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CLSG
www.clsg.org
editor@clsg.org

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Editorial

You might be converted, after previous indifference, to a cause such as that of saving the natural environment, but conversion in Christian tradition is often a change of life involving the turnaround, the metamorphosis, the *metanoia*, of repentance. Somewhat like translation, the topic of a CLSG conference in 2007, it's a transition from one state or identity to another, yet retaining an essential continuity of identity. In historical narratives, of the late medieval period for example, conversion which had previously meant a turn from paganism, came to mean a passing into the life of a religious. Then in Protestant tradition, following the New Testament, conversion is usually but not always an individual matter, albeit with implications of community.

The idea of conversion has some overlap with the tropes of calling and of theophany. There's a definable pre- and post- phase of life for figures like Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and others. Before his conversion there was Saul, then he was Paul. For Simon there had been a parallel moment after which he became Peter, the Rock. With Augustine these constitute, in the Christian tradition, paradigmatic examples, with after-echoes in Bunyan's allegory and in the testimonies of countless converts to gathered church congregations in Britain from the 17th century onwards.

The tradition goes forward with figures such as Luther, Donne, Bunyan, John Newton, Wesley, Newman, C. S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, Charles Colson and Anne Rice. In this issue the papers from David Parry, Anna Walczuk and Kerstin Shands, given at the CLSG conference of 2012, take the discussion still further.

Telling the story of our own or another life is a way to interpret and to discover a meaning in it. The story necessarily takes shape from other stories, other understandings. The big stories and metanarratives have the status of myths, and lend their form to a numerous progeny. When we try to understand matters of personal or collective origin and destiny, or to chart the course of circumstances, making reference to the Creator of everything, our stories can acquire a transcendental context, and take a radical turn.

Roger Kojecký

‘God breaketh not all men’s hearts alike’: Early Modern Conversion Narratives in Contemporary Perspective

David Parry

Conversion and its representation in narrative are currently undergoing a resurgence of interest within early modern studies, both literary and historical – one manifestation of the broader religious turn across the humanities in recent years.¹ This is exemplified by a major research project on ‘Conversion Narratives in Early Modern Europe’ currently underway at the University of York.² This present interest in conversion recapitulates and recasts a venerable body of older scholarship on what was termed ‘Puritan conversion narrative’ by the likes of Edmund Morgan, Owen Watkins, and Patricia Caldwell.³ In many ways this article revisits a presentation given by Roger Pooley to a Christian Literary Studies Group day conference on John Bunyan in November 1986 (later published in lightly revised form for the tercentenary of Bunyan’s death in 1988) which summarised and engaged much of this scholarship.⁴ In this article, I will engage some of the same questions as Pooley in light of the current state of the field.

There are accounts of conversion throughout Christian history, beginning in the New Testament, with Augustine’s *Confessions* being one of the best-known post-Biblical instances. However, conversion narrative as a recognised genre attained prominence in the seventeenth century, particularly, but not exclusively, in what can be broadly called a Puritan milieu. The written genre of conversion narrative gained traction from the requirement of many ‘gathered churches’ that prospective members give what Bunyan calls ‘*a Relation of the work of God upon my own Soul*’ as a condition of being admitted to membership in the congregation.⁵ Whilst such conditions for church membership were imposed in some of the churches of the Puritan New England colonies relatively early in the seventeenth century, as well as in expatriate English congregations in continental Europe, it is only in the middle of the seventeenth century that gathered congregations of ‘visible saints’ became widespread in England.

In her recent book *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World*, Kathleen Lynch pinpoints with startling specificity the rise of the conversion narrative: ‘the timing of combustion can be dated precisely to 1653, when some religious

¹ On the ‘religious turn’ in literary studies of the early modern period, see Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, ‘The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies’, *Criticism*, 46.1 (2004), 167-90.

² The website for this project provides helpful resources for all researchers in the field: <http://www.york.ac.uk/crems/conversion/> (accessed 8 December 2012).

³ Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, 1963; repr. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1965; Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972; Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

⁴ Roger Pooley, ‘Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Autobiography: Some Contexts for *Grace Abounding*’, *Baptist Quarterly*, 32.8 (1988), 393-402. The original conference paper is freely available at the CLSG website: <http://www.cls.org/html/pooley-bunyan.htm> (accessed 8 December 2012).

⁵ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* [1666], in John Stachniewski with Anita Pacheco (ed.), *Grace Abounding with other Spiritual Autobiographies*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 3.

radicals, mostly Independents, took the political upheavals that saw a Commonwealth yield to a Protectorate to be the millenarian opportunity for which they had been waiting.⁶ Though there are individual conversion narratives predating 1653, often left in manuscript, Lynch notes that 1653 saw three collections of conversion narratives printed and disseminated: *Spiritual Experiences of Sundry Beleevers*, probably compiled by Henry Walker, John Rogers's *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh: A Tabernacle for the Sun*, and John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew's *Tears of Repentance*.

Whilst all three were printed in London, and Walker's collection came from a London congregation, Eliot and Mayhew's collection testified to their missionary labours among the Algonquian tribes adjoining the New England colonies, and Rogers's collection was from a Dublin congregation mostly made up of Cromwellian soldiers. Lynch argues plausibly that these publications, whilst seemingly apolitical, were taking advantage of the arrival of Cromwell's Protectorate to push for a new religious settlement based on Congregationalist gathered church principles.

In his 1963 book *Visible Saints*, Edmund Morgan coined the phrase 'morphology of conversion' to describe a standard pattern of spiritual experience which emerges from many such narratives of the time.⁷ Lynch opts for the more alliterative phrase 'semiotics of salvation'.⁸ Dozens of these accounts follow the same pattern, where the narrator starts out in a state of ignorance and depravity and gradually comes into contact with the preaching of God's word, causing the protagonist to realise his or her sinful state. This often leads to a period of seeking to reform oneself morally and thus to live a life acceptable to God, which ends in failure and despair. At this point, the retrospective self depicted begins to understand that salvation is offered by the free promises of God in the Gospel, but it is often a long and agonising struggle before the speaker can believe that these promises truly apply to him or her.

The patterns of experience found in these narratives broadly fit the stages which the works of practical divinity written by Puritan divines led people to expect. The secondary literature most often cites the Elizabethan Cambridge preacher William Perkins for a conveniently codified version of the morphology of conversion, but Perkins was indebted to the pioneer of English practical divinity Richard Greenham, who ministered in the village of Dry Drayton near Cambridge, and Greenham's pastoral diagnoses as a 'physician of the soul' were taken up by many English Reformed divines besides Perkins.⁹ To a large extent, Greenham's methods were a pastoral application of Luther's distinction between the Law of God, which brings conviction of sin but cannot save, and the Gospel, the free promise of God which gives eternal life to those who believe. One might say that Luther's theological dialectic between Law and Gospel is turned into a diagnostic tool by Greenham, into a prescriptive pattern by Perkins, and into a narrative recipe by the spiritual autobiographers of the mid-seventeenth century.

Whilst older literary scholarship tended to see Protestantism in general and

⁶ Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 120. Some of the ideas and a few of the sentences in this article are borrowed, by kind permission of Oxford University Press, from my review essay on Lynch's book: David Parry, 'The Semiotics of Salvation', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 41.4 (2012), 463-70.

⁷ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, p. 66.

⁸ Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography*, p. 7.

⁹ On Greenham, see Kenneth L. Parker and Eric Josef Carlson, '*Practical Divinity*': *The Works and Life of Revd. Richard Greenham*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998, and John H. Primus, *Richard Greenham: Portrait of an Elizabethan Pastor*, Macon, GA, Mercer University Press, 1998.

Puritanism in particular as promoting an individualistic concern with one's own salvation, Lynch emphasises how the oral and textual transmission of individual spiritual experience arises from and is addressed to communities of shared belief. Drawing on her scholarly strengths in book history, Lynch demonstrates this particularly through careful attention to the material features of the publications she discusses. It is often through the allegiances of booksellers, printers, and licensors that Lynch draws out the political resonances of seemingly apolitical religious works, and typefaces, printer's rules, page signatures, and marginalia are made to bear witness under her skilful cross-examination.

Lynch's emphasis on the communal validation of individual experience reflects a general shift in literary studies towards a focus on communities of reading and writing rather than single authors considered in isolation. However, there is already an implicit communal dimension in the older scholarship, if less fully developed, in the discernment of a common narrative pattern in Puritan spiritual autobiography. This leads Roger Pooley to ask: 'should the pattern disturb us, as a sign of inauthenticity, of conforming to the pattern set down rather than the individuality of the experience?'¹⁰

'As if his book had been written out of my heart': Bunyan and Luther

Intriguingly, this is an anxiety also expressed by John Bunyan in perhaps the best-known seventeenth-century spiritual autobiography, his *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). Writing from prison in the early Restoration period, but relating his spiritual quest in the 1650s during the Interregnum, Bunyan recalls:

I did greatly long to see some ancient Godly man's Experience, who had writ some hundreds of years before I was born; for, for those who had writ in our days, I thought (but desire them now to pardon me) that they had Writ only that which others felt, or else had, thorow the strength of their Wits and Parts, studied to answer such Objections as they perceived others were perplexed with, without going down themselves into the deep.¹¹

The younger Bunyan in the narrative is sceptical about the contemporary spiritual autobiographies he is reading. Though he does not put it quite in these terms, he suspects that the authors of these accounts may simply be replicating the generic expectations for conversion narrative rather than recounting their own authentic spiritual experience.

Bunyan's desire to read 'some ancient Godly man's Experience' is a quest to find a historical continuity in Christian experience which transcends his own immediate context and so confirms that his experience of grace has a transcendent divine source. His desire is answered by an encounter with Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians, probably the 1575 English translation of Luther's 1535 commentary. Bunyan records:

Now I was pleased much that such an old Book had fallen into my hand; the which, when I had but a little way perused, I found my condition in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart; this made me marvel: for thus thought I, this man could not know any thing of the state of Christians now, but must needs write and speak the Experience of former days.¹²

Luther has a profound influence on Bunyan's thought, particularly his understanding of the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. Incidentally,

¹⁰ Pooley, 'Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Autobiography', p. 397.

¹¹ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, pp. 37-8.

¹² Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 38.

Luther's Galatians commentary includes extended discussion of the nature of allegory, justifying Paul's allegorical reading in Galatians 4 of the Genesis narrative of Hagar and Sarah within the framework of a Protestant hermeneutic suspicious of medieval allegorical readings, and so suggesting some lines of defence for Bunyan's later turn to allegory in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹³

Bunyan's finding of his own 'condition' in Luther's 'experience' reassures him that his own particular experiences of spiritual struggle participate in a pattern of universal significance. It also gives him hope that he is not alone in his struggles, and that he, like Luther, can work through his spiritual struggles to find an assurance that the promise of grace applies to him.

Yet what is curious about this is that nowhere in his Galatians commentary does Luther recount a conversion experience of his own directly. There are a few places in which Luther speaks in the first person about his past attempts as a monk to gain favour with God by his religious performances and his present struggles to keep trusting in the free grace of God, and there is one place where he briefly describes in the third person the experience of a generic repentant sinner:

Here then he beginneth to sigh, and saith in this wise: Who then can geue succour? For he being thus terrified with the law, vtterly despaireth of his own strength: he loketh about, and sigheth for the helpe of a Mediatour and Sauour. Here then cometh in good time the holesome word of the Gospell, and saith: *Sonne, thy sinnes are forgeuen thee*.¹⁴

However, Luther nowhere presents in narrative form how he has come to the convictions he now holds. In fact, as David Steinmetz has discussed, the first generation of Protestant Reformers showed relatively little interest in pinpointing a moment of conversion, and tended to talk about conversion as an ongoing renewal of life rather than a once for all event.¹⁵

Bunyan's reading of Luther's commentary as resonating with his own story is thus a transposition of doctrine into narrative, foreshadowing in some ways the narrative presentation of Reformation doctrine in *The Pilgrim's Progress* a few years later. Bunyan scholars often quote Bunyan's remark that 'I do prefer this Book of Mr. Luther upon the *Galathians*, (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the Books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded Conscience'.¹⁶ However, Bunyanists do not generally note that this language is very similar to the preface to the reader given to the English translation of Luther's commentary by Edwin Sandys, bishop of London at the time the translation was first printed. Sandys is writing in his role as a licenser of books, but goes beyond simply authorising publication:

This booke being brought vnto me to peruse and to consider of, I thought it my part, not onely to allowe of it to the print, but also to commend it to the Reader, as a treatise most

¹³ See, for instance, Daniel V. Runyon, 'Luther's Influence on Bunyan's Use of Allegory', *Bunyan Studies*, 14 (2010), 76-84.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *A Commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians*, London, 1575, fol. 61v.

¹⁵ David C. Steinmetz, 'Starting Over: Reformation and Conversion', in *Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in Historical Perspective*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 69-77.

¹⁶ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 38. See, for instance, Vera J. Camden, "'Most Fit for a Wounded Conscience": The Place of Luther's "Commentary on Galatians" in *Grace Abounding*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 50.3 (1997), 819-49.

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comfortable to all afflicted consciences exercised in the Schole of Christ. The Author felt what he spake, and had experience of what he wrote, and therefore able more liuely to expresse both the assaults and the saluing, the order of the battell, and the meane of the victory. Satan is the enemy, the victorie is by onely faith in Christ, as Iohn recordeth. If Christe iustifie, who can condemne, saith S. Paule.¹⁷

Sandys's preface to Luther's commentary has significant resonances with Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, which relates the assaults of the Tempter to drive Bunyan to despair, and Bunyan's victories over the tempter by coming to see that Christ is interceding for him before God's throne. Not only the themes of Sandys's preface, but some of Sandys's specific wording finds echoes in *Grace Abounding*. Bunyan writes that, when he began his preaching ministry, 'I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel'.¹⁸ Despite his present difficulties with the episcopal Church of England at the time of writing *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan is perhaps reading Luther's commentary through the lens of this episcopal preface.

Readers often find *Grace Abounding* a frustrating experience. One reason for this is that it is extremely difficult to pinpoint a specific moment of conversion for Bunyan. This is largely because, rather than moving straightforwardly from the terrors of the Law to the assurance of the Gospel, the young Bunyan seems to cycle between them over and over and over again. After a relatively brief account of his early life, famously sparse on such trivial details as the name of his first wife, and detailing his youthful wickednesses, including lying, swearing, and bellringing, Bunyan decides to reform his life, which he describes as 'my great Conversion, from prodigious prophaneness, to something like a moral life'.¹⁹ Yet although this so-called conversion impressed his neighbours, Bunyan the narrator informs us that he still had no true knowledge of Christ and that his attempts to live a righteous life by his own willpower were woefully inadequate.

About a tenth of the way into his account, Bunyan describes how his work as a tinker brought him to Bedford where 'I came where there was three or four women sitting at a door in the Sun, and talking about the things of God'.²⁰ This encounter brings him into contact with the Independent congregation at Bedford, under the leadership of John Gifford. Having learned from the Bedford Independents the doctrines of a spiritual new birth and of grace offered freely through the promises of the Gospel, the majority of the rest of the book is taken up with a lengthy battle for Bunyan to believe that these promises apply to him. He describes duelling scriptural texts, some promising salvation and some threatening damnation, the fear of having committed the unforgiveable sin, and his many battles with 'the Tempter'.

In a foundational text for the psychology of religion, William James comments of John Bunyan that 'He was a typical case of the psychopathic temperament, sensitive of conscience to a diseased degree, beset by doubts, fear and insistent ideas, and a victim of verbal automatisms, both motor and sensory.'²¹ Much literary scholarship on Bunyan has followed the lead of James by inferring that Bunyan suffered from psychological illness, giving him odd obsessions such as the idea that if he truly

¹⁷ Edwinus London (=Edwin Sandys), 'To the Reader', in Luther, *Commentarie*, sig. *ii^r.

¹⁸ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 78.

¹⁹ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 13.

²⁰ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 14.

²¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* [1902], repr. London, Longmans, 1942, p. 154.

had faith he could command the puddles to be dry. In a variant on this approach, John Stachniewski has argued influentially that Bunyan's Calvinist convictions are themselves sufficient to account for his predestinarian paranoia without invoking brain chemistry. Stachniewski criticises scholars with Christian commitments who 'are given to seeing the essence of their faith as unchanging, so that they are guided by an inclination to read their own religious experience back into the past, fleshing this out with the historical accidentals'.²²

More recently, Michael Davies has challenged readings of Bunyan dominated by despair, arguing that Bunyan intends to guide his readers to an assured confidence in God's grace and that his experience in *Grace Abounding* is not presented as normative, but is rather a 'map of misreadings' through which Bunyan is warning his readers how not to read Scripture and how not to read their own spiritual experience.²³ I think Davies is right to resist the reductionism of many psychoanalytic readings of Bunyan, but there is also some validity in Stachniewski's caution to us against rubbing off the rough edges of Bunyan's struggles to fit a pattern that may be more comfortable for us.

In a retelling of *The Pilgrim's Progress* for children, Rhoda Couldridge provides an introduction explaining to her readers who John Bunyan was. In this introduction, the account of Bunyan's conversion is somewhat telescoped:

John was ashamed and again decided to lead a better life, but he soon forgot and went back to his old ways. Then he met a young lady and fell in love with her.

When they were married she often talked about her father and how he had tried to follow in the way of Jesus Christ. Gradually John began to see the things that were wrong in his own life. He started to read the Bible and other books that would help him.

One day he gave his heart to the Lord Jesus. His fears and his wicked ways were gone. John was so happy then that he had to tell others about Jesus Christ. He went to the villages near by and preached there. Many people listened to him, but some were angry. They did not like what they heard and because of this John was arrested and put into prison.²⁴

Unfortunately, this does not fit Bunyan's experience as he records it in *Grace Abounding*. Rather, Bunyan records that even when he first began preaching: 'I went my self in chains to preach to them in chains, and carried that fire in my conscience that I persuaded them to beware of.'²⁵ In an effort to make Bunyan's life improving for her young readers, Couldridge falls prey to the temptation to improve Bunyan's story to fit a different prescribed pattern of spiritual experience, in which true saving faith leads instantly to continuous and unclouded peace and joy.

It is untrue to Bunyan's narrative to reduce his experience either to perpetual paranoia or to instantaneous certainty. Leaving to one side questions of the truth value of Calvinist understandings of predestination, a fair reading of the lived experience of those who subscribed to Reformed theology in the early modern period suggests that Reformed doctrine could induce both anxiety and assurance, depending on how one read the doctrine and how one read one's own experience.

²² John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991, p. 2

²³ Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 113.

²⁴ Rhoda Couldridge, *Christian's Journey: John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, Guildford and London, Lutterworth, 1979, pp. 4-5. This retelling features some impressive illustrations by the author's then ten-year-old daughter Anna.

²⁵ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 78.

A change of church and a change of soul

Conversion is a slippery subject to study for a number of reasons. One is an ambiguity of definition. The word 'conversion' is routinely used to refer both to an externally visible change of religious affiliation, and to an internal change whereby one turns from sin to receive the grace of God – in Molly Murray's pithy formulation, 'a change of church' and 'a change of soul'.²⁶ These two changes may of course correlate in the eyes of interested parties, with one being the sign of the other, but, whether or not a given scholar believes that claims to the inward reception of grace correspond to any objective reality, it is necessary to acknowledge the conceptual distinction in order to understand converts and conversion narratives on their own terms.

One writer of spiritual autobiography who, by his own account, underwent both kinds of conversion, but not at the same time, was Richard Norwood. Norwood was the chief surveyor of the Bermuda islands, a pearl diver, and a noted mathematician later in life, but his written 'Confessions' recount a restless youth – Owen Watkins comments that 'his life story sounds like the plot of a picaresque novel'.²⁷

Norwood began writing his memoirs in a small octavo notebook in 1639, in his forty-ninth year – the first page of the journal records that one day, a day that Norwood had set aside for prayer and fasting, he 'endeavoured to call to mind the whole course of my life past, and how the Lord had dealt with me', and, realising that he was beginning to forget things as he got older, he 'determined then to set them down in writing', which he did on Saturday afternoons for the following year.²⁸ He finished writing his account in 1640, a decade before the efflorescence of published conversion narratives, but, although Norwood's works on triangles, trigonometry, and tropical islands were printed in his lifetime,²⁹ his 'Confessions' were not printed until the twentieth century, making it unclear who his intended audience was or whether there was an intended audience besides God and himself.

The 'Confessions' do not in fact cover the whole course of his life past, but conclude in 1620 when Norwood was around thirty. Unlike Bunyan, Norwood reports a godly upbringing, and acknowledges having had a 'childish piety' including learning psalms and praying not to be beaten at school, but he deems this 'not much material in respect of any true conversion'.³⁰ Following his father's losses in business, the family moved from Stevenage to Berkhamsted, where, Norwood says, there was a good minister who preached faithfully and catechised the children:

So that sometimes I seemed to myself to be indeed almost converted. But surely they were only fleeting persuasions and I did not well understand from what to convert, nor to what, nor could distinctly discern what piety was but only in a general and very confused and uncertain manner.³¹

²⁶ Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 7.

²⁷ Watkins, *The Puritan Experience*, p. 70.

²⁸ *The Journal of Richard Norwood, Surveyor of Bermuda*, ed. Wesley Frank Craven and Walter B. Hayward, New York, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1945, p. 3. An abridged version of Norwood's 'Confessions' which preserves the original spelling can be found in Stachniewski and Pacheco (eds), *Grace Abounding with other Spiritual Autobiographies*, pp. 123-55.

²⁹ See 'Bibliography of Norwood's Writings', prepared by William A. Jackson, in Norwood, *Journal*, pp. lvii-lxiv.

³⁰ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 6.

³¹ Norwood, *Journal*, pp. 9-10.

Norwood had a grammar school education, enabling him later in life to read Latin books, including the works of Augustine, which play a similar role in his conversion to that which Luther's Galatians commentary does for Bunyan. However, Norwood's education was cut short by his parents' straitened financial situation and the loss of his scholarship to a schoolmate, and so his parents apprenticed him to a fishmonger. The young apprentice, stirred by the tales of mariners passing through, had itchy feet, 'seeing I was like to gain little or no skill in navigation by his means and to have only short and toilsome voyages to Newcastle especially', and so broke away illegally from his master to become a seafarer.³²

Finding himself some time later in continental Europe, the young Norwood takes a fancy to visiting Rome. However, to be admitted to the papal capital, he needs a letter from a papal nuncio, which requires a letter 'from one of the English priests or Jesuits in Louvain'.³³ After some initial conscientious qualms, Norwood performs the signs of conversion to Catholicism:

Thus, after some weeks there I very desperately dissembled seeming to be convinced and to embrace that religion, confessed to a priest, and received their sacrament, and then had a letter commendatory from one of the chief of them to the Pope's Nuntio's at Bruxelles for procuring his letter for my journey to Rome, which he readily upon the sight of that letter granted.³⁴

This is a false conversion in two senses. One is that, from the perspective of Norwood as narrator, it is conversion to an apostate, falsified form of Christianity. Secondly, it is an inauthentic conversion where the outward signs do not express an inward conviction. Nevertheless, Norwood's performance obtains two documents vouching for the authenticity of his conversion, perhaps raising questions for us about how reliably writing is able to authenticate conversion.

Having outwardly been received into the Church of Rome, Norwood begins to be persuaded by his Catholic companions, which helps to salve his conscience over dissembling, since it brings his inward disposition more into line with his outward confession. However, in retrospect, Norwood sees his use of 'crossing, lights, holy water in a superstitious manner, thinking it may be they do some good' as an instance of sin compounding sin and leading him from deliberate deception into self-delusion.³⁵

Norwood's wanderings arguably recapitulate the story of the prodigal son, with his journey into a far country away from his father's house enacting his spiritual delinquency, a story, which, according to Richard Helgerson, was pervasive in the work of male Elizabethan writers of prose fiction such as Philip Sidney and Robert Greene.³⁶ It is in Rome that Norwood realises that he has gone out of the way:

And thus without the special grace and good providence of God I had wandered further from home and withal should have had my heart more and more alienated from my native country, countrymen, and friends, from religion which was now as it seemed almost extinct, and from God. But the Lord was graciously pleased to set limits to my wanderings which otherwise were boundless and confused, tending to the place of confusion and destruction.³⁷

³² Norwood, *Journal*, p. 16.

³³ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 21.

³⁴ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 23.

³⁵ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 24.

³⁶ Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

³⁷ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 28.

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The Lord's providential limits on Norwood's wanderings manifest themselves in the form of 'two or three gallant English ships' present in Naples when Norwood arrives there.³⁸ It is at this point that Norwood decides to return to England, where he continues his struggle towards true faith, seeking spiritual counsel and experiencing 'sundry thoughts and motions inwardly of a full conversion to God and newness of life'.³⁹ However, he is not able to stay in England long, but, to what seems to him to be his spiritual peril, is compelled to go to sea again. After further adventures, he eventually finds himself in Bermuda, where he is given the task of surveying the island. There, largely alone with his thoughts and his books, including a Latin Vulgate Bible and works by Augustine and William Perkins, Norwood finally breaks through to what he calls 'an undoubted assurance of the remission of my sins and sure reconciliation with God in Christ.'⁴⁰

Yet his spiritual experience was not always so consolatory. Seeking to read his own heart against the marks of grace he read about in Perkins's treatise on *The Right Knowledge of Christ Crucified*, Norwood was troubled that he 'could not sensibly find my heart so disposed towards him [God] as that treatise describes it should', the victim perhaps of an overly stringent semiotics of salvation which troubled his faith 'even unto this day'.⁴¹

The complexity of the changes effected by inward and outward conversions, and the fluidity of personal identity thus revealed form the theme of Craig Harline's recent book *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America*. In this study, both novel and novelesque, Harline bravely and movingly departs from scholarly convention by juxtaposing the story of Jacob Rolandus, the son of a seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed preacher son who runs away from home and becomes a Jesuit, with the story of 'Michael Sunbloom', the pseudonym for a friend of the author's who converted to Mormonism in the 1970s from an evangelical family, only to leave the LDS church on discovering his gay identity. It reads enough like a novel for one to feel a slight twinge at giving away the twist in the tale. In the case of his seventeenth-century story, the impulse for the project comes from Harline's chance find of Jacob's journal in the Belgian national archives:

I don't forget myself completely, like the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes, who after a discovery he made supposedly ran naked into the street, excitedly waving his arms. Most archives, sticklers for quiet, would probably frown on that. But I do silently raise my hands in triumph.⁴²

As with Richard Norwood, Jacob Rolandus's spiritual journey takes him on a physical journey to Rome (on foot through the Alps), and to the new world, in Jacob's case as a Jesuit missionary to Brazil. Craig Harline's ancestors emigrated from Sweden to Utah on their conversion to Mormonism, but Harline returns to the European old world, first as a young Mormon missionary to Belgium and later as an academic researcher, as does his friend Michael, who settles in Switzerland with his partner

³⁸ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 28.

