds Donne to directly implicate his sense organs in his former ignorance, and goes on to claim that Donne sees true knowledge as only being possible in heaven once the soul has been liberated from the "sense" and "Fantasy" (292) of empirical considerations. If we are to share in the beatific vision, Frontain's Donne argues, our very senses must be transcended through a distinct, and distinctively spiritual sensorium which Frontain himself links to prophetic activity.

When merged with the first poem's critique of the material world, it is easy to see how arguments such as the above have led to the situating of *The Anniversaries* within the *contemptus mundi* tradition. As I have already argued in relation to *The Anniversaries*' critique of new science, however, I do not see the poems as ever wholly deserting materiality. While the passage above suggests that the task of experiencing God is easier in heaven, it does not rule out the possibility of such experience on earth. Lines 290-300 clearly inveigh against the ability of sense data to 'teach' – and hence attack the world's *experimental* consistency – yet I do not see them as discounting earth-bound *experiential* perception. The criticism to which our fallen senses are subjected targets their efficiency without definitively compromising their ultimate efficacy. A labyrinth remains a path, albeit a circuitous one (with the term, in any event, having been in medical usage since the mid-sixteenth century to describe the existing structures of the inner ear[76] – a conventional, and patently functional, sense organ), and, similarly, the description of our fallen eyes as 'lattice-like' suggests that, though seeing is inconvenienced on earth, it is not necessarily precluded. In the specific context of the perception of the divine, moreover, the choice of 'lattice' echoes both the bible and the precise mode of reading upon which I am focussing. In the second chapter of the *Song of Songs* it is suggested that the "lattice" *allows*, rather than impedes, the Bride's view of her Groom: "[My beloved] standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice" (*SoS* 2:9). In Bernard's hugely influential reading – a text which Donne himself directly cites elsewhere in his work[77] – this passage is seen as indicating how Christ deliberately allows his divinity to be glimpsed from behind 'our' wall of flesh (*SSoS* 'sermon 56'), the lattice, therefore, rather like the labyrinth, suggests that apprehension is impeded, but never outlaws its

[76] Gabriele Fallopio is credited with the coinage to describe the fine bone structures of the inner ear (see Porzionato 906). Donne, whose medical knowledge was advanced, may well have been aware of this characterisation.
[77] Donne quotes this work in later sermons (see for example 3:318).

possibility. Perception is expedited in heaven – where Donne is clear that we shall "not" suffer such impediments (296-297) – but it is never ruled out on earth. Donne, like all other sources, admits that the mystical apprehension of God is punishingly difficult, yet maintaining difficulty is not positing impossibility.

Disadvantaged earthbound senses are clearly expedited in Heaven – our souls will become "All Ey" (SecAn 200) and acquire a "new eare" (SecAn 339) – yet their essential functioning is not altered. As already discussed in my introduction, the kind of spiritual sensing to which Donne would appear to allude, did not necessarily forestall perception in physical terms, and what is thus offered by *The Anniversaries*' "watch-towre" of heaven is a vantage point which precipitates, without transforming, our experience of the divine. Though learning (SecAn 292) in Heaven may bypass the time-consuming procedures of rote (SecAn 298), it does not follow that what is learnt in such a venue is necessarily non-empirical. The actual content of Donne's heavenly vision is entirely spatially conceived and populated in ways not unfamiliar to earth, with its "new" (SecAn 339) senses remaining eminently recognisable in their conventional functioning. New ears continue to hear that which is audible (the songs of angels and edifying conversation of saints) and all-encompassing eyes perceive the physically existent (the heavenly spheres as well as assorted saints and angels). Described in terms of a "third birth" (SecAn 214), a formulation which, following tradition, Donne uses elsewhere in his work to describe bodily resurrection,[78] his entire vision suggests an embodied life and an epistemologically familiar world where the Fall has been abrogated, but the nature of perception remains essentially unchanged.

A continuity between Heaven and earth is also pressed in the second poem's drawing of a distinction between the *essential* and the *accidental* (SecAn 449-490). Though readers such as Frontain have seen this division as postulating two entirely separate forms of knowledge – one earthly and the other Heavenly (Frontain 126-127) – reading the relevant passages outside of an instinctively dualistic paradigm suggests that the division postulated is not one of type. Introduced in terms of 'joy', the essential in the "Second Anniversary" is ultimately mapped out through an examination of its character in relation to the accidental:

> All casuall ioye doth loud and plainly say,
> Onely by comming, that it can away.
> Onely in Heauen ioies strength is neuer spent;

[78] Donne, following Gregory the Great, uses the term in this way in a later sermon (see 6:134-135).

And accidentall things are permanent.
Ioy of a soules arriuall neere decaies;
For that soule euer ioyes, and euer staies.
(485-490)

In heaven, freed of the world's decay, accidental things are rendered permanent, while all that remains earthbound "doth loud and plainly say, / Onely by comming, that it can away". It is thus not essence, but destiny that differentiates the two states. Strictly at the moment of their apprehension, accidental and essential joy are apparently identical, yet, when perceived in the fallen world, permanence breaks down and a division emerges. This distinction is further blurred with direct reference to Elizabeth, who, we are told, somehow possessed "essentiall ioye" here on earth (SecAn 449). Though this claim seemingly dials back on Donne's previous prohibition of the earthly essential, it is entirely in line with his earlier assertion that Elizabeth had experienced God in life. In a move which echoes Donne's own "Second Prebend Sermon", the soul destined for heaven is believed to have experienced Heaven in life: going "by Heaven to Heaven" (*Sermons* 7.71), death leads the soul not to the discovery of the divine but to its recognition.

Donne's Reading of Elizabeth Drury

Fundamental to my understanding of *The Anniversaries* is the idea that Elizabeth does not only promote the poems' means of apprehension, but also – as a denizen of the world – forms this apprehension's central focus. It is thus Elizabeth Drury's actual person which I take to have been epistemologically active in Donne's perception of the divine. Although Donne proves unable to follow Elizabeth's example in regard to stones and trees, he does claim to have experienced God's "light" (FirAn 70) in the special case of Elizabeth herself. It is thus the "essential joy" (SecAn 449) which Elizabeth experienced on earth that has also been apparently accessed by Donne in his experience of Elizabeth:

[…] shee to Heauen is gone,
Who made this world in some proportion
A heauen, and here, became vnto vs all,
Ioye, (as our ioyes admit) essentiall.
(SecAn 467-470)

The "Records for God" (SecAn 506) imparted in Donne's experience of Elizabeth have apparently overturned the normal restrictions of our state, and allowed Donne to experience the divine immanently in the mundane world.

Suggesting that Elizabeth acts as Donne's muse is hardly controversial, but what I wish to stress is that the 'Elizabeth' who acts in this way should be understood entirely literally. This argument clashes with the vast majority of the poems' readings, which have suggested that the location of the essential within Elizabeth has been the result of an intellectual operation, and that it is thus a figurative conception of the girl at the poems' centre which should be adopted. Reading *The Anniversaries* in this way, however, entirely neglects Elizabeth's own manner of divine apprehension. As I have argued, Elizabeth herself neither reads the world through Scripture's "spectacles" nor adopts an obviously prophetic mantle; her grasp of the divine is entirely a result of her direct apprehension of God's face in the stones and trees of Creation (SecAn 451-454).

Traditional intellectual readings of the poems have had trouble rationalising Elizabeth's actual description. No space is devoted in *The Anniversaries* to anything that she herself may have actually said or done, and while she may well have lived a rich inner life, this life is manifestly of little interest to Donne who never touches upon any concrete aspect of Elizabeth's actual behaviour. It is Elizabeth's "example" that the world has lost (FirAn 48), yet in view of what we are told about Elizabeth this example can be neither moral nor applicative (to use Lewalski's term). As Sherwood, Targoff and McDuffie have all intimated, whole swathes of Elizabeth's description are embodied in character, a fact that sits uncomfortably with her postulated nature as an abstraction. At the heart of this description is a repeated insistence upon Elizabeth's beauty, which, though superlative, is consistently discussed in embodied and conventionally recognisable terms. Explicit praise is devoted to her form and proportion (FirAn 306, 309-325, SecAn 141) and specific mention is made of her "eyes" (FirAn 229, SecAn 78), "faire body" (SecAn 221), "limmes" (SecAn 240) and "cheekes" (SecAn 245). This picture is complemented with references to her youth (FirAn 75, 88, SecAn 68) – more or less the only feature, it is worth noting, that can be quite literally imputed to the otherwise unknown historical Elizabeth – and "concoction" (FirAn 456, SecAn 123-12), an entirely humoral – and thus equally embodied – concept in the seventeenth century, which suggested a perfect balance of fundamentally physical constituents. In a world otherwise "ugly" (FirAn 326), "old" (FirAn 75, 88) and "out of

ioynt" (FirAn 192) it is Elizabeth's beauty, youth and "complexion" (SecAn 123)[79] that shone.

Though these qualities are spectacular in their felt extent, they remain in themselves standard aspects of man's condition, which are potentially admissible in regard to a 15-year-old girl. It is not *what* Donne experiences in Elizabeth that singles her out, but the degree to which this *what* has been experienced as having avoided the Fall. Though, as argued in the following section, I see this apprehension to be largely due to *how* Donne has read, it is worth stressing that what has been read is an essentially normal girl who boasted features which in their type – if not their extent – fell entirely within the course of our lived experience.

As argued in the previous section there has been nothing intellectual or privileged in Elizabeth's experience of the divine; it is not inherent worthiness or revelation that facilitated her reading of Creation, but the manner of her looking. It is this manner – Elizabeth's reading method – which I see Donne to have applied to Elizabeth herself, and it is thus that he has come to feel the divine in the experience of a young girl. Like Vaughan in "The Retreate" (already quoted above) who felt "Bright shootes of everlastingnesse" (20) in his "angel-infancy" (2), Donne too would appear enraptured with the possibilities of innocence, a theme he constantly picks up in later sermons via the repeated quotation of Ecclesiastes 12:1 "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth". This text forms his central reading in a Lincoln's Inn sermon of 1619 (2.235-249) and is further cited in twenty eight of his existing printed sermons. In many of these sermons Donne argues for the benefits of childhood and the ways in which our memories of its innocence potentially allow us a clearer grasp of divinity. It is a similar argument that I see Donne to be less directly expressing in *The Anniversaries*. What Donne reads is the divine, but what Donne has read the divine within is an ostensibly normal teenage girl.

The suggestion that it is divinity in the everyday that Donne has perceived in Elizabeth leads to potential similarities between my approach and that of Barbara Lewalski, who, in her discussion of praise in Donne work, *Donne's Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise*, argues that, throughout Donne's laudatory verse, he responds less to the actual recipients of his poems than he does to the redeemed image of God in man which he takes to be symbolically present within the elect. While my conclusion is

[79] A humoral concept in the seventeenth century which was identical to concoction.

similar to Lewalski's – essentially that Donne has read God in Elizabeth – the epistemology of our arguments is entirely different. While Lewalski sees Donne to be asserting a theological tenet – that the post-judgement elect are potentially perfect – I take *The Anniversaries* to press the notion that this perfection is already empirically sensible in the world of our experience. Elizabeth's apprehension of divine presence is not due to reflection on Scripture, but in direct relation to her perception of stones and trees. Donne's apprehension of the divine in Elizabeth has, in turn, equally depended on the mundane, with a 15-year-old girl having served to grant Donne "records for God" (SecAn 506) in Creation.

While it is Donne's perception of Elizabeth's beauty, youth and balance which allows him to move to beauty, youth and balance more generally, this movement is not the kind of intellectual operation that derives universals through the grouping of particulars. Both Elizabeth and Donne refuse to ever abandon the particularity of what is perceived and, unlike universals, the objects of apprehension in *The Anniversaries* remain embodied throughout. Evident from Elizabeth's actual description as discussed above, this is also maintained systematically early in the "First Anniversary" which, when reflecting upon "who it is that's gone" (42), argues that what has been lost from the world is not the abstraction of "law" but "A strong example" (48) which "did faithfully compact / And glue all vertues" (49-50). The concern of the poems is thus not to teach, or even tell, but to attempt to present something existent as it existed.

The overarching importance of embodiment is pressed again towards the poem's close:

> But as some Serpents poison hurteth not,
> Except it be from the liue Serpent shot,
> So doth her vertue need her here, to fit
> That vnto vs; she working more then it.
>
> (FirAn 409-412)

The jarring comparison of a virtuous girl and a snake's venom has concerned critics, who have generally taken the image to be a prime example of Donne's 'metaphysical' style (in Jonson's sense). What has received less attention however, is the actual connection Donne draws between physical presence and efficacy. While Elizabeth's "Glimmering light" perseveres, her true value cannot be divorced from her embodiment, a condition which links her power to connote to her actual material

presence. It is not, Donne stresses, the idea of Elizabeth that is necessary for the world's reading, but Elizabeth herself.

In 1610, at the request of Drury, Donne wrote an elegy to be read at Elizabeth's funeral. This poem is much shorter, and vastly less ambitious, than the slightly later Anniversaries, yet it nevertheless rehearses a number of their themes and touches upon issues of embodied existence. Done turns to the customary idea – also briefly entertained in the "Second Anniversary" (108) – that we should not mourn the dead because they now exist in a happier state in Heaven:

> May't not be said, that her grave shall restore
> Her, greater, purer, firmer than before?
> Heaven may say this, and joy in't, but can we
> Who live, and lack her here, this vantage see?
> What is 't to us, alas! if there have been
> An angel made a throne, or cherubin?
> We lose by't: and as agèd men are glad
> Being tasteless grown, to joy in joys they had,
> So now the sick, starved world must feed upon
> This joy, that we had her, who now is gone.
>
> ("Funeral Elegy" 44-54)

Though elegies typically look to console, Donne's verdict on the world's current state lacks any consolation. Unable to relish Elizabeth in the absence of her actual existence – the world is now "tasteless" (52) – neither memory, nor the knowledge of her heavenly abode, offers release from grief. Clashing with the typical treatment of this trope, Donne sees no reason to celebrate heaven's gain and draws only the coldest comfort from an absence that has severely impacted the world as lived. It is an identical feeling of loss that I see *The Anniversaries* to rehearse. Though we have evidence of Elizabeth's passing – a grave still present in the parish Church of Hawstead, Suffolk – in the absence of her living particularity Elizabeth herself is no longer an object of experience and thus her ability to convey God's "light" (FirAn 70) is diminished.

"Th'Art of knowing Heauen": Reading Experientially

The broadly monastic experiential approach which I see *The Anniversaries* as taking in regard to Creation implies an attitude to empirical perception which is more phenomenological than empiricist. What has been read is not stored for cross-reference and independent clarification, but is experienced holistically in the moment

of its apprehension. As such, what Donne claims to have apprehended in the poems – "records for God" in Elizabeth (SecAn 506) – is, to some extent, a function of the moment of his own looking.

While this may strike some readers as inappropriately subjective, within the cataphatic tradition it was the reading experience of the individual that was of the utmost importance, as it was within this subjective experience that the presence of an objective God was felt to be manifested. In the context of the 'book of nature' this reading procedure can be understood similarly, with monks not examining the world to deduce God *from* it, but reading a world in which they themselves participated in the hope that they would be enabled to experience the divine *within* it. Sampling the 'book of the nature' in the light of their own 'book of experience' (see my discussion of Bernard p. 20) the suitably prepared reader would feel God's presence in a Creation of which he or she was also part.

This kind of approach feeds upon the aforementioned contiguity of intellectual and material factors in the period, a contiguity which is also featured in *The Anniversaries*. As discussed in the section above, Elizabeth is a materially defined subject, yet drawing attention to the role of materiality in the texts does not work to the exclusion of intellectual factors. There is nothing nakedly mechanistic in *The Anniversaries*. Though empirical, Donne's former experience of Elizabeth is phrased in terms similar to the soul's "stringing" of heaven and earth, which also declined to conclusively divide materiality and immateriality. Elizabeth's physically described body conveys an intellectual charge:

> we vnderstood
> Her by her sight, her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinckly wrought,
> That one might almost say, her bodie thought,
> (SecAn 243-246)

Though this passage is taken by Targoff to relate to Donne's rejection of dualism – she describes it as both an anticipation and a rebuttal of the Cartesian *Cognito* (98) – it should be noted that this passage is epistemological rather than metaphysical. Donne never maintains that Elizabeth's body thinks – this is only something that "one might almost say" – but he does maintain that her animated form can be read as doing so. Though rooted in the senses, seeing Elizabeth is an experience which, in modern terms, surpasses the mere stimulation of the optic nerve. Her apprehension involves an

observational understanding, “we vnderstood / Her by her sight”, which exceeds the normally postulated boundaries of purported physical experience and leads to the apprehension of a body in “thought”. To adopt a more explicitly mystical vocabulary, Elizabeth’s soul is immanent in the experience of her body. It is thus that Donne is later able to famously maintain that, in the case of Elizabeth, “eies might read vpon the outward skin / As strong Records for God, as mindes within” (SecAn 505-506). The reading experience which Donne claims encompassed both the physical and the intellectual.

Insisting upon a wider, more holistic, notion of experience which involves reader reception begins to elucidate how the divination of ‘records for God’ from Elizabeth is a process that is built on neither representation nor deduction. In as far as man was made in God’s image, Elizabeth should, in some respect, resemble God, yet it is not solely her appearance that has been noted in this regard. It is the “eloquent blood” (SecAn 244) that “spoke” in her cheeks (SecAn 245) which Donne notes, in language that clearly invokes the notion of voice, a quality touched upon elsewhere in *The Anniversaries*, which is also present in many mystical discourses relating to Creation’s legibility (see for example Psalm 19 mentioned above). As with the cataphatic mystical tradition more generally, the use of terms such as voice in *The Anniversaries* is neither transparently literal nor figurative, but seemingly assists Donne in coming to terms with the principle of animation which he believes allows the world to speak *of*, without pointing *to*, the divine. While words implicate structural meaning, the embodiment and *in situ* delivery which is added by voice forms a seemingly more unitive force that anchors language in space and time. It is specifically the absence of voice, we are told in *The Anniversaries*, that has undermined God’s apprehension in Creation, with Donne demanding that the world has been rendered “speechlesse” (FirAn 30) by Elizabeth’s departure. This condition, he is careful to note, does not preclude talk (FirAn 53), but apparently does retard the transmission of real presence. It is, Donne claims, only our “tongues” (FirAn 54) that now speak, as we mechanically affirm her loss, but – in the wake of her lost presence – fail to truly communicate this loss’ weight.

Focussing on the reading experience, rather than something that has been derived from it, allows Donne to produce a unitive impression of Creation which makes space for physical, emotional and spiritual factors alongside the intellectual considerations that a more meaning based approach would emphasise. A second

element of this reading procedure, equally instrumental in terms of *The Anniversaries*, is the way in which an experientially based approach highlights the importance of the moment of apprehension. This focus allows for a number of the poem's seeming inconsistencies. As well as discussing Elizabeth's "complexion" (SecAn 123), *The Anniversaries* also express her balance in non-humoral terms. Though fundamentally past and now only "glimmering", Elizabeth's description – perhaps somewhat strangely – is crowned by the suggestion that she was uniquely stable. The "cyment" (FirAn 49) that would "all parts to reunion bow" (FirAn 220) and the "magnetique force" (FirAn 221) that drew and fastened all "sundered parts in one" (FirAn 222), Elizabeth stood as an example of unity, in the debased and unstable world. Donne's apprehension of this security cannot, however, have been a case of long observation. Not an obvious or indelible beacon, but a now only "glimmering light", Elizabeth is already lost by the time of the poems' composition, and the remembered experience of her is thus, in some respects, already compromised. Donne's ardour for Elizabeth's power is not tempered by his awareness of this absence, however, and Elizabeth, despite her loss, is never discussed in any terms other than the superlative. That something can be both stable and also gone makes little sense under an experimental paradigm, which would typically counsel patience and cross-reference. In light of the actual epistemology forwarded in the poems, however, this positioning can be rationalised. The surety of Elizabeth's person is ultimately secured against the experiential manner of Donne's reading method: it is the moment of apprehension that is all important, not consistency over time.

The suspension of time in the moment of apprehension is textually suggested in *The Anniversaries*, not only by the maintenance of Elizabeth's surety, but also by the Edenic nature of her presentation. Donne's reading method creates a timeline in the "First Anniversary" which repeatedly conflates the time of Elizabeth (a year prior to the poem's composition) with the time of both Eden and the relatively unfallen world of the Patriarchs. This equation is not a symbolic, but a literal assertion of identity which transforms the timeless apprehension of Elizabeth's youth and stability into the apprehension of the ultimate youth and stability that was believed to have existed in the prelapsarian world. In line with the general stress in the poems upon embodiment, nowhere is the relationship between Elizabeth and Eden portrayed as a simile. Elizabeth was not *like* Edenic humanity, but, in regard to her youth, beauty and balance at least, *was* actually perceived as being pre-fallen, with a "Golden" era pre-sin (SecAn

70) not represented by her ageless form, but somehow, to use De Lubac's phrasing, "immured" within it (see p. 14). "Paradise", we are told, "adhear'd" to her person (SecAn 77), in such a manner that it could be "harkened" (SecAn 68) by the world's more overtly fallen inhabitants, whose subsequent experience of youth – even in a 15-year-old girl – was enough to provide them with an awareness of a divine, pre-fallen world.

Returning to the issue of the *essential* and the *accidental*, already mentioned above, further illustrates how this can be seen to be the case. Donne maintains in the "Second Anniversary" that Elizabeth was somehow privy to the essential on earth (SecAn 449) and likewise claims to have himself accessed the essential in relation to Elizabeth (SecAn 470). By his own definition, however, such apprehension should be impossible if it takes place within time. What I see as having overcome this prohibition is not some special faculty – as argued above the essential and the accidental are not differently constituted – but rather a form of apprehension that has holistically registered the divine in the absence of time. The manner of isolation pursued in Donne's apprehension of Elizabeth is thus not an abstraction from materiality – as in the derivation of universals – but a suspension of time that has occurred through the nature of Donne's reading. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, such a suspension was a key part of the wider cataphatic meditative tradition, with readers within the tradition commonly seeking to isolate the moment of their reading from the kind of narrative conventions that are typical of non-mystical scriptural reading.

How Donne has read in *The Anniversaries* is largely responsible for *what* Donne has read in *The Anniversaries*. It is in this sense that Elizabeth stands as an "antidote" (SecAn 378) to the Fall; the experience of her person potentially resisted its thrall, if only at the moment of its apprehension, and thus held out hope for the world's continued legibility. Though not something qualitatively or quantitatively extra, the very surety and stability with which her existing and aforementioned human qualities were experienced allowed her to become visible as wholly and superlatively herself. Though change, and the relativity that change brings, plagues everything in the fallen world (SecAn 391-400), Donne's experience of Elizabeth, we are led to believe, shone in terms of its security. She, it would appear, like the God of Exodus, 'is what she is', or, at least given the *Anniversaries* tense use, 'was what she was'. Though essentially a function of Donne's reading, this surety remains entirely premised upon Elizabeth's

empirical experience as it is through her that he has become aware of the Creator's immanence within Creation.

Presenting Presence Lost

The Anniversaries' professed didactic purpose – to tell its readers what they have lost in Elizabeth's death – sits uncomfortably with the broad emphasis of experience over knowledge that I have argued to be present throughout the poems. Having read the world directly via his experience, Donne assumes the task in *The Anniversaries* of communicating what he has read in order that his readership may ascertain its "true worth" (FirAn 90). In transitioning to a writing project, however, the epistemological procedure which has hitherto generated Donne's reading becomes problematic. As documented above, Donne maintains that it is the experiential reading of Elizabeth's physically instantiated example that has allowed him to detect God immanently within his Creation; in recommunicating this presence in writing, however, his claims for the efficacy of embodiment can only ever be expressed by apparently non-embodied means.

Lauding the efficacy of embodied Creation, Donne seeks in *The Anniversaries* to present it as encompassing the divine, yet, in writing this laudatory, it is precisely such embodiment that he is apparently forced to abandon. Donne has read in a manner that suspends time's passage, yet he is forced in writing to communicate this reading exclusively at the remove of the past tense. Elizabeth, at the poems' time of writing, was dead, and, while Donne claims to have felt God to reside in her, it is much less obvious that that same God continues to reside in Donne's relation of Elizabeth. This dilemma – that Donne is unable to effectively 'practice what he preaches' – is explicitly recognised at the close of the "First Anniversary":

> Since herbes, and roots by dying, lose not all,
> But they, yea Ashes too, are medicinall,
> Death could not quench her vertue so, but that
> It would be (if not follow'd) wondred at:
> And all the world would be one dying Swan,
> To sing her funerall prayse, and vanish than.
> But as some Serpents poison hurteth not,
> Except it be from the liue Serpent shot,
> So doth her vertue need her here, to fit
> That vnto vs; she working more then it.

(403-412)

Elizabeth's example has not ceased to exist in her absence – by "dying" she has not 'lost' all "medicinall" force – yet her true efficacy and value "need her here", and Donne thus seems to admit the point that, in the absence of her aforementioned particularity, his appeal is necessarily weakened. While her virtue is not entirely quenched (405) in abstraction, what is needed "to fit" that virtue "vnto vs" is not narration, but manifestation. It is this very point that Donne has previously stressed in the opening of the "First Anniversary", which explicitly states that it is Elizabeth's "example", as opposed to "law", (48) that has been lost from the world. Embodied particularity has powered Donne's reading, yet, in Elizabeth's absence, his writing project lacks such immediate force.

In the 1610 "Funeral Elegy" Donne is particularly clear on the shortcomings of poetry, especially in comparison to Elizabeth:

> […] can we keep her [Elizabeth] then
> In works of hands, or of the wits of men?
> Can these memorials, rags of paper, give
> Life to that name, by which name they must live?
> Sickly, alas! short-lived, abortive be
> Those carcase verses, whose soul is not she;
>
> ("Funeral Elegy" 9-14)

As with the extract from the poem quoted above, there is little comfort to be gleaned from Donne's elegy and his "carcase" verse is as dead as the world which *The Anniversaries* anatomise. While Donne seeks to let his verse live (12), any life he succeeds in imputing is "sickly", "short lived" and "abortive" (13). Diagnosing his own elegy's flaw, Donne identifies a lack of soul, or, to be more precise, a lack of appropriate soul (this qualification is revisited below), which stymies his project of giving Elizabeth new life. Little consolation is thus to be had in Donne's "Funeral Elegy", *The Anniversaries*, however, offer a more ambitious and hopeful note; Donne does not write a thousand lines of verse only to conclude verse's futility.

Typically, the poet attempting to mediate the divine prayed for assistance, or, in a more classical mode, invoked a muse; Milton, for example, utilises both approaches in the opening of *Paradise Lost* in the hope that his verse may pursue "things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme" (16). Donne, however, though also apparently seeking divine representation, calls forth no help other than Elizabeth's formerly experienced empirical example. While he does, at points, seem to adopt a prophetic

mantle (as Frontain suggests in "Donne's Protestant *Paradiso*"), he makes no direct pitch or plea for such a position, and the texts ultimately appear as the carriers of only his own fiat. This is surely strange. In 1612 Donne was known for wit rather than sanctity. The holder of no privileged or ordained position, Donne's work arrived without theological imprimatur, and his writing's lack of petition for grace thus risks undermining his claim upon divinity. Acknowledged in the passage above from the close of the "First Anniversary" – and again at a number of other points in both poems (see for example FirAn 469 and the apparent reluctance of the soul to contemplate heaven in the "Second Anniversary") – Donne is candid in regard to the scale of his self-set challenge. These difficulties are ultimately not sufficient, however, to dissuade him from his didactic project. Conveying the ineffable may be fraught, but Donne is entirely resolute in maintaining that: "incomprehensiblenesse" cannot "deterre / Me, from thus trying to emprison her" (FirAn 469-470).

In a similar way to that in which he claimed the ability to read the divine, I take Donne's confidence in writing to be founded not upon bravado, but method. Fully aware of his limitations, Donne, at various points in both poems, addresses the respective strengths and weaknesses of various types of textual composition. What emerges from these disquisitions is a contrast between literal forms of record such as "Chronicle" (FirAn 460), catechism (SecAn 284) and "History" (FirAn 465) and the performative genres of "verse" (FirAn 460 & 474) and "song" (FirAn 447 & 462). This distinction, which I see as echoing that drawn in my introduction between 'reading for knowledge' and 'reading to experience', sees Donne begin a process of alignment between his writing and reading practices. Though Donne's aim is didactic – he clearly seeks to educate his audience (FirAn 87-90) – his means of reaching this goal is to be performative rather than explanatory.

Amid Creation's constant decay, Donne comes to the realisation that he cannot diegetically communicate what he claims to have felt, and it is in this light that he warns his reader that he or she should not:

> […] sweat
> To Know Catechismes and Alphabets
> Of vnconcerning things, matters of fact;
> How others on our stage their parts did Act
> What Caesar did, yea, and what Cicero said.
> (SecAn 283-286)

This indictment of fact, and the avenues by which it is transmitted, amounts to a disparagement of knowledge that can be learnt at second hand (a trope also familiar from Bernard, who couches his aforementioned praise for "stones and trees" in an attack on the primacy of book learning). Though in *The Anniversaries* it is Elizabeth who forms Donne's steady aim, Donne is no more involved with what she "did" or "said" than he is with Caesar or Cicero (286), as he seeks to impart not facts, but a feeling of the divine that cannot be divorced from the moment of its experience. It is this that I see the layered superlatives of Donne's description as trying to capture, not the actual properties of a time bound girl but the potential of those qualities in the moment of their experience to disclose the divine in Creation.

