THE THEOLOGICAL AESTHETIC IN SOUTHWELL AND DONNE

METAPHORICAL ANGST:

THE INFLUENCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL AESTHETIC ON THE METAPHORS OF

ROBERT SOUTHWELL AND JOHN DONNE

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Abstract

This thesis examines the metaphorical expressions of Robert Southwell and John Donne in light of the instability created in metaphorical thought by Reformational debates. I argue that the theological doctrines regarding the Eucharist and Biblical interpretation had associated consequences for figurative thought and that the violence with which these doctrines were interrogated in early modern England created a crisis of figurative representation that contributed to the elaborate experimentation of metaphor (layerings, argued conceits, rapid transitions between tropes, etc.) found within the poetry of Southwell and Donne.

My first chapter traces the theological landscape of early modern England, noting the continental Catholic and Protestant positions which defined the Reformational debates, as well as roughly locating the position of the English Church in the centre of these debates. While each of these doctrinal positions contains certain understandings about metaphorical thought, this chapter argues that it is the general uncertainty and the society-wide fluctuations between these ideas that defines my concept of the "theological aesthetic." In my final two chapters I look at specific metaphors in the works of Robert Southwell ("Saint Peter's Complaint," "Christ's bloody sweat," and "The prodigal childs soule wracke") and John Donne ("The Cross," "Holy Sonnet 10: Batter my heart, three-personed God," and "Holy Sonnet 2: I am a little world made cunningly"). Close analysis of these poems reveals that Southwell's poetry often combines imagery and tropes in complicated ways to form multifaceted metaphors, while Donne's poetry often functions as a meditation upon the possibilities of figurative language to create meaning.

This thesis does not attempt to form a comprehensive theory of early modern metaphor, but rather examines how the theological debates of the Reformation questioned the representational efficacy of figurative language, allowing metaphor to be redefined by the experiments of early modern poets like Southwell and Donne.

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Introduction

My God, my God, Thou art a direct God, may I not say, a literall God, a God that wouldest bee understood literally, and according to the plaine sense of all that thou saiest? But thou art also (Lord I intend it to thy glory, and let no profane mis-interpreter abuse it to thy diminution) thou art a figurative, a metaphoricall God too: a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such Curtains of Allegories, such third Heavens of Hyperboles, so harmonious eloquutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding perswasions, so perswading commandements, such sinewes even in thy milke, and such things in thy words, as all profane Authors seeme of the seed of the Serpent that creepes, thou art the dove, that flies. O, what words but thine, can expresse the inexpressible texture, and composition of thy word; in which, to one Man, that argument that binds his faith to beleeve that to bee the word of God, is the reverent simplicity of the Word, and to another the majesty of the Word; and in which two men, equally pious, may meet, and one wonder, that all should not understand it, and the other, as much, that any man should.

(Donne, "Expostulation XIX")

The theological and doctrinal debates of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century introduced one of the most prolific periods in English devotional poetry. The fractured identity of a broken church found its way onto the page in powerful ways as each poet struggled to express his or her devotion to God within new doctrinal perspectives. The Reformation debates over the definition of the sacraments and the centrality of biblical interpretation had a profound impact beyond the theme and subject matter of these poems. These theological issues—under both ecclesiastical and popular debate—resulted in a re-formation of metaphorical thinking such that the poetry of the seventeenth century exhibits an angst about the power and ability of metaphor to

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accurately represent. This angst is central to a defining aesthetic of early modern poetry that I have termed the "theological aesthetic."

Although the relationship between theology and poetry might at first seem opaque, my thesis contends that as the arguably more complex forms of representation found in Catholic theology (transubstantiation and multiple signification in biblical interpretation) were replaced by more linear understandings of representation expressed in Protestant formations of a spiritual Eucharist and singular meaning in scripture, the very essence of figurative thought was put into question. As the Eucharist transitioned away from the real presence of Christ, the symbol became more removed from the referent and the process of figurative thought was complicated and made more abstract. The Protestant belief in the intelligibility of scripture also simplified medieval understandings of figurative language at the same time that it strengthened the connection between words and their meanings. The Reformation, by making these theological doctrines prominent in the social consciousness of early modern England, introduced a crisis of metaphor that deeply affected the way English poets understood the meaning-making properties of figurative language.

My thesis first reads the theological debates over the Eucharist and scripture for their consequences to figurative thought before tracing the impact of the theological aesthetic on the metaphors of Robert Southwell and John Donne. I will examine the nuanced structures of the metaphorical expressions of Southwell and Donne in light of this widespread crisis of representation created by the English Reformation. The

metaphors of Southwell and Donne's poetry are particularly striking both in their variety

of construction and the thoroughness with which they are interrogated within the poem.

This thesis will explore how their poems elaborate on some metaphors, compounding the

figurative argument until the original metaphor is lost in complexity, and yet frequently

abandon other metaphors left in half-formed states. Upon the collapse of the initial

figurative image, their poems often rapidly transition into one new image after another.

Finally, my thesis looks at the way that the metaphors of these poems hold multiple

images in concert, layering meanings and images upon each other in varying, complex

forms. These poems of Southwell and Donne emphasize the importance of metaphor at

the same time that they express uncertainty about its representational efficacy. Both poets

manipulate the traditional structures of metaphor as they struggle to navigate the

theological challenges to metaphorical efficacy.

Recognition of the prominence of metaphorical language has long been a part of

the critical tradition of seventeenth-century verse; however, while scholars have noted the

complicated structures of early modern metaphor, they explain neither the development

of complicated conceits and argued metaphors, nor the existence of twisted and aborted

metaphors. As early as the eighteenth century, the critic Samuel Johnson decried the

metaphysical poets of the previous century because they "broke every image into

fragments" and their "conceits were far-fetched" (Johnson 21). His analysis draws

attention to the distinctive quality of the seventeenth-century metaphor. By the eighteenth

century, the aesthetics had changed and poets and critics had a different understanding of

metaphor and figurative language. The theological and doctrinal debates that gave rise to the "far-fetched" conceits of seventeenth-century poetry were no longer pervasive; the exaggerated imagery of the seventeenth century held no appeal to the readers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

When scholarly interest in the poetry of the early seventeenth century was revived by Herbert Grierson in the early twentieth century, metaphor remained the focus of criticism. In an attempt to define the poetry of the seventeenth century in his introduction to *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (1921), Grierson highlights the distinctive significance of the metaphysical conceit to these poets' verse. It has since often been argued that one of the central features of seventeenth-century poetry is the conceit, an elaborate metaphor in which "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together" (Johnson 20). Adapting this criticism in his 1965 anthology of seventeenth-century poetry, Jim Hunter suggests that one of the defining features of the conceit is its interest not only in enhancing the original image, but in more fully tracing the relationship between the symbol and referent. On the other hand, T.S. Eliot (1924) notably rejects the common understanding of metaphysical poetry as being tied to long, extravagant metaphor; although he acknowledges the use of long, drawn-out conceits, he reveals there is just as often "rapid association of thought" (Eliot 25) as a poem progresses quickly through different images. Nevertheless, recognition of the complex metaphor of seventeenth-century poetry is a recurring theme of modern criticism.

Later twentieth century criticism of the poetry of the seventeenth century often

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examines the clever wit and rhetorical skill of its metaphors; such scholarship (Tuve, Gardner, Shami and Block to name a few) regularly draws attention to the prominent status of metaphor in the poetry, but rarely examines the possible cultural influences upon the structure of metaphor. While they explore the complicated ways in which poets like John Donne integrate imagery from contemporary scientific discoveries with amorous lyrics, they never explore any underlying reasons as to why these poets contort their images in such a laboured manner. The assumption seems to be that these poets were just being 'clever.' A look toward the pressures placed upon figurative thought by the English Reformation, however, suggests that there might be a more fundamental reason for the tortuousness of early modern metaphor noted—but not explained—by these scholars.

Louis Martz's book *The Poetry of Meditation* in 1954 remedies the lack of explanatory power of previous criticism by connecting the style of devotional poetry to that of contemporary devotional practices. Martz's book is a landmark in criticism of seventeenth-century verse not only because, as Anthony Low remarks, "criticism of religious verse had lagged so far behind secular verse that Martz was almost the first to bring it into the twentieth century" (Low x), but also because of the added historical context he brings to formalist studies. His work both grows out of the earlier work done by Grierson and Eliot, and at the same time creates a new critical tradition that has defined successive scholarly approaches to seventeenth-century devotional poetry.

Martz opens his discussion of his chosen devotional texts by recognizing the work of Grierson and Eliot, highlighting the "highly unconventional imagery, including the

whole range of human experience, from theology to the commonest detail of bed and board; an 'intellectual, argumentative evolution' within each poem, a 'strain of passionate paradoxical reasoning, which knits the first line to the last' and which often results in 'the elaboration of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it'" (Martz 2). Martz differs from his contemporaries, however, by suggesting that devotional poetry borrowed some of its elaborate stylistic choices, including its "highly unconventional imagery," from existing devotional practices. While previous scholars argued that these stylistic characteristics of early modern verse be understood in a limited way through contemporary historical and cultural influences, Martz argues "that the art of meditation played a fundamental part in the development of these qualities" (Martz 2). Importantly, Martz tries to understand the unique style of poetry used by the seventeenth-century poets in light of contemporary devotional practices. He attributes the structure and style of devotional verse to practices in both Reformation and Counter-Reformation meditative traditions, claiming that meditative thinking, which he sums up as "not simply diligent thinking but thinking deliberately directed toward the development of certain specific emotions" (Martz 14), is a primary influence informing many of the complex rhetorical and stylistic choices of these poets. By attributing both stylistic and thematic elements of these poems to early modern practices of meditation, Martz not only introduces the genre of devotional poetry to modern criticism, but also initiates the critical dialogue between religious belief and poetic style.

　　　　Like Martz, Low's work, especially *Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in*

Seventeenth-Century English Poetry (1978), examines devotional practices contemporary

to Southwell and Donne in order to understand the devotional modes expressed through

verse. Low's work extends Martz's argument to consider other prominent devotional

practices. In addition to meditative practices, Low also analyzes what he calls the

traditions of vocal prayer, both spoken and sung, sensible affection and immediate acts,

which he also defines as contemplation or mysticism. He uses his analysis of these four

types of devotional practice to support his premise that "great religious poetry requires of

its author not only strong faith but familiarity with elaborate technical systems if that

faith is to be supported and conveyed to others" (Low 2). Thus, Low explores how the

"technical systems" of seventeenth-century devotion are expressed through both the style

and content of the devotional poetry of the era. Like Martz's, however, Low's analysis

looks primarily at the larger progression of ideas within the poem rather than at any one

specific structural element like metaphor.

　　　Arthur Clements's *Poetry of Contemplation* (1990) also follows the Martz and

Low tradition. Clements surveys the ways in which the contemplative and mystical

traditions of both the Catholic and Protestant churches influence the verse of the

seventeenth century. He claims, in order to complicate Martz's meditative argument, that

"some of their poems are conventionally religious and pious; some are mainly

meditative; but others, usually their most distinguished and highly regarded poems, have

profound and powerful mystical elements in them, sometimes alongside the pious and

meditative elements" (Clements xii). While Clements's argument includes an analysis of

the connection between mystical contemplation and complexity in poetic imagery, his

focus is more general in scope than my project, referencing the entire tone of the work

rather than specific structures.

Finally, Ramie Targoff's work *Common Prayer: The Language of Public*

Devotion in Early Modern England (2001) also uses devotional practice to explore poetic

structures. Targoff explores how the structure of the English *Book of Common Prayer*

contains language and devotional structures that were used by the poets of the

seventeenth century. Moreover, in an essay published in 1999, Targoff argues that

> it is only by exploring the theological efficacy that the Established Church
> attributed to formal perfection in prayer that we can begin to understand the
> particular motivations of seventeenth-century religious poetry ... [;] the
> seventeenth-century devotional lyric did not simply emerge from the conflicted
> and idiosyncratic voice of private belief, but also relied heavily upon the "tuning"
> of the worshipper's internal condition to the external patterns of the poetic or
> liturgical text. ("The Poetics of Common Prayer" 471)

Like Martz, Low and Clements, Targoff explores the structures of contemporary

devotional practice in parallel to the structure of poetry. Like her predecessors, however,

Targoff also limits her study to the larger structure of ideas within a poem and only

tangentially examines more specific metaphorical tendencies.

While these scholars (Martz, Low, Clements and Targoff) offer valuable insight

into the nuanced subtleties of seventeenth-century devotional verse, I am less interested

in exploring the immediate imitation of style than I am in understanding the fundamental

shift in figurative thinking, a shift that finds its focal point in the various structures of

metaphor so prominent in these poems. The metaphorical expressions of Southwell and

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Donne are more complex than these more general studies can discover. Each of the

aforementioned critics studies the larger structures of a poem with only cursory

comments about metaphorical structure. As we have seen, however, metaphorical

experimentation is a preeminent characteristic of early modern poetry and requires more

focused scholarly treatment than these general treatises can provide.

My study also differs from Martz *et al.* because, instead of examining other early

modern expressions of devotion in order to understand the changing forms of poetry, I

analyze the root manifestation of changing thought, theology. While the devotional

practices examined by these scholars can provide valuable insight into the current

religious environment, they are themselves influenced by the deeper changes in religious

and theological thinking. Moreover, the overlap between devotional modes and

devotional poetry obscures the deeper changes occurring at the level of symbolic thought

as contemporary methods of prayer and meditation are primarily poetic in nature and

devotional poetry is in fact its own form of devotional practice. Therefore, as both an

extension of and supplement to this previous work, my study more closely examines the

theological developments at the root of devotional change.

The theological developments at the foundation of religious change, while further

removed from poetry, offer more immediate access to the ideas shaping popular

understanding of figurative thought. Admittedly this focus on theology means that I will

have to do more work to connect the greater distance between theology and poetry;

however, some of this work has already been accomplished by other scholars (Lewalski,

Ross, Young and Schwartz) who study seventeenth-century poetry in light of the theological developments of the Reformation.

At the centre of modern theologically based criticism is the attempt to draw a distinction between a Catholic and a Protestant poetic. This particular tradition is most famously represented in Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (1979), and it typically understands English poetry of the seventeenth century to be a representation of a uniquely Protestant poetic. Before Lewalski came to the defence of the Protestant poetic, however, Malcolm Ross lamented the loss of Catholic sacramental language in his book *Poetry & Dogma* (1969).[1] He claims, with regard to metaphorical thought, that "there is a revolutionary leap between the Catholic and Reformation cycles, and this leap occurs at the level of dogmatic symbol" (Ross 41). Ross sees something perverse, empty and anti-poetic in later seventeenth-century verse, and he blames this lack of creativity on the imaginative restrictions of Protestant theology. He thus understands the elaborate metaphors found in the poetry under study here as remnants of a Catholic worldview. Particularly of concern for Ross's analysis is the loss of the sacramental understanding of the Eucharist, an idea that will be further explored later in this thesis.

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1 It is from Ross's critique of the metaphysical poets that this thesis first took root. I was researching a paper on the modern classification of metaphysical poets when I read a short article by Malcolm Ross called "A Note on the Metaphysicals." At the end of his paper he suggested that "perhaps the metaphysical mode is a clutching after straw as the ancient bricks [of Catholic dogmatism] crumble" (Ross 113). I did not have space to explore the idea of the metaphysical metaphor being connected to Catholic sacramentalism in that paper, but in my Honour's thesis, I explored the influence of Catholic theology on Donne's secular metaphors. The groundwork which I laid in that essay formed the basis for the more nuanced reading offered in this thesis.

Lewalksi on the other hand, while exploring the same phenomenon, recognizes the explosive growth in Protestant devotional poetry. For Lewalski, the values of the Protestant Reformation revitalized devotional poetry. Prioritizing the scriptures highlighted the poetic language of the Psalms, and the vast store of scriptural imagery provided much material for Protestant poets.[2] Likewise, the Protestant emphasis on the process of personal salvation, including the Calvinistic angst over one's predestination, created a "Protestant-Pauline paradigm of salvation" (Lewalski 24-25) that Lewalski argues is central to much of the devotional verse of the period. Lewalski's work, like Martz's, has become seminal in the critical tradition of devotional poetry. While many of her conclusions have been questioned by later critics, her work is representative of a larger movement to attribute specific stylistic and thematic characteristics of a poem to either a Protestant or Catholic tradition.[3]

Such studies into the theological nature of a poem, however, often over-simplify the complexities of theological divides. These studies necessarily gloss over the nuanced nature of the many Reformations and Counter Reformations of sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, ignoring the extent to which theological traditions interacted and overlapped.

In response to this criticism, R.V. Young's book *Doctrine and Devotion in*

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2 Evidence of scriptural borrowing can be seen most clearly in Southwell's "Saint Peter's Complaint" and Donne's "Holy Sonnet 10: Batter my heart, three-personed God." In both of these poems, the speakers both rely upon scriptural imagery, and yet expand their imagery beyond it.

3 See R. V. Young's *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (2-3) and Doerkson and Hodgkins *Centered On The Word* (26 n5) for a partial look at the critical tradition of the "Protestant poetic" and its critics.

Seventeenth-Century Poetry (2000) seeks to trouble the idea of a Protestant poetic. He

claims that such a concept "is based on a simplistic and inaccurate view of the doctrinal

issues of the Reformation era," and that it ignores the possibility that "the same features

of theme and style might not be available in contemporaneous Catholic poetry" (Young

4). In explicitly trying to avoid such oversimplification by drawing the two Christian

traditions together, however, Young seems to negate the very argument he is trying to

make: that doctrine affects poetry. While earlier theological criticism attempted to

associate certain doctrines, either Protestant or Catholic, with a distinct style of poetry,

Young primarily argues that three central issues of doctrinal contention in the

Reformation—grace, sacrament and scripture—which proponents of a Protestant poetic

see as influential in seventeenth-century verse are also present in continental Catholic

theology and poetry.