³⁹ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 81.

⁴¹ Norwood, *Journal*, p. 86. It is with this episode that Kathleen Lynch begins her study (Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography*, pp. 1-12).

⁴² Craig Harline, *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America*, Yale University Press, 2011, p. 10.

Stefan.

Harline, a historian at Brigham Young University, is an active practising Mormon and features as such a character in the story he tells about his friend; but this book does not come across as an apologia for Mormonism. Harline has said in interview that it is an apologetic for the relevance of history to the present-day concerns of ordinary people, but the book has another message of a more broadly ethical rather than overtly religious kind, which, like the message of the other narratives discussed in this article, is embodied in its genre. Though this is a study of real historical actors grounded in documentary source material, Harline's novelistic mode of writing entails exercises in empathy, imagining how his characters would have felt.

This empathy extends across the hotly contested confessional boundaries which his characters traverse. Harline indeed conveys with empathy Michael's conversion to Mormonism, but he also shows an empathetic understanding of his parents' hostility, as here with regard to Michael's father, also named Michael but called Mike in Harline's narrative to differentiate him:

This wasn't how he'd envisioned life going for his talented son. Mike had found the Lord and was sure that Michael, despite his recent spiritual wanderings, would find the Lord too. But you couldn't find the Lord through a cult such as Mormonism, Mike was sure of that.⁴³

Similarly, Harline imagines from the inside the zealous convictions both of young Jacob and of the family he left behind. This takes on a particular poignancy through the surviving three-year correspondence of Jacob and his sister Maria, who mix standard interconfessional polemic with a tangible sibling affection tinged with sorrow that the other was clearly hell-bound for their membership of a false church, as with this extract from Maria's final letter to her brother:

It is a great sorrow and persistent ache that I notice no sobering up in you from the wine of the glass of the great whore, which has made you drunk, and touched your mind, taken your reason, and even blown out the light of natural love.⁴⁴

By titling his book *Conversions*, Harline foregrounds different meanings of the word 'conversion' and wrestles with different levels of explanation:

As with all converts, surely other factors besides pure religious zeal were operating on Michael, such as his stage of life. As a 1979 study of conversion put it: *The transition to young adulthood is particularly marked by a call to ideological commitments and conversion-related orientations*. But whether a conversion was mostly the product of zeal or the Holy Spirit or the need for independence from parents, young adulthood was indeed the peak period for joining (and quitting) just about any religion, at just about any time in Western history.⁴⁵

Recounting Michael's response to the Mormon missionaries teaching the doctrine that humans had a pre-existence before this life, Harline writes:

For as long as he could remember, Michael had felt that he had always existed and always would. Upon hearing this idea, he thought: *Talk about the truth ringing clearly within your*

⁴³ Harline, *Conversions*, p. 75.

⁴⁴ Letter from Maria Rolandus to Jacob Rolandus, cited in Harline, *Conversions*, p. 206.

⁴⁵ Harline, *Conversions*, p. 75.

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heart, or should I say refreshed from within me.

Here was a sense of conversion beyond those commonly understood: not merely *turning around*, as suggested by the Latin root *convertere*; not merely undergoing a change, as in conversion's usual sense of changing from one thing to another; not merely a conversion table, as in finding an equivalent form; but rather conversion as discovering what you always have been, or believed.

It wasn't a new phenomenon. The classical thinker Plotinus thought of conversion as *a return to origins*. And the Amsterdam preacher Jacob Triglandius, Old Jacob Rolandus's friend, grew up Catholic but upon reading Reformed theology for the first time immediately felt at home: as he put it, he had *already been reformed, before I knew the doctrine of the Reformers*.⁴⁶

Harline's conclusion seems to be that life, personal identity, and interpersonal relationships are immensely complicated, and that people undergo profound changes ('conversions') in all directions which further complicate these relationships, but that we need to hold on to those we love with a compassion which reaches across these divides. Even if we would not personally endorse Harline's religious convictions, Harline models an empathetic engagement with the world as experienced by others from which we can learn. In a pluralistic academy where we might wish our colleagues had more empathy with Bunyan's convictions, or our own, perhaps we need to be willing to exercise empathy with Craig Harline and Michael Sunbloom.

I, yet not I

Among the most thorough recent historical studies of conversion narrative as a genre is Bruce Hindmarsh's *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*. Hindmarsh's study focuses primarily on autobiographical accounts in the orbit of the Evangelical movement which emerged in the eighteenth century, though his introduction and first chapter helpfully survey earlier antecedents and some of the theoretical questions thrown up by conversion more generally. Hindmarsh states that, 'in the context of spiritual autobiography, the term "identity" is usually shorthand for "self-identity" or "narrative self-identity"'.⁴⁷ Yet the narrative identity of the convert is complicated.

In his article 'The Rhetoric of Form in Conversion Narratives', Charles Griffin suggests that there is a rhetorical problem inherent in the genre.⁴⁸ Biographies and autobiographies typically construct a plausible version of the self who forms the subject by selecting experiences and actions which form a coherent thread, giving a continuity to the literary character of the self. However, conversion, whether used in the Christian sense or analogically of other kinds of significant identity change, is an assertion of discontinuity in the self. If the self after conversion is different from the self before conversion, Griffin asks, how can 'characterological coherence' be established?⁴⁹

Kevin Mills raises similar questions by interrogating the multiple selves found in the New Testament writings of Paul and the later conversion narratives of Augustine and Petrarch. Mills describes conversion using the rhetorical term 'anacoluthon', which refers to a sentence which does not cohere grammatically because the syntax

⁴⁶ Harline, *Conversions*, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁷ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Charles J. G. Griffin, 'The Rhetoric of Form in Conversion Narratives', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 76.2 (1990), 152-163.

⁴⁹ Griffin, 'The Rhetoric of Form in Conversion Narratives', p. 160.

changes partway through:⁵⁰

Augustine's self splits around the event or process of conversion. Conversion, then, may be the experiential ground of anacoluthon. The autobiographical and doctrinal texts of that definitive model of conversion Saul/Paul, suggest that conversion is anacoluthic. His Christian subject is both continuous and discontinuous with its preconversion self: I and not I.⁵¹

In this connection, Mills particularly probes Paul's words in Galatians 2:20:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.⁵²

Mills comments, 'The problem is one of the deep logic of conversion: if the "I" is sacrificed, then who, or what, is saved?'⁵³ In his preface to Mills's book, John Schad puns, 'Conversion, you see, is the prodigal business of getting the hell out of your self.'⁵⁴

These questions about the contested identity of the convert predate the rise of post-structuralist critiques of the self. In the commentary which so comforted Bunyan, Luther, like Mills, probes the paradoxes of Pauline expression in Galatians 2:20. Luther asks 'But who is that I of whom he sayeth yet not I',⁵⁵ and he concedes that

it seemeth a very straunge and a monstrous maner of speaking thus to say: I liue, I liue not: I am dead, I am not dead: I am a sinner, I am not a sinner: I haue the law, I haue not the law. Which phrase is sweete and comfortable to all those that beleue in Christ.⁵⁶

Luther imagines an interlocutor to whom this does not make a whole lot of sense:

It might againe be obiected vnto Paule: what saiest thou Paule? Doest thou not liue by thine owne life, or in thine owne flesh, but in Christ? we see thy flesh, but we see not Christ.⁵⁷

Roger Pooley concluded his 1986 presentation by suggesting that the post-structuralist attack on the sense of a unified rational self is less threatening to a Biblical Christian view of human nature than one might initially think, since 'the Christian self has always been recognised as a battlefield of words and desires'.⁵⁸

'God breaketh not all men's hearts alike'

One seventeenth-century writer well aware of the conflicted nature of the Christian self is Richard Baxter, for many years the parish minister of Kidderminster, and for many

⁵⁰ For instance, 'Had ye been there – but what could that have done?' (from Milton's *Lycidas*).

⁵¹ Kevin Mills, *The Prodigal Sign: A Parable of Criticism*, Eastbourne, Sussex Academic Press, 2009, p. 79. Some of this material has been reworked from an article in *The Glass*: Kevin Mills, 'Reason's Disciple: After Master Derrida', *The Glass*, 18 (2006), 28-35.

⁵² Biblical quotations are taken from the Authorised Version.

⁵³ Mills, *The Prodigal Sign*, p. 70.

⁵⁴ John Schad, 'Series Editor's Preface', in Mills, *The Prodigal Sign*, p. vii.

⁵⁵ Luther, *Commentarie*, fol. 78^{r-v}.

⁵⁶ Luther, *Commentarie*, fol. 79^r.

⁵⁷ Luther, *Commentarie*, fol. 80^r.

⁵⁸ Quoted from the online version of the conference paper – the published article revises this to 'the language of crisis and alienation is as much part of the Christian lexicon as selfhood and assurance' (Pooley, 'Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Autobiography', p. 401).

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further years after his ejection from his living in 1662 a prolific writer and itinerant preacher. In 1681, Baxter published a collection of poems whose full title borrows Pauline language to convey this sense of a self under strain: *Poetical Fragments: Heart-Employment with God and It Self. The Concordant Discord of a Broken healed Heart. Sorrowing-rejoicing, fearing-hoping, dying-living. Written partly for himself, and partly for near Friends in Sickness, and other deep Affliction.*

Baxter is in many ways a paradoxical figure, hard to pin down. He was an anti-separatist Dissenter, a pugnacious irenicist, and has been plausibly labelled a Biblicist, a rationalist and a mystic. One such paradox is that Baxter's ministry had an intensely conversionist emphasis but yet he questions the typical prescribed pattern of Puritan conversion. In *Gildas Salvianus: The Reformed Pastor*, Baxter exhorts his fellow ministers to 'ply this great work of converting souls whatever else you leave undone',⁵⁹ and his evangelistic address *A Call to the Unconverted* was one of his most frequently reprinted works. However, although conversion was paramount for Baxter, his own experience led him to be cautious about prescribing a particular pattern for the experience of receiving grace.

At his death, Baxter left in manuscript some fragmentary memoirs on his life and times, which were then edited and published under the title *Reliquiae Baxterianae*.⁶⁰ In the *Reliquiae*, Baxter records that he was anxious in his youth

because I could not distinctly trace the Workings of the Spirit upon my heart in that method which Mr. Bolton, Mr. Hooker, Mr. Rogers, and other Divines describe! nor knew the Time of my Conversion, being wrought on by the forementioned Degrees.⁶¹

Baxter, like Norwood, was the victim of an overly stringent semiotics of salvation, but, unlike Norwood, Baxter emerged from this anxiety to conclude that, although 'the Change of our Heart from Sin to God, is true Repentance', yet 'God breaketh not all Mens hearts alike'.⁶² In his pastoral writings, Baxter stresses the importance of godly living as evidence of present convertedness rather than past experiences as evidence of a moment of conversion.

Pooley observes that Baxter is at greater liberty to depart from expectations in the *Reliquiae* given its late date and posthumous publication, meaning that his narrative is 'not about authenticating ministry or membership in the same way that the early flowering of Puritan spiritual autobiography is'.⁶³ The *Reliquiae Baxterianae* is frequently cited by historians, but less commonly studied is another autobiographical account by Baxter which provides a contrast in this regard. The *Poetical Fragments* begins with a fifty page testimonial poem entitled 'Love Breathing Out Thanks and Praise'. In this poem, which was published in Baxter's lifetime, Baxter more readily conforms his experience to the typical morphology of conversion.

After an opening section reminiscent of Augustine in its emphasis on God as

⁵⁹ Richard Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus; The Reformed Pastor*, London, 1656, p. 71.

⁶⁰ The first edition of the *Reliquiae* which aims to follow the manuscript text so far as it survives is currently underway, being edited by N. H. Keeble, Tim Cooper, and John Coffey, with the editorial assistance of Thomas Charlton.

⁶¹ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxters narrative of the most memorable passages of his life and times*, London, 1696, Part I, p. 6.

⁶² Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Part I, p. 7.

⁶³ Pooley, 'Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Autobiography', p. 398.

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the highest good which the soul should desire, Baxter recounts his birth, his godly upbringing and his childhood sins of 'Excess of pleasure in vain Tales, Romances' and 'neglect' of 'holy duty', leading to a conviction of sin:⁶⁴

I wondred at my self that staid so long,
So little toucht with Arguments so strong!
Laughing and playing, as if all were well,
For ought I knew, near to the brink of Hell.⁶⁵

After realising his inability to save himself, Baxter recalls, reminiscently of Bunyan:

Now I began to *feel* as well as *see*,
How near the *Word of Grace* concerned me.⁶⁶

This leads to what sounds like a crisis experience either of conversion or of coming to an assurance of salvation:

The heav'nly Powers w^{ch} made my heart to quake,
My Prison bonds and doors did open shake.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Baxter does acknowledge the gradualism of his experience of grace:

Nor did the change so suddenly begin,
As to make known *when* special Grace came in:
[...]
This greatest Change began when I was green,
Having not much above three lustres seen:
Therefore I doubted whether it were true,
Because its *entrance* I no better knew.⁶⁸

We should not be surprised that written conversion narratives are a step removed from the conversion experiences of their subjects, since they have been shaped for an audience, often reflecting the emphases and expectations of that audience. I would argue further that conversion experiences themselves, in all their variety, are still not primary, that there is something deeper going on even before it emerges into the conscious experience of the convert. This is arguably the case even for scholars who understand conversion within an entirely naturalistic frame, since, the early psychologists of religion would remind us, the shifts in self-consciousness experienced in conversion have sources in the deeper subconscious parts of the psyche.

Those who believe that conversion can, at least sometimes, be attributed to a transcendent divine agency might recall Jesus's words to Nicodemus in chapter 3 of John's Gospel: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (John 3:8). The fourth-century Church Father Hilary of Poitiers comments as follows: 'Though I have received faith by my regeneration, I am still in ignorance.'

⁶⁴ Richard Baxter, *Poetical Fragments* [London, 1681], facsimile edition, Farnborough, Gregg, 1971, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Baxter, *Poetical Fragments*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ Baxter, *Poetical Fragments*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Baxter, *Poetical Fragments*, p. 12.

⁶⁸ Baxter, *Poetical Fragments*, p. 13. Italics in original.

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And yet, I have a firm hold on a reality I do not understand. I am born again, capable of rebirth, but without conscious perception of it.⁶⁹ In reading and in writing conversion, we cannot capture the wind, but perhaps we can catch some echoes of 'the sound thereof'.

⁶⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 12.56, cited in Joel C. Elowsky (ed.), *John 1-10* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture), Downers Grove, Ill., InterVarsity Press, 2006, p. 116.

‘In order to spirituall good the body often afflicted’: Bodily Affliction in Lady Mary Carey’s Conversion Narrative (1649-57)

Rachel Adcock

In seventeenth century narratives of conversion, the body and spirit were seen to be inextricably intertwined. The body’s appetite for carnal pleasures was thought to tempt the soul from its spiritual path towards salvation, and during the process of conversion the body was often afflicted by the various means that God used to mortify sin in his chosen people. In the manuscript conversion narrative of the seventeenth century noblewoman Lady Mary Carey, entitled ‘A Dialogue betwixt the Soul, and the Body’ (1649), she noted in one of the margins that ‘in order to spirituall good[,] the body often afflicted’.¹ This article will go on to consider the importance of bodily affliction in Carey’s religious experiences, particularly how she interpreted it as integral to her spiritual health. At the time of her writing, Lady Carey (c.1609-1680) had been married twice, firstly to Sir Pelham Carey (a younger son of Henry Carey, first earl of Dover) between 1630 and 1642, and from 1643 to her second husband George Payler. From 1639 to 1642 Payler was a paymaster of the garrison in Carey’s place of birth, Berwick upon Tweed, Northumberland, but after their marriage he subsequently accepted duties in the Tower of London and later became MP for Berwick in 1659. Though Carey clearly held her husband in high regard, she kept her first husband’s name throughout her life, which Sara Mendelson suggests was ‘because of his titled status’.² Her first marriage did not leave any living children, and it was Carey’s struggle to comprehend the deaths of those conceived during her second marriage that provoked her to record her experiences on paper. By the time she wrote her ‘Dialogue’ in 1649 (her first surviving work), Carey had lost three children (two boys and one girl) and was pregnant with a fourth, Robert, who died soon after his birth in 1650. The death of another boy, Peregrine, in 1652, was happily followed by the birth of a girl, Bethia (1653/4), and a boy, Nathaniel (1654/5) who both lived to adulthood, though in 1657 Carey wrote that she had experienced a miscarriage on which she wrote her most well known poem, ‘Upon y^e Sight of my abortive Birth’. These traumatic experiences are recorded and interpreted in Carey’s manuscript writings, showing how she reconciled herself to the belief that God was teaching, cleansing, and refining her through these bodily afflictions, for her spiritual improvement.

Carey’s collection of manuscript writings, written between 1649 and 1657, records her conversion through the means of dialogue, narrative, meditation, and elegy, and explore the relationship between physical ‘affliction’ and ‘spiritual good’ in different ways. Her conversion on her sickbed when she was 18 years old is depicted in a dialogue, while her elegies on her children’s deaths are written in tightly controlled verse.

¹ Bodleian Library, MS. Rawlinson D.1308, 14r. Subsequent references to the work are placed in parentheses following the quotation. This is a transcription of Lady Mary Carey’s manuscript made in 1681 by Charles Hutton. The original manuscript is in the hands of the Meynell family.

² Sara H. Mendelson, ‘Carey [née Jackson], Mary, Lady Carey (b. c.1609, d. in or after 1680)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45811>.

Carey's writings explore the nature and purpose of physical affliction in conversion, questioning and interpreting its meaning in the framework of her conversion process from an obsession with vain company, to a life devoted to praising God. Her poems on child loss have usually been considered as single documents, rather than as part of a conversion narrative, but this article will consider how, together with her dialogue and meditations, they make up part of a larger work indicating the continual process of sanctification in seventeenth century Puritan experience.³ Carey's writings draw attention to the importance of exploring physical affliction and the assault on the believer's senses, as part of the seventeenth century conversion narrative. For instance, what was the relationship between the soul and body in conversion, and why was physical affliction thought integral to religious experience? This article will consider these questions.

'A Dialogue betwixt the Soule, and the Body'

Lady Mary Carey composed her conversion narrative, 'A Dialogue betwixt the Soule, and the Body', while she was pregnant with her fourth child in 1649. After the birth and death of this child, named Robert, she dedicated the manuscript to her husband George Payler in 1653, explaining that she had written the work in expectation that she would die in childbirth, and experience 'a combat with Sathan at the last' (2r). In order to 'answer' Satan when he was contesting for her soul, she gathered the evidence that she was one of the God's elect, and destined for 'endlesse Glory' (2r), and set this down in a paper book so that she could refer to comforting scriptures and experiences if she needed to. Carey did not die in childbirth, and so presented her husband with 'the poore mite of [her] endeavours' (4v) that he could add to his spiritual treasury, encouraging him to continue his path towards spiritual joy. She writes: 'Truely my Deare, you are high in my Thoughts, and deservedly, God hath begun a Worke in thee, which he will performe, Phillipians.1.6. I partly know the Change which God hath made in thee, both inwardly, and outwardly, from what, and to what' (4v). Carey intends her narrative to encourage her husband's continual conversion to her own spiritual path: she later thanks God for making them both 'of one Mind' as their 'Judgments are one, our Wills, our Way, our Aimes in Spiritualls' (6r). Even in the 'separating troubles' of the Civil Wars, Carey and her husband are shown to be united in their faith and experience. She evidently moved with him from their home town of Berwick to London when he became an Officer of the Ordnance and Armoury at the Tower of London, and accompanied him on military campaigns.⁴ When her conversion narrative was transcribed by Charles Hutton in 1681, in fair copy, it appeared alongside Lord Thomas Fairfax's memoirs of the civil war, and an elegy on his death by the Duke of Buckingham. Hutton's inclusion of Carey's work in this collection indicates that it was considered by him to be an example of pious

³ Until recently, Carey's poems were only available in Germaine Greer, Jeslyn Medoff, Melinda Sansone, and Susan Hastings (eds.), *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of 17th Century Women's Verse*, Virago, 1988. The poems will soon appear with extracts from her conversion narrative and meditations in Rachel Adcock, Sara Read, and Anna Warzycha (eds.), *Flesh and Spirit: An Anthology of Writings by Seventeenth-Century Women*, Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2013. I would like to thank my co-editors for their valuable input at various stages of the research presented in this article.

⁴ Sara H. Mendelson, 'Carey [née Jackson], Mary, Lady Carey (b. c.1609, d. in or after 1680)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45811>.

parliamentarianism worth preserving.

The form of Carey's conversion narrative is integral to the way it works as an instructional work, intended, as she wrote, for advising and encouraging her husband if she could no longer do this in person. Her narrative consists of a dialogue between two entities, the Soul and the Body, drawing on the popular medieval genre where, faced with divine judgement, Soul and Body discuss which of them is to blame for the sins a damned man has committed in life. These dialogues were in part didactic, asking the listener to compare themselves to the damned man whose Body has committed fleshly sins, further confirmed by the accusations of the Soul. However, as Rosalie Osmond writes, there is no resolution to these debates, only an imposed conclusion in which 'devils seize the soul and bundle it off to hell, shouting that that the body will inevitably follow at the last judgment'.⁵ While Carey believed herself to be near death, her dialogue between the Soul and Body turns its attention to the relationship between the two entities present in her own living body as she undergoes the process of conversion. Rather than the soul and body antagonising each other, as was the case in seventeenth century dialogues following the medieval tradition (including Andrew Marvell's 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body'), Michelle M. Dowd notes that 'Carey's Soul and Body pursue an entirely congenial exchange'.⁶ Whereas Platonic philosophy held that the Soul was morally superior to the corrupt Body, Carey's entities correspond more with St. Paul's descriptions of the 'spirit' and 'flesh', where both were believed to be corrupt until the process of conversion, or regeneration, had taken place within the individual believer: Ephesians 4:24 called this putting on the 'new man'. The spirit had to overcome the desires of the flesh in order for both to be regenerate: for St. Paul, then, the 'flesh' and 'spirit' referred, rather than two distinct entities, to the 'two ways of life which the whole man [could] choose to follow'.⁷ For instance, Romans 7:22-3 described the inward conflict between spiritual obedience and fleshly desire: 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members [limbs], warring against the law of my mind'. While Carey's Soul and Body express different opinions, Body very clearly identifies that its fate rests on the spiritual regeneration of the Soul:

Body: But, my Sister, Thou knowest that when I shall be dissolved, thou wilt leave me, and goe immediately to thy place; but I must lye in grave, rot, putrifie, and have no enjoyment until our re-uniting, and therefore, my deare Soule, let me know what I may then hope for, that so I may lye downe, In peace, and expectation. (8r-v)

On death, Body says, its sister Soul will ascend to its place in heaven, while the body must rot in the grave until the two are again united at the last judgment, hoping that will result in eternal life for them both. With this in mind, Body reflects Carey's own fears that she will face death in child labour, uncertain whether she will be one of God's elect: 'I am now neare the time of my Travell, & am very weake, faint, sickly, fearefull, pained, apprehending much sufferings before me, if not Death it selfe, the King of Terrours' (7v). Soul replies by comforting Body with scriptures suitable for those in affliction, and advises that Body's 'strength is no helpe in Gods Worke' because

⁵ Rosalie Osmond, *Mutual Accusation: Seventeenth-Century Body and Soul Dialogues in their Literary and Theological Context*, University of Toronto Press, 1990, p. 56.

⁶ Michelle M. Dowd, 'Genealogical Counternarratives in the Writing of Mary Carey', *Modern Philology*, 109 (2012), 440-62: 450.

⁷ Osmond, *Mutual Accusation*, p. 18.

God's strength is 'all sufficient' (7v): as long as the Body has faith in God, death has no sting. Carey's Soul and Body have a mutually beneficial and loving relationship. Soul is Body's comforter, adviser, and friend, which testifies to the process of regeneration that Carey has already undergone, while Body encourages Soul to remember and record experiences of God's love and continue this process.