To reach this aim, Donne turns away from factual genres and attempts the performative capturing of the ineffable. Song and verse are characterised throughout *The Anniversaries* in a consistently positive light, with verse – itself a property of Elizabeth (FirAn 433) – being used by Donne in a marked contrast to "chronicle" (FirAn 460). Verse, Donne maintains, forms a palliative against forgetting:

> [...] God did make
> A last, and lastingst peece, a song. He spake
> To *Moses*, to deliuer vnto all,
> That song: because he knew they would let fall,
> The Law, the Prophets, and the History,
> But keepe the song still in their memory.
> (FirAn 461-466)

Citing Moses' didactic verses (or song) of Deuteronomy: 31-32 Donne highlights the particular efficacy of the genre, which, in opposition to history, is awarded a special kind of durability. I see the postulated ability of Moses' song to last (462) to rely on more than the mnemonic power of rhyme and metre, however, with Donne elsewhere in his work stressing the virtue of performative iterability. In a discussion of Deuteronomy in the contemporaneous *Essays in Divinity*, Donne specifically highlights re-performance as being the key to Moses' song: "[God] knew they would ever be repeating this song... and so he should draw from their own mouthes a confession of his benefits" (92). That verse finds voice in the mouth of another is taken as a prime virtue, with the song's potential for performance being cited as the reasoning behind its composition. Moses' song, *The Anniversaries* are clear, was not a revelation to Moses alone but was delivered "vnto all" (463); *The Anniversaries* similarly are

works which are to find their manifestation in the mouths of their readers, who, repeating Elizabeth's graces, lend body to Donne's otherwise disembodied text.

The performative aspects of verse in both the medieval monastic tradition and Donne's sacred verse are essential to the wider argument of this thesis and are re-visited in more depth in the following chapter; my central interest here, however, is the distinctive acquisition of voice – a notion already linked to Elizabeth's own power to convey meaning – that further justifies Donne's adoption of Moses' method. Rejecting the explanatory genres of chronicle and catechism, it is a restoration of voice that Donne cites as his key poetic aim (SecAn 528) as he adopts a medium that turns reading into re-performance. Donne does not 'tell' his audience about Elizabeth, but rather sets up her potential enactment. While the fanciful accretion of superlatives regarding Elizabeth apparently surrenders any hold on logic or rationale, Donne's hope would appear to be that his audience reinvigorates his suggestive portrayal in a way that helps them grasp the divine in Creation.

Cementing the point above, the "First Anniversary" crowns its discussion of Deuteronomy not with a plea for divine inspiration, but with something approaching a methodological rationale:

> Which when I saw that a strict graue could do,
> I saw not why verse might not doe so too.
> Verse hath a middle nature: heauen keepes soules,
> The graue keeps bodies, verse the fame enroules.
>
> (FirAn 471-474)

Donne maintains that he writes poetry, not merely because he is a poet, but because verse, in itself, boosts the efficacy of his expression. Its possession of a "middle nature" enables the negotiation of the opposing pulls of heaven and the grave and allows for the enrolment of its subject's "fame". The cause of much critical discussion (*Variorum* 449), these lines are not immediately transparent – and certainly do not equate to a fully worked out poetics – yet, in the context of *The Anniversaries* more widely, they echo the texts' resistance to dualism and emphasis upon the particular as well as further reinforcing Donne's confidence in his own project. By claiming that his text holds a "middle" status, I see Donne to be attempting the alignment of his writing project with his more fully grounded experiential reading methodology. The possibility of verse's iterative performance sustains Elizabeth and offers a means by which the divine can continue to be collaboratively sought.

The "Second Anniversary" closes with a complementary invocation of "voice":

Did this Coine beare any other stampe, then his,
That gaue thee power to do, me to say this.
Since his will is, that to posteritee,
Thou shouldest for life, and death, a patterne bee,
And that the world should notice haue of this,
The purpose, and th'Autority is his;
Thou art the Proclamation; and I ame
The Trumpet, at whose voice the people came.
(SecAn 521-528)

Donne, as poet, claims a role that echoes Elizabeth's expression in life. The fiat behind the expression of both springs from an identical source – God – yet, Donne is clear, this fiat is manifested in different ways: while Elizabeth *does*, Donne *says*. Consequently, while Elizabeth is framed as a "proclamation" – essentially the message – Donne casts himself as a trumpet, publicising that proclamation in a way which lends a sustaining "voice" to its broadcast. Though it has been Donne who has initially read Elizabeth and gone on to produce *The Anniversaries*, instruments exist to be played, and the poems' sustaining voice potentially becomes that of the reader who invokes Elizabeth through his or her own impassioned reading. While Elizabeth conveys as part of God's Creation, Donne voices this conveyance in a way that is echoed by the reader who, like the Israelites of Deuteronomy, performs the poem and channels, via Elizabeth, God's own presence as expressed in his Creation.

There is a closing sense in *The Anniversaries* therefore that Donne is attempting to recant his own authorship in favour of his readership's subsequent performance. This technique is returned to in my following chapter, yet, specifically in the context of *The Anniversaries*, it should be admitted that it sits uncomfortably beside the instructive tone taken in the poem more generally. The poem, as I have argued, came from somewhere and this origin risks interfering with any subsequent re-authoring. In the passage from "Funeral Elegy" quoted above, Donne mourns his inability to award his verses Elizabeth's soul, yet he does not argue that his verse is entirely bereft in this respect; line 14 is clear that his verse has a soul but is also clear that this soul is not Elizabeth's. Though this soul's identity is never made explicit, there is most scope for equating it with Donne's own. Donne was a known and commissioned author – and quite possibly the poem's first public reader. The poem came from somewhere, and it is to this somewhere, or someone, that any search for the poem's soul should turn.

Where *The Anniversaries* differ from "Funeral Elergy" is that Donne in their close casts himself not as the poems' point of origin, but as an instrument (SecAn 528)

that has re-performed Elizabeth's originary performance. Though by acting in this way he downplays his own role as author, the lateness of this move – it occurs in the poems' final line – does little to quell the diegetic expectations that have been built up throughout the preceding thousand lines. *The Anniversaries* are generally framed as didactic texts, which claim to tell us something of the world. It is thus that they adopt the past tense in their relation of Elizabeth and it is also thus that they take on the task of relating heaven to a readership that is presumed not to know. While Donne suggests at points to that read performance will re-animate his verse, in the final analysis this method clashes with his more openly stated didactic aim. It is not clear that Donne in *The Anniversaries* is able to resolve this issue.

Presence Parsed

Sherwood's characterisation of *The Anniversaries*' epistemology as "jagged" (Sherwood 92) stems from the way in which they point both towards and away from the material world. On the one hand, the poems laud Elizabeth's body and display a stubborn attachment to our material predicament; on the other, they are scathing of materiality and council against placing any trust in the world's consistency. I see the epistemology I have proposed in this chapter as explaining both these attitudes, and thus, resolving one of the largest stumbling blocks in the poems' reading. Separating *experimentalism* – an empirical method seeking structure through repeated observation – from *experientialism* – a similarly empirical method which, however, seeks immanence rather than representation – accounts for Sherwood's inconsistency, while doing justice to both *The Anniversaries*' insistence on materiality and their low opinion of 'scientific' methodology. Sampling "records for God" (SecAn 506) involves sense experience, yet it does so in a way that targets indwelling presence, not abstractable laws or patterns.

What ultimately supports Donne's reading of the world is not some intellectual construct or reading of theology, but his own lived experience. Donne's aim is not to bring the specific instance under the universal, and it is thus not likeness, but unlikeness which holds his interest, with his readers urged to experience particulars entirely on their own account. What Donne describes as Elizabeth's "glimmering light" (FirAn 70) is not a piece of a puzzle hinting towards a logically deducible whole, but a particular instance, which in itself embodies its creator's presence. While the universe

of things described in the "First Anniversary" is essentially dead, a more phenomenological world as experienced retains – or, more accurately, retained at the point of its perception – a voice which facilitated *The Anniversaries*' reading project. Donne, I argue, has read Creation not to know, but to experience.

When turning to write what he himself claims to have read, Donne admits doubts as to whether presence can be conveyed in abstraction from its instances, yet he ultimately aims to invigorate his words in a manner which follows Elizabeth's own example. What Donne attempts to deliver in his superlative-filled, but essentially fact-free, presentation of Elizabeth, is not the temporal facts of a time bound girl, but the embodied "records for God" (SecAn 506) that have been disclosed in his experience of her. Steering away from chronology and concrete observance, Donne layers superlatives in the hope that his audience may capture something of the prelapsarian earth in the act of their own performance.

There persist a number of questions about the success of Donne's procedure, and there is perhaps – even in Donne's own eyes – a differential which emerges between the respective successes of his reading and writing projects. That Donne feels himself to have grasped the divine in Elizabeth is clear, but that Donne has been able to convey this experience at the remove of the past tense is much less secure. Donne's practice of past-tense narration sits poorly alongside the kind of embodied apprehension he advocates in terms of reading, with the importance of the reading moment lost in the structural imperatives of recounting. While Donne has 'read to experience', it is difficult at the remove of the past tense for his audience to escape a position of 'reading for knowledge'.

In mitigation, Donne suggestively claims that his poetic medium involves his readers, encouraging them to award their own voices to the texts' portrayal. There remains, however, particularly in the second poem's close, a measure of ambiguity about who in *The Anniversaries* is ultimately mediating who, and, more broadly, what exactly it is that is mediated. There is, accordingly, a level of truth in the pun that heads this section. Presence *past* is perhaps only ever presence *explained* as Donne succeeds in glossing what has been allegedly felt, yet does not necessarily convey the actual experience of this feeling. His superlatives are more suggestive than compelling, and, as *The Anniversaries*' convoluted reception history relates, there has been only discord in regard to Donne's poetic achievement. Donne's attempt to preserve the world's facility in the face of the Fall is ingenious, yet it is far from clear that his effort to recount

what he claims to have read is successful. It is thus that I see *The Anniversaries* to ultimately speak, not of presence, but only of presence lost.

Chapter 3
Presence Sought
Writing the Life of Christ in "La Corona"

> *Causing ourselves to fixe our eyes on Him [Christ] we ask, How long we shall continue so doing, and when we may give over? Let this be the answere… 'Looke upon Him, till He looke upon you againe.' For so He will.*
>
> Lancelot Andrewes[80]

This chapter focuses on "La Corona", Donne's cycle of seven interlinked sonnets which relate the significant occasions of Christ's life. Unlike *The Anniversaries*, which I have framed as an attempt to narrate a now lost presence, I view "La Corona" as an instrument designed for the *detection* of presence. Seeking the divine in the present, rather than the past tense, its concern, I will argue, lies wholly with a reader who searches, rather than with an author who is presumed to have already found. This concern renders the cycle itself as a potentially mystical exercise, with its assumed reader, in line with the quotation from Andrewes above, seeking to find and ultimately hold Christ's gaze.

The cycle is comprised of seven regularly rhymed sonnets which chronologically present key episodes from Christ's life. Following Sonnet One's introduction, each individual sonnet is awarded a title appropriate to the biblical setting which forms its focus: "Annunciation", "Nativitie", "Temple", "Crucifying", "Resurrection" and, finally, "Ascention". The continuity ensured by this naming is further secured structurally, with the last line of each sonnet repeated as the first line of the next, and the first line of the first sonnet repeated as the final line of the final sonnet. The text thus forms the

[80] Taken from Andrewes' Passion sermon delivered on Good Friday 1597 before the court (Andrewes 347).

crown of its title, with each sonnet linking to that which follows and the last sonnet linking back to the first in a loop that appears to invite repetitive reading.

Though little narrative detail is added to the titled sonnets over and above the biblical accounts upon which they are based, the individual settings are effectively differentiated from their scriptural source material through their presentation. Eschewing the narrative form of the Gospels, "La Corona's" scenes are rendered in an immediate present tense, which, in combination with a mixture of first and second-person pronouns, serves to portray Christ's life as happening contemporaneously with the text's reading. Investigating the impact of these structural elements upon its audience, I claim that Donne's aim in "La Corona" is to make Christ manifest to the suitably prepared reader in the moment of his or her reading.

In light of this claim, the cycle is discussed throughout this chapter in the context of a venerable, and essentially cataphatic, tradition of imaginative meditation on Christ's life. Stretching back at least as far as Bernard of Clairvaux, this tradition was strongly rooted within the kind of monastic reading practices already referred to in both Chapter One and Two, and was thus explicitly concerned with the seeking of divine presence.

Though links between "La Corona" and this tradition have been drawn, they have rarely been discussed in depth, with scholarly attention instead focussing on more explicitly Reformation forms of meditative practice. Reading the cycle as an exhibition of its speaker's devotion – a view at odds with that presented in this chapter – critics have typically connected it with either Jesuit meditative exercises, or distinctly 'intellectual' forms of Protestant meditation that are seen as developments of medieval practice. Although my focus in this chapter is on meditative continuity rather than difference, it is not my intention to claim that "La Corona" is entirely unresponsive to its immediate milieu. As the cycle's opening sonnet makes clear, "La Corona" also responds to a set of devotional anxieties that are typically associated with reformed religion. Salvation, the Reformation demanded, lay in 'faith alone', with such faith only granted to those who were already in receipt of God's freely given grace. This doctrine, which removed institutionalised means of atonement, problematised certain devotional practices and put an end to the notion – frequently entertained in much later medieval religion – that meditative activity could, of itself, have a direct soteriological effect. Unable to pursue their own salvation, some in the period thus fell

prey to an acute form of devout melancholy: doubt without recourse led to fear, which, in turn, risked a form of despair that imperilled the very souls of its sufferers.

While in its first octave "La Corona" clearly requests salvation, by the end of its first sonnet, explicit asking has been relinquished, as its reader – who, I argue, is invited to take the place of its speaker – instead seeks redress for anxiety through *experience* rather than *knowledge*. Bernard's aphorism, to which I frequently turned in Chapter Two, is thus also relevant to "La Corona": unable to evoke what is, in essence, freely given, Donne's aim is for his readers to feel their election by meditatively connecting with the underlying physical reality of Christ. "La Corona", therefore, utilises a venerable meditative method, yet it does so in an attempt to deal with a distinctly newer type of problem.

It is in seeking to offer melancholy respite that Donne's own authorial role becomes problematic. While *The Anniversaries* sought to present the results of Donne's own reading of the world, the kind of text that "La Corona" aspires to be requires its author to take an entirely mediating stance. Donne's medieval method sought not to communicate something that its author had felt, but to engineer a reading experience in which readers themselves encounter the Incarnation. Though it is this hope that "La Corona" pursues, the cycle never quite manages to do so unhesitatingly, as Donne, at points, palpably chafes against his mediating role. Doubts and difficulties in regard to the writing of the divine – fundamentally similar to those I have discussed in relation to *The Anniversaries* – begin to surface and Donne's own faith in his project begins to waver. Engaging with an medieval tradition, I see Donne as confronting, and attempting to ease, a set of devotional issues which were decidedly 'of his day'. In doing so, however, he collides with a reformed insistence on his own fallen state that urgently questions his own suitability for the role of divine poet.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the cycle's voicing. Mimicking medieval models, Donne, I argue, is engaged in the composition of a text for the functional use of others. In the section which follows I push this idea further, discussing the issue of performative intent in the cycle's first sonnet and maintaining that by uniting "heart and voice" (13) the reader is engaged in an activity that seeks to make something happen through reading alone. The next two sections reflect on "La Corona's" titled sonnets against the background of the medieval tradition that I have discussed to this point. Focussing first on similarities of technique and content between the cycle and the distinctive style of Bernard's sermons, I move on to look at the linked traditions of

the meditative lives of Christ and medieval English Passion verse. Both of these traditions – which sought to make Christ present through reading – make use of deictic pronouns and present tenses in ways similar to "La Corona". Reading the cycle against the background of this material's aims and preoccupations helps to illuminate elements of the sonnets which have hitherto caused confusion.

Having related the cycle to then still current devotional genres and framed it similarly as an attempt to achieve Christ's presence, I subsequently reflect on a range of counter arguments that have typically divorced the cycle from this material and framed it in *intellectual* terms. Maintaining that these arguments fail to fully account for the cycle's reading experience, I argue that "La Corona" is ultimately concerned with experiential rather than intellectual factors.

In the final sections of this chapter, I turn to the issue of the cycle's ultimate success or failure. While I see Donne, in some respects, to be caught between medieval practice and reformed sensibility, I argue that he is more substantively challenged by a disconnect between his abilities as a reader and a writer. Unable to truly reconcile these roles, Donne transforms an essentially linear life – Christ is born, lives and dies – into the ever repeating circle or crown of his title, a move which I find to be at once troubling and hopeful. Lacking confidence in his ability to mediate the divine, Donne leads his readers at the cycle's end only back to its beginning; his decision to write at all, however, demonstrates a faith in reading which surely outweighs his hesitations over writing. Relying upon his audience's persistence, Donne's hope is that his readers will experience that which he has himself felt unable to inscribe.

"La Corona's" Voicing

What "La Corona" has been felt by some critics to lack – a strong personal engagement on the part of Donne himself[81] – is, in many respects, what draws me to it in this chapter. Aiming to produce a text which will connect its reader directly with Christ, I see Donne throughout as working to suppress his own authorial presence. Such an understanding of "La Corona" was first put forward by Rosemary Woolf, who, contrasting the cycle with Donne's other sonnets, suggests that its impersonality stems

[81] Diane Chambers, for example, describes the text as "impersonal" (161) as does Ramie Targoff (*Common Prayer* 92) and J.B. Leishman dubs it "detached" (approvingly quoted by Oliver 105), also see O'Connell (119).

from its fundamentally medieval voicing.[82] Its speaker, the first-person "my" (1) at its heart, is, she argues, neither to be associated with its author, nor with any other third party, but should instead be treated as an open position specifically prepared for the reader's assumption. As with the medieval devotional verse that forms the central focus of her work, Woolf holds that the pronouns of "La Corona" stand ready for adoption by the suitably prepared reader in order that he or she might *perform* the text as their own utterance. "La Corona" is thus conceived as a kind of script; rather than witnessing the devotion of its speaking voice – the position Woolf takes to be normative in Reformation verse – *its reader is offered a vehicle through which they may voice their own personal devotion*.

Woolf's understanding of the 'scripted I' directly connects "La Corona" to the originally monastic practices of *lectio divina* already discussed in my first chapter. Readers within this tradition had long taken Scripture's first-person pronouns to be designed for adoption, with the first-person psalms forming a paradigmatic example. Though nominally authored by David, these verses were felt to be re-authored through their use, as their reader assumed the position of the psalmist and issued their lines as his or her own utterance. In the extract below from his *Conferences*, Cassian makes this manner of participatory involvement clear:

> Taking into himself then all the dispositions [*affectus*] of the psalms, he will begin to repeat them and treat them in his profound compunction of heart not as if they were composed by the prophet but as if they were his own utterances and his own prayer… When we have the same disposition in our heart with which each psalm was sung or written down, then we shall become like its author.
>
> (qtd. from Robertson 86)

For Cassian, assumed authorship demands the reader's recognition of the text as their own. Such recognition involves the adoption of the 'scripted I' and ensures that the psalms, in the words of the eighth-century ecclesiastical poet and scholar Alcuin, provide "an intimate confession of *your* sins, and an… intimate thanksgiving for all things which have happened to *you*" (qtd. Robertson 127, my italics).

This method of scriptural reading was adopted in a range of other devout medieval texts, which were similarly prepared with assumable subject positions. Sarah

[82] See Woolf's introduction to *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*.

McNamer, in *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (2010), discusses the spread of these materials and stresses their functionality as tools for their readers. Comparing Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations* to the Psalms – with which it sometimes appeared[83] – McNamer notes that Anselm's compositions contain an identical 'I' to be understood "as an affective technology… a position entered into and made both passionate and personal by the one who performs the prayer" (70). The effect of this technology – whose occurrence throughout the medieval period McNamer goes on to document – is the fusing of a work's speaker with its reader in a manner which ensures that every sincere reading essentially becomes an act of re-authorship.

As McNamer demonstrates, Woolf's understanding of early devotional poetry's scripted nature has become the default position in medieval studies. Woolf's suggestion that "La Corona" shares this assumable first-person position, however, has been met with much less enthusiasm in Donne scholarship. Though some have broached the topic, they have either noted liturgical similarities without examining the issue in much depth,[84] or rejected the idea entirely on the basis of the cycle's first introductory sonnet (Targoff and Oliver, who both take such a position, are discussed below). The majority of studies of the poems have tended to pay little overt attention to the issue, however, and the consensus around the cycle is that it amounts to an exhibition *of*, rather than an opportunity *for*, devotion.[85] "La Corona", these writers implicitly suggest, is exhibitive in that it displays the devotion of someone else to a reader who is not explicitly considered. While the text's audience may choose to identify with its persona, the cycle's actual wording is treated – in line with what Woolf sees as Reformation norms – as the utterance of a third-party speaker, who may, or may not, be thought of as Donne himself.

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[83] McNamer refers to a manuscript compiled by Anselm for Adelaide, daughter of William the Conqueror, which also included various parts of the Psalter (McNamer 70).

[84] See Gardner's comments on "La Corona" in her introduction to *John Donne: The Divine Poems* (xxi-xxiv) and Diane Chambers' "'Salvation to All That Will Is Nigh': Public Meditation in John Donne's 'La Corona'". Chambers expands this issue at more length than Gardner, taking the cycle to be a potential work of liturgy designed for public exclamation. The idea of the cycle is a public work sits at the heart of the dismissal of Targoff and Oliver (see above). A more successful and consistent treatment of the cycle as scripted discourse can be found in David Marno's *Death be not Proud* (2016). Marno describes "La Corona's" first person as "a locus of experimentation" (34) and proceeds to view the cycle instrumentally. His concerns are predicated against prayer structures from outside the cataphatic tradition, however, and our readings of "La Corona" ultimately bear little similarity.

[85] See, for example, works by Cousins, Oliver, Maurer and O'Connell, as well as works by both Lewalski and Martz, mentioned in my bibliography. While a number of these critics discuss the cycle as a meditative exercise – most prominently Louis Martz – it would appear that what is generally meant by this is that the cycle is seen as an exemplar which displays a third party who is engaged in such activity.

Outside of "La Corona's" explicit study, the idea that the period's verse always features a strongly subjectivised speaking voice has been disputed by Ramie Targoff, who, in her 2001 study *Common Prayer*, questions any absolute divorce between prayer and poetry in the period, and argues for the persistence of explicitly scripted forms of poetic devotion. Targoff acknowledges a growing distinction – partially absent from the pre-Reformation landscape – between scripted and exhibited devotion, and documents the suspicions held by some reformed figures towards both set prayer and the kind of artifice that would appear intrinsic to poetry. Her purpose in reciting this history, however, is to maintain that, despite these movements, verse retained a role in mainstream devotional and liturgical practices. The officially prescribed prayer book, Targoff is clear, continued to script public service, and scriptural materials in verse with explicitly assumable first-person pronouns[86] remained at the heart of even the most Puritan worship[87]. She goes on to note, moreover, that original works of scripted devotion outside of officially sanctioned liturgy and Scripture were also intensely popular. Originating from, and addressed to, all parts of the Christian spectrum, the large number of prayer books composed in the period – Ryrie speaks of a "torrent" (219) – suggests that while extempore private prayer may have been a goal for some, the majority of believers were uncontroversially using at least some form of set prayer in their regular practice.

Targoff herself points to evidence that Donne was supportive of such movements (she principally discusses the poem "Upon the Translation of the Psalms") and argues strongly with an eye to Herbert and Wyatt that now canonical poetry could also fall within this bracket. What Targoff does not do in *Common Prayer*, however, is place Donne's own verse directly in this context. This conscious omission is due to both her specifically liturgical focus and her view that Donne never manages to wholly detach himself from his verse. Donne's poetry, she maintains, is unsuitable to be read "privately by anonymous worshippers" as "his consistently idiosyncratic and complex formulations" (93) restrict the possibilities for readerly appropriation.

[86] She is referring to the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer here. Patristic texts, supportive of scripted devotion, were specifically appended to Psalm translations by reformed authors: Targoff, among other references, notes Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury's 1567 Psalter (67).

[87] The term 'Puritan' has been disputed by scholars who prefer 'non-conformist' or 'Godly' (see Anthony Milton's discussion of devotional terminology (1 & 8)); it has therefore largely been avoided in this thesis. In this particular instance, I use the term to refer to the wing of the Church that advocated various degrees of further reform; this follows Milton's usage (8).

A similar estimation of the potential of Donne's verse to be re-authored is provided by P.M. Oliver, who likewise argues for "the limited usefulness of Donne's religious poems as aids to devotion" (12). Unlike Targoff, however, Oliver expresses these concerns in the context of a detailed discussion of "La Corona". While acknowledging that "La Corona's" sonnets generally mimic traditionally scripted pre-Reformation forms, he points to the cycle's opening as being markedly less medieval in both style and content and argues that this sonnet presents an apparently authorial speaker who stakes a direct claim to the ensuing cycle. Directly referencing "the poet-speaker's extra-textual life" (99), Sonnet One, Oliver argues, significantly particularises its central speaking voice in a way which invites "us to believe that Donne is writing about himself" (99). With reference to the octet of the cycle's first sonnet, the grounds upon which Oliver bases his argument are clear:

> *Deigne at my hands this crown of prayer and praise*,
> Weav'd in my low devout melancholie,
> Thou which of good, hast, yea art treasury,
> All changing unchang'd Antient of dayes,
> But doe not, with a vile crowne of fraile bayes,
> Reward my muses white sincerity,
> But what thy thorny crowne gain'd, that give mee,
> A crowne of Glory, which doth flower alwayes;
>
> (1-8)

Though the imperative and first person possessive of line 1 are amenable to being (re)voiced by their reader, other elements of the octave do appear to individuate their speaker. "Weav'd" (2) is highly suggestive of authorship, as is line six's usage of 'muse', and the self-diagnosis of "melancholie" in line 2 would seem to have a similarly particularising effect. Though melancholy is most frequently treated as a harmful humoral imbalance, to be of a melancholic complexion was not necessarily seen as pathological in the period, and the humor's classical associations with genius and artistry even led to its deliberate cultivation. Such 'fashionable melancholy'[88] was of demonstrable interest to Donne himself and he would appear to have adopted the stance in both a 1595 portrait[89] and a number of his own poems.[90] Reference to

[88] See for example Lawrence Babb's *The Elizabethan malady: a study of melancholia in English literature from 1580 to 1642*

[89] The 'Lothian' portrait now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London; see Nick Davis' "Melancholic Individuality and the Lothian Portrait of Donne".

[90] Grief is relatively common in Donne's work, but see particularly "Twickenham Garden" and "Oh My Blacke Soule!".

melancholy, therefore, potentially magnifies the sonnet's references to composition and suggests the assumption of an explicitly poetic mantle which serves to distance the speaker from a more generalised readership.

(i.) The Argument for Treating "La Corona" as a Scripted Text

Though I also have reservations relating to Donne's continuing involvement in "La Corona" – these are discussed later in this chapter – I do not follow Oliver's specific reading of Sonnet One. While the text clearly particularises its speaker, particularisation is not necessarily to the exclusion of scripting. It is not my intention to frame "la Corona" as an explicitly liturgical text for public use, but as a more private document specifically tailored to a specific type of audience.[91] Ever the coterie poet, Donne was self-consciously discerning in his verses' dissemination.

The particularising of the speaker through the diagnosis of melancholy restricts the type of reader able to voice the text, i.e. a melancholic, yet a narrowing of potential readership does not necessarily rule out scripted devotion. Melancholy was far from an exclusive or exclusionary condition. As many studies have shown,[92] the condition was entirely pervasive in Reformation England, with Burton's *Anatomy* classing it an "epidemical disease" that infected "all the world" (1.120). Though it is true that melancholy was directly cultivated by some with artistic aspirations, it was also a condition of specifically theological concern, and, given the speaker's explicit classification of his affliction as "devout" (2), it is melancholy's religious associations that I take to be relevant in "La Corona".

Associated with black bile – a cold, dry and earthbound humor – melancholy was roundly thought inimical to effective prayer, with a key devotional fear in the period – Ryrie describes it as "ubiquitous" (21) – being that aridity would dull ardour and prevent the melting of a petitioner's "stoney" heart ("La Corona" 73). Humorism thus encouraged believers to pray that heat and moisture be added to their petitions in the hope of directly countering such ill effects. In Donne's own "A Litanie", for example, a poem contemporaneous with "La Corona", a meditant reader whose "heart is by dejection, clay" (5) aims for deliverance from the "Dead clods of sadnesse" (127), via

[91] It is here that I part company with Diane Chambers, one of the few critics to have more recently espoused Woolf's view, who takes the piece to be actively liturgical.
[92] The topic is long standing, Lawrence Babb's *The Elizabethan malady*, for example, was published in 1951. Yet it has also been at the heart of many recent works; see, for example, works in my bibliography by Gowland, Schoenfeldt, Selleck and Rollin.

the doubling of God's flame in his or her heart (24) and the application of "devout sad tears" (25)[93]. One side of the humoral spectrum is appealed to in order to counteract an imbalance at its other extreme. As Angus Gowland stresses, however, the humoral system as understood in the early seventeenth century was not nakedly mechanistic, and causation could equally flow in both directions, i.e., the mind could affect the body as much as the body could affect the mind. It is in the light of such causation that Burton links melancholy directly to salvation anxiety: "Predestination" and "reprobation", he maintains, are words that "terrify the souls of many" who "predisposed to melancholy… torture and crucify themselves" with "doubt of their election" (3.398-399). In cases such as this, black bile is not so much the source of doubt, as doubt is the source of black bile. Reformed Christians, newly deprived of institutional salvation, potentially found themselves intensely vulnerable to such melancholic anxiety, with Burton going so far as to suggest that "papists" were wholly immune to religious melancholy because of the ready availability of indulgences and absolution (3.403).