   In contrast to a "Protestant poetic," a Catholic poetic and Young's unified poetic,

this thesis examines the impact of theology about sacrament and scripture on poetry not

as providing discrete doctrines, but rather opening a liminal space between contrasting

doctrinal statements. I argue that the violence with which these doctrinal statements are

questioned, uprooted and examined within England results in an uncertainty about the

correct or even possible role(s) of figurative language in creating meaning.

   My thesis also differs from previous work on the theological impact on poetry in

that previous studies have been primarily interested in the *kind* of theology represented in

the subject matter of the poem—debating whether a poem's speaker or even poet is

Catholic or Protestant, Calvinist or Arminian. Criticism of this sort often examines the ways that the speaker of a poem interacts with the divine. Rather, I am specifically interested in the manner in which these poems use figurative language. I want to prioritize the *way* meaning is created (the relationship between symbol and referent), as opposed to *what* is being said (theme or subject).

A further innovation of my study is a more focused look at figurative and metaphorical language. Studies into the relationship between theology and poetry typically examine the overall structure of the poem as opposed to localized metaphorical imagery. Consequently, poems can be explained as reflecting Catholic meditative structures (Martz), or expressive of an individual's struggle to find redemption (Lewalski), without due consideration given to the elements that produce these larger effects. While the spectacular metaphors of the seventeenth century are often talked about, these discussions are usually limited to a consideration of how the imagery, often borrowed from scripture, supports certain scriptural themes in the poem. By examining the style of the whole poem, scholars have often glossed over the basic elements of these poems, and have missed the nuanced structures of metaphor that are deeply affected by the same theological doctrines they discuss elsewhere.

A recent work by Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism* (2008), however, does focus less on the meta-structures of seventeenth-century devotional poetry and discusses in greater detail the consequences of the secularization of metaphor in the poetry of the period. She attempts to look at the

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"sacramental" metaphors of the time period as responses to the crisis of sacrament within

the church. She claims that "a sacramental poetics, hence, is not afflicted by

embarrassment at the poverty of signs, at the inept ways in which language falls short of

conveying the sacred. In it signs are empowered to be effective—if not to convey grace,

then to change their hearer; if not to grant him eternity then to manifest a world"

(Schwartz 7). Despite the theological changes to symbolic meaning she argues that the

poetry maintains confidence in figurative language. Many metaphors of the period reflect

this idea of a sacramental metaphor; however, her argument does little to account for the

other structures of metaphor that are not specifically sacramental. Indeed, rather than

metaphors that re-create the sacramental relationship, in much of early modern poetry we

see metaphors that *fail* to embody this perfect relationship. We see tortuous and

incomplete metaphors which, while ambitious, are struggling to connect their component

images in a meaningful way. My thesis attempts to understand the coexistence of both

sacramental and non-sacramental (representational) imagery as an embodiment of the

angst surrounding metaphorical representation because of the uncertain nature of

theological doctrines.

      Scholarly treatment of the poetry of Robert Southwell and John Donne has

benefited greatly from the various theoretical approaches surveyed here; however, as I

have argued throughout, the focus of these scholarly projects has not adequately

addressed a fundamental element of their poetic expression. The metaphors of Southwell

and Donne and the ways that they structure the figurative relations between their images,

first noted by in the eighteenth century by Samuel Johnson, still require further study.

My definition of metaphor is necessarily expansive in order to encompass the many different styles of figurative representation utilized by these poets. The metaphors of Southwell and Donne do not always equate one symbol with one meaning; therefore, my study of metaphor must embrace the many ways in which the symbolic imagery of their poetry is taken up and complicated. Consequently, this study of Southwell and Donne's poetry does not shy away from discussing allegory, synecdoche, metonymy and other types of figurative language all under the title of metaphor.[4] Rather than categorize the techniques with which these poets write figuratively, this thesis explores the ways in which these poets *defy* categorization with their dramatic experimentation with the meaning-making possibilities of figurative language.[5]

Although this thesis will often use the terms "symbol" and "referent" to specify the image used symbolically and that which is referred to by the image respectively, the ways that these poets use these elements are constantly changing. Sometimes the referent becomes subsumed into the symbol, as in the Catholic sacraments; at other times, however, the symbol comes to represent more than one thing, or even becomes divorced entirely from any referent. It is this evolving relationship between symbol and referent—

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4 Throughout this thesis I use the terms figurative language and metaphor interchangeably to refer to the relationship between imagery and meaning.

5 My study could benefit from a more carefully delineated definition of metaphor, as offered in both philosophical and literary theories of metaphor; however, for this particular study, I chose to focus more closely on the effect of theology on figurative thought and language, an effect yet to be studied in great detail. While the work of theorists like Carl Hausman, Jane Hedley, Harold Skulsky and Josef Stern, to name a few, could provide further insight into my analysis of metaphor, the scope of this thesis does not allow for the inclusion of their theories.

between symbol and *meaning*—that is challenged in Reformation theology, experimented with in the poetry under study and serves as the focus of this thesis.

As the anxiety surrounding figurative thought that arose during the English Reformation provides the context for my analysis into metaphorical experimentation in Southwell and Donne, my first chapter examines the destabilizing influences of these theological debates. The pervasive streams of thought about the sacraments and biblical interpretation affect the early modern understanding of figurative thought, and the English uncertainty surrounding these doctrines abandons figurative thought without a firm grounding in either doctrine, leaving poets to work out for themselves how metaphor can create meaning. My aim in this thesis is not to define a specifically Catholic or Protestant understanding of metaphor, but rather to note that regardless of one's religious affiliation these Reformation theological debates challenge the efficacy of representational language and change the possibilities of metaphor.

I have decided on the term 'theological aesthetic' to refer to this crisis of representation because within the debates over Christian theology, which affected every aspect of early modern life in England, there also existed a debate over the practical limits of figurative language. Catholic and Protestant theological distinctions suggest differing possibilities (and limitations) for figurative thought; however, due to the fluidity of actual Reformation theology there is a pervasive uncertainty and volatility in the manner in which poets like Southwell and Donne seem to use metaphor. We see poets struggling to define and use metaphor within their poetry, understanding metaphor in

neither Catholic nor Protestant terms, rather than expressing the metaphors in a manner consistent with official doctrinal statements. Therefore, in my first chapter, although I will trace the theological debates surrounding the Eucharist and scriptural interpretation, I will locate my discussions about the outcomes for figurative thought in the uncertainty between the differing doctrinal statements.

I begin my first chapter with a discussion of the debates surrounding the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the theology does not merely affect the way one partakes of the elements, but also the way in which one understands the symbolism of the bread and wine to create meaning. I first trace the important doctrinal differences between the Catholic Eucharist as expressed in the Council of Trent (1563)[6] and the Protestant doctrines of Luther, Zwingli and primarily Calvin.[7] It is important to understand that although the English church officially specified certain doctrinal positions in *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, these doctrines often remained vague enough to allow for some variance for individual believers. Moreover, because of the gradual (and regional) changes to popular belief and the eclectic nature of personal religion, English beliefs span the spectrum between all of the various continental

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6 The Council of Trent serves as my primary source of official Catholic doctrine, being the most recent and comprehensive expression of early modern Catholic theology. The issues that the Council addresses, including those doctrines which they re-affirm and those which they modify, are formulated in direct response to the challenges posed by the Protestant Reformation.

7 The reasons for choosing these theologians over specifically English theologians are partially addressed below; however my decision is also based upon the detail with which these theologians deal with the doctrines under issue. Moreover, as Carl Trueman points out, "the basic contours of English Reformations theology were largely set by debates on the continent" (Trueman 163). Finally, there is little doubt that Calvinist theology dominated the English religious landscape of the period; as Doerksen & Hodgkins observe, "the works of Calvin available in England exceeded those of any other author in English or English translation" (13-14).

theological positions, despite official statements of church doctrine. Nevertheless, I do attempt in this chapter to roughly locate how the English church situates itself within the larger Reformation debates. Finally, I conclude this section with an analysis of how the precarious nature of the Eucharist debate affects figurative thought. Although each doctrine under consideration here, Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Zwinglian, has specific connotations for metaphor, the consequences of the pervasive debate over the meaning of the elements of the Lord's supper creates an uncertainty about the use of metaphor to create meaning, and this section highlights some of the more specific ways in which metaphorical thinking is challenged.

My approach to analyzing the debates about Scriptural interpretation is similar to that of my analysis of the Eucharist. I again start by highlighting the distinctive characteristics of Catholic and Protestant approaches to scripture, emphasizing their differing approaches to figurative language. Initially, I rely on the continental Council of Trent and Calvin's *Institutes* because of their more developed theological statements and their important influence upon the English attitude towards scripture. I then examine how the English church related to these opposing views, while recognizing that the church at large often held varying positions in concert together. Again, this section concludes with an analysis of the ways in which the contemporary debate between doctrinal statements destabilizes figurative thought.

Admittedly, the early moderns would likely have considered that there is a great difference between the figurative language instituted by God and the human-created

metaphors in poetry, especially thinkers of more iconoclastic leaning. Calvin, for

example, is particularly careful to distinguish between God's sacraments and other

images in his criticism of imagery in the church:

> when I ponder the intended use of churches, somehow or other it seems to me
> unworthy of their holiness for them to take on images other than those living and
> symbolic ones which the Lord has consecrated by his Word. I mean Baptism and
> the Lord's Supper, together with other rites by which our eyes must be too
> intensely gripped and too sharply affected to seek other images forged by human
> ingenuity (1.11.13.113-114).[8]

Calvin understands the symbolism found in the sacraments to be entirely different from

other forms of symbolic representation. It is equally clear that he considers meaning

contained in scripture to be different in kind from meaning in other works. Despite

Calvin's distinction between the symbols of God and those of human, it is not

unreasonable to assume that the metaphor-making capabilities of a human would be

understood in light of the sign-making capabilities of God. Moreover, I am not arguing

that poetic metaphors were understood in the same way as theological symbols. Rather, I

suggest that these theological debates affected the larger ways in which the early modern

reader understood figurative language. Neither Southwell nor Donne is intentionally

constructing his metaphors to mirror any theological position; however, their poetry

exhibits a concern over metaphorical efficacy that in part arises from those theological

debates dramatically challenging modes of figurative representation.

Upon establishing the roots of the theological aesthetic, and highlighting the ways

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8 Citations from Calvin's *Institutes* are cited by book, chapter, section and page number.

in which figurative thought is challenged, the remainder of my thesis will explore more

precisely how Robert Southwell and John Donne navigate the resultant

uncertainty/emptiness of symbolic language. My second chapter is devoted to the study

of the metaphors of Robert Southwell, an English-born Jesuit priest, trained on the

continent but working as a missionary in London. My study takes up an extended

meditation upon the eyes of Christ in his long poem, "Saint Peter's Complaint." I pay

particular attention to the various ways he incorporates dozens of interlaced images to

represent the eyes of Christ. I then analyze the complicated grammatical structures of his

poem "Christ's bloody sweat" to highlight the elaborate ways in which he links symbol

and referent to create multiple layers of meaning. Finally, I examine the interrelated

language used in "The prodigal childs soule wracke," to describe simultaneously the

allegorical sailor, the figurative prodigal son and the speaker of the poem. The variety of

structures within Southwell's figurative language suggests that he is not entirely

comfortable with the means of representation available to him, and the excess of meaning

with which he infuses his metaphors suggests the metaphorical angst of the theological

aesthetic.

My third chapter approaches the complicated and intentionally reflective poetry of

John Donne. This chapter begins with an analysis of "The Cross," a poem that explores

the complicated nature of representation through the threatened iconoclastic removal of

the speaker's symbolic cross. Both the direct statements of the poem and the ways in

which Donne uses metaphor to link images suggest the same uncertainty about

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metaphorical representation. My analysis turns then to the elaborate and shocking

imagery of "Holy Sonnet 10: Batter my heart, three-personed God," in which the

speaker's imagery becomes increasingly virulent as it is proven flawed. Finally, in "Holy

Sonnet 2: I am a little world made cunningly," Donne seems to be playing with the

relationship between figurative and literal language as his metaphorical language is

meant to have both literal and figurative meanings simultaneously. Like Southwell's,

Donne's metaphors are both complicated and varied. The expansive exploration of

imagery and the over-development we see in his metaphorical thought reflect the

unknown potential and limitations of figurative language.

Chapter One – The Theological Aesthetic

The Church of England at the end of the sixteenth century was at once profoundly Protestant, while experiencing the effects of various Counter-Reformation movements. Although the Church had, for some time, been organized under Elizabeth's *39 Articles of the Church of England* (1563) and national conformity to the liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559, re-issued in 1604), it remained challenged by Catholicism, both latent in English society and arising from the influx of Jesuit missionaries spreading Counter-Reformation theology. Moreover, the Protestant movement was far from uniform as the English church had to navigate the varying positions between Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist and many other forms of Protestant doctrine. For the most part, the official position of the Church of England, as represented in the *39 Articles*, maintained a central position, resisting the extremes of any one form of Protestant doctrine. This 'middle-ground' (*via media*) of the English church, however, also left room for much debate between the various Protestant influences. The theological landscape of early modern England was far from a static entity; instead it was consistently engaged in the theological debates of the time.

This chapter attempts to outline the broad scope of the early modern English debates concerning sacrament and scriptural interpretation, by first noting the continental Catholic and Protestant positions of the time, as well as locating the position of the English Church amidst these established churches and theological doctrines. In particular,

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I am interested in how each of these theological positions—and the plethora of positions

in between—ascribes (whether implicitly or explicitly) to a corresponding perspective on

the possibilities and restrictions of metaphor and figurative thought. I attempt to describe

how the theological and cultural changes of the Reformation brought issues and questions

of figurative thought and the (in)ability to represent to the fore—particularly questions

regarding the ever-evolving relationship (from transubstantiation to purely symbolic

representation) between symbol and referent. The existence and prominence of these

theological debates simultaneously instigated a renewed focus on metaphor in the poetry

of the time, while also inciting doubt over the efficacy of metaphor. This apperceived

general distrust of metaphor resulted in a variety of different, elaborate experimentations

with metaphor (layerings, rapid transitions between metaphors, etc.), which are identified

and examined in greater detail in the later chapters of this thesis in the poetry of

Southwell and Donne. I argue that this experimentation is symptomatic of a unique

aesthetic in the writing of the period, which I refer to as the theological aesthetic.

Sacraments

At the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church had long held the sacraments

to be the central experience of God's grace and presence here on earth. The pinnacle of

every Mass was the moment when the priest consecrated the bread and wine and Christ

became bodily present in the church's midst. This miracle of transubstantiation rested at

the centre of Catholic religious experience, and the uniting of symbol and referent in the

image of bread and wine inevitably defined the possibilities of other symbolic language

to create meaning.

The Catholic Church reaffirmed the doctrine of transubstantiation, first defined in the thirteenth century in the Fourth Lateran Council (George 146), at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). In the face of mounting criticism of the doctrine from reformers, "this holy council now declares it anew, that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation." (13th Session 75).[9] The key to this theological nuance rests in the medieval philosophy, based on Aristotelian logic, that argued that there are two parts to an object, its accidentals and its substance—in other words, an object's appearance and other secondary characteristics, and its true and distinctive essence. While the bread and wine maintain their accidental qualities to the human senses, they otherwise physically become Christ: "the holy council teaches and openly professes that after the consecration of bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the august sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those sensible things" (13th Session 73). This style of sacramental thinking allows for a mysterious and powerful understanding of how one thing can not only represent something else, but actually become that which it is said to represent.

The Catholic belief in the celebration of the Mass, however, extends beyond the

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9 Quotations from the Council of Trent are cited by Session and page number.

mysterious transformation of the elements; for the believer, transubstantiation was more than just a complicated philosophy. There were practical consequences to this doctrinal stance. As the body and blood of Christ, the elements themselves were treated with awe and respect. Oftentimes it was considered satisfactory for the believing Catholic just to see the consecrated elements and not even partake of communion. Timothy George highlights how "the Mass became a special task performed by the ordained clergy" such that although "the Eucharist continued to be celebrated each Sunday ... the congregation no longer communicated, except at Easter"(George 145). Moreover, George speaks of the way in which it was not uncommon in the medieval church for the priests to parade the elements around the town, proudly displaying Christ's imminent presence to the laity (George 147). The elements of the Eucharist meal, regardless of whether the churchgoer communicated or not, symbolized for him or her Christ's real presence among his people. Since the elements were considered fully Christ, the Eucharistic symbols not only *represented* Christ but served as Christ's *actual presence*. They do not just point to his imminent spiritual presence; rather, the presence of the sacrament is God's physical presence amidst his people.

        An important consequence of this real presence of Christ is the implied efficacy of the physical elements. Because Christ is placed on the altar and broken, the consecration of the elements was understood to be an active renewal of Christ's sacrifice. Although Christ's sacrifice on the cross was a onetime historical event that cannot be repeated, the elements did not just point backward to it. Rather, as the Council of Trent proclaimed, "in

this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass is contained and immolated in an

unbloody manner the same Christ who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the

altar of the cross" (22nd Session 145-146). The Council even proclaimed that, "If any one

says that the sacrifice of the mass is one only of praise and thanksgiving; or that it is a

mere commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross but not a propitiatory

one ... let him be anathema" (22nd Session 149). The symbols of the bread and wine

become the body and blood that is again broken in a new daily sacrifice that

communicates God's grace to those who partake.