This inward dialogue, dramatised by Carey's Body and Soul, is characteristic of Puritan forms of introspection. Believers were encouraged by their ministers to record evidence that they were one of God's elect, and draw on these in times of hardship, both physical and spiritual. In Carey's dialogue, Body is preparing for the 'last Battaile' of child labour, and asks Soul to draw 'Water out of the Wells of Salvation' of Isaiah 12:3. 'Meditation (of Mercy)', she writes, 'is a Bucket w^{ch} will come full up with spirituall Joy' (9v-10r). Soul then begins to recount the foundations of Carey's faith, reciting the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, compiled by the Westminster Assembly in 1647 and submitted to the Long Parliament a year after, to instruct the laity, including children, in doctrinal matters via a series of questions and answers. This catechism replaced that of the Book of Common Prayer between 1648 and 1661, and advocated the further reformation of the Church of England along Calvinistic lines. Carey has her Soul recite answers from the catechism, which included confirming her belief in God, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and Original Sin, including the most relevant to the Body's plight, and paraphrasing where necessary, adding scriptural examples, and some answers of her own. Re-appropriation of the catechism in this way was expected and encouraged: the printed catechism advised that a 'Learner may further improve it upon all occasions, for his increase in knowledge and piety, even out of the course of catechising, as well as in it'.⁸ Early modern women were expected to catechise children and servants, and written catechisms were intended, in part, for this use. As well as learning from this catechism, Carey perhaps also intended its use by her own unborn child should it survive her, as a mother's legacy in place of her own physical presence. However, after surviving child labour and the death of her fourth son, Carey re-addressed her work to her husband four years later, hoping to encourage him on his own spiritual journey. The existence of such advice for a husband rather than a child is unusual, and Carey's modest description of herself as 'a weake Help' (4r) and her work, 'the poore Mite of my Endeavours' (4v), depicts her as a reluctant but pious author. She attributes her urge to write to her closeness, as she believed, to death. As Ralph Houlbrooke notes, 'women for their part had certain exceptional opportunities on the death-bed. Forbidden to speak in church, they might now utter prayers, exhortations and statements of faith which were heard with a special respect'.⁹ Near-death experiences, it was held, caused believers to become closer to God.

Carey's dedication of the work to teaching and advising her husband also shows her to be subverting the usual relationship between the body and the soul. Through the voice of the Soul she advises and comforts the Body, but she also implies that her husband takes the place of the less dominant entity. Where male-authored writings explored the relationship between the soul and body, they often associated the fleshly, sinful body with femininity. As Roy Porter observes, the dialogues between body and soul were clearly gendered: 'typically, the body was identified with sensual Eve

⁸ *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines*, 1648, p. 24.

⁹ Ralph Houlbrooke, 'The Puritan Death-bed, c. 1560-1660', in Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1996, pp. 122-44 (p. 140).

and the soul, or reason, with Adam'.¹⁰ The subordinate female body would tempt the immortal soul, whilst the dominant rational soul was in danger of submitting to fleshly desires. The Anglican preacher Jeremy Taylor likened this relationship to that of husband and wife:

The Dominion of a man over his Wife is no other than as the Soul rules the Body.... For then the Soul and Body makes a perfect Man, when the Soul commands wisely, or rules lovingly, and cares profitably and provides plentifully, and conducts charitably that body which is its partner, and yet the inferior. But if the Body shall give Laws, and by the violence of the appetite first abuse the Understanding, and then possess the superior portion of the Will and Choice, the body and the soul are not apt company, and the man is a fool and miserable.¹¹

Here, a good relationship between body and soul is related to a successful marriage, following the words of St. Paul in Ephesians 5:22-29, especially 5:23: 'For the Husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body'. Carey's presentation of her Soul and Body is in accordance with Taylor's description of a 'perfect Man', where the Soul 'conducts charitably that body which is its partner, and yet the inferior'. However, she clearly positions herself as the Soul in her dialogue, which gives voice to her stable spiritual self, whereas her body is the entity under tutelage. Though Body voices Carey's own doubts, the dedication to her husband also has the effect of positioning him as the Body receiving advice and tuition. The use of the Soul as a mouthpiece for her godly views certainly testified to Carey's godliness, and emphasised that women were not solely sinful, fleshly beings.

Bodily Affliction and Conversion

Carey's positioning of her husband in the role of the Body also associates him with her earthly experiences, particularly the loss of several of their children soon after they were born. These experiences of child loss were documented by the couple in short poems of consolation, attributing their loss to God's providence. The death of their fourth child, Robert Payler, with whom Carey was pregnant while writing her conversion narrative, provoked both parents to compose poems in couplets of twelve lines in a plain style of grief and submission. George Payler's poem is addressed to his wife, while urging them both to submit themselves to God's providence in a similar way to the voice of Carey's Soul:¹²

Deare Wife, let's learne to get that Skill,
Of free Submission to God's holy Will:
... 'tis no matter what:
If by such Changes, God shall bring us in
To love Christ Jesus, & to loath our Sin. (95r)

Carey's poem, on the other hand, is addressed wholly to God, and, as Pamela Hammons has noted (comparing the poem to Milton's 'On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough'), Carey's voice takes a 'much more active role' rather than the straightforward

¹⁰ Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, Oxford and New York, Norton, 2003, p. 41.

¹¹ Jeremy Taylor, *Eniautos: A Course of Sermons*, 1653, pp. 223-40.

¹² Payler's poem is entitled 'Written by my deare Husband at y^e Death of our 4th (at that time) only child, Robert Payler', and Carey's was, 'Written by me at y^e same time on y^e Death of my 4th, & only Child, Robert Payler'.

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'Submission to God's holy Will' that her husband advises:¹³

My all; that Mercy hath made mine
 Freely's surrendered to be thine:
But if I give my All to thee
 Let me not pine for Poverty:
Change wth me; do, as I have done,
 Give me thy All, even thy deare Son. (95v)

Carey acknowledges the depth of her loss as 'surrendering' her 'all' to God, whose 'Mercy' had allowed her to give birth and enjoy the child for a short time. However, in return for her son, she asks God to 'Change' with her his only 'deare Son', Jesus Christ, actively urging him to 'do, as I have done', and 'Give me thy All'. By this exchange, Carey is also urging God to change her inwardly, further purging and cleansing her from sin by both physical and spiritual means. As a mother, she is shown to understand and experience God's providence in a different sensory capacity to her husband: by repeatedly giving birth to children who do not live long, Carey begins to attribute this to God's repeated purgation of her sinful body. Rather than experience a moment of conversion that Puritan believers often called a 'new birth', a regeneration of their souls and bodies, Carey's process of conversion involves a series of unsuccessful births, though later followed in 1652/3 and 1654/5 by the birth of two children who lived to adulthood, Bethia and Nathaniel.

Carey's conversion narrative, written after the deaths of three of her children, is framed using several episodes where bodily affliction given her by God encouraged the development of her spiritual life and the process of conversion. After reciting the answers to her catechism, Soul is asked by Body how she is 'sensible' of Original Sin (mentioned in the catechism), and of the 'Meanes God shewed thee to get out of it', 'how God dealt wth thee', and 'what case thou art now in' (13v). Soul proceeds to recount Carey's conversion narrative as proof of her spiritual credentials. God's work began when she was eighteen years old, 'in y^e midst of my Jollity', when it was 'y^e Lords pleasure to smite me wth a sore sickness' (14r) which she believed, at the time, would kill her. She perceived that this sickness was to bring her to apprehend God, instead of spending her time in 'Carding, Dice, Dancing, Masquing, Dressing, vaine Company, going to Playes, [and] following Fashions' (14r). On recovery, Carey 'quit' her vain companions and enquired after God, thanking him that she then fell under a 'powerfull Ministry' (15v). However, this minister's preaching convinced her that she was destined for hell, and Satan was 'let loose' (16r) upon her, leading her to refuse any more food and water than she needed to keep alive. She continued in this condition for almost a year, and was comforted by others in similar conditions, but eventually 'y^e sweet Time came, that God did declare his free Grace, his abundant Love to me, in y^e Gift of y^e Treasure of Heaven, & Earth, Jesus Christ, he set himself so forth to my Apprehension both by his Word, & Spirit' (18r). Body replies expressing thanks for this 'strange' process, giving thanks that God 'should smite me wth a Sicknesse, when we were in such a dangerous Course' (24v). Affliction, here, is figured as part of the path to spiritual health, and Body goes on to thank God for this and other material mercies he had shown her.

¹³ Pamela Hammons, 'Despised Creatures: The Illusion of Maternal Self-Effacement in Seventeenth-Century Child Loss Poetry', *English Literary History*, 66 (1999), 25-49: 31.

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Carey's conversion narrative focuses on moments of physical affliction that marked turning points in her spiritual journey. Her original calling to God was signified by a providential sickness, her belief that Christ had died for her redemption followed an attack by Satan that caused her to refuse food, and her labours in childbirth were understood as God purging her from all sin, continuing the process of sanctification. Throughout their lives, seventeenth century believers often continued to experience the burden of sin, as well as doubts about the validity of their faith and election, in being tempted to over-value 'fleshy' things, whether they were loved ones, possessions, wealth, or food, drink, and other sensual pleasures. Belief in these chastisements could lead to periods of melancholia and despair if they were interpreted as signs of damnation, but, interpreted as God gradually removing their sins, believers could find strength to overcome their trials. As Jeremy Schmidt has written, 'despair was actively cultured as a token of God's favor and as something of a spiritual exercise ... paradoxically linking hope to the substance and feeling of despair itself'.¹⁴

For instance, Carey's second poem, written on the death of her fifth child, Peregrine, depicts her son as a 'Love-Token' (96r) that she has presented to God as proof of her devotion to him. Hope, here, finds its place in despair, as Carey indicates that she is exchanging her own dear son for a closer relationship with Christ. Whereas her written 'Dialogue', figured by her as a 'poore mite', was addressed to her husband, her poetry places God in the role of recipient of her poor child. Both her writings and children become offerings of devotion to her husband and her God. In Carey's 'Dialogue', Body also voices the temptation to despair over the loss of a child (her third child):

Body: Deare Sister, the Lord hath taken from me a Son, a beloved Son, an onely Son, an onely Child, the last of three, and it must needs affect me; Can a Woman forget her sucking Child? that she should not have Compassion on the Son of her Womb; Isaiah 49:15. And will there not be mourning for an onely son; Zechariah 12:10....

Soule: First, For the removal of the Child, know that it is Gods Will, to which submit not one Word; and doe not onely yield, but approve; God is wise, and knows it best; God is loving; and therefore did it; I am sure In faithfullnesse hath the Lord afflicted me; Psalms 119:75. (7r-v)

This dialogue indicates that, while pregnant with her fourth child, Carey was still grieving for her other lost children. Soul, though, advises that God loves her, and 'therefore did it'. In the margin, she writes that 'the apprehension of love produceth patience': the knowledge that God loves her gives her hope in her despair. However, Body's argument is also figured as deliberately flawed, as she takes scriptural references out of context. For example, she leaves out the latter part of Isaiah 49:15 which suggests that even a nursing mother might forget her child, whereas God would never neglect his people: 'yea they may forget, yet will I not forget thee'. This is intended to show that even the strongest, most powerful love imaginable (a mother's for her child) pales in comparison with God's eternal love and affection. Also, Zechariah 12:10 is a prophecy of Christ's death, God's 'onely son', already implying that a mother should be willing to exchange or sacrifice her only son as God has set the precedent. Deliberately, it seems, Body's suffering is undermined by the scriptural arguments it uses, submitting

¹⁴ Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England*, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 54-5.

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to the power of God's love without the need for a conventional reprimand from Soul, who comforts and advises instead. Carey, here, exemplifies the type of introspection that was thought to be necessary to spiritual health, re-evaluating her experiences at times of conflict. Experiencing this inward struggle signified, for her, that she was spiritually regenerate.

These possible interpretations of affliction go some way to explaining the proliferation of conversion narratives like Carey's, as believers sought to interpret their traumatic experiences as part of a healthy spiritual life. The prophetess Elizabeth Avery's narrative, published in the same year as Carey addressed her 'Dialogue' to her husband, 1653, is also remarkable in its interpretation of this kind of intense suffering. It was included by the Fifth Monarchist John Rogers in his collection of believers' experiences recorded when they entered his Independent church in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, and contains Avery's account of her conversion that began at the age of sixteen.¹⁵ Like Carey, Avery struggled with the lack of preaching ministers in the area where she lived, a state of affairs that appears to have continued until she joined Rogers's congregation. Although she experienced the 'Free-grace' of God, she also felt his 'rod ... laid *heavy*' upon her with the loss of three of her children in rapid succession.¹⁶ She describes one particular incident when friends gathered at her house during the serious illness of the third of these children, when she writes 'my *Husband* came and told me my *childe* was dying; at which I was left in an *horror* [Genesis 15:12], as if I were in *Hell*, none could comfort me, nothing could *satisfie* me' (p. 403). In order to try to gain some comfort, she proceeded to converse with a minister who satisfied her with a letter he had received. She then understood the reason that God had punished her, and afterwards thought she 'was content to part with all, and to let all go' (p. 403). After that she tells us, 'God tryed me, and took away another *childe* from me, [...] I could bear it very well, and was not *troubled*, but rather did rejoyce within me to be thus *tryed*' (p. 403). That she could rejoice rather than grieve for the death of her child is a remarkable resolution but one not uncommon in the scheme of narratives like these. In the depths of her torments, where she had 'no *comfort*, nor *ease*, nor could I *eat* or *drink*', she came to the conclusion: 'here was all the *comfort* that was left me, and it was my *Heaven* in my *Hell*, that *God would be glorified by my destruction*' (p. 405). She found comfort in knowing that her sufferings, warranted by her sins or not, would glorify God. Later, Avery described how she 'heard a *voice* say' (p. 406) that she would see no more sorrow, but she struggled to find an explanation for the trials that she was yet to face. In the end she came to the understanding that Christ was purging her of her sins:

Yet I was *struck* in the *flesh* again, *which I wonder at*; and then I heard the *voice* again say, *It was sin that was suffering in me, and the flesh as the punishment of sin*; and so I found it was, for the *destruction* of the *flesh*; and ever after that I found *Christ* in me, ruling and reigning, and taking *all power to himself*, and he hath caught [taken] the *man-childe* up to God, which I brought forth. i.e. *The flesh*, (by his *incarnation*) and I have found in me (and do yet) his *judgement-seat* sit, to *judge* and *sentence* sin, and *lust*, and *corruption*. (p. 406)

Avery's resolution that her newborn child's death was due to Christ judging and then purging her of the sins of the flesh is remarkable. Like Carey, she attributes her pains to punishments for the sins of the flesh, and the taking away of her son is the most effective way that Christ has sentenced her corruptions. This is an example of how

¹⁵ See Jane Baston, 'Avery [née Parker], Elizabeth (fl. 1614-1653)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/69074>.

¹⁶ John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh, A Tabernacle for the Sun*, 1653, p. 403.

sufferings could be understood as part of God's providence, and how they could be explained as proof to the believer that they were among God's elect.

The most powerful exploration of God's 'destruction of the flesh' in Carey's work is her last and longest poem of 46 numbered couplets, 'Upon the Sight of my abortive Birth the 31st of December 1657'. The poem was written after she had miscarried a child, soon after the birth of her two healthy children, and shows clearly the physicality of affliction on her maternal body interpreted as purgation of sin. Carey describes the child as 'void of life, & feature' (114r), or form, suggesting that the child had been born dead before it could develop limbs or, possibly, that its body had developed but was deformed. According to early modern medical thinking, miscarriages were thought to occur because the embryo had not developed properly, causing, as the seventeenth century physician Nicholas Culpeper wrote, 'the exclusion of a child, not perfect nor living, before legitimate time'.¹⁷ Since Carey's abortive birth was 'featureless' it is possible that hers was a very early miscarriage, and her poem interprets its appearance as a reflection of her own spiritual state. A characteristic of seventeenth century child loss poetry was the expression of belief that an unhealthy, deformed, or dead child was given by God as a punishment for the sins of the parents, and particularly the mother. As Pamela Hammons writes, the 'spiritual, and moral shortcoming of mothers were believed capable of replication in their offspring's bodies':¹⁸ the mother's spiritual state could be mirrored by her child's physical appearance. This draws on popular medical belief in the maternal imagination, by which the emotions of the mother during the formation of a foetus could affect its appearance. The midwife Jane Sharp described this belief in her midwifery manual:

The child in the Mother's womb hath a soul of its own, yet it is a part of the mother until she be delivered, as a branch is part of a Tree while it grows there, and so the mother's imagination makes an impression upon the child, but it must be a strong imagination at that very time when the forming faculty is at work or else it will not do, but since the child takes part of the mother's life whilst he is in the womb, as the fruit doth of the tree, whatsoever moves the faculties of the mothers soul may do the like in the child.¹⁹

Mothers, therefore, were held culpable for their children as soon as they were conceived, and such writings show them drawing on these ideas to express their grief and find consolation.²⁰ Carey's poem explores her child's death in this framework, exploring the idea that she had valued her earthly, healthy children too highly and become too complacent in spiritual duties. Therefore, God had sent her an underdeveloped child as a sign that she herself was underdeveloped spiritually, and used this affliction as an act of purgation. Her child is still destined for heaven, as she believes 'Since't had a Soule, shall be for ever blest' (114v), which indicates that although the child may not have had form enough to live, it was still a member of God's elect, like its mother.

Carey's miscarriage was understood by her as a necessary chastisement of God in a framework where such affliction was considered necessary to make herself

¹⁷ Nicholas Culpeper, 'Of Abortion', *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives: or, A Guide for Women*, 1662, p. 172.

¹⁸ Hammons, 'Despised Creatures', 27. See also Dowd, 'Genealogical Counternarratives in the Writing of Mary Carey'.

¹⁹ Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, ed. Elaine Hobby, OUP, 1999, pp. 92-3.

²⁰ See Hammons, 'Despised Creatures'; and Raymond A. Anselment, "'A heart terrifying Sorrow': An Occasional Piece on Poetry of Miscarriage", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 33 (1997), 13-45.

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spiritually healthy. An Collins, also writing verse in the 1640s and 50s, described the link between chastising and healing in her poem, 'The Fourth Meditacion', where God is figured as the 'mercyfull Physician':

Perceivest not thy mercyfull Physician
Doth give thee for thy health these strong purgacions ...
So if that thou should'st seem to disregard,
The Chastisements of God, or seek to ward
The same by wayes or meanes impenitent,
How just shall God renew thy punishment:
If physic for our Bodies health be tane,
We hinder not the working of the same,
Strong Physick if it purge not, putrifies,
And more augments then heales our maladies,
And as is sayd, our manifold Temptacions,
Are nothing but thy scouring Purgacions,
Wherein a dram too much, hath not admission,
Confected by so Skilfull a Physician
Who will not have their bitternesse abated,
Till thy ill humors be evacuated.²¹

Collins, here, understands bodily affliction as a health-giving process where 'ill humors', or sin, are purged from a believer's body. Just as a sick person would not attempt to 'hinder' the effects of 'physic' or medicine in order to do themselves harm, a believer should accept affliction as part of their journey towards entire holiness. Collins, herself, appears from her poetry to have suffered from an illness that caused her to remain housebound.²² Carey's poem, however, is remarkable in questioning the purpose of her afflictions, while suspecting that she had not shown enough 'Thankfulnesse, / And high Esteeme for those I do possesse' (115r):

I only now desire of my sweet God,
The Reason why he tooke in hand his Rod?
What he doth spy? What is ye thing amisse?
I faine would learne? Whilst I ye Rod do kisse:
Methinkes Iheare God's Voice, *this is ye Sin,*
And Conscience justifies ye same within:
Thou often dost present me wth dead Fruit;
Why should not my Returns, thy Present sute:
Dead Duties, Prayers, Praises thou dost bring,
Affections dead, dead Heart in every thing; ...
Lively, O do't, thy Mercies are most sweet;
Chastisements sharpe; & all ye Meanes that's meet;
Mend now my Child, & lively Fruit bring me;
So thou advantage'd much by this wilt be;
My dearest Lord, thy Charge, & more is true;
I see't, am humbled, & for Pardon sue;
In Christ forgive, & henceforth I will be,

²¹ An Collins, 'The Fourth Meditacion', in *Divine Songs and Meditacions*, 1653, pp. 84-7 (pp. 84-5). Collins remains nearly anonymous. 'An' is a not uncommon variation on 'Ann' or 'Anne', but could also be short for another name, or mean 'a' member of the Collins family.

²² See Sidney Gottlieb, 'Collins, An (fl. 1653)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45500>.

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What, nothing, Lord; but what thou makest me;
I am naught, have naught, can do naught but sin. (115v-116v, italics added)

Asking God directly why he has punished her by taking 'in hand his Rod', he replies (part italicised) berating her for her own 'deadness' and inactivity in spiritual duties: God explains that she has presented him with 'dead Fruit', so he is repaying her in kind in order to encourage her to subdue her sin. This fruitlessness, God addresses with chastisements so that she will bring forth 'lively fruit', both spiritually and perhaps even physically. Carey responds with acceptance, suing for pardon and forgiveness and declaring that she will be 'nothing' but what God makes her.

Carey ends the poem by asking God to enable her to be spiritually fruitful, implying also that this will make her physically fruitful, as the two are intertwined:

I'm a branch of the vine, purge me therefore;
 Father, more Fruit to bring, then heretofore:
A Plant in God's house; O that I may be;
 More flourishing in Age, a growing Tree:
Let not my hart, (as doth my Womb) miscarry;
 But precious Meanes received, let it tarry;
Till it be form'd; of Gospell Shape, & Suite;
 My Meanes, my Mercies, & be pleasant Fruit:
In my whole Life; lively doe thou make me:
 For thy Praise, & Name's sake, O quicken me;
Lord I beg quick'ning Grace, that Grace afford;
 Quicken mee Lord according to thy word. (117r)

Carey asks that her spiritual fruits be properly formed, according to the 'Gospell Shape, & Suite' indicated in scripture, and not left unformed and featureless like the fruit of her womb. Like the 'branch of the vine' of John 15:2, she asks to be purged, or pruned, so that later she will bring forth more spiritual fruit and be 'quicken'd'. Variations on the word 'quicken' appear five times in seven lines towards the end of the poem, indicating the urgency of Carey's pleas to be made fruitful. By the end of the poem she pleads that the Lord would continue to 'amend' and 'keep' her heart that he had 'lifted up' to himself, echoing the rising of the child's soul earlier in the poem. The 46 couplets of the poem reflect the on-going process of purging sin from the body in order that Carey rise towards spiritual health, becoming closer to God. It is also likely that each couplet represents a year of her life, given that her meditations (written shortly before this poem) indicate that she was 45 years old: as An Collins wrote about this process, 'So have the faithfull imperfections some, / Till to a perfect age in Christ they come'.²³

Mary Carey's manuscript conversion narrative demonstrates her piety and her dedication to teaching and improving the godliness of her family, particularly her husband. She vindicates women from their usual cultural position as the more sinful and fleshly of the two sexes by adopting the role of the Soul in her dialogue, and directly addressing God in her poems. What is particularly remarkable, though, is Carey's interpretation of her afflictions as health-giving, gradually purging her of sin through the process of continual sanctification. Towards the end of the part of conversion narrative entitled 'A Meditation', Carey writes about her afflictions with hindsight, declaring to Satan her willingness to have undergone the loss of her children:

²³ Collins, 'The Discourse', in *Divine Songs and Meditations*, pp. 2-27 (p. 25).

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What's that farther, Sathan, I wanted y^e Life of my Children, w^{ch} I importunately begged;
I answer thee, When I importunately begged their Life, I knew not but God's Will might
be to spare as well as to take; & when I more clearly saw it God's Will to remove them;
I wanted not a Heart (of God's giving) willingly to surrender them, nor did I want y^e
Comfort of them after they were gone, for God gave me more then he tooke from me;
more Enjoyment of God for some of y^e Creature is a sweet Change. (102v-103r)

It is remarkable that Carey writes that the exchange of her children for 'more Enjoyment of God' is sweet, and that she puts in Satan's mouth that she 'begged' for the life of her children and grieved for them. This is what we might think of now as perfectly understandable behaviour, and yet it is voiced by Satan. Carey, however, believes in the absolute sovereignty of God and strives to accept his providence as the work of a physician, gradually refining and purging her. Drawing on the specifically female physical experiences of childbirth and miscarriage, Carey interprets her conversion in a gendered way, emphasising the vividness of her spiritual regeneration. The extent of her physical affliction supports her spiritual credentials.

Tell the Story: Re-imagining Victorian Conversion Narratives

Andrew Tate

[T]he Churches for a long time have practically forgotten that the conversion of the world is the great business assigned them.... They have ceased to regard the conversion of men as their peculiar, great, and only business in the world; for they are, evidently, living for other ends (Charles G. Finney, 'Why London is Not Converted', 1850).¹

Dramatic calls to conversion are alien to most liberal, contemporary readers. However, during the mid-nineteenth century, conversion narratives – in sermons, fiction, music and art – were a commonplace element of popular culture. In a sermon to the 'members and visitors of the Christian Instruction Society' at the Tabernacle, Moorfields, Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), a distinguished American evangelist, challenged the assembly to dedicate themselves to the task of converting the world, beginning with London. Finney's zealous message – taking the 'great commission' of Matthew 28 as its text – was delivered in June 1850, and foreshadowed a decade in which religious belief in Britain would experience some radical challenges, including the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and a new wave of popular revivalist activity. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92), for example, rose to prominence as a preacher who emphasised the necessity of spiritual second birth. Spurgeon's emotive, conversion-focused sermons, heard by thousands every week from the pulpits of New Park Street and the Metropolitan Tabernacle, are part of what Callum Brown, in his controversial secularisation thesis *The Death of Christian Britain* (2001), has named the 'salvation economy' of Victorian Britain. Borrowing the term from Albert Bradwell's *Autobiography of a Converted Infidel* (1844), in which a new believer repudiates his former resistance to God's grace, Brown defines the 'salvation economy' as 'the machinery of ideas and agencies by which the discursivity of evangelical piety dominated public culture'.² Conversion, in short, was not just a part of the grammar of Victorian theology but also an animating presence in the popular imagination.

This article examines the shifting concept of radical religious change and its representation in early and mid-Victorian Britain. What is conversion? How important was it in the Victorian age, beyond the enthusiastic chapels of non-conformist Christianity? The chapter will explore the ideas of eminent Victorian 'converts' of various kinds – Spurgeon, John Henry Newman (1801-90) and John Ruskin (1819-1900) – and narratives by less well known figures. Where Callum Brown emphasises the socio-historical processes that produced conversion, my argument will explore the intersections of theology, sociology, religious practice and literary representation.