While melancholy, therefore, does specify a particular type of reader, its pervasiveness in the period works against its exclusivity. It is not purely Sonnet One's self-diagnosis, however, which fuels Targoff and Oliver's doubts regarding scripting. Although melancholy was very much the malady of the age, authorship is typically a more singular phenomenon, and the sonnet's suggestions of weaving (2) and inspiration (6) are thus less easily reconciled with the idea that its first person is to be filled by its reader. In view of the octave as a whole, however, I see these hints towards composition to be better understood as references to performance. Any claim to "Glory" (8) in "La Corona" is fundamentally not founded on artistry, as the speaker renounces "fraile bayes" (5) and instead offers up his or her own "white sincerity" (6) for judgement. Salvation – the crown "which doth flower always" (8) – is the "reward" (6) that the speaker seeks, yet, the speaker insists, salvation is a laurel which should be issued on the basis of performative intent rather than aesthetic form. The sonnet consequently does not appeal to originary authorship, but seemingly does reference the kind of re-authorship through performance mentioned by Cassian above. Though Sonnet One of "La Corona" is involved with its own generation, generation can be associated with performance as well as composition. In this context, line 2's 'weaving'

[93] See for example Nicholas Byfield's *The Signes: or an essay concerning the assurance of God's love* (9-10); Ryrie provides a wealth of other examples 20-26, 100-101.

is best seen as a rebinding of something pre-existent, and I believe that line 6's mention of muse may be understood in a similar way. The cycle's penultimate line (97) links "muse" directly with both the Holy Spirit[94] and the aforementioned lifting of "heart and voice" (13) in prayer, associations which I see as also supporting notions of performed re-authorship.[95] While the text forms a vehicle for devotion, it is not the vehicle itself but its powering intent upon which the speaker wishes to be judged, and it is thus its performance – its reading – which is of direct relevance. "La Corona's" first sonnet is to be voiced by its melancholic assumed reader[96] who, as line 1 literally states, is understood as offering up its prayer with his or her own "hands" (1).

The Speaking Reader and the Issue of Performative Intent

The understanding of the octave's voicing laid down above is consolidated in the ensuing sestet. Opening with a discussion of "ends" that further links performative intent to salvation, it goes on to set out the method that I see as being followed throughout the rest of the cycle:

> The ends crowne our workes, but thou crown'st our ends,
> For, at our end begins our endlesse rest,
> The first last end, now zealously possest,
> With a strong sober thirst, my soule attends.
> 'Tis time that heart and voice be lifted high,
> *Salvation to all that will is nigh*,
>
> (9-14)

While line 9's first mention of "ends" could be understood solely in the word's most common sense – i.e. the opposite of 'beginnings' – it can also be read in terms of 'aim or purpose', as in 'to serve one's ends'.[97] Reading the line in this way suggests that God rewards intention over works, a reading which both echoes the previously discussed

[94] This association is made famous by Milton in the invocation which opens *Paradise Lost*. It is also explicit in Donne's own "Upon the Translation of the Psalms" (l. 31).
[95] In the context of Homeric muse, Ruth Scodel suggests that the purpose of invocation was linked to re-performance, with the muse instructing "the poet anew with each performance" (65).
[96] I have consciously used the term 'assumed reader' rather than the more accepted 'implied reader' in both this and my following chapter; a choice that reflects the narrowness of Donne's intended audience. Donne, I suggest, is in these poems not just writing a position to be filled by any reader, but had actual specific readers in mind while writing. As suggested above in note 7, the majority of Donne's verse was circulated among a group of people who knew Donne and who were known to him, a position that is even clearer in terms of his religious works.
[97] see *OED* def. 14

crowning in the octave and also better fits the general promotion of faith over works in reformed theology.

The addressee of lines 9-10 – the second-person "thou" of line 9 – is contextually Christ (this is assured by line 7's reference to his "thorny crowne"), yet the content of this address is neither directly praise nor petition. In natural speech, the addressing of doctrine back towards its source would be rather strange, yet, in the context of both prayer and poetry, the situation of lines 9-10 may be explained in a number of ways.

One possibility would be public profession, with "La Corona" cast in a more explicitly liturgical role. This suggestion, however, does not fit well with "La Corona's" stipulation of an assumed reader (see my discussion of Oliver above), which weakens the sense in which this is a prayer that has been designed for everyone. While Donne wrote devotional material for the use of others, these materials were not designed for truly public airing. As he makes clear in an accompanying letter to his friend Henry Goodyer, Donne envisaged his own "A Litanie" – irrespective of its title – for private usage "in the lesser Chappels, which are my friends" (Coffin 385-386). As a coterie poet, Donne's writing was never truly private, yet it was consistently exclusive.

A second option implicitly adopted by many who have written on the poem (some instances are discussed below), is that it is actually didactic in intention. Such arguments reject the kind of scripting I have discussed and presume the existence of an audience other than that which has been explicitly addressed. While the speaker of the poem ostensibly addresses Christ, therefore, the content of his address shows him to be obliquely addressing his reader. Two factors militate against this argument. The first of these is the weight of a medieval tradition – to which I see "La Corona" as pointing – that presumed a much more totalising identification between speaker and reader. The kind of work that I see "La Corona" to be did not teach, but rather offered a script for performance. The second militating factor is the nature of the material apparently taught in Sonnet One and elsewhere in the cycle. What "La Corona" teaches – if "La Corona" can be said to be teaching – is not of any obvious interest. Readers with even the faintest knowledge of Christianity will learn nothing from the cycle, which delivers doctrine, but does so in only the most general of terms.

In contrast to the suggestions above, I see "La Corona's" relation of doctrine to be best understood in connection to the coupling of heart and voice that occurs in line 13 of Sonnet One. Though prayer in the period could certainly be silent, as the heart

alone conversed with God, religious authorities across the reformed spectrum were clear that this model was not the ideal, and that a union of voice and heart, similar to that called for in the closing of Sonnet One, was the ultimate devotional goal. Although the emphasis placed upon voice was partly motivated by a desire for public profession, its import should also be understood in the light of the then commonly held integrated understandings of personhood (man was seen as an amalgam of physical and intellectual aspects), which I have already had cause to discuss in terms of melancholy. Such a model opens the possibility of vocalised prayer becoming self-reinforcing, with the voice stirring the heart, and the heart, so stirred, further lifting the voice.

It is with this reciprocal pattern specifically in mind that Targoff claims that "mainstream Renaissance Protestants frequently imagined performative behaviour to have a causal as well as reflective relation to the internal self… the assumption of external gestures prompted the corresponding internal conditions" ("The Performance of Prayer" 60).[98] Raising the voice was a way of integrating and intensifying man's whole being in the praising of God, an understanding which I see as helping to elucidate not only Sonnet One's voicing of doctrine but also the wider status of "La Corona" as a performed work of scripted devotion. Sonnet One's reader addresses God through its lines in a hopefully self-fulfilling effort to capture his or her particular self under the promise made more generally to mankind. The reader is not to be seen as validating the words of another – as would be the case in public confession – but voicing an address in order that it may become entirely their own. Read in this sense, the sonnet's last line becomes a kind of performative utterance: the act of its declaiming boosts the will, and 'willing', line 14 makes clear, helps to make this pronouncement true. By voicing that "*Salvation to all that will is nigh*" (14) the reader who adopts the speaker's position is not didactically voicing Christian truths, but simultaneously expressing and bolstering his or her aforementioned sincerity through the kind of holistic and experiential reading process which I see as powering the entire cycle.

The justification for this practice lies in the fact that the reader's status as a recipient of salvation remains very much at issue throughout the cycle. In the individuating mode of the first-person singular (lines 1-8 and 11-13), the confident voicing of lines 9-10 and 14 is entirely lacking. The sonnet's projected speaker/reader is a melancholic, who, in the lines directly preceding the confidence of lines 9-10, has

[98] Targoff's view is backed by her reading of Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*. Also see Ryrie's discussion (210), particularly his quoting of the influential Calvinist, William Perkins.

felt the need to issue a direct and personal plea for salvation. While doctrine, as asserted in lines 9, 10 and 14, may well render the reader's request superfluous, the sonnet's very existence is evidence of a yearning for something more than a general statement of church orthodoxy. Utter certainty regarding *mankind's* salvation does not meet the needs of the *particular reader*, who, voicing the text as his or her own prayer, expresses a desire to feel him or herself covered by this promise. It is the humoral processes discussed above which work to make this the case. The tension between reformed Christianity's perceived certainties and uncertainties enlivens the cycle and rationalises the practice of the reader who tries throughout to performatively make things the case via their voicing.

Unable to petition salvation, the meditant reader's goal is to experience salvation's presence through a direct encounter with Christ. Like Andrewes in the quote at the head of this chapter, the meditant hopes to enter into his saviour's presence and hold his gaze, a reciprocal engagement which will solidify in personal terms the promise that has been made to mankind more generally. It is in this light that I understand the sestet's complex central lines:

> The first last end, now zealously possest,
> With a strong sober thirst, my soule attends.
> (11-12)

These lines have typically been read as suggesting that the speaker's soul either awaits or stretches towards (two possible meanings of 'attend') "The first last end" which is salvation (see, for example, Marno 7-9). I see scope, however, to read these lines in an altogether more literal fashion, not as a reference to attention, but as an actual attendance. "The first last end" has typically been linked to the discussion of ends in the preceding lines ("The ends crowne our workes, but thou crown'st our ends, / For, at our end begins our endlesse rest,") and thus understood to refer to ultimate salvation. Such a move, however, conflates death and resurrection, with the idea of "first" not being present in the preceding discussion; it is not death that the speaker/reader craves, but eternal life. I find it preferable, therefore, to parse "The first last end" as a direct reference to Christ, who is frequently discussed in these terms in Scripture (see, for example, Rev. 22:13: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and last.", but also a wealth of other places in both *Isiah* (41:4, 44:6, 48:12) and *Revelations* (1:8, 1:17, 2:8, 21:6)). Interpreting line 11 in this way allows us

to read line 12's "attend" literally: "zealously possest" (11) with a "strong sober thirst" (12), the speaker/reader declares an intent to attain Christ's presence.

What argues most strongly for this interpretation is that the attendance of Christ – understood in a literal fashion – is at the centre of the sonnets which follow. Utilising what McNamer above calls the affective technology of the scripted pronoun, a suitably prepared reader picks up the cycle's first-person position and directly addresses a stream of Biblical figures in real-time as if present. Though the target of this address shifts throughout – from Mary, to the reader's own soul, to Joseph, and then to Christ himself – the cycle's lines are consistently uttered as if the reader were in the direct presence of the divine, who, irrespective of address, is central to the set scenes of each of the following sonnets. The aim of the reader who follows medieval tradition and assumes the first-person pronoun is, therefore, not to understand Christian truth but to grasp its actual experience through a meditative attendance at the scenes of Christ's life. Ultimately, "La Corona's" first sonnet is thus a further example of reading, not to know, but to experience. The sonnet is experiential rather than explanatory, as the voicing of doctrine becomes an attempt to experience – rather than know – its explicit theological truth.

Experiencing Christ in "La Corona" and the Medieval Reading Tradition

It is the reader's attempt to personally attend Christ that dominates the rest of the text. Rather than directly praying for membership of the elect, the reader attempts to feel Christ's promise through experiential attendance at the key scenes of his life. This procedure begins with the opening lines of "Sonnet Two", as the "nigh" from the final line of "Sonnet One" shifts in its repetition to become a literally interpretable adjective of place:

> *Salvation to all that will is nigh*,
> That All, which alwayes is All every where,
> Which cannot sinne, and yet all sinnes must beare,
> Which cannot die, yet cannot chuse but die,
> Loe, faithfull Virgin, yeelds himselfe to lye
> In prison, in thy wombe;
>
> (15-20)

It is now salvation in terms of Christ – its literal incarnation – that is spatially near. Addressing Mary as a fellow presence who is quite literally *there*, the meditative reader points towards her womb – "loe" (19) – where Christ lies imprisoned. The meditant thus talks not *about* Mary, but *to* her, as he or she does not merely witness a past scene, but actively takes a role in the Annunciation.

In a 2007 article, A.D. Cousins and R. J. Webb cast the behaviour of the sonnet's speaker (they do not acknowledge the possibility of scripted devotion) as "curious" (137). Though they concede that bringing a "reader imaginarily into contact with the sacred" (137) was a "customary tactic" (136) of devout meditation, they find fault with the "impertinent" (136) speaker, whom they accuse of "lecturing" the virgin "about her womb". The authors' own expectations of meditative decorum are, it would appear, altogether more passive, as, with a note of disapproval, they contrast Donne's practice in "La Corona" with Southwell's "self-effacing" (137) speaker in the thematically similar "The Presentation". While Southwell, they suggest, absents himself in order to present his reader with the scene of the Annunciation, they see Donne – through his failure/refusal to veil his own presence – to succeed mainly in presenting himself. Though not exactly censorious of this procedure, they are clearly suspicious of Donne's motives, and seem to imply that a truly sincere meditant would, in Southwell's mould, work much harder to suspend his or her self in the act of their imaginative thought.

While the model of a seeing yet unseen meditant in Southwell's mold may well be self-effacing – and thus, by some standards, perhaps more reverent – self-effacement in the face of the divine was not inevitable in the mystical tradition that concerns me in this thesis. Building on the idea that the text scripts rather than exhibits devotion, I see Donne as working within a movement which, pre-dating the sixteenth century Ignatian model assumed by Cousins and Webb,[99] aimed to project an active living agent into Scripture, who would fundamentally participate in the scene observed. This agent brought its own fore-knowledge, and potentially pre-conceptions, to the scene imagined, with the intent of not only witnessing, but also actively and holistically (with both body and soul) participating in the events which were felt to unfold as they were read. The aim of such texts was not to establish the facts of episodes such as the Annunciation, but to 'taste' (see Leclercq above 15) them through the experience of their reading.

[99] Whether it is strictly fair to suggest that Loyola actually took this position is beyond the scope of my research; that he is taken to do so by Cousins and Webb is clear.

In the twelfth-century sermon discussed below, Bernard of Clairvaux takes the Annunciation of Luke 1 as his text, and, as Gabriel's message comes to a close in verse 37, suspends the Gospel narrative in order to enter the verse in a way highly reminiscent of "La Corona". With his audience in attendance, Bernard directly entreats the Virgin in the present tense:

> You have heard, O Virgin, the announcement of the great mystery; the means designed for its fulfilment have been unfolded to you, each wondrous, each replete with joy [...] allow us to hear from your lips the answer and the good tidings which we desire, that the bones that have been humbled may rejoice [...] You have heard that you are to conceive and bring forth a Son, and that it will not be through the power of man, but by the virtue of the Holy Ghost. The angel awaits your reply.
>
> (*Sermons of Saint Bernard* 67)

What had formerly been a mixture of straight Biblical reading and exegesis makes way for apostrophe, as Bernard scripts himself and his audience – Bernard uses the first person plural throughout – in directly petitioning the second person Virgin as if present at the scene. From this internal vantage point, Bernard and his monks comport themselves passively through their hope of hearing Mary's reply, but also actively through their own speech, adopting, like the reader of "La Corona", an embodied discourse that assumes the speaker's presence within the scene envisaged. Importantly, their wish to hear Mary's answer stems not from curiosity – outside the progressing scene this answer had already been long given – but originates from a much more profound desire to experience the Annunciation's actual occurrence. It is with this aim in mind that Bernard renders the third-person narrative Gospel into a live and immersive reading process in which an apparently malleable in-progress progression replaces a temporarily suspended, yet already rigidly determined, historical narrative.

Bernard's sermon continues in an even more urgent vein, which further stresses the meditants' involvement in the scene relayed:

> We, too, are waiting, O Lady, for a word of mercy we, who are groaning under the sentence of condemnation [...] By your short answer we shall be refreshed and recalled to life. Adam, with all his race Adam, a weeping exile from Paradise, implores it of

> you. Abraham entreats you, David beseeches you. This is the object of the burning desires of the holy fathers, of your fathers, who are still dwelling in the region of the shades of death. Behold the entire human race prostrate at your feet in expectation.
>
> (*Sermons of Saint Bernard* 67-68)

As "we" (Bernard and his monks) join the angel "waiting" in a progressive[100] present for Mary's word, the pronoun's power to script devotion begins to expand. Old Testament figures are co-opted into the first person plural as a series of Church figures, and, in a final flourish, "the entire human race" join Mary and the angel in first-century Galilee. This strangely a-temporal gathering is not passively marooned within the setting of the biblical Annunciation, however. Bernard's petitioners are engaged in present-tense activity: "waiting", but also imploring, entreating and beseeching the Virgin to action. Irrespective of how seemingly artificial their inclusion may appear, and with no regard for their true temporal status, these witnesses attend the Annunciation in the spirit of the present; "groaning" under an identical "sentence of condemnation", even though, post-Passion, a path to the salvation for which they so ardently wish had already been cleared.

By scripting a biblical scene in such a way, Bernard looks not to explicate Luke 1 conventionally, but rather attempts to secure its experience for his audience. His emotive dramatising technique seeks to demonstrate rather than maintain the theological importance of the Annunciation, and thus tries to bring his audience closer to God through particular experience rather than abstract proposition. As with the sermons on the *Song of Songs* discussed in my previous chapter, the aim is not to explain Scripture through the allocation of meaning, but to stimulate its reception as a living text via its experiential encounter. Such participation involves the understanding – in some sense it takes place in the imagination – yet it is ultimately as visceral as it is imagined. Bernard's method is no thought experiment; his ardent desire is to live through the scene presented, respond and react as if to a real event, and thereby taste with the "palate of his heart" (see my discussion of Leclercq p. 15) that event's particular relevance.

[100] The Latin text would of necessity used only the present tense, but the sermon above is based on an English translation of 1508 (see Bibliography) and English readers in the late medieval/early modern period would thus have been exposed to this effect.

Though "La Corona" is less conspicuously guided than Bernard's Annunciation sermon (this point is retuned to below), there are clear similarities of approach. Eschewing typical narrative structures, both texts address a second-person Virgin in the present tense as the meditative reader does not merely witness, but acts through their instruction. Utilising his or her own "book of experience", the meditant maintains the soterial significance of the Annunciation from a position unavailable to merely historical witnesses of the event. This process is, accordingly, at odds with the kind of self-effacement apparently preferred by Cousins and Webb. While they would seem to desire a relation of the scene that strives towards objectivity, Donne's desire, like Bernard's before him, is to feel the scene as an occasion of his own experience. What is sought is thus less a species of historical thought than something approaching its denial. Bernard's aim – and by extension, that of Donne in "La Corona" – is not to explain the Annunciation as something discrete and finished, but to collapse distinctions between both here-and-there and past-and-present in order to capture a moment which would otherwise be removed in both place and time. This is not to argue that all objectivity is abandoned; the scene envisaged remains very much an instance of historical fact for both Bernard and Donne. Their goal, however, is not this fact's objective representation, but the generation of a subjective experience relating to it. Tenses and pronouns are hence utilised to separate not now from then, but narrative from experience, as the meditant author seeks to turn a past-tense tale into a potentially realisable present-tense experience.

This technique, which is employed throughout the titled sonnets of "La Corona", is also distinctively pursued elsewhere in Donne's work of this period. "The Annunciation and Passion", a text broadly contemporaneous with "La Corona", uses the calendrical coincidence of both Good Friday and the feast of the Annunciation falling upon the same day[101] to provide a bravura illustration of precisely the kind of meditative transposition that the tradition involved. Though the events at hand are logically divorced in time, the duality of the occasion acts as a meditative trigger that allows the prepared soul to experience both events as "today":

> Tamely fraile body' abstaine to day; today
> My soule eates twice, Christ hither and away.
> …

[101] This occurred on March 25 1608; critics have thus placed the poem's composition somewhere around this date.

Shee [the soul] sees a Cedar plant it selfe, and fall,
Her Maker put to making, and the head
Of life, at once, not yet alive, yet dead;
She sees at once the virgin mother stay
Reclus'd at home, Publique at Golgotha.
Sad and rejoyc'd shee's seen at once, and seen
At almost fiftie, and at scarce fifteene.
At once a Sonne is promis'd her, and gone,
Gabriell gives Christ to her, He her to John;

(1-16)

The poem's opening merges three, normally discrete, time periods through an act of meditative thought which perfectly demonstrates the tradition's attitude towards historical occurrence. The Annunciation and the Crucifixion are experienced simultaneously, not only by a speaker in 1608, but potentially also by the reader, no matter how contemporary they may be. The deictic flexibility of line 1's "today" and line 2's first-person merge with the given present tense apprehension in an attempt to simultaneously involve the reader with both the Annunciation and the Passion on the occasion of the today of his or her reading. Though entirely paradoxical in terms of historical progression, the contrasting visions of Mary are treated as being co-extensive in a species of meditative thought which strives not to process and organise, but to 'taste' (2) the arc of Christian history as it exists contemporaneously in the act of his or her reading. The manipulation of grammatical tense breaks down established boundaries of time, allowing a temporally engaged, but a-temporally informed, meditant to be both "Sad and rejoyc'd" (13), as the Incarnation is experienced through the catalyst of the Virgin.

Though five hundred years separate Bernard's sermon from "La Corona", works which drew on a similar imaginative method to transport their readers to the divine were continuously in production throughout the later Middle-Ages and into the early modern period. First in Latin and then in the vernacular, Bernard's example was imitated by a wealth of writers who sought to attain Christ's presence through an imaginative engagement in the scenes of his life and death. The most prominent examples of this tradition are the many so called meditative lives of Christ, which took direct inspiration from Bernard,[102] and – in a manner similar to the Annunciation

[102] This was equally true of both early and late examples. The earliest complete life was the twelfth-century *De Institutione Inclusarum*, by Aelred of Rievaulx, a slightly younger contemporary of Bernard and fellow Cistercian, who was clear about his debt to his friend and guide (see Karnes' discussion of

sermon above – sought to propel their audience directly into Gospel scenes. Like "La Corona", these popular works typically ran from the Annunciation through to the Ascension and utilised techniques identical to those discussed above in the hope of establishing a direct colloquy between the meditant reader and Christ.

While Bernard had written more or less exclusively for his fellow monks, the less self-consciously elite audiences for whom these lives tended to be prepared, required an extra level of guidance, and the texts thus appeared with prefaces, which outlined, and didactically encouraged, precisely the kind of apprehension required for their successful usage. One of the genre's most influential examples[103], the fourteenth-century *Vitae Christi*, traditionally attributed to Saint Bonaventure, offers a clear and thoroughly representative example of the tradition's aims, with its preface instructing the meditant who wishes to "feele truly" Christ's presence:

> thou that coveytest to feele truly, the fruyte of this presente booke thou must with all thy thought & thyne entent procure thee in thy soule present to those thinges that be here written, said, or done of our Lorde Iesu. And that earnestly and respectively as thoughe thou heardest thé with thy bodily eares or sawest them done with thy bodily eyes
>
> (Love 14)

The core demand is that the scenes of Christ's life be experienced as if the reader were actually there. This highlights the importance of the veracity of the imaginative process called for, not necessarily in terms of factual accuracy, but rather in terms of its character as authentic experience. There is an intimation that any imagined event that remains restricted to the mind possesses less efficacy, and that Christ's life must therefore be heard and seen as "thoughe thou heardest… with thy bodily eares of sawest them done with thy bodily eyes". Becoming a meditant reader in the terms of the *Vitae*'s author thus involves the adoption of an approach similar to that elicited by both Bernard and Donne above; devotees were not merely to *think* upon the scenes of Christ's life, but to "procure" themselves present and engage with them more fully as episodes of his or her own lived experience. Given that the extrinsic stimulus normally

influence 120). One of the last lives to be produced in English, *Sighes, Sobbes, and Tears Upon our Saviours Passion* (1611), was attributed – albeit falsely – to Bernard himself.

[103] It was particularly influential in England, where its fifteenth-century English translation by Nicolas Love stands as the most frequently surviving non-scriptural work from the pre-print era (see Ogoru xiiv for a discussion of the book's publishing and transmission history).

required for such perception is lacking, the mode called for would appear to involve a mental act, yet, as the preface asserts, the essential character of this act must be "bodily", as the meditant is effectively asked to see what is not there. Though such seeing might be commonly labelled as delusional, any such criticism of the *Vitae Christi* misses the point, as this is not the position maintained. As with other works within this tradition, its interest throughout lies with the character of physical perception, and its aspiration is that this character be applied to the imaginative meditative process in which the reader engages.

The 'Meditative Lives', English Passion Poetry and "La Corona"

The *Vitae*'s preface describes meditative experience, yet is itself didactic, not meditative. This distinction is essential, as it is not my intention to claim that "La Corona" is about meditation, but that it is itself an entirely scripted meditative exercise. Turning to the *Vitae*'s actual text, the didactic manner of the preface is abandoned in favour of a mixed style, which, at points, makes stirring use of the more obviously scripted method of Bernard and "La Corona". Its procedure is clearly demonstrated in its envisaging of the Crucifixion below (italics are my own):

> When our Lorde Iesus Christ was come to the hille of Calvarie, loe how wickedlie those cursed workemen began on all sides to worke that cruell worke. *Take heede now diligently and attentively to those things which be done, and make thy selfe as present in minde therat, behouldinge all that shall be inflicted upon thy Lorde Iesu. And so with the inner eie of thy Soule behoulde*, some preparing the Crosse, some making readie the ropes and cordes to binde him, some the nayles and hammers to nayle him, and some diginge the hole in the earth to fix the Crosse in, and others busie aboute him and drawing of his cloathes from him. And so is he the thirde time spoiled of his garments, and standeth starke naked in the sighte of all the people
>
> (512-513)

The first sentence sets a scene in a familiar narrative past, before the (italicised) guiding voice of the preface reasserts itself at the start of the second sentence, breaking the narrative flow and urging the adoption of the correct meditative attitude in terms

almost identical to the preface. The result of this urging is a glossing of the "cruell worke" already introduced, which upon retelling is transformed through a string of present participles into a scene much more befitting a meditant who is present "thereat". It is as if the text takes heed of itself and acts accordingly, allowing the passage to culminate with Jesus, rendered directly in the present tense, standing "in the sighte of all the people", a designation which, considering the preface's injunction, includes the temporally re-aligned reader as much as any other historical witness.

It is an identical present-tense observing of Christ that preoccupies "La Corona's" titled sonnets, with the reader repeatedly led to the stating of doctrine in the actual presence of its incarnation. Mary, for example, is asked in the second sonnet not to understand, or even accept, the angel's message, but to look – "loe" (19) – to its truth as it 'lies' embodied in her womb; this technique becomes general throughout the cycle. Five of "La Corona's" six titled sonnets are similarly dominated by imperatives of sight: "loe" (19, 47, 65) "seest" (37) "see" (44) and "behold" (89). While the addressees of these imperatives are various (Mary, as above, but also Joseph, the reader's own soul, and, finally, those who have already gained salvation), their visible target is universally Christ, who, whether in the womb, manger, temple or carrying his cross, is portrayed throughout as an object of direct present-tense apprehension. It is Christ's presence, "Sonnet One's" stated aim, that therefore dominates the cycle, as readers, following the *Vitae*'s lead, repeatedly attempt to engage with the physical embodiment of the salvation which they seek.

It should be noted that it was not only sight with which the meditative lives were concerned. The twelfth-century *De Institutione Inclusarum*, of Aelred of Rievaulx (translated into English in the fourteenth century) calls, for example, for wide-ranging physical engagement, as its reader is assigned roles within the Gospel narratives that stimulate a broader sensorium than vision alone. The reader is tasked with assisting in the delivery of the infant Christ (l. 595), staying awake in Gethsemane as the disciples sleep (845) and collecting drops of Christ's blood at the Crucifixion (962-963). These actions are supplemented by a recurring call for the meditant to not only witness, but to "run" towards his or her focus, a manoeuvre which serves, through the resultant proximity achieved, to increase the scope of sensory participation. Upon arrival at the scene in question, the meditant is frequently instructed to act in a variety of physical ways. Describing Christ in the garden at Gethsemane sweating "so grievously þat it

semeþ dropes of blood rennyngge doun on þe irþe"[104] (841-842) Aelred instructs the meditant:

> Wher-aboute standest þu, suster? Ren to, for Godys sake, and suk of þe swete blessyde dropes, þat þey be not spiled, and wyþ þy tounge likke away þe dust of hijs feet.[105]
>
> (842-844)

The opening question, like the authorial voice of the *Vitae Christi*'s preface, looks to ensure adherence to this kind of meditative experiential reading practice, with its implicit answer establishing that the meditant is actually in the garden at Gethsemane. Having secured this spatial-temporal repositioning, the meditant is urgently instructed to approach the suffering Christ and interact with his body in a somatic – and presumably sensory – manner. Rather than merely collecting the "swete blessyde dropes" of sweat that rain from Christ, the meditant is instructed to suck them from his body and to lick the dust from his feet, thereby introducing tactile, and even gustatory, engagement to the meditant's experience.

