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From Temple to Text:
Reading and Writing Sacred Spaces of Poetic Dwelling

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Theology and Religious Studies
School of Critical Studies
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Abstract

This thesis inhabits the space between the art of poetry and the conditions of faith. Its concern is threefold: women, Church, poetics. It undertakes a journey from institutional Church into more radical and textual spaces, beginning with an examination of the state of the Roman Catholic Church today as revealed in Tina Beattie's critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose disturbing theology has contributed to a misogyny she argues has poisoned the body of the Church. Beattie's critique is a point of departure into a potentially transformative poetics that she hints at but never fully pursues. I attempt to articulate such a poetics through multiple, spiraling approaches that are interdisciplinary, invitational, performative and creative. In my reading and writing practices, I seek to trace the contours of this poetics through the delineation of a series of alternative poetic 'ecclesiological' spaces. These spaces will be shaped mainly by engaging the work of five poet/thinkers, a seemingly disparate group of authors, who, whether strictly poets or not, exhibit qualities of 'poetic being': Ignatius of Loyola, Gaston Bachelard, Yves Bonnefoy, Dennis Potter, and Hélène Cixous. The latter will further assist me in defining this poetic geography through her philosophical and fictive investigations of the interrelationships of gender, writing and spirituality. The readings I undertake are relational, conversations in which reading is a careful listening to texts and writing becomes an organic outcome of that listening. I ask essentially what happens when we, man/woman, stand in the clearing with Heidegger to share his wonder at being? With the help of my poet-companions, I respond that we are transformed after a full engagement with poetic thinking itself. I conclude that we are brought by this engagement to a sacred space of poetic dwelling.

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Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Introduction(s)

Origins

May, if life is sheer toil, a woman
 Lift her eyes and say: so
 I too wish to be? Yes. As long as Kindness,
 The Pure, still stays with her heart, woman
 Not unhappily measures herself
 Against the godhead. Is God unknown?
 Is she manifest like the sky? I'd sooner
 Believe the latter. It's the measure of the woman.
 Full of merit, yet poetically, woman
 Dwells on this earth. But no purer
 Is the shade of the starry night,
 If I might put it so, than
 Woman, who's called an image of the godhead.
 Is there a measure on earth? There is
 None.¹

I begin with this late poem of Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Of lovely blueness . . .', (re-gendered, with reason to be clarified later and apologies to the poet) because it is an origin and touchstone for this discussion of poetics, faith and gender, particularly the term within it, taken up by Heidegger, 'poetically, man dwells'.² I was first taken with the phrase some years ago in divinity school when I came across it in an obscure book, *The Mystery of Death*, by the Jesuit Ladislaus Boros. He wrote of poetic dwelling as a contradictory existence, a 'dialectic of the proximity that is realized in remoteness' in which '[a]ll hiding is revealing, all dark is light, all concealment is beauty, all retirement is presence.'³ Dwelling poetically, Boros wrote, '[w]e abandon things, we give up all idea of seizing and grasping.'⁴ I forgot about Hölderlin, pursued other things, yet the phrase stayed with me and began to insist itself: What might it mean to 'dwell poetically'?

¹ Adapted from the version of Friedrich Hölderlin's late poem 'In Lovely Blueness . . .' quoted in Martin Heidegger, ' ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . ." ', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 219.

² Heidegger engages Hölderlin's phrase 'poetic dwelling' in his later work, in four essays written in the 1950s, reprinted in the collection mentioned above. I am indebted to David Jasper for our discussions of 'poetic dwelling'. To begin to hint at the implications of the term and its relevance for this work, I turn to his preliminary remarks on the subject in his book *The Sacred Body: Asceticism in Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), xiv, xiii: 'Heidegger asserts that "dwelling" is the fundamental form of human life and that to dwell is to build.' To dwell poetically 'is to live within the "space" that is at once a desert, an oasis and a space of literature'.

³ Ladislaus Boros, S.J., *The Mystery of Death*, trans. Gregory Bainbridge, O.S.B. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

Sometime later I would read Heidegger's difficult and beautiful essay on the phrase and the poem, ' "... Poetically Man Dwells ..."', and be struck most strongly by his discussion of the dimension where sky and earth meet, a space, he says, not understood in an ordinary sense, but as a dimension of the 'meting out of the between', the between of the glance upward by (wo)man and downward to earth by the divine, a spiritual space, according to Hölderlin, in which a person toiling on earth who yet looks toward the heavens with desire, measuring oneself against the divine and desiring to *be* that unknown presence that is yet known as mysteriously manifested most fully in its absence is a *believing* person.⁵ Gradually, the question shifted to what might it mean to believe as a poet? Could such a thing be sought? Could it be delineated? Such delineation would have to involve consideration of 'dwelling', which implies space, a space of home in which believers dwell, the *ekklesia*.⁶

This thesis seeks then to discover and create spaces of poetic dwelling in which such a faith might find a home, a task that takes on some urgency and importance as the shape of the space of the believers' home contracts as traditional forms of Church in the West decline, particularly my own, the Roman Catholic Church, with the movement of the official Church away from the reforms of Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council undertook the task of re-imagining, of, as Karl Rahner, wrote, 'rebuilding [. . .] the old fortress with its narrow loopholes into a house, equally strong but with broad glass walls and the world shining in through them.'⁷ Here we have an image of *ekklesia* that harks

⁵ Heidegger, ' "... Poetically Man Dwells ..."', 220-221.

⁶ *Ekklesia*, Greek for 'assembly', as in civic assembly, was adopted by the beginning Christian communities and given new meaning: church. Daniel Harrington offers an apt elaboration for this discussion in *The Church According to the New Testament: What the Wisdom and Witness of Early Christianity Teach Us Today* (Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward: 2001), 49: 'The word *ekklesia* derives from the Greek "called out," and it was originally used in connection with citizens who had been "called out" to represent themselves and their city in political matters. Rejecting the political nuances, the early Christians used *ekklesia* in a religious context with reference to their experience of having been called by God out of the darkness of their former lives and into the light of Christ and the life of discipleship (see 1 Peter 2:9-10). The term *ekklesia* expressed the early Christians' consciousness of their divine election and their mission.' Though I do not pursue it here, I would further wonder whether the willingness to engage and transform language in this way is evidence of a poetic flexibility and fluidity in these new communities. Then I would ask whether that type of activity can really be a rejection of the political.

⁷ Karl Rahner, S.J., *The Christian of the Future*, trans. W.J. O'Hara (Montreal: Palm, 1967), 9. Not long after the end of the Second Vatican Council, this slim collection of four lectures by Karl Rahner on changes in the Church was published in English. Rahner had been appointed by Pope John XXIII as a *peritus* to the council, where he contributed toward the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, a major conciliar document also known as *Lumen Gentium* after its opening words, 'light of all nations'. The document steps away from the primarily institutional ecclesiological model of the past and, like other documents of the council, it does not condemn but seeks to clarify, enlighten, and renew, in this instance, the Church's self-understanding. Rahner was thus an architect of the 'rebuilding of the old fortress' and hence a fitting theological partner for this project of poetic building. By any measure, he was brilliant, creative, prolific and influential. Yet he was also humble: 'all these reflections seek to help prepare a little the path of the

back to another kind of home, to the ecclesial epistle Ephesians, an origin of Church, with its reference to believers as ‘members of the household of God [. . .] built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.’⁸ Church as spiritual dwelling place is not built of walls, but out of our interior selves, in which we build out of symbols invested with meaning to ‘create a world in which we can find our bearings’,⁹ as Louis-Marie Chauvet put it. These symbols ‘are less objects of speech than *space* within which speech takes its meaning.’¹⁰

In this somewhat roundabout opening, I begin to sketch the contours of a journey that is both theological and poetic (though how could theology, in the traditional definition as ‘faith *seeking* understanding’, not be poetic?). The beginning of the Hölderlin poem I opened with speaks to a joining of the theological and poetic. Its opening lines evoke a wondrous sense of ‘church’ and may begin to offer us another way of seeing:

In lovely blueness with its metal roof the steeple blossoms.

Around it the crying of swallows hovers, most moving blueness surrounds it. The sun hangs high above it and colours the sheets of tin, but up above in the wind silently crows the weathercock.¹¹

The poet goes on to write of the sound of ringing bells leaving church windows, which are like ‘gates of beauty’, of the possibility of a figure below the bell, walking down steps, ‘a still life’ even in the movement and sound and silence. Simple images, he calls them, and holy, so much so ‘that really often one is afraid to describe them.’ It is an odd thing for the poet to admit this fear. What is he getting at? Perhaps he is showing what it is to dwell poetically. As Julian Young puts it, writing of Heidegger’s later focus on this idea of poetic dwelling, ‘Poets are those who, in naming, bringing forth, the unnameable, in bringing

pilgrim Church,’ he wrote in the preface (8), ‘so that even in our time it may proclaim and mediate the grace of God.’

⁸ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (NRSV), Third Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Ephesians 2:19, 2:22 (all biblical citations henceforth will be from this edition unless otherwise indicated).

⁹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Hölderlin, Friedrich, ‘In Lovely Blueness . . .’, in *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Routledge, 1966), 601.

being to presence in beings, the transcendent in the immanent, “name,” “ground” or “found” the holy. [. . .] Poetry lets us dwell because it renders the ordinary extraordinary.’¹²

In my readings and writing I attempt to show how the poets I have chosen bring forth poetic holy spaces into which woman may be brought into greater presence. The focus of this thesis is not on gender, per se, but on the marking of spaces hospitable to a gender fluidity that undoes the rigid gender binaries of the institutional Church. As a beginning to that effort, my re-gendering of the Hölderlin passage sets the path playfully, though with perfect seriousness, for it elicits an image of woman in a poetic space of faithful dwelling, the symbolic sacred space in which we find our bearings as true Church, or, holy ground. When women are denied a full presence in that space, that world is off-kilter.

The project and the poets

I begin the project in this world out of balance, in the crumbling institutional edifice that is a huge part but certainly not the whole of my own faith tradition, the Roman Catholic Church. Partly for this reason, I have named the first section of this thesis home, though it has become a home in which I have felt increasingly ill at ease. That paradox of unease at home, where one is expected to be most at ease, is a prime motivator of my writing this work. While it may not be everywhere apparent, it is an energy providing force throughout, often acting below the surface of my thinking and of the text.

In hindsight, I realize that this condition was central to the shaping of the form of the thesis, to the informing of its content, and to a not entirely welcome continuing intellectual and spiritual formation of myself. Toni Morrison expresses well this unsettling ambivalence of the simultaneous recognition of the familiar and unfamiliar of one’s home in a preface poem in her recent novel *Home*:

Whose house is this?
Whose night keeps out the light
In here?
Say, who owns this house?
It’s not mine.
I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter
With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats;
Of fields wide as arms open for me.

¹² Julian Young, ‘What Is Dwelling? The Homelessness of Modernity and the Worlding of the World’, in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Volume I*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 196-197.

This house is strange.
 Its shadows lie.
 Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?¹³

Feeling famished in a house not mine, I went out in search of nourishment and life. The thesis' tripartite structure of 'home/leaving home/to home transformed' thus arose organically, out of the readings and out of life. The movement was similar to the energy described above: a spiraling, under the surface, increasingly into greater depths. The writing became in this way more poetic than linear, profoundly affected by the writers I was reading. As the thesis grew more unconventional in its form and content, its goal became not that of the usual finding and contributing new knowledge that could be measured objectively like the number of bricks added to the building of a house, to continue the home metaphor, but rather a realizing that the goal was ultimately goallessness, a different way of knowing, another kind of building, in the words of Heidegger's aforementioned essay, 'we are to think of the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell, as a—perhaps even *the*—distinctive kind of building.'¹⁴

To say that the process of building this thesis equals this essential building would be too great a claim, but it is the horizon it strives for. In this and other ways that will become clear it is a very postmodern undertaking. What I mean to say here is suggested by Edith Wyschogrod in her excellent prelude on postmodernism in her book *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*, which I turn to now for assistance. Marking the difference identified by Jean François Lyotard between modernist and postmodernist ways of proceeding in aesthetic presentation, she notes a shift in the postmodern 'mode of artistic shaping' that is temporally similar to the lives of the saints in that the rules for creating the art and for living holy lives 'are not fore-disclosed but come to light only after they have already been put to use.'¹⁵ As Lyotard notes, 'The rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer then are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the character of an *event*.'¹⁶

¹³ Toni Morrison, *Home* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2012).

¹⁴ Heidegger, ' "... Poetically Man Dwells ..."', 215.

¹⁵ Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xvi.

¹⁶ Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81; quoted in Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, xv-xvi.

It is my intention that this work, this text, have the character of event as journey, as quest, in which the textual paths that are walked begin to mark fresh categories for new ways of thinking, reading, writing, being. A questing text requires companions, a word that in itself holds implications poetic and theological (with its roots in ‘together’ and ‘bread’¹⁷), to journey with. I have chosen seemingly incompatible companions who below surface appearances are in truth compatible: Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th-century Basque saint and founder of the Society of Jesus; the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard; the French poet Yves Bonnefoy; the English television writer Dennis Potter; and the French thinker Hélène Cixous.