In the same way that Christ is bodily sacrificed daily in the Eucharist, so the

observation and participation in the daily Mass effects real change in the churchgoer. The

signs of the bread and wine have real spiritual power to communicate God's grace to his

followers, for they are "the most holy sacraments of the Church, through which all true

justice either begins, or being begun is increased, or being lost is restored" (7th Session

51). The council consistently reaffirms that the sacraments do not merely point

elsewhere, instead claiming, "If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law do not

contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who

place no obstacles in its way, as though they are only outward signs of grace or justice

received through faith and certain marks of Christian profession, whereby among men

believers are distinguished from unbelievers, let him be anathema" (7th Session 52).

According to the Council of Trent, the sacraments are clearly efficacious on their own.

Because the signs actually contain the thing they reference, they also have the power to

convey the same salvation offered by the referent.

With the rise of the Reformation, however, came new challenges to the sacramental way of thinking. In the process, the reformers shattered confidence in sacramental representation. Luther was the first of the major reformers to question the doctrine of transubstantiation; however, for the most part, Luther did little to change the doctrine. Luther settled on a doctrine that still emphasized the real presence of Christ in the elements, but retained the full substance of the elements. Rather than replacing the substance of the bread and wine, Christ's body and blood united themselves with the bread and wine in a sacramental unity. As Scott Hendrix explains, Luther's Eucharist meal still "promised the presence of Christ and the forgiveness of sin in such a way that Christians could be certain of receiving both in the sacrament" (Hendrix 51-52).

Directly in contrast with the real presence of Catholic and Lutheran theology, however, was the theology of Huldrych Zwingli. Zwingli saw a logical absurdity in the medieval philosophy of substances and saw no need for such a doctrine; he sought to sever the link between the elements of the Eucharist and Christ's actual presence, arguing, as W. Peter Stephens summarizes, "a sign cannot be what it signifies, otherwise it ceases to be a sign" (Stephens 88). He understood the sacraments to be signs that point to a sacred thing, not the thing itself—in this case the historical crucifixion. For Zwingli, there was nothing inherently different about the elements of the sacrament; rather, similar to the Passover meal, whose significance comes with the remembrance of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, the spiritual significance of the Eucharist meal

comes primarily with the remembrance of Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice. Of the three

major reformist positions, Zwingli's theology is that which creates the most distance

between symbol and referent and consequently the most doubt about the power of

metaphor. Ultimately, however, his views were less popular than the more widespread

theology of John Calvin. Calvin tried to define a middle ground that both resists the

sacramental language of real presence, and yet expresses fear at the suggestion of an

empty symbol.

    Calvin first completely and absolutely denies any sacramental doctrine that

teaches the real presence of Christ. He claims that the doctrine of transubstantiation is a

perversion and "in using the word 'sacraments' the ancients had no other intention than to

signify that they are signs of holy and spiritual things" (4.14.13.1288). Likewise, he

attacks the Lutheran position because by "placing the body itself in the bread, they assign

to it a ubiquity contrary to its nature, and by adding 'under the bread' mean that it lies

hidden there" (4.17.16.1379). Calvin sees no reason to conflate the symbols of the

sacrament with the physical embodiment of Christ. Moreover, he argues that by placing

Christ in the lowly elements, Catholics demean the great glory of God. In a similar way,

Calvin also rejects "what ever the Sophists have dreamed up concerning the *opus*

operatum" (4.14.26.1303). Unlike the Catholic belief that the elements had spiritual

power, Calvin does not believe that the sacraments in and of themselves convey grace.

Instead, he states that "justification is lodged in Christ alone, and that it is communicated

to us no less by the preaching of the gospel than by the seal of the sacrament, and without

the latter can stand unimpaired" (4.14.14.1290). For Calvin, the symbols of the

sacraments neither contain the real presence of Christ, nor do they contain the power of

his presence.

Despite Calvin's rejection of any real physical presence, he also rejects those who

would completely dissever the symbols of the sacraments from the divine "mysteries"

that accompany the physical signs of Christ. He plainly states that "we ought to guard

against two faults. First, we should not, by too little regard for the signs, divorce them

from their mysteries, to which they are so to speak attached. Secondly, we should not, by

extolling them immoderately, seem to obscure somewhat the mysteries themselves"

(4.17.5.1364-1365). While Calvin rejects the "absurdities" of conflating the symbol and

referent as the Catholics and Lutherans believed, he also fears the separation of the two.

For as he claims elsewhere, "What wonder, then, if ceremonies, cut off from Christ, are

divested of all force. For, when the thing signified is removed, all that belongs to the

signs is reduced to nothing" (4.14.25.1301). The risk of an empty sign, as advocated by

Zwingli, is equally abhorrent to Calvin. Therefore, he attempts to define a relationship

between the physical symbols of the sacrament and the divine mysteries to which they

refer that avoids endorsing either extreme position.

Calvin defines the sacraments as "an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our

consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of

our faith," or again as "a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward

sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him" (4.14.1.1277). Calvin theorizes that

although "God's truth is of itself firm and sure enough, and I cannot receive better confirmation from any other source than from itself ... our faith is slight and feeble [and] unless it be propped on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, totters, and at last gives way" (4.14.3.1278). Therefore, because humanity's faith is weak, God "condescends to lead us himself even by these earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings" (4.14.3.1278). The symbols of the sacrament are distinguishable and separate from the spiritual reality and merely reflect, in a physical form, the spiritual truth. Using another metaphor in an attempt to describe the relationship between the symbols and the referent, Calvin calls the sacraments a seal that affirms and authenticates the truth, but does not actually contain the content of the truth (4.14.5.1280). At the same time, however, he also re-emphasizes the importance of the connection between the symbol and the referent as he claims that "whenever God gave a sign to the holy patriarchs it was inseparably linked to doctrine, without which our sense would have been stunned in looking at the bare sign" (4.14.4.1279). He claims that "although the symbol differs in essence from the thing signified (in that the latter is spiritual and heavenly, while the former is physical and visible), still... it not only symbolizes the thing that it has been consecrated to represent as a bare and empty token, but also truly exhibits it" (4.17.21.1385). Although Calvin rejects sacramental thinking, he is unwilling to completely separate the symbol and the referent. He worries that by completely deconstructing sacramental thinking, any symbolic meaning whatsoever is lost.

Calvin's sacramental theology, including his concern about an empty sign, was

prevalent in early modern England as Daniel Doerksen and Christopher Hodgkins note

(Doerksen and Hodgkins 13); however, despite Calvin's influence upon the English

church, there was still a very active debate surrounding the celebration of communion.

Within England there remained many of a more conservative Catholic faith, and there

also developed movements that were more radical in their demands for reform. As

Doerksen argues, the "English church people of this time did walk a middle way, but a

clearly Protestant one, marked off on the right by the Roman church and on the left not

by Calvinism, or puritanism, but by those who separated" (Doerksen 21). Despite policies

intended to unify the Church of England the sacraments remained a contentious issue,

fluctuating between all the continental positions outlined above.

One of the potential reasons for this debate is that, while the English liturgy in the

Book of Common Prayer offered a dramatic reformation of medieval liturgy, it often

maintained ambiguous language. Trueman argues that

> The real problem with the book [1549 Prayer Book] turned out to be its retention
> of key aspects of Catholic ceremonial aesthetics and procedures and its use of
> certain elements of pre-Reformation medieval theology. While the latter – for
> example, prayers for the church in heaven – were edited out of the second edition
> in 1552, the former were in a large part retained, and so the problems which first
> emerged in the clash between Hooper and his supporters on one side, and
> Cranmer and Ridley on the other, were to continue for the rest of the century and

on into the seventeenth. (169-170).[10]

Although the prayer book moves the emphasis away from the sacraments and towards

other aspects of the church service, its language regarding the sacraments seems to allow

for multiple interpretations of what is actually happening during the celebration of the

Eucharist. For although the revised printing of the 1552 and following editions of the

BCP add further clarification to the "holy Mysteries" of the 1549 prayer book (213-214),

it retains most of the initial sacramental language of 1549: at the communion, the priest

was to recite "*The body of our Lord Jesu Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy*

body and soul unto everlasting life, and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee,

feed on him in thine heart by faith with thanksgiving" (217; text in italics is also

contained in the more sacramental 1549 version). This addition, while suggesting a non-

sacramental understanding of the meal, does not deny the real presence of Christ in the

Eucharist meal. As Arthur Dickens notes, "these provisions retained commemorative

phraseology, yet reopened the way for belief in a real presence falling short of

Transubstantiation" (Dickens 359).

Further evidence of the Prayer Book's uncertain position is the so-called "black

rubric," inserted at the last minute into the 1552 version of the Prayer book but excluded

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10 Thomas Cranmer is credited with the authorship of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*. With Nicholas Ridley and others, Cranmer advocated for moderate reform. Although he rejected the real presence of Christ, his formulation of the liturgy retained many ceremonial elements. On the other hand, John Hooper and his supporters responded with more radical reforms, specifically arguing against the priestly garments, longing to restrict the practices of the church to only that which was commanded in scripture. The conflicts between radical and conservative Protestantism were not resolved in part because of the ambiguity of the liturgy.

from the 1559 and 1604 versions. This clarifying statement was appended to the order of

communion—after the initial print run had begun—and states that despite the direction

for the communicant to kneel to receive communion

> it is not meant thereby, that any adoration is done, or ought to be done, either unto
> the Sacramental bread or wine there bodily received, or unto any real and
> essential presence there being of Christ's natural flesh and blood. For as
> concerning the Sacramental bread and wine, they remain still in their very natural
> substances, and therefore may not be adored, for that were Idolatry to be abhorred
> of all faithful Christians (233).

The removal of this definitively Protestant statement suggests that the Elizabethan and

early Stuart churches allowed for a more liberal and personal understanding of the

sacramental nature of the Eucharist meal. The lack of clarity in the Liturgy of

Communion in the *BCP* created opportunities for variant understandings of the

Eucharistic meal to continue to exist within the English Church.

In contrast with the ambiguity of the liturgical celebration of communion, *The

Thirty-Nine Articles*, the other definitive expression of official English doctrine, does

specify in greater detail the Church's position on the Eucharistic meal. The twenty-eighth

article declares that transubstantiation "is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture,

overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions"

(Article 28) and that "The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only

after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the body of Christ is

received and eaten in the Supper is faith" (Article 28). Much like Calvin's position, the

official English position explicitly rejects transubstantiation but attempts to find a balance

in which the signs of the sacraments are "not only badges or tokens of Christian men's

profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and

God's good will towards us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only

quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in Him" (Article 25). Despite this

official doctrinal stance, however, there remained much debate within the larger church.

For while the Prayer book's liturgy was practised uniformly throughout the nation, the

enforcement of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* fluctuated throughout the early modern Church,

and at most subscription to these articles was required only of priests and public

preachers (Gibson 57-60). Moreover, as John Wall notes, "English religious controversies

in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries swirl around the *Book of Common Prayer*

rather than around matters of doctrine" (Wall 6). The plural possibilities of the *BCP*

resulted in diverse beliefs spanning the spectrum between Catholic and Separatist

theology.

The nature of the sacraments remained a contentious issue throughout the English

church as evidenced in many publications and sermons. In a "Sermon preached at St

Paul's upon Christmas Day" (1626), John Donne felt it necessary to address this issue,

claiming that,

> as they that deny the body of Christ to be in the sacrament, lose their footing in
> departing from their ground, the expresse Scriptures; so they that will assign a
> particular manner, how that body is there, have no footing, no ground at all, no
> Scripture to Anchor upon…[They] snatch at a loose preposition… so that the
> Roman church hath catched a *Trans*, and others a *Con*, and a *Sub*, and an *In*, and
> varied their poetry into a Transubstantiation, and a Consubstantiation, and the rest,
> and rhymed themselves beyond reason, into absurdities, and heresies…. (Donne

18)

Not only does this quotation reveal Donne's experience with the never-ending fluctuating "absurdities" of the debate, it also reveals his tendency to avoid a strict definition of the divine mystery. Rather than define a correct way of perceiving the sacraments, he seems to dwell within the pervasive uncertainty about how exactly the symbolic elements of the Eucharist are related to the body and blood of Christ. Like the official doctrinal and liturgical statements of the English church, Donne's sermon seems to deny the extreme positions of transubstantiation and of complete absence, yet provides no definitive understanding of how symbol and referent relate.

One of the primary concerns of the sacramental debate is the extent to which symbols and symbolic language can accurately represent that to which they refer. Medieval theology offered great assurance that the bread and wine could completely and wholly represent the body and spirit of Christ. There was no way in which the symbol was inferior to the referent. Indeed, aside from external appearance, the symbol became the referent completely. A metaphor based upon this understanding of symbol would rarely distinguish between symbol and referent because it is assumed that they overlap. However, while the Catholic Church continued to affirm this doctrine, the reformers' challenges to the doctrine weakened this confidence in symbolic language. With Zwingli's complete separation of the symbol and referent and Calvin's insistence upon a separate but linked metaphorical structure came a questioning of the validity of all metaphorical representation. Whether a metaphor is simply establishing a comparison

between two physical entities, or attempting to describe something more abstract, it could

no longer be assumed that the metaphor could make meaningful comparisons. Just as

theologians debated over the exact relationship of the elements to Christ, whether they

embody Christ or merely point to him, it became uncertain whether figurative language

merely points to an external or abstract reality or whether a metaphor actually stands in

for and shares the essence of the things being described. In the midst of this uncertainty

about symbolic relationships, poets were forced to consider whether a metaphor simply

made a cerebral connection between objects or whether there was a more substantial

connection between the symbol and referent.

The sacramental debate of the early modern period inherently raises concerns

about the nature of the symbol and the referent and their relationship. The doctrine of

transubstantiation undeniably blurs the boundary between symbol and referent until they

are nearly indistinguishable. The symbol does not merely point to a distinct referent, but

becomes essentially that to which it refers: Christ. However, as Regina Schwartz argues,

"Sacramental thinking is completely alien to the way modern secularism has conceived

matter, space, time, and language[;] in a sense it had to be dismantled for modernism to

be born… 'A sign can only stand for, that is, stand in for what it signifies, which is

necessarily absent' said a logic of representation that defied the participation of the sign

in the referent" (Schwartz 11). With the influence of the more modern rationalist

reformers, a more limited concept of metaphor began to develop. Rather than sharing

essential characteristics, so that the symbol might actually embody the referent, the

symbol only shares accidental and tangential qualities with the referent.

In the following chapters, I begin to trace the connection between this shift in sacramental thinking and a related shift in the poetic metaphors of Southwell and Donne. My theory of the theological aesthetic argues that, confronted by a challenged and declining sacramental worldview, poets began to experience an angst about the possibilities and limitations of metaphor. Amid this uncertainty, one finds a desire for more sacramental metaphor; in the face of failed attempts at such sacramental representation, however, there emerges a reluctant reliance on representational metaphorical framing.

Scripture

Another contentious debate in the Reformation was that of scriptural interpretation. Indeed, one could make the argument that interpreting scripture and reading the "plain truth" supposedly contained therein was the inspiration of the many reforms proposed throughout the sixteenth century. One of the most combative issues raised by the reformers was that the Catholic Church subordinated the authority of scripture to the authority of church dogmas. While the Catholic Church claimed that extra-biblical teaching held the same authority as scripture because those teachings were passed down from the same people who wrote the scriptures, the reformers rejected traditional teachings that were not explicitly supported in scripture. Protestants and Catholics also differed on the manner in which scripture was to be interpreted. The Catholic Church embraced a view of scripture that allowed multiple and complicated

meanings to flourish, while Protestants typically believed that scripture conveyed one specific meaning to believers. It is important to note here that this one meaning was not limited to a literal understanding of scripture, for as Doerksen and Hodgkins explain, the reformers' "emphasis on the literal sense was not an unimaginative literalism but a serious reading of the manifest sense, well aware of the imagery, symbolism, and typology evident in the text"(Doerksen and Hodgkins 16). The primary difference between Catholic and Protestant readings is not a difference between symbolic readings and a literal reading, but rather the difference between a multifaceted understanding of meaning and a belief in a singular inspired meaning.

At the heart of the Catholic method of interpreting the Bible is a deep respect for the ambiguity and depth of scripture. Catholics expressed a reverence for the hermeneutic challenges associated with interpreting any text, an initial difficulty made trickier by the belief that the Holy Scriptures were inspired by God. Since God is infinite, it was assumed that his word would be representative of that infinite power and contain a wealth of possible meanings beyond human comprehension. As Thomas Aquinas explains, quoting St. Augustine, "since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says (*Confessions* xii), if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses" (Aquinas 1.1.10). Simply put, the Catholic Church maintained a view of scripture that was capable of holding more than one meaning simultaneously.

This multiplicity of meaning did not result in an unintelligible Bible beyond

human comprehension. Rather, medieval theologians like Aquinas developed

complicated systems for discovering and assembling the possible meanings of scripture

into meaningful categories. Aquinas developed a fourfold method of understanding

multiple scriptural meaning. He states that the

> first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the
> historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have
> themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the
> literal, and presupposes it. Now this spiritual sense has a threefold division…so
> far as the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law, there is the
> allegorical sense; so far as the things done in Christ, or so far as the things which
> signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do, there is the moral sense. But so
> far as they signify what relates to eternal glory, there is the anagogical sense.
> (Aquinas 1.1.10)

All four of these meanings of scripture—literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical—were

meant to be understood in light of each other, and a single passage could be read through

any number of these lenses. Indeed, even when these meanings are ostensibly unrelated

or even contradictory in nature, the meanings are still capable of coexisting together.

Rather than subordinating one meaning to another or elevating one meaning above the

rest, Catholic theologians attempted to hold all possible meanings in concert.

Trying to understand what scripture is teaching, however, when it contains so

many levels of meaning is a dangerous process fraught with pitfalls. Therefore, the

Catholic Church believed that no individual could hope to accomplish this by his or her

own reason alone. Thus, the Council of Trent re-affirmed the belief that

> no one relying on his own judgement shall, in manners of faith and morals
> pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in
> accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that

sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers (4ᵗʰ Session 18-19).