¹ Charles G. Finney, 'Why London Is Not Converted', sermon delivered at the Tabernacle, Moorfields, 5 June 1850 (http://www.gospeltruth.net/1849-51Penny_Pulpit/500605pp_why_london_ntcnvt.htm (25 January 2007)).

² Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000*, Routledge, 2001, pp. 35-6. Chapter Three ('The Salvation Economy') offers a very useful exploration of this phenomenon in relation to the 'privatisation of faith'.

'No Longer Myself': Theologies of Transformation

'[C]onversion,' reflects Jacques Derrida, 'ought to be the surprise of an event happening to "myself," who am therefore no longer myself'.³ The unsettling thought of radical personal change may have been crucial to a long repressed nineteenth-century religious discourse, but it is also one that continues to haunt the postmodern imagination. In his study of the covert tradition of 'Christian unreason' in literature, science and philosophy from Darwin to Derrida, John Schad suggests that for the latter (specifically in the peculiar essay, 'Circumfession') 'conversion is a name for the radical discontinuities that beset identity or being; it names, if you will, 'The Importance of Being Someone Else', or rather the inevitability'.⁴ Narrating dramatic personal change presents the interpreter with a series of problems about the meaning of the transformation. '[T]he experience of conversion,' notes Heather Henderson, 'points toward a central problem of the autobiographer.... How can he assert the continuity of his personality over the course of time?'⁵

Does the 'surprise event' of conversion imply insincerity or is it evidence that the original, firmly held conviction was entirely erroneous? John Henry Newman, perhaps the most famous convert of the nineteenth century, isolates this question in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864). He does not, however, associate the problem with his own conversion to Roman Catholicism but with a critique of the 'anti-dogmatic principle' of liberalism: 'persistence in a given belief is no sufficient test of its truth: but departure from it is at least a slur upon the man who has felt so certain about it'.⁶ Significantly, almost a decade and half before joining the Roman Catholic communion, Newman had arrived at the conclusion that conversion is a gradual process, analogous to the growth of plants, rather than a sudden or dramatic transformation of identity:

When men change their religious opinions really and truly, it is not merely their opinions that they change, but their hearts; and this evidently is not done in a moment.... This we see in the growth of plants, for instance; it is slow, gradual, continual; yet one day by chance they grow more than another, they make a shoot, or at least we are attracted to their growth on that day by some accidental circumstance, and it remains on our memory. So with our souls⁷

The organic imagery of this sermon might be interpreted as an attempt to challenge the traditional hegemony of Evangelicals on the importance of personal transformation through repentance and public confession of Christ.⁸ Newman's disdain for the sudden and unexpected conversion of formerly profligate individuals is an indirect, but nevertheless incisive, denunciation of the Evangelical mode of calling

³ Jacques Derrida, 'Circumfession', in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* [1991], tr. Geoffrey Bennington, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 124.

⁴ John Schad, *Queer Fish: Christian Unreason from Darwin to Derrida*, Sussex Academic Press, 2004, p. 95. Schad invokes Derrida and the spectre of rebirth in an exploration of Oscar Wilde's lasting flirtation with – and death-bed conversion to – Roman Catholicism.

⁵ Heather Henderson, *The Victorian Self: Autobiography and Biblical Narrative*, Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 14.

⁶ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of his Religious Opinions*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic, Oxford, Clarendon, 1967, p. 54.

⁷ John Henry Newman, 'Sudden Conversions', preached January, 1832, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, new edn, 8 vols, London, Rivingtons, 1882, VIII, 225-26.

⁸ For a discussion of Evangelical influences in Newman's early life see Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography*, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 3-5.

for conversion. This, Newman implies, engenders a subjective sense of forgiveness without the authority of the Church and constitutes a mockery of its sacraments. Newman's argument is based on an audacious re-reading of the conversion of Saint Paul, who, he argued, underwent a gradual conversion that was concluded, but not begun, on the road to Damascus. He observes that as Saul, persecutor of Christians, he was without equal for his zeal and religious obedience, and that he was a strict follower of the Law. Newman notes that these remained key aspects of Saul's character after his conversion to Christ and his change of name and were 'merely directed to other and higher objects, and purified; it was his creed that was changed, and his soul by regeneration'.⁹ Newman's emphasis on the developmental nature of Saint Paul's dramatic transformation was informed by his suspicion of the Evangelical tradition which had been so vital in his own religious heritage. Yet it also indicates some of the problems we might have in describing the nature and legitimacy of different conversion experiences.

Asserting a stable definition of conversion is not easy, even, as Roland Robertson has noted, within the limits of the Christian tradition. However, its core characteristic, throughout Christian history at least, might most accurately be described as 'the idea of self-revision relative to God'.¹⁰ A.D. Nock, in his highly influential 1933 study of religious transformation in ancient and early Christian civilizations, described conversion as a 'reorientation of the soul' and the 'deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved'.¹¹ As a social phenomenon, conversion implies a radical reassessment of identity and the relationship between the individual and the society of which it is a part. In the Gospel accounts of both Matthew and Mark the first assertion of Jesus' ministry was 'Be converted!'.¹² A number of words are used in the New Testament to denote different forms of conversion. *Metanoein* and *metánoia* indicate the divinely influenced 'change of heart' that leads to salvation. Michel observes that these words take precedence in the New Testament over *metamélomai*, meaning to feel regret or to repent.¹³ The sentiment of remorse, as Michel notes, does not always lead to a full repentance or 'conversion', and this is illustrated with reference to the sense of guilt experienced by Judas after the betrayal of Christ which resulted in suicide rather than spiritual re-birth.¹⁴ James Walter makes a further distinction between *metánoia* and *epistrophé*, arguing that the first word emphasises the intellectual processes and intentions that inspire action, whilst the latter indicates 'the visible characteristics of an external act'. He also notes that these terms are almost synonymous and can both be appropriate translations of the Hebrew *shub*, used in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah to call Israel to turn away from sin and return to God for salvation.¹⁵

Since the eighteenth century, 'conversion' has most often been associated with

⁹ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, VIII, 227..

¹⁰ Roland Robertson, *Meaning and Change: Explorations in the Cultural Sociology of Modern Societies*, Blackwell, 1978), p.197..

¹¹ A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford University Press, 1933, p.7.

¹² Matthew 4.17, Mark 1.15. See entry on 'Conversion' by James J.Walter in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Joseph A. Komonchak and others, Dublin, Gill, Macmillan, 1987, p.233.

¹³ O.Michel, entry on *Metamélomai* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. by Geoffrey W.Bromiley, Eerdmans, 1985, pp.589-90.

¹⁴ See Matthew 27.3. Kittel and Friedrich, p.590.

¹⁵ Komonchak, p.233.

Evangelical Christianity. Bebbington argues that a particular emphasis on the necessity of the conversion experience is one of the ‘priorities’ of the Evangelical tradition from its origins in the 1730s to the end of the twentieth century.¹⁶ In his groundbreaking study of conversion narratives (‘a biography of a genre’), D. Bruce Hindmarsh claims that a reappraisal of spiritual autobiography might challenge common assumptions about modern identity. These Evangelical stories of personal change, he argues, ‘bore witness to a religious understanding that was only ever a vector of the Enlightenment ... that did not succumb to the pathological elision of community, contingency, or faith that is typical of the modernist autobiography’.¹⁷

The matrix of nineteenth-century religious debate produced many dynamic accounts of faith re-discovered, lost or transformed which were widely published as print culture became increasingly accessible. John Wolffe has argued that literature was the most obvious medium for Evangelicals, in particular, to make use of because it was ‘a natural extension of their own consciousness of being a people of the book, drawing inspiration and authority from the study of the Scriptures’.¹⁸ Testimony was a crucial element of Victorian religious life: new converts stood before congregations recounting their salvation stories; short pamphlets, often anonymously written, described reasons for joining, or leaving, particular churches. The ‘reality-shaping power of language’, as Brad Kallenberg has described it, has a specific theological precedent in the narratives of the life of Christ. He observes that Jesus is made distinct from the Old Testament prophets by his ability to heal through words.¹⁹ How, then, do conversion narratives, by necessity retrospective, operate? Can modern-day, sociological models of religious experience help us to understand conversion without traducing its theological nature?

‘Conversion Motifs’: John Ruskin and the Sociology of Conversion

If Newman is the most famous convert of the nineteenth century, John Ruskin might well be its most distinguished ‘un-converted man’, to use his own phrase. In 1858, the great critic of art and society underwent what he described as an ‘unconversion’ from the Evangelical tradition of his youth for which had been an articulate advocate. The first major public assessment of this *bouleversement* was detailed in Letter 76 of *Fors Clavigera*, published in April 1877, almost twenty years after the event. In this narrative Ruskin describes his departure from a Turin gallery where he had been studying the gorgeous (and Catholic) art of Paolo Veronese, a place of spiritual and physical affirmation where he had been filled with a sense of a painter’s ‘God-given power’, to a Waldensian chapel that is characterised by a sermon given by ‘a little squeaking idiot’ who believed that ‘all the people in the world out of sight of Monte Viso, would be

¹⁶ D.W.Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp.2-3.

¹⁷ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*, Oxford University Press, 2005, v-vii. For other relevant studies see Avrom Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England*, University of California Press, 1983; John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular*, Cambridge University Press, 1993. See also George P. Landow, ed., *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, Ohio University Press, 1979.

¹⁸ John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945*, Routledge, 1994, p.176.

¹⁹ Brad J. Kallenberg, ‘Conversion Converted: A Postmodern Formulation of the Doctrine of Conversion’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 67:4 (1995), 335-64 (p.350).

damned': 'I came out of the chapel, in sum of twenty years of thought, a conclusively *un-converted man*'.²⁰

Ruskin wrote a number of accounts of this intellectual and spiritual crisis: separate conversion narratives appear in his private correspondence of 1858 with his father, John James Ruskin, and friends including Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Charles Eliot Norton; it is also represented in his 'Notes on the Turin Gallery'. The last of these individual readings of the crisis is included in the third part of his uncompleted biography, *Praeterita* (1885-9), where Ruskin refers to his unconversion from Evangelical dogma as the 'Queen of Sheba crash', in reference to Paul Veronese's painting that precipitated this radical change.²¹ Michael Wheeler, whose *Ruskin's God* (1999) is the most thorough and sophisticated account of its subject's theological journey, rightly warns that the 'crash' is too 'easily caricatured as another simple case of Victorian "loss of faith"'.²²

Describing a movement away from a religious tradition as conversion might be deemed perverse. However, as Wheeler notes, Ruskin explicitly (and subversively) drew on the language of his Evangelical background to describe an experience apparently counter to its claims.²³ The writer's failure to transcend a Puritan idiom resonates with Callum Brown's emphasis on the defining 'salvation economy' of the era and illustrates the difficulty of using the term 'conversion' in Victorian Britain. Throughout the 1850s the problem of conversion divided the believing community of Great Britain. To state that a person was a 'convert' had a number of contrasting meanings in different social circles: in Oxford Tractarian circles, for example, it was likely to indicate secession from the Anglican communion and admission to the Roman Catholic Church. For Evangelicals, however, the epithet was rarely used to describe an individual's new institutional affiliation. Rather it was bestowed to indicate the movement of a soul from damnation to salvation through sincere repentance and confession of Christ. The lack of consensus on how an individual was to find salvation informed the other major religious debates of the decade regarding Biblical authority and historicity, and conflicting images of regeneration became a key feature of the literature and art of the period, even in work that was not consciously 'religious'.

Much of the most crucial late twentieth-century research on religious conversion was conducted by sociologists and social anthropologists. In particular, Victor Turner's work on ritual models of personal transformation has influenced research in a number of disciplines, including religious studies and English literature.²⁴ In the late 1970s important work was produced by James Beckford, Sallie McFague, and Brian Taylor. McFague's work contrasts with that of Beckford and Taylor as her criticism explores theologies of conversion rather than the social conditions and consequences of its

²⁰ John Ruskin, *The Works of Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols, London, George Allen, 1903-1912, XXIX, 89.

²¹ Ruskin, XXXV, 497.

²² Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 126. Chapter 6 ('Solomon's "Christian Royalty": a rite of passage in Turin', pp. 125-52) explores the 'unconversion' in unparalleled detail.

²³ Wheeler, p. 149.

²⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago: Aldine, 1962.

production.²⁵ More recently, interdisciplinary work has been undertaken by scholars including Lewis Rambo, Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant, Martyn Percy and Gauri Viswanathan.²⁶ In an article written in 1981, John Lofland and Norman Skonovd identified six key types of conversion. These 'Conversion Motifs' are Intellectual, Mystical, Experimental, Affectional, Revivalist, and Coercive. The last of these is irrelevant to the present discussion as it relates to the primarily twentieth-century phenomenon of 'brain-washing', often associated with religious cults and oppressive political regimes.²⁷ However, the other five categories defined are pertinent to Victorian religious discourse and provide a useful framework for introducing a number of the fundamental elements of 1850s conversion narratives.

The 'Intellectual' motif indicates a conversion that is reached privately, through engagement with literature, for example, or perhaps through listening to a number of sermons, and with little reference to the believing community. Lofland and Skonovd suggest that this model of faith is relatively new and is a result of the increasingly personal nature of religion in the Western world. This motif was, however, also a significant element of Victorian religious experience. One of the earliest references to conversion in Ruskin's writing describes a religious transformation that was arrived at primarily through intellectual engagement with Christian texts. In his diary for 31 October 1848, Ruskin reflected on a discussion he had held that afternoon with the father of his school-friend, Edmund Oldfield:

I was sitting with Mr. Oldfield for an hour, and permitted to question him respecting the origin of his faith. It was a deliberate conviction, attained by careful reading and examination of all *serious* and dignified objections to Christianity, as well as of the evidence for it, begun about the age of twenty six, in shame at not being able to render a reason for the faith taught him from a child. Afterwards he had rested secure, quoting the words of an aged clergyman to some questions put to him respecting his faith: 'I was in doubt about the foundation of my house; I took a candle and went down into the cellar, and ascertained that all was perfectly safe. Since then I have lived in the pleasantest of the upper parts of the house: I don't live in the cellar.'²⁸

The intellectual conviction of this reflective and rational approach to religious commitment contrasts with the anxiety of the age. There is a strong resonance between this intellectual decision as the basis of conversion and the aforementioned New Testament *metánoia*, indicating the divinely induced change of heart. As Mr Oldfield was the father of a school-friend we can assume that his conversion, at the age of twenty six, occurred some decades earlier, in the context of a society that

²⁵ James A. Beckford, 'Accounting for Conversion', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 29 (1978), 249-62; Sallie McFague, 'Conversion: Life on the Edge of the Raft', *Interpretation*, 32 (1978), 255-68; Brian Taylor, 'Recollection and Membership: Converts' Talk and the Ratiocination of Commonality', *Sociology*, 12 (1978), 316-17.

²⁶ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Yale University Press, 1993. See also Rambo's contribution to *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Mircea Eliade and others, 16 vols, New York, Macmillan, 1987, IV, 74-9. *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, edited by Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant, London, Cassell, 1999; *Previous Convictions: Conversion in the Present Day*, edited by Martyn Percy, SPCK, 2000; Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*, Princeton University Press, 1998.

²⁷ John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, 'Conversion Motifs', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 20 (1981), 373-85 (p.375).

²⁸ *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, ed. Joan Evans, and John Howard Whitehouse, 3 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1958, p. 370.

was significantly less troubled about its religious identity. The suggestion that to 'live in the cellar' of faith was unhealthy appears to be a rejection of the doubts of historicist scholars who were challenging the integrity of the Biblical narrative as a contemporaneous and accurate account of key moments in human history. Neither the creation of the world nor the details of the life of Christ were taken for granted by these critics. The Evangelical hermeneutic which had formed the basis of Ruskin's world-view since childhood was the defining influence on his work during the late 1840s: *Modern Painters II* (1846), published two years before this conversation, and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), appearing some months later, both feature *apologia* for the Evangelical tradition. Ruskin reached the summit of his *intellectual* commitment to Evangelicalism during this period, culminating with the publication of *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds* in 1851. His response to Mr Oldfield's conversion narrative illustrates this unequivocal intellectual sympathy:

I then made some observation on the great distinction between this evangelical trust in Christ and all other, including any confidence in man: he then said, 'I believe there is but One great Difference, and that is, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not; and that is implied by what St. Paul says: "Grace, mercy and peace be to all them that love our Lord Jesus in sincerity". If any man love *not* the Lord Jesus let him be anathema maranatha.'²⁹

The use of the lower case 'evangelical' implies a broader sense of the term than a specific reference to the Puritan tradition of that name. Rather, he uses it to distinguish between genuine or Gospel-inspired Christian commitment from insincere conversions. Ruskin was certainly no latitudinarian at this time, and he believed that there could be no possible ambiguity regarding an individual's conversion to Christ: a soul was either inside the fold or was living in a state of corruption. This sense of assurance was undermined in the 1850s as Ruskin became less convinced of Protestant teaching on salvation and the authenticity of conversion. Disdain for the doctrine of justification by faith, that became so crucial to his work in the 1870s and 1880s, also guided him away from approbation for 'intellectual' conversion.

The 'Mystical' type of conversion is most obviously associated with the Damascus road encounter with the divine that led Saul to become St Paul, and in a sense is the 'classic', if not in reality the most common, mode of transformation. Theophany, a moment when God reveals himself, in some palpable way, to the individual or to the community, is a common feature of 'Mystical' conversion narratives. Intense emotional and sometimes even physical experiences are often integral to this motif. Ruskin's encounter with Veronese's 'Queen of Sheba' has elements of such a conversion.

'Experimental' conversion relates to active participation in a religion by an individual as a means of deciding whether to become a committed member. Although Lofland and Skonovd relate this type primarily with twentieth-century 'new age' groups that thrive on curiosity and which are often free from authoritarian structures, many Victorians experimented with different forms of worship, moving between church and chapel to listen to the latest highly esteemed preacher. In an anonymously published pamphlet, entitled *The Religious Tendencies of the Age* (1860), one writer advocated a full experiential encounter with specific religious practices as the only means of true understanding. Cool rationalism, he argued, was not the basis of a decision for or against a mode of worship:

²⁹ Ibid, p.370.

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Do not imagine that you understand a religious system because you have mastered its history and can explain its doctrines.... You should try to divest yourself for a time of your previous notions and to assume the feelings of others; you should read not merely their standard theological works, but also their ordinary devotional manuals; you should haunt the village chapel and the village procession, and endeavour in every way to enter into the feelings of the worshipper.³⁰

The growing access enjoyed by wealthy Victorians to the Continent, and the tradition of the 'Grand Tour' in particular, exposed travellers to forms of worship and religious practice that were quite unlike their own modes of belief. Attending a Mass, for example, would have been very different in a culture that was predominantly Roman Catholic from one in the militantly Protestant environment of 1850s England. In July 1856 the *Evangelical Magazine* observed that the increasing opportunities for international travel would influence the religious identity of the nation. The writer suggested that this 'traffic' was potentially both enlightening and a threat to Protestant liberty:

As the traffic among the nations becomes augmented, the difficulties of language will disappear, and literature will attain a tenfold power of enrichment as well as of a diffusion. The great law embodied in the proverb of Solomon applies in all its force to this case. 'There is that scattereth and yet increaseth.' The interchange of thought between races of the most various mental constitutions and habits is a process that cannot fail to be suggestive.³¹

'Affectional' conversion is precipitated by friendship or familial bonds with active members of a religious group. Lofland and Skonovd argue that emotional attachment can have the same influence as the intellectual sympathy, divine encounter, or 'experimental immersion' associated with the other motifs. For the Victorian Church, the 'affectional' motif was perhaps a means of holding members rather than actually gaining new ones. The social pressure to remain within the faith tradition in which an individual was brought up was, and is, often strong. The opprobrium conferred on those who seceded from the Church of England to Rome, for example, was highly potent and individuals were denounced in sermons and pamphlets for their act of apostasy. Charles Kingsley's censure of John Henry Newman in an article published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in January 1864 is arguably the most prominent example of such public defamation. However, the attempt to shame those who abandoned the Protestant faith was common. In a pamphlet entitled *The Folly of Going to Rome for a Religion* (1846), the Reverend A. G. H. Hollingsworth censured the conversion of 'Miss R.' to the Roman Catholic faith. He attacked this convert's lack of intellectual rigour and suggested that her earlier 'low church' affinities signified an insecure religious identity. His denunciation, however, indicates the desire of many Protestants for a stable site of authority:

At first her own refinements, or her reason, or her feeling of some inward and ecstatic religious sensations were her sole guides to truth . . . Every one that professed to love the Saviour of the world was her co-religionist. No difference could be perceived between methodist and presbyterian, churchman or baptist, so long as all these different dissenters and nominal churchmen could be fused together at a tea-party . . . she looked round for something more fixed, and of a firmer consistency, and found, as she thought, in these western regions nothing but Rome, which, in its intense exclusiveness, gave a well-

³⁰ Anonymous, *The Religious Tendencies of the Age*, London: Saunders, Otley, 1860, pp.24-5.

³¹ Anonymous [J.G.], 'Hints to the Christian Tourist', *Evangelical Magazine*, 34 (1856), 390-93 (pp.390-91).

defined though gloomy and uncharitably embattled citadel to her wandering soul.³²

Other pamphlets in this popular genre included the Reverend W. E. Scudamore's *Letters to a Seceder from the Church of England to the Communion of Rome* (1851) and the Reverend Henry Alford's *An Earnest Dissuasive from Joining the Communion of the Church of Rome* (1846).³³ Public shaming was an important ritual for the Protestant community with its missionary rationale and an accompanying need to sustain its existing membership.

The 'Revivalist' motif is the final category to discuss. This involves the conversion of many people in the context of emotionally charged meetings. Revivalism is given little credence by modern critics and it is often argued that relatively few conversions occur within these meetings. Certain post-war studies suggest that the impact of this kind of missionary activity is significantly less dramatic than claimed by evangelistic organisations.³⁴

Whether or not revivalism ever engendered significant numbers of conversions it was certainly a vital element of Victorian Church history. The foundation of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 encouraged inter-denominational missionary activity, and many of these endeavours were distinctly revivalist in style. At the end of 1852, for example, the Reverend James Haldane issued an *Invitation for United Prayer for the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* at a meeting to be held on New Year's Day, 1853. This summons, published as a short pamphlet, attempted to galvanise the Protestant community with the observation that 'the Pope is making a daring onset on our ... faith'.³⁵ Roman Catholics were clearly not included in Haldane's call to all 'who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity' to participate in a prayer meeting for the 'outpouring' of the Holy Spirit. This kind of assembly was designed to dissipate the variety of doctrine that existed even within the Evangelical community.³⁶ Although the principal objective of this particular rally was not the conversion of non-believers, the confident expectation that the Holy Spirit would become manifest and enact a transformation of those present locates it as part of the revivalist movement.

Spurgeon's meetings in the Music Hall of the Surrey Gardens and later in the Metropolitan Tabernacle were characterised by the presence of vast, emotionally stimulated crowds and by his dramatic sermons, delivered in impassioned rhetoric that emphasised the narrow road to salvation. Spurgeon was undoubtedly part of the tradition of 'revivalist' preachers, though he disliked the epithet: 'Whenever I see a man who is called a revivalist, I always set him down for a cipher. I would scorn the

³² A. G. H. Hollingsworth, *The Folly of Going to Rome for a Religion in Two Letters to a Friend*, London, Hatchard, 1846, pp.3-4.

³³ W. E. Scudamore, *Letters to a Seceder from the Church of England to the Communion of Rome*, London, Rivington, 1851; Henry Alford's *An Earnest Dissuasive from Joining the Communion of the Church of Rome (Addressed to the younger members of the Church of England, and especially to students in the universities)*, London, Burns, 1846.

³⁴ Lofland and Skonovd, p.380.

³⁵ James Haldane Stewart, *Invitation for United Prayer for the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, London, Hodgson, 1852, p.2.

³⁶ One minister, the Reverend Dr Chalmers, argued that the aspirations of the Evangelical Alliance were missionary rather than ecumenical. *On the Evangelical Alliance; its Design, its Difficulties, its Proceedings and its Prospects (with Practical Suggestions)*, Edinburgh, Oliver, Boyd, 1846, p.5.

taking of such a title as that to myself'.³⁷

Yet the objective of Spurgeon's ministry was unequivocal. He wanted to convert his listeners, and he very rarely preached without a challenge to accept faith in Christ as the sole means of salvation. He also believed that genuine revival was a fundamental promise of scripture, and, as a Biblical literalist, he was confident that prophecy would be fulfilled in accordance with the word of God.³⁸ Significantly in 1858, the year of Ruskin's apparent 'unconversion' from the Puritan tradition, Spurgeon and other Evangelicals told their congregations of a dramatic revival of religion in America. Reports were made that thousands of people had turned to the Christian faith, and this was interpreted by certain groups as an unmistakable act of the Holy Spirit.

On 28 March 1858, preaching at the Royal Surrey Gardens, Spurgeon described the conditions necessary for a similar revival to the one that had apparently swept across the United States, exemplified by 'towns in New England where you could not, even if you searched, find one solitary unconverted person'.³⁹ Interestingly, Spurgeon represented the intensification of religion as an opportunity to compete with Rome, emphasising the distinctly Protestant character of revival. Hostility towards the Roman Catholic Church was still strong some eight years after the re-establishment of the hierarchy: 'if we for once could outvie old Rome, who kept her monks in her sanctuaries, always at prayer, both by night and by day, - if we together could keep up one golden chain of prayer . . . then might we expect an abundant outpouring of the Divine Spirit from the Lord our God'.⁴⁰ One famous historian of nineteenth-century revivalist movements, J. Edwin Orr, has argued that the American revival was followed by a 'similar movement' in the United Kingdom in 1859.⁴¹ However, Bebbington has since challenged Orr's conclusions. He argues that Orr failed to distinguish 'between spontaneous popular revival, deeply rooted in the community, and meetings carefully designed to promote the work of the gospel.' Orr's work, he suggests, relies too heavily on R.C. Morgan's magazine, *The Revival*, which 'created the impression that a single phenomenon, revival, was already aflame throughout Britain'. The reality, claims Bebbington, was that 'its range was severely limited'.⁴² The history of conversion is a space of debate and contest, open to re-interpretation and new perspectives.