Similar techniques also appear in "La Corona". Turning to address his or her own soul in Sonnet Three, "Nativity", the meditant aspires to a deepening of participation:

> Seest thou, my Soule, with thy faiths eyes, how he
> Which fils all place, yet none holds him, doth lye?
> Was not his pity towards thee wondrous high,
> That would have need to be pittied by thee?
> Kisse him, and with him into Egypt goe,
> *With his kinde mother*, *who partakes thy woe.*
>
> (37-42)

By imploring their own souls to view the scene with "faiths eyes" – a term redolent of the *Vitae* above – readers project their self into the humble scene of the nativity. Line 41 then expands participation by directly scripting physical involvement through the kissing and accompanying of Christ as he journeys with his mother to Egypt. Though those who have neglected "La Corona's" medieval inspiration have found this kiss to be out of place – P.N. Oliver, for example, describes it as "a bizarre gesture of

[104] In transcription: "so grievously that it seems drops of blood are raining down on the earth." (All Middle English translations from *De Institutione Inclusarum* are my own, devised in conjunction with the extensive notes provided in the text prepared by Ayto and Barratt).
[105] "Where are you standing sister? Run to him for God's sake, and suck of the sweet blessed drops that they be not spilled, and with your tongue lick away the dust of his feet."

affectionate allegiance" – it is clearly in line with the broader tradition of both imaginative and somatic engagement that I have outlined.

Where "La Corona" and the meditative lives differ is in the former's lack of an authoritative narrative voice. Clearly present in the above quotations from *Vitae* and *De Institutione Inclusarum*, such a voice serves to guide the meditant, establishing the scene and urging the adoption of the correct meditative attitude. "La Corona", however, relies purely on tense and pronoun use to cement the notion that apprehension and reading are simultaneous activities. Far from alienating the cycle from tradition, this lack of a narrative voice allies it more directly with the large body of distinctly verse treatments of Christ's life which, like the meditative lives, were produced and disseminated from the twelfth century onwards. Similar to the lives in terms of technique and subject matter,[106] yet much more condensed in presentation, these verses were typically composed almost entirely of scripted discourse and sought, like "La Corona", to engender a meditative attitude purely through performance alone.

The verse below is typical in its eschewing of an authoritative speaker in favour of a first-person position, which relates experience rather than narrative:

> Whyt is Thi naked brest
> and blodi is Thi side,
> Starkë are Thine armes
> that strecchëde are so wyde.
> Falwe is Thi fairë ler
> and dimmyëth Thi sighte,
> Drie is Thin hendë body
> on rode so y-tighte.[107]
>
> (Duncan 119)

A scene is described as visible in real time in a manner which, through the act of reading alone, potentially represents a meditative procedure. The poem is neither narrative, nor instructional lesson, and no voice beyond that of the reading meditant is necessary since, similar to the titled sonnets of "La Corona", the immediacy of the present-tense works to suggest that apprehension is simultaneous with reading. The affectively

[106] The link between the meditative lives and Passion poetry is strong. Bennett, in *Poetry of the Passion* (34), and Woolf, in *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (19-66), both explicitly link these works' emergence to the writings of Bernard and Bonaventura. Also see Christiania Whitehead's, 2005 summation of the genre, 'Middle English Religious Lyrics' (96-101).

[107] "White is thy naked breast / And bloody is thy side / Rigid are thine arms / that stretched are so wide / Pale is thy fair cheek / and dim grows thy sight / Lifeless thy gracious body / Upon the cross so tight" (modernisation is my own, based on Duncan's annotations).

depicted humanity of the figure addressed is pressed by description, yet ultimately cemented by its second-person treatment, which transforms the text into an apostrophe wholly directed towards a fellow presence rather than a narrative feature. Had the third person been used: "White is Christ's naked breast", reference would have been maintained, but 'experience' would be lost, as the text would have been transformed from the direct address of someone in attendance to a propositional statement regarding that person.

It is precisely this scripted procedure which "La Corona" adopts. In the six titled sonnets tense use demands that apprehension and reading are contemporaneous, and the use of first and second-person pronouns insists that this apprehension is directly of a presence which is subject to the recognition implicit in the usage of the second person. To paraphrase Love's introduction to the *Vitae Christi*, "La Corona's" assumed readers procure themselves in their soul as present and speak directly to, rather than about, the figures that dominate the cycle's central sonnets: first Mary, then Joseph and finally Christ himself.

(i.) The Continuance of Participative Meditation in Reformation England

Though, as discussed in my introduction, twentieth-century criticism has sometimes worked to cut off the early modern period from the medieval, the thrust of much work over the past thirty years has run counter to this tendency. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, much of the intellectual background underpinning cataphatic meditation clearly maintained its relevance, and I thus see little contextual necessity for breaking "La Corona" away from what I have argued is its root tradition. Love's English version of the *Vitae*, the most popular of the English 'lives', was reprinted three times during the first three decades of the seventeenth century – albeit at continental presses[108] – yet the period also saw the open publication of similar texts in England. Fewter's sixteenth-century translation *Myrrour or Glasse of Christes Passion* (1534), the anonymous *Sighes, Sobbes, and Tears Upon our Saviours Passion*[109] (1611) and Joseph Hall's *Contemplations upon the History of the New Testament* (1634), for example, all claimed, in the words of Alec Ryrie, "the rich seams of medieval piety" for

[108] Editions faithful to Love's text were produced in Douai in 1606, 1610 and 1635, see *EEBO*.
[109] This collection of largely medieval material attributed (falsely) to Bernard, was freely available and evidently popular, as it was reprinted four times, in various configurations, in the first half of the seventeenth century (Teller 245).

Protestant purposes (290), as they rehearsed procedures that had persisted since Bernard with little attention paid to the Reformation boundary.

Though these works did in some respects respond to their religious background – any discussion of purgatory, for example, was expunged, as was reference to traditional non-scriptural material[110] – the fundamental processes and method of the earlier lives was maintained. As the quote below from Hall's *Contemplations* makes clear, tone and tense use entirely coincide with earlier patterns, as the meditant is taken up and transported in a emotive and deeply sensory meditation:

> Oh the torment of the crosse… the tree is raised, and now not without vehement concussion settled in the mortise. Woe is mee, how are thy joynts, and sinewes torne and stretched till they crack againe, by this torturing distension?
>
> (*Contemplations* 268)

Echoing medieval works, an apostrophe of compassion is followed by a present-tense relation of the Crucifixion that adds to the reality of the relatively sparse scriptural texts. The horrific vision of the hanging Christ is augmented by the auditory "vehement concussion" of the cross as it falls into place, a sound (Hall's meditation stimulates multiple senses) which triggers a second apostrophe of woe that is in itself followed by scenes of further torture and a final auditory "crack" as Christ's limbs are distended under his own weight. A similar usage of medieval technique can also be seen in many of the printed sermons that survive from the period. Pointing to Easter sermons by divines from across the reformed spectrum[111], Lucy Wooding asserts that "the immediacy of the Crucifixion experience, and the idea that the observer should participate within the scene" (299) were frequently preserved as the clergy endeavoured to bring their auditories into a direct form of contact with Christ.

Shorter scripted meditations in the tradition of Passion poetry also subsisted in Reformation England. Richard Day's lavishly produced compilation *A Booke of Christian Prayer* (1578) features a number of prayers that closely mimic the unmediated apprehension of earlier Passion verse. His "Prayer upon the minding of Christes Passion", for example, clearly begins in such a vein: "What man is this whom

[110] It is the presence of such material in Love's *Vitae* (the text includes episodes such as the 'harrowing' of Hell and relies on much medieval Mariology) that precluded its open publication in Reformation England.
[111] She mentions Anthony Stafford, John Bradford and Bartholomew Chamberlain (299-300).

I behold all bloody, with skin all to torn" (76), and goes on to sustain this mode throughout, as the reader performs the text as if he or she were actually present at the Crucifixion. It is also of note that Day presents his Passion prayers alongside allegorical illustrations of the five senses; a move which clearly strengthens the idea that they are to be read with reference to a bodily sensorium. Further examples of this tendency can be found in Wooding's survey of Tudor devotional material, which notes the persistence of anonymous ballads re-producing the techniques of medieval verse (301-302), and also points to better known works such as Herbert's "The Agony" and Crashaw's "Christ Crucified" that similarly adopt the tenses, pronouns and subjects of the imaginative medieval tradition. Though I do not wish to claim that these works slavishly reproduced all aspects of the previous tradition, the stylistic concerns I have highlighted in this and my previous section were clearly maintained by many who sought, like Donne in "La Corona", to bring their readers into meditative contact with the divine.

"La Corona" and the Path of Reform in Reformation England

"La Corona" has been related to medieval devotion with some frequency, yet it is not these links that have most commonly been pursued by critics writing on the cycle. As with *The Anniversaries*, a perceived intellectual bent has been highlighted in "La Corona" (see Marno 3, Chambers 161, Maurer 52-53 and Martz 110), which has been potentially associated with the distinctively Reformation currents of both Ignatian and Protestant meditation that I have already discussed in my Introduction.

The most recent, sustained and explicit argument for the cycle as an Ignatian work is put forward by Francesca Knox Bugliani in her 2011 volume *The Eye of the Eagle*. Picking up Louis Martz's earlier arguments, she frames the cycle as a distinct search for understanding predicated against a meditation on the life of Christ which she sees as having been principally inspired by Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. In line with her specifically cognitive emphasis, the focus of the cycle for Bugliani is not 'Ignatian composition' – the first phase of the *Spiritual Exercises*' project which involved the affective envisaging of Gospel scenes – but 'Ignatian analysis', a subsequent, more cerebral, phase of reading which works from Gospel re-enactment towards "inner knowledge of our Lord" (86). Though never denying the existence of medieval precedents, Bugliani's emphasis upon intellectual processing obscures the

experiential thrust of "La Corona" and institutes an emphasis which, following Martz, she sees as being distinctively Counter-Reformation. While medieval meditations were both affective *and* intellectual, Jesuit meditations, for both Bugliani and Martz,[112] began affectively but then became intellectual.

Pointing out that "La Corona" lacks visualised detail and affective content (I return to this below), Bugliani and Martz draw attention to the cycle's presentation of paradox, an element which they see as emphasising an Ignatian preoccupation with divinity over humanity. For Martz, the cycle involves "a careful development from the visual imagination to impassioned paradox" (77): a meditant envisages a scene from Christ's life, but is then gently coaxed towards drawing out the theological mysteries of the Incarnation through the counterpoise of Christ's human life, and God's ultimate ineffability. Particular reflection, he believes, leads, via Donne's prompting, to intellectualised theological truth.

My hesitations in regard to this reading revolve around both its implicit understanding of paradox and its postulated direction of travel – whereby visualisation leads to paradox, but not vice versa. The usage of paradox in meditative practice is ancient and has typically been connected with the apophatic theology of writers such as Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Focusing on Christianity's mysteries, apophatic mystical approaches urged devotees to strip away their reliance on the mundane and focus instead upon divinity through the deliberate cultivation of earthly impossibilities. In a popular example from Pseudo-Dionysius, an affirmation, "God is light", is met by a negation, "God is darkness". This produces a paradox which is highlighted through a third statement such as "God is luminous darkness" (Turner 22).[113] The aim of such a procedure is not the production of linguistic oddities, but the dissolving of earthly categories and the orienting of the meditant away from the world and towards the divine.

On inspection "La Corona's" paradoxes bear little relation to those associated with apophatic models. Entirely relating to the Incarnation, the cycle's paradoxes are consistently voiced in the Incarnation's presence, such presentation disputes the

[112] How fair this estimation is to Ignatius' own intentions falls outside the remit in this thesis. That this is the understanding of both Martz and Bugliani appears from their work, however.
[113] This example is adapted from Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* and has been commonly used to gloss his work. See the discussions of Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God* (22), and Rik van Nieuwenhove, "Monks and scholars in the fifth and sixth centuries" (33-35) for further elaboration of this point and the generally perceived workings of the approach.

notion that "La Corona's" reader is being drawn away from the empirical. The statement in line 18, for example, that Christ "cannot die, yet cannot chuse but die" (18), is followed by the command to look, "Loe" (19), to Christ as he lies in the Virgin's womb. The seeming impossibilities of Christianity's mysteries are thus related in the presence of Christ as their particular, and essentially tangible, reality, who resolves conflict through his own empirically related example. Paradox may focus on divinity, but any meditative assent in "La Corona" partakes in material reality via the Incarnation's literal presence. Christ, visible, but also audible (45), kissable (41) and accompaniable (41), demonstrates – without explaining – how the unboundable can be bounded (38), how "Immensitie" may be "cloistered" (28, 29), and how the prescriber of fate is now himself prescribed (63). Potential antinomy in the text does not, therefore, take us beyond our experience, as would be the case in negative theology, but positively points us towards an object which is perceived to be of our direct apprehension. While the text certainly involves the intellect and stresses the divinity of Christ, this involvement and stress are never disassociated from concrete material manifestation. As in *The Anniversaries*, where divinity is constantly embodied through Elizabeth's particular example, theological reflection in "La Corona" is continuously related back to the particular reference of Christ's envisaged presence. The Incarnation is not an abstracted mystery but an embodied fact and metaphysical speculation, in both texts, thus potentially finds a resolution in a solidly empirical epistemology.

The stronger element of the Ignatian critique of "La Corona's" medievalism is a negative argument, based not on what the cycle *is* but upon what it *is not*. "La Corona", this argument runs, is distanced from medieval practice because it lacks the kind of emotive content that had been a mainstay of earlier participative meditation. The idea that "La Corona" is in some sense emotionally cold has received a large amount of critical backing. For Diane Chambers: "Those readers expecting the deeply private and emotional meditations found in John Donne's "Holy Sonnets" are often disappointed in the impersonal and intellectual meditation in "La Corona"" (161) and Patrick O'Connell is even blunter, declaring the cycle to be entirely "bloodless" (119) when compared with similar works. There is clear support for such statements. "La Corona" is dry-eyed by the standards of the genre, with its scenes clearly lacking the volume of emotive description that is present in both the medieval tradition and Hall's notably more pathetic *Contemplations*.

Though affective augmentation is not obvious in "La Corona", emotional content is not entirely absent from the text, and any relative lack should be framed in the context of the relationship that I have postulated between "La Corona" and its readers. No seventeenth-century reader would have come 'cold' to such meditative work, and "La Corona's" first sonnet, as I have argued above, is largely concerned with the impassioning of performance. Picking up the cycle's pronouns as his or her own and bringing, in the words of Sonnet One, both "heart" and "voice" to the text, its reader may be envisaged as performing the cycle with a verve not necessarily apparent from a purely formal evaluation. Though the text *per se* may be adjudged cold, therefore, this affective lack must be understood in the context of the text's vehicular role. As Sonnet One makes clear, what is to be adjudged by the text's *actual* audience – God himself – is not Donne's verse but the reader's performance.

The instances where the text does script emotional sighs and interjections support this position. These occur in the cycle's most potentially affective sonnets, the "Nativity": "But Oh, for thee, for him, hath th'Inne no roome?" (33) and the "Crucifixion": "But Oh! the worst are most, they will and can, / Alas, and do…" (61-62). Lacking emotive build-up, these exclamations may seem under-determined from a modern perspective, yet committed seventeenth-century meditants caught up in the present of their own reading, need not have shared this feeling, as Christ's troubled birth and death were (re)experienced in their real-time performance of the text. "La Corona" accordingly attempts not so much to stage its emotion, as to reflect an affectivity that it assumes to be already there. If vocalised in accordance with Sonnet One's prescriptions (the raising of "heart" and "voice" (13)), the sighs of lines 33 and 61 are potentially consistent, not with the tenor of Donne's text, but with the meditant's ongoing experience of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

(i.) "La Corona" and Reading for Knowledge

As discussed above in relation to paradox, the cycle insists throughout on the presence of the Incarnation and seeks to assert through demonstration rather than abstracted explanation. The cycle is not a sermon in any modern sense; it does not seek to instruct, and any doctrine that is expounded would already be known to its presumed audience. Accordingly, those who have sought the text's 'message' have been disappointed. Cousins and Webb, for example, when attempting to envisage "La Corona's" second

sonnet in an instructional mold, are more or less forced to take issue with the unoriginality of its teaching, with Donne, they conclude, ultimately offering "little to those to whom he speaks" (136). While I agree fully with this assessment, I see its sting to be entirely drawn by the text's aim, which, as I have argued, is participative rather than instructional. While we may *now* instinctively equate many genres of writing with the purpose of informing – and thus automatically ask what a text is *about* – the interests of scripted devotion lie with the power of expression, not the intellectual content of that which is expressed: "voice" in "La Corona" is raised to rouse the heart as much as the intellect.

The contrast between "La Corona's" participative approach and the kind of knowledge based structures familiar to applicative Protestant practice is brought into relief by comparing the cycle with the strongly applicative Biblical paraphrases already mentioned in my Introduction. Unlike the participatory lives, which added realistic detail and first and second-person subject positions to the sparse Gospel accounts, these highly popular, and essentially novel, texts sought to condense Scripture and emphasise its message at the expense of its happening. The aforementioned *Doctrine of the Bible*, for example, offers a clear and illuminative contrast with "La Corona". The first overlapping scene in these works is the temple episode from Luke 2. The relevant passage from the *Doctrine* is quoted below:

> Qu. *What are the poynts from whence we must derive our argumentation in this Gospell?*
> *An.* The preaching of Christ…
> Qu. *When began Christ to prech?*
> *An.* At twelve yeres olde, when his Parents found him disputing with the doctors in the Temple
> Qu. *How shal we know a Preacher?*
> *An.* By his fruites
> Qu. *What be they?*
> *An.* His doctrine…
>
> (166)

After a further short disquisition on preaching, the text proceeds to offer the contents of Christ's "doctrine" as it is espoused, not in the temple, but in the Gospel as a whole. Consequently, apart from Jesus' age and the fact that his parents "found him disputing", we are given no other detail relating to the incident in the temple, as the emphasis rests entirely on the meaning of what Christ said. Nothing is left to the reader's imagination, as it is solely the understanding that is to be nourished by a voice

which pre-interprets, paraphrases and condenses Scripture with an emphasis that is entirely placed upon meaning. The contrast with "La Corona's" "Temple" sonnet is clear:

> *With his kinde mother who partakes thy woe,*
> *Ioseph* turne backe; see where your child doth sit,
> Blowing, yea blowing out those sparks of wit,
> Which himselfe on the Doctors did bestow;
> The Word but lately could not speake, and loe
> It sodenly speakes wonders, whence comes it,
> That all which was, and all which should be writ,
> A shallow seeming child, should deeply know?
>
> (43-50)

What Christ says in the temple is not to be found in either Sonnet Four's octave, or any of "La Corona's" other sonnets, with attention entirely focused on event rather than meaning.[114] Joseph is instructed in the present tense not to listen to, but to "see" (44) his son as he speaks, and, in stark contrast to the *Doctrine*, the "wonders" spoken are thus something to be observed – "loe" (47) – as opposed to heard. There is no attempt to explain the scene at hand, and no emphasis is placed on the content of what is said. "La Corona's" thrust is to task its reader with envisaging a child teaching in the temple, not to drive home the actual message which that child delivered. That the *Doctrine* so clearly adopts a different approach shows that, as Lewalski and others have emphasised, ways of reading devotionally that emphasised cognitive factors had clearly taken root in the period. What "La Corona's" variant method demonstrates, however, is that, in the early seventeenth century at least, other approaches were still being propagated and pursued from within the established Church.

"La Corona" and the Non-Description of Christ

While, as argued in this section, I see no reason to accept the idea that "La Corona" is a work whose intellectualism divorces it from its root tradition, there remains an aspect of this argument that has received little overt attention. Where "La Corona" does deviate from its root tradition is in its treatment of Christ. Though he does form the cycle's clear meditative focus, no actual depiction is ever offered, a lack that breaks starkly with former practice and suggests that Donne's estrangement from medieval

[114] Luke's Gospel itself is also quiet in regard to the content of Christ's words in the temple. The contrast I wish to draw is between "La Corona" and *The Doctrine* not "La Corona" and Luke 2.

forms may be in fact greater than I have hitherto suggested. The failure of the cycle to physically describe Christ is particularly stark given the pivotal role that Christ holds within both "La Corona" and the wider tradition of imaginative meditation. Repeatedly addressed and demonstrably pointed towards, Christ's importance is acknowledged throughout "La Corona", yet Donne – in a clear departure from both medieval and some Reformation practice – forgoes the opportunity to ever actually describe this focus.

The contrast between "La Corona" and a poem such as the already discussed "Whyt is Thi naked brest" (see page 105) is clear. The eight short lines of "Whyt is Thi naked brest" operate as a litany of Christ's wounded humanity, with reference made to his breast, side, arms, cheek, eyes and body, and with each element qualified by an adjective that further intensifies its pained corporeality: naked, bloody, stretched, pale, lifeless and pierced, the tortured figure tightly bound to the "rode" is described in an impassioned and recognisably human detail which Donne's own contribution never approaches. Where tradition leads the reader to expect a deeply affecting portrait, "La Corona" offers nothing more than a Christ-shaped hole. A sight unseen, Christ is repeatedly viewed, but never actually depicted. Though he demands the gaze of all, what this gaze beholds is never directly related.

This non-description represents a significant and jarring break with tradition. The logic of cataphatic mysticism demands that Christ was not merely a character within the biblical narratives, but those narratives' ultimate author, who, immaculate and self-created, unambiguously 'was what he was', and facilitated the bridging of the divine and the profane. Donne's reluctance to place this figure into the context that he has produced in "La Corona" – irrespective of his efforts elsewhere to reproduce medieval forms – is a significant challenge to the tradition which verges on the iconoclastic.

An effect of Donne's reticence in respect to Christ's description is a reduction of the extent to which Christ himself stands as a pathetic figure within the text. This toning down of sympathetic cultivation chimes well with reformed attacks on practices which – particularly in later medieval period – had seen devotees attempt to institute fellow suffering with the crucified Christ as a means of securing salvation for either themselves or others. As Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen establishes in *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (2012) this idea, linked as it was to wider Catholic notions of penitence, purgatory and soterial suffering, was entirely anathema

across the reformed spectrum, which viewed it as an "intolerable impingement on Christ's unique role as saviour" (Van Dijkhuizen 59). The effect of this injunction is made plain in Joseph Hall's 1609 *The Passion sermon, preached at Paules-Crosse*, which, as Van Dijkhuizen points out, clearly relates to medieval traditions, yet also works to curtail an inappropriately literal identification with Christ's suffering. Hall is keen to delimitate roles within the Passion; while Christ suffered for our salvation, this suffering is, as Christ himself states in John 19:30, "finished". Man's role in respect to the Passion is entirely one of guilt. Hall is clear:

> I call you not to weake & idle pitty of our glourious saviour: to what purpose? His injurie was our glory. No, no; *Yee daughthers of Jersulaem, weepe not for me; but weepe for your selves*: for our sins, that have done this; not for his sorrow that suffered it
>
> (50)

Any notion of imitative suffering is definitively rejected by Hall. While tears may follow meditation, any such tears must be those of self-contempt as devotees are encouraged not to indulge in compassion, but to look back at themselves in guilt; the part of man in the Passion is not to suffer, but to applicatively – in Lewalski's sense – hold himself responsible for Christ's suffering.

Pointing to similar material, Michael Schoenfeldt's "Spectacle of too much Weight" charts a general turning away from the spectacle of the Crucifixion in Reformation England. Though this scene had been central to late-medieval devotion, Schoenfeldt sees later poets (principally Donne, Herbert and Milton) as reassessing its propriety in the light of religious reform. De-emphasising Christ's suffering, Schoenfeldt's poets place weight upon a devotees' own culpability and encourage an inwardly focused reflection. Referencing the reluctance in the work of Donne, Herbert and Milton to literally face the Crucifixion as an event, Schoenfeldt sees them to be rejecting tradition and re-orientating their verse towards the "interior spaces of the believer" (561). Although the primary object of both Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen's attention is Donne's "Goodfriday 1613" – the subject of my following chapter – Donne's reluctance to depict in "La Corona" seemingly echoes the trends they identify. That Donne never dwells upon Christ's description prevents sympathetic engagement and creates a poem that is – at least in terms of Christ – less graphic than its apparent root tradition would lead us to expect.

While a meditation on Christ which does not itself feature Christ is in danger of becoming no meditation at all, I ultimately see "La Corona's" non-description to neither totally undermine its status within the imaginative tradition, nor to exactly map Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen's devotional shifts. Though "La Corona" balks at Christ's depiction, it repeatedly and urgently demands that it is precisely Christ to whom the reader must turn. Despite never being actually shown, Christ's embodied presence is noted: "yet he will weare / Taken from thence [Mary's womb], flesh" (21-22), and this flesh is firmly, and physically, situated within his environment: "cloistered" in Mary's womb (28), lying in the manger (38) or fixed upon the cross (67). Christ, though undescribed, is a determined and undeniable occupier of space. This physicality challenges any suggestion that "La Corona" is part of a wider reformed retreat from materiality in religion[115] and clearly preserves the cycle's cataphatic thrust. Though Donne himself as author would appear to have been struck dumb in the face of Christ's depiction, it is precisely such a task that he continues to demand of his reader. It is thus not the propriety of observation, but the specific practice of depiction which I see as generating "La Corona's" reticence. The possibility of reading divinity is affirmed, yet that same divinity's writing is exposed as problematic.

Though I do not see "La Corona" to be partaking in any wider retreat from physicality, the relative lack of pathetic language in the cycle may well be attributable to the kind of hesitations regarding compassion to which Van Dijkhuizen points. That Donne does not depict Christ circumscribes potential sympathy, and he thus seemingly responds to the reformed injunction against imitative suffering. It should be stressed, however, that the restriction of compassionate feeling in "La Corona" is not sufficient to sever the links between it and the meditative tradition. Though many in the medieval period undoubtedly saw fellow suffering in a penitential light – see, for example, Bynum's descriptions of Christina the Astonishing and Catherine of Sienna (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast* 120-121 & 165-180) – the ultimate aim of cataphatic meditative practice was not penitence but divine connection. As Bynum herself emphasises towards the close of *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, meditative activity in the period was not restricted to "merely feeling or understanding" Christ, but essentially sought "becoming or being" (*Holy Feast* 256), a divine union which took its fiat from Paul's injunction in Galatians

[115] This idea is implicit in many accounts of the Reformation's effects. It fuels Lewalski's account and, though challenged since then, still functions behind Schoenfeldt's "Spectacle of too much Weight" and forms the backdrop of Schwartz's *Sacramental Poetics At the Dawn of Secularism*.

that the Christian should be "Crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). Though interpretations of Galatians 2:20 have been numerous, a clear strand within medieval thought postulated the verse as a clear call for mystical union.[116] A particularly clear illustration of this practice is Bonaventure's *De perfectione vitae ad sorores* (*On the Perfection of Life for Sisters*) where the theme of identification is pressed beyond compassion to an essentially mystical conclusion:

> Therefore, oh handmaid, with the feet of your affections approach the wounded Jesus, to Jesus crowned with thorns, to Jesus fixed to the gibbet of the cross. And with blessed Thomas do not look only at the impression of the nails in his hands. And do not only put your finger in the place of the nails and your hand in his side. Rather, though the door of his side enter as far as the heart of Jesus himself. […] Then you may cry out with the Apostle Paul and say, "With Christ I have been crucified on the cross. It is no longer I who live. Indeed Christ lives in me."
>
> (*De Perfectione Vitae ad Sorores* 25)

Participation in a present tense Crucifixion is followed by an extremely vivid – and physically envisaged – moment which involves what Bynum above refers to as "becoming". The meditant does not merely pity Christ; rather than weeping for his sufferings, they are urged to join with him in a dramatic colloquy that is ultimately accomplished through the "feet" of the affections. This phrase stresses that it is physically envisaged emotion which is responsible for the meditant's arrival at the "door" of Christ's side wound, but also makes it clear that affectivity is facilitative and not itself an intrinsic goal of meditation. Michelle Karnes is clear in her discussion of the above passage that, while sympathy functions as a "vehicle for spiritual assent" (113), the aim of this ascent is "nothing less than mystical union" (112).

In "La Corona", where relative emotional restraint downplays compassion, the meditant would not appear to be tasked with explicitly feeling for the wounded Christ. What remains present in the text, however, is a mystical sense of becoming as the reader pleads to be drawn towards the scene that he has physically envisaged. While, compared to similar texts, the Crucifixion scene of Sonnet Five is not particularly

[116] See for example Bynum's *Holy Feast* (256), but also Michelle Karnes' *Imagination, Meditation & Cognition in the Middle Ages*, whose essential argument is that many of the lives of Christ took nothing less than mystical union as their goal.

emotive, it still finds space to script the kind of participative colloquy sought by the tradition:

> [...] loe, where condemned hee
> Beares his owne crosse, with paine, yet by and by
> When it beares him, he must beare more and die;
> Now thou art lifted up, draw mee to thee,
> And at thy death giving such liberall dole,
> *Moyst*, *with one drop of thy blood*, *my dry soule*.
> (65-70)

The third-person reference of lines 65-67, which could potentially work to invoke sympathy, shifts to a second-person address in line 68, as direct allusions to suffering are dropped and the third-person 'man of sorrows' assumes a more obviously redemptive character. As meditants are drawn towards their saviour by the pull of the second person, narrative portrayal is replaced by an apostrophe directly angled towards a fellow presence. The aim of this call is the literal enactment of Galatians 2:20: that the meditant reader might be crucified with Christ. Following the tradition's logic, but also reformed injunction, it is thus not sympathetic tears which assuage the meditant's "dry" melancholy, but the moisture (70) of Christ's own blood as the meditant attempts to join with his saviour and feel him or herself saved. The explicitly mystical character of the meditative tradition to which I point is demonstrated in the switch from third to second person. What "La Corona" calls for is not the "weake & idle pitty" (50) of Hall's sermon but Bonaventure's aim to "enter as far as the heart of Jesus himself" (25). While compassion and becoming are certainly not mutually exclusive – the latter involves the former – they do not denote the same experience. "La Corona's" clear aim – in conjunction with the wider meditative tradition – is not to promote feeling *for* Christ, but feeling *with* Christ. Explicit compassion in terms of pity is downplayed through "La Corona's" relative restraint, yet this restraint does not rule out the pursuit of a more encompassing moment of union.