This Catholic reticence about leaving scripture open to private interpretation recognizes that within the multiple and conflicting possible meanings of scripture there exist many interpretation that run counter to traditional church teaching. Scripture alone is not capable of providing all doctrine because as a poetic book its figurative language presents too many possible meanings. The only way to distinguish "correct" Catholic belief from the possible meanings contained within the text is to irrevocably tie such interpretations to the more literal teachings of the church.

The subordination of scripture to church tradition in Catholic doctrine was one of the primary issues raised by the reformers throughout the sixteenth century. They advocated that scripture should be the highest authority and should not be controlled or censored by human institutions. In order to argue this, however, Calvin and the other reformers believed that individuals could approach the Bible and understand for themselves what it means. Calvin claims that "Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste" (1.7.2.76). Unlike the multifaceted and parallel truths found in the Catholic doctrine, Calvin and the reformers believed that scriptural truth was evident and easily apparent to anyone who reads it. At the centre of this belief is the confidence that God wants to communicate plainly and truly to his followers: "the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so

also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward

testimony of the Holy Spirit" (1.7.4.79). Calvin does not believe that fallen human reason

alone can uncover the truth behind scripture, but he does believe that there is a truth that

can be reached by an individual through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

One of the greatest differences between the theology of the reformers and

Catholicism is that the reformers believed that one could arrive at an absolute and simple

meaning in scripture, while Catholics maintained a complex and multilayered system of

metaphorical, allegorical and literal meanings. For Calvin and the other reformers even

the most abstract passage had one intended specific meaning. Whether a passage was

meant to be understood literally, metaphorically or even typologically, the scripture aligns

with one truth. In scripture, as Calvin argues, "God is truly and vividly described to us

from his works, while these very works are apprised not by our depraved judgement but

by the rule of eternal truth" (1.6.3.75). Within this understanding of scripture, each phrase

has one conclusive meaning. Moreover, the reformers placed great confidence in the

individual's ability to determine that meaning without recourse to an authority or external

commentary.

Within England, the authority of scripture became a central component of the

English church. First, the reformers wrote in Article Six of *The Thirty-Nine Articles* that

the "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not

read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should

be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation"

(Article 6). Further evidence of scripture's perceived clarity is the prominence of easily

accessible scripture throughout early modern English culture. The English liturgy

emphasized the importance of unadulterated scripture; the daily service included readings

from both the Old and New Testaments. These readings were read aloud and clearly in

the vernacular without additional commentary. It was considered important that the laity

hear and experience the scripture regularly, regardless of whether they were literate or

not. Moreover, for the literate of English society, scripture was made readily accessible.

Not only were English Bibles made available in churches, they were also available for

purchase. Scripture's importance to the English culture was such that King James felt it

appropriate to commission a new English translation of the Bible. In England, it was

generally accepted that scripture can and should be experienced firsthand by the

individual.

Despite this apparent confidence in the accessibility of scripture, the flourishing

of the sermon in the seventeenth century and the abundance of printed commentaries

(Doerksen and Hodgkins 13) suggest that in practice English believers were less certain

about the ease with which scripture might be interpreted than the reformers in theory.

Despite the incorporation of Calvin's belief in the plain meaning of scripture, there was

much variation in how to achieve that meaning. In reality, both clergymen and the laity

disagreed on the precise meaning of scripture even though they agreed that such a

meaning could be found. Thus, sermons and commentaries, often written by trained

clergy, delved into the various implications, connotations and practical considerations of

the scripture under study, and were designed to assist the laity in obtaining a deeper and more correct understanding of the complexities of scripture. Although the Church of England clearly acknowledged the ability of scripture to speak truth into the lives of the reader, debate persisted with regards to the precise manner by which to interpret scripture.

The debate about meaning in scripture inevitably reflects on the meaning of figurative language in other writings. Although the Bible had always been considered distinct from other human-made texts because of its presumed divine origins, it remained, nevertheless, a book, and one whose meaning-making capabilities reflected upon the way that early modern readers understood language. This is especially true of early modern readers, given the importance of the Old and New Testaments to literacy education throughout the period. As Kenneth Charlton and Margaret Spufford argue, in vernacular education, "the Bible seems to have been the commonest of all the textbooks, and indeed, the one to which the manuals for teachers pointed" (Charlton and Spufford 17). The Bible and all of its rhetorical and figurative tropes formed the basis upon which the majority of individuals learned to read and understand written texts. The metaphors of scripture would have been many people's first exposure to figurative language and the manner in which these metaphors were understood to create meaning would invariably affect the way that one determines meaning in any other text.

The meaning-making powers of poetic images seem to be challenged along the same lines as meaning in scriptural images. This is not to say that the Reformation

debates on meaning, interpretation and representation are by any means straightforward;

likewise, the effects of the scriptural debates on figurative language are extensive and

complex and difficult to articulate completely. The oft-cited binary of Catholic

multiplicity of meaning versus Protestant singularity of meaning is reductive. Ultimately,

the Protestant ideal of accessible and singular scriptural meaning is thwarted by the

complexities of meaning itself.

       In a volatile culture in which the manner of interpreting scripture is under debate,

the processes by which meanings are manifest through figurative language are somewhat

unclear. Therefore, a poem might explicitly explore the many possible meanings of a

single image, testing the variety of meanings that can be gleaned from that image. This

exploration of an image is quite prevalent in the early modern period and, as highlighted

in my literature review, is often cited as one of the central features of the metaphysical

poetry of the seventeenth century. The meaning of a metaphor in many of these poems is

not simply assumed but argued for, as if there is doubt concerning the ability of the

metaphor to represent its correspondent, complicated realities. Moreover, the poetry of

the Reformation occasionally seems to intentionally emphasize the multiple meanings of

an image (often through ambiguity) without allowing one particular meaning to gain

ascendancy.

       This question of how to interpret figurative language is evident in much of the

poetry of the time. As occurred within the Catholic/Protestant scriptural debates, poets

likewise contended with the question of whether meaning could only be constructed in

terms of one-to-one correlations, or whether singular articulations were capable of

asserting multiple meanings at the same time. The poetic experimentations emerging

from these considerations are notably diverse; in the works of Southwell and Donne they

often result in an abundance of meaning forced onto their metaphors. The poems of

Southwell and Donne both, in different ways, reflect and explicitly respond to these

complicated and complex evolutions of thought.

        The theological aesthetic arises out of and within the Reformation debates

surrounding understandings of scripture and sacrament (as well as other theological

divides during the Reformation, such as conceptions of grace, penance and purgatory, not

explored here) that reflect and develop alongside the transition from a medieval

understanding of the world to a more modern understanding of the world. It is a revision

of the relationship between symbol and referent, a reconsideration of the relationship

between what happens here on earth and what happens in the spiritual realm. As

mentioned previously, this thesis examines the impact of this theological and hermeneutic

transformation on poetry, not as isolated final doctrines, but rather as creating liminal

spaces between contrasting doctrinal statements. I argue that the violence with which

these doctrinal statements are questioned, uprooted and examined within England results

in an uncertainty about the correct (or even possible) role(s) of figurative language in

creating meaning.[11]

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11 The theological debate over the sacraments and biblical interpretation not only created a crisis in poetic metaphorical representation (the focus of this thesis), but also raised concerns about symbolic representation that manifested in the iconoclastic tendencies of the English Church. Although I do not have time to trace the relationship between the theological aesthetic and iconoclasm, a brief look suggests that an angst similar to that pervading poetic expression and symbolic representation was also expressed as partial motivation for the destruction of symbolic church art. This is not to suggest that icons and metaphors or any studies thereof can be thought of as equivalent; however, both certainly are concerned with the representation of something (else) symbolically. Indeed, I would propose that one could read iconoclasm in terms of the theological aesthetic. There are of course many other things informing the iconoclastic debates; I merely suggest that the concerns of the theological aesthetic offer one frame through which one could understand aspects of the iconoclastic movements of early modern England. The concerns that Calvin and English reformers expressed about the futility of symbolic representation in the imagery of the Church mirror the concerns that I argue inform the theological aesthetic in poetry.

Chapter Two – Describing the Divine: The Metaphors of Robert Southwell

I have thus far argued that the theological debates of the Reformation profoundly changed the ways that sixteenth and early seventeenth-century readers and writers understood figurative language. Although expressions of the theological aesthetic in poetry are varied, the remainder of my thesis attempts to point out some of the ways in which the metaphors of Robert Southwell and John Donne reflect the representational angst pervasive throughout the period. The complicated ways in which their metaphors blend images together and layer meanings and the mutability and instability of these images reveal a deep uncertainty surrounding metaphor's ability to represent. While some figurative structures suggest an intimate connection between symbol and referent, the frequent fluidity of these metaphors conversely undermines this connection and suggests instead that metaphorical connections are fragile and unstable.

The instability of metaphor created by the theological aesthetic is evident in the devotional poetry of Southwell because, as a Jesuit missionary, his entire life reflects an active involvement in and concern about the contemporary theological debates. Raised as a Catholic, Southwell would have been keenly aware of the differences between his beliefs and those of his countrymen. Rather than adapt his Catholicism to conform to the English Church (as many Catholics chose to do), Southwell defined his religious beliefs in opposition to those of his compatriots. Like many other young Catholic men, he departed England to study at the Catholic English College on the continent. Throughout

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his studies, however, Southwell showed a keen desire to return to England as a Jesuit

missionary, and after nearly ten years of training in the Catholic ministry both in Douai

and Rome, he returned to England as a priest secretly serving in London. For Southwell,

it was important that his fellow Englishmen return to the teachings of Rome. Eventually,

Southwell's tireless work promoting the Catholic faith within London resulted in his

capture, torture and martyrdom;[12] however, what bears noting here is his passion for

correct Catholic doctrine and teaching. Southwell was well educated in the details of

Catholic and Protestant theology, so as to be most effective in his Counter-Reformation

ministry. Moreover, while he was writing poetry during his mission, he was confronted

daily with the nuances of the differing theological beliefs; it is not surprising, therefore,

with theology so prominent in his daily life, to find the theological aesthetic at play in the

metaphors of his poetry.

Scholars of Southwell suggest that his poetry stands at a crossroads in the history

of English poetry, often highlighting the revolutionary style of his metaphors. As early as

Helen White's 1963 article, "Southwell: Metaphysical and Baroque," scholars explored

the ways in which Southwell mixes the elaborate imagery common to the continental

baroque style with the complex arguments defining the English metaphysical style. She

notes how Southwell's poetry displays "the Baroque readiness to shift the figure, once its

impossibilities have been exhausted, to another in a strikingly different category" (White

164). In a similar way, Gary Bouchard argues that Southwell should be regarded as the

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12 For more on Southwell's life and death see Nancy Pollard Brown's entry in the *DNB* "Southwell, Robert."

first metaphysical poet: "Several of the characteristics by which we now describe 'metaphysical poetry'— the dramatic opening, the argued metaphor, the eccentric conceit, and spiritual ascent—are to be found first in the poetry of Robert Southwell" (Bouchard, "England's First Metaphysical Poet" 104). While many of these baroque and metaphysical qualities are indeed present in Southwell's work, it is not sufficient to merely attribute his style to large and arbitrary categories; these categories are primarily descriptive and do little to contribute to one's understanding of his poetic. Although scholars have repeatedly highlighted the ways in which Southwell uses metaphor, they rarely explore these metaphorical expressions in depth. Moreover, as discussed above, they are often satisfied by attributing Southwell's style of writing to contemporary trends in poetry. Instead, I wish to explore how Southwell's specific way of using metaphor reflects the influence of the theological aesthetic. While he may well have been influenced by the baroque and metaphysical styles of his contemporaries, he also ushers in a new style of devotional poetry that can be attributed, at least in part, to the theological aesthetic.

In addition to his baroque (or metaphysical) style of writing, critics often examine Southwell's poetry in light of its argumentative style. Scholars, including White, Sadia Abbas and John and Lorraine Roberts, argue that Southwell's primary purpose in writing his poetry was to have it serve as an extension of his missionary work. Roberts and Roberts suggest that "denied a pulpit from which to exhort and instruct his countrymen, Southwell turned to poetry" (Roberts and Roberts 64). They argue that Southwell's poetry

was written in order to correct doctrine, instruct the English on the developments of the

Council of Trent, encourage moral integrity and lead lapsed Catholics to repentance,

accounting for the use of poetry as "sugar-coating the didactic pill" (Roberts and Roberts

67). They suggest that Southwell's poetry is a "poetry of imitation, not poetry of

inspiration" (67), whose primary purpose was to teach Catholic doctrine using popular

forms. Other scholars, like Abbas and White, note that Southwell's metaphorical imagery

—no matter how intricate—is ultimately subservient to the argument he is trying to

make. While Southwell's poetry often imitates popular styles of writing (such as the love

poems of Breton, Lodge and Oxford)[13], however, I would suggest that his particular

image constructions are more complex and tortured than in those poems he parodies.

While his use of metaphor may have been intentionally didactic, I am more concerned

with how he constructs his tropes, rather than the role the figure of speech serves within

the larger context or argument of the poem. He may be using poetry primarily to spread

his Catholic message, but he allows his metaphors to expand well beyond the practical

purposes of his argument.

"Saint Peter's Complaint"

Scattered throughout Southwell's poetry are startling and powerful tropes built

upon a tenuous metaphorical relationship. One of the most image-saturated passages of

any of Southwell's poetry is found in his longest poem, "Saint Peter's Complaint," which

reflects upon the grief, remorse and eventual repentance of the apostle Peter after he has

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13 See John and Lorraine Roberts "Robert Southwell and Counter-Reformation Poetics" for more details on Southwell's use of sacred parody (70).

denied his friend and lord Jesus three times. While much of the poem engages in

philosophical argumentation—Peter carefully and methodically outlines the tragic

significance of his betrayal—the poem also employs an expressive range of powerful

imagery in its reiteration of and reflection on the moment(s) following his denial.

Foremost among these metaphors are Southwell's attempts to describe Christ's eyes. In

stanzas 55-75, the speaker is overwhelmed by the light and emotion coming from Jesus's

eyes and struggles, through a variety of metaphors, to describe the experience of a sinner

looking into his saviour's eyes.

The structure of this poem—a guided meditation upon a moment in the biblical

narrative—is not unique. Martz thoroughly explores the practices of Ignation meditation

from which this method originates, claiming this style of meditation encourages believers

to use their "image forming faculty to provide a concrete and vivid setting for a

meditation on invisible things" (Martz 28). This context is particularly relevant to the

twenty stanza section about Christ's eyes under examination here, introduced within the

context of a specific moment of the biblical Passion narrative. Despite the highly

philosophical nature of the rest of this poem, this moment of eye contact occurs just as in

the scriptural narrative[14]: "In time, O Lord! thine eyes with mine did meet, / In them I

read the ruines of my fall" (325). Southwell firmly situates the moment of the glance in a

historical moment, "in time." This section is not meant to describe an imaginative

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14 "And Peter sayde: Man I wote not what thou sayest. And immediatlye whyle he yet spake, the Cocke crewe. And the Lorde turned backe, & loked vpon Peter: And Peter remembred the worde of the Lorde, howe he hadde sayde vnto hym, before the Cocke crowe thou shalt denie me thrise And Peter went out, & wept bitterlye" (Luke 22:60-62). All biblical citations are from the Bishops Bible (1572).

moment in which an abstract figure might look into Christ's eyes; rather, Southwell is trying to describe an actual moment in history. It is this single glance, this moment in time, which connects all of the otherwise seemingly isolated images. As Martz notes in his scathing criticism of this section of the poem, it often seems as though each stanza is disconnected from the one before it (Martz 186). None of the metaphors seem fully developed, and the transitions between images are abrupt and haphazard. As Southwell's imagery becomes more and more fanciful, this moment in time becomes an important touchstone upon which all of this layered imagery is grounded.

Within this concrete moment in time, the poem proceeds to introduce a series of metaphorical images intended to describe not merely the appearance of Christ's eyes or Peter's experience of Christ's eyes; rather, the metaphors seem designed to convey the essence or substance of Christ's gaze. Southwell's variety of images, however, betrays a sense of desperate failure to accurately describe the reality of staring into Christ's eyes. I examine these persistent attempts and ultimate failure to express the mystery and majesty of Christ's eyes in view of their progression, in order to consider Southwell's compounding of images. Within this progression of images, I also examine specific images to highlight Southwell's use of ambiguity to promote multiple levels of meaning, and I note how Southwell's use of metaphor often blurs the distinction between symbol and referent in a sacramental way.

Southwell's speaker, St. Peter, first refers to Christ's "sacred eyes" as heavenly or otherworldly in his description of them as "springs of living light":

O sacred eyes, the springs of living light,
The earthly heavens, where angels joy to dwell,
How could you deigne to view my deathfull plight,
Or let your heavenly beames looke on my hell?
But those unspotted eyes encountered mine,
As spotlesse Sunne doth on the dunghill shine. (331-336; 56)[15]

This first image begins by establishing a generic understanding of Christ's eyes as a pure

source of life and light, while contrasting that with Peter's unworthy state. Southwell

artfully opposes Christ's "living light" with Peter's "deathfull plight." Christ and Peter

are as separated as life and death, as heaven and hell. The intangible image of "springs of

living light," however, is in the final line refined to the more concrete image of a

"spotlesse Sunne." This connection between eyes and the sun is not new or original.

Indeed, by the time Southwell is writing this image it is a tired and overused Petrarchan

conceit. Nevertheless, Southwell also returns to the image of the sun in stanza 67 where

he tries to reinvigorate the image through extending the metaphor. For Peter the presence

or absence of Christ's gaze is equivalent to the presence or absence of the sun. He is left

frozen without Christ's presence. The development of this metaphor represents an

embodiment of reality that is not found in the Petrarchan sources that he parodies. Instead

of simply baptizing the image from love sonnets as Roberts and Roberts theorize,

Southwell seems compelled to develop the image more fully. The metaphor seems to

need elaboration in order to strengthen the connection between Christ's eyes and the sun.