Apostasy and Public Profession

Lewis Rambo, acknowledging Lofland and Skonovd's vital work, has developed a further typology of conversion. One notable category featured in Rambo's work that is not included in the 'Conversion Motifs' essay is 'Apostasy'. This indicates the repudiation of a previous set of beliefs in favour of a new worldview. Rambo argues that this is a significant form of conversion because the 'dynamics of leaving a group or of loss of faith constitute an important form of change, both individually and collectively'.⁴³ In *Praeterita* Ruskin famously described the Turin crisis as his 'final

³⁷ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit and the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, containing Sermons preached and Revised by the Rev. C.H. Spurgeon*, 42 vols, London, Alabaster, Passmore, 1856-96, IV, 161-2.

³⁸ See 'A Revival Sermon', preached by Spurgeon on 26 January 1860, at Exeter Hall.

³⁹ Spurgeon, IV, 161.

⁴⁰ Spurgeon, IV, p. 164.

⁴¹ J. Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain*, London, Marshall, 1949, p.5.

⁴² Bebbington, p.116.

⁴³ Eliade, p.74.

apostacy from Puritan doctrine'.⁴⁴ This is something of an exaggeration. However, it is a useful example of the ways in which the term was used to describe a mode of conversion.

In the 1850s apostasy was often associated with those who had not lost faith but, being disillusioned with fundamental aspects of Protestantism, had chosen to enter the Roman Catholic communion. Just as thousands of pamphlets and sermons were issued to condemn these conversions, so too were many accounts given in defence of personal religious change. In 1858 one convert published *Churches, Sects and Religious Parties; or, Some Motives for my Conversion to the Catholic Church*, withholding his name and identifying himself simply as a 'Master of Arts, formerly a Clergyman of the Established Church'. Significantly, the pamphlet begins with a rejection of the charge that converts to Rome were weak men unduly influenced by Pusey and the Tractarian movement. The writer also notes that secession to Rome was not recognised by most Protestants as 'conversion', indicating spiritual rebirth and salvation, but described instead as '*perversion*', a parody of the interaction between man and God.⁴⁵

His reasons for entering the Roman Catholic Church indicate that for many the Protestant tradition could no longer offer spiritual assurance. Catholicism offered a permanent understanding of truth, not influenced by the *zeitgeist* or by denominational division:

I wanted a *theology*, and I found it only in the Catholic Church. I needed a *faith*, which should be something better than a mere system of opinions, and I found it there. I had all along sought for a *religion* which should be something more than mere sentiment, and here alone again I found it ... universal truth was enshrined in a Church which more than realized all the dreams of *Kosmopolitan* – of world-regard – embracing in her large and generous heart the whole of humanity – all the families, tribes, and tongues of the human race, without distinction of race, or lineage, or tongue, or nationality, or the thousand other differences which divide mankind.⁴⁶

The public narration of conversion is extremely important, both to the individual who has undergone the change and to the community which he or she has entered. As Rambo argues, 'stories as they are retold orally and composed as autobiographies become the paradigms by which people interpret their own lives'.⁴⁷ This anonymous account, though written rather than spoken, provides a coherent reinterpretation of a life, locating it in a specific doctrinal frame of reference, and integrating the individual's identity in a '*Kosmopolitan*' religious community. The Roman Catholic Church harmonised the confused voices of the post-Babel world, and many converts desired transcendence from the conflicting tongues of an increasingly pluralist society. The conversion narrative is also an important act of reinforcement: the religious transformation becomes more 'real' when restated, both for the narrator and for the reader/listener. Brian Taylor maintains that in describing the momentous change, individuals in 'a quite literal sense ... talk themselves into the experience of conversion

⁴⁴ Ruskin, XXXV, 492.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the semantic slippage of the words 'pervert' and 'perversion' in relation to conversion see Schad, p. 94. Schad also acknowledges a debt to Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, and to Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*, University of California Press, 1970.

⁴⁶ Anonymous, *Churches, Sects and Religious Parties; or, Some Motives for my Conversion to the Catholic Church*, London, Dolman, 1858, pp.4-5.

⁴⁷ Rambo, p.158.

in the past through engagement in the experience of accounting for conversion in the present.⁴⁸ This, in Rambo's terms, 'biographical re-shaping' creates a powerful sense of regeneration, an opportunity to abandon the limits of the past and to enter a new, more authentic state of selfhood.⁴⁹

A crucial part of the narrative process is a repudiation of the rejected hermeneutic or mode of belief. For the writer of *Churches, Sects and Religious Parties*, this is discernible in his careful contrast between the theology of growth with which he associates the Catholic Church and the aridity of 'dead Protestantism'. Repudiation is so vital as it emphasises the separation between the identity of the past and present as converts wish to establish the integrity of their new religious selfhood and to maintain the sincerity of their transformation. Yet, as another anonymous convert to Rome observed, also 'a late Clergyman of the Anglican Communion', the intellectual transition was rarely swift or conclusive: 'How hard it is to get rid of the Protestant mind in which we have been educated !'⁵⁰

This method of 'casting-off' the old form as a means of vindicating the new was not peculiar to those who relinquished Protestantism. The sense of becoming a new creation, fundamental to Evangelical conversion, was often perpetuated in public testimony as the convert described the sinfulness of his pre-regenerate self, as if describing a completely separate individual.⁵¹ This rhetoric of newness is also a feature of narratives constructed by those who inverted the apparently popular trend of movement to Rome. In 1851 a pamphlet entitled *Papal Aggression in England and Defection from Popery in France* was published, featuring the first person account of a French priest's recent rejection of Rome. The writer argued that he remained a Catholic, as did all true believers but that the corrupt decisions and practices of his former Church would precipitate the judgement of God unless the believing community interceded for a renewal of private and corporate holiness.⁵² The pamphlet was published within a year of the so-called act of 'Papal Aggression' and there is a clear agenda for bringing the story of a Roman Catholic priest, who now rejected the Papacy, to the turbulent *milieu* of Protestant England. It was a narrative of conversion appropriated to warn people away from the call of Rome, using one individual's private religious experience as anti-Catholic propaganda.⁵³

Conclusion: Saving Conversion

'Conversion is paradoxical,' observes Lewis R. Rambo: 'It destroys and it saves ... It is created totally by the action of God, and it is created totally by the action of humans'.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Taylor, p.319.

⁴⁹ Eliade, p.77.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, *Some Account of the Reasons of My Conversion to the Catholic Church*, London, Levey, Robson, Franklyn, 1847, p.39.

⁵¹ I explore these issues in more detail in 'Evangelical Certainty: Charles Spurgeon and the Sermon as Crisis Literature', in *Reinventing Christianity: Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, ed. Linda Woodhead, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001, pp. 27-36.

⁵² Anonymous (M.R.), *Papal Aggression in England and Defection from Popery in France*, London: Hanbury, 1851, p.5.

⁵³ For a detailed survey of Protestant and Roman Catholic relations in the period, see Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁵⁴ Rambo, p. 76. Also quoted in Sara Savage, 'A Psychology of Conversion – From All Angles' in Percy, pp.1-18 (p. 14).

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Victorian iterations of conversion are no less slippery than those of the pluralist, postmodern era. Yet if we are to understand nineteenth-century Britain, we need to re-appraise the irreducibly theological nature of its popular culture, however much it might offend our contemporary sensibilities. From a purely secular perspective, conversion narratives illuminate the 'practice of everyday life', to borrow Michel de Certeau's famous phrase, operating in a world that is no longer our own. In theological terms, by contrast, the form of spiritual autobiography known as the conversion narrative is vital in connecting disparate religious communities to a grand narrative of God's redemptive action in history. Whether we privilege the secular or the sacred versions of these accounts, our encounter with figures such as Newman, Spurgeon and Ruskin – as well as the host of anonymous converts – is enriched by the 'surprise ... event' of conversion.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ Derrida, p. 124.

Mapping Spiritual Experience through Myth

Anna Walczuk

You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.¹

That is how C.S. Lewis in his book *Surprised by Joy*, subtitled *The shape of my early life*, describes the culmination of his long path of quest and evasion which in the year 1929 led him to Theism, and then two years later to Christianity. *Surprised by Joy* is an autobiographical record of the growth of the man who passes from a fairly conventional Protestantism of the Church of Ireland through various shades of Agnosticism and Atheism to the full embrace of Christianity.² The book was published twenty-four years after C.S. Lewis's conversion and it traces his transformation from a non-believer to a committed Anglican in the mould of orthodox Christianity on two interconnected planes of intellectual and imaginative experience.

A year after the publication of *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis published a novel entitled *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* which, though a work of fiction, is closely connected with its immediate predecessor in the genre of factual life writing. When the novel appeared in 1956, seven years before Lewis's death, as a work of the writer who had already established his reputation as a medieval and renaissance scholar, university don, and Christian apologist, it was rather underestimated by literary critics. Nevertheless his last novel always held a very special position for C.S. Lewis himself and, despite the cool critical reception, C.S. Lewis maintained that *Till We Have Faces* was particularly dear to him for it had lived in his mind since his undergraduate years. It is not surprising therefore that Peter Schakel calls *Till We Have Faces* Lewis's 'fictional autobiography'.³

Till We Have Faces therefore provides an interesting fictional analogue to the facticity of the autobiographical record one finds in *Surprised by Joy*. The following discussion will trace the parallels in the respective narratives of Lewis's conversion. Focusing on the imaginative potential of myth it will attempt a closer analytical insight into how far the myth accommodates the complexity of the spiritual journey recounted in his autobiography.

The novel, significantly subtitled *A Myth Retold*, is a twentieth century reworking of the ancient story of Cupid and Psyche, derived from Lucius Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, or *Metamorphoses*. C.S. Lewis's own re-telling of the ancient myth serves to convey

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* [1955], Glasgow, Collins, Fount Paperbacks, 1982, p. 182 (hereafter referred to in the text as *SJ*).

² I am indebted to Dr Andrew Tate for referring to Jacques Derrida's 'Circumfession' with his comment on conversion: 'conversion ought to be the surprise of an event happening to "myself" who am therefore no longer myself' (Geoffrey Bennington, Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, Chicago University Press, 1993), which I find particularly relevant as it throws new light on the title of C.S. Lewis's spiritual autobiography: *Surprised by Joy*.

³ Peter Schakel, *Reason and Imagination in C.S. Lewis*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1984, p. 160.

in imaginative terms what he has been expounding as it were to the intellect in his autobiographical writing. He chooses the myth of Psyche and her lover's invisible palace as a mode of re-telling the story of his own spiritual journey to life-changing epiphany. The myth represents for him an imaginative flight from enslaving subjectivity, which he feared, to the firm but liberating foundations of the universal, which he desired. As such it provides the rationalist and the logician with the most suitable narrative form for the expression of his profoundest personal needs, intellectual challenges and aesthetic fascinations which, combined with a deep-seated, though for a long time suppressed, religious feeling and yearning for God, led to his conversion.

However, it seems that the most important reason why C.S. Lewis chooses myth as the best framing device to tell the story of his conversion is that he looks upon myth as a superior narrative form which possesses the unique power to reach out beyond itself and grasp reality in the Platonic sense of touching the core of Being. That is why myth, in a greater degree than other narratives, has the capacity of 'affording a taste of reality'.⁴ In one of his essays C.S. Lewis explains:

What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; *in hac valle abstractionis*.⁵

It is then Lewis's firm belief that myth, like fairy tale, is the best possible means of plunging into reality and touching it because, instead of giving mere simulacra and approximations, it has the capacity

to generalize while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies.⁶

Unsurprisingly, in myth C.S. Lewis finds 'a real, though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination'.⁷ Consequently the mythic narrative represents for him an epistemological situation for which Eliade proposes the term *hierophany*, meaning that 'something sacred shows itself to us'.⁸

Therefore due to its capacity for grasping reality and its quasi-mystical link with the divine, myth becomes C.S. Lewis's most immediate choice to narrate in imaginative terms everything that he otherwise describes in *Surprised by Joy*. In some respects *Till We Have Faces* may be regarded as a translation of the autobiographical into mythic narrative.

In Lewis's life-narrative of spiritual transformation the key concept and the main operative force in the movement from a position of indifference, or even outright

⁴ Schakel, p. 124.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, 'Myth Became Fact', in Walter Hooper (ed.), *Undeceptions. Essays on Theology and Ethics* [1970], London, Geoffrey Bles, 1971, p. 42.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, 'Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said', in Walter Hooper (ed.), *Of This and Other Worlds*, London, Collins, 1982, p. 74.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles. A Preliminary Study*, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1947, p. 161.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion* [1957] (transl. Willard R. Trask), San Diego, New York, London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959, p. 11.

rejection of God, to an attitude of full submission and acceptance of the Transcendent Divine, is 'Joy'. C.S. Lewis defines Joy as a kind of metaphysical longing, or '*Sehnsucht*' (*SJ*, p. 12). He tries to elucidate the exceedingly elusive and idiosyncratic thrill of Joy in his autobiographical discourse, where he draws heavily on his immense reading, his familiarity with the psychology and aesthetics of the reception of literature, and his training in philosophy. C.S. Lewis's experience of Joy is closely linked with his immersion in Norse mythology and his enthrallment with the music of Wagner. He speaks of 'the stab of Joy' (*SJ*, p. 106) and pictures it as 'the arrow (...) shot from the North' (*SJ*, p. 106). Joy has the 'taste of heaven' (*SJ*, p. 135) and it comes to him 'riding (...) on huge waves of Wagnerian music and Norse and Celtic mythology' (*SJ*, p. 134).

What deserves special emphasis is that C.S. Lewis manages effectively to incorporate his highly personal but hardly definable sense of Joy into the solid body of myth. When the spiritual journey described in *Surprised by Joy* gets transformed into the mythic narrative of *Till We Have Faces*, the pivotal Joy, presented in the autobiographic narrative as instrumental in putting C.S. Lewis on the way to conversion, becomes incarnate in the mythic narrative about the allure of the realm of the gods for the mortals, and about Psyche's mysterious intercourse with her divine lover who takes her into his invisible palace. Thus the myth of Cupid and Psyche provides C.S. Lewis with a perfect repository for the dialectic between the numinous and the mundane which always attracted him and sometimes was acutely sensed as 'the stab of Joy' (*SJ*, p. 66).

In *Till We Have Faces* C.S. Lewis introduces an important alteration to the ancient story. In the foreground of his narrative, instead of Psyche, Lewis puts her ugly elder sister Orual, who is portrayed in the novel with a considerable depth and complexity. After Psyche's marriage to the mysterious lover-god, Orual cannot recover from the loss of her beloved sister. She can neither understand Psyche's exquisite happiness, nor curb her dormant envy of that at which her sister rejoices. What is more, Orual is overcome by deep resentment directed to the gods who take away everything, give nothing instead, and always stay in the darkness. Eventually Orual becomes the Queen of Glome. She is well-educated, successful and held in the highest regard by her subjects. Deep inside her, however, she still bears a private grudge against Psyche and adamantly refuses to see the secret palace which is the cause of her sister's elation.

By introducing Orual to the foreground of the myth as the major character, and keeping Psyche as an unceasing reverberation in the background, C.S. Lewis brings together what Mircea Eliade calls the sacred and the profane, two distinct and yet complementary spaces of reality.⁹ C.S. Lewis's retelling of the myth with Orual as the protagonist and Psyche as a continual frame of reference significantly underscores the overlapping of the profane with the sacred on the one hand, while on the other it accentuates the tension between these two existential spaces, which is concomitant with C.S. Lewis's own experience on his arduous path towards conversion.

As it is made clear in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis's progress to conversion comprises three distinct although intertwined paths: inklings of the numinous and yearning for the quasi-mystical state of transcendent Joy, the appeal of spirituality, and a fascination with books combined with high esteem for rationality and learning. All those paths are inscribed into the poetics of *Till We Have Faces* and find their imaginative equivalents in the novel's symbolism.

⁹ Eliade, pp. 14-15.

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Most of the time Orual is torn between two contradictory pulls. One is embodied by her mentor and foster father by choice, a Greek, Lysias, nicknamed the Fox. He represents the reliance on rationality and logic, and he stands for the Greek dimension in Orual's life where everything is lucid, transparent and ordered by reason. In the Greek part of Orual's upbringing the Fox nourishes her with knowledge, feeds her with words, teaches her how to make trim sentences and speaks of the lies of the poets. However, no matter how much she is drawn to the metaphorical Greeklands, Orual cannot sever her natural ties with the kingdom of Glome which is under the rule of Ungit, a faceless goddess of the land who in Lewis's narrative serves as a figure of all those hidden compartments of life that cannot be accommodated within the clear paradigm of verifiable and quantifiable phenomena. The Fox opens for Orual a broad and enlightened vista of cognitive perception.¹⁰ Ungit, conversely, bars her from any elucidation, demanding an unconditional belief and surrender to the shapeless enigma. Orual therefore struggles on the border of two interlocking worlds, and her fight is made even more desperate and painful when she is forced to come to grips with the great offering of Psyche to the gods first, and then with the glimpses of her sister's invisible palace, the emblem of Psyche's exquisite happiness, which Orual would like to erase from her perceptual horizon.

Although there are obvious parallels between the fictional Orual and C.S. Lewis on his way towards conversion, it would be an oversimplification to say that in the novel Orual is cast as C.S. Lewis's *alter ego*. It is rather more accurate to see her as a character portrayal of the archetypical convert inscribed into the mythic narrative. When viewed on the imaginative level C.S. Lewis's personal conversion comprises not only the complex experiential truth of Orual but also the straightforward truth of Psyche couched in the basic myth. When towards the end of his autobiographical narrative C.S. Lewis tells of his conversional epiphany that '[t]he hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation' (*SJ*, p. 183), he is like Psyche who enjoys heavenly bliss in a marvellous palace which to others' eyes seems to be only a prison house.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that C.S. Lewis assigns to Orual the central role in the narrative structure: she becomes the narrator of the story of Psyche and of her own difficult relationship with her younger sister, where adoring love mixes with egoism. More importantly, however, apart from being the main protagonist and the main focalizer of the story, Orual also becomes the narrator of the book. She begins to write her story as an old woman who has experienced a lot and achieved much in life. Her crucial motive for writing her book is, she declares, to state her case against gods: 'The case against them should be written'.¹¹ Thus Orual gets involved in the dialectic of an intercourse with the gods, and her narrative, reaching towards the realm of the divine, becomes the book. Although the gods are the primary addressees of her book of grievance, Orual, while writing it, never loses from sight the secondary recipient or the target human reader of her existential protest delivered to the domain of the

¹⁰ There is a clear and interesting resemblance between the Fox and C.S. Lewis's tutor Kirkpatrick, known as 'Kirk' or 'the Great Knock'. When in his autobiography C.S. Lewis writes about his time of learning spent at Bookham, he introduces Kirk as a 'Logical Positivist' (*SJ*, p. 110), and he describes his tutor's atheism as being 'chiefly of the anthropological and pessimistic kind' (*SJ*, p. 113).

¹¹ C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces. A Myth Retold*, [1956], London, Collins, Fount Paperbacks, 1981, p. 254 (hereafter referred to in the text as *TWHF*).

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transcendental. That recipient and witness of Orual's angry complaint is a hypothetical Greek, 'You, the Greek for whom I write' (*TWHF*, p. 228), who like her tutor, the Fox, represents outstanding reason growing upon a soil which lacks faith.

However, the most significant aspect of such bold address to the gods is that the process of writing itself begins to work a change in Orual. She starts from the position of a self-centred and cowardly sceptic¹² who first follows Psyche to prove the illusory nature of her sister's happiness and then audaciously challenges the gods with her irreverent accusations; she ends up in a state of humble acquiescence which gives her sufficient openness of mind to let her accept the numinous and at the same time enter into a totally new area of cognition, where the Fox's erudite eloquence appears only as a mere 'prattle of maxims' (*TWHF*, p. 306).

And now those divine Surgeons had tied me down and were at work (*TWHF*, p. 276).

They used my own pen to probe my wound (*TWHF*, p. 263).

The transformation is completed when Orual actually faces the gods, and is made to read out her complaint. Significantly, she stands before the court of divine judgement completely naked and without her veil which up till that moment she has been always wearing over her ugly face. The scene is strongly reminiscent of a passage from *Surprised by Joy*, where C.S. Lewis recounts a climactic moment in the process of his conversion which took place when he was on a bus going up Headington Hill:

Without words and (I think) almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow presented to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. Or, if you like, that I was wearing some stiff clothing, like corsets, or even a suit of armour, as if I were a lobster. I felt myself being, there and then, given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut; I could unbuckle the armour or keep it on. Neither choice was presented as a duty; no threat or promise was attached to either, though I knew that to open the door or to take off the corslet meant the incalculable. The choice appeared to be momentous but it was also strangely unemotional. I was moved by no desires or fears. In a sense I was not moved by anything. I chose to open, to unbuckle, to loosen the rein. I say, 'I chose', yet it did not really seem possible to do the opposite (*SJ*, p. 179).

It is remarkable that all logical connections and causal links are withdrawn from that crucial moment of making a choice for Faith. And though reason and conventional dialectic led up to it and assisted Lewis as he spent long hours reading, discussing and analysing all arguments for and against Faith, the final leap of the convert was for him made in total darkness. And so in his spiritual autobiography C.S. Lewis reflects:

Doubtless, by definition, God was Reason itself. But would he also be 'reasonable' in that other, more comfortable sense? Not the slightest assurance on that score was offered to me. Total surrender, the absolute leap in the dark, were demanded (*SJ*, p. 182).

¹² It is interesting to note that C.S. Lewis describes his pre-conversion life in *Surprised by Joy* in terms of priggishness, cowardice, hypocrisy and blasphemy, e.g. he speaks of making his first communion 'in total disbelief, acting a part, eating and drinking [his] own condemnation' (*SJ*, p. 130).

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In *Till We Have Faces* Orual's dive into the darkness of the gods' presence and their answer to her challenge is reflected not only in the fictional discourse but also in the structure of the novel which consists of two parts of strikingly unequal length. The first part, much longer than the second, represents what Orual intends to be her entire book of complaint. It ends on the note of contemptuous resignation when Orual utters what seems to be a rhetorical question: 'They have no answer?' (*TWHF*, p. 259). However, Orual is pressed to add a kind of postscript to her book, and in it she continues the motif of the gods' answer. The appendix is different from the first part of the narrative not only in length, but also in character. It seems that Orual has been forced to leave the rational order of hard visible facts and instead she walks into visions: 'I walked into the vision with my bodily eyes wide open' (*TWHF*, p. 296).¹³ Thus the boundary between the real and what earlier might seem merely the imaginary, gets blurred. Plunging into visions Orual gradually understands that 'things that are shown only to one may be spears and waterspouts of truth from the very depth of truth' (*TWHF*, pp. 288-9). After the slow-moving storyline of the first part, in the second part the pace of the narrative is much faster. Orual's encounter with the court of the gods ends abruptly with the quick exchange of a simple question and a brisk answer:

There was silence in the dark assembly long enough for me to have read my book out yet again. At last the judge spoke.

'Are you answered?' he said.

'Yes,' said I (*TWHF*, p. 304).

It seems that the logician and the dialectician behind the story-telling have been forced to break all the rational links and the rules of consistency in the argument. Accordingly, Orual opens the next and the last section of the second part of her narrative with the clarification of her affirmative 'yes':

The complaint was the answer. To have heard myself making it was to be answered (*TWHF*, p. 305).

Orual's postscript to her narrative is a compelling record of her mystical trial before the gods who come to judge her, and at the same time it is an account of the convergence of the sacred space with the profane. As such it provides a moving testimony to the fulfilment of the myth of Psyche in her own life:

Joy silenced me. And I thought I had now come to the highest, and to the utmost fullness of being which the human soul can contain (*TWHF*, p. 317).

Towards the end of her tale Orual gets a handsome face and she becomes one with her beautiful sister. Orual's merger with Psyche completes her journey towards the 'fullness of being' which she has been yearning for. She finishes her book at the moment when she is dying.

It should be emphasised that in her final address Orual no longer speaks of the gods but significantly changes her idiom and refers to 'Lord,' a much more meaningful

¹³ It may be recalled here that in *Surprised by Joy* C.S. Lewis tells how on his way to Faith in God he was exposed to the contradictory pressures coming from the imaginary and the real (cf. *SJ*, p. 138).

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term of ontological proximity and epistemological intimacy:

I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words. Long did I hate you, long did I fear you. I might — (*TWHF*, p. 320).

Her last sentence gets cut, and the dash which follows the initial 'I might' stands for the space of silence. It seems that C.S. Lewis needs such wordless space in his autobiographical conversion narrative, and it can be best rendered in imaginative terms through myth.

Orual's book in C.S. Lewis's novel is given the status of a sacred text¹⁴ put in charge of the High Priest that is urged 'to give up the book to any stranger who will take an oath to bring it into Greece' (*TWHF*, p. 320), or, in other words, to that space in life which is blind to the mysteries appertaining to the experience of Psyche-and-Orual in their encounter with the Divine. In such a way in the closure of *Till We Have Faces* C.S. Lewis reiterates the novel's foremost purpose as the narrative of his conversion to the belief in God.

Thus his re-telling of the old myth is like the crossing of a bridge which spans the apparently distant shores of the sacred and the profane, and reconciles the perceptible realm of the human with the equally real but transcendent Divine.

¹⁴ cf. 'I, Arnom, priest of Aphrodite, saved this roll and put it in the temple' (*TWHF*, p. 320).