I have cause to return to distinctions between different levels of compassion in Chapter Four, where I also return to a discussion of the work of Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen. What it is essential to stress here, however, is that "La Corona's" medieval meditative links remain operative even in the absence of Christ's direct pathetic description. Despite not offering such description, Donne still sets up a situation where Christ is potentially present to his audience. Pressing his reader into service, Donne's hope is that his text's lacunas will be filled by truly impassioned performance. While

the text *as written* diverges markedly therefore from both medieval meditative exercises and the texts of writers such as Hall,[117] the text *as read* still remains potentially cataphatic. It is to Donne's apparent anxiety regarding direct depiction that I turn in the following section.

Caught Between Preacher and Poet: Donne's Absence and the Reader's Task

Much medieval devotional material was either disseminated anonymously or attributed to a removed and saintly figure such as Bernard, Augustine or Bonaventure.[118] Though often not factual, these attributions serve to illustrate the period's disregard for originality and a willingness to fall back upon tradition that was typical to monasticism.[119] The burden of mediating Christ – the essential goal of the medieval authors I have discussed – was thus substantively supported by the placing of one's work within an unbroken progress which acted to defuse individual inspiration. The patina of time and use, alongside saintly imprimatur, provided medieval works with a fiat that the vast majority of individual authors would have struggled to replicate.

Though anonymity and pseudonymity were the norm, some cataphatic materials in the medieval period were released under their authors' own names. The composers of these materials were typically already esteemed at the point of publication, however, and were more or less universally ordained.[120] Bernard, for example, produced a great deal of original devotional work, yet did so in his role as abbot – literally the father of his monks – with the pressure of divine mediation being partially borne by the authority afforded by his position.[121] As Robertson discusses (38-

[117] Though Hall argues against the harbouring of sympathy for Christ, his own recreations of the Crucifixion, in both this sermons and his later *Contemplations*, remain graphic (see *Contemplations* 268-269). As Van Dijkhuizen suggests, there may well be some unresolved tensions in Hall's attitude, but, as I discuss in the following section, Hall's position as ordained authority may have also facilitated his authorship.

[118] The vast majority of English Passion poetry is anonymous. The 'lives of Christ' more frequently relied upon pseudonymity, however, the practice of an unknown author attributing their text to an earlier, already acknowledged, saintly source.

[119] See Robertson (105); this trend is clear from the prevalence of unattributed citation in monasticism, with individual writers relying heavily on their forebears without feeling much need to acknowledge these borrowings.

[120] This is the case for most of the genre's major figures. A number of female mystics were Beguines, however, and could thus be seen as a special case; these women took vows and lived ascetic lives, but were not specifically ordained.

[121] See Pranger's "Bernard the Writer" for a more suggestive description of Bernard's use of this role.

43), more experienced monastics generally laid claim to *fiducia* – a deep faith that granted interpretative confidence – which was felt to be partially conveyed through the sacrament of ordination. First described by Paul (2 Cor 3:4 & Eph 3:12), it was such *fiducia* which had fuelled the original apostles in their mission, granting the confidence to write and interpret freely, while knowing that the grace of which they were the recipients ensured that they remained within holy writ. It is an essentially identical confidence, Robertson argues, that not only fuelled the composers of the meditative lives, but potentially also their readers, as they too embellished their readings under God's influence in their quest for experiential realism (40).

The contrast between the above models of authorship and Donne's own is surely obvious. Wholly without sanctity,[122] and, as "La Corona" suggests, afflicted by anxiety and melancholia rather than interpretative confidence, Donne's authority to mediate the divine is surely compromised, particularly in the context of line 5's denial of artistry which also relinquishes any secular claim to wit. While "La Corona's" mimicking of medieval forms and constructions suggests that Donne is attempting to occlude his authorship in the manner of medieval Passion poetry, such a course of action is intensely problematic for a coterie poet who wrote for influence – and ultimately sustenance. Though Donne may well try in "La Corona" to write like a monk, extra-textually he would have been entirely unable to pass for one, a fact which remains as true today as it was in the opening decades of the seventeenth century. Donne, a poet of more notoriety than authority, is – and was – preceded by a biography which provides ample ammunition for those who would question the sincerity of his sacred verse.[123]

Despite renouncing artistry as "La Corona's" powering intent, in the absence of sacramental or institutionalised authority, there is little that might support Donne's claim to divine mediation. It is Donne's awareness of this lack which I see as explaining his subsequent practice. Acknowledging his limitations, Donne restricts himself to the engineering of negative space in such a way as to guide and mandate its completion through reading. Setting scenes but not filling them, Donne establishes a text which is to be performed rather than a story that exists in an already completed form. Artistry,

[122] Though a solid date for "La Corona's" composition is hard to arrive at, nearly all critics have chosen somewhere between 1610 and 1614, a time where Donne's reputation was still dominated by his youthful dissolution and elopement.
[123] Carey's biography illustrates this point well. Oliver is also particularly sceptical in regard to much of Donne's religious verse.

thus, plays a role, yet in deference to its denial in Sonnet One, this role is preparatory and suggestive, rather than propositional or representational. It is for this reason not possible to discuss 'Donne's Christ' in the way in which we might, for example, discuss Milton's in *Paradise Regained*. A function of the text as *read*, not of the text as written, Christ is envisaged in "La Corona's" performative reading, but not in a way that allows the kind of naked analysis typical of a formalist reading.

Frances Cruickshank, though providing no in-depth discussion of "La Corona" or its voicing, makes some highly suggestive comments about the cycle's denial of artistry in this context. Suggesting Donne to have been involved in "deliberate acts of withdrawal" (28), she connects "La Corona" to the sonnet "To the E.D. with Six Holy Sonnets"[124] and suggests that E.D's wit is being called upon to alchemise the cycle through his reading and thus "make good this Bad" (See Cruickshank 28 and "To the E.D." (14)). Though there are serious doubts as to the relation of this sonnet to "La Corona" (not least that the cycle comprises seven, not six sonnets), it is something essentially similar to this redeeming act which I see as taking place in "La Corona". Donne looks to raise his reader to complete the task of authorship, which he himself appears to see as being beyond him in this particular regard.

Turning to the issue of ordination offers further motivation for Donne's lack of representational confidence. Contrasting Donne's reticence in "La Corona" with Hall's interpretive freedom in his own *Contemplations* (already quoted above) suggests a divergence in their perceived abilities to portray the divine. Though notions of a 'sacred priesthood' had been undermined by the processes of reform, they were not necessarily destroyed in the explicitly episcopal English church, where, in this particular respect, Lutheran theology retained real influence.[125] Though the reformed churches typically backed away from Roman Catholic notions of the priesthood the role retained a sacramental character in both the Lutheran and the English Church which conferred both duties and privileges. The ordained pastor, Luther maintained, could lay claim to the ability to mediate the divine for his flock, yet this ability entailed a corresponding duty that "If the pastor is not sure that God speaks through his mouth, he should leave

[124] While I find the binding of the "E.D." sonnet to "La Corona" to be suggestive of the approach I advocate, the suggestion – despite Cruickshank's implication – has won little support since Gardner's (1952) thorough re-editing of the divine poems, which placed "To the Lady Magdalen Herbert, of St. Mary Magdalen" in this position.

[125] See McCullough's "Donne and Andrewes" for a discussion of Andrewes' vision of a sacred priesthood (198) and some wider discussion on the influence of Luther in the more overtly Calvinist English Church.

preaching alone for he surely denies and blasphemes God" (qtd. Meuser 136). It is this stance, I believe, which can explain both Hall's vaulting confidence and Donne's faltering nerve. While Donne, at the time of "La Corona's" composition, was a poet, who – if "Sonnet One" can be believed – was in the business of renouncing poetry, Hall, at the *Contemplations* publication, was a bishop of long standing and the established Church's pre-eminent meditative authority.[126]

Luther's use of the notion of the *hidden God* (*Deus absconditus*) is also relevant in this respect. Luther's precise understanding has been subject to much discussion, yet at its most basic it derives from two potentially contradictory biblical positions: first, that God is not evident: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself" (Is 45:15), and second, that Christians are yet tasked with God's location: "and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zech 12:10, but also also Lam 1:12). For Luther, it is the Incarnation that bridges these positions, with Christ acting as both a further instance of God's hiding (the divine shrouded in flesh) and a unique source of his revelation (through flesh we can come to know Christ). While it is not my intention to suggest that "La Corona" is a directly Lutheran work,[127] Donne's concern in "La Corona" is also the seeing of the apparently 'unseeable'. What further links these positions, moreover, is the suggestion in both Luther and "La Corona" that it is an act of reading which is required to unite these positions. For Luther, it is essentially through Scripture that we come to encounter the hidden nature of God. This experience, however, was frequently to be mediated by the ordained preacher, who – as long as he taught wholly from the example of Christ's life – could rightfully assume the mantle of God's direct vessel (see Meuser 137). While "La Corona" presents the Incarnation, it does so in a circumscribed fashion. Lacking the interpretative confidence associated with *fiducia*, Donne backs away from fulfilling the Lutheran preacher's role, yet he does establish a framework within which the 'hidden God' may nevertheless be read by the suitably prepared reader. With the license provided by their own book of experience, and the grace without which successful apprehension was futile ("La Corona" 97), readers might set

[126] Hall's *The Arte of Divine Meditation*, in the words of Alec Ryrie, "defined the subject [meditation] across the Protestant spectrum" (115)

[127] In a 2008 essay on Andrewes, "Lancelot Andrewes's Consuming Passions", Peter McCullough argues for the relevance of Luther's doctrine of the 'hidden Christ' to Andrewes' sermons in a way that supports my argument in relation to "La Corona". While I do not mean to suggest that Donne was a closet Lutheran, he was clearly versed in both Luther's and Andrewes' writings.

about filling the Christ-shaped lacuna that sits at "La Corona's" heart and animating the cycle in a way that outstrips its strict textual basis.

In the final analysis it is illuminating to compare "La Corona's" lack of detail with the difficulties surrounding depiction that I have already discussed in relation to the *Anniversaries*. Like Elizabeth in these poems, Christ's perfection makes him a peculiarly difficult image to capture. Both man and God, self-created and, like Elizabeth, essentially perfect, Christ unites sign and signified in a way which complicates the possibility of propositional relation. When trying to capture something of the world's perfection in the *Anniversaries*, Donne isolates from time a perfection experienced in youth and beauty and attempts to convey this experience through a presentation infused with hyperbole. In "La Corona", voice is not provided but presumed to be brought by the individual reader, with Donne delegating relation in the hope that his reader can perhaps capture something of the divine that Donne himself has felt unable to inscribe.

Presence Found?

Presenting the cycle as an attempt to attend Christ begs the question of whether this attendance ever comes to fruition. Providing a straightforward answer to this question, however, is difficult. On the basis of the argument I have made in this chapter, any success or failure in "La Corona" is bound to be subjective, as it is only within the cycle's reading that presence might be found. What is sought is felt by the text's reader, not stated by its writer, and consequently, moments of potential colloquy in the cycle are only ever conditionally expressed in the text itself. The principal of these occurs in the already mentioned closing lines of Sonnet Five where Christ, the cycle's unswerving meditative focus, merges for the first time with the text's addressee, as the meditant reader directly petitions the figure upon the cross (68).

The treatment of this unitive moment does not immediately suggest a meditative goal to have been met. Line 70's "*Moyst, with one drop of thy blood, my dry soule*", is a request, which, upon repetition in line 71, is only hypothetically granted, and the cycle's final two sonnets are thus deeply ambiguous regarding the question of whether Sonnet One's aim of attending Christ has actually been fulfilled. While many medieval works script moments of actual colloquy – Bonaventure's *De Perfectione Vitae ad Sorores*, for example, has its reader literally enter Christ through the wound

in his side (25) – such a moment is absent from "La Corona", which, as I have argued, never even fully describes its meditative focus, let alone scripts the merging of this focus with the reader.

Had the reader's request of line 70 been granted, then it would appear reasonable that Sonnets Six and Seven – titled "Resurrection" and "Ascension" and thus the joyful climax of the Gospels – would enact the merging of the first person singular and plural for which "Sonnet One" so ardently wishes. That this has happened in reading is not definitively ruled out, yet, problematically, the text offers little evidence that such merging has occurred. "Sonnet Six", despite its title, largely suspends the imaginative re-enactment that characterises the previous four sonnets and instead takes the form of a direct, yet only ever conditional prayer, in which a speaking reader is still apparently trying to attain some security in respect to his or her own personal resurrection:

> *Moyst with one drop of thy blood, my dry soule,*
> Shall (though she now be in extreme degree
> Too stony hard, and yet too fleshly,) bee
> Freed by that drop, from being starv'd, hard, or foule,
> And life, by this death abled, shall controule
> Death, whom thy death slue; nor shall to mee
> Feare of first or last death, bring miserie,
> If in thy little booke my name thou enroule,
> Flesh in that long sleep is not putrified,
> But made that there, of which, and for which 'twas;
> Nor can by other meanes be glorified.
> May then sinnes sleep, and death soone from me passe,
> That wak't from both, I againe risen may
> *Salute the last, and everlasting day.*
>
> (71-84)

These lines discuss the kind of salvation for which the reader hopes, yet, vitally, this salvation remains conditional. Running to the semi-colon in line 76, the first conditional clause asserts the power of Christ's blood, yet within the brackets, more or less confirms that this promise is yet to be enacted for the reader. The second half of this sentence, running to the end of line 81, is slightly contorted in that the reward, a release from "miserie" (77), is placed before the cause of that reward: election, which hangs entirely upon the central "if" of line 78. Nothing, it would thus seem, has been definitively gained to this point in the cycle; an impression which is solidified by the final sentence which essentially re-requests Sonnet One's plea. The possibility of

resurrection is acknowledged, yet the explicit extension of this possibility to the reader's own self remains at issue and thus the speaker's anxiety apparently remains.

Any sense that Sonnet Six represents the abandonment of participatory practice is undercut, however, by Sonnet Seven, which again takes up the cataphatic mode:

> *Salute the last and everlasting day*,
> Joy at the uprising of this Sunne, and Sonne,
> Yee whose just teares, or tribulation
> Have purely washt, or burnt your drossie clay;
> Behold the Highest, parting hence away,
> Lightens the darke clouds, which hee treads upon,
> Nor doth hee by ascending, show alone,
> But first hee, and hee first enters the way
>
> (85-92)

The renewal of present tense apprehension seemingly re-affirms confidence in participation as address is made to the saved ascending to heaven. The determinedly second-person address of the saved, however, does not bode well for the reader's actual inclusion. Though the octave's opening speaks of "joy" (86), this reaction is part of an exhortation directed to others rather than scripted on behalf of the reader, and the tone of the entire sonnet is thus much more nuanced than its title "Resurrection" might suggest. While the reader participates in the terms I have discussed, it is not his or her fate within the scene to rise, and the desire that has fuelled performance is hence enjoyed not by the poem's addressor, but by its addressee.

The implicit frustration of the reader left to watch others claim the joyous culmination of his or her hopes is sustained into the final sestet, which resumes the direct address of Christ, first in terms of praise, and then in terms of petition, as the reader's suit is again resumed:

> O strong Ramme, which hast batter'd heaven for mee,
> Mild lambe which with thy blood, hast mark'd the path;
> Bright torch, which shin'st, that I the way may see,
> Oh, with thy owne blood quench thy owne just wrath,
> And if thy holy Spirit, my Muse did raise,
> *Deigne at my hands this crowne of prayer and praise.*
>
> (93-98)

The conditionality of the closing couplet lacks a sense of triumph as it apparently petitions with no more hope than was mustered in Sonnet One. Any acceptance it acknowledges is dependent on performance, and this performance is subsequently dependent on God's grace; a condition which, though potentially present in the reader,

Donne can apparently not script with conviction. Sonnets Six and Seven, therefore, do not form the kind of glowing culmination that would suggest Sonnet Five's moistening to have taken place, and the meditant remains in a state of some suspense. While Christ may have been experienced, there is no compelling textual evidence that this is the case.

Even more than questions of tone, however, it is the position of the cycle's last line that raises the most significant doubts as to the poems' ultimate success. Line 98's status as both final and opening line of the cycle renders it a singularly un-climactic climax. If, as Sonnet One maintains, the cycle's goal is to attend Christ, its invitation to repetition looks like an admission of failure. In mitigation of this negativity, however, it should also be noted that, whilst repetition does not suggest completion, neither does it suggest rejection. Circularity is thus ultimately an ambiguous sign. Though taking the reader back to line 1 implies that religious melancholy still plagues the meditant's soul, it nevertheless also affirms success's future possibility, by scripting the continuation, rather than the curtailment, of the process I have outlined.

As I began this chapter by pointing out, "La Corona's" assumed reader is a melancholic, a condition which its original author also claimed, and we should thus not be surprised by its conditional ending. A devotional exercise for sinners rather than saints, "La Corona" is a text that never establishes the certainty to conclusively conquer anxiety and doubt and its circularity is thus an effect of the epistemology into which we are locked: unable to propositionally capture the divine, we must continuously chase it in order to glimpse what the *Anniversaries* term its 'glimmering light'.

Though this position may disappoint some – "La Corona" has certainly been read as an infuriating text (see for example Maurer 68) – the cycle's search need not be viewed as futile. "It is God alone", Bernard insisted, "who can never be sought in vain" (qtd. McGinn *The Growth of Mysticism* 223) and we should thus perhaps not view the cycle's aim as being to definitively capture the ineffable, but as being to create a moment in which a reader might experience divinity. That the relaying of this experience is fraught with difficulty and, as *The Anniversaries* show, perhaps even impossible, is not directly the cycle's concern. In creating a text which he hopes will be lived, rather than understood, Donne shows faith in the idea that what cannot be written, may in fact be read.

Chapter 4
Presence Reformed
From Reading to Writing in "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward"

I'm alone with somebody who's not there
Denis Johnson[128]

"Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward" focuses upon a lone rider, who, travelling westwards at dawn on the morning of Good Friday 1613, contemplates the completion of a Passion meditation. Both the precise nature of this meditation and the extent to which it is brought to fruition have divided critics, yet there has been broad agreement in respect to the kind of poem that "Goodfriday" has been felt to be. Irrespective of its links to an earlier tradition, discussions of the poem have not understood it as a script for a reader's devotion, but have more or less universally treated it as an exhibition of the devotion of another. "Goodfriday", critics have maintained, is not to be read as a text which is *itself meditative*, but as text which is *about meditation*.

A tension runs throughout "Goodfriday" between two apparently discrete periods of time. Spatially and temporally situated by its title, the poem appears to deliver a narrative centred around a speaking voice who is riding westwards on the morning of the poem's titular date. This figure, however, is himself fixated upon an occasion some 1600 years and several thousand kilometres removed from his presumed location. The poem's concern, therefore, is with two distinct Good Fridays: one at the dawn of the Christian era and one which took place on April 2nd 1613. My interest in this chapter encompasses both these dates, yet it also involves a third situation, that of the text's reader – both assumed by Donne and otherwise – which has barely featured in the debates surrounding the poem.

[128] The recovering addict in Johnson's "The Starlight on Idaho" (61) is trying to capture the ambiguity of his recent religious experiences.

As already discussed in Chapter Three, the urge of "Goodfriday's" rider "to behold those hands which span the Poles, / And tune all spheares at once peirc'd with those holes" (21-22) had a long lineage in English verse, and Donne's composition clearly echoes those of the many, largely anonymous, poets who preceded him within the cataphatic tradition. Though this tradition has been frequently referenced in readings of the poem, "Goodfriday" itself has not typically been placed within it, with critics framing the poem as a distinctive development of such medieval practice. In relation to this trend, existing critical discussions of "Goodfriday" are divisible into two broad camps: those who view the poem as presenting a meditative success in Ignatian terms, and those who see it as a dramatisation of participative meditation's rejection.

The former group, largely following a path charted by Louis Martz in the 1950s, understand the rider to be engaged in a project inspired by the *Spiritual Exercises*, and maintain that Donne's speaker fundamentally succeeds in the rebalancing of his soul via a form of imaginative recreation. Although Martz's original reading of "Goodfriday" has been subject to a good deal of more recent criticism, its central argument has been adapted and taken up by a number of critics who have added both nuance and a deeper engagement with the work of Augustine. In this chapter I principally discuss the views of Helen Brooks, R.V. Young and Francesca Knox Bugliani.

Away from these specific readings, the overall popularity of Martz's understanding of "Goodfriday" has waned over the past thirty years, and, increasingly, those commenting on the poem have taken their lead from Barbara Lewalski. Fundamentally revisiting Martz's views in the light of a more stridently Protestant theology, Lewalski sees the poem as a rejection of former practice which points towards not imaginative visualisation but a more applicative mode of meditative engagement. Whereas Lancelot Andrewes, in the quote that headed my second chapter, was concerned with the predicament of a man who feared that Christ would not look back, "Goodfriday", she implies, is more concerned with the predicament of the man who fears to look. The enormity of the meditative task – the aim of which, as argued in Chapter Three, is not to merely 'think upon' the Crucifixion, but to actually experience it – is apparently too much for the rider, whom Lewalski, and those who have followed her, have subsequently cast as abandoning participative practice in connection with a more evidently reformed theology. In the following sections I particularly refer to William H. Halewood, P.M. Oliver, Michael Schoenfeldt and Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen.

My own reading in this chapter navigates a course between these two positions. In my first section, I argue that the poem endorses the cataphatic meditative techniques discussed throughout this thesis. The rider, seeking to make himself experientially present at the Crucifixion, follows a course similar to that set out in "La Corona". As I then move on to discuss, however, the poem's rider does not obviously bring this process to completion within the confines of his text. While he clearly gestures towards medieval practice, he ultimately hesitates before colloquy is reached. There are perhaps reasons for linking this hesitancy to reformed practice – I here return to the views of Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen already touched upon in Chapter Three – yet my particular argument stresses both the personal nature of the rider's doubts and that hesitations of this kind were not in themselves foreign to medieval practice. Though the concerns the rider shows were not typically enacted in Passion verse, his essential attitude does relate to that of Bernard, who, in his sermons on *The Song*, also speaks of faltering confidence and personal weakness in the context of a reading project.

Working from both "Goodfriday's" acceptance of cataphatic meditative technique and its reluctance to complete its own attempted meditation, the second half of this chapter investigates how the poem twists meditative participation in ways which engage with lyric poetry much more generally. As discussed in my previous chapter, change in meditative practice was certainly afoot in the England of 1613. What appears clear, however, is that many readers confronted with a poem entitled "Goodfriday" would still have expected such a work would to seek their own involvement in the Crucifixion. Though Donne presents a scene in "Goodfriday", I do not see his goal in doing so to be a straight act of representation. Fundamentally challenging the notion that the poem is an exhibitive text, I examine the ways in which "Goodfriday's" reader is pushed into service to inter-animate the rider's presence-seeking process.

In reflection of this chapter's title, I ultimately see "Goodfriday" to be engaged in a partial transformation of meditative practice. Though reformed in the sense that elements of Donne's motivation are potentially linked to his own milieu, this transformation is most fundamentally a re-formation. Struggling with the kind of imbalance between reading and writing that I have already discussed in relation to *The Anniversaries* and "La Corona", Donne, I believe, ultimately reformulates his method around a more secular goal which avoids divine representation yet still embraces the methods and ethic of the cataphatic tradition.

"Goodfriday's" Endorsement of the Cataphatic Tradition

Though the links between "Goodfriday" and the meditative material discussed in Chapter Three have been often pointed out, it is not this material that the poem has typically been taken to express. Pointing to explicitly Reformation meditative currents, critics have tended instead to associate the text with either the Jesuit meditative exercises of Ignatius Loyola or some form of 'applicative' Protestant practice (both of which I have already had cause to reference in this thesis). These approaches both understand "Goodfriday" in terms of an intellectual process, either a balancing of the tri-partite soul (Ignatian exercise), or a mental realisation of the individual's actual 'role' within the Passion (Protestant application). In direct contrast to these approaches, I am wary of describing "Goodfriday" in exclusively intellectual terms, and I see no reason to definitively sunder the meditative practice that the poem expresses from the presence-seeking tradition that I have hitherto discussed in this thesis.

Though there are some qualified exceptions which I discuss below, studies covering the poem have tended to approach it through a dualist lens.[129] This is even the case for readings which identify some of the areas I later discuss in this chapter. Terry G. Sherwood, for example, discusses the poem in the light of the work of Bernard of Clairvaux – an emphasis rare in Donne studies – and also stresses the importance of experience within the text. His understanding of both Bernard and experience more widely, however, is framed in an entirely intellectual light. Taking "Goodfriday" to be "an experience of reason" (164), Sherwood holds that its language of seeing and physical transformation should be interpreted in an entirely "figurative" manner (164). As with his work on *The Anniversaries*, therefore, he acknowledges the physicality of Donne's verse, yet ultimately treats this physicality as being either figurative or ambiguous. Both William H. Halewood and Helen Brooks, to whom I turn in the following section, also acknowledge occasions of physical language in the text, but similarly adopt fundamentally disembodied understandings of such occasions, and even the influential reading of Donald M. Friedman's– which understands the poem as a turn against the rational mind – barely reflects on physicality, preferring instead

[129] Perhaps in reflection of this perceived intellectual slant, studies which have otherwise questioned the application of dualism to Donne's work have refrained from any real discussion of "Goodfriday" (e.g. the aforementioned works by Selleck, Targoff and McDuffie).

to draw a contrast between a disembodied rationality and an equally disembodied conception of spiritual faith.[130]

It is "Goodfriday's" opening lines which have cemented notions of the text's intellectualism:

> Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,
> The intelligence that moves, devotion is,
> And as the other Spheares, by being growne
> Subject to forraigne motion, lose their owne,
> And being by others hurried every day,
> Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:
> Pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit
> For their first mover, and are whirld by it.
> Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West
> This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.
> (1-10)

The motive "intelligence" (2) or "forme" (6, 10) of man's soul is characterised as "devotion" (2), a trait which, we are told, is liable to disruption from the whirling (8) of "other Spheares". A common argument here, backed by the "forraigne motion" (4) of these spheres and their association with "Pleasure or businesse" (7), is that they represent a physical worldliness whose constant hurrying (5) diverts the soul from its proper object. In the words of Michael Schoenfeldt, the text's "opening gambit… is to divorce soul and body as an explanation of [the rider's] own divided will" (571).[131] The result of this interpretation is that lines nine and ten are taken to entail that the body travels in one direction, west, against the soul's will which still "bends toward the East". Man, according to such a reading, is in possession of a spiritual soul oriented towards God, but is also beholden to a more aggressively persuasive body, which interrupts this focus and disrupts the soul's motive function. In Halewood's characterisation, the speaker is thus a "leaf in the storm", who, "whirled and hurried", principally exists as "compulsion's slave" (220).

My hesitation in regard to such arguments is that I see them as bringing a dualism to the poem which is not necessarily native to it. Though there is a clear declaration in the passage above that the soul is pulled in contrary directions, this dilemma is presented in the first eight lines without direct reference to the body. The

[130] See "Memory and the Art of Salvation in Donne's Good Friday Poem".
[131] Rosendale's 2012 summation of work on the poem demonstrates the pervasiveness of Schoenfeldt's reading (269).

thrust of the poem's opening analogy is not that souls are moved against their will, but that souls' motive qualities are prone to interference. Veering from their original "forme" (10), souls "admit" "Pleasure or businesse" as their "first mover" and thus stray from the path of devotion. While the rider's direction of travel may be against his soul's natural inclination, it is, therefore, entirely in line with his soul's current inclination, as the 'I' which travels west is "carryed" (9) by its soul, not the other way around. Although, as many readings suggest, the allure of "Pleasure or businesse" may hint towards worldliness and embodiment, there is no implication of mechanical causation in the poem. It is the soul that is responsible for its own straying, and it is some form of mental and/or spiritual turbulence, not physical kidnapping, that should be posited at the root of the rider's dilemma. The soul may be distracted by the accoutrements of the world, but it is the soul, not the body, that is both conflicted and motive in the poem's opening.

Rather than being blamed for the soul's misdirection, the body, when it is invoked in the poem, is cast as the soul's potential saviour. In "Goodfriday's" closing lines the body takes a redemptive role, with the rider pleading to be remade through physical affliction:

> I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
> Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.
>
> (37-42)

Even though the text is clear in its language of punishment and burning, the intellectual bent of the poem's typical reading has demanded a figurative understanding of these lines (see for example Sherwood's interpretation (164)). A series of more recent readings, however, do relate these lines to earlier practices. Both Schoenfeldt (568) and Van Dijkhuizen (112-113) point out that the equation of violent physical action with spiritual renewal invokes the deeply affective and literally understood physical responses of medieval devotion, yet such an understanding does not lead in their accounts to the wholesale disruption of the poem's reception history. As I discuss in the following section, both Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen take the poem to present a Passion meditation that has been in some sense blocked, with its closing lines serving to display the internal ambiguity of a devotee who is caught between competing

paradigms of meditative activity. Even though the rider is not prepared to entirely divorce himself from this devotional background, "Goodfriday" in their readings cannot stand as an example of medieval devotion.