The decision to gather such different works calls for some explanation at the outset, though the reasons for the gathering become increasingly clear as the thesis progresses. Essentially it is a matter of compatibility, which is at heart a mysterious thing. Why are we friends with some and not others? Why do we marry this one and not that one? Why do I choose these writers and thinkers, whom I call my ‘poet companions’, and not others? Because we are mysteriously compatible, so much so that I began to feel as if they had chosen me instead of the other way around. Cixous tells of the same experience:

That is what we do, we pick up something in the dark. We don’t know what we will pick up. We always do this: we pick up a book, but we don’t know why. And it happens to be our parent, since the only way to find our real parent is to pick up a book in the dark. It is mysterious. Maybe it is the parent on the shelf that has chosen us, but it can’t be explained. Anyway, this is the way we happen on those books that will change our lives.¹⁸

For these companions, for their texts, their texts that change lives, their lives changed by texts, I have the greatest affinity, and it is this love itself that both explains and best helps me articulate why they are chosen and not others. As Cixous says in an interview, ‘One reads the texts that interpret our moods, the books that correspond, that write us, friendly or adversarial companions. To read, and feel oneself read is a pleasure. [. . .] a voice speaks up within me, saying: that’s me in there, you who know me even if I don’t yet know you.’¹⁹

¹⁷ OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. See etymology of ‘companion, n.’ at <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37402?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=mtvbeX&>; accessed 23 December 2012.

¹⁸ Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, trans. Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 24.

¹⁹ Hélène Cixous, Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *Encounters: Conversations on Life and Writing*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 29.

Therefore, being read, I write. My readings are relational, in that they involve encounters between self and other in which both participants play an equal part. They are conversations in which reading is a careful listening to texts and writing is what arises out of that listening. In order to work in this way, it was necessary to have the right companions, those who also read and write in corresponding fashion, who would teach me how to 'converse' and who would provide the method for writing this thesis, that mode of artistic shaping mentioned above that arises out of its practice, without predetermination.

A variation of compatibility occurred by placing the poets' texts in conversation with one another, allowing them to speak rather than attempting to master them, which is postmodern in its 'tolerant eclecticism', 'its juxtaposition of widely differing genres' of writers who themselves often work in a variety of genres.²⁰ Bonnefoy is not only a poet but also a translator and art historian. Cixous writes experimental fiction, plays, criticism, working, like Bonnefoy, across multiple languages. Bachelard is known for philosophical studies of both science and poetry. Potter draws from situation comedy, *noir*, musicals and Greek tragedy in his television dramas. Ignatius pulls together Gospel scenes, lives of the saints and narratives on imitating Christ to create something new. All of them, within the frame of my 'tolerant eclecticism', have taught me how to move between disciplines and genres and thus how to listen better and not impose my views upon them. This way of knowing they hold in common is constituted by an exquisite attentiveness and fluidity, a countercultural ability to not give in to the temptation to possess and control. I read these writers not because their work is religious but rather because it creates transformative possibilities for being religious in ways that eschew exclusivity and hierarchical structures and allow for poetic dwelling.

Another way these works are compatible can be found in their ability to be held alongside one another. The word in this sense is especially apposite for us, as it originates with ecclesiastical advantage ('Of benefices: Capable of being held together.'²¹) and develops into meanings of assistance and gift more extensive and varied than consideration of what is fitting property and income for a priestly caste, a movement akin to that of this thesis. Such compatibility is a core reason for my selection, for I am interested in what happens when the companions are held together, having discovered that it is in these unpredictable

²⁰ Such tolerance is cited by Wyschogrod as a tendency of postmodernism. See *Saints and Postmodernism*, xix.

²¹ OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 'Compatible', definition three: Available at <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37499?redirectedFrom=compatible>; accessed 23 December 2012.

interactions that the most interesting results occur. When placed together, an alchemy occurs so that the outcome of the mixing of two or more is more precious and alive than one alone. Here I take a cue from Cixous, who often places her favourite ‘characters’ together, those writers with whom she feels the most affinity, because together these ‘pathfinders’ lead her ‘in the direction of truth’.²²

In order to situate myself and the reader at the beginning of this journey, I would like to give Cixous and Ignatius more of an introduction than the others, as they have been particularly influential, though they model traits of all the poet companions in the transformative potential of their texts and the ‘alchemy’ referred to above that happens when they are held together. These two most strongly open up paths to the heart of the interplay of the concerns of this thesis. Their texts are best loved yet most challenging and perplexing. Their writing has both undone and re-formed me. They provide the lenses that help me see, the ones with whom it seems right to linger with briefly as we begin, for they invite us, urge us, to return to origins in order to move forward.

Consider, then, some samplings, which are, again, about listening, encounter and transformation, themes that will be continually revisited throughout this thesis: In an early novel, *To Live the Orange*, Cixous writes, referring to a life-changing, spiritual/textual encounter with the words of the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector,²³

From Brazil a voice came to return the lost orange to me.²⁴ “The need to go to the sources. The easiness of forgetting the source. The possibility of being saved by a humid voice that has gone to the sources. The need to go further into the birth-voice.”²⁵

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius urges the exercitant to review her life, return to past sins and blessings, trace the course of her thoughts, revisit the creation of the world and the

²² Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 36, 52-53.

²³ Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) is one of the most important writers in 20th century Brazilian literature. Cixous began reading Lispector in the 1970s and helped bring her work to wider attention in Europe. Lispector is perhaps less well known in the English-speaking world, though recently there has been a resurgence of interest with a biography and new translations by Benjamin Moser. (See Colm Tóibín’s introduction to Moser’s translation of Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star*, the first [2011] in a series of new translations by New Directions [New York].)

²⁴ As Heather Walton notes, ‘The orange is a favorite metaphor for Cixous. It is a vivid word linking fruit, flesh, her maternal home (Oran/Oran-je) and writing. To write is to know the orange. To immerse oneself in its flesh.’ (‘Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat in the Heart of the World’, in *Literature, Theology and Feminism* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007], 152.)

²⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Vivre l’orange/To live the Orange*, trans. Ann Liddle and Sarah Cornell (Paris: des femmes, 1979), 16.

birth and baptism of Jesus.²⁶ Out of these returns to the sources come opportunities for new life, ‘possibilities of social and subjective transformation’.²⁷ What the two hold then perhaps most in common is a belief in what Verena Andermatt Conley called, in reference to Cixous, ‘liberation through textuality’²⁸, a constant concern of ‘helping the other actively to have his or her birth, to join body and mind.’²⁹

Ignatius is an excellent liberator and midwife, a path breaker in life and in texts. Setting out from his home in 1522, against his family’s wishes, he began his spiritual journey, writing his text while walking sometimes hundreds of miles in his quest for God.³⁰ (It is not surprising that he would draw me in, considering the attraction of ‘home’ for me. Ron Hansen writes that later in life Ignatius would welcome visitors with the greeting, ‘*Eres en tua casa*’—‘You are at home’.³¹) He is my closest companion, having been beside me in a more primary and intense way and for longer than the others. He has unfortunately often ended up here on the cutting room floor, as it were, yet because of the profound effect of his text on my ways of thinking and being, he is perhaps more present in his absence than others who appear more often and directly. Maybe the more important consideration of his influence is how the way he created his text is reflected in the creation of this one, that is, each arises out of encounters and conversations with others; they are not created in isolation; there is no room in their scenarios for the ideology of the individual going it alone.

As is already apparent, this thesis values personal experience as an integral part of its method. Personal experience will be included throughout as necessitated by the material at hand. This experience will be critically reflected upon, and its inclusion has as its rationale several points. For one, it is a fitting way to proceed because of the nature of the work of

²⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

²⁷ Morag Shiach, *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 69.

²⁸ Verena Andermatt Conley, introduction to Hélène Cixous, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, trans. and ed. Verena Andermatt Conley (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), xvii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

³⁰ Ignatius is known for his incredible physical endurance, which I mention here in relation to our associations between texts, writing, and physical walking. In 1526, for instance, he walked ‘over five hundred miles barefoot from Barcelona to the University of Alcalá, near Madrid’. (Avery Dulles, S.J., ‘Preface to the Vintage Spiritual Classics Edition’ of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. [New York: Vintage, 2000], xxxii; see, also, for example, Joseph N. Tylanda, S.J., commentary to *A Pilgrim’s Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985], 136: ‘After a good month’s walk of almost seven hundred miles, and in the cold of winter, Ignatius finally arrived in the City of Light’.)

the poet companions, particularly the two I discuss here. Both Ignatius and Cixous bring texts and life into intimate contact, writing out of bodily experiences and challenging their readers to do likewise, to experience their texts viscerally. Second, as Jeff Staley puts it, when writing about autobiographical biblical criticism (which I practice in chapter six in a reading of Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* with the Book of Job), including oneself reflectively in one's writing 'openly challenges the traditional genre of academic discourse—the distanced, third-person voice that by default has counted as “scientific objectivity.”'³² Third, this approach is more likely to engage and enact ways of knowing alternative to the latter. It has as its motivations and destinations the crossing of boundaries, especially of interior and exterior, and the undoing of hierarchies as it seeks more fluid 'spaces of radical openness' conducive to human flourishing.³³

In this introduction, the personal serves as an intellectual and spiritual beacon at which to glance back in order to move forward. For me, both Cixous and Ignatius have become such beacons. I first encountered Ignatius a decade ago in spiritual direction sessions with a Sister of Saint Joseph trained in Ignatian spirituality, the basics of which entail developing skills of listening and discernment in order to live a more holy life.³⁴ In a series of spiritual conversations between us, she listened with great attentiveness and began to teach me Ignatian discernment, an attentive listening in which one notes one's affective responses

³¹ Ron Hansen, 'The Pilgrim: Saint Ignatius of Loyola', in *A Stay Against Confusion: Essays on Faith and Fiction* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 99.

³² Jeffrey L. Staley, 'What is Critical about Autobiographical (Biblical) Criticism?', in Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (ed.), *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism: Between Text and Self* (Leiden: Deo, 2002), 15.

³³ I borrow this wording 'spaces of radical openness' from Bell Hooks, who writes of the need to create such spaces when one has left home, needing to both hold on to and discard aspects of one's home while entering new worlds. Once one has departed, the meaning of home shifts; it 'is that place which enables and promotes ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.' (Bell Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* [Boston: South End Press, 1990], 148; quoted in Leonie Sandercock, *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities* [Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998], 116.)

³⁴ For a concise introduction to Ignatian spirituality and *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* from which it derives, see Avery Dulles, S.J., 'Preface to the Vintage Spiritual Classics Edition' of *The Spiritual Exercises*, xiii-xxiii. For a detailed study, see Michael Ivens, S.J.'s *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing and New Malden, Surrey: Inigo, 1998; reprint, 2008 [page citations are to the reprint edition].) Ivens cites as his main concern the desire 'to help the ordinary director to elucidate the meaning of the text itself, and to sense something of its spiritual doctrine.' (xi). In other words, he seeks to bring forth the life of the text and the text to the life of the director and the directed. Perhaps a definition of 'spirituality' would also be helpful now, one associated with 'holiness', as in whole and healing. One suited to our purposes is provided by New Testament scholar Sandra Schneiders when she writes that 'virtually everyone talking about spirituality these days is talking about self-transcendence which gives integrity and meaning to the whole of life and to life in its wholeness by situating and orienting the person within the horizon of ultimacy in some ongoing and transforming way.' ('Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?' *Horizons* 13 [Fall 1986]: 263; quoted in Mark O'Keefe, OSB, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* [Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1995; reprint, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005], 23 [page citations are to the reprint edition].)

(what Ignatius referred to as consolation and desolation) and uses that knowledge to make a sound decision. Such attentiveness is at the core of Ignatius' life and of his *Spiritual Exercises*, the text for which he is best known and the foundation of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit life.³⁵

Ignatius was a mystic and pilgrim.³⁶ His text was born out of his spiritual struggles, much of it written as he wandered through Europe, engaging men and women in what he referred to simply as spiritual conversations.³⁷ One could say his book was not created to be read but to be 'walked' while in conversation. It is on one level basically a manual for those who would direct others in the exercises, a series of Gospel meditations and contemplations meant to enable one to grow into a more intimate relationship with God. This occurs, if it occurs, not by reading the text, but by participating in the narratives of Jesus, from the Nativity through the Ascension. The text is subversive, a quality usually unnoticed by casual readers.³⁸ It is radical most of all because Ignatius cuts out any mediator in the God/human relationship, believing as he did that the human person could encounter God directly and intimately in the imagination. Its theology is unconventional in that it is passionate, creative, experiential, equalizing, and founded in prayer.³⁹ Its anthropology is one of deep respect for the freedom of the human person.

³⁵ An early Jesuit 'described consolation as "an inner joy, a serenity in judgment, a relish, a light, a reassuring step forward, a clarification of insight." Desolation was the opposite of this. The Jesuits wanted to live according to such consolation themselves and to help others do the same. This was in fact the goal of the *Exercises* stated in its most generic terms.' (John W. O'Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993], 83).

³⁶ For Ignatius as pilgrim, see, for example, Ron Hansen, 'The Pilgrim: Saint Ignatius of Loyola', 85. Like Hansen and others, Joseph N. Tylenda, S.J., remarks on Ignatius self identifying as a pilgrim and emphasises that aspect in the title he gives his translation of the saint's autobiography: 'I have entitled this translation *The [sic] Pilgrim's Journey*, taking into account that "pilgrim" is what Ignatius called himself and that throughout his life he was on a pilgrimage seeking God. The journey he made during those years was not merely a land and sea journey to the Holy Land and through Europe; more importantly, it was a spiritual journey that he had embarked upon.' (Introduction to *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985], 13.)

³⁷ Once when challenged by a Dominican friar, who had invited him to Sunday dinner, about his activities and those of his four traveling companions (the beginnings possibly of the *Compañía de Jesús*, translated, perhaps unfortunately, into English as 'Society' of Jesus, which was founded ten years later), Ignatius replied, 'We do not preach, we speak to a few in a friendly manner about the things of God, just as one does after dinner with those who invite us.' (Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 126.)