On the Path to a Spiritual Life: The Autobiographies of Lauren Winner

Kerstin W. Shands

Postmodernist writing has explored the unravelling of time, the fragmentation of the self, and the breakdown of knowledge and truth. Fredric Jameson's well-known essay on the sense of disorientation in a hyperspatial hotel in Los Angeles delineates the inability of the postmodern subject to situate itself in a new hyperspace where 'protopolitical Utopian transformation' is no longer 'expected or desired'.¹ If postmodern fiction, playfully relying on cliché and using unreliable and questionable narrators in bizarre, outlandish, or fantastic stories, has parodied quests for meaning, dismantled hopes for permanent resolution, and dealt with serious themes in a tongue-in-cheek manner, and if poststructuralist criticism has tended to foreground the fictionality of literature and the impossibility of language to convey anything incontrovertible, the impossibility of knowing anything (including oneself, and much less God) in any definite or absolute sense, how should one look upon a form of writing that appears to celebrate spiritual homecoming, a sense of oneness, permanence and resolution along with 'grand narratives' of universal, divine, timeless truths?

I am referring to a genre of contemporary narrative nonfiction (or literary nonfiction) that I will tentatively call 'transformation narratives' or 'narratives of arrival.' I have chosen this term because, rather un-postmodernistically, the authors of spiritual autobiographies have arrived at something, and their lives have been transformed. Their stories are recounting the ultimate in personal and spiritual development (or a passionate *pursuit* of it): enlightenment, illumination, and transformative encounters with an ultimate reality or God.

With roots in seventeenth and eighteenth century conversion narratives, the modern spiritual autobiography could be traced back to what David J. Leigh in *Circuitous Journeys: Modern Spiritual Autobiography* has called the foundational spiritual autobiography of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. In *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*, Bruce D. Hindmarsh, further, looks at the conversion narratives written in England from the mid-1730s to the mid 1780s, and observes that: 'As in the case of Augustine, the Bible's account of fall from innocence and return provided a structure and many topoi for these spiritual autobiographies' (p. 8).

As was the case with the protagonists in the early spiritual autobiographies, the modern journeys often begin with or include) difficult life experiences that push the author-protagonists onto paths of spiritual quest. From a reader response perspective, spiritual autobiographies themselves could be understood as a form of confession, putting readers in the position of priests offering absolution. One might see a paradox in spiritual autobiographical writing, since religion often calls for surrender or submission of the self while autobiographical writing emphasises the self in what could be seen as a self-centered act. In *The Self and the Sacred: Conversion and Autobiography*, however, Rodger M. Payne finds that conversion may endow the converted person with an authority that enables him or her to write about their experiences.

¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC, Duke UP, 1991, p. 41.

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In this article, I focus on the spiritual path delineated in the writings of the Evangelical writer, the Rev. Dr. Lauren F. Winner, an Episcopal priest. I propose to take a look at some of the governing metaphors related to turning points and arrivals in Winner's work: *Girl Meets God: On The Path To a Spiritual Life*, *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, and *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*.²

Mixing personal reflections and spiritual commentary, *Girl Meets God: On the Path To a Spiritual Life* (hereafter referred to as GMG), Lauren Winner's first autobiography, is organised in a circular fashion around both the Jewish and the Christian calendars, following religious dates and seasons and commenting on the liturgical order and the prayers and sermons of the day. It is a learned tract offering reflections on religious rituals, rabbinical and priestly pronunciations and perspectives, and analyses of Biblical stories.

In her second autobiography, published in 2012, entitled *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis* (hereafter referred to as *Still*), similarly, Winner offers an explicatory commentary on subjects such as epiphany, intinction,³ hymns, exorcism, and dislocated exegesis along with her own life story. Among Lauren Winner's other books is *The Voice of Matthew*, a retelling the Gospel of Matthew in contemporary story form. She has also written *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Colonial Virginia*. Winner's middle book, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth of Chastity*, is not an autobiography as such. Still, since it is informed by Winner's own life, it could rightly be regarded as at least partially autobiographical, and it does shed interesting light on the key metaphors in her two autobiographies.

Lauren Winner's spiritual story is remarkable in its inclusion of two conversions, first to Judaism and then to Christianity. Showing her awareness of the requirements of the traditional conversion narrative, Winner remarks early on upon how her Evangelical friends want her to 'shove' her spiritual story 'into a tidy, born-again conversion narrative' (GMG, p. 7). While the 'datable conversion story has a venerable history' beginning with St. Paul, 'the most famous Jew to embrace Jesus' and who 'established the prototype of the dramatic, datable rebirth' (p. 7), Winner's conversion story does not have an exact date and time. Since she has not had an 'epiphanic on-the-road-to Damascus experience' herself, she finds that her own 'story doesn't fit in very well with this conversion archetype.'

Winner's first conversion is to Judaism. With a Jewish father and a lapsed Southern Baptist mother, Winner had a Jewish upbringing, but from the perspective of Conservative and Orthodox Judaism, Winner knows that she will never count as a 'real' Jew, and she will never be able to marry an Orthodox Jew or move to Israel, should she want to. She decides to convert to Judaism, and goes all out in her effort to become an Orthodox Jew, attending Orthodox services every day and taking up all the Jewish rituals.

Despite her efforts, she experiences a growing dissatisfaction, one that seems to have less to do with a vertical dimension of faith than with a horizontal, social dimension of Jewish life in New York where Winner feels that she will never completely fit in. She experiences a supremely subtle ostracism, a lack of total acceptance by Orthodox Jews

² Lauren F. Winner, *Girl Meets God: On the Path To a Spiritual Life*, New York, Shaw Books, 2002; *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*, Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos Press, 2005; *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, New York, Harper, 2012.

³ 'The action or practice of dipping the bread of the Eucharist in the wine so that the communicant may receive both together,' *SOED* – Ed.

in New York. There are subtle but sharp snubs from Orthodox girlfriends that are wounding: 'There were lots of Sarahs, lots of pretty Orthodox girls who snubbed me, the convert, never mind all the rules the rabbis piled up forbidding Jews to remind converts of their background. Those small snide remarks, which I should have been able to overlook, those, I think, are where this story begins' (GMG, p. 91). One man she dates, further, informs Winner that he cannot go on seeing her because he can never marry a convert, no matter how profoundly, devotedly, and ambitiously Jewish she might be (GMG, p. 91).

Looked at from the perspective of matrimonial metaphors, then, it becomes obvious that Winner's alienation from Orthodox Judaism has a lot to do with her own realization that, being barred from marriage to an orthodox or cohanim Jew, she is actually barred from a complete union with Judaism.

Gradually, there are experiences that push Winner in the direction of Christianity and that lead to her second conversion. She has a dream that she interprets as Jesus rescuing her. Reading a novel by Jan Karon, *At Home in Mitford*, further, plays an important role since it '[leaves Winner] wanting something Christians seemed to have' (GMG, p. 8): '*I want what they have,*' she affirms (GMG, p. 60, italics in original). So what is it that Christians have and that Winner realises that she is longing for? One answer is Incarnation: 'In Christianity,' Winner writes, 'God got to be both a distant and transcendent Father God, and a present and immanent Son god who walked among us' (p. 51). Another answer, I'd like to propose, could be found in the imagery embedded in Winner's texts, especially a range of metaphors related to the teleological aspect of the narrative of arrival.

In accounts of the spiritual journey, certain metaphors are recurring. Light and darkness are among the prevalent metaphors, and they can be found in Winner's books as well. Another prevalent metaphor in spiritual writing is that of the journey. Winner points out that 'The Christian tradition is thick with metaphor for the journey to God' (*Still* p. 197).

But the metaphor that is most central in Winner's work, as I will argue, is the extended metaphor of matrimony. The matrimonial metaphor is a complex and capacious category containing both persona and shadow parts that encompass the whole range of stages that *can* be part of the journey of matrimony – and out of it as well: attraction, courtship and dating, nuptials, marriage, stagnation, infidelity, fornication, separation, and divorce.

The matrimonial metaphor is appropriate in spiritual writing. In the Bible, matrimonial metaphors are often used to depict the relationship between human beings and God. One example is the marriage metaphor in Hosea. In The Old Testament, marriage represents the covenant of the Lord and his people. 'For your Maker is your husband,' we read in Isaiah (54:5), and in Jeremiah, the Lord says, 'Return, O backsliding children, for I am married to you' (3:14). In the New Testament, Jesus tells parables about a wedding feast that symbolises the coming of the kingdom. In the Epistle to the Ephesians (5:23), further, Paul says: 'For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour.' Here, it is the union of love between Christ and His Church that is described, that is, between Jesus and his believers.

So let us turn to some examples of the image of matrimony in Lauren Winner's work. Advent, first of all, is described through metaphors of love and courtship. Advent is 'the season of expectation,' a season 'during which you are supposed to

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cultivate longing for Him, the type of longing you feel when your beloved has been out of town for three weeks but you know he is coming home tonight' (GMG, p. 34). The relationship with Jesus, waiting for Jesus, is filled with intense longing, metaphorically described through an erotic image of the lover 'coming home tonight'. Winner's account also makes clear that a divorce seldom is final, even when there is a new marriage. For Winner, Judaism and Christianity continue to dwell side by side, and they turn up intertwined in the final chapter of *Girl Meets God*.

If we turn to Lauren Winner's first autobiography, *Girl Meets God*, we see that the title itself almost hints at romantic attraction of a kind one might associate with 'chick lit'. 'Girl' meets 'God,' a meeting that will hopefully lead to a significant union. 'Girl' evokes a sense of smallness, immaturity, and beginnings in life, whereas 'God' evokes a sense of greatness, omnipotence, ultimate truths, and eternity. A meeting or a union between the two evokes the relationship between God and Jesus, just as Jesus' humanity relates to the divinity of God.

The process of converting to Christianity is described through metaphors of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. 'If it was a marriage, [Winner] to Orthodox Judaism,' Winner thinks, '[she has] failed from the beginning' (GMG, p. 96):

I had married Judaism and then I had an affair with a foreign God, another religion, I took another lover. And I realized I was in love with that other lover, and I wrung my hands for a while. I struggled through my own inner turmoil and angst and then I handed my shocked husband divorce papers, threw my stuff into some empty cardboard boxes, and moved out, setting up home with my new love before an even passably decent interval elapsed. (GMG, p. 98)

Winner's conversion to Christianity is conveyed through matrimonial metaphors of erotic passion, infidelity, divorce, and a new relationship of even greater passion. Winner was, as she puts it, 'courted by a very determined carpenter from Nazareth,' whose 'dogged pursuit of [her]' wins out in the end (GMG, pp. 12, 89). Clearly, her spiritual desire is visualised through sexual metaphors of passion: the new lover, Christianity, is embraced before decorum permits; such is the irresistible passion he evokes.

In the first chapter of *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, Winner's second autobiography, Winner, whose last name, so far, has seemed so spectacularly appropriate, is facing failure: 'it is a mark of [her] charmed life that it [is] the first time [she has] ever tried to do something and simply failed' (p. 7). What she has failed at is her marriage, but she also seems to be failing at religion. Winner's spiritual impasse – that might be construed as a form of spiritual burnout resembling the condition Karen Armstrong suffered from in *Spiral Staircase* – is marked by anxiety, hypochondria, and compulsivity. Winner comes to a point where she decides to 'Sit with the loneliness and ask what loneliness has for [her]' (*Still* p. 56). This being in the moment resembles a stance of surrender and submission to the suchness of reality, even though, when Winner does invite loneliness to sit down, a surprisingly aggressive imaginary dowager turns up, '[taking] a letter opener from her bag and [telling Winner that] she can kill [her] if she wants to' (*Still* p. 59). If we take a closer look at this strange image, we discover that here, too, there is a hint of the matrimonial metaphor, since a dowager is a dignified elderly widow whose identity is forever marked by the *marriage* she once had.

The image of the dowager can be contrasted against the image of God as conveyed in another part of the book, once again through marital metaphors. The nearness of God is experienced rather like the proximity of a husband, who is invisible for the moment but who is nonetheless present in some other part of the house: 'With this elusive God, there is a kind of closeness, one I did not know before God became elusive, one I did not know when God was still nearby as friend. It is the closeness of invisibility, of abiding presence, of your husband in another room of the house, also reading. Close, you do not have to speak' (*Still* p. 162). Since God is imagined as a husband, one could understand the image of the aggressive dowager as an image of the frustrations and self-deprecations of the author at having lost her marital and spiritual relationships, that is, the loss of her husband and the alienation from God Winner experiences during the 'middle' stage of her spiritual journey.

Remembering the words about Jesus withdrawing into 'lonely places to pray,' Winner muses in a marvellously original metaphor of complete bodily and spiritual union that is as matrimonial as it is maternal: '*Maybe I can make my loneliness into an invitation – to Jesus – that he might withdraw into me and pray*' (*Still* p. 141, italics in original). With its gestational and erotic associations, this metaphor conveys the depth of Winner's longing, picturing herself both as a temple and as a womb and Jesus as a foetus gestating in the body of her loneliness. It could be seen as an inversion of the vision by Julian of Norwich, who said that 'Our Saviour is our true Mother in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come' (quoted. by Winner, *Still* p. 160).

Encapsulating a sense of mutuality and interdependency between divinity and humanity, this charged bodily metaphor is an image of a state of being *and* becoming. In the desire for union, the gap between Winner and Jesus is closed, and movement (into the womb) coincides with the stillness and interiority of the small space of the womb. Here, we might see an *inversion* of the image evoked by the title of Winner's first autobiography, where girlish minuteness encountered the hugeness of God. Here, instead, Jesus is small enough to lodge inside her body and Winner is big enough to house God. Since Jesus is God's son, this pregnancy must have resulted from a conception, immaculate or not, that is all about transformation and new beginnings. Like a latter-day Virgin Mary, Winner is literally creating space for Jesus, creating space for God, embracing and harbouring the divine within her own body, as if saying that God is not to be found in another world but in the very middle of our own, human and physical, lives.

The matrimonial metaphor is also appropriate on structural and narrative levels of the spiritual autobiography since it resonates with understandings in the psychology of religion of the process of individual development in conversion. According to psychologists of religion (see e.g., Marcus Koskinen-Hagman⁴), the self is not obliterated in the process of conversion, instead, it expands and reaches a point where it can identify with something much larger than the self, something holy; a conversion narrative is 'a tension-filled synthesis of surrender of the self and expansion of the self' (Littberger 27).⁵

Marriage, similarly, involves a surrender of the self and an expansion into

⁴ e.g. *Latent Trait Models of Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Quest Religious Orientation*, Lund University, 1999.

⁵ Inger Littberger, *Omvändelser: Nedslag i Svenska Romaner Under Hundra År*, Eslöv, B. Östlings bokförl. Symposion, 2004.

something larger. As already suggested, matrimonial metaphors are appropriate in spiritual writings because of their Biblical connotations. They are also appropriate since connubial bliss has been compared to the bliss of mystic experiences, and vice versa. In *Why God Won't Go Away*, Andrew Newberg writes that: 'the neurological machinery of transcendence may have arisen from the neural circuitry that evolved for mating and sexual experiences. The language of mysticism hints at this connection: mystics of all times and cultures have used the same expressive terms to describe their ineffable experiences: *bliss, rapture, ecstasy, and exaltation*.⁶ It seems, says Newberg, that 'mystical union and sexual bliss ... [have] similar neural pathways' (p. 125). 'An evolutionary perspective suggests that the neurobiology of mystical experience arose, at least in part, from the mechanism of the sexual response. In a sense, then, mystical experience may be an accidental by-product, but this does not necessarily diminish the meaning of spiritual experience' (Newberg, p. 126). Newberg underlines that 'by explaining mystical experience as a neurological function, we do not intend to suggest that it can't be something more' (p. 126). In William James's chapter on mystic experiences in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, further, we learn that the states of mystic experience are ecstasies often conveyed through images referring to 'nuptial union,' whereby, according to James, 'intellect and senses both swoon away in these highest states of ecstasy.'⁷

Insofar as it concerns Winner's own process of learning how to practice chastity, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*, could be regarded as partly autobiographical, although her primary aim is to offer an argumentative essay on Christian marriage. Written by 'a fellow pilgrim,' *Real Sex* is, Winner tells us, 'no more and no less than one person's reflections on the process of learning how to practice chastity' (*Real Sex*, p. 10). Although initially intended as a supportive manual for Christian singles struggling with chastity, her book turned out to be about marriage, too, since, as she puts it, 'the heart of the Christian story about sex is a vigorously positive statement: sex was created for marriage' (*Real Sex*, p. 25). 'Without a robust account of the Christian vision of sex within marriage, the Christian insistence that unmarried folks refrain from sex just doesn't make any sense' (*Real Sex*, p. 25). 'God created sex for marriage and that is where it belongs,' Winner states, and 'in Christianity's vocabulary the only real sex is the sex that happens in marriage' (*Real Sex*, pp. 15, 38). Sex outside marriage 'is only a distorted imitation of sex,' it is *ersatz* and not real sex (*Real Sex*, p. 38). Winner continues: 'The inflections of community are important because they get at the very meaning of marriage. Marriage is a gift God gives the church; He does not simply give it to the married people of the church, but to the whole church, as marriage is designed not only for the benefit of the married couple. It is also designed to tell a story to the entire church, a story about God's relationship with and saving work among us' (*Real Sex*, p. 144).

In *Real Sex*, Winner remembers 'that the Bible tells [her] over and over that marriage is like the relationship between God and His beloved' (*Real Sex*, p. 144). At the same time, interestingly, at resurrection there will be no marriage at all: Winner points to Matthew 22:23-30, 'in which a band of Sadducees comes to Jesus and asks

⁶ Andrew Newberg, *Why God Won't go Away: Brain Science and The Biology of Belief*, New York, Ballantine Books, 2002, p. 125.

⁷ William James, *The Works of William James. The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 1985, p. 319.

him about a woman who had married, and survived, seven different men. At the resurrection, the Sadducees wanted to know, whose wife would she be? Would she have seven husbands in heaven? Jesus replies: 'At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage' (*Real Sex*, p. 146). 'Married people – as the frequent scriptural analogies between marriage and Christ's relationship with His church make clear – mirror God's relationship with His people eschatologically. At the end of time, when the kingdom of God is consummated, when Christ returns, there will be a huge wedding feast between Christ and His people.... Marriage, in this way, instructs the church in what to look for when the kingdom comes – eternal, intimate union' (p. 147).

This article has pointed to the centrality of the complex, extended metaphor of matrimony as related to the spiritual journey described in Lauren Winner's writing. As I have suggested, the matrimonial metaphor is the central metaphor that infuses much of Lauren Winner's writing. In the three texts I have looked at, *Girl Meets God: On the Path To a Spiritual Life*, *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, and *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*, the matrimonial metaphor is crucially intertwined with the stages of the spiritual journey itself, with its accelerations, turning points, impasses, stases, and arrivals.

Narratives of arrival often lead up to or include conversion. One often thinks of conversion as an ending, a happy ending, after which the converted person lives blissfully enveloped by the love of God. Like other forms of passion, however, the passion of conversion can wear off and become stale. Towards the end of *Girl Meets God*, Winner admits that 'a sort of sinking staleness' has made its appearance, making her think that it '*isn't working, [she doesn't] believe this Christian thing anymore, this is just some crazy fix [she's] been on, and now [she's] reached [her] toleration level, and it's not working*' (GMG, p. 269, italics in original). In *Girl Meets God*, when Winner reflects on the passion of falling in love with a religion, the matrimonial metaphor returns, mixed with other metaphors. That stage of falling in love is behind her; now it is the long-term relationship that lies ahead of her: 'How to fall in love is not, now, [what she needs] to learn. What [she needs] to learn, maybe what God wants [her] to learn, is the long grind after you've landed' (GMG, p. 270). If conversion is flying high, life after conversion is a potentially more exhausting 'long grind' closer to the ground. Having begun with Lauren Winner's orientation in a particular time and place (Oxford, Mississippi), the alternatively backward- and forward-looking narrative of *Girl Meets God* ends with Winner projecting herself into the future and to the thoughts she imagines that she is going to have of a story of a conversation between a rabbi and the prophet Elijah, a story that, given its placement as a forward-looking conclusion, has a particular significance as an exhortatory message both to Winner herself and to her readers to be open and listen to the voice of Jesus.

At the end of *Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*, Winner's second autobiography, God reappears, God is heard again, and God speaks to Winner. The scene is not a dramatic one, rather, it is in the stillness after having received communion and returning to her seat that Winner hears a voice saying: 'You can stay here now'. 'Just five words, and I know that this voice is God and what God means is that there is ground beneath my feet again, that this is the beginning of sanity and steadiness; this is the beginning of a reshaped life' (*Still*, p. 149). Winner is aware of the fact that many people might construe this as an instance of hearing one's own voice, it might be seen as 'a bit of liturgical cliché, hearing this promise of revivification at the Easter Vigil' (*Still*, p. 149),

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but she knows that she heard God's voice 'naming a resurrection of sorts, telling [her] that she could stay' (*Still*, p. 149).

While the first section of *Still: Notes of a Mid-Faith Crisis* depicts the experience of being stuck in front of a spiritual wall, in the second section there is a 'wrestling with God.' In the third section there is 'a moment of presence' (*Still*, p. xvii). Even though Winner is 'still at the beginning of the middle,' she understands that there is no way to go back. There is a shift: 'you are looking for God and you are looking in ways you hadn't known before' (*Still*, p. xviii). At this point, Winner is no longer in the wilderness but in 'a place, a house, a room,' understanding that 'something will turn up in this room,' that is, faith. Even though *she* may be 'less certain,' the *place* is certain and it is 'sure.' A *climb* recalling Jacob's ladder, the journey is vertical.

The title of Winner's second autobiography has several layers of meaning. The author tells us that her book is partly an answer to question as to why she is *still* a Christian. But 'still' is also pointing to the idea of the spiritual journey itself a 'process of distillation' (p. 203). Still, furthermore, is a word that carries associations ranging from a deathly state of spiritual lifelessness to the serenity and profound peace *also* inherent in the word, thus covering the entire spiritual journey Winner has traversed in her second autobiography. Settling for a three-part structure for *Still*, as she explains (in the final section of her book) has everything to do with the sense of movement from 'depressed, intense crisis to pacific openness, from no sense of God to a new sense of God' (*Still*, p. 202).

Despite her two conversions, Winner, in the end, does not see herself as having turned around completely. She doubts that she 'will achieve a complete turning around here on Earth' (*GMG*, p. 213), and she continues to need confession and the absolution given after confession. But at the end of the second autobiography, Winner has, in a spiritual sense, been transformed. Towards the end of the narrative, she is about to be ordained, and she concludes: 'I am not a saint. I am, however, beginning to learn that I am a small character in a story that is always fundamentally about God' (*Still*, p. 194).

Book Reviews

Tom Wright, *How God Became King: Getting to the Heart of the Gospels*, SPCK, 2012, 282pp., £12.99, pb., 978 0 281 06146 4, eBook, £8.15, 978 0 281 06890 6

In this book Tom Wright argues that for too long the church has overlooked the gospels, or at least has failed to learn and teach their most fundamental message about Jesus. Paul warned his converts against any other gospel than the one he preached, but whether adopting Paul's teaching as the framework, or the creeds, or Enlightenment thinking, the church's Gospel message has lost touch with the original message of the four evangelists.

Wright is emphatic: 'We have all misunderstood the gospels.' Even those who drafted the creeds missed out on the gospels. Or perhaps took them as read. The mistake has been to take the themes of the kingdom and the cross separately. In popular understanding 'Jesus' public career began with a time of happy, early fulfilment ... but turned a dark corner and ran into opposition, unpopularity, and finally arrest, trial, torture and death.' There's a similar naivety about the rationale for the individual of belief: the gospels do not teach that 'going to heaven' is the end, the point, of Christian faith. This is a 'wrong' reading.

Wright's more sophisticated and corrective reading puts back together the scriptural theme of the kingdom and the crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate. The creeds don't mention Israel, but the gospels, especially Matthew, present Jesus as the climax of Israel's history. In explicating his more complex view, Wright suggests for the four gospels four major themes. They are like a quadrasonic setup and produce, when rightly adjusted, a quadruple polyphony. What this amounts to is: YHWH comes back in human form to his people, the story of Israel reaching its climax, the launching of God's renewed people, and the story of the kingdom of God clashing with Caesar's.

The incident about paying tax to Caesar is not saying that state and church are separate, it is a refusal to side with either the pro-Roman or the independence parties, and puts instead the Kingdom of God, universal, all powerful, over all. Wright's large gestures are calculated to gain the believing reader's assent. He tells us that the central aim of Jesus, for which he died and rose again, was to launch God's Kingdom, his sovereignty on earth: 'Jesus' launch of the kingdom is ... the central aim of his mission'.

'In the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth the God of Israel has become king of the whole world.' Wright would have it that the gospels' core message has been neglected. Yet, one wants to interpose, since the creation narrative of Genesis or the dealings of Israel's God with the Egypt of Joseph's day, it was a cardinal tenet of Israel's belief that God is the creator and ruler of the whole world. It is reflected in the Psalms, and is not new at all. What is new is that Jesus fulfils messianic prophecies and takes his place at the right hand of God.

Wright explains that Jesus fulfils the central aim of his mission when he is executed. The cross was the weapon with which God stripped the armour from the rulers and authorities, replacing their kingdoms based on force with one based on servant love. It's a 'deeply paradoxical victory.' Jesus went to his death 'so that evil might do its worst to him and so spend its force once and for all.' At Golgotha, the new holy mountain, Jesus is 'enthroned' with 'This is the King of the Jews' inscribed over his head. Thus the kingdom of God, properly understood, has come on earth. Here the figurative language threatens to get out of hand. What is the mode of this

stripping and disarming, and has the force of evil really spent its force? Has it done so in the present day? Jesus gained a moral and spiritual victory by letting himself be killed, but it was a nasty end and regarded at the time with horror and as a public humiliation and utter failure. To describe this tortured death as an enthronement is quite incongruous, however much the ironic title affixed to the cross might remind initiates of a messianic theme.