In contrast to Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen, in this chapter I take the entire poem to consistently express a species of meditation that is in line with the medievalism of its denouement. Neither the soul of "Goodfriday's" first ten lines, nor that of its final six, approaches a Cartesian 'I', and I thus find the outright divorcing of material and intellectual considerations in the poem's interpretation to be at odds with the worldview which is actually expressed. Only ever a part of the self, the soul is subject to the rider's own first-person possessive, "my soule" (10), and cannot thus be directly equated with the poem's speaking voice. That the poem works with such a view of personhood allows it to accommodate the kind of experiential meditative processes I have discussed in this thesis, which require a continuity between spiritual and material factors. If God is to be 'tasted' in the course of meditative activity, the soul and the body must work in unison to deliver an experience that frustrates any definitive separation of the two.

(i.) The Nature of the Rider's Meditative Procedure

As the impersonal declarative tone of the first eight lines gives way to a first-person voice in line 9, the precise mode of meditative procedure involved in the poem begins to unfold. The rider makes it clear that he feels bound by a duty that he is quite consciously not carrying out:

> Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West
> This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.
>
> (9-10)

Journeying westward under the thrall of "pleasure" and "businesse" (7), the rider is prevented from turning towards the east, a movement, we are told, for which his soul nevertheless yearns. The content and purpose of this omission are elaborated in the lines which directly follow:

> There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,
> And by that setting endlesse day beget;
> But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
> Sinne had eternally benighted all.
>
> (11-14)

This sentence, spanning four lines and broken only by the semicolon at the end of line 12, links the soul's wished devotion directly to the Crucifixion. It is the sun which is literally rising at the rider's back, yet sense can only be made of the assertion that this rising is also a setting, if it is acknowledged that it is the Crucifixion – Christ rising on the cross – for which the rider actually yearns. The Crucifixion, however, is of course, as lines 13 and 14 clarify, a past event, which is temporally and spatially removed from the present-tense yearning of the rider in 1613.

Turning in the present tense to an event which happened in the past can be most readily understood by conceiving of the rider's duty as a commemoration. The sun, representing Christ *the son*, engenders a desire in the rider, which subsequently results in some form of intellectual meditation. Though this reading has proven popular with many critics (see, for example, Friedman, Brooks and Halewood), it is unclear to me that such an approach pays close enough attention to the text's tense use. The lines directly following the above strike a contrast and again return to present-tense activity:

> Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see
> That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
>
> (15-16)

If it is an intellectual commemoration that is at hand, then the use of "do" in line 15, rather than the earlier "did" of line 13, is surely strange, as it suggests that the rider has fallen for his own pun (sun/son) and mistaken a symbolic association for a statement of identity. Understanding the act for which the rider's soul yearns in the light of the meditative tradition, however, allows for sense to be made of this tense use. What I take to be really at stake in these lines is an act that is concerned with the experience of genuine presence. The rider's aim is not to figuratively turn and think about the Passion, but to actually turn and see it as it occurs. As lines 13 and 14 make clear, the rider is both already thinking upon the Crucifixion and is aware of its import, yet it is not the meaning of Christ's death as a past event that is at issue in the poem. lines 11 and 15 make repeated use not of *think*, but the more somatic "see", and line 13 refers to "this", rather than 'his' or 'that' "crosse", a word choice which suggests demonstrable presence. Fully in line with a still persistent tradition, and very much in the spirit of Bernard's aphorism, I understand the rider's hope in "Goodfriday" not to be to *know* Christ's Passion, but to actually *experience* it.

The sense in which the rider's desire is experiential builds throughout the poem's middle section. Justification for the rider's characterisation of meditative

apprehension as being of "too much weight" arrives in lines 17-20, which, once again, are largely delivered in a temporally appropriate past tense:

> Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
> What a death were it then to see God dye?
> It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
> It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.
>
> (17-20)

Biblically derived warnings (line 17's reference to Exodus 33:20 and line 18's reference to Mathew 27:45-51) are voiced, as the rider outlines a somewhat casuistic reluctance to engage with Christ.[132] These past-tense *explanations*, however, fail to quiet his meditative urge and the lines which follow return to the present tense, clearly and directly recalling the kind of meditative texts discussed in my previous chapter. What is at issue again is a literally envisaged attendance:

> Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
> And tune all spheares at once peirc'd with those holes?
> Could I behold that endlesse height which is
> Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
> Humbled below us? or that blood which is
> The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
> Make durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
> By God, for his apparell, rag'd, and torne?
> If on these things I durst not looke, durst I
> Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
> Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus
> Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?
>
> (21-32)

Devotion, fighting to make itself the motive force in the rider's soul, urges the adoption of the present tense, and thus the repeated self-addressed question is neither the narrative 'did I behold' or the speculative 'could I have beheld'. Steering away from both Gospel account and thought experiment, the rider's desire is to attend the Crucifixion in the spirit of the present: Christ's arms *span* the cross and his blood, which *is* the seat of our souls, *makes* dirt of dust. There is nothing conceptual about a death so envisaged: a "spectacle" (16) to be seen (11, 15) and looked upon (29, 35), but, most prominently, beheld (21, 23), a term extremely prevalent in English medieval meditative texts, which Sarah McNamer suggests may have denoted a special kind of

[132] Line 17's Old Testament verse is dragged out of context and can have no bearing over the Incarnation which is clearly the focus of the rider's proposed meditation. The Passion's horror did not preclude it from being a witnessable event in the Gospels.

embodied apprehension.[133] The task the rider would thus perform is that of Bernard and the many who followed him. To paraphrase Bonaventure's introduction to his *Vitae*, the rider's aim is to *procure himself in his soul present* in order that an event may be experienced *as though he heard it with his bodily ears or saw it done with his bodily eyes* (Love 14).

That this meditative operation is in line with that I have described to this point in my thesis I take to be relatively clear. What is less clear, however, is to what extent the rider actually follows through on this suggested course of action. Though the process outlined relates to that of "La Corona", the manner in which this process is outlined differs significantly from such poems. "Goodfriday" surely relates to Passion verse, yet it does not unfold in line with this genre's norms. It is to the issue of the poem's success that I turn below.

The Issue of Meditative Success: Ignatian Arguments for Mental Balance

Alongside a focus on the precise nature of the meditative practice advocated in "Goodfriday", discussion of the poem has centred on the extent to which the rider actually follows through with the meditative process described. While, for some, "Goodfriday" is a meditative success, for many the poem does not ultimately become what it, at points, promises to be – a meditative attempt to experience the Crucifixion – as the rider ultimately remains blocked by the "weight" (16) of this task.

Apart from characterising the manner of first-person present-tense devotion required, lines 15 and 16 also set out a conscious failure to partake in that devotion:

> Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see
> That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
> (15-16)

The rider directly questions his ability to make himself present at the scene, suggesting that such seeing is, of itself, too *weighty* for its present pursuit. Despite this denial's subsequent repetition ("If on these things I durst not looke" (29), "these things, as I ride, be from mine eye" (33) and "I turne my backe to thee" (37)), its veracity has been repeatedly questioned by those who, irrespective of such denials, have read the poem

[133] Noting the term's prevalence in her 2010 *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, McNamer traces its etymology and suggests that the verb may have been felt to capture "a specific way of seeing" (135) which involved the body more actively in the process of vision.

as a meditative achievement. Helen Brooks, in what is perhaps the most successful Martzian reading of the poem, maintains that despite all protestations to the contrary, the presence in the poem's central section of such strong records for meditative engagement effectively occludes both the rider's denials and that section's own conditionality: "Although the word 'could' (21) … implies a conditional present", she states, "the references to 'those hands,' 'those holes,' 'that height,' and 'that blood' clearly are uttered out of the vivid present of the soul's faculty of attention" (294-295).

Though Brooks' argument in some ways captures the rider's felt duty, I do not see that the intent to complete this duty alone offers grounds for genuine meditative connection. Underplaying the central section's conditionality risks misrepresenting what happens in the poem. Line 21's "could", which is repeated in line 23, extends to the entire phrase, rendering not only the looking, but also the sight seen as hypothetical, a fact compounded by line 29's further denial: "If on these things I durst not looke", which immediately follows the scene that has been conditionally set. The procedure referenced is clearly participative, and, as Brooks suggests, involves "the vivid present of the soul's faculty of attention", yet *the procedure referenced is not clearly a procedure that is followed*. To read "Goodfriday" as a meditative success involves either passing over the areas where the rider wavers, or insisting that the act of denial itself equates to the completion of the procedure denied. Given that the form of meditation invoked is not purely intellectual, however, I find such arguments unconvincing. Had the rider claimed 'I am not thinking about the Crucifixion', then it would be possible to argue that denial amounted to its own contradiction. The statement 'I am not attending the Crucifixion', however, is not self-contradictory in the same sense. As Francois de Sales – a key source for those who look to Ignatian practice – writes in his *Treatise on the Love of God*: "Every meditation is a thought, but every thought is not meditation" (qtd. *Poetry of Meditation* 14). Participative engagement may involve intellectual factors, yet it cannot be restricted to them.

It is the following lines that are most significant for those who forward an Ignatian reading:

> Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
> They'are present yet unto my memory,
> For that looks towards them; & thou look'st towards mee,
> O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
> I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
> Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
>
> (33-38)

Highlighting line 34 at line 33's expense, the argument runs that the un-viewed Crucifixion is "present yet" to the rider's "memory" (34), an affirmation which is seen as triggering the switch to a second-person Christ, and line 36's apostrophe. For Brooks these lines demonstrate that, though optative, the scene composed has aligned the rider with Christ and allowed for a form of soul-based "communion" (295). Leaning heavily on Augustine, Brooks maintains that presence to memory equates to presence more widely (295) and that the apostrophe of lines 35-36 hence illustrates the completion of an Ignatian practice. Though Brooks' reading of Augustine – upon which she founds this argument – may well offer support to her reading, in reaching for Augustine she chooses not to engage with the wider tradition of cataphatic meditation pioneered by Bernard. This would, of itself, be a perfectly legitimate manoeuvre, yet it entails the ignoring of the manifold similarities between "Goodfriday" and the medieval cataphatic tradition.

A number of points are pertinent in this respect. Line 34's comment about the memory maintains only what it states. While the rider thinks upon the Passion, his wider experiential aim is still not being met, with line 35 explicitly highlighting the rider's failure of connection. Split by a semi-colon, the line initially names only things: "that" ('the memory') "looks towards" "them" (presumably the events of the Passion); in the second half of the line, however, grammatical subject and object are transformed in a construction which, though otherwise identical, now labels presences in its switch from the third to the second person: "thou" (Christ) "look'st towards" "mee" (the rider himself). Any sense that this line's second half represents a breakthrough should be tempered by the fact that it expresses nothing more than theological doctrine: an omnipotent and omnipresent God always looks. While an a-symmetrical connection has, therefore, been achieved, sadly for the rider, this connection is only efficacious in one direction. Christ's gaze may well rest upon the rider, but it is only ever an objectified part of the rider which rests on a third-person Christ. The divine's engagement is not reciprocated, and the passage, therefore, presents no experiential gain. Christ is undeniably *there*, but the speaker has not yet brought himself to look at him in the full meditative sense of the term. Admittedly, Christ is apostrophised in lines 35-36, yet apostrophe does not necessarily equate to presence, and the trope could equally be used to pour words into the void. While the rider may well wish to conjure Christ through address alone, such a will offers no guarantee of success, and the rider's repeated denials in this regard should not be ignored.

In Donne's contemporaneous *Essays in Divinity*, a situation parallel to that of the rider is put forward much more nakedly in Donne's own voice: "I beseech thee, that since by thy grace, I have thus long meditated *upon* thee, and spoken *of* thee, I may now speak *to* thee" (Coffin 372 my italics). This prayer makes little sense if speaking *to* is taken to refer to nothing more than apostrophe (a state that every prayer automatically achieves). What becomes contextually clear in *Essays in Divinity* is that speaking to, for Donne, involves a personal and more direct experience of God's presence. While anything, everything or nothing at all may be apostrophised, what is required by Donne is connection, not one-sided address. Returning to "Goodfriday", which follows the affirmation of Christ's gaze with a despairing apostrophe, there is clear evidence that the rider has spoken *of* Christ, yet there is no indication – miss-directioned as he is – that the rider has ever actually spoken *to* Christ.

Arguments that the rider has somehow in these lines found God "within" (Brooks 297, but also Sherwood 168) may well follow suggestions in Augustine, yet these suggestions are not supported by the poem itself, which, vitally, carries on for six lines past this supposed epiphany in a tone which reflects not internal balance, but building distress. This plea for redemptive punishment argues strongly against an Ignatian reading of "Goodfriday". The poem offers not a newly balanced rider, but a flailing subject still seeking the strength to turn. This ongoing search embraces the language and experiential thrust of cataphatic mysticism, with the rider praying not for the body's abnegation, but its reconstitution in the hope that such a change will supply the personal agency essential for colloquy. If Christ's gaze is to be met, the rider must right the imbalance of line 35 and involve his entire person – both physically and intellectually – in his meditative attempt.

The Issue of Meditative Success: the Rider's Hesitancy in the Face of the Crucifixion

The work of Barbara Lewalski marks a change in "Goodfriday's" reception. She, and a number of critics who have followed in her wake, have argued that the poem documents first failure and then a re-establishment of meditation on more explicitly applicative grounds.[134] Following this reading, the repeated denials of "Goodfriday's"

[134] See, for example, Sherwood, Halewood and Oliver.

rider are taken more seriously; recognising his inadequacy in the face of God, the rider is seen to try, in the words of Oliver, "to wrench personal meaning" (107) from his failure of connection. Line 35's apostrophe, "O Saviour", thus becomes in Halewood's reading not a statement of presence found, but an epiphany, as the rider intellectually acknowledges, without experientially registering, that God is already there. It is this realisation which underwrites what Halewood sees as a subsequent methodological transformation: "the thrashings of the restless spirit cease in the apostrophe, as the 'testimonie of God's presence rectifying all' asserts its rectifying influence" (Halewood 228).[135] Under this model, participative presence is jettisoned as a meditative goal, as the rider, acknowledging his unworthiness and utter dependence upon God, turns inwards and adopts an essentially penitent attitude.

Reading "Goodfriday" in such an applicative light does justice to the rider's repeated denials, and, accordingly, clears some of the issues presented by an Ignatian understanding. As with Martzian readings of the poem, however, the emphasis placed on lines 35-36 sits uncomfortably with the fact that the poem continues for another six lines past this point, and, so doing, focuses on precisely the kind of embodied concerns that are more familiar to pre-Reformation practice. Though many modern readers – lacking the seventeenth century's instinctive faith – may find God's appearance in lines 35-36 climactic, the realisation that Christ is always and already there, cannot be revelational for the rider for whom God's existence is not at issue. Doubts in "Goodfriday" – as in *The Anniversaries* and "La Corona" – surround personal failings, not fundamentally ontological questions, and it is with the resolution of these failings that the poem's concerns ultimately lie. What the rider seeks in "Goodfriday" is the strength to meet an already present Christ in participative colloquy. It is to this task that the poem's coda returns.

While the rider's avowal of looking is accommodated by an applicative approach, the persisting physicality of the poem's conclusion exists as a challenge to the kind of intellectual model which such a reading proposes. Lines 37-42 issue a plea for divine violence which relates directly to the more embodied practices of medieval participative meditation. It is the rider's back that meets Christ's gaze in "Goodfriday", yet Christ's envisaged response to this disrespect is not a disdainful shrug, "but" (37) the deliverance of potentially reconstituting "corrections" (38):

[135] Halewood's embedded quote is from a Donne sermon on Matthew 8:23-27, where Jesus Calms the sea.

O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.
(39-42)

The rider pledges, in the event of the called-for violence, to return to his attempted beholding of the Crucifixion, an envisaged turning which is incompatible with the notion that participation has been fundamentally blocked. Acknowledging the apparently medieval tone of these lines, both Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen justify them by suggesting that the rider's behaviour reflects conflicted psychology rather than doctrinal positioning. For Schoenfeldt the rider questions the Crucifixion's role as spectacle, yet also documents a continuing attachment to a scene which had formerly been so central to Christian devotion. His more general argument, which can be found in his essay "Spectacle of too much weight", is most convincingly developed in regard to Milton's "The Passion" – Schoenfeldt's final example in this text – which documents desire through the poem's existence, but registers the impossibility of this desire through the poem's abrupt curtailment (Milton's "Passion" remained deliberately unfinished at his death). As with my discussion of Schoenfeldt's work in the context of "La Corona", however, I am less convinced of this understanding's applicability to Donne. Questioning only the rider's *current* resolve, no prohibition of looking is actually ever issued in "Goodfriday", and the poem is accordingly careful not to dismiss the possibility of what it never quite achieves. The rider's doubts in the poem are most obviously linked to his own faltering nerve, not specifically reformed theology, and the essential task of turning to face Christ is ultimately re-affirmed at the poem's close with the rider's promise to turn.

Adding a more detailed theological background to Schoenfeldt's view, Van Dijkhuizen connects the rider's reticence directly to participation. As Hall maintains – a key source for Van Dijkhuizen – the Crucifixion is quite literally "finished" (John 19:30) and the devotees' role is thus strictly one of guilt (see Chapter Three p. 114-115), which leaves little ground for any deeper form of connection. It is such an understanding of Christ's sacrifice for Van Dijkhuizen which triggers the rider's inability to partake. That the rider returns to more affective styles of devotion in closing does not counteract his earlier reluctance, but stands as evidence of the conflicted nature of both Donne and his milieu. "Goodfriday's" rider reflects reformed injunctions against participative suffering, yet the poem's close demonstrates the continuing

attraction of practices that have been only intellectually rejected. The poem, Van Dijkhuizen thus stresses, ultimately dramatises the plight of a devotee who is caught between a persisting desire to physically partake and a theology that promoted only applicative guilt.

Viewing "Goodfriday" as conflicted deals with the rider's fears much more securely than a reading which posits some kind of intellectual epiphany. I find little rest in the poem and see no evidence of the kind of mental balance postulated by an Ignatian reading. Reading the poem in its entirety as conflicted, however, struggles with the strength of the rider's closing pledge to turn. Line 42 delivers a clear intention for future action which is at odds with the idea that such action has been superseded. Over-riding his previous reluctance, I see the rider's promise to show that his current doubts are personal rather than methodological. As the rider literally states, the Crucifixion is not a "spectacle of too much weight", but a "spectacle of too much weight for *mee*" (my italics 16). Personal considerations stymie colloquy, yet such engagement is postponed not abandoned.

A further caveat to the notion that "Goodfriday" dramatises the conflicted nature of its milieu, is that the kind of reluctance displayed by the rider was not in fact alien to the wider tradition of monastic reading in the Middle Ages. Meditation in this thesis has been characterised as a reading procedure that sought God's presence in the texts of his creation. In connection to "Goodfriday" – a text in which little actual reading would seem to take place – it should be acknowledged that reading was understood by its monastic adherents to be an essentially compound process. As Hall, channelling Bernard, maintains:

> As prayer is our speech to God, so is each good Meditation (according to Bernard) GODS speech to the heart; the heart must speake to God, that God may speake to it. Prayer therefore, and Meditation are as those famous twines in the storie, or as two loving Turtles, whereof separate one, the other languishes.
>
> (*The Arte of Divine Mediation* 77-78)

Stressing that "the heart must speake to God" so that "God may speake to it", Hall outlines a process that accommodates "Goodfriday's" apparent turn to prayer. Meditation for Hall, very much in the spirit of *lectio divina* (See Chapter One p. 14-17), was a compound process that involved both reading – God speaking to man – and praying – man speaking to God – in its pursuit of participative colloquy. It is in this

context that I believe the reluctance charted by both Schoenfeldt and Van Dijkhuizen should be taken. The rider's vocalisation of doubt should not be seen as an early-modern interpolation, but as an integrated part of the meditative procedure at hand.

Reading meditatively did not involve the abstraction of a text's meaning, but rather the tasting of a text within the real-time experience of the properly attentive reader. Far from being smooth and predictable, this process was potentially circuitous; missteps or doubts raised were not rejected, but understood as fundamentally relevant to a text's reading. Placing themselves within a text's hermeneutic circle, readers accordingly awarded their own feelings and responses an interpretive role. The paradigmatic example of this process is Bernard's own, already discussed, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. Deeply self-conscious, this meditative work records doubts and pleas alongside insights and colloquies, as Bernard works his way verse by verse, and sometimes word by word, through his chosen text. In the words of Robertson:

> Bernard does not attempt to conceal his hesitations or uncertainties. He dramatises, on the contrary, his own struggles as a fearless interpreter who ventures into the thick of difficulties in quest of truth. His unconcealed fumbling truly illustrates [...] his reading methodology.
>
> (188)

Trusting in his own 'book of experience', Bernard has no qualms in relating Scripture to personal biography, with the clearest example being his own interjected grief at the death of his brother ("Sermon 26"). Asking himself "I, whose life is bitterness, what have I to do with this canticle?" (II.3.), Bernard brings personal grief to biblical exegesis, as – always working with reference to his own readerly experience – he emphasises process over completion and seeks understanding with reference to his own responses of doubt, fear and grief.

Viewing "Goodfriday" from this perspective, the rider's self-examination and doubts can be seen as the traces of an in progress experiential reading. Current failure does not preclude future success in the text, with the possibility of the Crucifixion's beholding being postponed rather than ruled out by a rider whose final promise remains to "turne" his "face" (42). Though the poem itself exists only as 42 lines, there is no reason to hold that this end must mark the cessation of the rider's participative attempt with Christ. "Goodfriday" does not round off a process, but it does express a stage of an ongoing procedure, with the rider in the poem's closing lines only steeling

himself for further engagement. Given that both the rider's endorsement of participation and his refusal to participate are consciously pursued, in the final analysis I see "Goodfriday" to be neither an expression of Catholic nostalgia nor an instance of covert habit dying harder than overt theology. Working within its own internally consistent paradigm, "Goodfriday" reflects an essentially trans-confessional understanding of meditative reading's possibilities.[136] Cataphatic participation is treated as essentially possible, even though, at the juncture presented in the text, the rider himself is unprepared to bring such participation to fruition.

While this reading preserves links with medieval meditative practice, claiming that the text only captures a non-conclusive moment of a meditative procedure still separates it from the specifically verse tradition of cataphatic mysticism that I have outlined. Passion poetry had typically scripted a moment of meditative fruition, yet "Goodfriday" offers even less than "La Corona" in this regard, with the poem's middle section providing only a highly conditional script for the Crucifixion's enactment. In the absence of colloquy, there is a risk of "Goodfriday" becoming under-determined as a meditative text. Given the conditionality of the rider's Christ, the poem as a whole focuses much more strongly on its westward riding speaker than his proposed meditative focus, and thus questions can surely be asked about the text's exhibitive value. Ignatian readings of "Goodfriday" frame it as meditative tour de force, applicative readings see it as offering an intellectual epiphany, and both Van Dijkhuizen and Schoenfeldt present it as a dramatised dilemma; understanding the poem to be an earnest yet unsuccessful meditative attempt potentially lacks both the impact and didactic value of these readings. Justifying the poem's existence in the face of its lack of achievement requires that we return to the role of the reader and revisit the notion that the poem is designed with the performance of its audience in mind.

Meditative Reading and Lyric Theory: Goodfriday's Treatment of Time

As discussed in Chapter Three, the manner of medieval Passion verse to which "Goodfriday" relates was originally a scripted devotional exercise composed for its

[136] As discussed in both my introduction and second chapter, devotional habits across the confessional divide in the period could be very similar, particularly in the England of 1613. To again quote Ryrie: "Early Modern British Protestants had, for want of a better word, Catholic tastes in devotional writing" (284).

reader's performance. In "La Corona", for example, the reader is envisaged as picking up the available first-person position as his or her own, and raising both "heart and voice" (13) in an attempt to directly experience the Incarnation through the medium of their own reading. While "Goodfriday" relates thematically and structurally to this tradition, its inclusion of a distinct speaking persona – the rider – displaces the reader's traditional role and seemingly re-orientates the poem as an exhibition of another's devotion rather than a meditative exercise geared towards its own reader. This shift of practice represents a significant rupture with the cataphatic verse tradition, which was not typically concerned with third-person *representation*, but in the instituting of colloquy between a first-person reader and a second-person Christ. The commonly held situation of "Goodfriday", that it is the rider who addresses God, while the reader silently watches, is thus alien to a tradition that was geared towards the participative engagement of a meditant reader with an authorial God.

"Goodfriday's" diversion from the use of a scripted I has generated little scholarly interest, with most discussion of the text paying no heed to the reader's status, reduced or otherwise. Understanding the text to be *about* meditative practice, the poem has been read either as a window upon Donne's attitude towards meditative activity or as a symptomatic reflection of the attitudes of its period. As I have argued in the previous two sections, however, the absence of direct participation in "Goodfriday" is not paired with a rejection of its aims. Curtailed, but never actually transformed, an experientially understood participatory colloquy remains at the heart of the rider's closing promise to turn. In the light of this pledged continuation, I find any unambiguous characterisation of the poem as a denial of participation to be premature. "Goodfriday's" seeming acceptance of the mechanisms of participation clouds its assumed exhibitive character and calls for a more detailed examination of its reader's role. "Goodfriday", I believe, is a text that pays much more heed to its root tradition – and thus its reader – than has been typically recognised.

Turning away from historically rooted scholarly work to a more theoretically based criticism, wider assumptions about representation and verse – which are broadly in line with the downplaying of the reader's role in "Goodfriday" – have recently come under sustained examination. Jonathan Culler's 2015 *Theory of the Lyric* examines recent arguments put forward by himself and others and expounds a view of lyric verse which is based firmly around the role of its reader. For Culler, the lyric is defined by the "fundamental indirection" (199) of its "triangulated" (187) address. Setting out

three distinct positions: the 'addressor' (typically the text's first-person 'speaking' position), the 'addressee' (the subject addressed) and the 'audience' (the reader), Culler maintains that, irrespective of a given text's ostensible situation, lyrics are all ultimately angled towards their readers, who – vitally – are also ultimately responsible for the lyric's enactment through the progress of their reading.

Culler's position challenges what he frames as the more traditional notion – typically assumed in relation to "Goodfriday" – that the lyric amounts to an exhibition, a discourse between addressor and addressee that has been merely "overheard" by its reader (186).[137] Treating verses' audience as incidental, or perhaps even accidental, such a model suppresses the study of readership and examines poetry exclusively in the formal terms of its addressor and addressee – roles which, in most cases, are understandable without explicit reference to a text's actual audience and authorship. Confronting this view with aspects of Culler's work suggests that "Goodfriday" may be less exhibitive than has been frequently acknowledged.

(i.) "Goodfriday" and Time

In Chapter Three, I was particularly concerned with expounding the distinctive temporality of meditative verse. A central characteristic of both Passion verse and the meditative lives is the way in which the present-tense promoted the idea that reading and crucifying were simultaneous activities. The conflation of these logically distinct moments collapses distinctions between reading and event and potentially enables the meditant's actual participative attendance at the occasion envisaged. In contrast to this presentation, "Goodfriday's" full title, "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward", [138] suggests a meditative exhibition. Situating the poem in a time that is, on the one hand, some sixteen hundred years removed from its presumptive meditative focus, and, on

[137] Culler attributes this position's definition to John Stuart Mill, but argues throughout his chapter on lyric address that it has been at the heart of much scholarly work both before and since.

[138] Unlike many Donne poems, "Goodfriday's" title was an apparently inalienable element of the work. Printed editions of the poem since the original of 1633 have all been published with this title, including all seven seventeenth-century editions (see Todd 135). During Donne's lifetime, the work circulated exclusively in manuscript. Of the 24 manuscript copies which survive all are titled, though a number exhibit alternate titles that do not perfectly match that of the print editions. Following the procedures adopted for the Variorum edition of Donne's works, Todd assigns the individual manuscript copies to three groups. The first (with only minor differences of spelling and spacing) ascribes the title "Goodfriday. 1613. Riding towards Wales" and the second "Good Friday Made as I was Riding westward that daye". The third group exhibits more variety, but all titled works include both "Goodfriday" and the year 1613. It is difficult to establish to what extent any differences between the manuscripts are authorial and what formulation should be taken as normative. What is clear, however, is that the features which I draw on above were all included irrespective of precise wording.

the other, necessarily prior to the time of its reading, this title establishes a temporal position which sits awkwardly between those periods which are typically of interest to meditative verse (the *now* of reading and the *then* of Christ's life and death).

Comparison with "La Corona" highlights the potentially intrusive nature of this date. Throughout all seven of its sonnets Donne is at pains to occlude himself, in the hope that such an occlusion will facilitate the collapsing of barriers between the time of the text's performance and the time of Christ. "La Corona's" fifth sonnet, for example, is titled simply "Crucifixion" and thus – in contrast to "Goodfriday" – interpolates no date of composition between *reading's now* and the *Crucifixion's then*. It is the refusal of "Goodfriday" to follow this practice which most strongly argues for its exhibitive nature. While it is typically the reader in Passion verse who actually meditates, in "Goodfriday" it is the poem's own speaker who most obviously undertakes the Passion's reading, a change that apparently transforms the text from a poem that *is in itself* meditative into a poem that is instead *about* meditation.