³⁸ See Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 130-131.

³⁹ I would like to thank Heather Walton for pointing out that the text is also equalizing as far as gender is concerned. As one imagines oneself in the narratives, one's identity is unrestricted. Ignatius was limited by the gender stereotypes of his time, and yet, one can see in the spiritual counsel in his letters to women, he appeared to be gender neutral in affairs of the spirit. (See Hugo Rahner, S.J., *Saint Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1960].)

For all these reasons alone he is a fitting companion, yet in a project engaging poetics and gender, Ignatius may seem an especially odd choice, for his text, at least on first encounter, seems anything but poetic, and, as Ron Hansen, among others, notes, '[w]omen are often put off or mystified by this highly masculine saint.'⁴⁰ Look a little closer, however, and these images are seen to show only a partial picture. Suffice it to say here that while it may not be well known, Ignatius was teacher, spiritual director, and friend to many women.⁴¹ At least one, Isabel Roser, was a close friend and benefactress.⁴² Others sought spiritual counsel; many learned the exercises from him. His associations with women, particularly his teaching them the exercises, contributed toward investigations and imprisonment by Inquisitors, though he was found to be without error and released.⁴³ His text was also viewed with suspicion, though it appeared to be difficult for his interrogators to discover by reading it exactly what troubled them.⁴⁴

Unlike Ignatius' Inquisitors and many other readers, Roland Barthes recognized the text's subversiveness by reading it. He perceives its life-giving nature and writes of it and other unlikely companion texts he is engaging (by Sade and Fourier) in a way that articulates what it is I mean by 'affinity':

Nothing is more depressing than to imagine the Text as an intellectual object (for reflection, analysis, comparison, mirroring, etc.). The text is an object of pleasure. [. . .] at times the pleasure of the Text is achieved more deeply (and then is when we can truly say there is a Text): whenever the "literary" Text (the Book) transmigrates into our life, whenever another writing (the Other's writing) succeeds in writing fragments of our own daily lives, in short, whenever a *coexistence* occurs.'⁴⁵

A coexistence, an affinity, occurs, so that Barthes is led, and here we see the importance of our themes of home and relationship, to call Ignatius 'Loyola', 'as I have always named him for myself', he writes, after Ignatius' original home, 'the community of labor in which

⁴⁰ Ron Hansen, 'The Pilgrim: Saint Ignatius of Loyola', 80.

⁴¹ See especially Hugo Rahner's *Saint Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*. Rahner undertook this project to correct the distortion of the perception of Ignatius as singularly soldier-saint.

⁴² See correspondence between Ignatius and Roser in Hugo Rahner's *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*. There is a line in a letter about Roser that is telling regarding the spirituality of Ignatius. The friendship between Ignatius and Roser became strained after he founded the Jesuits and she wanted to enter the order. As she made plans to leave Barcelona for Rome, a Jesuit brother wrote to Ignatius for advice on the matter. Though he was firmly against her plans, Ignatius replied that 'It is in any case better if Isabel herself makes up her mind one way or the other.' (277)

⁴³ See, for example, Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 114-120.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 132-133. No error is discovered, and Ignatius and his companions are released.

⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), 7.

he is caught'.⁴⁶ Similarly, Hansen reveals such affinity when he refers to Ignatius by his birth name, Iñigo, visiting his former quarters in Rome, where holding the saint's plain house shoes in his hands causes him to feel 'a tenderness one feels for a friend who's died.'⁴⁷ Barthes is most impressed by the saint's weeping; Hansen with the materiality of the man's home and clothing, paying close attention, as Ignatius would urge, to his own affective responses to place and object. This is another way of knowing beyond the strictly rational mode.

Which leads me naturally, if peculiarly, to my other dearest companion, Hélène Cixous. She will situate us in a different way than the saint, both more and less personal, resonant with him in the way they both help us begin to build with their concerns for tracing textual paths that then become rules for holy living and writing, yet there is a note that jars with one of them. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* have been formative for me in many ways. But despite my love for Ignatius and devotion to the practice of the spirituality he gave birth to, my gratitude for my Jesuit friends and teachers, I know I can never participate fully in that life, nor can any woman. That 'but' is a central hinge of this thesis, or, more apt, perhaps, is to call it a crossroad, a turning, away from one horizon toward another, which all the poet-companions speak to in one way or another. Heidegger in his essay speaks of its presence in our opening passage, using the language of 'turning point' and a turning of 'the heart'.⁴⁸ He sees that piece of Hölderlin's poem as particularly crucial is explicating this way of poetic dwelling. For the possibility of a turning, a metanoia, if you will (though he would probably not have used that language), we must 'remain heedful of the poetic [. . .] the basic capacity for human dwelling.'⁴⁹ This capacity makes its appearance, the philosopher claims, only where love for others, Hölderlin's 'kindness', is present, only then is poetry, and living, authentic. This loving 'kindness' makes 'a claim' on the heart so it may turn 'to give heed to the measure.'⁵⁰

It is Cixous who will mainly help us attempt an epistemological turn toward a different way of knowing akin to that which Heidegger attempts to elucidate in his readings of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11; Text/text here clearly not meant in the traditional sense of words that make up a work and give it a stable meaning that can be uncovered but rather in the structuralist and poststructuralist sense of an unstable space where 'meaning is generated by the intertextual relations between one text and another and by the activation of those relations by a reader.' (Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 2d ed. [London: Routledge, 2011], 227.)

⁴⁷ Hansen, 'The Pilgrim: Saint Ignatius of Loyola', 74.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, ' ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . . " ', 228-229.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 228.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 229.

Hölderlin and several other poets. Her readings of the later Heidegger influence her own readings, especially of Clarice Lispector, whom she encounters as an act of grace, a religious experience, salvific in its effect on her. I am reminded of Barthes and Hansen's visceral experience of Ignatius when I read of Cixous' encounter with Lispector. Like them, Cixous calls Lispector by a more personal name, her first name, Clarice, which Conley, I think rightly, calls 'an obviously poetic and political gesture insisting on an intimacy beyond language that avoids labeling the author as a dead fact'.⁵¹ (To return to the personal, as beacon and anchor, I found in my own reading encounter of Cixous an experience like that I had known in the text of Ignatius, one of joy, gift and life, without exclusion because of one's gender. I recognized her, she recognized me, I recognized myself in her, saw myself, for example, in my childhood home when she writes of being a stranger to one's family when reading and writing, 'as if we were foreigners inside our own families [. . .] When I write I escape myself, I uproot myself [. . .] I leave from within my own house and I don't return.'⁵²)

But I stray from what needs to be said here before setting forth. My concern with the connection between the thinking of Heidegger and Cixous is simply the way she takes on aspects of his thinking, making it her own, to move into alternative ways of knowing, the poetic, through her reading and writing practices. It may be useful before continuing to begin to define what I meant in this context by the terms 'poetics', 'poetry', and 'poet', with the caveat that they will be continually defined and elaborated upon throughout the thesis, if not always explicitly. For now, it is perhaps enough to say that what I mean by 'poetics' is well expressed by Richard Kearney in his book *Poetics of Imagination*: 'in the broad sense of the term—an exploration of the human powers to make (*poiesis*) a world in which we may poetically dwell.'⁵³ He expands this definition by drawing on Linda Hutcheon's description of postmodern poetics as an 'open, ever-changing theoretical structure by which to order both our cultural knowledge and our critical procedures. This would not be a poetics in the structuralist sense of the word, but would go beyond the study of literary discourse to the study of cultural practice and theory'.⁵⁴ These definitions resonate with Heidegger, who stresses in his essay on poetic dwelling that when he speaks of poetry, the poet, and poetics, he is not speaking of 'the literature industry', for which he

⁵¹ Conley, Introduction to *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, ix.

⁵² Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 21.

⁵³ Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern*, 2d ed., rev. and enl., Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, no. 6 (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 8.

expresses some disdain for its tendency to make poetry into an object to be studied ‘in educational and scientific terms’.⁵⁵ One of the aspects of poetic dwelling, for Heidegger, is the recognition that though we act as if we are the masters and shapers of language, in truth, ‘language remains the master of man.’⁵⁶ A poet, Heidegger says, is a maker, but a maker who seeks not to master language but to listen to its call in the imagination.⁵⁷ ‘What they make is merely imagined. The things of the imagination are merely made. Making is, in Greek, *poiesis*.’⁵⁸ What the poets make is poetry, but the making itself is poetics. We can begin with a basic way of distinguishing poetry by its unique relationship to language, by what it does in both form and content, for ‘the language of a poem is *constitutive* of its ideas’.⁵⁹ Reading the work that is made, the poetry, is what reveals the poet’s orientation, her poetics. Poetics, as I’ve begun to define it, is what allows me to call the writers I have gathered together, even those who write in prose, ‘poets’ and to re-vision ‘Church’ as poetic sacred space.

Both Cixous and Ignatius as poets, then, exhibit an exquisite ability to listen and allow themselves to be led and transformed by the voices of an Other, whether person or text. As Conley notes in her perceptive introduction to *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, Cixous ‘takes an ascetic turn not devoid of religious overtones [. . .] through readings of Heidegger’.⁶⁰ Relevant to our discussion in this regard are her insistence on the poetic as a way of knowing, her non-appropriative approach to texts (‘Hers is a hand that caresses [. . .] rather than a fist that pounces on the text’, notes Conley.⁶¹), in which she insists fiercely in finding joy and pleasure (Heidegger writes, ‘The poet must talk, for/It is a joy.’⁶²), her sense of gift, which perhaps is what most contributes to her talent for reading authors as if they were companions on a journey. She reads *with* Lispector, Genet, Joyce, Kafka, and other favourites, so that they become subjects in their own right and not objects. The re-gendered Hölderlin suits her, with *woman* dwelling as a poet with kindness

⁵⁴ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 10; quoting Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 14.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, ‘“ . . . Poetically Man Dwells . . . ”’, 214.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁵⁹ Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 2.

⁶⁰ Conley, Introduction to *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, xiv.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁶² Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 43; quoted in Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger*, Routledge Critical Thinkers (London: Routledge, 2002), 107.

in her heart resonant with Cixous' idea of *écriture féminine*, a practice frequently misunderstood and difficult to define. Conley offers one of the clearest definitions I have found, as

a working term referring less to a writing practiced mainly by women than, in a broader logical category, to textual ways of spending. It suggests a writing, based on an encounter with another—be it a body, a piece of writing, a social dilemma, a moment of passion—that leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most conscious life.⁶³

My personal reflections attempt to exemplify and enact such alternative ways of knowing and thus to challenge conventional academic models of scholarship, as well as traditional ways of doing theology and conceiving of 'Church'.

This stance is one far different from where I was situated not long ago when I was in a Master of Divinity program at Regis College, the Jesuit Faculty of the University of Toronto. It is worth briefly tracing the turn that occurred there in my research journey that influenced my turn away from the Church in which I once felt so much at home in every way, including intellectually. I do not wish to give an overly negative view of that time, for it was vibrant and life-changing, partly because the program succeeded in its goal of being formative for the whole person, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. I existed in a context unlike any I have been in before or since, as almost all my friends, teachers, and housemates were Roman Catholic, many in religious congregations. It was simultaneously insular and expansive. I fell in love with theology, biblical studies, Christian ethics, finding a natural affinity for the Ignatian pedagogy, out of which my Jesuit teachers would urge me to 'pay attention to my affect', as it would tell me how to move forward.

That one piece of advice, a key aspect also of Ignatian spirituality, affected my writing, as I began to be much more aware of my responses to the texts I was engaging. In fact, it became difficult to write a conventionally academic paper, one that did not include awareness of my response to texts and of an oscillation between the text and my affective response. At the time, I was unaware, as apparently were my teachers, that there were many others experimenting with including oneself in scholarly writing, autobiographical biblical criticism and life-writing being two examples. Ironically, my final year of study, the writing that had become more creative partly as a result of my Ignatian formation was criticized by a few teachers for having become too poetic, not systematic enough to

⁶³ Conley, Introduction to *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, vii.

continue in doctoral studies, which by that time I knew I wished to pursue. One of the professors seemed personally affronted that I dared write on the parousia as falling in love. The paper was flawed, but it took risks I had not previously taken; my thinking had become more imaginative, less restricted. That same year I noticed what seemed a marked increase in conservatism in the seminarians. Two incidents are illustrative, and I mention them because they affected both my life and my research. One was hearing about a party some of the young Jesuit seminarians had organised in which they made a pointed show of wearing their clerics. My response was to write of it and suggest humour and theatre as a response. I would show up in my own clerics, though that evening I was involved in something more life-giving, a birth of sorts, celebrating the opening of a friend's art exhibit. The other incident was more serious and in hindsight I believe it is indicative of a widespread misogyny in the Church. In a bioethics class, in a discussion about abortion, ectopic pregnancy was brought up. One of the young diocesan seminarians in the class said, '*For the Church*, couldn't we move the embryo from the tube to the uterus so it could die a natural death?' I immediately called him out on this cruel and absurd idea that imagined woman as nothing more than a baby container. Notably, no one else in the class, including the professor, challenged him.

I tell these brief stories because they are foundational to both theses. As a result of my increasing awareness of such interior changes and external exclusions, my Master's thesis, titled 'Re-creating Church: Towards an Ethics and Ecclesiology of Love', began to investigate the retrieval and reappropriation of scripture and tradition for the renewal of individual, community, and Church and the importance of imagination and story for that renewal. I looked to the past, especially to the New Testament, for ways into the future, with a core focus on Vatican II, which did exactly that by rooting the Church's self-understanding in scripture. The ecclesiology of the Council is heavily biblical, as was my thesis, as it explored models of Church in the New Testament and in Tradition. In this discussion of what it means to be Christian community, past, present, and future, I took the image of the first 'Christian' community in Jerusalem as portrayed in the Book of Acts as a touchstone. Passages in chapter two of Acts present an image of a community of inclusion.