The speaker seems unsatisfied with this initial attempt to account for that which he

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15 Stanzas from "St Peter's Complaint" will be cited both by line number and by stanza number in
order to make each reference clear.

encounters in Christ's glance and this stock image is quickly abandoned.

In response to the deficiency of the initial image, the speaker begins to introduce

alternative metaphors in the subsequent stanzas, compounding many images to create one

overarching description:

> Sweet volumes, stoarde with learning fit for Saints,
> Where blisful quires imparadize their minds,
> Wherein eternall studie never faints,
> Still finding all, yet seeking all it findes:
> How endlesse is your labyrinth of blisse,
> Where to be lost the sweetest finding is!
>
> Ah wretch how oft have I sweet lessons read,
> In those deare eies, the registers of truth?
> How oft have I my hungrie wishes fed,
> And in their happy joyes redress'd my ruth?
> Ah! that they now are Heralds of disdaine:
> That erst were ever pittyers of my pain. (337-348; 57-58)

Instead of the uncomfortable image of a blazing sun revealing that which is despicable,

Christ's eyes now take on the qualities of an "endlesse ... labyrinth of blisse" in which the

saint's mind finds joy in "eternall studie." Within three stanzas, Southwell rapidly shifts

the tone from hostile to peaceful and from distant spaces to close comfort. This dramatic

development broadens our understanding of the potential latent in Christ's eyes, but sets

the metaphors at odds with each other. The interplay between images representative of

distant purity and of immanent comfort alternating throughout this section of the poem is

never explained by the speaker and suggests a willingness on his part to unite

contradictory images together, layering their meanings so that despite the contradictory

nature of the images they can be understood to work together. The closeness with which

he temporarily concludes his description evokes a nostalgia for how Peter used to see

Christ's eyes. For Peter, the eyes in which he used to read "sweet lessons" and have his

"hungrie wishes fed" are now "Heralds of [his] disdaine" and "pittyers of [his] pain." The

parallel phrasing leads us to the revelation that Christ's eyes can be a source of

nourishment and growth while simultaneously accusing him of his failings.

In stanza 59, Southwell returns to describing Jesus's eyes in Petrarchan terms of

light and fire:

> You flames devine, that sparkle out your heats,
> And kindle pleasing fires in mortall hearts;
> You nectared Aumbryes of soul-feeding meats,
> You graceful quivers of loves dearest darts:
> You did vouchsafe to warme, to wound, to feast:
> My cold, my stony, my now famishde breast. (349-358; 59)

With this return to a fiery image, Southwell places emphasis on the passion that Christ's

eyes emit, as "You flames devine, that sparkle out your heats." Peter fondly remembers

the affective quality of Christ's look as it sets "fires in mortall hearts," and targeting

Peter, Christ's eyes "vouchsafe to warme, to wound, to feast: / My cold, my stony, my

now famishde breast." While it makes sense to warm a cold heart, and such language

hearkens back to traditional biblical imagery,[16] it is impossible to wound a stone. Indeed,

that is precisely the point intended by the image of a stone heart. Nevertheless, Peter's

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16 The language of cold stony and hardened hearts is used throughout scripture to describe those who are obstinate in their disobedience of God: "Yea, they made their heartes as an Adamant stone, lest they should heare the law and wordes which the Lorde of hoastes sent in his holy spirite by the prophetes aforetime" (Zech 7:12). It is precisely this characteristic, however, which God intends to remedy: "A newe heart also wyll I geue you, and a newe spirite wyll I put into you: as for that stony heart I wyll take it out of your fleshe, and geue you a fleshy heart" (Ez 36:26).

heart is throughout this poem wounded by Christ's eyes, which cause pain and sorrow, and inspire repentance. Finally, the verb "to feast" is situated so that although the primary meaning is to feed Peter's heart, as in the previous stanza, it also suggests that Christ's eyes feed upon Peter's broken heart. Peter's heart is not being nourished from the "nectared Aumbryes of soul-feeding meats." Rather, he is becoming more depleted as he is "now famishde." Again we see a contradiction in Southwell's imagery, for although Christ's eyes are described one way, Peter's actual experience of them is antithetical to the metaphorical description. One explanation of the opposing imagery is to see some images applying to Christ's eyes before Peter's denial and others as describing Christ's eyes afterwards; however, in this stanza the same imagery applies to both pre- and post-denial eyes. Throughout this stanza Southwell's imagery is not restricted to one meaning; it is infused with multiple meanings in a way that is similar to the multiplicity of Catholic scriptural interpretation.

As Southwell moves into the next stanza (60) he once again abruptly contrasts the image of the fire of Christ's eyes with the image of "liquid pearle:"

> The matchles eies, matchd onely each by other,
> Were pleasd on my ill matched eyes to glaunce:
> The eye of liquid pearle, the purest mother,
> Brochte tears in mine to weepe for my mischaunce.
> The cabinets of grace unlockt their treasure,
> And did to my misdeed their mercies measure. (355-360; 60)

While Southwell continues to emphasize the purity of Christ's expression throughout, the image of Christ's eyes assaulting Peter is here replaced by an image which passively

prompts Peter into action. Unlike the fire that feeds and attacks Peter's wounded heart,

Christ's pearly eyes simply call Peter to "weepe for [his] mischaunce," by casting his

own failures into sharp relief. At the expression of Peter's remorse, Christ's eyes become

"cabinets of grace," in which, although previously locked, Peter can now find grace. This

relief is temporary, however, as the poem, in its developing alternation between images of

aggressive attack and images which inspire calm reflection, returns once more to an

active image of Christ's "blasing comets, lightning flames of love:"

> These blasing comets, lightning flames of love,
> Made me their warming influence to know:
> My frozen hart their sacred force did prove,
> Which at their lookes did yeeld like melting snow.
> They did not joyes in former plentie carve,
> Yet sweet are crums where pined thoughts do starve. (361-366; 61)

Once again Christ's eyes actively engage Peter, exerting their "sacred force" before

which Peter "yeeld[s] like melting snow." Unlike the self-reflexive Peter of the previous

stanza, who responds to Christ's passive eyes, this time Peter is portrayed as passively

accepting Christ's advances. Southwell alternates between portraying Christ's eyes as

emitting fiery rays which assault Peter's soul and receptive vessels which welcome

Peter's repentance.[17]

    In the next three stanzas Southwell introduces two metaphors which, in addition

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17 Southwell's combination of active and passive imagery is partially explained by contemporary poetic tropes of eyesight. Herbert Grabes in *The Mutable Glass* notes that due to innovations in early modern theories of ocular science the eye could be seen as both an active and passive organ. Thus he argues "the eye of the beloved can in love-poetry be seen as a mirror, or it can equally well be seen as emitting fiery rays which are received and reflected by the eye of the lover, piercing and inflaming his heart" (Grabes 85). Peter's description of Christ's eye as both active and passive, however, suggests that Southwell is combining images in a more complex manner.

to adding to Peter's compounded description of Christ's eyes, explore a more sacramental

connection between symbol and referent in which the qualities of the symbol reflect back

onto the way we understand Christ's eyes:

> O living mirrours! seeing whom you shew,
> Which equall shaddows worthes with shadowed things:
> Ye make thinges nobler than in native hue,
> By being shap'd in those life giving springs.
> Much more my image in those eyes was grac'd,
> Then in my selfe whom sinne and shame defac'd.
>
> All seeing eyes more worth then all you see,
> Of which one is the others onely price:
> I worthles am, direct your beames on me,
> With quickning vertue cure my killing vice.
> By seeing things, you make things worth the sight,
> You seeing, salve, and being seene, delight. (367-379; 62-63)

The trope of the mirror is common in poetry of the early modern period, with poets

exploring the various ways in which mirrors can be said to reflect the world around

them.[18] In this particular poem, Southwell adopts this tradition by describing the mirror of

Christ's eyes as "mak[ing] thinges nobler than in native hue." Southwell adapts the

image, however, by making it a living mirror that both actively sees and reflects reality:

"seeing whom you shew, / Which equall shaddows worthes with shadowed things."

Likewise, in the next stanza Southwell turns to another reflective image, that of the pools

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18 In *The Mutable Glass*, Herbert Grabes traces the complex ontological relationship between the reflection in a mirror and the original (112-130). Unlike many of the images Grabes traces, however, Southwell maintains that the image contained in Christ's eyes has a separate existence. Interestingly, Grabes earlier points to the Middle Ages, where the phenomenon of a broken mirror "was exploited to illustrate the doctrine of transubstantiation: just as the fragments of a broken mirror each furnish a complete image of an object, Christ is wholly present in each fragment of broken bread" (107). This idea of transubstantiation loosely resembles Southwell's use of the trope.

of Hesebon used by the Hebrew poet in Canticles:

> O Pooles of *Hesebon*, the bathes of grace,
> Where happy spirits dyve in sweet desires:
> Where Saints rejoyce to glasse their glorious face,
> Whose banks make Eccho to the Angels quires:
> An Eccho sweeter in the sole rebound,
> Then Angels musick in the fullest sound! (379-384; 64)

Southwell's metaphorical persistence in attempting to accurately describe Christ's eyes recalls the attempts of the Hebrew poet to describe his lover's beauty. That having been said, there are notable differences in metaphorical structure that distinguish Southwell's descriptions from those found in Canticles, differences expressive of the theological aesthetic. Most notably, while the Hebrew poet's comparison is a single simile linking the appearance of his lover's eyes to the appearance of the fish-pools of Hesebon, Southwell's metaphor involves a more essential connection between sign and referent. For Southwell, it is not merely that Christ's eyes resemble a beautiful pool of water, but that they take on the qualities of the pools.

    In the case of both the image of the mirror and of the pool, the reflexivity between image and object, and between the viewer and the object being viewed, introduces a complex paradigm within which the boundaries of sign and referent are blurred. These two images specifically present a sacramental understanding of metaphor in which the sign and the referent not only point to each other, but actually share the same essential characteristics. Southwell's imagery does not simply illuminate characteristics of Christ's eyes; rather, the various images and Christ's eyes become subsumed into each other. It

seems that Christ's eyes are transformed by the images that Southwell uses in a manner

similar to the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements with the essence of Christ:

the essence of Christ's eyes is embodied in the image at the same time that the full nature

of the image reflects back on the reader's experience of Christ's eyes.

In stanza 68, Southwell introduces his longest extended metaphor (spanning four

stanzas) comparing Christ's eyes to worlds. In the course of this extended metaphor, the

world(s) within Christ's eyes become more physical while at the same time becoming

more allegorical:

> O gracious spheres, where love the Centre is,
> A native place for our selfe-loaden soules:
> The compasse, love, a cope that none can mis:
> The motion, love, that round about us rowles.
> O Spheres of love, whose Centre, cope and motion,
> Is love of us, love that invites devotion.
>
> O little worldes, the summes of all the best,
> Where glory, heaven; God, sunne: all vertues, starres:
> Where fire, a love that next to heaven doth rest,
> Ayre, light of life, that no distemper marres:
> The water, grace, whose seas, whose springs, whose showers,
> Cloth natures earth, with everlasting flowers.
>
> What mixtures these sweet elements do yeeld,
> Let happy worldlings of those worlds expound;
> But simples are by compounds farre exceld,
> Both sute a place, where all best things abound.
> And if a banishd wretch gesse not amisse:
> All but one compound framde of perfect blisse.
>
> I outcast from these worlds exiled rome,
> Poore saint, from heaven, from fire, cold Salamander:
> Lost fish, from those sweet waters kindly home,
> From lande of life, strayed pilgrim still I wander:

> I know the cause: these worldes had never a hell
> In which my faults have best deservde to dwell. (403-426; 68-71)

In these stanzas, Southwell's metaphor extends beyond a figurative world, as the images representing Christ's eyes exist beyond their metaphorical significance and are described using very corporeal language. The spheres in Christ's eyes have a "Centre, cope and motion" all their own. Although love, an immaterial force, drives this world's existence, Southwell repeatedly encourages his readers to experience the physicality of his image by developing his image independently from Christ's eyes.

In stanza 69, Southwell continues to develop his imagery in more concrete terms; the worlds to which he refers are composed not of love, as in the previous stanza, but of the four classic elements: fire, air, water and earth. The world of Christ's eyes becomes explicitly physical, distinctly separate from Christ's eyes; however, in addition to being physical images, these elemental metaphors also propose a spiritual allegory. The fire represents "a love that next to heaven doth rest;" the air is spiritually the "light of life"[19], the sustaining power of life; the water both represents a sea of grace and the "springs, whose showers, / Cloth natures earth with everlasting flowers." In this stanza Southwell creatively constructs an image that is both incredibly physical and spiritual. The poem connects Christ's eyes to little worlds that seem to exist in their own corporeality before connecting the physical elements with a spiritual purity that belongs simultaneously to the metaphorical elements and Christ's eyes. In this stanza, these layers of meanings

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19 The phrase "light of life" describes the gift that Christ gives: "Then spake Iesus agayne vnto them, saying, I am the light of the world: He that foloweth me, doth not walke in darknesse, but shal haue the light of life" (John 8:12).

coexist within a single image and none takes precedence. This metaphorical structure

embodies a Catholic openness to the multiplicity and plurality of figurative imagery.

In the final stanza of this metaphor, the worlds of Christ's eyes retain their

material quality as Peter laments his banishment. Once again, Peter's description of his

exile reinforces the physicality of the metaphorical worlds. He systematically describes

his exile from the metaphorical locations he constructed in the previous stanzas: the saint

is banished from heaven, the cold salamander is removed from the fire, the "Lost fish, [is

exiled] from those sweet waters kindly home" and finally "From lande of life, strayed

pilgrim still I wander." The inclusion of the natural inhabitants of these figurative

environments further strengthens the recurrent sense that these images have a physical

existence. Indeed, the worlds of Christ's eyes have become so realistic that Peter feels

inclined to explain that these worlds, unlike the real universe, do not contain a hell; thus

he is forced to leave them completely and return to the real universe and face his

punishment on earth.

After a hyperbolic reflection upon his grief, calling King David's tears "but tipes,

these [his tears] are the figured thing" (432), Peter for the last time returns to Christ's

eyes:

> O Turtle twins all bath'd in virgins milke,
> Upon the margin of full flowing bankes:
> Whose gracefull plume surmounts the finest silke,
> Whose sight enamoreth heavens most happy rankes:
> Could I forswear this heavenly paire of doves,
> That cag'd in care for me were groning loves. (433-438; 73)

Southwell takes the image, "O Turtle twins all bath'd in virgins milke" from Canticles

5:12, which reads, "His eyes are as the eyes of doues by the water brookes as though they

were wasshed with mylke, and are set lyke pearles in golde." Southwell's interpretation

of this metaphor does not show the same kind of paradoxical blurring of symbol or

referent as previous stanzas, nor does it evoke a complex layering of meaning. Rather,

this image seems to function the same way in both the original source and in Southwell's

adaptation of the image. Indeed, of all the multitude of imagery that Southwell has

enlisted in his attempt to describe Christ's eyes, this metaphor shows none of the

uncertain expansion and layering evident throughout his poem. It seems that Southwell

has finally found a sufficient metaphor to describe Christ's eyes. This is not surprising,

however, when one considers that this passage in Canticles actually *does* describe

Christ's eyes. This verse, unlike the previous image Southwell borrows, is used by

Canticles's female lover to describe the eyes of the male lover. Typologically, the male

figure in Canticles was read as an allegory for Christ and His love for the church. In other

words, having exhausted all possible images in attempting to describe Christ's eyes,

Southwell finally decides that the only way to accurately do so is to quote a scriptural

passage that provides a direct description of Christ's eyes.[20] Even though the male lover

in Canticles is only allegorically understood to represent Christ, Southwell seems to trust

the metaphorical expressions of scripture more than he trusts his own metaphors.

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20 The only other passage in scripture that talks about Christ's eyes is in Revelation and describes the resurrected divine Christ: "His head, and his heeres were whyte as whyte wooll, and as snowe, and his eyes were as a flambe of fyre" (Rev 1:14).

With this final biblical description of Christ's eyes, Peter realizes how far from the momentary glance his meditations have taken him, and we, the readers, are reminded that this entire complicated series of metaphors was created all to describe a brief look. In the end, Peter almost sheepishly admits, "But O, how long demurre I on his eies, / Whose looke did pearce my heart with healing wound" (445-446). Peter recalls himself from his exploration into metaphor and reminds himself and his audience that the twenty stanzas of metaphor were dedicated to describing a single moment in which Peter's eyes encountered the love and reproach within Christ's eyes.

Throughout this poem, Southwell adapts metaphors and imagery from other popular early modern poets. Sometimes he applies the imagery without much originality, while other times he seems to feel the need to strengthen the metaphorical connection between symbol and referent. Some of his images are limited to a single stanza; others, however, are developed over several stanzas. Southwell applies all these different metaphorical techniques to describe Christ's eyes. Likewise, within the course of this extended meditation, he utilizes multiple, sometimes contradictory images without mediating between the differing connotations. Rather, Southwell seems to intentionally compound his images upon each other, suggesting that no one image is sufficient to describe the eyes of Christ. Although it is difficult to make any comprehensive observations about the multiplicity of metaphorical styles here used by Southwell, the very existence and emphasis upon the plurality of metaphor is evocative of the theological aesthetic.