Neither 'going to heaven' nor, in the way it is commonly understood, is 'eternal life' the goal of Jesus' teaching in the gospels. [I for one disagree, and would say they are.] The Lord's Prayer provides the key, speaking of God's kingdom coming and his will being done on earth. 'The "kingdom of heaven" is not about people going to heaven. It is about the rule of heaven coming to earth.' Wright refers several times to this idea of God's Kingdom coming on earth, and even more frequently to the creeds and certain kingdom-related OT prophecies. For him the fulfilment took place at the moment of the crucifixion, and endures as an inspiration. At the end of the book he reviews the creeds, contrasting them with his reading of the gospels, but why does he not pay sustained attention to the entire Lord's Prayer, which stands as the architect's blueprint for Jesus' message and for the gospels' theology? If he had done so, there would be more discussion in his book of forgiveness and deliverance from evil in terms that are interestingly different from Paul's forensic doctrine of justification. He might also have been led to consider in detail the heaven that is earth's model, and the transcendent glory associated with it.

But Wright centres the only important thing on earth, on the historical moment of crucifixion. 'All four gospel writers believed that with the crucifixion Jesus of Nazareth had indeed been enthroned, however paradoxically, as Israel's Messiah and that, with that event, Israel's God had established his kingdom on earth as in heaven.' The *parousia*, the second coming, the final kingdom-bringing moment is, we are told, a 'scholarly mistake'. The evangelists did not believe that the kingdom was to be 'expected whole and entire all at once'. 'The kingdom is the ultimate meaning of the cross.' Or, we might say of Wright's argument, vice versa. The resurrection does not feature, you will notice, in this characterisation, and indeed Wright has his own explanation of it, not as an event that either did or did not occur, but in terms of its rhetorical function. It's a way, after the death of Jesus, 'of opening the question up again, so that what looked like defeat, yet another failure of a kingdom-dream, was in fact a victory.'

Another of the arguments that Wright wishes to controvert is the assumption 'that the four evangelists, in recounting the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion, are doing so with minimal intention to offer theological interpretation of those events.' Here again I believe Wright is wrong, and that the theology of the gospels is at a fairly primitive stage of development. So I argued in *A Gospel Reading* of which the PDF can be found in the 'Reading Room' of the CLSG website at www.cls.org. The gospels convey the trauma of horribly losing the Teacher who was with good reason credited with messiahship and divine sonship, and with it the dawning hope that there is a divine plan and purpose in it all still being worked out. Mark gets no further than the emptiness of the tomb: at the time of his writing this was a gesture towards a resurrection he took to be eloquent enough in itself.

In his final section Wright puts forward an illustration. The owner of an old, much-loved car takes it to a repair garage, and returns later to find it has been taken apart, the components variously admired and criticised, but he can no longer drive it.

That's what the ordinary believer finds with Biblical scholarship. We might adapt the terms. The car owner takes it to the garage in anticipation of driving it overseas on holiday. Wright's argument in this book curtails the driver's destination. There will be no Channel crossing, no holiday on the sunny Mediterranean coast, just the familiar local neighbourhood. 'Salvation,' he tells us, 'is not a rescue from the earth ... but in and for the earth, and for us as creatures of earth.'

Roger Kojecký

Katrin Ettenhuber, *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, 2011, xii + 267pp., £60, 978 0 19 9609 10 9

The profane Jack Donne, arms crossed, of the love poetry, alive with conceits of pandering fleas, interinanimated souls, tear-weltered worlds, bracelets of hair about the bone, and gold to airy thinness beat, makes up only a small portion of Donne's complete corpus. One might argue, though, that Donne saw himself last and not least, if not first and foremost, as the good Doctor John Donne, who served from 1621 to 1631 as Dean of St. Paul's, the 'prosaic' Donne who gifted us with the *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* and some one-hundred-and-sixty mesmerizing sermons. This is the Donne who could write in 'Meditation 17' of his *Devotions*:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

This is the Donne who delivered his final sermon, *Death's Duel*, in the royal presence from the pulpit at Whitehall. Sickly, cadaverous, and frail, Donne was quite literally at death's door. Fittingly, he preached on the subject of the miraculous nature of our resurrection bodies, distilled and glorified from the dust and muck of this world. 'We shall all be changed':

That that monarch, who spread over many nations alive, must in his dust lie in a corner of that sheet of lead, and there but so long as that lead will last; and that private and retired man, that thought himself his own for ever, and never came forth, must in his dust of the grave be published, and (such are the revolutions of the grave) be mingled with the dust of every highway and of every dunghill, and swallowed in every puddle and pond. This is the most inglorious and contemptible vilification, the most deadly and peremptory nullification of man, that we can consider. [...] This death of incineration and dispersion is, to natural reason, the most irrecoverable death of all; and yet *Domini Domini sunt exitus mortis, unto God the Lord belong the issues of death*; and by recompacting this dust into the same body, and remaining the same body with the same soul, he shall in a blessed and glorious resurrection give me such an issue from this death as shall never pass into any other death, but establish me into a life that shall last as long as the Lord of Life himself.

This is heady, stirring stuff; prosaic it is not.

Donne's Augustine, Katrin Ettenhuber's recent study, engages with Donne the theologian and prosaist. Specifically, Ettenhuber is interested in the lifelong influence of that Doctor of Grace, (Saint) Augustine, upon Donne's thought and writing. Izaak

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Walton, Donne's earliest biographer, records Donne's customary process of cribbing and re-cribbing and working up his sermons: 'The latter part of [Donne's] life may be said to be a continued study; for as he usually preached once a week, if not oftener, so after his Sermon he never gave his eyes rest, till he had chosen out a new Text, and that night cast his Sermon into a form, and his Text into divisions; and the next day betook himself to consult the Fathers, and so commit his meditations to his memory, which was excellent.' Walton is, to a degree, writing quasi-hagiography, but Ettenhuber makes clear Walton's true lack of exaggeration in Donne's very real dedication to his library and his unflagging fascination with the windings of Augustine's thought. Donne, Ettenhuber tells us, referred to Augustine three times more than any other non-scriptural source; and no less than 155 of Donne's 160 sermons cite Augustine's works. But Ettenhuber goes a step further than demonstrating Donne's debt to Augustinian thought. Her first two chapters, the first half of the study, are a meticulous, exhaustive examination of the methods by which Donne had recourse to Augustinian material. Her accomplishment is to show us not only how Donne read, but just how early modern thinkers read and scanned, the reading practices of Renaissance men and women as they excerpted, collated, annotated, compiled. Where Evelyn Simpson and George Potter, the twentieth-century editors of Donne's complete sermons, uncovered references to a mere twenty-four Augustinian texts, Ettenhuber unearths evidence that Donne's availed himself of sixty-one. In addition, Ettenhuber's archaeology, which amounts to unreckonable hours of research, identifies not only those primary sources Donne would have drawn upon, but also Donne's numerous short cuts to Augustinian citations, through other genres and mediating texts: the handbook, the commentary, the ecclesiastical history, the index, the excerpt collection or *florilegium*, the catena, and, only perhaps surprisingly, the cunningly camouflaged works of Thomas Aquinas.

After laying the foundation for understanding early modern reading practices, Ettenhuber's ensuing chapters, which comprise the second part of the study, explore the uses Donne makes of Augustinian intertexts across the full spectrum of his prose: the *Essays in Divinity*, *Biathanatos*, the Lincoln's Inn Sermons of 1620 and the crisis of 1629, one of the late, ten Whitsunday sermons, and the Easter and Candlemas sermons. Of these five case studies some readings are markedly more successful than others. In one early example, Ettenhuber argues that in one of Donne's Whitsunday sermons Donne's apparently contrived patterning of Augustinian quotation secretly reflects, even enacts, the subject of his sermon: the workings of divine providence in a world of apparent injustice. Donne quotes from Augustine's *On Order*, at first in a scattershot, random fashion, and then with three quotations in the precise sequence in which they appear in Augustine's treatise. From this Ettenhuber maintains, 'Thus, disorder gives way to order and sequence as Donne moves from fragmented quotation to the larger unity and coherence revealed by the final tableaux of references.' A scant three quotations seem rather a thin basis for such unequivocal categorization. At times this sort of invention can feel like the thin end of the wedge.

In Chapter Three, 'Ascending Humility,' Ettenhuber makes the case that in the *Confessions* Augustine closes the gap between himself and the divine through his engagement with the Scriptures of the holy scribes Moses and, in Augustine's conversion in a garden in Milan, Paul. In a similar way Donne finds in the figure of Augustine and, in particular, in Augustine's spiritual biography, a means of both charting a 'hermeneutic trajectory' and overcoming the distance between himself and God. In Chapter Four, 'The Bad Physician,' Ettenhuber argues that, in *Biathanatos*,

Donne's treatise on suicide, Donne plays the casuist, redirecting, reshaping, blurring, and even consciously misrepresenting Augustine's teachings on self-murder so that Augustine's stance yields to a hermeneutic of charity (itself an Augustinian interpretive strategy). These two chapters were on occasion a little forced and over-ingenious in the ways in which they wrested meaning from the textual traces of Augustine's works.

For me, the punchy closing three chapters dealing with Donne's sermons were the achievement of the second half of Ettenhuber's monograph. In Chapter Five, 'Medicinall Concoctions,' in a sermon addressed to the lawyers of Lincoln's Inn Ettenhuber interrogates Donne's implementation of religious and legal discourse and, especially, the language of charity and equity. According to Ettenhuber, Donne's sermon reveals he has his finger on the pulse of current affairs, the tension over who had the right to administer equitable justice — the King's Bench or Chancery; common law or equitable, sovereign jurisdiction; Parliament or the King. Donne's sermon politicizes Augustine's rule of charity, a form of 'hermeneutic "liberty" that can accommodate a plurality of occasions and audiences'. All in all, Ettenhuber here offers a fascinating portrait of 'Donne's active and principled participation in the political affairs of early Stuart England'. Chapter Six, 'Keeping the Peace,' resumes the theme of Augustinian charity by interpreting Donne's 1629 Whitsunday sermon as an implicit challenge to and redefinition of Laudian rigour. 'Laud's rhetoric of loving forbearance masked a rather more oppressive register of political compliance' that Donne seeks to redress and recuperate as God's 'supreme [and not specious!] love' and 'eternal peace'. The seventh and concluding chapter, 'The evidence of things not seen', completes this elegant thematic arc of discussions on Donne's sermons that are concerned with Augustinian charity. Ettenhuber observes how, '[f]or Donne, as for Augustine, [attending to] divine self-revelation represents the completion of a lifelong hermeneutic quest.' Alongside her discussion of Donne's treatment of the *visio Dei* or beatific vision in Donne's Easter and Candlemas sermons, Ettenhuber incorporates fresh readings of the early verse, 'The Extasie' and *The Second Anniversarie* for Elizabeth Drury, both of which are welcome inclusions at the close of a study hitherto exclusively focused upon Donne's prose.

Ettenhuber launches an irrefutable defence that, to echo her words, Donne and Augustine should never be sundered. In light of her respectful, tactful, and assured scholarship in this monograph, it is pleasing to learn that she will be a contributing editor to the Oxford Edition of the *Sermons* of John Donne, a vast, sixteen-volume project that is currently in the works. Under Ettenhuber's editorial eye, it is safe to say, Donne's *Sermons* will not be undone.

Russell M. Hillier

Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, xx + 328 pp, £20.99 pb. (£58 hb.) 978 0 521 71114 2

To paraphrase Ecclesiastes, of the making of many books on C. S. Lewis there is no end. 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis's death, may well see more than usual. Among the most notable of recent years is Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia* (OUP, 2008; reviewed in the 2010 issue of *The Glass*), which has reshaped the landscape of Lewis studies through its thesis that the seven Chronicles of Narnia have structural parallels

to the seven planets of medieval cosmology. For this *Cambridge Companion*, Ward joins up with Robert MacSwain to gather a group of contributors diverse in disciplinary, ecclesiastical, and theological affiliations. As MacSwain comments in the introduction, they wanted ‘to widen the discussion of Lewis’s legacy beyond “the usual suspects”’.

The volume consists of twenty-one essays divided into three sections: Part 1 on Lewis as ‘Scholar’ (focusing on his academic writing), Part 2 (the longest) on Lewis the ‘Thinker’ (a series of topical essays interacting with Lewis’s thoughts on subjects such as Scripture, love, and power), and Part 3 on the ‘Writer’ (focusing on Lewis’s fiction and poetry). Though Parts 1 and 3 taken together are longer than Part 2, the volume feels weighted towards Lewis as philosopher-theologian rather than as a literary figure. This may be intentional – MacSwain’s introduction expresses a desire for Lewis to be taken seriously within academic theology. However, there is plenty throughout to interest literary scholars and other serious readers of Lewis.

This *Companion* is not a comprehensive ‘C. S. Lewis Encyclopaedia’ (a work which has been written by Colin Duriez), but a collection of perspectives on Lewis from various angles. Nevertheless, reading through the essays, some common threads begin to emerge. These recurrent themes echo the subtitle of Lewis’s first post-conversion publication: *The Pilgrim’s Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism*.

Several contributors discuss Lewis’s romantic sensibility, including but not limited to an appreciation of capital ‘R’ Romanticism. David Jasper points out that the bittersweet longing which Lewis calls ‘joy’ is more precisely expressed by the German *Sehnsucht*, a feeling ‘profoundly expressed in the poetry of Hölderlin in German and Wordsworth in English’. Alan Jacobs quotes a letter which Lewis wrote to the Milton Society of America: ‘The imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative, and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic.’ Accordingly, several essays take into account evidence of Lewis’s youthful imaginative formation from his pre-conversion writings.

Lewis’s rationality is also taken seriously, with the essays in Part 2 placing Lewis’s ideas into dialogue with those of others. Sometimes this is in relation to his own intellectual context (as with Caroline Simon’s skilful analysis of influences on Lewis’s thoughts ‘On love’), and sometimes Lewis is enlisted into more recent discussions (Charles Taliaferro recruits Lewis to debate Daniel Dennett). One occasionally worries that Lewis may be being ventriloquised through categories not his own, but elsewhere it is more clearly demonstrated that strands in Lewis’s thought anticipate contemporary concerns, as with Malcolm Guite’s finding of ‘deep ecology’ in Lewis’s poetry. (Rowan Williams also discusses Lewis’s ecological concerns in *The Lion’s World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia*, SPCK, 2012.)

The introduction tells us that ‘we have deliberately sought out some provocative figures to interact with well-known aspects of Lewis’s thought.’ This motivation seems to underlie the assignment of a consideration of Lewis’s thoughts ‘On violence’ to the pacifist theologian Stanley Hauerwas and his views ‘On gender’ to the feminist theologian Ann Loades. To their credit, although Hauerwas and Loades articulate their disagreements with Lewis’s adherence to just war theory and a hierarchical view of gender relations respectively, both read Lewis’s thought sympathetically within his historical and intellectual context. Moreover, Hauerwas and Loades find resources within Lewis’s work which could furnish theologies of Christian non-violence and of gender equality.

Lewis's professional academic persona is addressed in Part 1, with appreciative essays on Lewis's literary scholarship by a medievalist (John V. Fleming), a Romanticist (Stephen Logan), an early modernist (Dennis Danielson), and a classicist (Mark Edwards). Whilst acknowledging some of Lewis's more dubious moves, such as his relegation of large swathes of sixteenth-century literature to the 'Drab Age', they suggest that Lewis is not given due credit for his role in pioneering perspectives on literary history now commonplace, such as the importance of reading Chaucer in a European context, and emphasising continuities between 'medieval' and 'Renaissance'.

The contributors to Part 3 all, to varying degrees, cite Lewis's literary criticism to shed light on his literary practice. For instance, David Jasper cites Lewis's interest in Renaissance rhetoric to alert us to hidden designs that *Surprised by Joy* might have on its readers, and Alan Jacobs suggests that the mixture of genres in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* provides a literary model for the Chronicles of Narnia (which have a relatively low profile outside Jacobs's chapter). Jacobs is an enthusiastic convert to Ward's planetary perspective on Narnia, but also proposes that the unifying storyline of the Chronicles concerns 'disputed sovereignty'. Though there is no inherent contradiction between these accounts, they perhaps need to be more thoroughly integrated.

Elsewhere in Part 3, T. A. Shippey traces how the Ransom Trilogy interweaves medieval magic with mid-twentieth century concerns about the relationship between humanity and technology, Jerry Walls interestingly harnesses *The Great Divorce* as a vehicle for philosophical discussion of the afterlife, and Peter Schakel offers a sensitive reading of how the difficulty of reading *Till We Have Faces* trains the reader, along with the narrator, in learning to see the hidden God.

Every essay in this volume is worth reading, but inevitably not all are equally strong. I found some of the Part 2 chapters a little narrow in scope – for instance, Joseph Cassidy's reading of *Letters to Malcolm* and *The Screwtape Letters* in light of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola is illuminating, but Cassidy perhaps pays insufficient attention to the generic differences between *Malcolm* and *Screwtape*, and to how the humour and irony of *Screwtape* bear on the topic of 'discernment'.

Malcolm Guite's closing chapter on Lewis as 'Poet' is an especially significant contribution to the literary study of Lewis. Guite seeks to rescue Lewis's poetry from a mediocre reputation by situating it within literary contexts whose prominence has increased since Lewis's death. Guite reminds us of Lewis's Irish identity (being born in a British-ruled but not yet partitioned Ireland) and his appreciation of W. B. Yeats. He also argues that, despite Lewis's early antipathy to the 'modernist' poetry of T. S. Eliot, which has contributed to Lewis's marginalisation in academia as a reactionary conservative, Lewis and Eliot were in fact closer in their thinking than either of them realised. (David Jasper, by contrast, admires Lewis's scholarship despite describing him as 'extraordinarily resistant to shifts in twentieth-century culture'.)

The contributors to this *Cambridge Companion* take Lewis seriously enough to argue with him when they disagree. One suspects that Lewis would be more comfortable being afforded this mode of respect than the virtually infallible guru status he holds in some Christian circles. Though the Inklings likewise have attracted their fair share of mythology, it seems that argumentative friends were the sort of companions that Lewis favoured.

Zoë Bennett and David B. Gowler (eds.), *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland*, OUP, 2012, 320pp., £65, 978 0 19 959977 6

These essays, a Festschrift for Christopher Rowland, Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture in the University of Oxford, constitute a varied collection, thought-provoking and at times remarkably good. Its title, which resonates with Rowland's own book *Radical Christianity*, could sum up his interests.

In a Foreword Alan Kreider writes that through Apocalyptic, '[Rowland] came to see the writhing world unveiled, and also to long for a world made new.' In the *New Interpreter's Bible*, Rowland edited the volume on *Revelation*.

Bennett and Gowler share in their Preface how warm and brilliant a friend and colleague Christopher Rowland has been, which strikes a chord of recognition in the heart of the present reviewer. I think that for Rowland, brilliant though he is academically and intellectually, theology would mean nothing without Christian practice, or the love/charity Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13. The editors also contribute an Introduction, "'Action is the life of all": Approaching the Work of Christopher Rowland'. The statement is, as they point out, quoted from Gerrard Winstanley (d. 1676), who wrote in 'A Watch-Word to the City of London and the Armie':

yet my mind was not at rest, because nothing was acted, and thoughts ran into me, that words and writings were all nothing, and must die, for action is the life of all, and if thou dost not act, thou dost nothing.

I first met Chris while working on my doctoral thesis at Kings College London, on William Blake and Robert Browning. I needed to consult with someone who could speak with authority on the literary qualities of the Biblical prophets – which would not mean ignoring or disparaging their spiritual qualities. When I enquired at Kings's Theology Department the young lady suggested Chris Rowland. From that followed a number of trips on my part to Oxford, as well as a couple on Chris's part to London, once to the Blake exhibition at Tate Britain in 2000, and once to give a talk to the William Blake Society of London, of which I was Programme Secretary. Chris always seems to me to be someone with a Blakean feel, being a radical Christian with a love for the marginalised, who uses pictures by Blake and Dürer in his sermons, as well as in his interpretation of the *Book of Revelation*.

The volume here reviewed has a range of essays; it was especially interesting to me that Rowan Williams is one of the contributors and that his essay is on Blake. I was impressed by his clear grasp of Blake's poetry and ideas, and by the strenuous engagement he makes with Blake's works. He notes that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* seems to many readers to have an affinity with Nietzsche, but he goes on to assert, interestingly, and I think perceptively, that

Blake's 'metaphysic' is not founded on the will – and thus, significantly, not on the assertion of ego. It is founded on desire – which for him is clearly not defined as the wish for specific gratification (which would be to make desire itself reactive, like the religious person's 'good'); it is an inherently excessive, boundary-less production, a bringing-forth of life that always crosses beyond limits.

I find very helpful Williams's notion of the 'reactive' as an idea of goodness distinct

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and different from Blake's, indeed one that Blake was concerned to avoid. From the *Marriage*, Williams turns to 'the vastly complex and tantalizing text of *Jerusalem, the emanation of the Giant Albion* for some further illumination.' The 'illumination' sought is on this question of 'desire' and what it meant to Blake. Williams writes:

To restore to human goodness or, better, human fulfilment and flourishing, what might be called an 'originary' character, a sense of alignment and continuity with primordial activity [that is, rather than its being essentially 'reactive' to evil] is, for Blake, to unite goodness to desire, the excessive desire that is never exhausted by the particular object but constantly overflows into gratuity and creativity.

Williams quotes from Blake to illustrate what he says is the 'refusal ["of violence at every level"] that in some sense "constitutes" the moral unity of humanity as a single family' (recovering a theme in the lyric with which [his] chapter began):

Mutual in one another's love and wrath all-renewing
We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
We behold multitude; or expanding, we behold as one,
As One Man the Universal Family; and that One Man
We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us and we in him,
Live in perfect harmony in Eden, the land of life,
Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses.

Williams pursues and identifies some of the minute strands of meaning in Blake, as well as identifying judiciously the main themes.

He also writes interestingly on Blake's late, great poem *The Everlasting Gospel*, concluding:

What matters is that the self-gift [i.e. of Jesus] is unintelligible, poetically and theologically, except as *action*, and thus in this context as something not subject to historical conditioning and the world of predictable Newtonian reasoning.

It is indeed, presumably, the *predictability* of Newton's system that Blake loathed (Newton being, along with Bacon and Locke, part of what one may call Blake's infernal trinity, who he considered had corrupted English thought). It is also true that one cannot hope to make sense of Blake without considering both the poetry and the theology – since he so consistently wrote in theological terms that are self-evidently full of sincerity and enthusiasm (a word he often used and evidently loved, especially from around 1800). For him, poetry, theology, science and other intellectual disciplines are all part of the Divine Human cosmos. He evidently felt that Newton's science was bad theology (presumably because of what it implied about God and man, and that it left no room for freedom). It is appropriate that Williams writes largely about Blake, since Christopher Rowland has a special love for Blake's work and uses his pictures (and those of Dürer) to interpret the Bible and in his sermons.

The present volume consists of sixteen chapters, including the Introduction by the editors and a final chapter by Rowland himself. The subject-matter is wide-ranging, for the most part peculiarly and intentionally appropriate to Rowland and his interests. Not only Blake, but also liberation theology, Apocalypse, early Christian community, excellent close readings of for example Jesus' parable about a 'manager of injustice', Gerrard Winstanley, Gospel women, prophecy, are covered here.

There is an essay that argues that ecclesiastical opposition to homosexual practice is a form of 'Fertility Religion' and is in opposition to 'Human Rights' – though it is at least arguable that it is Biblical and indeed Divine opposition to homosexuality that ought to rule the church's and the Christian's response to this phenomenon – that in this instance, 'human rights' may refer really to the right to sin. But the word 'radical', helpful though it can be and certainly close to Rowland's beliefs as it is, does not of course necessarily refer to 'radical Christianity' but can also refer to a worldliness that is radically opposed to Christianity and the Bible. All the essays are thought-provoking, interesting and worth reading, as befits the theologian and human being they honour.

William Goldman

Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 289pp., £55, 978 1 107 02126 6

This is a wide ranging and detailed study of the treatment of sacrifice and the act of substitution in the Victorian novel. Schramm concentrates on the works of Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Anthony Trollope to provide the basis for most of her conclusions, but she also touches on the works of a number of other Victorian authors. Schramm's strong legal background gives her the capacity to draw nuanced parallels between preoccupations in the Victorian novel, criminal law and social conventions in England at the time. The most engaging aspects of her study result from the intersection of the two worlds of literary endeavour and legal practice. With consummate ease she draws heavily on a multitude of secondary sources and commentators to endorse or enhance her sustained considerations.

Each of the chapters explores ways in which one may substitute for another in differing contexts. They vary from the act of the vicarious experience of reading; to 'stand for' another in the sense of professional or political representation; to 'die for' another in the theological sense of the Atonement; and to 'pass oneself off as another' for financial benefit. In the Victorian novel, Schramm concludes, each of these acts of substitution is 'conflicted'. For example, 'the Christian salvific scheme valorises the suffering of the innocent' but on the other hand 'Victorian criminal law sought to calibrate punishment and culpability as it repudiated archaic models of sacrifice that scapegoated the innocent'. Thus, the differences between the heightened theological debates of the mid-Victorian period and the highly publicised outworking of changed practices within the courtroom created unease in attitudes to substitution.

Schramm begins with a close examination of several of the major works of Dickens, Gaskell and George Eliot, demonstrating how they give 'fictional flesh to the ways in which a life of self-sacrifice makes real the metaphors of Christ's atoning work on the cross'. Dickens' *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, *Bleak House*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*; Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*; and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* are some of the novels considered. Of these authors it is Dickens who receives predominant attention, his literary output shaped more than most by personal encounters with the prevailing legal system. She draws on biographical details from Dickens' life throughout her work.