I also turned to a number of Catholic scholars who were interested in analogical imagination, such as William Spohn, S.J., David Tracy, and William Lynch, S.J., because through the use of analogical imagination, we are able to enter into scripture, or another

text, and bring it to life in our own contexts.⁶⁴ I was sure that there could be no Church without text, and I heeded these words of Lynch as I entered into the biblical and other texts of the Church: ‘And who shall call this a desert or a night of non-being? We can very well let the anagoge and the fuller insights take care of themselves if we will see that to get to them we need to explore endlessly the literal concretions of love.’⁶⁵

Lynch’s words have stayed with me, but as I was writing that first thesis, I encountered another who would impart a message of love and have a much greater impact. I was reading every morning, for inspiration, delighting in its courage, playfulness, and joy, the first text I read of Cixous’, one that became critical in this thesis, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. The last third of the thesis was about the possibility of a Church built out of encounters of love, moving across religions and disciplines. So it was not so much that ecclesiology was insufficient but that it lit a fire in my mind, a desire to go where it could not take me, into a reading and writing practice that was born out of both the formative experience of my intellectual and pastoral training by the Jesuits and my newfound discovery of Cixous, a woman’s voice that I was as starved for as she was before she encountered Clarice Lispector. It was another turn, another hinge, from which to turn to this work that seeks an alternative to Church, though it holds on to elements of the first.

I wish to read and write with Cixous beside me, in part, because she is a participant of the huge epistemological shift that occurred in the last century as a reaction against the Enlightenment’s privileging of rational and scientific thinking. Major challenges arose from feminist thinkers who insisted on a reconsideration of the importance of alternative ways of knowing that challenge dualistic notions, including incorporation of experience, imagination and intuition.⁶⁶ Yet the very existence of ‘a feminist epistemology’ brings with it the dangers of its own dualisms and a risk of essentialism. Cixous’ work can be vulnerable to such critique, yet her thinking regarding gender is much more fluid and creative than perhaps many are willing to acknowledge.⁶⁷ It is this latter talent that links her to the opening chapter, which is a critique of Tina Beattie’s deconstruction and

⁶⁴ See, for example, William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999); William F. Lynch, S.J., *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960).

⁶⁵ Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 195.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Leonie Sandercock’s discussion of feminist epistemologies in *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities*, 67-70.

reconstruction of the gendered theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. While this thesis is not, ultimately, about gender, gender is in large part a key aspect of its origins, as well as the lens with which it offers us clearer sight of paths from the theological to the poetic.

The first section of this thesis, conceived of as Home, opens with a consideration of two Roman Catholic theologians, Balthasar and Beattie. They are each very different from the other yet alike in their decision to remain within the walls of the institutional Catholic Church. Their refusal to leave home, as it were, will provide a starting point of discussion for this thesis, asking as it does what might happen if the sort of creative theological thinking both engaged in were given leave to leave home.

In chapter two, we will explore the phenomenological method of Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* as a way to begin making the move away from Church as institution into more radical textual spaces, a poetics of Church, if you will. The chapter is in two parts. The first enters an engagement of Bachelard through a brief consideration of the poet-companions' relationships to vocation and translation, revealing sympathies in the themes of writing as a calling and translation as transfiguration that allow for different ways of knowing. The second part consists of readings of *Poetics of Space*, partly experiential of his phenomenological method, to further move imaginatively into possibilities of ecclesial poetic spaces.

Before continuing to the second part of the thesis, conceived as 'leaving home', I present the first of two pieces I call 'Intersections', which act as spaces between the three sections of the thesis. To intersect is 'to meet and cross at a point', 'share a common area', 'pierce or divide by passing through or across'.⁶⁸ Rather than simply act as bridges between the sections, these intersections are so called because they intend to utilise those definitions and act as in-between spaces of meeting, crossing, sharing and piercing. The form and content are intended to 'free up' both the writer and the reader so they may engage the texts under consideration with openness and creativity, two qualities of our ongoing delineation of 'poetic'. They attempt to be turning points, 'about faces', which is how Hélène Cixous, as intimated above, speaks of her textual encounters with Lispector and certain select others such as Kafka, Joyce, and Genet that give her hope for a 'law of

⁶⁷ See, for example, Heather Walton, 'Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat at the Heart of the World', 144-145.

⁶⁸ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. 'intersection'.

meeting and sublime friendship'⁶⁹ rather than one of isolation and dominance. In the first Intersection, we encounter Yves Bonnefoy, who with his themes of thresholds and crossroads is an apt guide to take us into what I have named his 'poetic house church', where we may inhabit Bonnefoy's poems and enter what Cixous calls 'the country of words'.⁷⁰ Bonnefoy, the only one of the poet-companions who would be considered a 'real' poet by common measure, also crosses disciplines and, as noted above, works in translation and art criticism. Here, then, I return to the themes of vocation and translation, where in Bonnefoy's work they become transfigurative.

From here we move into the three chapters of section two, further away from 'temple' into 'text'. Chapter three addresses the question of what we mean by 'Church' and how we might proceed without relying on ecclesiological models but rather making a turn toward the poets and poetic ways of being, as exemplified in the work of Cixous and Bonnefoy. The next chapter, a reading of Cixous' experimental novel *Manna*, is implicitly a continued meditation on textual exile, an explication of Cixous' fluid understanding of gender, and a discovery of varying approaches to reading this text and thus others arising from the text itself as well as Cixous' reading of Heidegger's later essays on poetics. Chapter Five brings together three of the companions—Cixous as poet thinker, Bonnefoy as poet painter, Ignatius as pilgrim poet—who in their reading/writing practices were led on interior journeys that were transformative.

Intersection II takes up a practice of Cixous', after Heidegger, of following a phrase to see where it leads. In this instance, we are led to an intersection of poetry and prayer, a kinship unveiled in the writings of Karl Rahner, Cixous, and Bachelard, all of whom were concerned and knowledgeable about interior depths, where Rahner believed that kinship is revealed. From here, we enter the final section, conceived as a return to home transformed. Chapter six further explores the theme of spiritual transformation in a reading of Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* with the Book of Job in which both protagonists move from places of great suffering into new life and insight. An existential poetics is begun to be developed utilizing Cixous' reading and writing practices. Finally, in chapter seven I call upon the poetic thinking we have engaged and enacted to explore the space of believing as a poet as home, built out of the imagination, a house of poesis. I turn again to the themes of home and writing into and out of the depths, concerns of all our poet companions.

⁶⁹ Cixous, 'From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History', in *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989), 11.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

Part I: Home

Home is a concept, not a place; it is a state of mind where self-definition starts; it is origins—the mix of time and place and smell and weather wherein one first realizes one is an original, perhaps like others, especially those one loves, but discrete, distinct, not to be copied. Home is where one first learned to be separate and it remains in the mind as the place where reunion, if it were ever to occur, would happen.⁷¹

⁷¹ A. Bartlett Giamatti, *A Great and Glorious Game* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1998), 99-100; quoted in Henry M. Seiden, 'On the Longing for Home', in *Loneliness and Longing: Conscious and Unconscious Aspects*, ed. Brent Willock, Lori C. Bohm and Rebecca Coleman Curtis (Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2012), 267-279 (268).

Chapter 1: Skirting the Edges: Tina Beattie and Hans Urs von Balthasar in Church

The situation in which we find ourselves

If feminists are to understand and challenge the misogyny that forms a dark undercurrent to the Catholic theological tradition, we must go beyond politics in order to ask why the Catholic hierarchy is so resistant to acknowledging the sacramentality of the female body in its capacity to reveal Christ. There is a profound fear of female sexuality that infects the celibate Catholic imagination, and I believe that this lies behind many of the Church's other failings, not least her failure to challenge war and violence with the same unyielding absolutism with which she challenges abortion and contraception. Although feminists have done much to diagnose the symptoms of this sexual malaise, they have done relatively little to explore its possible causes.⁷²

Tina Beattie opens her book *New Catholic Feminism* (2006) with this volley into the opposing camps of the Catholic hierarchy and feminist theologians. In so doing, she places herself in the middle, as she does continuously throughout, moving, for example, in-between the poles of those who favor Vatican II reforms and those who think they've gone too far, of 'new' Catholic feminists promoting neo-orthodox Catholicism and liberal feminist theologians immersed in secular feminist theory, and of Hans Urs von Balthasar's rigidly gendered theology. It is an intentional move that frees Beattie to undo oppositions through multiple and relentless approaches that allow her to spiral down into depths of language and faith in an attempt to unveil hitherto hidden truths. What she discovers is often disturbing yet potentially transformative.

Beattie proceeds in her deconstruction of Balthasar's theology by bringing feminist and psycholinguistic theories into conversation with Catholic theology, arguing that each can benefit from the other's knowledge of the psychological and spiritual depths of the human person. She seeks and finds in this in-between space an important commonality among the differences of the theologians and theorists she engages: an acknowledgement of 'a continuum between the innermost workings of the human psyche and the structures and systems which order our world [. . . and] that we become persons capable of living at peace with ourselves and with one another, through *our attentiveness to the power of language to*

⁷² Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 4.

*reveal and shape the worlds we inhabit.*⁷³ So it is that she seeks to go ‘beyond’ politics to, she claims, an ultimately more political act by excavating ‘some of the deeper layers of language and symbolism within which fear and desire are coiled together, emanating energies that have the power to corrode our most committed struggles for peace, justice and sexual equality.’⁷⁴ It is out of this space she discovers resonances in the language of psycholinguistics and Catholic theology that unmask the violence underlying Balthasar’s theology. Illustrative of this move is her comparison of Lacan and Balthasar, both of whom, she notes, are ‘shaped by Catholic Christianity’:

For Lacan, a nihilist, the solution is to analyse away God and woman as maternally induced projections of the masculine psyche—occupying the space of the desire that shadows language in the imaginary and that buries itself almost without trace in the Real. As a Catholic priest, Balthasar achieves a more complex double act. On the one hand, he projects woman and God out of the sphere of his own masculine psyche [. . .] thus ostensibly preserving the difference of both and the polarities between them. But at the same time he internalizes these polarities so that they become a battleground within him—he wants to be the woman, and he also wants to be the Christ. So when reading Lacan and Balthasar, we are on similar psychological and theological territory, even although [*sic*] they offer different narrative accounts of what this means.⁷⁵

Beattie’s book is clearly not a systematic theology, nor does it claim to be. It is rather an invitation to a theological and spiritual pilgrimage in search of a sacramental space for woman in the Catholic Church. Beattie writes:

I invite the reader to accompany me on a quest through a labyrinth of conflicting and contested meanings, a linguistic landscape which inevitably becomes more uncanny and disorientating the more we explore its hidden depths, so that the style as well as the content of the book becomes increasingly exploratory and searching as we feel our way towards a clearing in the forest of faith, where a woman’s body might come into being.⁷⁶

She seeks, therefore, a deep and radical re-visioning of the Catholic Church through the transformation of thinking and being. As such, her project makes for an apposite entrance into this discussion of faith, gender, and poetry as much for its form as for its content as it invites the reader along on a journey, conceives of that journey in terms of spatial metaphors, and engages a plurality of voices along the way.

⁷³ Ibid.; emphasis mine. Beattie describes here what could be considered a poetics, a shaping of the world through language, but that is not the path she takes, instead exploring the language of theology, psychology and philosophy.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 209.

Beattie is courageous in her willingness to go to contested spaces of in-between and depth. She evidences an ability to stray, at least temporarily, partially, from what are safe and certain homes—the Church, the academy, feminist sisters—to challenge them and to explore areas few are willing to go, as she puts it, ‘to know through not knowing [. . .] to stay in the dark spaces’.⁷⁷ By placing herself in the conflicted and volatile space between Catholic theology and feminism, she believes she will be able to move beyond the usual antagonisms between the two and open up a sacramental ‘space of becoming’ for Catholic women ‘in the situation in which we find ourselves’, one that is both restricted and freed by feminism and Catholicism.⁷⁸ She does this as one whose interior space as a believing Catholic feminist theologian mirrors the tensions of that reality. Perhaps it is that disruptive interior space that also gives her the courage to posit ambivalent spaces and explore them vigorously. Yet she also makes clear that she remains firmly within her academic and faith communities.⁷⁹ This commitment lends the work its passion, but also perhaps prevents it in the end from pursuing a potentially more liberating course beyond the boundaries of Church and academy, one hinted at but not taken, into poetics, the course taken in this thesis.

What I shall do in this chapter is to go in the back door, as it were, and look at Beattie in these ambivalent spaces as she performs a deconstruction and reconstruction of what she refers to as the sexual theology of Balthasar. My focus will be limited to those aspects of this work I perceive as gifts from Beattie—gifts to the Church, to the world, to thinking. Balthasar’s work will briefly be discussed, also in terms of his gifts. Through a reading of one of his essays on Church, I realize a similarity among their differences, a shared stumbling block. I suggest that both Beattie and Balthasar, as Catholic theologians, skirt the edges of a poetic way of being, as both are too firmly ensconced within the walls of the institutional Church to *be* poetically. Here I find an intense energy with which to begin a move into poetics in the following chapters.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ Ibid., see especially Beattie’s introduction, in which she writes, for example (11), ‘Although my theological ‘voice’ is often mimetic and ironic, it is at the same time a subjective exploration of faith, informed not only by the demands of academic scholarship, but also by my ongoing commitment to the Catholic Church.’