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"Christ's Bloody Sweat"

Like "St Peter's Complaint," "Christ's Bloody Sweat" combines multiple images together to form a complex picture of Christ; however, rather than simply listing a series of disconnected images, this poem unites these images with intentional grammatical and structural forms. The poem opens with a quick series of connected images that work together to present a complex picture of Christ's body as he kneels in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane:

> Fat soile, full spring, sweete olive, grape of bliss,
> That yeelds, that streams, that pours, that dost distil,
> Untild, undrawn, unstampt, untoucht of presse,
> Deare fruit, clear brookes, faire oile, sweet wine at will: (1-4)

Southwell cleverly interweaves these images so that we cannot separate them from each other; the reader must encounter them altogether. For although we read the poem from left to right, the grammatical structure and thought run vertically through these four lines. In the first line we are given the subject of each image while the second line follows with the verb that applies respectively to each noun. The third line then modifies the verb with a single adverb, which is then followed by the object of each phrase. More logically, the poem reads,

> Fat soile, ... That yeelds, ... Untild, ... Deare fruit
> full spring, ... that streams, ... undrawn, ... clear brookes,
> sweete olive, ... that pours, ... unstampt, ... faire oile,
> grape of bliss, ... that dost distil, ... untoucht of presse, ... sweet wine at will:

Because these four phrases are mixed together, however, we are forced to understand these multiple images as a single expression of Christ. Christ is not pictured first as a

field then as a spring, but as field, spring, olive and grape all at once. As a result, the

connotations of these four images are mixed together as we read them simultaneously.

This multiplicity of imagery functions similarly to a Catholic typology that encourages

reading the imagery of scripture in manifold ways.[21] Nevertheless, despite the

interconnectedness of the presentation, each image also offers a different perspective on

the unified image which both complicates and enriches the cumulative effect of this

metaphor.

Although Southwell presents this metaphor as an integrated image, each of the

component metaphors offers greater subtlety to this poetic understanding of Christ's

sacrifice. Southwell first compares Christ to a farmer's field, an image that

simultaneously suggests life and fertility, while hauntingly pointing to the harvest as

Christ struggles with his own impending death. More to the point, however, Southwell

uses the image of a farm producing fruit to represent the bounty that Christ releases in his

bloody sweat. Likewise, Christ is pictured as a full spring that offers up a pure and

refreshing stream of water which both cleanses and nourishes. The third image of the

olive oil speaks further to the importance of Christ's blood. Oil was used not just as a

cooking ingredient, but was essential to everyday life in a multitude of ways, including as

the fuel in lamps. The final image of wine is traditionally a drink of celebration; however,

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21 Coincidentally, like Aquinas's theory of biblical interpretation, which advocates four ways of understanding scripture (literal, figurative, allegorical and analogical), Southwell also thinks through four levels of meaning in this amalgam of imagery.

it also symbolically stands for God's wrath.[22] Moreover, wine is also the symbol

representing Christ's blood as celebrated in the Eucharist. Instead of focusing on the

nuances of each image, Southwell emphasizes the unity of the cumulative image as the

production of the fruit, brook, oil and wine come without external action. Christ is not

tilled, drawn, stamped or pressed; rather, He wilfully offers up his bloody sweat before

"the whips, the thornes, the nails, the speare, and roode" (6). All the images work

together to produce one complex overarching picture of the consequences of Christ's

wilful self-sacrifice.

In the second stanza, Southwell changes metaphors but continues to use

interconnected images. This time, he compares Christ to two birds with mythical

pedigrees: a Pelican and a Phoenix.

> He Pelicans, he Phenix fate doth prove,
> Whom flames consume, whom streames enforce to die,
> How burneth bloud, how bleedeth burning love,
> Can one in flame and streame both bathe and frie?
> How could he joine a Phenix fiery paines
> In fainting Pelicans still bleeding vaines? (7-12)

The pelican was thought to wound itself in order to provide life-giving sustenance for its

children, while the Phoenix dies in flames so that a new phoenix might be reborn. Both

birds clearly point to the Christ figure, and the pelican is a particularly apt image to

describe Christ's bloody sweat. The similarity between these metaphors is readily

apparent; Southwell, however, does not simply use these images in sequence. Rather, he

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22 "The same shall drynke of the wyne of the wrath of God: yea, of the pure wyne which is powred in the cup of his wrath: And he shalbe punisshed in fyre & brimstone, before the holy angels, and before the lambe" (Rev 14:10)

structures this stanza as he did the fourfold image in the first stanza, so that both images

remain in the forefront of his reader's mind. He opens the stanza with the Pelican first

and then the Phoenix; however, for the rest of the stanza he reverses the order in which he

talks about the images, always commencing with the phoenix "Whome flames consume,

[then the pelican] whome streams enforce to die" (8). By using chiasmus Southwell

forces his reader to acknowledge both images simultaneously and does not allow one

image to rise above the other. Southwell is not content to allow only one image to

describe Christ and asks both "How could he joine a Phenix fiery paines / [and how] In

fainting Pelicans still bleeding vaines?" (11-12). Just as Southwell links these two

images, he also recognizes the differences, as he asks "can one in flame and stream both

bathe and fire?" (10). Southwell is aware of the problems with representing Christ in

contrasting images; however, without addressing the impossibility of simultaneously

bathing and burning, he continues to closely associate the two images. He highlights the

contradiction, at the same time as he forces us to consider the images together,

simultaneously.

"Christ's Bloody Sweat" experiments with uniquely structured adjacent images—

first combining nuanced metaphors of production and nourishing, then blending two

related but distinct mythologies of life-giving sacrifice—in a manner that recalls the

multiplicity of meaning found in Catholic understandings of scripture. The reader is

asked to read these diverse meanings together, rather than apart or individually. A similar

metaphorical strategy is employed in "St. Peter's Complaint;" however, while in that

poem Southwell employs a barrage of metaphors crudely layered on top of each other, this poem offers the reader a more subtle and nuanced integration of multiple images to create a complex understanding of a divine image. The vertically arranged images in "Christ's Bloody Sweat" are poetically united, integrated. In terms of meaning, the poem achieves more than a description of Christ offering up his blood. Christ's sacrificial offering is poetically rendered as more than blood, described beyond its literal, singular essence (as field, as spring, as olive and as grape). This particular instance of multiple representation speaks to the revelatory potential inherent to the theological aesthetic.

"The Prodigal Childs Soule Wracke"

Southwell's poem "The prodigal childs soule wracke" introduces a different style of metaphorical expression than the multifaceted layering of tropes in the poems examined above, one that straddles the line between allegory and metaphor. Unlike the previously explored poems, which primarily enlist multiple metaphors in quick succession, this poem creates and combines two central tropes in an attempt to describe the speaker's soul. The speaker, illustrating his experience in terms of the prodigal child narrative, further portrays his experience in terms of a storm-tossed ship—an image Southwell enlarges and expands. For much of the poem, this seafaring image seems to develop independent from the prodigal child narrative (while the speaker's soul is never mentioned at all), such that, aside from the title, the poem might be read as a literal voyage. Despite the detail with which the seafaring image is developed, however, it is intricately tied to the story of the prodigal child; it is undeniably meant to be read as a

metaphorical representation of the prodigal soul's figurative journey into despair. Both of these symbolic narratives are in turn meant to be read as allegories of the speaker's own soul. Throughout the poem Southwell blends together the two tropes of the prodigal child and the shipwrecked sailor. At times the poem's language seems to refer to the sailor, at other times the prodigal child, and oftentimes both; however, these distinctions are far from clear. Throughout the poem, the imagery of the sailor is both strangely distinct from the prodigal child and yet also a recreation or reiteration of it.[23]

The poem moves straight into the central metaphor with the exclamation that the speaker is "Disankered from a blissful shore / And launcht into the maine of cares" (1-2). The seafaring imagery is instantly apparent. When these lines are read in relation to the title, the metaphor becomes obvious: the shore parallels the prodigal child's home and father, while the sea represents the world he chose to explore with his father's inheritance. The metaphor is so complete that the imagery stands on its own. Even when Southwell introduces the moral and spiritual elements of the prodigal son, the metaphor remains quite independent. While it is clear that the prodigal child has "growne rich in vice, in vertue poore, / From freedom faln in fatal snares" (3-4), the language of the rest of the poem remains ambiguous enough that it could equally apply to the figurative sailor imagined in the poem. The moral language does not break the image, but actually strengthens the metaphorical representation with spiritual significance, entwining the

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23 Throughout my analysis of this poem, I refer to the prodigal child as the referent and the shipwrecked sailor as the symbol; however, these distinctions are artificially imposed upon a poem that refuses to distinguish between the two. Moreover, both the prodigal child and the sailor ultimately function as symbols for the speaker's soul.

symbol and the referent in the same narrative.

In the second stanza, the seafaring imagery is continued as the speaker finds himself "Enwrapped in the waves of wo, / and tossed with a toilesome tide" (6-7). It is clear that Southwell continues to connect the two narratives as he imbues the physical imagery of his allegory with the abject emotions of the prodigal child. Interestingly, this strategy allows the literal and symbolic meanings of the image to co-exist. Throughout the stanza, the reader is simultaneously aware of both the image of the waves and tides buffeting a ship at sea and the symbolic significance these waves represent: the prodigal child's "toilesome" "wo." The final line of this stanza furthers the dual nature of this metaphor; the port of refuge functions both as a literal port and as a return to the prodigal child's home.

To this point, the imagery has been strongly linked to the moralistic narrative that the metaphor serves to elaborate; however, the third and fourth stanzas seem to break away from metaphorical language and develop symbolic imagery separate from the referent of the prodigal child. Southwell abandons the emotive language as he describes a ship chased and beaten by "the wrastling winds with raging blasts" (9). Stanza three seems to lose sight of the metaphorical/allegorical meta-narrative of this poem. Southwell makes no obvious connection between the prodigal child's predicament and the ways the winds "broke my anchors, sailes and masts" (11). Rather, how the symbolic ship reflects back on the referent child is left to the reader to discover as the symbol becomes more and more central to the poem. The referent, the prodigal child, seems to fade into the

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background, overcome by the powerful symbolism of the sailor lost at sea.

The fourth stanza continues to further the development of the seafaring image, while ignoring the associated development of the referent, the prodigal child. Southwell continues to paint a visceral image of a ship overwhelmed by "the boistous sea with swelling flouds" (13). Even the heavens are described only in terms of their secular use for charting the ship's path: the overcast skies "Denide the Planets guiding light" (16). These lines are surprisingly bereft of any of the spiritual significance that has been attributed to the imagery in the previous stanzas. Instead, these stanzas seem to speak only to the physical image without any direct parallels to the metaphorical nature of the image.

This lack of explicit metaphorical development does not mean, however, that Southwell intended the image to separate from the referent. Rather, the opposite seems true: the symbol and referent have become so intertwined that Southwell does not need to explicitly address both: what happens to the ship happens to the child and vice versa. Instead of providing visceral imagery to enhance the description of the internal experiences of a prodigal child, Southwell's metaphor seems to absorb the figure of the prodigal child into its narrative. The storm-tossed sailor does not merely point to the prodigal child; the sailor becomes the prodigal child, and the child becomes the sailor. In a sacramental manner, the image of the prodigal child (the referent) embodied in the sailor (the symbol) become one concept in the poet's and reader's minds.

In the stanzas that follow, Southwell returns to the spiritual language of the

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prodigal child and nearly abandons the seafaring language; however, it remains clear that

just as the prodigal child is implied in the two stanzas that describe only the ship, the

figurative sailor also experiences "the hellish furies" (17) and witnesses "God's deserved

ire" (24). Just as the physical language of the previous stanzas applies to both the symbol

and the referent, the spiritual language of these middle stanzas applies to both the sailor

and the child. The conflated symbol and referent both experience God's wrath as it is

expressed physically through "heaven and hell, thus, sea and land, / Thus stormes and

tempests" (21-22), as well as the internal judgment experienced as "my inward bleeding

sores" (28). In these stanzas Southwell abandons the image of a storm-tossed ship and

sailor completely, preferring a more straightforward analysis of the prodigal child's

despair. Instead of waves and tides, the speaker now struggles with

> Death and deceit [which] had pitcht their snares
> And put their wicked proofes in ure
> To sink me in despairing carees,
> Or make me stoupe to pleasures lure: (37-40)

The penitent language of these stanzas is not surprising coming from the prodigal child;

however, the seafaring imagery, so vividly described earlier in the poem, is completely

abandoned. The storm-tossed ship now seems irrelevant. Before the poem concludes,

however, Southwell returns our attention to the seafaring symbol and reminds us that in

this poem the symbol and the referent are inseparable.

In the final few stanzas, the thoughts of the prodigal child are integrated back into

the symbolic narrative of the sailor at sea. The death and deceit with which the prodigal

child struggles are also tempting the sailor: "With Siren songs they fed my ears, till luld

asleepe in errors lap" (49). The mythology of the Sirens is specifically linked to the tragic

sailor's fate, as the Sirens would tempt sailors to stray from their course and wreck their

ships on the Sirens' island. This image is decidedly connected to the symbolic voyage of

the sailor, but Southwell also connects the Sirens' song to the temptations that distract the

prodigal child. Indeed, this final image deftly reunites the symbol and referent in

common fate, as both prodigal child and wayward sailor find themselves "chained in

sin ... next to the dungeon of despaire, / Till mercy raisde me from my fall, / And grace

my ruines did repaire" (56-60). In the final lines of the poem, the speaker brings together

his metaphorical allegories, concluding with a prayer that not only encompasses the sailor

and the prodigal child, but also the speaker himself.

Throughout this poem, Southwell plays with the boundaries between the referent,

the story of the prodigal son, and the symbol, the storm-tossed sailor—or vice versa, as it

is nearly impossible for one to definitively identify the referent from the symbol. At times

the symbolic imagery seems to take prominence, while at other times the poem focuses

primarily upon the moral tale of the prodigal child. However, neither the symbol nor the

referent can ever be separated from each other. The prodigal child and the image of the

wayward sailor are inextricably connected throughout this poem in such a way that it no

longer remains clear how the metaphor is supposed to work.

In "The Prodigal Childs Soule Wracke," Southwell plays with the relationship

between symbol and referent, and between allegory and metaphor. At times it seems that

the prodigal child and the sailor are one in the same person; the existence of the child and that of the sailor become so intertwined, they are practically inseparable. At other times, they are configured as two distinct people. In other words, it is impossible to discern what is "real," from what is "metaphor;" what is referent, from what is symbol. Symbol and referent become one in essence, in character, in practicality, just as the bread and wine become Christ and do not simply represent Christ, but *are* Christ's presence amongst his people.

The overall thrust uniting my analyses of these three poems by Southwell is Southwell's own difficulties in describing divine things (Christ's eyes, Christ's sweat, etc.) and articulating the paradox of the incarnation. In "St Peter's Complaint" he struggles to find imagery capable of representing correctly and fully, and as a result he borrows, layers and rapidly transitions metaphors, trying to find the perfect "fit." In "Christ's Bloody Sweat" he is somewhat more successful combining imagery, although he still struggles with the necessarily contradictory nature of his combined imagery, which complicates the sense of accumulative understanding of the image sought to be conveyed. Attempting something quite different in "The Prodigal Childs Soule Wracke," Southwell pushes the boundaries of allegorical and symbolic representation to the point where the components of his metaphorical structure are no longer discernible or distinguishable from each other. His experimentation with different styles of metaphorical representation are evidence of Southwell's uncertainty with figurative language, and this angst is constitutive of what I have identified to be a theological aesthetic.

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Chapter Three – Describing Devotion: The Metaphors of John Donne

Like Robert Southwell, John Donne lived his life in the midst of the early modern

theological debates. Donne was also born and raised Catholic in Protestant England;

however, unlike Southwell, who maintained his Catholic faith by studying on the

continent, Donne remained in England and struggled to reconcile his Catholic faith with

the reformed theology of his compatriots. His poem "Satire III," written during his time

at the Inns of Court,[24] might be read as an expression of this struggle:

> To adore, or scorn an image, or protest,
> May all be bad; doubt wisely; in strange way
> To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
> To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,
> Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
> Reach her, about must and about must go,
> And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so. (Donne, "Satire III", 76-82)

Little is actually known about Donne's conversion, though much is speculated;[25]

however, his eventual apostasy is evident in his polemical works against Catholics in

1610 (*Pseudo-Martyr* and *Conclave Ignati*) and his eventual ordination into the Church

of England. I do not wish to argue that Donne was specifically influenced by any one

theological perspective while writing his devotional verse; we cannot determine with any

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24 Although David Colclough dates only the first two satires to Donne's time at the Inns of Court, Arthur Marotti in *John Donne, Coterie Poet* also dates the third satire to this period (127-128). Regardless, my point is that it was written during the time he was probably debating his religious affiliation.

25 Colclough explores several differing perspectives on Donne's conversion, eventually concluding that "it is probably unhelpful to conceive of it as an event, rather than as a long process. The best that can be said is that by 1600 or so Donne considered it possible that he could successfully seek advancement in areas that would be closed to a known Catholic, and that in 1601 he was married in a Church of England ceremony (if an unorthodox one). Seven years later he was writing anti-Catholic polemic, and using his own upbringing in the Roman Catholic Church to lend greater force to his criticisms of that church."

certainty what Donne believed when he composed a specific poem. Rather, I wish to

demonstrate that throughout his life Donne was regularly confronted with the different

consequences of Reformation theology as he dismantled his childhood Catholic faith.

Even as a priest at St Paul's Cathedral, Donne's sermons show an acute awareness of the

subtleties of contemporary theological debate. Although John Donne is chronologically

late in the Reformation of England, he is in many ways situated at the centre of all of the

theological debates and it is not surprising that his metaphors are explicitly affected by

the uncertainty of the theological aesthetic. Donne's use of imagery is not only highly

unconventional, but his poetry also seems to reflect upon the very effectiveness and

correctness of this figurative language.