Schramm writes with a strong awareness of the impact of Unitarianism and German Higher Criticism on attitudes to sacrifice and atonement in the mid-Victorian period. Dickens was influenced by Unitarian thought and Gaskell came

from a strongly Unitarian social milieu. In her attention to capital punishment and the jury system, Schramm demonstrates how the novel in the mid-Victorian period indicated a 'preference for mercy rather than judgment, for reconciliation rather than conflict', tendencies that are consistent with the more tolerant views expressed within Unitarianism. The sense of vicarious fear and revulsion that Thackeray experienced at the public execution in London of the murderer, Courvoisier, in 1840, is used, amongst other events, to show an 'identification with the humble victim regardless of his status', and a 'release of empathy across class boundaries'. This is but one example of the liberalisation of views regarding identification, in this case associated with capital punishment.

Famous Victorian legal trials and the novels they spawned are an interesting aspect of Schramm's work. The murder trial of Eugene Aram in York in 1759 paved the way for sustained literary outpourings regarding legal representation, justice and the value of human life. *Caleb Williams* (1794) by William Godwin, began a series of novels which saw 'legal incidents as the source of romantic and dramatic interest'. This continued into the nineteenth century with novels such as *Eugene Aram* (1832) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Varying attitudes to advocacy, especially in regard to the Chartist movement maintained interest in criminal responsibility. Schramm devotes a lengthy section to the politics of restraint and reconciliation in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), a novel that addresses specifically the issues surrounding the Chartist riots.

Interspersed with her treatment of the legal backdrop for Victorian literary output, Schramm deals in detail with the Atonement controversy that prevailed in the mid century. Works such as *The Doctrine of Sacrifice Deduced from the Scriptures* (1854) by F. D. Maurice, 'opened the floodgates for a dynamic, often vitriolic, debate about the function and efficacy of sacrifice', particularly in the period 1856-1860. She also gives attention to the impact of the Crimean War. Both indirectly shaped attitudes in some of the novels of Dickens. An interesting section is Schramm's treatment of *The Frozen Deep*, a play that Dickens composed with Wilkie Collins. It was based upon John Franklin's tragic maritime expedition in 1845 and was 'a meditation upon the type of sacrifice men might be called to make in the final extremity of suffering when death for a noble cause was certain'. At the end of this section Schramm gives a lengthy analysis of *A Tale of Two Cities* as a clear example of 'heroic suffering and substitutionary salvation in the face of sustained legal and political persecution'. The novel is a key text in Schramm's study.

The last section deals with novels by George Eliot and Anthony Trollope, and with the notion of substitution and imposture. The infamous Tichborne Trial of the late 1860s provides the basis for much of her discussion regarding concepts of identity and inheritance. This claim to inheritance, now known to be the work of a fraudulent imposter, Arthur Orton, created interest and controversy over the several years that it was being conducted. Novels such as *Ralph the Heir* (1871) by Trollope, and *His Natural Life* (1874) by Marcus Clarke, were written in response to this trial. The Victorian novel, Schramm asserts, was 'intensely interested in the salvific and the fraudulent potential of substitution'.

Schramm has set herself a complex and challenging task in this scholarly work. Eliciting trends regarding atonement and self-sacrifice from nineteenth-century narratives (both historical and fictional) will always involve difficult choices. This is particularly true of the mid-Victorian period, the focus of her work, when theological

debates were heightened, when significant legal and constitutional reforms occurred, and when the novel proliferated and became a potent instrument for social change. Schramm has made the right choice, however, in concentrating on the work of Charles Dickens and some of his contemporaries, and in using Victorian legal theory and praxis to illuminate and explain changes in the burgeoning literary realm of that period. Schramm's work is a significant work for Victorian scholars and all who wish to understand more clearly the political, legal and theological ferment of the nineteenth-century and how that is reflected in attitudes to sacrifice and substitution in the Victorian novel.

Peter Stiles

Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*, Faber, 2012, 224 pp., hb., £12.99 9780571225217

'To see this age!' – the speaker is Viola in the grand old play of *Twelfth Night* – 'A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit; how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!' By *cheveril* she means the skin of a young goat, 'kid leather', soft and pliable enough to take any form or impress. And it might occur to some readers of Francis Spufford's brilliantly pliable treatise, that a manipulation of sorts (not to say 'kidding') is going on here. Others will be persuaded by the author's evident sincerity, and his skill in steering round hard cases, tight corners and flat contradictions. Ambivalences are, after all, the broadcloth of his trade; he is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a teacher of writing (at Goldsmiths College) and also, according to his publishers' handout, 'an acclaimed historian and science writer'. The handout does not mention his skill in the play of rhetoric, but he has it, 'in spades'.

Unapologetic. The word is a kind of trope, related to the figure of *oxymoron*, the one that faces two ways at once. It announces the subject of the book by declaring what is *not* the subject of the book, or its tenor. It is not an apology, by the author, for what he is determined to say; equally, its thesis is not an *apologia*, a reasoned and systematic exposition of an objective stance. He sets all such fretwork aside and gets down, in this sharp-tongued attack on atheists, to creative writing, boldly, wittily, learnedly, indeed charmingly, though with many startling and abrupt shifts of diction and register and *decorum*. Something Sir Thomas Browne says in the introduction to his *Religio Medici* (1642) sums up my impressions more aptly than I am able: 'There are many things delivered Rhetorically, many expressions therein merely Tropical, and as they best illustrate my intention; and therefore also there are many things to be taken in a soft and flexible sense and not to be called unto the rigid test of Reason.' This oracle could be applied piecemeal to the Style (rhetoric), the Allusions (tropes) and the Speculations (variously 'soft and flexible') of Dr Spufford's book.

The book is full of itself, yet structured with enormous care; written by an author who is full of himself, yet concerned for others, *sympathique*, a likeable man. Its nine chapters are a continuous narrative on connected themes: a recital based not so much on the probability of God's existence as on the power of the emotions that lead us to Him. The personal history that these chapters unfold is Mr. Spufford's own. He is by no means a Christian at ease with himself, or his church, but he lets the 'buried logic' of his book lead him, as a 'broken' man to a comfortable conclusion: 'don't be afraid, far more can be mended than you know.' I attempt here the briefest of inadequate

summaries for a sequence of chapters ineluctably voluble and at times littered with polymath digressions, from which the real Francis Spufford stands up now and then, a good man, casually foulmouthed, but wonderfully well-spoken.

He can be buttonholed in two words, *tell* and *feel*; his chapters are stories with feelings attached, and book is full of processes amounting to emotional self-portraiture. He defines *belief* as 'a characteristic set of our feelings', and no chapter passes without some reference to feeling; indeed, from the outset his tale is of the necessity of feeling, the unremitting need for emotional reassurance. Confidence in the Christian faith comes with the knowledge of what, and how, we feel, and how we respond to the feelings that can inform our religious life and help us to know ourselves as Christians. There is a kind of circular progression in this.

Some of his feelings are not of the faith-sustaining sort, but rather of mild disdain or bitter enmity, the one reserved for smug suburban sabbatarians happy to believe that 'God's in his Heaven, all's right with the world' (as Pippa chants in passing); the other nursed for rational atheists, represented by 'Richard bloody Dawkins' (so designated in the last chapter) or Bertrand Russell, inventor of 'the sodding teapot' (*sic*). It seems that in one of his writings (not specified, but possibly *Why I am not a Christian*, 1927) Russell suggests that people who stake the intellectual integrity of belief on the impossibility of disproving God's existence are like people suggesting that there is an undetectable teapot in orbit between the earth and Mars'. This phantom teapot deeply offends Dr Spufford. I would suggest that in Russell's usage it is a muffed recollection of Alice trying to recollect Jane Taylor's 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star ... Up above the world so high / Like a diamond in the sky', and foundering on 'Twinkle, twinkle, little bat! ... Up above the world so high / Like a teatray in the sky'. If this interpretation is valid, 'sodding teapot' ought to read 'blessed teatray'.

Contending with Dawkins and the Delusionists is a harder matter, all the harder because Dr Spufford wants it to figure in his book somewhere, but obviously cannot allow it a separate chapter or a structural position in any chapter; though he does allow it a two page footnote in the course of his third chapter, referring to 'arguments to be made about God based on probability' and beginning 'Though the good ones do not include the steaming heap of "evolutionary" manure, raked together by Richard Dawkins and Bertrand Russell's teapot', I have to say that though he is a good shadow-boxer, quick-footed and quick-fisted I would not call him a good controversialist; he lacks the necessary calm of address, the levelled, wounding civility that considers and opines, and will not take no for an answer; the impression of standing well within his own ground that Russell, in all his essays, urbanely conveys.

There is a general observation, often made by writers on rhetorical matters, that 'rhetoric compromises stance', or less precisely, that the means tends to modify the message. This might be said of *Unapologetic*, which at the outset proposes to demonstrate that *belief* is, exclusively, 'a characteristic set of our feelings' and comes to rest with the last words on the last page – 'Don't be afraid, far more can be mended than you know'. This is a shift of final position enforced by the gradual pull and sway of the preceding argument. Another rhetorical matter is Dr Spufford's easy recourse to Basic English or Pardon-my-French; e.g. 'If I say the word *sin* to you, I'm basically buggered as we like to say in the Church of England'. This had me hiccupping with laughter, though as an Anglican in exile I would protest, did I not realize that 'as we say in the Church of England' is only a whimsical variant of 'as the actress said to the bishop', and 'buggered' a tolerably vulgar synonym for 'useless', as in 'the hedge-

clippers are bugged'. What has 'buggered' Dr Spufford is the multiplying over-use and misuse of the word *sin* in so many journalistic and social contexts; he needs to find new terms of discourse. In consequence, he calls sin 'the human propensity to fuck things up', acronymed throughout the book as HPtFtU. In general there is a rhetorical / structural purpose to his swearwords. They are related to the condition of unredeemed (or possibly half-redeemed) humanity; they disappear when the story tells us that for all our failures we still have our chances to know, and do, and say, and fail, better.

A sentence in his third chapter, perhaps inserted during revision of the text, has the air of a postscript to the work as a whole: 'Reading over what I've written, I fear I've turned it into an *effect*, a special effect in prose, controlled by me.' This is remarkable. He seems here to be accepting the 'deconstructionist' position that writing, not speaking, is the primary activity of the human mind, and that one text imaginatively begets another. Thus he declares, in briefly reviewing his own book, that having regarded himself throughout as someone speaking, he has come to think of himself as someone writing. Accordingly, in the last of his self-portraits he pictures himself ensconced in a privileged place reserved for him by the amiable staff of Costa Coffee, in Sidney Street, Cambridge, where, he claims, he wrote his book, or most of it, fortified by frequent draughts of black Americano coffee and with no indebtedness to anyone else's work. He never took time off to go to a library? That might well be true, he is in general a well-read man with a good memory.

At the finish, this reader is impressed, and then again, not a little *depressed*. Can it be that all the fine words in the book add up to nothing more than a book of words? That its 'buried logic' lies too deep to be resurrected? I think of that fine old play of Twelfth Night, and Viola saying to the clown, Feste, 'Nay, that's certain: they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.'

Walter Nash

Thomas Gardner, *John in the Company of the Poets: The Gospel in Literary Imagination*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2011, 978 1 602 58315 3

The Fourth Gospel has long been recognized as a wonderful resource for Christian imaginative literature and, indeed, for arts of all kinds. Several factors account for this.

John begins with a wonderfully expansive point of view from which to consider the life, ministry and significance of Jesus – 'In the beginning was the Word.... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.... What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.' He shapes his narrative from a post-resurrection standpoint where all aspects may be viewed simultaneously – that wonderfully expressive story of new creation at the wedding feast in Cana happens, almost inevitably, on the third day. Both history and tradition (in terms of Torah, Temple, festivals and so on) are re-shaped and given new life and further creative possibilities are opened up.

There is much misunderstanding, opening up a mysterious and suggestive space from within which new ideas may emerge. Irony drips frequently from the narrative – 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?' Jesus chides Nicodemus. 'So you are a king?' asks Pilate, clearly struggling with a much higher reality than he is used to. And a little later, 'What is truth?' he asks, presumably looking Jesus pityingly in the face. The reader half-smiles, curiously involved, yet detached

from this scene which is both horrifying and curiously evocative of sympathy.

John has frequently been described as a pool in which a child may paddle safely, yet an ocean in which any of us can drown. Which of us fails to empathise with Mary's grief at the empty tomb as she complains 'if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him?' But how many notice the resonances behind her supposition that he may be the gardener – the Second Adam, as Paul might have written, already bringing in the new creation? Further revelations await us at each step.

And, of course, John has most of the best stories, usually told at length and sometimes accompanied by discourses and dialogues which open up further discussion and interpretation – Nicodemus, the Woman at the Well, the Invalid at the Pool of Bethesda, the Man Born Blind, the Raising of Lazarus, Mary, Thomas, Peter, drawn back to his old way of life – all apparently curated by the mysterious and unnamed 'Beloved Disciple'.

Small wonder that John supplies profound reflection on the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit or Paraclete, and offers creative possibilities for the future – 'When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.... He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.'

Thomas Gardner's wonderful book elucidates the narrative of John with the understanding that 'John writes to draw readers into a confrontation with the words of Jesus, structuring his Gospel so that the reader is drawn deeper and deeper into the struggle to make out the meaning of his rich, enigmatic words.' His is a commentary of sorts, proceeding sequentially through the chapters of John and offering an elucidatory reading which takes seriously the text in its original context with its controversies and community opponents, yet leaving an intentional space for mostly fairly modern poets to further the engagement with what the text presents. He is sensitive to the multi-layered structure of the Gospel, the repetitions and the authorial voice. He has clearly benefited hugely from the more literary readings of the Gospels which over the past thirty years or so gently shouldered aside the determinedly historicist concerns of most of the past century or two. He is not especially theological, though, inevitably, theology can never be far away when reading the sacred text. However it is theology governed by different agendas from that of the confessional church or the creed-makers. This is quite striking given the strongly conservative nature of the publisher.

The usual or expected suspects are here. Emily Dickinson, Donne, Eliot, Herbert, R.S. Thomas, Hopkins and Denise Levertov are represented. But so are John Berryman and Elizabeth Bishop. Thomas Gardner himself shows up! Nineteen poets and twenty-nine poems. Following a contents page which simply lists out the chapters of the Gospel in eight sections, a valuable 'Poems Examined' alerts the reader to which poets will make a contribution and to the tune of how many poems. This parallel list highlights the significance of the poetic component of the book. It is not simply a commentary illustrated by selected poems but an examination of how poetic expression is prompted and fostered by the Gospel itself.

Space allows for only one example of Gardner's *modus operandi*. Chapter 12 of the Gospel closes out the first half of its narrative of public ministry. From now on, in John's account, Jesus will focus upon teaching his disciples privately and preparing both them and the reader to reflect upon the ultimate irony and mystery – namely that this glorious Lord will be further glorified in agonizing death upon the cross and leaving a legacy which will be initiated and shaped by the arrival of the Holy Spirit,

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the Paraclete. Gardner turns to 'The Windhover' of Gerard Manley Hopkins, which he describes as the 'most powerful account I know of the glory expressed in Christ's brokenness'. The sonnet, according to Gardner, fosters the experience of turning from one experience of glory to a radically different one – just as the Gospel does. The ecstatic description of the bird's beautiful movements and regal dominion evokes a profound engagement with the normally understood perception of glory. Praise tumbles easily from the poet's lips but crashes at the first word of line 10 – 'Buckle! AND the fire breaks from thee then.' The glory of the cross is the inevitable outcome of such soaring, lofty flight, plunging earthwards but losing none of the potency envisaged earlier in the poem ... or Gospel.

The Fourth Gospel encourages such exploration of paradox and metaphor in a way that possibly no other part of Scripture does, though, perhaps, Genesis and the Psalms would run it close, though in completely different ways. The great value of Gardner's book is that it not only teases open this most evocative of texts, but offers outstanding examples of poets pursuing further exploration. In doing so it can only generate further attempts on the part of those of us who read it. And I suspect that the writer of John would have approved of this outcome.

Robert Willoughby

Walter Nash, *Any Day Now: Poems of Late, Beyond the Cloister Publications* (rainbow.poetry@hotmail.co.uk), 2012, 44 pp., p.b., £4.25

The opening lines strike the keynote: 'Any day now / a jangle of phones will tell the tale of my demise.' With tough-minded good humour the poet foresees the circumstances of his end – he will 'fly up in smoke / like other folk', 'they'll take my books'. In this, the title poem, familiar supports will be removed as time's destruction takes its course. But wait. By writing verse the poet defies time and may be heard 'tomorrow, perhaps'; moreover there's more than one way to confront the dying of the light.

The latest collection from Walter Nash makes entertaining play with a number of themes, prompting from the reader of the thirty-eight poems several complicit chuckles. The different psychologies of men and women (one group of poems is headed 'Marriage Lines') is a rich seam and, although it's clear that the poet is much in the Canaries, 'Landscape in a Provincial Gallery' invites readers to share radical reflections at a great English house and park, reflections that might be approved by a Cobbett or an Orwell.

What rage is in me inspires the thought
That the seemly wood
Shelters the nakedness of the deluded,
That the noble hall
Houses a conference of fops and brutes,
That the homely cows
Are a brawling company of malcontents?

And the reference point, the crouching, trusty spire
Is X, the spot for the heavens to fall.

In 'A Little Spat of Free Verse' there's a feisty riposte to an unnamed editor who, presumably making a rejection, has suggested that the intending contributor should

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buy a few back numbers. In this collection there is no space made for anything apologetic about religious belief. Indeed preachers in 'Time of Apocalypse' are wrong-footed for associating death with a salve. They should learn from

A doctor brisk and busy on his rounds,
a gardener potting-on and planting out,
a tranquil mother with her newborn child,
daring to look the future in the face, [people who]
put in a word for Life.

The insecurely balanced voice in 'The Balanced Man', the kind you might hear in a pub, is not gainsaid when he opines:

'The church? Ten pensioners, old fingers locked
On little service books and hymnals packed
With happy-clappy lines;
Then there's the vicar, standing as God's locum,
Dishing out crumbs and wine
And the good news – meaning the old salvation act –
Bags of hot air and hokum.'

Nash, who has contributed a thoughtful article in this journal on the practice of sonneteing ('About an Uncertain Sonnet', *The Glass*, No. 13, Winter 2000), displays in these poems a sure-footed relaxed approach to poetic form, throwing down a pattern of line-end rhyme in some poems, enhanced here and there with internal rhyme, while in others he is content with free verse. It might be himself in 'Old Man Making':

Lost in pursuit of form and design
Long hours you keep,
Almost achieving the almost fine
As you drink your coffee or sip your wine, or glimpse a skill in the turn of a line
While you fall asleep.

Such reflective pauses are offset by lively incidents, as in 'Undesirable Tenants':

Moiled in a maelstrom, suddenly shipwrecked seamen –
Two cockroaches I've batted into the loo,
Boldly breasting the billows, refuse to be flushed,
The beggars.[...]

Rage they inspire. My God, how they get your rag –
Crush, club, gas, drown the ubiquitous pests,
Or suck them up in the Hoover – but beware,
They'll be waiting to get you when you open the bag,
For they die hard.

Over most of the poems is the sense of an ending. A story, a poem, a life has to have one, yet it may be comic rather than tragic. That is the witness of these witty, often self-deprecating ironic poems, which signal too a triumph of humour.

Roger Kojecký

The Change

Before I became a proper sort of Christian,
believing wasn't too hard –
I had the blackletter guide, I read the old story
(*Praise the Lord*)

The world seemed like a species of performance,
a show, in many ways:
Sundays, in church, I understudied the godly,
(*His name be praised*)

But days of the week were theatre unending,
with many good parts and some
clearly reserved for butchers, bakers and bankers
(*Thy kingdom come*)

All other available roles took my attention,
all sins, from one through seven,
mortal denials of life in the shadow of living
(*As it is in heaven*)

Then one night, deep in reflections on Prince Hamlet
I heard an echo say,
'You have to try to be what I want you to be'
(*Give us this day*)

And ever after knew I would have to be altered
feeling that, from then on
being a Christian was going to be very awkward
(*Thy will be done*).

Walter Nash

Notes on Contributors

Dr Rachel Adcock is a University Teacher in the English and Drama Department at Loughborough University. Her PhD research on seventeenth-century women Baptists has been published in *Prose Studies*, *The Seventeenth Century*, and *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, and she is currently revising her thesis for monograph publication under the working title *Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640-1675*. With two colleagues at Loughborough University, Sara Read and Anna Warzycha, she has recently completed an edited collection of seventeenth-century women's works provisionally entitled *Flesh and Spirit: An Anthology of Writings by Seventeenth-Century Women* (MUP, forthcoming 2013).

Having obtained his PhD from Kings College London in 2005, **Dr Bill Goldman** took up an offer to teach in universities in China, staying for three years. Living now in Richmond and tutoring privately, he is working on the book of his doctoral thesis, to be entitled *Prophetic History: Blake, Browning & the Visionary Tradition*.

Dr Russell M. Hillier is Assistant Professor of English at Providence College, Rhode Island. He has published articles on Milton, Bunyan, Coleridge, and Dostoevsky. His *Milton's Messiah: The Son of God in the Works of John Milton* was reviewed in *The Glass* No. 24, Spring 2012, where the publisher, in fact OUP, was given incorrectly. With editorial apologies.

Dr Roger Kojecký's *T S Eliot's Social Criticism* describes Eliot's attempts to engage as a Christian man of letters with social issues. The book contains first publication of a paper on the role of the clergy contributed by Eliot to the proceedings of a discussion group, The Moot. He is among the contributors to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (IVP), and has lectured recently at universities in Krakow, Olomouc, Toronto and Beijing. He is Secretary of the Christian Literary Studies Group.

Walter Nash is Emeritus Professor of Modern English Language at Nottingham University. He has authored several collections of poems, including *Memorabilia*, and *Recent Intelligence*. He is also the author of numerous books and articles on language and rhetoric. He lives now on the island of Tenerife.

Dr David Parry teaches early modern English literature at the University of Cambridge, where his Ph.D. research focused on rhetoric in Puritan writing. Following his Ph.D., he completed a Government of Canada Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the University of Toronto.

Dr. Kerstin W. Shands is Professor of English at Södertörn University in Stockholm. She holds a doctorate in English from Uppsala University. Among her publications are *The Repair of the World: The Novels of Marge Piercy* (1994), *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse* (1999), *Collusion and Resistance: Women Writing in English* (2002), *Notions of America: Swedish Perspectives* (2004), and *Neither East Nor West: Postcolonial Essays on Literature, Culture and Religion* (2008). Shands has been a Visiting Scholar at

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Columbia University, New York, at the University of Kansas at Lawrence, and at Utkal University in India. She is a member of the Editorial Boards of *Contemporary Women's Writing* and *The Ravenshaw Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*.

Dr Peter Stiles is a Lecturer in English and Education at the Wesley Institute in Sydney, Australia. He is also an Adjunct Professor of English and Religious Studies at Trinity Western University in Vancouver, Canada. For many years he held senior positions in leading independent schools in New South Wales. His doctorate in Literature and Theology is from Glasgow University. His principal research interests are in the Victorian period, especially the work of Elizabeth Gaskell, but also modern religious poetry and Australian literature. He has published numerous articles, reviews and his own verse. He is the Australian representative for the American journal, *Christianity and Literature*.

Dr Andrew Tate is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English & Creative Writing at Lancaster University where he also the Associate Director of the Ruskin Research Centre. He has published widely in the field of literature and theology and his books include *Douglas Coupland* (2007), *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (2008), and, co-authored with Arthur Bradley, *The New Atheist Novel* (2010).

Dr Anna Walczuk teaches English literature in the Institute of English Philology at the Jagiellonian University, Krakow, where she is Head of the Section of British Literature and Culture of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries. Her doctoral dissertation was a comparative study of G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis. She published a book on irony in Muriel Spark. She has been writing on the relation between Christianity and literature, especially the rendering of dogma and faith in works of poetry and fiction. She is interested in literary records of spiritual autobiographies, and currently is working on the poetry of Elizabeth Jennings.

Robert Willoughby, a modern languages graduate and member of the CLSG committee, teaches New Testament at the London School of Theology. He combines a commitment to Scripture with a love for all kinds of literature.

News and Notes

CLSG Essays

In 2013 a book of essays, *Visions and Revisions: The Word and the Text* is published in association with Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Co-edited by Roger Kojecký and Andrew Tate, its dozen essays include contributions by Valentine Cunningham, Michael Edwards and Walter Nash. It appears in hardback and in digital form. Details, when available, will appear on the websites of the CLSG and Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Contribute to *The Glass*

Members don't need to wait to be asked. For example, send an idea or proposal for an article or book review any time up to 30 April, then write it during the summer months. Contributions for *The Glass* should be sent to the Editor, Dr Roger Kojecký, preferably by email to editor@clsg.org. The optimum length for articles is 5,000 words, and for reviews around 1,200 words. Contributors should consult the style guidance notes in the Journal section of the website www.clsg.org. Submit copy as an email attachment, but a short item, such as a review, can be sent in the body of an email, preferably with HTML formatting preserving italics etc.

Back numbers of *The Glass* can be found on the Journal Archive section of the website.

Keep in touch

Send in news of your publications, appointments and other items likely to interest list members. Even if you are not a CLSG member you are invited to join the email list and receive occasional information about developments relating to Christianity and literature. There is no charge for membership of the e-list. Email the editor if you would like to join.

Autumn conference

Attend, or offer to read a paper at the CLSG autumn conference at Oxford on 2 November. This year's conference theme will have as its theme spiritual journeys. Offers of papers are invited by 31 May 2013. A call for papers will be sent to members of the e-list and posted on the websites of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) and the University of Pennsylvania Calls for Papers. The CLSG website www.clsg.org gives the fullest information and will be progressively updated.

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