*'So there has been a sense of risk . . .'*⁸⁰

So Beattie writes about her writing of *New Catholic Feminism*. She sees a threshold and moves through it, as she does when she explores the gendered theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, feeling 'a sense of risk, even of fear, and an occasional overwhelming urge to withdraw to a safer, cleaner, more rational space.'⁸¹ Like the poet companions of our journey, Beattie is willing to risk. And like many of them, it is through her reading that she is transformed, coming to a different way of knowing, finding herself 'swept up in something [she] was beginning to see through not seeing'.⁸²

To look as critically as Beattie does at Balthasar is in itself a risk, for Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) is known as one of the most significant and creative theologians of the 20th century. He is highly respected and utilized within the Catholic Church, and his influence has also been felt in Protestant circles. His theology, particularly his thinking on aesthetics, on the primacy of office, and on a restoration of the Marian Church, has been championed by popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, with whom he co-founded the journal *Communio*,⁸³ is a major part of the formation of priests in seminaries around the world.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Balthasar founded *Communio: The International Catholic Review* in 1972 partly to counter the influence of *Concilium: International Journal for Theology*, founded in 1964 by Karl Rahner and several other Catholic theologians associated with the reforms of Vatican II. Both journals claim to represent the 'authentic' spirit of the council, though the emphasis of the former is on Catholic Tradition, while the latter stresses creativity, at least in the journals' current iterations. The two journals continue to be viewed as representative of the differences in the theologies of their founders. The most relevant difference for us and what perhaps most leads me to turn, perhaps counter-intuitively, to Rahner (as a theologian concerned with poetry) later in the thesis (see, especially, Intersection II), is what Karen Kilby notes in an essay ('Balthasar and Rahner', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* ed. Edward T. Oakes, S.J., and David Moss [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 257) about the two theologians: 'Balthasar presented Rahner as a leading light in the going-wrong of contemporary Roman Catholic theology [. . . by] adapting to modernity when he should have resisted it, and as distorting theology by removing its centre from God and God's revelation to man.' What Balthasar objected to is perhaps expressed in the founding statement of *Concilium*, written by Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx: '[The journal] seeks, on the basis of our contemporary situation, a better understanding of the Word of God for man and the world of our time. A theological insight of this kind is necessary for anyone who, acting in faith, is actively engaged in the Church and in the world.' (Available online at www.conciliumjournal.co.uk/about-concilium.aspx; accessed 3 April 2013.) For further discussion of the distinctions between the theologies of the two men see Kilby's essay and also Rowan Williams, 'Balthasar and Rahner', in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986).

⁸⁴ For basic background on Balthasar, see, for example, Beattie's preface to *New Catholic Feminism*; and Stephen Wigley, *Balthasar's 'Trilogy': A Reader's Guide*, T&T Clark Reader's Guides (London: Continuum, 2010), 1-3.

Yet, as Beattie notes, almost all of the increasing number of admirers ‘seem oblivious to the violence inherent in his theology with regard to female sexuality’.⁸⁵ Though some have remarked on the foundation of sexual difference on which Balthasar’s theology is built.

Lucy Gardner and David Moss, in a 1999 essay, note that in this theology woman

is made to be second over and over again [. . .] sexual difference [. . .] is thus located as a vulgar difference or fixed distance between two unchanging, un-interchangeable points (man-first :: woman-second) between which there can be no exchange. This fixing of (chrono-)logical order seems set to leave its mark in attempting to concretize all remaining undecidability, including that between world and God [. . .] in sexual difference, and so continue woman’s increasing over-determination.⁸⁶

While Corinne Crammer more recently (2004) concludes that despite his

attempt to construct a two-sex theological anthropology [. . .], ultimately Balthasar reproduces the one-sex model in which the normative human being is implicitly male and Woman’s definition is based around Man, particularly around what Man is seen to need Woman to be. The result of this methodology is that Woman in Balthasar’s theology lacks substance, subjectivity, and a voice of her own.⁸⁷

Beattie’s analysis goes deeper and is more complex, revealing that in Catholic theology, including Balthasar’s theology, there is remarkable multiplicity and versatility of gendered identities. It is, she believes, Balthasar’s, and others’, insistence on sexual stereotypes that results in distortions and violence. She is willing to risk exactly because she rejects such distortion and seeks to keep the possibility in our lives open, to keep the Catholic Church from closing in on itself. She goes to the depths, as do the poet companions, undertaking a spiraling descent, approaching from shifting vantage points.⁸⁸ Beattie challenges feminists to engage an epistemology of prayer and theologians to be informed by feminist theory and

⁸⁵ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, ix.

⁸⁶ Lucy Gardner and David Moss, ‘Something like Time; Something like the Sexes—an essay in reception’, in *Balthasar at the end of Modernity*, ed. Lucy Gardner, David Moss et. al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 87. Difference is also stressed in the relationship between Christ and the human being, what Balthasar refers to as ‘participation in distance’, the distance ‘established insuperably in the loneliness of [Christ’s] death on the cross’. (Medard Kehl, S.J., ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Portrait’, in *The Von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl, S.J., and Werner Löser, S.J., trans. Robert J. Daly, S.J., and Fred Lawrence [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980], 38.) Kilby points out that Balthasar’s focus on the cross and atonement differs from Rahner’s stress on the Incarnation, for whom it is ‘the high point of God’s self-communication to the world, that towards which creation from the beginning was directed’. (Kilby, ‘Balthasar and Rahner’, 265.)

⁸⁷ Corinne Crammer, ‘One Sex or Two? Balthasar’s Theology of the Sexes’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 102.

⁸⁸ Beattie’s style of ‘spiraling descent’ is a particularly welcome gift for which I am most grateful because *how* she makes her journey will both inform my own way of proceeding and encourage a constant consideration of form and content, aesthetics and knowledge.

philosophy, thereby ‘positioning the feminist theological subject in a space of bodily receptivity to the revelation of God, without surrendering the significance of reason informed by feminist theory and philosophy, for enabling her to think through the position in which she finds herself, inevitably shaped as it is by the texts and traditions of patriarchal religion.’⁸⁹ From here, she situates herself as ‘Catholic woman, attempting to speak as she does, and to think theologically from the position assigned her.’⁹⁰ What she finds is ‘a baroque extravaganza of sex and death with a hellish ending, as we seek to act out the woman’s role in the script of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theo-drama.’⁹¹ Beattie goes to the gaps, the in between spaces, the middles, to examine binary oppositions and critique them. Movement is what matters here, for it is the combination of multiple approaches and downward motion that allows Beattie to reach below the surface to see what bubbles up and uncovers itself.

Unconventional and nonlinear, Beattie’s way of proceeding is a path demanding a greater degree of creativity and patience from both reader and writer than a more straightforward one. This is evidenced in the work’s basic structure: a three-part, 15-chapter arrangement, organized as ‘middle, end, beginning’. Her rationale for this layout is, quoting Derrida, ‘that we begin “*Wherever we are*: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be”’,⁹² continue toward an end that is ending because it is in desperate need of transformation, and end in a beginning that is a renewal of the destructive elements that contributed toward the end. In these three parts, Beattie moves fluidly from a critical engagement with feminism and Catholic theology into a brilliant deconstruction of the sexual theology of Balthasar and, finally, toward a reconstruction of Church to make a sacramental space for women.

‘In a text where we already believe ourselves to be’

In what text does Beattie believe herself to be? As would be expected in a work seeking to engage and enact postmodern thinking, she situates herself in multiple narratives in which texts and ideas are viewed through various lenses to create a “multi-vocal theology” consisting of “multiple meanings and interpretations.”⁹³ The range is wide, the moves, often dazzling and creative—putting in conversation, for instance, such unusual partners as

⁸⁹ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 87.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 11, quoting Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976 [1967]), 162.

⁹³ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 8.

Heidegger and Aquinas, Balthasar and Irigaray. But Beattie is also faithful resident of her 'homes' of Church and academy, where she originates and remains throughout, in life and in this text. In the text, Church is situated in the context of its relations with women. The time of her finishing the book in 2005 was one of transition, Pope John Paul II had died and Benedict XVI had only been pope briefly.⁹⁴ It was too soon to tell if the authoritarianism for which Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was known as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith would transfer into his papacy.⁹⁵ Three years later she expressed hope that the mixed messages of Benedict's early papacy—an improved relationship with Hans Küng, but a censoring of Jon Sobrino, for example—might indicate a softening of the authoritarian tendencies of Benedict and his predecessor.⁹⁶

Unfortunately, her hope has not been realized, at least in terms of the relationship between the Vatican and feminists. Within the past several years, there have been many signs that suggest those relations have drastically deteriorated. In 2007, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith decreed that anyone attempting to ordain a woman and any woman claiming ordination is subject to excommunication.⁹⁷ In 2008, the Vatican began an investigation of women religious in the U.S., visiting and gathering information on

⁹⁴ As I was finishing this thesis in the spring of 2013, the Roman Catholic Church entered another momentous time of transition with the resignation of Benedict and the election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina, the first Jesuit and Latin American pope, who took the name of Francis, after Francis of Assisi. The choice of name is significant in itself. St. Francis understood the dramatic effect of symbolic acts on the imagination (As Thomas Cahill notes in *Mysteries of the Middle Ages: The Rise of Feminism, Science, and Art from the Cults of Catholic Europe* [New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2006], 164-5, 'Symbolic gesture' was 'Francis's natural language', an approach that 'silenced sermonizing windbags and brought archbishops up short'.), which this new pope seems to grasp quite well. At least judging by the very early days of Francis' papacy, there are hopeful signs for a rapprochement in the relations between the Vatican and women. On Holy Thursday, Pope Francis broke with the Vatican tradition of washing the feet of 12 priests and instead visited a prison, where he washed the feet of prisoners, including women and Muslims. The following week, he would proclaim the important role of women in the Church from its beginning, noting that the 'Apostles and disciples find it harder to believe in the Risen Christ, not the women however!'. (See Joshua J. McElwee, 'Cardinals elect Pope Francis, Argentinean Jesuit Jorge Mario Bergoglio' *National Catholic Reporter*, 13 March 2013; available online at ncronline.org/news/vatican/cardinals-elect-pope-francis-former-cardinal-jorge-mario-bergoglio, accessed 5 April 2013; and 'Audience: The Fundamental Role of Women in the Church', Vatican Radio, 4 March 2013, available online at www.news.va/en/news/audience-the-fundamental-role-of-women-in-the-church; accessed 5 April 2013;

⁹⁵ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 2.

⁹⁶ Beattie, 'From Rosaries to Rights: Towards an Integrated Catholicism', in *Moral Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Julie Clague, Bernard Hoose, Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 225.

⁹⁷ See 'The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith General Decree Regarding the Delict of Attempted Sacred Ordination of a Woman', available online at the Vatican website: http://www.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20071219_attentata-ord-donna_en.html; and John L. Allen Jr., 'Vatican Revises Church Law on Sex Abuse', *National Catholic Reporter*, 15 July 2010; available online at <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-revises-church-law-sex-abuse>; accessed 20 December 2011.

congregations that have become more active in the world since Vatican II.⁹⁸ That same year, Roy Bourgeois, a highly respected American Maryknoll priest and peace activist, was threatened with excommunication and dismissal from his order for supporting women's ordination and refusing to recant his position.⁹⁹ A year later, a bishop in Arizona excommunicated Margaret McBride, a Sister of Mercy, for her decision as member of an ethics committee in a Catholic hospital to allow an abortion to save the life of a mother.¹⁰⁰ In 2010, the Vatican added the attempted ordination of women to its list of grave crimes.¹⁰¹ In 2011, Benedict fired Bishop William Morris in Australia for discussing the possibility of women's ordination.¹⁰² Also in 2011, the U.S bishops denounced the Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, in part for what they saw as its radical feminist tendencies and disregard of official Church teaching. It is hardly a radical book if one considers the broadest theological spectrum, but it is one that includes a chapter titled 'God Acting Womanish'.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ See Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious of the United States website at <http://www.apostolicvisitation.org/en/index.html>; accessed 26 November 2011.

⁹⁹ See Tom Roberts, 'Canon Lawyer Questions Maryknoll's Move Against Bourgeois', *National Catholic Reporter*, 14 November 2011; available online at <http://ncronline.org/news/people/canon-lawyer-questions-maryknolls-move-against-bourgeois>; accessed 26 November 2011. By the end of 2012, Bourgeois had been dismissed, excommunicated and laicised. See Joshua J. McElwee, 'Maryknoll: Vatican Has Dismissed Roy Bourgeois from Order', *National Catholic Reporter*, 19 November 2012; available online at <http://ncronline.org/news/people/maryknoll-vatican-has-dismissed-roy-bourgeois-order>.

¹⁰⁰ See Barbara Bradley Hagerty, 'Nun Excommunicated for Allowing Abortion', *All Things Considered*, NPR News, 19 May 2010; available online at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126985072>; accessed 26 November 2011.

¹⁰¹ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, '*norms de gravioribus delictis*', available online at the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_norme_en.html; see also John L. Allen, 'Vatican Revises Church Law on Sex Abuse', 15 July 2010; available online at: <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-revises-church-law-sex-abuse>; last accessed 20 December 2011.

¹⁰² See Cindy Wooden, 'Pope Removes Bishop Who Expressed Openness to Ordaining Women', *Catholic News Service*, 2 May 2011; available online at <http://ncronline.org/news/women-religious/pope-removes-bishop-who-expressed-openness-ordaining-women>; accessed 26 November 2011.