　　　　Scholars of Donne often reflect upon the style of his figurative language; the

unconventional connections he makes and the lengths to which he extends his imagery

are often highlighted. One characteristic of Donne's poetry that is often examined is his

juxtaposition of the sacred and profane. He is often criticized for his "paradoxical use of

theology and of religious allusions and imagery [which] pervad[e] even the most indecent

of the elegies or *Songs and Sonets*" (Sellin 171). Similarly, in one of the earliest

condemnations of Donne's poetry, Dryden complains that Donne "affects the

metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should

reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when

he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love" (Dryden

19). In other words, Donne unites "the public and the private, the religious and the

secular, the skeptical and the idealistic" in his poetry (Beliles 103). Many scholars have

attempted to explain these unusual connections by referencing Donne's use of wit.

Johnson's famous indictment against the metaphysical poets suggests as much: "the

metaphysical poets were men of learning and to shew their learning was their whole

endeavour" (Johnson 19). However, while these explanations may account for Donne's

use of scientific imagery, they do not clarify the reasoning behind the conflation of the

sacred and the profane in his works. Rather, it seems, as Robert Whalen argues, that this

"capacity for perceiving the sacred in the profane…belongs to a medieval world view

that had been carried into the early modern era in large part by Roman Catholic

sacramentalism" (Whalen 61-62). Similarly, Murray Roston, as quoted by Paul Franssen,

attributes Donne's penchant for unification to the "'Counter-Reformation tradition with

its encouragement to cultivate the bodily senses imaginatively, as a means of glimpsing

the celestial'" (Franssen 152). I argue, however, that Donne's selection of imagery is not

merely a product of medievalism or Counter-Reformation traditions but an expression of

the confrontation between these Catholic ideas and Protestant theology.

Donne's poetry is also specifically known for his experimentation with what has

come to be known as the metaphysical conceit. His conceits explore the relationship

between symbol and referent and often blur the logical connections between them in a

manner that reflects the angst of the theological aesthetic. While poetry admittedly

revolves around the use of figurative language, Donne's use of metaphors is uncommon.

He not only applies connections between images that rely on tenuous logical connections,

but also insists on a close and essential connection between the two images in a

sacramental relationship. Moreover, he often extends such metaphors until they become

self-examining, until the possibility of such a metaphor is questioned at the same time

that it is affirmed. In light of the Catholic understanding of symbol and referent, however,

this poetic trait is understandable. Donne's "elaborate conceits [seem to] replicate

linguistically the incarnational paradox sacrament embodies" (Whalen 36). Louis

Bredvold appears to agree, suggesting that Donne's "excess of metaphor" can be "traced

to the survival of [Catholic] Medievalism…, fragments of a decayed age" (Bredvold 194-

195). This may explain the distaste of neo-classical critics like Johnson for Donne's

aesthetic. Ultimately, Catholic sacramentality provides a rationale for some of the radical

connections that Donne not only makes, but sustains *throughout* his poetry. As Michael

Moloney argues, however, the essence of his poetic verse is not simply Catholic

sacramentality. Rather, "the drama of [Donne's] life, [and] the arresting fire of much of

his verse, derive from [the] clash between the medieval and the modern" (Moloney 73)—

between Catholicism and Protestantism.

"The Cross"

John Donne's struggle to define the role of figurative thought in his poetry and his

religious life is particularly evident in his poem "The Cross." This poem opens with an

explicit argument against the strict iconoclastic movement that would have even images

of the cross removed from religious practices.[26] In the opening lines of the poem the

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26 See footnote eleven for more details on how the Iconoclastic movement relates to my theory of the theological aesthetic.

speaker explains, "since Christ embraced the Cross itself dare I / His image, the image of

his Cross deny?" (1-2). The speaker also defiantly declares that "From me, no pulpit, nor

misgrounded law, / Nor scandal taken, shall this Cross withdraw" (9-10). While these

lines cannot be directly linked to Donne's personal experience, they read like the words

of a man who longs to retain a symbol of deep personal significance despite increasing

pressure to dispose of this icon of his childhood faith.[27] This biographical speculation,

however, is of less consequence than the resulting ways that figurative language is

developed within the poem itself. Although the explicit argument against iconoclasm

suggests that the speaker is leaning towards a Catholic understanding of imagery, the way

that Donne actually uses imagery throughout the rest of the poem is decidedly more

confused. Ultimately, the poem struggles to establish the expansive possibilities of

metaphorical imagery in the face of the limitations placed upon figurative thought by the

Reformation.

      In the first sixteen lines, the speaker resists the arguments of the iconoclastic

movement and defends the image of the cross not by specifying its harmlessness, nor its

aid to teaching—as a Protestant might—but rather because it is "the instrument / Of God,

dewed on me in the Sacrament" (15-16). With a more Catholic readiness to see the

sacraments as the practical working of God's grace, the speaker argues that by viewing

the image of the cross one actually receives the grace of God. Assuming the symbolic

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    27 Keeping the authorial fallacy in mind, there is no reason to assume that this poem represents the thoughts of Donne; however, he is deliberately using the lyric "I," with its suggestion that the poet is speaking directly to the reader.

importance of the cross, the speaker wonders, "Would I dare profit by the sacrifice, / And dare the chosen altar to despise?" (3-4). The speaker expresses disdain towards the idea of experiencing grace apart from the symbolic expression of such grace, even though he does not deny the possibility of experiencing grace apart from the sacramental symbolism. Likewise, a couple of lines later, he incredulously asks, "Who from the picture would avert his eyes, / How would he fly his pains, who there did die?" (7-8). In the mind of the speaker, avoiding the image of the cross is akin to avoiding the spiritual reality of the cross. Both the spiritual and the material cross are here subtly conflated in a way that is similar to the doctrine of transubstantiation. The image of the cross, like the bread and wine of the Eucharist, seems to contain the essence and spiritual power of Christ's death on the cross. This conclusion, however, is only the beginning of the poet's speculation on the power of signification, for in the following lines the speaker explores the representational power of other images to represent the cross.

After his impassioned defence of his use of the cross despite iconoclastic pressures, the speaker enters into an extended meditation on the vast potential of representation. Instead of exploring traditionally sacramental imagery, however, he explores the power of signification through the variety of everyday objects that are capable of pointing to the crucified Christ. The eight lines following the declaration of the sacramental cross immediately transition away from religious imagery and enlist the use of human physiology, seafaring imagery, microcosmic natural beauty and geographic terminology to represent the redemptive power of the cross. The speaker argues that if

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you banish the image of the cross, "who can deny me power, and liberty /To stretch mine arms, and mine own cross be?" (17-18), alluding to the potential for anyone's outstretched arms to convey the same meaning and symbolic power as the iconographic image of the cross. Indeed, this substitution of a physiological cross for the iconography of the cross does not suggest any lessening of the viewer's experience of the cross. The same sacramental power that Donne attributes to the painted or carved image of a literal cross is equally found in the speaker's outstretched arms. Although the poet understands the sacramental nature of figurative language, his understanding of sacramental imagery is not limited to those images instituted by God.[28]

The speaker argues for the flexibility of the image and, as a poet, adapts it to his purposes. Indeed, the speaker begins to play with the image of the cross, simultaneously asking and arguing that a person's outstretched arms and the mast and yard of a ship can serve as icons of Christ's sacrifice. The speaker further claims,

> Look down, thou spiest out crosses in small things;
> Look up, thou seest birds raised on crosses wings;
> All the globe's frame, and sphere's, is nothing else
> But the meridians crossing parallels. (21-25)

There seems to be no limit to what imagery is available or appropriate to represent the sacred mysteries of the cross. Although Donne seems to choose this eclectic mix of

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28 While Calvin (and other reformers) denied the sacramental nature of imagery he does suggest that "God, indeed, from time to time showed the presence of his divine majesty by definite signs, so that he might be said to be looked upon face to face. But all the signs that he ever gave forth aptly conform to his plan of teaching and at the same time clearly told men of his incomprehensible essence." (1.11.3.102). For Calvin, these images, and no others, can truly represent the nature and work of God. Donne, however, is here directly contradicting this position by showing how all sorts of images can point to God's saving work.

images at random, the selected images are intentionally commonplace and spread across

human experience. Indeed, the implicit argument of this section seems to be that despite

the distance between the symbol and referent (these images have nothing in common

aside from the accidental form of a cross), metaphor is no less able to unite the images in

a common purpose. Each of these images is connected to the Cross of Christ in a

practical and efficacious manner; for the speaker, these images contain the same power as

the icons of the Catholic Church to represent the divine. The first half of the poem

presents a trusting view of metaphor such that a metaphor, as in the Catholic

understanding of symbolism, can not only unite disparate things but actually permit the

symbol to embody the referent. This confidence in metaphorical efficacy, however, is not

maintained throughout the rest of the poem.

Immediately after listing the variety of images that can be used metaphorically to

represent the cross, the poem transitions from mere observation of physical

representations of the cross to a discussion of the spiritual experience of bearing a cross:

"Material crosses then, good physic be, / And yet spiritual have chief dignity" (25-26).

Although the poem is not explicit about the meaning of these spiritual crosses, Donne is

here referring to the practice of embracing hardship epitomized in Christ's command that

"If any man wyll folowe me, let hym forsake him selfe, and take vp his crosse, and

folowe me" (Matt 16:24). Through relatively mild pain and suffering in comparison to

Christ's death, in taking up the spiritual cross the believer can grow closer to Christ,

identifying with his suffering and becoming holier. The poetic connection between

physical imagery of crosses and spiritual crosses, however, is far from clear as Donne intimates from the beginning that the image of the cross is intimately connected to any spiritual experience of it: "the loss / Of this [material] Cross, were to me another [spiritual] cross" (11-12). Moreover, though the poem seems to transition to a focus on the spiritual concept behind the image of the cross, the next lines, "These for extracted chemic medicine serve, / And cure much better, and as well preserve" (27-28), are intentionally ambiguous as to which type of cross, spiritual or physical, "These" refers too. Although the poem leads one to read the "These" as referring to the spiritual crosses of the line before, some doubt surrounding the referent cross remains.

The relationship between the signifying crosses and their corresponding spiritual experience is further confused by the metaphor of the medicinal plants, which seems to explicitly connect the physical and the spiritual. Just as the medicine is contained within the plants, so it seems the spiritual benefits are contained within the image of the cross. This understanding of metaphorical imagery closely aligns with the Catholic understanding of the Sacraments, which are understood to contain what they represent, unlike the Protestant sacraments that point to something beyond themselves. Rather than transitioning between spiritual and representational crosses, Donne seems to unite the physical cross more closely with the spiritual benefits of the cross such that, as the poem progresses, it becomes less clear whether the speaker is referring to the spiritual cross (the referent) or the symbolic physical crosses.

The poem proceeds to confuse and conflate the meaning(s) of the word "cross."

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The uncertainty, introduced earlier in the poem, over which type of cross is referenced is not only maintained but encouraged. Donne rapidly increases the frequency with which he references crosses, yet he does not clarify what kind of cross he refers. Moreover, rather than defining how the spiritual and the physical are related, which seems to be the initial goal of this second half of the poem, the poem introduces a third meaning of the word cross in its appearance as a verb. The poem instructs the reader to "cross / Your joy in crosses" (41-42). This addition of the verb form of "cross" does not initially pose a problem to our understanding of the speaker's use of the word; however, as the poem continues, the boundaries between the differing meanings of "cross" become obscured. Instead of clarifying the way that a cross may be said to represent a spiritual concept, the poem descends into a chaotic assemblage of homonymous uses of the word cross. For instance, at one point Donne, in an almost playful manner, repeats the word "cross" eight times with various connotations until the intended meaning of the word is lost in multiplicity:

> *Cross* and correct concupiscence of wit.
> Be covetous of *crosses*, let none fall.
> *Cross* no man else, but *cross* thyself in all.
> Then the *Cross* of Christ work faithfully
> Within our hearts, when we love harmlessly
> That *Cross's* pictures much, and with more care
> That *Cross's* children, which our *crosses* are. (58-64 my emphasis)

Here, the speaker not only intentionally confuses the symbol and referent; he also subtly blends three different meanings of the verb "cross" together. First, it means "To thwart, oppose, go counter to" (OED 14.a); then it means "To meet or face in one's way; esp. to

meet adversely; to encounter" (OED 11.a); and finally "To make the sign of the cross

upon or over"(OED 2.a). The poem seems to intentionally obfuscate the meaning of these

words as it rapidly transitions between meanings without any warning.

In the same way as he employs the verb "cross," the speaker uses the noun

"cross" to refer to the cross upon which Christ died, to the icons and images of such a

cross and to the spiritual experience of the cross. The first use of the noun "cross" in this

passage (59) seems to be referring to the iconography of crosses that others would ban;

however, it could easily include the everyday images of crosses referenced earlier in lines

21-25. The next use of the noun "cross" is modified to refer specifically to the cross of

Christ (61), suggesting the spiritual cross to which all other crosses point. In the final

couplet, however, such distinctions become lost as the speaker distinguishes between the

crosses to which he refers by the undefined pronouns "that" and "our." Moreover, the

ambiguity of the apostrophe mark in "That Cross's pictures..." (indicating the possessive

or an omitted "e") allows for the word "pictures" to function as both a verb and a noun,

dramatically altering the relationship between the different crosses as the relative

pronouns modify each other. The speaker refuses to allow the audience to pin down the

meaning of his language as he combines and confuses the various possible meanings,

literal and figurative, of the word cross.

Donne's use of the image and word "cross" throughout this poem suggests an

intentional meditation upon the validity of figurative language and the relationship

between symbol and meaning; however, the obfuscation of the word "cross" denies the

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reader the ability to understand the relationship between symbol and referent. In the

concluding lines it is no longer clear whether the word or the image of the cross can

represent anything. The poem hints towards the possibilities of language and imagery to

represent in complex and sacramental ways, but it refuses to explicate how this might

occur. Rather, in a confused blend of literal and figurative language, the poem admits an

uncertainty about how metaphorical language creates meaning.

"Holy Sonnet 10: Batter my heart, three-personed God"

Unlike "The Cross," which seems to engage in an intentional meditation on the

possibilities of figurative thought, "Holy Sonnet 10: Batter my heart, three-personed

God's" passionate use of metaphor to describe the speaker's relationship with God

suggests the failure of figurative language to represent complex ideas. The

unconventionally violent imagery of this poem is suggestive both of the speaker's

religious frustration and his struggle to represent accurately his personal situation through

metaphor:

> Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You
> As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
> I, like an usurped town, to another due,
> Labour to admit You, but Oh, to no end!
> Reason, Your viceroy in me, me should defend,
> But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
> Yet dearly I love You, and would be loved fain,
> But am betrothed unto Your enemy:
> Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;
> Take me to You, imprison me, for I
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,

Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me.

This poem, which asks God to commit violence against the speaker, is simultaneously

metaphorical and yet frighteningly vivid. Throughout, Donne uses examples of physical

violence as metaphors for the analogous spiritual intervention he seeks, and his imagery

is intentionally shocking and sensory. The viciousness of these thoughts and the rapid

transitions between them suggest the religious frustration of the speaker, but they also

reveal the poet's desperation to describe a distant spiritual reality that refuses to be

accurately represented in metaphor. As the speaker becomes more religiously frustrated,

he also becomes more frustrated with his metaphor's failures; in turn, the imagery

becomes more dramatic. This forceful linking of the physical and the spiritual is

symptomatic of a poetic arising from the theological aesthetic.

The first quatrain of the poem opens with a rapid sequence of verbs. The speaker

issues thirteen different commands to God, begging him to violently and intrusively

intervene in his life. The frantic pace at which the speaker transitions between these

requests suggests an impulsive desperation to be reconciled to God; however, each of

these verbs also evokes provocative imagery that ultimately reveals a deeper anxiety

about the status of metaphor. In the second line of this poem, Donne leans upon imagery

common to the Holy Scriptures. The verb "knock," for instance, reflects back upon the

image of Christ standing at the door and knocking, recorded both poetically in Canticles

and starkly in the book of Revelation.[29] Likewise, the verb "breathe" is used several times

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[29] "I heare the voyce of my beloued when he knocketh" (Cant 5:2); "Beholde, I stande at the doore and knocke" (Rev 3:20).

in scripture to portray God giving and restoring life: first in the initial creation account, when God breathes life into Adam, and second in Ezekiel, when God breathes into a valley of dry bones, which then rise up with life, metaphorically representing the nation of Israel.[30] Finally, the verb "shine" immediately conjures the image of the Hebraic blessing: "The Lorde blesse thee, and kepe thee / The Lorde make his face shine vpon thee, and be mercyfull vnto thee / The Lorde lyft vp his countenaunce vpon thee, and geue thee peace" (Num 6:24-26). These images, though rich with heritage and believed to be divinely inspired, are nevertheless ineffective at describing the speaker's reality, and are consequently inconsequential for him. The speaker therefore rejects these biblical metaphors and spends the remainder of the poem attempting to find a metaphor that will describe the speaker's relationship with God.

The speaker attempts to replace these images with more extravagant, vivid and violent images. Instead of biblical imagery of blessings, he turns to the more evocative and violent images of biblical destruction—break[31], blow[32] and burn[33]—which, paradoxically, are supposed to make him new. The speaker's impetuous second attempt to

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30 "The Lorde God also dyd shape man, [euen] dust from of the grounde, & breathed into his nosethrylles the breath of lyfe, and man was a lyuyng soule " (Gen 2:7); "O thou ayre from the foure windes, and blowe vpon these slaine, that they may lyue" (Ez 37:9).

31 "As for the wall that ye haue daubed with vntempered morter, I wil breake it downe, and make it euen with the grounde, so that the foundation therof shalbe discouered, and it shall fall: yea and ye your selues shall perishe in the middes therof, and ye shall knowe that I am the Lorde" (Ez 13:14). "He shall set engins of warre before hym against thy walles, & with his weapons breake downe thy towres" (Ez 26:9).