What mitigates the observation above, however, is "Goodfriday's" actual tense structure, which – despite expectations raised by its title – works consistently to suppress narrative conventions. In line with the medieval tradition, the text's proposed Crucifixion is rendered in the present tense, as Christ's hands "span" (21) the poles and the drops of his blood "make durt of dust" (27). What complicates this presentation, however, is the fact that the present tense is also shared by the rider journeying westward in 1613. The rider *is* "carryed towards the West" (9), and, as he *rides* (33), he *beholds* (21&23) – or at least considers beholding – the scene which took place some sixteen hundred years earlier. This use of the present tense to capture a discrete moment of finished time (April 2nd 1613) stretches both narrative and grammatical convention, with the temporal merging of this moment with another that is logically some 1600 years divorced pushing such conventions even further. "Goodfriday's" title sets an expectation for narrative, yet we are in fact presented with two apparently discrete but equally present-tense moments. This manner of presentation is, at the very least, reminiscent of the kind of temporal manipulation that had been such a vital part of the medieval cataphatic tradition.

A further twist to this picture is added by the fact that it is not only the present-tense which is used in the poem. As already discussed in this chapter's opening sections, lines 9-20, which set the scene of the rider's journey and his contrasting duty, mix both past and present forms. These instances of past-tense usage still do not follow

the narrative lead of the title, however, and instead pick out a series of biblical facts regarding the Crucifixion: "But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall / Sinne had eternally benighted all" (13-14), and "It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke, / It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke" (19-20). Though these occurrences took place before the moment of the rider's journey, and can thus be seen as prompting naturalistic tense use, the fact that these same events are elsewhere in the poem alluded to in the present tense suggests that what really controls "Goodfriday's" tense usage is the attitude of the rider. When presented in the past tense no effort is made to experience the events of lines 13-14 & 19-20, which are instead invoked in an explanatory fashion to justify first the rider's obligation and then his reluctance. Tense use in the poem is thus utilised not to separate *now* from *then* but to distinguish between different modes of apprehension – the dissemination of Christian truth in the past tense, and the experiential presentation of otherwise temporally discrete experiences in the present.

(ii.) Time in the Lyric more Generally

As already noted, the tense use of "Goodfriday" has garnered little detailed attention in the critical literature which has grown up around the poem, a lack that is explained by the broadly conventional nature of present-tense lyric verse. It is this convention, however, which is picked up by Culler in *Theory of the Lyric*, as he foregrounds its essential "strangeness" (viii) in regard to traditional notions of the lyric as a discourse overheard. If lyrics are narrative, Culler reasons, then we could expect them to use the past tense, that this is almost never the case, argues for a differing conception of the lyric. Highlighting, rather than suppressing, the tense use of the lyric, Culler maintains, yields a conception of the form that is actively non-narrative: "Lyrics have been constructed for re-performance with an iterable now: not timeless, but a moment of time that is repeated every time the poem is read" (295). Something that *happens*, not something that *happened*, lyrics, Culler argues, are fundamentally iterative events which 'take place' as often as they are read.

Though Culler has nothing explicit to say about the kinds of scripted verse I have discussed in this thesis (his otherwise wide-ranging focus involves neither devotional nor medieval material), I take his conception of the lyric to be extremely pertinent to precisely the kinds of verse I have been examining in this thesis. The "iterable now"

(295) of Culler's theory overlaps with what McNamer above refers to as the "affective technology" (70) of meditative apprehension, with both understandings promoting a conception of texts as something which happens when read. A poem such as "La Corona", therefore, is deliberately composed to achieve that which Culler sees as being implicit in the entire genre: readers become poems' speakers and voice a text's lines as their own in the moment of performance.

What distinguishes Culler's theory from the meditative tradition I have outlined is that while Culler pursues his investigation in inductive structural terms – he investigates examples of lyrics to isolate their structural similarities – meditative reading, as I have described it, was an attitude taken to texts. *Lectio divina* mandated a distinct reading procedure in order that a meditant might *taste* a work's composition. While texts explicitly prepared for such reading (e.g. Passion verse) foreground precisely the features Culler describes, other texts lacking these features (e.g. Creation, as read in *The Anniversaries*, or the essentially narrative Luke 1:26-38 of Bernard's Annunciation sermon) could also be read in such a way by a reader who was prepared to emphasise the moment of the reading. The importance of this attitude lies in its treatment of apostrophe which, for Culler, exists as the lyric's most characteristic trope (213). Apostrophes such as "Goodfriday's" "O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree" (36) would be treated by Culler as incidences of prosopopoeia – a real-time address, but to a person not present; in the meditative tradition, however, the aim of the reader is to render such apostrophes as instances of direct addresses to someone who *is* present. This attitude preserves apostrophe in its broadest modern sense as an exclamatory address, yet does not follow its stricter rhetorical roots, which suggest a turning away from one audience to address another. Given that the reader in the tradition I have discussed has been felt to inhabit a text's speaking voice, the apostrophes of the cataphatic tradition are not instances of turning-away, but intimations of direct connection. The tradition's aim is that trope is transformed into literal address by a reader who strives, in the words of Bonaventure, to procure himself in his soul present.

My motivation for turning to Culler in this thesis is that his work demonstrates the potential of so-called affective technologies in secular contexts. In a significant break with Donne's host tradition, what I take to be at issue in "Goodfriday" is not the partially obscured Christ, but a more fully envisioned mundane rider, who in establishing himself as the source of the text's original composition, also offers his

position in the present tense for the potential (re)voicing of the reader. Though "Goodfriday's" narrative title suggests a poem that is *about* meditative reading, its presentation and tense structure open the possibility of it actually *being* meditative in a manner which approaches, without perfectly following, the scenario I have hitherto described. The reader is not offered a conventional narrative *representation* (third-person, past-tense), but a position whose tenses and pronouns call for *presentation* by a reader who is prepared to perform the text as scripted discourse. Though this may seem an artificial way of reading, the aforementioned persistence of scripted forms in the early seventeenth century entails that a reader confronted with a poem entitled "Goodfriday" would have potentially expected to adopt such an attitude. Exploiting the similarities between meditative and lyric time, I see Donne as recalibrating his verse in order to shift its meditative focus away from Christ and towards his own anxiety-stricken rider.

Recasting "Goodfriday" in this manner allows Donne to avoid the kind of divine mediation with which he struggles in both *The Anniversaries* and "La Corona". The rider's failure to truly encounter Christ yields the not inconsiderable methodological benefit of recusing Donne from providing a description of such an event's occurrence. In a poem seeking to exhibit completed devotion, the successful beholding of Christ would lead a reader to expect the reciprocal representation of the sight beheld. It is precisely such representation, however, with which we have seen Donne to struggle. That "Goodfriday's" rider never unambiguously looks, means that Donne, as author, has no need to unambiguously recount that which is looked upon. This is not to claim that the rider's aborted projection of the Crucifixion is not suggestive – the cross to which he alludes is patently not empty – yet the text itself largely avoids filling in these contours through the use of hypothetical constructions that restrict the reader to only speculative glimpses. What the rider envisages seeing – hands that span the poles, ragged and torn flesh, and dust turned to dirt – is itself never actually seen, as Donne consistently veils the rider's apprehension – and thus his own authorial depiction – behind rhetorically angled self-questioning. A conditional Crucifixion is suggested, yet, similarly to "La Corona", the lack of obvious colloquy in the text saves Donne from ever having to capture a moment of true divine apprehension. As we have seen in *The Anniversaries* and "La Corona", Donne felt himself lacking both the fiat and the confidence necessary to mediate the divine (the *fiducia* mandated by both Paul and monasticism, but also by Luther). In this light, we can see that Donne recognises

"Goodfriday's" status as a non-divine text and presents not Christ, but the plight of the westward riding sinner – Donne's own plight – to his readership.

Meditative Reading and Lyric Theory: the Balance between Reader and Rider

On a structural basis, identification between rider and reader takes place most clearly in terms of pronouns. Given the poem's appearance after Easter 1613, the reader is necessarily distinct from the poem's rider, yet, following the essential logic of both Culler and the meditative tradition, the reader voices the poem's 'I' as his or her own and is thus responsible – via performance – for the poem's animation. While the rider may have a narrative claim upon the poem's speaking voice, such identification is actually repressed by the poem's tense use and it is ultimately the reader who is performatively responsible for the poem's iteration on the "This day" (10) of their own reading. Activating the aforementioned "iterable now" (295) of lyric time, the reader takes on the role of both audience and speaker and – *becoming* the rider – voices the lyric as his or her own utterance.

Though Culler is clear that it is readers who perform lyrics, he does not hold that such readers must necessarily hold this utterance to be their own. Though given voice by their audience, lyrics are potentially surrounded by inverted commas that acknowledge a potential gulf between reading and speaking voices. This is demonstrably the case in many of the lyrics Culler investigates, where identification is structurally maintained through pronoun usage, yet contextually prevented by the setting up of a situation which is transparently not that of its reader (where, for example, the first person position belongs to an inanimate object). Asked to identify with a situation that is not his or her own, some level of detachment between reader and speaker is inevitable.

It is the detachment of the reader from the 'I position' in devotional poetry that Rosemary Woolf takes to be the decisive characteristic of Reformation verse. Effectively bracketing pre- and post-Reformation religious verse, she understands the former as a *script for* devotion and the latter as an *exhibition of* devotion (6-9). This distinction for Woolf finds its clearest manifestation in the expressions of subjectivity which open many seventeenth-century devotional poems. Pointing to texts such as Donne's own "Batter my heart three-person'd God", she posits the existence of a strong

subjectivity which asserts itself from the outset and closes down any realistic possibility of scripting. Already filled, seventeenth-century pronouns, Woolf argues, cannot contain their readers, who are subsequently encouraged to adopt the position of passive witnesses.

In contrast to Woolf's model, however, "Goodfriday" begins with a gesture of universality, "Let mans soule be a sphere" (1), which is maintained throughout the broadly didactic first eight lines. Resisting any suggestion of particularity, and instead focusing only upon "Soules" (7), the poem's opening move is to align humanity under a universal pattern. While a distinct voice emerges in line 9 – the rider – this voice immediately justifies his direction of travel with reference to the general causes which he has himself already glossed: "*Hence* is't, that I am carryed towards the West" (my italics). The rider's westward motion is therefore clearly apportioned not to an individual failing, but to a universal condition shared by all those readers who are also subject to the same unavoidable whirl (8) of "Pleasure or businesse" (7). This inclusive logic suggests that every fallen reader who voices these lines is also engaged in westward riding, albeit in a more figurative sense than the narratively construable rider.

The remedy sought by the rider for his indirection is equally an expression of general rather than specific causes. Observing the Passion is not a whim upon the rider's part, but a biblically derived duty – binding for all Christians (Lam 1:12, Zech 12:10, John 19:37) – that is presented in the text in terms of an obligation: "There I should see a Sunne, by rising set" (11). Putting the title aside, therefore, the situation of the opening lines can be understood in an entirely universal manner; the rider's predicament and promised course are both potentially shared by an equally fallen reader, who would be well able to express the sentiments written as an aspect of his or her own performance.

Suggesting the rider to be readable as a kind of everyman – potentially the inference of the first eight lines – maps neither the manner of scripted identification that I have described in "La Corona", nor Culler's observation about lyric performance. Such a reading, moreover, equally fails to map the experience of the text's original audience. Though the rider's predicament may be shared, he remains undeniably other in a way that the assumed first-person speaker of "La Corona" is not. On the one hand, deictic pronouns, time phrases and demonstratives promote identification, yet, on the other, it seems undeniable that for the poem's originally assumed audience the rider

would have contextually continued to persist as the poem's point of origin. Though not explicitly a verse letter, "Goodfriday's" dated title engages the text with an actual journey known to have been made by Donne at dawn on Good Friday 1613, and – as Donne's biographers have noted – the poem was most likely first sent to a readership which was directly engaged in its production: either Edward Herbert (to whom Donne was travelling on that day) or Henry Goodyer (whose house he had just left).[139] For the text's first recipients therefore, these circumstances would have worked alongside the title to further pre-inhabit the poem's first person 'I', and thus weaken the notion of the poem as scripted discourse. To be in receipt of a poem from a known hand about a situation in which one was oneself involved urges both the merging of author and rider and the stipulation of a precise and informed reader – in Culler's terms, both the position of 'addressor' and 'audience' would have been filled for the poem's first audience. Though current critical decorum may well demand that a poem's speaker is not associated with its author, not to draw such a link in regard to "Goodfriday" is surely artificial. All verse originates from somewhere, but coterie verse strips away any mystery in this regard, and, in the specific case of "Goodfriday", this situation is even clearer, with the precise 'somewhere' at hand literally given in the poem's title.

If attention is paid to the underlying concerns and motivations of *lectio divina*, however, the inter-play of structural and contextual features in "Goodfriday" is not as alien to cataphatic meditation as it might first appear. Within the medieval tradition, the 'affective technology' of the scripted 'I' was a *means*, not an *end*, with the tradition's ultimate goal being colloquy rather than pronoun adoption. Texts composed to mediate the experiential 'tasting' of the divine certainly used deictic pronouns and time phrases, yet such pronouns did not all function identically. The numerous complaints of Christ, a sub-genre of Passion verse,[140] employed, for example, a first-person position that was – like "Goodfriday's" – contextually pre-filled. Taking their lead from Lamentations 1:12, "behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow", these verses offered a first-person position that was simultaneously to be occupied by Christ

[139] See Stubbs (287) and Gosse (2.25).
[140] A fair number of such texts survive. Aside from the example above other poems featured in Duncan's compilation – particularly "My folk, now answerë me" (134-135) – John Lydgate's "upon the cros naylled" (*The Minor Poems of John Lydgate* 252-254), and Carlton Brown's compendium of fifteenth century verse, *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, which lists nine separate poems under the titles "Appeals to man from the cross" and "Complaints of Christ" (151-177).

(contextually) and the meditant (in terms of performance). The fourteenth-century example below is illustrative:

> Ye that pasen be the wey,
> abide a litel stounde;
> Beholdëth, al mi felawes,
> yif ani me lik is founde.
> To the tre with nailës thre
> wel fast I hangë bounde,
> With a spere al thrugh mi side
> to min herte is made a wounde.[141]
>
> (Duncan 134)

Voiced entirely from the perspective of Christ, readers willing and able to adopt the kind of meditative attitude I have propounded in some sense become the target of their own devotion. As already discussed in Chapter Three, identification in the cataphatic tradition called for a feat of empathy that was much further-reaching than Culler's potentially bracketed reading. Aiming not to sympathetically feel *for*, but empathically feel *with* Christ, meditants sought a position which would fulfil the cry of Galatians 2:20 (to participate in the Crucifixion) and mystically experience divine presence. It is this manner of empathy which poems such as "Ye that pasen be the wey" strived to foster.

Irrespective of its strength, the emphatic identification required of such becoming never amounted to an act of self-forgetting; monks 'took themselves with them' when they read and continued to view their extra-textual situations and emotional responses as relevant parts of their reading experience. Wholly in line with this tradition, a distinction continues to hold in "Ye that pasen be the wey" between the "ye" who passes by and the "I" who is bound fast to the cross, with both positions in some sense occupied by a suitably meditative reader (the latter textually through the poem's voicing, and the former extra-textually through self-knowledge brought to the text). Meditatively experiencing Christ in these lines does not entail, therefore, that meditants be blind to their actual position. While apophatic theology maintained that the self be utterly negated in the course of meditative thought, the cataphatic tradition necessarily encompassed some continuation of self, both as the nexus through which experience was registered and as a means of facilitating the kind of self-recognition

[141] "You that pass by the way / abide a little and stand / Behold all my fellows / to see if any like me be found / To the tree with nails three / securely I am bound / with a spear though my side / to my heart is made a wound." (my modernisation based on Duncan's annotations).

that is implicit in empathy. Those who have argued – or have at least been accused of arguing – that man and God are ever actually one in meditative activity have long flirted with heresy. Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and the Quietist movement of the late seventeenth century, for example, were all condemned and suppressed upon this charge. In the eyes of the Church, 'becoming Christ' in Paul's terms did not entail the meditant's being entirely lost in his or her colloquy. The persistence of the meditant who passes "by the way" is complemented in the lines above by the emphasis on the unbreachable loneliness of Christ's position: "Beholdëth, al mi felawes, / yif ani me lik is founde", which works to retain Christ's particularity and ensures that both proximity and distance feature within the verse. As attachment brings the reader into the vicinity of detachment, man, made in God's image, but estranged from his divinity by the Fall, identifies with Christ's Incarnation in the moment of his reading and, potentially, moves on to grasp his divinity.

It is an ultimately similar empathic act that I see "Goodfriday" to encourage, with its first-person position being simultaneously filled in the reiterable moment of the text's performance by both the rider – who, for the poem's assumed readership, would be Donne himself – and the reader who voices the poem through performance. While empathic becoming in terms of the rider and Christ is, therefore, blocked within the confines of the poem – this relationship is characterised by the asymmetry of line 35 – the poem comes much closer to achieving the merging of reader and rider via the structural elements and genre norms that have already been set out. Identification, fuelled by the formal characteristics which turn lyric into performance, prevents the text from becoming the kind of representation promised by its title, and instead works to establish an attitude of participative empathy between rider and reader, both of whom continue to persist as the text unfolds in the present-tense of the reader's performance.

The potential culmination of this movement arrives with the poem's closing apostrophic prayer (35-42), which is potentially (re)voiced directly to Christ by the reader who has identified with the westward riding speaker. It is apostrophe for Culler that most strongly resists narrative and characterises lyric verse. Unlike quotation or reported speech, an apostrophe uttered in the "iterable now" (295) of the lyric present stands as an act performed by a reader who talks *to*, not *about*, another being. "Goodfriday's", "thou look'st towards mee, / O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree" (35-36), becomes in this context not – or at least not just – the utterance of the rider,

but also the utterance of the reader who is equally attempting to escape prosopopoeia and directly address a second-person Christ who is actually present. For Culler, whose writing is fundamentally formalist,[142] this is true regardless of the reader's attitude: tense and address unite in the act of reading to transmute text into event. What the meditative tradition – which the poem clearly invokes – adds to Culler's account, however, is a reader compelled by an ethic of sincere identification. Culler's apostrophes address the world, but may do so ironically; "Goodfriday", via the cultivation of a participative bond between reader and rider, seeks to animate its structural features and transform its apostrophes into genuine attempts at meditative connection. Potential colloquy in the poem is thus most clear not between the reader and Christ, but between the reader and the rider, as the poem's closing plea for physical reconstitution becomes the reader's own. While Donne's rider never actually reaches his saviour hanging on the cross, he does potentially reach a mundane audience who re-voice his words and echo his yearning.

Presence Performed?

The meditative tradition looked to secure God and was thus engineered to mystically experience him as he was felt to exist within his works. Adopting a similar procedure in respect to conventional authorship requires that human works are acceptable on the same terms. Though this is not obviously the case – the mundane cannot demand the same status as divinity – it was specifically authorship that the cataphatic tradition sought, and this seeking proceeded under empirical conditions. Cataphatic reading was undeniably mystical in character, yet the character of this mysticism did not place it a remove from sensory concerns. While a fundamentally transcendental Cartesian ego exists in isolation – and thus perhaps demands apophatic theology – the integrated person assumed by Donne exists as part of a fundamentally accessible world, a status which allows mysticism to overlap into phenomenology.[143] Under this paradigm, space is opened for "Goodfriday's" non-transcendental reader to potentially encounter the poem's equally non-transcendental speaking voice.

[142] Due to Culler's interest in the reader, his work does not necessarily fit strict definitions of formalism. Culler, however, treats this audience purely as a position that is not to be further analysed or involved in the interpretation of the poem. While it is readers who turn text into event, such readers are entirely bloodless in Culler work.

[143] By 'phenomenology' here I am referring to versions of this approach – such as Merleau-Ponty's – which do not themselves work with a transcendental ego.

Though Donne's more secular verse lies outside the direct remit of this thesis, there are clear suggestions in many of his poems that he viewed his authorship as being textually available to his readers. In the verse letters particularly, Donne presents texts as venues where readers and writers might meet. "Sir more than kisses", for example, holds verse to have the ability to unite reader and writer in a manner suggestive of face-to-face conversation:

> Sir more than kisses, letters mingle Soules;
> For thus friends absent speake
>
> (1-2)

In the lines above Donne encounters a real comfort in reading, with his use of the verb "mingle" – a suggestively physical activity that one can presumably not undertake alone – implying that this comfort rested upon a simultaneous belief in the efficacy of writing. Letters, Donne maintains, grant friends the power of speech, a concept, which, alongside voice, has already featured in the verse I have discussed. Possessing a facility in regards to presence that surpasses that of words alone, speech in *The Anniversaries* is established as a now lost quality of Elizabeth (see p. 69 and FirAn 30-54), and voice is singled out in "La Corona" as an essential element that powers the text in performance (see p. 92-93 and "Sonnet One" 13).

Though it is only souls that are actually mentioned in "Sir more than kisses", if the aforementioned vicinity of body and soul in Donne's work is taken into account, I see little basis for understanding this mingling as a purely intellectual phenomenon. Donne, who would go on to explicitly maintain that "All that the soule does, it does in, and with, and by the body" (*Sermons* 4:358), habitually concatenated body and soul and in the verse letters does so specifically in the context of reading and writing: "This my letter is like me" he wrote to Rowland Woodward "for it / Hath my name, words, hand, feet, heart, minde and wit" ("To Mr. R.W." 5-6). Pressing this argument in relation to Donne's letters more generally, Ramie Targoff is categorical: "Letters for Donne are not only vehicles for conveying his soul. They are also vehicles for conveying his body" (39). Emphasising the many instances where Donne discusses letter reading in terms of actual presence (25-48), Targoff concludes that Donne's epistles constitute a series of attempts to fundamentally unite reader and writer.

While it is classical epistolary philosophy that Targoff sees as fuelling the unitive confidence of Donne's verse letters,[144] I see the kind of textual connection of which they boast to speak more clearly to the tradition of cataphatic reading discussed in this thesis. Echoing Bernard's description of monastic reading as an "embrace of Souls" (qtd. Robertson 202),[145] I take Donne's vision of *mingling* to speak of a similar hoped-for connection, with the explicit mysticism of *lectio divina* being transposed into an active and literary search for the mundane other. The words of Scripture for seventeenth-century readers were not dead, and, for Donne at least, the words of earthly authors were potentially animate in a similar way.

It should be acknowledged at this point that the notion of a persisting and accessible authorial presence is at odds with recent theory, which – irrespective of the historical turn over the last thirty years – has typically striven to remove any such consideration from the study of verse. Never doubting his right to read irrespective of authorship, Culler, for example, places the reader at the heart of a poetics which entirely banishes any consideration of a text's origin in favour of an exclusive focus upon its performance. The lyric, Culler thus stresses, is not something which has been predetermined by authorial authority, but something that happens when read. This kind of readerly emphasis is equally manifest in currently prevalent forms of historicism, which, though still seeking to situate texts, do so without making claims to either historical objectivity or authorial accessibility. While Stephen Greenblatt's influential desire "to speak with the dead" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 1) may, at first sight, seem suggestive of the kind of procedure I have discussed, Greenblatt never seriously adopts the role of "middle-class shaman" (1), and any hints of mysticism in his work are quickly disspelled. Dismissing the possibility of real connection with his interlocutors as fantasy, Greenblatt acknowledges the dead to be mute and declares that even in his "most intense moments of straining to listen" (1) it is only his own un-evadable critical-self which ventriloquises their traces. In the wake of this acknowledgement, Greenblatt focuses on the otherness of the past – made distinct through a contrast with his own positioning – in the hope that contextualisation will illuminate the textual traces that the targets of his conversation have left behind.

[144] See Targoff's first chapter in *John Donne, Body and Soul* which discusses the Roman origins of this movement.
[145] The quote originally issues from the opening sermon of *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. "*Complexus animorum*" (the translation is Robertson's own).

While readers within the tradition I have described would also seek to match the dispositions of originary authorship (see my discussion of Cassian) and utilise the tools of a more classically understood hermeneutics (the cataphatic method made full use of a meditant's existing knowledge), they would clearly have refused to compromise in regard to the presence of their interlocutor's voice. Greenblatt's statement that: "it is paradoxical, of course, to seek the living will of the dead in fiction, in places where there was no live bodily being to begin with" (1) is entirely alien to a tradition whose deepest conviction was that an authorial God sustained his texts. While Greenblatt's historicism – a search for *knowledge* rather than *experience* – lends context without ever trying to revive its ghostly interlocutors, it is for precisely such a procedure that cataphatic practice strives.

In passing over authorship both Culler and Greenblatt declare the primacy of readerly involvement. Perhaps strangely, such declarations are, however, not at odds with the kind of reading procedure I have outlined. A meditant's goal, in Cassian's phrase, was to experience the "face of Scripture", yet, for Cassian, scripture itself was also a mirror that placed the reader into a position of dialogue with the text (see Robertson 86-87). The reciprocity implied in the notion of dialogue is here key. Readers who look, potentially find an assurance that texts have been prepared with such looking in mind. Using the *situatedness* that meditation in its stricter sense as *meditatio* brought to monastic reading, Scripture's vital meaning was vitally sought by a reader who felt that such a procedure would result in the experiential apprehension of an authorial other. It is thus not self-annihilation but self-projection which is vital to cataphatic engagement: *reading was an act of animation that understood itself to be an act of re-animation*.

The similarities between cataphatic reading and Culler's treatment of the lyric highlight that their differences exist in regard to reading attitude rather than method. A critic such as Culler never finds authorship, yet it should be stressed that he never looks. Someone such as Donne – who, as we have seen, felt letters able to mingle souls – would certainly not have conceded that his reading conversations took place entirely with himself. Authorial presence mattered within the cataphatic tradition because readers were engaged in its *location*, a fact that is true in both senses of the word: presence was *found* by readers who were also responsible for its *positioning*. Though this entails subjectivity, it does not follow that the procedure simply led to self-discovery. The aim of cataphatic reading was a form of co-creation in which the reader's

experience of the "things that are made" (Romans 1:20) disclosed the taste of those things' authorship.

By suggesting that the presence involved in "Goodfriday" is a projection of Donne's own authorship I do not mean to imply any literal return to biography. The aim of meditative reading was not the grasping of biographical abstraction but powering intent. That these two entities potentially overlap does not make them identical. The project of finding God in his works (Romans 1:20) did not look to provide a meditant with propositional knowledge of its author – it did not deliver a series of facts about God – but rather, in line with its experiential focus, it looked to facilitate a reading encounter within which the divine could be experientially tasted. Given this aim, analytically citing with precision what stands to be gained in any such reading process is necessarily problematic. An indication, however, can perhaps be found in the Lancelot Andrewes quote that opened this thesis: "Through the veile of his flesh, Such beames he cast, as behind those clouds, they might know, there was a sunne". Andrewes here for once attempts to qualify his mysticism in terms of knowledge rather than experience, with the veil of Christ's flesh offering Andrewes an empirical means by which he may become aware of the (divine) other. Though the "beames" cast convey no detail – propositional knowledge cannot result from such a procedure – they do provide for the revelation of the sun's existence, a focus on the person of Christ potentially allows us to relish his divine nature.

It is a similar and essentially cataphatic experience of presence that I see "Goodfriday" to have been composed to promote. What is at stake in the poem is not the recreation of a second-order biographical construct, 'John Donne', but a view of a text as a meant utterance that has been written in the light of an ethic which is identical to that of its potential reading. While this assumption can never be made with certainty – faith in authorial availability remains a necessary element of any such process – it is ultimately experience, not propositional certainty, which this manner of reading sought. Reading "Goodfriday" in the light of its own beliefs about reading opens the possibility that we too might taste something of its own fallen authorship. The presence conveyed is not that of the divine, but a fundamentally mundane soul caught in the action of seeking earthly solace.

Conclusion

The Challenge of Writing Religious Verse and the Possibilities of Experiential Reading

> *who ever dare*
> *Seeke new expressions, doe the Circle square,*
> *And thrust into strait corners of poore wit*
> *Thee, who art cornerlesse and infinite*
>
> John Donne[146]

In the poem quoted above, "Upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sydney, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister", Donne explicitly outlines the problem of divine representation that has been implicit throughout much of this thesis. Though going on to celebrate verse as the "noblest form" (11), which fittingly attires (38) God's whispered words (32) in the Psalms, Donne is clear that man's own "poore wit" is helpless in the face of infinity. In contrast to the poems that have provided my focus, however, Donne is satisfied throughout "Upon the Translation" to accept poetry's stated limits as he didactically writes *about* the Sydneys' verse without ever attempting to represent the ineffable on his own account.

That the Sydneys have broken free of Donne's injunction, "Upon the Translation" is clear, is due to their verses' position as scriptural translation. Benefitting from "heavens high holy Muse" (31) – an agent Donne's own verse never openly invokes – the Sydneys' project remains a work of inspired discourse:

> That, as thy [God's] blessed Spirit fell upon
> These Psalmes first Author in a cloven tongue;
> (For 'twas a double power by which he sung
> The highest matter in the noblest forme;)
> So thou hast cleft that spirit, to performe
> That worke againe, and shed it, here, upon
> Two, by their bloods, and by thy Spirit one;
> A Brother and a Sister, made by thee
> The Organ, where thou art the Harmony.
>
> (8-16)

[146] "Upon the Translation of the Psalms" (1-4).

Having donned David's prophetic mantle, the Sydneys have produced a work whose essential inspiration is divine. The Holy Spirit "shed" upon both brother and sister ensures that the "harmony" which they have translated remains that of God, with the text's apparent conclusion being that the presentation of divinity is a task reserved purely for divinely inspired discourse. Summarising "Upon the Translation" and generalising its argument, Francis Cruickshank maintains that "poetry [for Donne] is best employed in translation rather than invention, transcription rather than description" (31).