¹⁰³ In this chapter, (Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'God Acting Womanish', in *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* [New York: Continuum, 2007], 93) Johnson writes the following on the importance of women in the Church finding their voice, a space for themselves, and a liberating *imago Dei*: 'In the process [of finding their voice], women have had the religious experience that, contrary to what has been said about them for centuries and contrary to what they have internalized, they are of inestimable worth in the eyes of God. The resulting surge of proper self-love leads to conversion, to turning away from assessments that trivialize their identity toward a profound affirmation of their human female selves in all diversity. Subsequently, some have left the church institution whose male dominance so distorted their religious experience; others have defected in place, remaining *in* but not *of* the system; still others remain with conviction to reform the church for the benefit of the gospel in coming generations. The ferment stirred up by women's discovery that they are beloved of God, who desires fullness of life for them.' For the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement, see www.usccb.org/about/doctrine/publications/upload/statement-quest-for-the-living-god-2011-03-24.pdf - 2011-10-24; and 'Bishops' Doctrine Committee Faults Book by Fordham Professor', News Release from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 30 March 2011; available online at <http://www.usccb.org/news/2011/11-063.cfm>; On Elizabeth Johnson's personal website,

Gifts of Beattie and Balthasar

There are other high profile cases, and, one can assume, many lesser-known ones. I merely note them to indicate how the fear and hostility of the situation in which we find ourselves has intensified since the writing of Beattie's book. Therefore, her uncovering and articulation of the details of that misogyny which infects (her word; she often turns to metaphors of illness and healing, which can be construed as medical, pastoral or philosophical) the body of Church is a great gift. Whilst Balthasar cannot be named as the sole cause of that misogyny, he is certainly an influential contributor towards it. As Beattie notes, 'Balthasar's theology profoundly influences the ways in which some Catholic thinkers, including the new feminists, the last Pope and the new Pope [Benedict], understand the significance of human sexuality, and it is important to ask what the implications of this might be for the Church's sacramental and ethical life.'¹⁰⁴

What are the symptoms of this infection? One is a shocking sexual violence in Balthasar's imagery, which Beattie documents. Here is an example of a passage from *Heart of the World*, in which Christ conquers his bride, the Church:

I dared to enter the body of my Church, the deadly body which *you* are . . . No wonder you realized your advantage over me and took my nakedness by storm! But I have defeated you through weakness and my Spirit has overpowered my unruly and recalcitrant flesh. (Never has woman made more desperate resistance!) . . . Our wrecked covenant—our blood-wedding, the red wedding of the Lamb—is already, here and now, the white bridal bed of divine love.¹⁰⁵

Beattie notes that one of Balthasar's most original and disturbing contributions to modern theology is

http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham_/theology/faculty/elizabeth_a_johnson/elizabeth_a_johnson_82888.asp, in an excerpt from 'Worth A Life' (in *Vatican II: Forty Personal Stories*, ed. William Madges and Michael Daley [Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 2003], 200-204) one finds the following statement reflecting her views on the current state of the official Church: 'Given this personal history, I have met current ecclesiastical efforts to reverse Vatican II's direction with dismay. After almost forty years of living in the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, it is spiritually and intellectually impossible for me to return to that narrow-minded and fearful world in which I was originally formed. The respectful, loving intent of *Gaudium et Spes* stands as prophetic witness against all in the church that is mean-spirited, arrogant, and reactionary. Weaned into my life's commitment by this profoundly humanistic, generous teaching on the meaning of the church and its mission, I continue to join with others who walk by its light . . . regardless.'

¹⁰⁴ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 170.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 174, quoting Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979 [1945]), 194-97.

the retrieval of the medieval idea of the Church as *casta meretrix*, the chaste whore [. . .] Here he uncritically reiterates some of the most misogynistic and disturbing imagery in the scriptural and theological tradition, drawing selectively on a range of sources to put together a flamboyant rhetoric of depravity and sin associated with the prostitution of the Church, in which the full extent of his dread of the female body is exposed.¹⁰⁶

The imagery is sickening—the male Christ raping the female Church, Church imaged as whore of Babylon and monstrous female, Christ as creator with Church as silent handmaid—and when Beattie remarks in the middle of the book that by that point many readers would be as nauseated by it as she is, I agreed, and concurred also with her feeling of being deeply disturbed by the lack of alarm expressed by those who translate and study Balthasar.¹⁰⁷ Even more alarming is the suggestion by some in the Church that Balthasar's sexual theology is to be held up as a model of relations between the sexes.¹⁰⁸ Integral to this suggestion is the corollary that Balthasar's relationship with Adrienne von Speyr (1902-1967) be held up as a model for gender roles within the Church.¹⁰⁹ Beattie devotes substantial space to this relationship because it was the foundation of Balthasar's theology and Balthasar and Speyr sought to become that theology's 'living embodiment'.¹¹⁰

Balthasar had a strange and unconventional relationship with the married doctor Speyr, living with her and her husband for 15 years, acting as both her spiritual director and confessor, a practice discouraged because of the distinct nature of those roles. Under the influence of Balthasar, Speyr had converted to Catholicism.¹¹¹ In the mid 1940s the two of them began a publishing company, Johannes Verlag, and a mixed religious community, the Community of St. John, with clergy and lay people, men and women, but Balthasar's Jesuit superiors objected.¹¹² Eventually, he would leave the order, mainly over this

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 13, and particularly Chapter 9: 'Sex, death and melodrama', 163-183.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Chapter 9; 163. Balthasar wrote that '[Speyr's] work and mine cannot be separated from one another either psychologically or theologically. They are two halves of one whole with a single foundation at the centre' (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Rechenschaft 1965* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965], 35; quoted in Kehl, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar', 42).

¹¹¹ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 164; Kehl, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar', 42. Kehl has this to say about the influence of Speyr on Balthasar's life and theology: 'In 1940 the physician Adrienne von Speyr [. . .] became a convert under [Balthasar's] direction. His encounter with this woman, with her special mission for the church, and with her mystical experiences became for Balthasar a decisive moulding influence in his life.'

¹¹² See Wigley, *Balthasar's 'Trilogy'*, 8. Kehl, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar', 43.

disagreement.¹¹³ The years with Speyr were his most creative and generative, and he acknowledged his debt to her.¹¹⁴ She claimed to experience visions, bi-locations, ecstasies and stigmatisations. She shared these experiences in detail with her mentor, which he then utilised in his theological thinking.¹¹⁵ Through this work, Balthasar believed that Speyr restored the role of religious experience to Christian discipleship.¹¹⁶

On the surface, then, without reading his work with a critical and feminist eye, as Beattie has done, it would indeed seem that Balthasar, with his creative, unconventional living and thinking, would be a good model for liberating gender roles in the Church. For my own purposes, his personal story fits my conviction that it is in the borderlands, the unconventional spaces, where the most creative thinking and living are accomplished. For despite his popularity now, Balthasar was for years outside the mainstream of Catholic thought. He was not chosen to be a *peritus* at Vatican II. He was no longer a Jesuit. He was isolated theologically in the Catholic world, which perhaps encouraged his close and inspirational relationships with Speyr and Karl Barth.¹¹⁷

Like Beattie, Balthasar was able to see a grave distortion, a lack, in the Church and to have the courage and imagination to address it. So it is in the opening of his massive seven-volume work *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* that he notes ‘how impoverished Christian thinking has been by the growing loss of this perspective [of the beautiful] which once so strongly informed theology’,¹¹⁸ and begins a needed restoration. Beattie never mentions Balthasar’s contribution to theological aesthetics, but she does claim that she has no interest in dismissing his theology. What she does is to see the distortion and attempt to begin a correction. Though her argument becomes quite complex and at times convoluted, it boils down to what I like to think of as a twist to Johnson’s now provocative chapter title, ‘God behaving womanish’. Out of the frustrated sexual attraction Balthasar and Speyr had for one another, Beattie believes, Speyr’s visions and Balthasar’s interpretations of them become more violent as they are unable to loosen their rigid

¹¹³ Wigley, *Balthasar’s ‘Trilogy’*, 8, 11. Balthasar left the Society of Jesus in 1950. He requested readmission towards the end of his life, in the late 1980s, but he was denied readmission because of his insistence that the Society take responsibility for the Community of Saint John.

¹¹⁴ Wigley, *Balthasar’s ‘Trilogy’*, 9; Kehl, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar’, 43.

¹¹⁵ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 164-165.

¹¹⁶ Wigley, *Balthasar’s ‘Trilogy’*, 21-22.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12

¹¹⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume 1: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio, S.J., and John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982 [1967]), 9.

insistence on sexual difference amid thinking that is clearly moving in a direction of much more fluid gender identities. Beattie is convinced that ‘Speyr is the living out of Balthasar’s theology of woman. She is not a person in her own right, but a being who is given to the man in order that he can discover his own ‘feminine’ self even as he drains away her life.’¹¹⁹ In his theology, the space of woman is colonised by men who perform as woman—brides or harlots—so they may be the feminine Church while still remaining male representatives of Christ. In occupying the place of Christ, the men ‘negate and appropriate the difference that woman represents.’¹²⁰

Like Balthasar, Beattie is at her most daring and creative when on the outermost edges of their Church, when bringing together unlikely partners into conversation such as Balthasar and Irigaray, making her multiple approaches, engaging ‘the opposition’, the ‘new feminists’ of Catholicism, exploring mystics and psycholinguistics. But it is as if both theologians can only go so far before pulling back, in both their interior and exterior lives.¹²¹ Like Balthasar, Beattie is ultimately unable to look beyond the walls of Church and chooses to retain a hierarchical priesthood and an emphasis on sexual difference.

Staying home and putting theology first

We end up, finally, with two theologians who do not read poetically. To continue the image of wrongful colonisation, they colonise wrongly the space of texts. As such readers, perhaps they lack the gift of listening, at least of a certain kind and degree to be developed

¹¹⁹ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 178. Speyr suffered horribly for many years from a variety of illnesses. See also Alison Jasper, ‘A Second Glance at Adrienne von Speyr’, in *The Shining Garment of the Text: Gendered Readings of John’s Prologue*, JSNT Supplement Series 165 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Jasper also notes the destructive nature of Speyr’s suffering as it became integral with her rigid hierarchical theology, which expressed a ‘vision of God and of redeemed humanity [...] strongly singular and essentially masculine’ (141). Like Beattie, she urges us to recognise the dangerous implications of such disordered theologies for women.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹²¹ What those outside the Church may not realize is how gutsy it is for a Catholic theologian in this chilly climate to engage postmodern thinking at all. When Roger Haight, S.J., for example, did so, rather mildly, in his three-volume series on ecclesiology (*Christian Community in History*, vol. 1-3 [New York: Continuum, 2004-2008]) and elsewhere, he was scorned by some Catholic scholars, and though he was silenced by the Vatican for other reasons, one can’t help but wonder if this minimal foray outside the walls of the Church contributed. (See, for example, Jeremy Wilkins, ‘The “I” of Jesus Christ: Methodological Considerations’, in *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 12 [2005], 18-29 [29], who critiques Haight’s work and warns against exchanging ‘the glory of the crucified for a tawdry “postmodern” fetish.’) Though this seems to be not only a Catholic issue. A similar fear exists among Protestant theologians, expressed by Carl Raschke as the ‘irrepressible anxiety among theological traditionalists over the “nihilistic” ramifications of postmodernist thinking’. Carl Raschke, ‘Indian Territory: Postmodernism Under the Sign of the Body’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (London: Blackwell, 2005), 507.

in this work, a major flaw of today's institutional Church.¹²² In their treatment of poems, he knocks them around and smothers them; she passes them by. They will cite the poets, use them to make theological or dogmatic points, or to adorn theological works; the poetry is secondary, the minor term of two, and perhaps here a binary relationship is revealed where literature is submissive to theology, the feminine pole to the masculine, a relationship unnoticed and perhaps unimportant to both theologians.¹²³

An example of what I mean may be seen in a creative essay on Church by Balthasar titled 'Official Church and the Church of Love (According to the Gospel of John)', a reflection on John 20:3-10:

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their home.

Balthasar introduces this pericope as an allegory on the relationship between the official church (Peter) and the church of love (John). His next statement is revealing: 'Only those who see the two as real symbols of these two sides of the church of Christ understand the intention of the evangelist.' Rather than listening to the text, he imposes his ideology upon it, with the predictable result that love (John) is viewed as 'respectfully giving precedence to office'.¹²⁴

In Beattie's book, there are numerous samplings of poetry, but they strike me as missed opportunities, merely illustrative. When she asks '[w]hat language can we use' to ask 'how woman is to become, when man and God have already ceased to be', she turns to Psalm 51 ('O Lord, open my lips,/and my mouth will declare your praise.'), but pursues the question

¹²² See, for instance, Frederick E. Crowe, S.J.'s essay on this problem ('The Church as Learner: Two Crises, One Kairos', in *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin [Washington: CUA Press, 1989]), particularly regarding the bishops' teaching authority, in which he insists that a teaching Church must be a listening Church.

¹²³ For an excellent study of the relationship between literature and theology as gendered, see Heather Walton's *Literature, Theology and Feminism*, particularly chapter one, 'If Literature Is a Girl'. In answer to the question 'how do we study literature and theology today?', Walton responds (35) that her sympathies lie with an 'approach in which literature is imaged as laying hold of theology and confronting it with claims of the feminised other.'