32 "I wyll bryng you together, and blowe the fire of my wrath vpon you, and ye shalbe molten in the middest therof" (Ez 22:21).

33 "the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were the vttermost of the hoast" (Num 11:1); "she shalbe brent with fire: for strong is the Lorde whiche shall iudge her" (Rev 18:8).

find a functional metaphor leads him progressively towards more violent imagery, yet he still does not find imagery that accurately represents his need for God's intervention. The speaker longs to find a metaphor with the significatory power of the Catholic sacraments, which have the power to convey grace; however, all he finds is a list of empty images that lead to no effectual change.

In the second quatrain, the speaker redevelops his imagery anew, this time engaging a single metaphorical concept: comparing himself to a "usurped town" (5). The image is a fairly simple simile; however, coming as it does after the rapid changes of the first quatrain, Donne's extension of this single image is notable. Not only is the speaker configured here as an occupied city, but Satan is assumed to be the occupying force and God the rightful monarch. The threefold connection of this metaphor, however, is still apparently insufficient to accurately describe the speaker's circumstance, and he therefore extends the metaphor and defends his figurative association by making it more explicit. The speaker introduces reason, the viceroy, into the metaphor, both strengthening and complicating the original figurative structure. The inclusion of "reason" makes a more complete connection between the symbolic town and the referenced struggling speaker, expanding upon how the speaker ended up in this situation, and explaining more clearly how the speaker can be understood to be a "usurped town." Donne argues on behalf of his metaphor's validity and he expands it beyond that which would traditionally be expected of a metaphor; however, despite the care he extends to developing this metaphor, the speaker's exclamation "Yet dearely I love You" at the volta and his transition into

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another, different metaphor suggests that his metaphors are still unable to represent the spiritual change he desires.

The volta introduces a new metaphor in which the speaker's spiritual relationship is compared to a marriage. This is far from a traditional "love" metaphor, however, as the speaker finds himself "betrothed unto [God's] enemy" (10), and embroiled in the legal and religious language of divorce. Although he first introduces the metaphor with a protestation of love, a simple expression of metaphorical love is not enough to alter the speaker's state. Rather, Donne maps the precise details of the speaker's love, despair and hopelessness onto a complicated metaphor. Instead of merely representing the speaker's love for God, the metaphor seems to stand in for the entirety of their relationship. We are told not only that the speaker loves God and would welcome God's love in return, but that he is affianced to Satan and requires God to enact a divorce, an action the speaker is powerless to perform. The speaker is unable to change his circumstance, but through a sacramental substitution a change in symbolism might effect a change in his spiritual state; however, as the rest of the poem reveals, this metaphor, like the others before it, is still ultimately ineffectual in drawing the speaker closer to God.

In the final three lines of the poem, Donne concludes with the now infamous images of imprisonment and rape. These final images are perhaps the most shocking because they depict an intensely personal and violent exchange between God and humanity. While the speaker urges such action as a necessary step in his development, the suggestion of God (symbolically) raping a person is disturbing. The speaker by this point

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has reached the limits of metaphor in his desperation to draw closer to God; however, the dramatic shift away from the extended metaphor of the third quatrain into these final dramatic outbursts seemingly opposed to the saving power of God also reveals a frustration with metaphor.

Within the poem, Donne draws on several different styles of metaphorical representation. First, he relies upon biblical tropes to invoke God's presence; upon finding them ineffectual, he then replaces these biblical images with his own. When these also fail, Donne proceeds to draw upon more complex metaphors in an effort to more completely represent reality. These metaphors, though they invoke powerful emotions, once again fail to embody the speaker's longed-for restoration; no one metaphorical evocation is capable of fully representing the speaker's reality. Thus in a final attempt to connect his imagery to his reality, the speaker shifts away from more traditional forms of metaphor and aggressively mixes the spiritual and the symbolic to scandalous paradoxical effect: the speaker argues that he will never be spiritually free unless he is symbolically imprisoned. More horrifically, he proposes that he will never be spiritually chaste unless he is symbolically ravished by God. The speaker longs for a real spiritual effect to come from the symbolic actions that he asks God to perform. This mixture of metaphor and literal consequence creates a shocking experience for the reader, and the violence of his language betrays the spiritual desperation of the speaker—desperation reinforced by and reinforcing of a related poetic desperation surrounding metaphorical expression.

Throughout the poem, the poet seems to exhibit a deep distrust of metaphor. As the speaker's continual search for new expressions reveals, none of the traditional forms of metaphor enable the speaker to express the details of his relationship with God. No one image undergoes any analysis or reflection before it is quickly and frantically replaced by a new image and a new style of metaphorical expression. This metaphorical progression betrays a spiritual angst about the state of the speaker's soul, a concern that not only imbues this poem with a compelling honesty and emotional intensity, but also reflects a more pervasive uncertainty about metaphorical representation.

"Holy Sonnet 2: I am a little world made cunningly"

"Holy Sonnet 2: I am a little world made cunningly," unlike "Holy Sonnet 10," consists of one long extended metaphor describing the speaker as a little world. Instead of multiple images, this poem develops the central metaphorical image in concert with the referent:

> I am a little world made cunningly
> Of elements and an angelic sprite,
> But black sin hath betray'd to endless night
> My world's both parts, and oh both parts must die.
> You which beyond that heaven which was most high
> Have found new spheres, and of new lands can write,
> Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
> Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
> Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more.
> But oh it must be burnt; alas the fire
> Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore,
> And made it fouler; let their flames retire,
> And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeal
> Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal.

In "Holy Sonnet 2" John Donne is not reflecting upon metaphor in the same way as he does in the two poems examined above: "The Cross" denies any certainty to the meaning making power of metaphor as the poem confusingly conflates symbol and referent while "Holy Sonnet 10" fails to discover a metaphorical expression that can effect change despite cycling through several different images. In this poem, Donne's adaptation of a singular conceit throughout the sonnet reflects a sacramental linking of the symbol and referent. "Holy Sonnet 2" also explores the boundaries between symbolic and literal language. Because symbol and referent are sacramentally linked, it becomes less clear which language acts figuratively upon the symbolic worlds of the poem and which language applies to the literal speaker of the poem. The language of this poem seems to apply on both a figurative and a literal level simultaneously.

The first quatrain introduces us to the comparison of the speaker to a little world; both the speaker and the world are described as being "made cunningly / Of elements and an angelic sprite" (1-2). This language is intended to apply to both the speaker's physical body and soul, as well as to a figurative world composed of the four basic elements. Likewise, because the speaker's "black sin hath betrayed to endless night / My world's both parts, and oh both parts must die" (3-4), both the speaker and the world are punished: the speaker in eternal death and his symbolic world in "endless night." Although he uses figurative language, Donne also seems to be describing the speaker's literal body and soul and the eternal consequences of his sin.

In the remainder of the poem, the image of the little world is complicated through

multiple metaphorical associations; the language, however, often reflects back upon the simplicity of the literal context of the poem. Donne expands his metaphor so that the little world made of flesh and spirit is compared to the recently discovered foreign lands and giant celestial bodies "beyond that heaven which was most high" (5). With this introduction of other planetary bodies, the image of a world suddenly takes on new metaphorical depth. It is not an abstract comparison between the microcosm of the human body and soul and the macrocosmic universe, as A.C Partridge (134)[34] argues, but rather the speaker symbolically *transforms into* a foreign land. As the quatrain continues, the distinction between the referent (the speaker) and the symbol (a world) becomes less and less obvious. The speaker becomes more like the mountains and valleys of distant lands than a person, even containing his own oceans: "Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might / Drown my world with my weeping earnestly, / Or wash it if it must be drowned no more" (7-9). At the same time that this figurative language is developing a life of its own, the speaker reminds us that this language is also meant to be understood in terms of the speaker's physical body: the oceans of distant lands and of the speaker's little world are also the speaker's tears.

These lines comparing his tears and sorrow to the depths of an ocean also transform the punishment of the speaker's body and soul into a catastrophic global

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34 Partridge highlights the manner in which Donne situates the microcosm of man in context of the macrocosmic universe; however, he only speaks of this as a philosophical connection common to early modern thought rather than as the symbolic connection of poetic metaphor. I argue instead that the language of the poem does not simply call attention to the similarities between man and universe but that the speaker actually begins to see himself as a macrocosmic entity, experiencing his microcosmic emotions as universal cataclysmic events.

punishment of his symbolic self. The drowning of the speaker's world through his tears

not only reflects his sorrow, but more poignantly, it points to the punishment of the

biblical flood.[35] In Genesis, God sent an epic flood to punish the guilty and to cleanse the

world of the horrible deeds perpetrated by humanity. The speaker appropriates this global

punishment and applies it to himself as he becomes the symbolic world to which he is

compared. He is neither the guilty men destroyed by the flood nor the faithful Noah who

is saved, but the world which survives the punishment washed clean and able to start

afresh. The emphasis, then, of the destructive flood, is the hope that these punishments

can bring redemption, that the flood may "wash it if it must be drowned no more" (9).

The speaker's hope is that the drowning of the symbolic little world (which represents

him), like baptism, through which one symbolically dies to sin and is reborn into a life of

grace,[36] will stand in for his own punishment and result in his salvation. Instead of

experiencing the punishment himself, the speaker asks that the symbolic version of

himself be punished, allowing him to receive the redemption symbolically.

This sacramental use of the symbolic world becomes more clearly evident in the

ninth line, in which the speaker changes the pronouns by which he refers to himself.[37]

35 Arthur Clements highlights the connection of this line to the flood in an annotation to this line in his edition of the poem (117).

36 "Knowe ye not, that all we whiche haue ben baptized into Iesus Christe, haue ben baptized into his death. We are buryed then with him by baptisme into his death, that lykewyse as Christe was raysed vp from the dead by the glorie of the father: euen so, we also shoulde walke in newnesse of lyfe. For if we be graft together by the likenesse of his death: euen so shall we be [partakers] of the resurrection. Knowyng this, that our olde man is crucified with hym also, that the body of sinne might vtterly be destroyed, that hencefoorth we shoulde not serue sinne" (Rom 6:3-6).

37 Martz suggests that Donne here breaks the traditional sonnet pattern, instead "using a mode of violent hyperbole" (Martz 53), and suggests that the overflow of the sin plaint mimics an example in Ingnation meditation.

The poem subtly transitions away from "*my* world with *my* weeping earnestly" (9, my emphasis) to the impersonal and distant "it" of lines nine through twelve. The world is still clearly identified with the speaker; however, the symbol now also has an existence separate from the speaker. The speaker has created a symbolic version of himself that can sacramentally stand in for him, much as the elements of the Eucharist not only represent Christ's sacrifice but actually stand in for his presence amongst the faithful. The speaker seems to believe that what is done to the symbolic image might likewise be done to him. The influence of this assumption is evident in how the speaker subtly transfers the punishment due to him onto the symbolic version of himself. This transition occurs at the same time as the speaker loses agency over his own punishment. For while the flood can be said to originate from his own sorrowful tears, the punishment by fire is inevitable, as the world "must be burnt" (10) and is in fact already burnt "heretofore" from the consequences of lust and envy. As the speaker faces the impending punishment of apocalyptic fire, he tries to replace himself more completely with his symbolic world in an attempt to sacramentally experience the punishment in order that he might actually experience the renewal God's fire paradoxically brings.

In the final five lines of the poem the speaker continues to exploit the sacramental representation of himself in the symbolic world. The speaker is trying to displace this destructive energy upon his symbolic world while allowing himself to experience the redemptive fire of the zeal of the lord. The speaker longs to experience the purgation of fiery judgement without experiencing the punishment, which he displaces symbolically.

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The speaker expresses great faith that his symbolism can do this sacramental work: as Theresa DiPasquale points out, since "the logic of Donne's sonnet is built upon the microcosm/macrocosm analogy, Donne can hope that the heavens and the earth of his microcosm - his spirit and his body - will also be transformed by purgative flame" (DiPasquale 405). Thus, while the symbolic world experiences the destructive effects of the speaker's lust and envy, the speaker is free to be consumed "with a fiery zeal / Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal" (13-14). The speaker plays with the dual image of fire in scripture, for in addition to the fiery apocalyptic fire that, "it was believed, would end the world" (Clements 117 n5), fire also refines and purifies.[38]

Throughout the poem, Donne is doing two things with his metaphor: he is mixing figurative and literal language, creating a symbolic world while maintaining a language that also applies to the speaker's own flesh and soul, and through sacramental substitution displacing divine punishment and the negative consequences of sin onto his symbolic world while appropriating the redemptive attributes that come with those punishments onto his literal/real self. In the first half of poem, the language unites the speaker and his little world, constructing both through the same language. This dual image (of body and symbol) then leads him to understand his punishment in terms of his symbolic world's global punishments (the flood and apocalypse), and his redemption in terms of his literal self. The connection between the world and the speaker reflects some of the ambiguity of

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38 "Euery mans worke shal appeare. The day shall declare it, because it shalbe reuealed by the fire: And the fire shall trie euery mans worke what it is. If any mans worke that he hath built vpon abyde, he shall receaue a reward" (1 Cor 3:13-14).

sacramental understandings of figurative language, and Donne's experimentation with the power of an image to represent points to the theological aesthetic.

Donne's poetry contains a conscious manipulation of metaphor, highlighting both the playfulness and frustration of metaphor's (in)ability to represent. As a result, Donne's poetry is self-reflexive, and is conscious and attentive to what it is doing—metaphor being at the heart of what it is doing. In the poems we have examined we find different explorations of this idea. "The Cross" is an intentional meditation on the possibilities of figurative thought that begins with confidence in symbolic representation but descends into chaotic confusion about representation, while "Holy Sonnet 10" is a poem that from the start reveals a frustration with the failure of figurative language to represent complex ideas. As the poet becomes more frustrated, his imagery becomes more unstable; the poem employs rapidly shifting and violent imagery as well as different types of metaphorical structures to portray the speaker's inability to give voice to his separation and anticipated reunion with God. Finally, "Holy Sonnet 2" uses two metaphorical strategies to connect the speaker to his symbolic world. It mixes figurative and literal language, creating a symbolic world while maintaining a "real" world, literal understanding of the language. At the same time, it utilizes sacramental substitution to displace divine punishment and the negative consequences of sin onto the speaker's symbolic world while appropriating the redemptive attributes that come with those punishments onto the speaker's literal/real self.

These poems suggest the high stakes of metaphorical representation in Donne's

poetry. In these poems, the ability of metaphor to represent seems to be intricately connected to the speaker's salvation and understanding of the divine. Where Southwell seems to struggle to describe the divine, Donne's difficulty is in defining his relationship to the divine in metaphor—both of these struggles were tossed into the air during the Reformation.

Conclusion

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the English Reformation introduced complex theological debates to the popular consciousness. Although the English Church tried to navigate a middle way through the extremities of the continental debates, pervasive uncertainty regarding several theological issues persisted throughout the era. The prominence of the debates surrounding the Eucharist and scriptural interpretation were so pervasive that they not only impacted religious belief, but fundamentally shifted early modern thought. My thesis has focused on the ways in which these two debates affected the understanding of the representational potential of figurative language. I have termed the resulting uncertainty surrounding metaphor in the poetry of the period the "theological aesthetic."

The theological aesthetic arises out of and within the Reformation debates surrounding understandings of scripture and sacrament (as well as other theological divides during the Reformation, such as conceptions of grace, penance, and purgatory, not explored here) and reflects and develops alongside the transition from a medieval understanding of the world to a more modern understanding of it. It is a revision of the relationship between symbol and referent, a reconsideration of the relationship between what happens here on earth and what happens in the spiritual realm. I have argued that the violence with which these doctrinal statements are questioned, uprooted and examined within England simultaneously instigates a renewed focus on metaphor in the

poetry of the time, while also inciting doubt over the efficacy of metaphor. This general

distrust of metaphor results in a variety of different, elaborate experimentations with

metaphor (such as layerings, rapid transitions between metaphors, and so on), which I

have traced in detail in the poetry of Robert Southwell and John Donne.

   The poetry of both Robert Southwell and John Donne exhibits a preoccupation

with metaphor and, as we have seen, both poets explore several different forms of

metaphorical structure within their poetry. While Southwell compounds multiple images

together (more or less successfully) in layered and complex attempts to represent the

divine, Donne seems to recognize more explicitly the challenges associated with

figurative language, especially regarding the representation of his speakers' relationship

with God. While the exploration of metaphor and figurative language by these poets often

seems playful, it often arises out of a sense of urgency and desperation to represent the

unrepresentable.

   The metaphorical experimentation so prevalent in Southwell and Donne seems to

persist throughout the civil war in the dramatic metaphors of the metaphysical poets and

the scandalous images of the cavalier poets; however, as the theological debates which

gave rise to the metaphorical crisis of the Reformation began to decline toward the end of

the protectorate, metaphorical experimentation also declined. By the time Milton is

writing his epic *Paradise Lost* metaphors no longer seem to be the focus, and by the time

early literary critics like Samuel Johnson are writing in the mid eighteenth century the

metaphorical expressions associated with the theological aesthetic seem absurd and

unpoetic.

      While my analysis is limited to the Reformation debates and poetry of early modern England, I believe that my approach to understanding metaphor through contemporaneous historical frameworks might be applied to other dramatic shifts in dominant worldview. In the early modern period, theology was the dominant worldview; however, in the modernist period, for example, (when Donne and other metaphysical poets were rediscovered by Grierson and Eliot) society underwent another fundamental shift of world view in which meta-narratives including theology were exposed as being untenable and consequently dismissed. While a study of modernist metaphor or an analysis of any other prominent shift in figurative thinking will look decidedly different from the study offered here, I believe that my approach to understanding figurative thought through external historical frameworks of thought has the potential to expand beyond the scope of my project.

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