Approaching "Upon the Translation" in the wake of the material I have discussed offers only limited support to Cruickshank's reading, however. While Donne struggles with the issue of representation, unlike Milton in "The Passion", Donne does not cease to write. For Cruickshank, Donne's continued authorship is justified by his belief that God himself will deign to transfigure his otherwise defective praise. Confident that his "final reading and judgement would be divine" (38), Cruickshank argues that Donne trusts in God to rectify his verses' defects and fill their lacuna. Against Cruickshank's suggestion, however, reluctance in regard to "invention" and "description" in the poems I have discussed does not lead to "translation" and "transcription", but to an insistence upon reading's possibilities and the emphasising of experience over knowledge. While Cruickshank sees Donne as accepting his inabilities and throwing himself upon God as his ultimate reader, it is the mundane reading abilities of his earthly audience that have interested me throughout this thesis. Stressing a disconnection between Donne's ability to read and write divinity, I see the possibilities of experiential reading as sustaining Donne's work in the face of his fallen status. "Upon the Translation's" prohibition, I believe, is applicable to authors not readers.

The most successful readings of Donne's work that I have discussed in this thesis have rejected the more absolutist interpretations of Martz and Lewalski. Though still presenting a picture of Reformation change, they have tended to only more obliquely situate Donne in this landscape. The aforementioned readings of Van Dijkhuizen and Schoenfeldt, for example, see Donne's verse as expressing a dissonance between a doctrinal reluctance to partake and a never quite articulated desire for participation; reformed theology exercises a pull, but this pull is inhibited by a counter tension of ingrained habit and tradition. In closing, I believe it is helpful to turn to another influential iteration of this argument which I have not yet had cause to discuss in detail

in this thesis. Building on more nuanced readings of Reformation England that have also inspired many of the authors with whom I have engaged, Regina Mara Schwartz's *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism* (2008) suggests that Donne's verse is evidence of a clash between the public expression of doctrine and the lingering persistence of more traditional theological sentiments. Maintaining that the Reformation's attack upon transubstantiation effectively banished the divine from material reality, Schwartz argues that this banishment saw the reconstitution of the sacramental impulse in poetic contexts.

In the particular case of Donne, Schwartz argues that this reconstitution occurs in his work on secular love. Passing over Donne's divine poetry – the reason why her work has played no real part in this thesis – Schwartz presents a series of readings of the *Songs and Sonnets* which are infused with medieval theology. These readings, though outside the direct scope of this thesis, invoke a number of the themes I have hitherto discussed, with Schwartz pointing to Bernard and, in doing so, branding Donne's work "quasi-mystical" (89). Given these similarities, aspects of *Sacramental Poetics*' reading of Donne chime with elements of my argument in Chapter Four which suggests the applicability of cataphatic reading to non-divine contexts. Links between the reading scheme I have discussed and secular verse are areas that would repay further discussion.

Any direct association between Schwartz's work and this thesis is undermined, however, by the lack of emphasis on both reading and experience in her work. While the prevalence of embodiment in Donne's verse is discussed, without an accompanying emphasis upon experience it is hard to see how this topic can be connected with mysticism, with Schwartz never being clear in relation to the manner in which she finds Donne to be mystical. My concern in this thesis has been to highlight the experiential quality of the verse I have discussed, with readers potentially reconstructing an authorial presence as a facet of their reading. Having nothing to say about read performance, Schwartz's work never allows text to become event, as she ultimately – like Van Dijkhuizen and Schoenfeldt – discusses Donne's verse in exhibitive terms and reads her chosen poems for knowledge rather than experience.

For Schwartz, Donne's declared displacement of the sacred is a response to metaphysical beliefs: the retreat of God from material reality that is most clearly expressed in the denial of transubstantiation. In the verse I have discussed, however, Donne never postulates a God entirely beyond the bounds of empirical epistemology,

and, as such, never ceases to read the divine in Creation.[147] Very much against *Sacramental Poetics*' suggestion, *The Anniversaries* maintain that God has not, in the words of Schwartz's subtitle, "left the world", but that his "glimmering light" remains legible to those who are prepared to engage appropriately. That Schwartz does not take account of this possibility is evidence of a more general critical failure to fully consider Donne's works in a pre-Cartesian light. Merely emphasising his connection to materiality in isolation from cognitive and intellectual factors is not sufficient in this respect. Donne never conclusively separates the material and the immaterial, a position that renders body and soul co-dependent and essentially allows for presence's detection.

The role of Reformation thought in the verse I have discussed reflects less upon metaphysics than upon Donne's own authorial positioning. Though mysticism is not banished from the world, mystery and power are stripped from the priesthood, a development that closes down possibilities for divine mediation. It is, therefore, neither the nature, nor the perception, of the divine that is problematised in the poems I have discussed, but its representation by uninspired hands. While there are no grounds in either Donne's verse or prose for believing that he himself ever ceased to 'read' the divine, as he states in "Upon the Translation", man cannot simply inscribe the ineffable. Donne's complaint in the poem's discussed is linked exclusively to divine *mediation* (writing), not divine *meditation* (reading).

In Chapter Two I maintained that Donne wrote poetry not merely because he was a poet but because he wished to exploit verse's ability to capture divinity through re-performance (see p. 75). It is similarly functional considerations – not explicit doctrinal change – which I see to be behind Donne's post-ordination move towards the sermon. Donne, I would suggest, marginalises poetry not because of its failings, but because it was principally didacticism for which his new role called. Confronted with a congregation that was increasingly 'reading for knowledge', Donne's output came to be dominated by the needs of 'writing to tell'. Joining the priesthood required, of practical necessity, the subordination of mystical co-creation to the demands of pedagogy and politics.

Having outlined two distinct reading approaches, 'reading to experience' and 'reading for knowledge', I have advocated the former, yet – somewhat ironically – have

[147] Schwartz's work has also been criticised on these grounds from a purely theological standpoint, with Skulsky arguing that she is working with only a caricature of Calvinism.

myself largely read in the spirit of the latter. There is no necessary contradiction in this approach, however, as it has not been my intention to suggest that reading for the knowledge that it may bring is a procedure which lacks value. The vast majority of texts are written with such a procedure in mind, and drawing an absolute division between the cultivation of reading experience and the amassing of knowledge via reading is perhaps impossible. As I have been at pains to stress throughout, the experience of reading also involved cognitive factors, and a text such as *The Anniversaries* could advocate experiential practice, while remaining largely didactic. Reading Donne's texts for the knowledge they convey potentially uncovers much about his time and attitudes and thus has an inescapable historical value. What such reading does not do, however, is convey a sense of the text as the meant utterance of its author, the kind of function which I have attributed to "Goodfriday". Historicism arms the literary critic with knowledge to contextualise and decipher texts with the aim being the achievement of knowledge's further expansion. Experiential reading, on the other hand, begins from a position of faith: readers who set out to experience the agency to which the existence of the text at hand bears evidence are convinced that such presence remains available and thus undertake their reading in the hope that such presence will be met.

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The cover of this thesis is taken from Philippe de Champaigne’s 1648 *Penitent Magdalen* (detail).

Summary

This thesis is concerned with the fate of medieval, and distinctively mystical, reading practices in the religious verse of John Donne.

It was an article of faith for many in the medieval period that God resided in Scripture. Various monastics authors – I particularly focus on Bernard of Clairvaux – held that, given this residence, God's presence could be experienced by readers who were prepared to encounter the divine in the course of their reading. This encounter was not due to something learnt or taken from the text, but was rather an experience, involving both physical and intellectual components, that took place in the moment of the reader's reading. Suitably prepared readers were held, therefore, to be able to directly experience the divine in the course of their reading. It is the interplay between this medieval mystical reading technique and Donne's own composition of verse at the beginning of the seventeenth century that is the focus of this thesis.

The argument of this thesis is constructed through four chapters. The first provides a broad introduction to the strain of medieval reading in which I am interested and links this strain to Donne's early seventeenth century. The next three chapters each focus on an individual work by Donne which I take to have been shaped by medieval mystical reading practices: Chapter two focusses on *The Anniversaries*, Chapter Three deals with the sonnet cycle "La Corona" and Chapter Four investigates "Goodfriday 1613. Riding Westwards". Composed between about 1609 and 1613, all these texts belong to a period which culminated in Donne's taking of holy orders and apparently foreswearing the writing of verse. Investigating these poems in the light of medieval mystical reading practices gives background to Donne's poetic choices and provides an alternative insight into both the poems I discuss and a number of wider issues regarding religious verse.

Chapter One: Preamble

Chapter One is a historical preamble which glosses precisely the kind of mystical reading procedure in which I am interested. Having done this I move on to discuss the fate of this procedure in the Reformation landscape of early seventeenth-century England.

Though Bernard of Clairvaux and his monastic predecessors had turned to Scripture itself in their quest for God's presence, many subsequent writers built upon Bernard's example and composed works of both verse and prose which were designed to furnish an identical sense of mystical presence during the moment of their actual usage. Following the fate of this material into the Reformation period, I show that texts within this mystical tradition remained influential in Donne's own intellectual milieu. While some of this material has been previously connected to Donne, its mystical character has typically been underplayed, as critics have preferred to situate Donne's work within either Protestant or Counter-Reformation contexts that are less obviously concerned with a mystical search for divine presence.

Drawing a distinction between two different models of reading, 'reading to experience' – which I associate with monastic practice and particularly Bernard of Clairvaux – and 'reading for knowledge' – which I see to be linked to both Protestant and Counter-Reformation practice – I argue that, while Donne attempts to write in the experiential tradition of monasticism, the shift from reading to writing entangles him within a paradigm that leans upon knowledge rather than experience. It is with the documenting of this entanglement – and Donne's responses to it – that the following three chapters are involved.

Chapter Two: Presence Lost

Chapter Two focuses on *The Anniversaries*. Two, apparently elegiac, poems whose content is more effectively glossed by their respective subtitles "An Anatomie of the World" and "The Progresse of the Soule". Published on the first and second anniversaries of the death of Elizabeth Drury, the daughter of Donne's then Patron, the poems picture a world that has been degraded by the Fall and contrast this world with the superlative memory of Elizabeth whose soul now resides in heaven.

Recent critical work on these poems has highlighted an ambiguity in their treatment of the world. The poems pronounce the world in Elizabeth's absence to be a worthless carcass that is entirely without value, they also, however, retain a clear fascination and attachment to worldly matters that is entirely at odds with their own bleak prognosis as to world's worth. My own reading negotiates this contrast and enables a unitive view to be taken of both poems.

I take the experiential reading practice outlined in Chapter One to be the key to understanding *The Anniversaries*' apparent contradictions. Reading the world to

extract knowledge from it, Donne maintains, can only disappoint, as decay will inevitably place past observation in doubt. I see Donne to argue, however, that if the world is experienced in the moment of its reception then God's presence remains empirically available. The world in *The Anniversaries*, therefore, does not point to the divine but rather discloses it immanently in the moment of its experience. Both Elizabeth's former engagement with the world and Donne's engagement with Elizabeth are described in the poems in a manner which links them to the monastic tradition's idea that an authorial God could be read in the things of his creation. Donne's experience of Elizabeth has enabled him to grasp the divine in the moment of his reading.

I go on to argue that there is, however, a disconnect in *The Anniversaries* between Donne's belief in his ability to read the divine and his capacity to relate in his verse precisely what has been read. Having read for experience rather than knowledge, Donne cannot easily convey the divinity he has encountered at the remove of his own narrative text. Donne has in some sense perceived the divine, but it does not follow that the experiential nature of this perception is conducive to its subsequent representation. There is a hope expressed by Donne in the poems that his verse may recapture such experience in its reciprocal performance, yet this poetics is never entirely worked out. In the final analysis, I thus see *The Anniversaries* to not offer an example of divine presence, but to only offer hints of a former presence that has been felt.

Chapter Three: Presence Sought

In Chapter Three I turn to "La Corona", Donne's cycle of interlinked sonnets which retell pivotal moments of the life of Christ. Unlike *The Anniversaries*, which I have cast as attempts by Donne to recount what he himself has read in creation, I see "La Corona" to be an instrument designed for the use of its reader. Tapping into an ancient tradition that begins with Bernard of Clairvaux I frame the cycle as an instrument for presence's detection.

I link "La Corona" directly to a medieval tradition, initiated by Bernard, which looked to make its readers present at the pivotal moments of Christ's life. This tradition encompassed both shorter works of Passion verse and much longer prose works which added significant detail, as well as meditative and methodological prompts, to the basic narratives set out in the Gospels. Though links between "La

Corona" and this material have been made previously, these links have not been treated in the full light of the tradition's essentially mystical goal: the facilitating of colloquy between the reader and the Incarnation. "La Corona" shares in the essential structural apparatus of this tradition – the distinctive usage of the present tense and deictic pronouns – as it too seeks to turn text into event and involve a first person reader directly with a second person Christ. Reading "La Corona" in this experiential light differentiates my reading from most other accounts, which have typically characterised the cycle as an intellectual exercise whose lack of apparent affectivity has cut it off from the medieval tradition.

By presenting a meditative exercise for his readers' use, Donne manages to avoid some of the difficulties encountered in *The Anniversaries* that are associated with divine representation. His chosen structure puts his readers to work, and, picking up on hints in *The Anniversaries*, challenges them to complete the text in the course their reading. There remain problems with the realisation of Donne's medieval method, however, particularly in regard to the cycle's lacking of a substantive scripted colloquy – an episode that typically would feature in the medieval tradition. Each of "La Corona's" sonnets is structurally connected to the next by the repetition of the last line as the first line of the next sonnet; the final sonnet similarly leads the reader back to the first with its last line being shared by the first line of Sonnet One. Donne, in practice, therefore never calls time on his readers' search as he launches his readers into a potentially infinite circle. His method suggests a faith in our ability to read the divine, but it also discloses a reluctance on his own part to fully script this moment.

Chapter Four: Presence Reformed

The final chapter focuses on the poem "Goodfriday 1613. Riding Westward". In line with its title, this poem has been typically treated as a dramatisation of a meditative attempt undertaken by a lone rider on the morning of Good Friday 1613. Understanding the text in these terms, critical work has first focussed on the precise type of meditative procedure the rider pursues and then commented upon the extent to which this procedure reaches fruition.

Readings of "Goodfriday" have typically split over whether the poem should be seen as a Counter-Reformation meditative success or a distinctively Protestant redeployment of meditative energy. Breaking this mold, some recent criticism has

navigated between these positions and framed the poem more ambiguously, suggesting that it is best read as a dramatisation of a meditant caught between two differing meditative paradigms.

Approaching the poem in the light of my previous chapters suggests a different interpretation. My argument is comprised of two separate parts. Firstly I take "Goodfriday's" rider to essentially support the kind of procedure I have outlined. Though the text contains no moment of meditative fruition, I take its closing prayer to remain an integral part of an attempt to bring such fruition about. While the kinds of doubts that the closing prayer voices rarely featured in meditative works composed for the use of another, these doubts, I argue, are wholly consistent with the kind of *lectio divina* practiced by Bernard.

Secondly, and more profoundly, I examine the role of the text's reader and question the extent to which "Goodfriday" is really a text that exhibits third person devotion. Turning to recent work by Jonathan Culler on lyric verse more generally, I suggest that "Goodfriday" presents a secular rather than a divine subject. This presentation, however, exploits the very same apparatus and conditions that I have discussed in connection to mystical meditative verse and the text thus works to resist narrative representation. Meditative becoming, I argue, is not banished but displaced in "Goodfriday" which ultimately enacts not the Crucifixion, but a colloquy between reader and rider.

In conclusion, I discuss what Donne's engagement with the medieval tradition implies for wider issues of representation and connection in religious verse. The disparity between Donne's faith in reading and writing illuminates the choices he himself made in his career and suggests that more attention should be paid to the role which he allots to his readers. What is important, I would suggest, is not what Donne's verse is about, but what that verse does when it is read.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift gaat over het lot van middeleeuwse, en aantoonbaar mystieke, leespraktijken in de religieuze gedichten van de 17e-eeuwse auteur John Donne.

Het was voor velen in de middeleeuwse periode een geloofsartikel dat God letterlijk in de Heilige Schrift aanwezig was. Verschillende kloosterschrijvers - ik richt me in het bijzonder op Bernardus van Clairvaux - waren van mening dat, gezien deze belichaming, Gods aanwezigheid kon worden ervaren door lezers die bereid waren om het goddelijke tijdens hun lezing te ontmoeten. Deze ontmoeting tussen God en de lezer was niet het gevolg van iets wat geleerd of uit de tekst gehaald was, maar was eerder een ervaring, waarbij zowel fysieke als intellectuele componenten betrokken werden tijdens het lezen. Van goed voorbereide lezers viel te verwachten dat ze het goddelijke direct konden ervaren tijdens het lezen. Het is de wisselwerking tussen deze middeleeuwse mystieke leestechniek en Donne's eigen schrijven, aan het begin van de zeventiende eeuw, die in dit proefschrift centraal staan.

Het ontwikkelde argument in dit proefschrift is opgebouwd uit vier hoofdstukken. Het eerste geeft een brede inleiding op het type van middeleeuws lezen waarop ik me richt, en koppelt dit aan Donne's vroege zeventiende eeuwse werk. De volgende drie hoofdstukken gaan elk in op een individueel werk van Donne dat volgens mij is gevormd door middeleeuwse mystieke leespraktijken: hoofdstuk twee richt zich op *The Anniversaries*, hoofdstuk drie behandelt de sonnettenkrans "La Corona" en hoofdstuk vier onderzoekt "Goodfriday 1613 Riding Westwards". Al deze teksten, geschreven tussen ongeveer 1609 en 1613, behoren tot een periode waarin John Donne koos voor het priesterschap en besloot te stoppen met schrijven van poëzie .

Het onderzoeken van deze gedichten in het licht van de middeleeuwse mystieke leespraktijk geeft achtergrondinformatie over Donne's poëtische keuzes en voorziet een alternatief inzicht in zowel de gedichten die ik bediscussieer als een aantal bredere kwesties met betrekking tot religieuze gedichten.

Hoofdstuk één: Preamble

Hoofdstuk één is een historische preambule die precies het soort mystieke leesprocedure waarin ik geïnteresseerd ben beschrijft. Daarna bespreek ik het bestaan van deze procedure in het Engelse reformatielandschap aan het begin van de zeventiende eeuw.

Hoewel Bernardus van Clairveaux en zijn monastieke voorgangers zich tot de Schrift zelf hadden gewend in hun zoektocht naar Gods aanwezigheid, leunden veel latere schrijvers op het voorbeeld van Bernardus en schreven werken die bedoeld waren om een identiek gevoel van mystieke aanwezigheid te geven op het moment dat ze werden gelezen. Ik laat zien dat teksten binnen deze mystieke traditie van invloed bleven in Donne's eigen intellectuele omgeving. Hoewel een deel van dit materiaal eerder verbonden is geweest met Donne, is het mystieke karakter ervan meestal onderschat omdat critici er de voorkeur aan hebben gegeven om Donne's werk te situeren binnen protestantse of contrareformatorische contexten die minder duidelijk te maken hebben met een mystieke zoektocht naar goddelijke aanwezigheid.

Ik maak onderscheid tussen twee verschillende modellen van lezen: 'lezen om te ervaren' (*reading to experience*) - wat ik associeer met de monastieke praktijk en in het bijzonder met Bernardus van Clairvaux - en 'lezen om te weten' (*reading for knowledge*) - wat ik in verband zie met zowel de protestantse als de contrareformatorische praktijk. Daarbij beargumenteer ik dat, terwijl Donne probeert te schrijven in de ervaringstraditie (*experiential tradition*) van het kloosterlijke leven, de verschuiving van lezen naar schrijven hem verstrikt laat raken in een paradigma dat eerder op kennis dan op ervaring steunt. Het is het beschrijven van deze complexiteit - en Donne's antwoorden daarop - waarop de volgende drie hoofdstukken zich richten.

Hoodstuk twee: Presence Lost

Hoofdstuk twee richt zich op *The Anniversaries*. Twee, ogenschijnlijk elegische, gedichten waarvan de context beter wordt beschreven in de ondertitels, als "An Anatomie of the World" en "The Progresse of the Soule". Gepubliceerd op de eerste en tweede herdenkingsdag van het overlijden van Elizabeth Drury, de dochter van Donne's toenmalige beschermheer, schetsen de gedichten een wereld die door de

zondeval is aangetast en vergelijken ze deze wereld met de superieure herinnering aan Elizabeth wiens ziel nu in de hemel is.

Recent kritisch werk over deze gedichten heeft een dubbelzinnigheid in Donne's behandeling van de wereld aan het licht gebracht. De gedichten verklaren de wereld in Elizabeth's afwezigheid tot een waardeloos karkas dat totaal nutteloos is, maar ze behouden tegelijkertijd een fascinatie en verbondenheid met wereldse zaken die volledig in strijd is met hun eigen sombere prognose over de waarde van de wereld. Mijn interpretatie van deze gedichten richt zich op dit contrast en probeert deze twee standpunten te verenigen.

Ik neem aan dat de ervaringsgerichte leespraktijk (*experiential reading practice*) zoals beschreven in hoofdstuk één de sleutel is tot het begrijpen van de ogenschijnlijke tegenstrijdigheden in *The Anniversaries*. De interpretatie van de wereld om er kennis uit te halen, stelt Donne, kan alleen maar teleurstellen, want verval zal onvermijdelijk de observatie uit het verleden in twijfel trekken. Ik zie Donne echter argumenteren dat als de wereld ervaren wordt op het moment van haar beleving, Gods aanwezigheid empirisch beschikbaar blijft. De wereld in *The Anniversaries* wijst daarom niet op het goddelijke, maar onltsluit die als immanent op het moment van de ervaring. Zowel Elizabeth's vroegere betrokkenheid met de wereld als Donne's betrokkenheid met Elizabeth worden in de gedichten beschreven op een manier die ze verbindt met het idee van de monastieke traditie dat een gezaghebbende God in de dingen van zijn schepping kan worden gelezen. Donne's ervaring met Elizabeth heeft hem in staat gesteld het goddelijke te begrijpen op het moment van zijn lezing.

Ik ga verder met te beargumenteren dat er in *The Anniversaries* echter een kloof bestaat tussen Donne's geloof in zijn vermogen om het goddelijke te lezen en zijn vermogen om in zijn gedichten precies te vertellen wat er is gelezen. Donne heeft gelezen voor een ervaring in plaats van te lezen voor kennisvergaring en kan de goddelijkheid die hij is tegengekomen niet gemakkelijk overbrengen in zijn eigen verhalende tekst. Donne heeft in zekere zin het goddelijke waargenomen, maar dat betekent niet dat de ervaring van deze waarneming bevorderlijk is voor de latere representatie ervan. In zijn gedichten spreekt Donne de hoop uit dat lezers tijdens het lezen van de gedichten een dergelijke ervaring zullen beleven, maar vreest dat dit onmogelijk te bevatten is in zijn schrijven. Uiteindelijk zie ik *The Anniversaries* dan

ook niet als een voorbeeld van goddelijke aanwezigheid, maar als een teken van een eerder aanwezigheid die men heeft gevoeld.

Hoofdstuk drie: Presence Sought

In hoofdstuk drie wend ik me tot "La Corona": Donne's krans van sonnetten die cruciale momenten uit het leven van Christus opnieuw vertellen. In tegenstelling tot *The Anniversaries*, die ik heb beschreven als een poging van Donne om te vertellen wat hij zelf heeft gelezen in de schepping, zie ik "La Corona" als een instrument ontworpen voor het gebruik van de lezer. Ik benut een oude traditie die ontstond bij Bernardus van Clairvaux, en ik beschouw de sonnettenkrans als een instrument voor het ervaren van de goddelijke aanwezigheid.

Ik verbind "La Corona" rechtstreeks met een middeleeuwse traditie, geïnitieerd door Bernardus, die ernaar streefde de lezers aanwezig te laten zijn bij de cruciale momenten in het leven van Christus. Deze traditie omvatte zowel kortere werken over het lijden van Christus als veel langere prozawerken, die belangrijke details en meditatieve en methodologische aanwijzingen toevoegden aan de basisverhalen die in de evangeliën worden beschreven. Hoewel er al eerder verbanden zijn gelegd tussen "La Corona" en dit materiaal, zijn deze verbanden niet behandeld in het volle licht van het mystieke doel van de traditie: het faciliteren van een colloquium tussen de lezer en de vleesgeworden God. "La Corona" deelt in de essentiële structurele componenten van deze traditie - het duidelijke gebruik van de tegenwoordige tijd en deiktische voornaamwoorden - omdat het ook probeert om van tekst een gebeurtenis te maken en een eerste persoon, de lezer, direct bij een tweede persoon, Christus, te betrekken. Het lezen van "La Corona" in dit ervaringsgerichte (*experiential*) licht onderscheidt mijn lezing van de meeste andere verslagen, die de sonnettenkrans typisch hebben gekenmerkt als een intellectuele oefening met een gebrek aan emotionele content, waardoor deze sonnetten afwijken van de middeleeuwse traditie.

Door een meditatieve oefening te presenteren aan zijn lezers, slaagt Donne erin een aantal van de problemen te vermijden die zich voordoen bij *The Anniversaries* en die verband houden met de goddelijke voorstelling. Donnes gekozen structuur zet zijn lezers aan het werk, en voortbordurend op hints in The

Anniversaries, daagt hen uit om de tekst in de loop van het lezen te vervolledigen. Er zijn echter nog steeds problemen met de realisatie van Donne's middeleeuwse methode, met name wat betreft het ontbreken van een inhoudelijk geschreven colloquium - een gebeurtenis die typisch is voor de middeleeuwse traditie. Elk van "La Corona's" sonnetten is structureel verbonden met de volgende door het herhalen van de laatste regel van het eerdere sonnet als eerste regel van het volgende sonnet; het laatste sonnet leidt de lezer terug naar het eerste sonnet; de laatste regel van het laatste sonnet is hetzelfde als de eerste regel van sonnet nummer één. Donne geeft dan ook nooit een einde aan, omdat hij zijn lezers in een potentieel oneindige kringloop brengt. Zijn methode suggereert een geloof in ons vermogen om het goddelijke te lezen, maar het onthult ook een terughoudendheid van zijn kant om dit moment volledig te beschrijven.

Hoofdstuk vier: Presence Reformed

Het laatste hoofdstuk richt zich op het gedicht "Goodfriday 1613. Riding Westward". Zoals de titel omschrijft, wordt dit gedicht typisch behandeld als een dramatisering van een meditatieve poging van een eenzame ruiter op de ochtend van Goede Vrijdag 1613. Bij het verkrijgen van inzicht in de tekst, hebben academisch werken zich eerst gericht op het precieze type meditatieve procedure dat de ruiter volgt en vervolgens op de mate waarin deze procedure tot stand komt.

Interpretaties van "Goodfriday" zijn meestal verdeeld over de vraag of het gedicht moet worden gezien als een katholieke contrareformatorisch meditatief succes of een duidelijk protestantse herverdeling van meditatieve energie. Meer recent academisch werk beschouwt het gedicht als dubbelzinnig, wat suggereert dat het gedicht het beste gelezen kan worden als een dramatisering van een gelovige die gevangen zit tussen twee verschillende meditatieve paradigma's.

Het benaderen van het gedicht in het licht van mijn vorige hoofdstukken suggereert een andere interpretatie. Mijn redenatie bestaat uit twee afzonderlijke delen. Ten eerste neem ik Goodfriday's ruiter om de procedure die ik heb geschetst te ondersteunen. Hoewel de tekst geen moment van meditatieve bloei bevat, neem ik aan dat het slotgebed een integraal onderdeel blijft van een poging om zo'n bloei tot stand te brengen. Hoewel het soort twijfels dat het afsluitende gebed uitdrukt zelden voorkomt in meditatieve werken gecomponeerd voor het gebruik van een ander,

komen deze twijfels volledig overeen met het soort *lectio divina* dat Bernardus beoefend heeft.

Ten tweede, en meer diepgaand, onderzoek ik de rol van de lezer van de tekst en vraag ik me af in hoeverre "Goodfriday" werkelijk een tekst is die de toewijding van de derde persoon toont. Wat betreft het recente werk van Jonathan Culler over lyrische verzen in het algemeen, stel ik voor dat "Goodfriday" een seculier, in plaats van een goddelijk, onderwerp presenteert. Deze presentatie maakt echter gebruik van precies dezelfde methode en dezelfde voorwaarden die ik heb besproken in verband met mystiek meditatieve poëzie en de tekst verzet zich dus tegen verhalende representatie. Het meditatief worden (*meditative becoming*), beargumenteer ik, is niet compleet verdwenen maar wordt verplaatst in "Goodfriday", dat uiteindelijk niet de Kruisiging naspeelt, maar een colloquium tussen lezer en ruiter is.

Tot slot bespreek ik wat Donne's betrokkenheid met de middeleeuwse traditie betekent voor bredere kwesties van representatie en verbondenheid in religieuze poëzie. Het verschil tussen Donne's geloof in lezen en schrijven verlicht de keuzes die hij zelf heeft gemaakt in zijn carrière en suggereert dat er meer aandacht moet worden besteed aan de rol die hij zijn lezers toekent. Wat belangrijk is, stel ik, is niet waar het poëzie van Donne over gaat, maar wat die poëzie doet als die wordt gelezen.

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Curriculum Vitae

Mark O'Donnell was born in London in 1979. After leaving school in 1997, he first studied Philosophy at University College London and then worked in a number of countries as an English Teacher. Returning to academia alongside full-time work in 2005 he completed a Master's degree in English at The Open University (2005 *Distinction*) and later completed a Research Master's in the Study of Art and Literature at Leiden (2012 *Cum Laude*). This thesis was also written while working full-time as a teacher and teacher trainer in the areas of English language, communicative business skills and cultural awareness.