¹²⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Official Church and Church of Love', in *The von Balthasar Reader*, 276.

no further beyond urging a return to the language of prayer and liturgy.¹²⁵ Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' is quoted in a chapter on redeeming language, introduced by a call for the cultivation of 'a sacramental vision which learns, with the poet, "To see the world in a grain of sand . . ."' ¹²⁶ But, again, there is nothing further. The book ends with Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'God's Grandeur', yet it appears as almost an afterthought to the high-minded insistence that what we need for 'a new space of gendered becoming' is a 'transfiguration of theology, allowing a graced vision to emerge which enables us to see the divine luminosity shimmering beyond and within all that is, so that the material world becomes an icon of God'.¹²⁷ Balthasar too will read Gerard Manley Hopkins in such a way that his theology is imposed upon the poetry, because, as David Jasper puts it, he begins 'at the wrong end of the theological tradition [. . .] reading only from the outside inward, a theology of surface only that can now be sustained simply through an intellectual concurrence.'¹²⁸

Beattie quotes a poem of Nicola Slee's, 'Praying Like a Woman', which speaks of entering and yielding to darkness, of being made and unmade, of knowing and not knowing, possessing and being dispossessed, all in this darkness of woman. Like Balthasar, Beattie sets up the poem by giving it theological meaning before it is read, insisting on redemption in language, towards prayer 'as the cultivation of a habitual attitude of wonder at being in the world, before the all-encompassing, incomprehensible otherness of God.'¹²⁹

In these instances, I am left disappointed that she did not venture into Slee's darkness or Blake's heaven or Hopkins' charge on their own terms, inhabiting those poetic spaces. There is a vagueness surrounding the poems; she does not engage the poetics and where it might take her in her quest of a shift in language and thinking that will lead to 'a new space of gendered becoming'. Yet even here, I would like to include Beattie as part of what Cixous refers to as an economy of gift; the lack I notice is nevertheless one that occurs in the process of giving birth to something new. I will attempt a different way forward in this thesis, exploring what happens when poetics is considered before theology, in other words, when office makes way for love.

¹²⁵ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 50.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 311.

¹²⁸ Jasper, *The Sacred Body*, 174.

¹²⁹ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 67.

In the end, the Church we are departing from is one of stasis, in which, for example, according to Beattie, Balthasar's 'theo-drama goes nowhere, does not move, becomes a monumental edifice in which is contained all history, all becoming, even God.'¹³⁰ This is a Church caught 'in the pernicious grip of an authoritarian masculinity hedged round with repression, fear and alienation' that can be liberated, Beattie suggests, by a recognition and redemption of male sins through the refiguration of the language of Catholic theology.¹³¹ Beattie's reconstructed Church arises from reflection on the cross, on Christ dead on the cross and his mother at its foot, one flesh, embodying difference, yet both maternal bodies giving birth to Church.¹³² Out of this space, she suggests, new meaning, new language is created that 'resists every hierarchy, every system, every dualism [. . .] To follow such language one cannot march to the rhythms of society's orderly ranks. One must dance, make merry, and join the carnival.'¹³³

Yet Beattie, who wonders what would have been the result 'if only [Balthasar] had allowed himself to go all the way',¹³⁴ is perhaps guilty of the same flaw of fearfulness she sees in Balthasar. For, only a few pages before the mention of making merry, she urges an ecclesiology 'in which the necessary structures of a social institution are held together [. . .] by men and women living in the imitation of Christ through the maternal Church.'¹³⁵ The priesthood remains, even if it has been leavened by the addition of women who form a maternal priesthood so that 'the male and female priest stand before us [. . .] the Motherhood of the Church and the Fatherhood of God are expressed in a fertile union.'¹³⁶ Beattie's ecclesiological redemption is found, ultimately, in hierarchy, system, and dualism. If there is something about Beattie's reconstruction that seems too easy, too tidy, too much like what was already there and impossible, would it not make more sense to make a radical break away from any sort of conception of Church? There is that temptation, but it is not one I will submit to. At least not yet.

For now, I ask what if Beattie had 'gone all the way', at least in reference to finding 'redemption in language', for it is there that she strikes me as being most timid. Too much

¹³⁰ Ibid., 197.

¹³¹ Ibid., Chapter 14, 'Redeeming Language', 269-289.

¹³² Ibid., 285.

¹³³ Ibid., 286.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 286-287.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 284.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 310.

attention paid to texts seems to make her uncomfortable. She objects a fair number of times to those she claims avoid the real world by refusing to leave the study of texts. For example, she suggests that ‘Heidegger and Irigaray confuse philosophy with living’, questioning ‘how relevant Heidegger and Irigaray really are for the daily business of being in the world’.¹³⁷ A comment here, another there, they appear to be not quite deliberate, bubbling up from someplace underneath. Life and text are seen as separate affairs. She writes, ‘We have to “hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:19), not as an intellectual exercise in textual deconstruction, but as a corporeal commitment to embody new ways of being in the world.’¹³⁸ Throughout her text, I found myself wishing that she had turned to Cixous, who seems so apt to engage questions regarding fluid genders and the integration of texts and bodies.

It is here that I sense my greatest difference with Beattie, but one that provides the stimulus to set off in a different direction, though in pursuit of a similar goal. Texts and life here will be intermingled and explored together in a search for that clearing in which Beattie seeks a renewed Church and a new theology of grace. Instead of spurning texts for life, might we do a volte-face and ask what happens when an emphasis on community replaces authoritarianism, when one not only reads texts but reads them so intensely one inhabits texts *for* life, ‘for’ having two meanings?

¹³⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 296.

Chapter 2: Gaston Bachelard Takes Us to Church

Introduction

Because of its attentiveness to the contemporary happenings of the life-world, phenomenology has been the first to recognize that the modern experience of homelessness in the actual order of things is what propels us to construct a new house for ourselves in imagination.¹³⁹

In this chapter I will turn to the phenomenological method of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) in *The Poetics of Space* to begin to explore how we might construct new ecclesial homes for ourselves in imagination. Many have called for a restoration of imagination in order to effect ecclesiological renewal,¹⁴⁰ yet reading Bachelard suggests that what is missing in that call is an analysis of the workings of the imagination itself and a desire for his same courage to experience and explore it joyously and with sensitivity, as he does in *The Poetics of Space*.

There are many thinkers to whom we could turn for a philosophy of the imagination,¹⁴¹ so why go to this thinker and this text, and why at this juncture in the thesis? Because in *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard analyses poetic thinking by reflecting poetically on interior and exterior space, opening up textual possibilities for us to explore. He is thus an excellent resource to make a move toward the transformation of language and thought enabled through poetic experience suggested by Beattie but not pursued.

¹³⁹ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 7.

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, James Alison's *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996). Alison suggests that to live faithfully is to live joyfully, creatively, imaginatively, *divinely*: 'Jesus' imagination is absolutely possessed by God's deathless vivaciousness. Ours is not. The access which we have to that deathless vivaciousness is by the slow opening of our imagination to that reality; that is what we understand by faith: the keeping open of our mind and imagination to the utter vivaciousness and deathlessness of God' (60).

¹⁴¹ In this work, I am relying on Bachelard's analysis of the imagination for the reasons stated, but Bachelard's investigations into the imagination take place within a context of a larger turn toward the imagination in modern Western thought. For general treatments of philosophical understandings of imagination, see, for example, Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, and Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) (Warnock begins with Hume and ends with Wittgenstein, while Kearney begins with Husserl and ends with Vattimo. Together, the two texts provide a useful overview.) See, also, among many philosophical developments of the imaginary, Paul Ricoeur, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action," in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blarney and John B. Thompson (London: Continuum, 2008); Michèle Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, trans. Colin Gordon (London: Continuum, 2002 [1980]); Luce Irigaray's 'female imaginary'.

The Poetics of Space also brings poetics and home together, encouraging alternative considerations to the static picture of home of the previous chapter. Published in 1957, Bachelard's classic text is a study of the poetic imagination through an exploration of home and how our perceptions of home shape our thinking. The book comes onto the scene not long after Adorno has written that '[t]he house is past. The bombings of European cities, as well as the labour and concentration camps, merely proceed as executors, with what the immanent development of technology had long ago decided what was to be the fate of houses. These are now good only to be thrown away like old food cans.'¹⁴² The postwar world has been shattered; the most horrific events having taken place in the nation perceived as among the most civilised. Millions murdered, millions more, displaced. '“Homesickness,” nostalgia for the true, natal home, thus emerges in the face of the massive uprooting of war and ensuing Depression as the mental and psychological corollary to homelessness.'¹⁴³

It is unsurprising in this context that Bachelard would circumscribe his project by focusing on 'the quite simple images of *felicitous space* [. . .] the space we love'.¹⁴⁴ For this reason he has been criticised, for looking at the home nostalgically and neglecting politics for poetics.¹⁴⁵ But such criticism misses the more important aspects of Bachelard's work, it seems to me, by not seeing his intention of using the house as a way to investigate the imagination. The geographer Edmunds Bunkše, who writes of the great influence of Bachelard's book on his life in his book *Geography and the Art of Life*, realises the distinction experientially when he returns to his birthplace in Latvia and discovers unexpectedly that the dreary flat he has rented is more homelike than other more 'felicitous' appearing spaces. What matters here and what has greater relevance for us is the conclusion Bunkše comes to as a result, in part, of this experience of poetic dwelling, though he does not refer to it as such:

¹⁴² Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974 [1951]), 39.

¹⁴³ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 7.

¹⁴⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958]).

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Joe Moran, 'Houses, Habit and Memory', in *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, ed. Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, *Nature, Culture and Literature*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

A Bachelardian home has nothing to do with what a society customarily thinks of as the ideal home; it is not a brownstone or a house in the suburbs, a domicile with so many bedrooms or bathrooms, with a parlor or a den. It has nothing to do with real-estate values or location, with being on the proverbial right side of the tracks. According to Gaston Bachelard, a home, even though its physical properties can be described to an extent, is not a physical entity but an *orientation* to the fundamental values—gathering together into ‘one fundamental value’ the myriad ‘intimate values of inside space’ [PS, 3-4]—with which a home, as an intimate space in the universe, is linked to human nature. Just as astronomy is an orientation to the display and mystery in the heavens, through which we discover planets, stars, the Milky Way, and black holes, so a Bachelardian house is an orientation to protected human intimacy and its mysteries.¹⁴⁶

Bachelard is here then as lodestar, to orient us in the right direction toward dwelling poetically. As a preface to that orientation, I will briefly consider themes of vocation and language as exhibited in the works of the poet companions in order to link them to Bachelard and to open up our approach to his and their work. The rest of the chapter consists of two parts, an engagement of Bachelard followed by a reading of *The Poetics of Space*. Both parts will include experiments with Bachelard’s reading method of reverie in an attempt to discover at a deeper level how the poetic image might open up possibilities for new ways of thinking and of imagining Church.

A question of vocation

To guide us into the messy and unstable spaces where texts and living intersect, I have chosen companion poets who exhibit a strong sense of vocation regarding the reading and writing of texts. Vocation (from the Latin ‘*vocare*’, to call, summon) has mostly lost its religious meaning and today often refers simply to one’s appropriateness for a certain career. But for our purposes I wish to restore some measure of its religious connotation at least in so far as expressed by Bernard of Clairvaux as spiritual movement when he wrote about his desire to go from the world into the cloister: ‘You see, it is a question of vocation—where I am called there must I go.’¹⁴⁷

As in the call of Bernard, in the work of the poet companions, there is action, movement, a sense of being drawn forward, additionally, into textuality in ways that are affirmative of life. And while they may or may not provide an explicit reference to the divine, there is always an implicit one of mystery in the attempt, as Robert Detweiler puts it, ‘to articulate

¹⁴⁶ Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše, *Geography and the Art of Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 101-102.

¹⁴⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, *From World to Cloister*, i.5.

what is virtually inexpressible—why we are drawn so powerfully to certain art works.¹⁴⁸ For Cixous, reading is a form of call and response with texts she is most drawn to. She writes, ‘When choosing a text I am called: I obey the call of certain texts or I am rejected by others.’¹⁴⁹ Writing is a calling, as Dennis Potter recognized even as a child: ‘I knew in the Forest of Dean, when I was looking at the banner in the chapel or whatever, I knew I had talent and felt that imperative upon me.’¹⁵⁰ Ignatius, having discovered his own vocation through reading stories of saints, creates possibilities in his *Spiritual Exercises* for the participant to discern her vocation by imagining herself in Gospel narratives.¹⁵¹ Bonnefoy in his essays and poems makes a claim for poetry calling us onward toward what he calls ‘the true place’.¹⁵² For Bachelard, reader and poem are in dynamic relationship as the poetic image transforms the reader, he says, from *homo faber* into ‘*homo aleator*, the explorers of possibility in the world and in ourselves.’¹⁵³

These poet companions relate to texts with passion, reading them, writing them, writing of them, in terms of the closest human relations, those of lovers, master and disciple, saint and follower. They speak of the importance of listening and language at its most essential levels, the word and the letter. They pay the most attentive care to what may seem initially to be the smallest and most insignificant parts. One sees an exquisite attention especially in the work of Cixous, our main guide to whom I will often turn, who writes,

I choose to work on texts that ‘touch’ me. I use the word deliberately because I believe there is a bodily relationship between reader and text. We work very close to the text, as close to the body of the text as possible; we work phonetically, listening to the text, as well as graphically and typographically.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ Robert Detweiler, ‘What Is Reading Religiously’, in *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 43.

¹⁴⁹ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Dennis Potter, ‘Interview with Dennis Potter’, interview by John R. Cook, in *The Passion of Dennis Potter: International Collected Essays*, ed. Vernon W. Gras and John R. Cook (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), 250.

¹⁵¹ The theme of election is important in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Not everyone who undertakes them is seeking to discern a vocation, but, as Ivens notes in *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (23), ‘a choice of some kind will always arise’.

¹⁵² See, for example, Yves Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, in *The Act and the Place of Poetry*, ed. John T. Naughton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 116: ‘And I say that a longing for the true place is the vow made by poetry.’

¹⁵³ Mary McAllester Jones, *Gaston Bachelard, Subversive Humanist: Texts and Readings* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 10.

¹⁵⁴ Hélène Cixous, ‘Conversations’, in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), 148.

In what has become perhaps my own most beloved text, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Cixous begins with the letter 'H', to which she shows intense attentiveness, allowing the letter, it seems, to reveal itself to her.¹⁵⁵ It is an instance of reading that is 'letting oneself be read' by the text, in this case, by the letter!¹⁵⁶ There is a playfulness in the selection of the 'H'. This 'H' as received by Cixous opens up into a discourse on writing, is a metaphor of writing. The vertical bars of 'H' are two languages, the horizontal is writing, 'the line that makes them vibrate [. . .] a passageway between two shores'.¹⁵⁷ Cixous is multilingual and attuned to the changes in thinking and writing as one moves between different languages. In French, the 'H' is pronounced 'ash'; she hears 'hache' (axe) 'to clear new paths'.¹⁵⁸ Three of the poet companions are French. I read them in English. Translation is of major interest for both Bonnefoy and Cixous. I read and think at a remove what they write about thinking and writing in French and English. (In the upcoming 'intersection' on Bonnefoy, I will return to questions of translation.) What is the loss of missing the vibrations of the bar in that 'H'? Is there a gain by perhaps being pushed into moving out of that loss toward a poetics that may transcend the particularities of language? I am clearly drawn to these French thinkers and their language, of which I know not enough, but I do know the thinking is different, revealing its differences even when read in translation.

But there is always loss and gain in any case in language and translation even when one is multilingual. Cixous writes,

I have thought certain mysteries in the French language that I cannot think in English. This loss and this gain are in writing too. I have drawn the 'H'. You will have recognized it depending on what language you are immersed in.¹⁵⁹

Unlike French, English has kept the 'voice' of 'H'. Unlike French, English has lost its gender. In French, the gender of 'H' is fluid, 'masculine, neuter, or feminine at will'.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps it is at the level even of the letter that encourages Cixous' fluid thinking around gender, a crucial area of resistance against the gender rigidity of Balthasar and Beattie that may help us liberate their thinking on gender.

¹⁵⁵ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁶ Sarah Cornell in 'Conversations', *Writing Differences*, 147, quoting Hélène Cixous, 'Approche de Clarice Lispector', *Poétique*, No. 40, Paris, Editions du Seuil, November 1979, 407.

¹⁵⁷ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

Definitions and unfolding paths

This brief discussion of vocation and translation, of poets being called into and transformed by language, is intended to lead us to our turn to phenomenology. Considerations of spirituality, language, and philosophy coincide in inner experience, intentionality, movement towards what Bachelard called the ‘not-self’ (I am reminded of Matthew Arnold’s phrase for God: the ‘not-ourselves’.¹⁶¹), and openness, as can be seen in the following definitions of phenomenology: A basic definition: ‘the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed towards something, as it is an experience of or about some object.’¹⁶² A more expansive definition, perhaps better suited to our purposes, comes from Richard Kearney. He speaks of the broad phenomenological project, which he traces from Husserl to Vattimo, including Bachelard’s engagement with poetics, that ‘invite us to think again, go back to beginnings, to question anew. This has the methodological advantage of enabling us to ask what things *mean*—as if we were asking for the first time. [. . .] We enter an attitude of methodic unknowing where things cease to be facts, data, objects, possessions, and become *questions*.’¹⁶³ But I am fondest of one of Bachelard’s definitions, the most fitting one in its combination of playfulness and exactness, of phenomenology of the imagination as ‘a school of naïveté’,¹⁶⁴ a descriptive that resonates with Heidegger’s ‘letting be’ and Ricoeur’s ‘second naïveté’.¹⁶⁵ I do not think he means by the latter to imply a lack of sophistication, but more an innocence and openness in approach to the poetic image, which he believes in its ‘primitive simplicity’¹⁶⁶ becomes ‘an origin of consciousness’.¹⁶⁷ It is this simplicity that allows for the counterintuitive combining of poetry and phenomenology. ‘By obliging us to retrace our steps systematically and make an effort toward clarity of awareness with respect to a poet’s

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶¹ Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma: an Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (London: Watts & Co., 1910), 1.3.

¹⁶² David Woodruff Smith, ‘Phenomenology’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/phenomenology/>>.

¹⁶³ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 4.

¹⁶⁵ See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 350–351. ‘By *interpreting* [. . .] we can hear again’ (351), Ricoeur concludes, and this ‘by a criticism that is no longer reductive but restorative’ (350).

¹⁶⁶ Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 1.

given image, the phenomenological method leads us to attempt communication with the creating consciousness of the poet.’¹⁶⁸

In this chapter, I experiment, phenomenologically, at least as proposed by Bachelard, beginning with allowing the title of the chapter, and perhaps others to come, to suggest paths forward into this thesis. I borrow from Cixous, who refers to subtitles as ‘seeds, the embryos from which something collected itself and allowed me to go ahead [. . .] they unfold.’¹⁶⁹ Though it is a more difficult way of proceeding than placing more definitive and stable signposts along the path, though I shall do that too, a process of gradual unfolding is perhaps more fitting for this project with its concerns of poetics and spiritual renewal.

Let us see then what unfolds, beginning with the title, which when it first occurred to me, struck me as all wrong. After all, having left the Church of Balthasar and Beattie, how is it that I am suggesting a return to Church? The path that seemed to open before me is a return to Church of a different order, where alternatives are imagined and explored, a poetics of Church, poetics as conceived by Aristotle at least as distinguished by its insistence on saying ‘the kind of thing that would happen’,¹⁷⁰ the possibilities opened by the power of the poet’s imagination. We recall the early Christians, who were exiles in their own home. As Julia Kristeva puts it:

Adapting the word of the Gospels to the Greek world the *Ecclesia* apposed to the community of citizens in the polis a community that was other: a community of those who were different, of foreigners who transcended nationalities by means of a faith in the Body of the risen Christ.¹⁷¹

The members of this community were ‘called out’ (*ekklesia*) of darkness into light, into freedom. The impetus for my taking this direction as opposed to, say, toward the exploration of psycholinguistics by Tina Beattie in her deconstruction and reconstruction, arises from two sources: love of language and texts and recognition of the experience of homelessness mentioned in the opening quote.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1997), 45.

¹⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), 51b30

¹⁷¹ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 77.

Here we are reminded again of Hölderlin's phrase, 'poetically man dwells', Heidegger's treatment of it in his essay that takes the phrase as its title, and the question of the relationship between language and home. Heidegger writes, 'the phrase "poetically man dwells" says: poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a dwelling place? Through building. Poetic creation which lets us dwell, is a kind of building.'¹⁷² In his essay, Heidegger speaks of several things around poetics and dwelling that encourage the placement of Bachelard at the beginning of this thesis: poets speak out of dreams, in images, and dwelling poetically involves a recognition that language comes first, so dwelling necessarily involves a response of listening. The main relation between language and us, between poetry and dwelling, to return to the theme of vocation, is one of call and response: 'poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other'.¹⁷³

Bachelard's thinking brings us to the beginning then of a kind of poetic building. Some commentators have remarked on the importance of Bachelard's introduction to *The Poetics of Space* in revealing a shift in his thinking,¹⁷⁴ one that relates to the move we make here, away from a certain rigidity of thought to one more open and most crucially dedicated to an intensely sensitive listening to the poetic image.¹⁷⁵ It is not that Bachelard rejects his previous ways of thinking about science for a new way of thinking overall, but that he realizes the study of the poetic imagination calls for a different approach. This realization is another reason for Bachelard's presence here, as he will provide an inspiration for an approach to reading in which 'one must be receptive' and not impose oneself.¹⁷⁶ As Roch Smith points out, Bachelard's approach to literature was 'consistent with his fundamental position that philosophy must learn from the object of its analysis and with the related view

¹⁷² Heidegger, ' ". . . Poetically, Man Dwells . . . " ', 215.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 227.

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Etienne Gilson, 'Foreword to the 1964 Edition' of *The Poetics of Space* (1994 edition), xiii-xiv; Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 118; and Colette Gaudin, *Gaston Bachelard: On Poetic Imagination and Reverie: Selections from Gaston Bachelard*, trans. and ed. Colette Gaudin (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1971), xiii-xvii, for commentary on Bachelard's change of approach from his studies of science to those of poetry.

¹⁷⁵ My synaesthetic mixing is not accidental. A relishing of the senses, even as they escape their own boundaries and get confused with the others, is one of the joys of Bachelard, one that will help us relate later to the prayer of the senses of Ignatius of Loyola's spiritual exercises. He writes, for instance, in the introduction to Marc Chagall's *Drawings for the Bible* (trans. Stuart Gilbert [London: Zwemmer, 1960], 5), 'scanning the plates in this superb collection, I read the Scriptures with new eyes. And I hear more clearly because I see more clearly; because Chagall, the *seer*, delineates the voice that speaks. Almost I might say that Chagall has enlightened my ears.'

¹⁷⁶ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xv.

that error stems from the imposition of a priori categories.¹⁷⁷ For Bachelard, images are not objectified but ‘“lived,” “experienced,” “re-imagined” in an act of consciousness which restores at once their timelessness and their newness.’¹⁷⁸

Such an approach seems right for this in-between time, as Richard Kearney notes, ‘“too late for the gods and too early for Being” (Heidegger).’¹⁷⁹ He writes, ‘it is precisely because the mediating structures of the old traditions and authorities have lost much credibility that the poetic manifesto of a thinker like Bachelard commands such ready attention: “A phenomenology of imagination must do away with all intermediaries ... it is not a question of observing but of experiencing being in its *immediacy*” (*Poetics of Space*, 1957).’¹⁸⁰

Therefore, rather than writing in much detail *about* Bachelard’s poetics and how they might lead us into a re-imagined space of Church, I would like to attempt to reach a deeper understanding of them by experimenting phenomenologically, partly by being more open than I might have been otherwise to images. Allow me, then, to mention an image that came to mind unbidden, unfolding perhaps from the title, that links Bachelard to Beattie, or, rather, unlinks him in the linking. I see him, in my mind’s eye, as David, ‘dancing before the Lord with all his might.’ (2 Sam 6.14)

Why the association? It is not a verse I am particularly fond of, nor had I thought of it or David in several years, yet the image appeared suddenly and would not leave me. Maybe it will help tell something of Bachelard and begin to provide a context for a process of receptive unfolding. I had been struggling to discover and articulate what it was about Bachelard that made me believe he was instrumental to make the move away from institutional Church into a more radical one of ‘textuality’, by which I intend the textured poetic spaces opened up by the interactions between texts and between texts and readers/writers that we might inhabit as sacred spaces.¹⁸¹ I had begun to consider Temple as metaphor for the space in which I have enclosed Beattie and Balthasar, necessarily so as

¹⁷⁷ Roch Smith, *Bachelard* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 137; quoted in Gaudin, *Gaston Bachelard*, xiv.

¹⁷⁸ Gaudin, *Gaston Bachelard*, xli.

¹⁷⁹ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 6.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ What I begin to mean here by ‘textuality’ is hinted at by David Jasper when he writes in his book *The Sacred Body* (125), in reference to Heidegger’s readings of Hölderlin, ‘The poem becomes a world that embraces the reader, at once familiar and unfamiliar, but always finally unsusceptible to the grasping hand of “knowledge.”’

an outcome of the restrictions they placed on themselves. God's home was believed to be in the Temple of Solomon, but God cannot be contained, which is so vividly and joyously expressed in that one verse description of David's ecstatic dancing before his God. When David thinks God would want him to build a great temple for God, God tells David, 'I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.' (2 Sam 7.6)

In his book *Theology in Stone*, Richard Kieckhefer notes that for the Protestant reformers, the place of worship mattered less than the sacred space created by the gathering community. He writes, quoting Luther, ' "We know that we need not build any special church or temple at great cost or burden and that we are not necessarily bound to any place or time, but have been granted liberty to do this whenever, wherever, and as often as we are able and are agreed together." The prophets, says Luther, had little use for the Temple or its priesthood, but the psalmist did take delight (Psalm 42:4) in going in procession with the throng "with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival."'¹⁸² 'Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!' (Psalm 150:6)

Michel de Certeau makes illuminating distinctions between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*) that are relevant here. Place defines location, is static, indicates stability. Space is the effect of what is enacted within a place, 'a practiced place'. Space understood this way lacks stability, is ambiguous and fluid. Certeau helps us bring together thinking on space, Church and reading when he writes that 'an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs.'¹⁸³

Beattie and Balthasar stay in the 'place' of Temple, as it were, as readers and thinkers. But Bachelard, exquisite reader that he is, is one of the rare ones who actually manages to 'dance, make merry, and join the carnival,' a modern David of sorts, at least David the young dancer, poet and musician. There is a real joy expressed in his work and felt by those who take joy in it. In a 1972 television interview, Michel Foucault, for example, is visibly delighted when speaking of Bachelard, especially about two related points of concern: his reading and his undoing of hierarchies.

¹⁸² Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90; quoting Martin Luther, 'Sermon at the Dedication of the Castle Church in Torgau: Luke 14:1-11, October 5, 1544', in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 51 (Sermons, 1), ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 333-54.

‘There are small people and big people,’ Foucault says. ‘There is hierarchy, you know that whole celestial world with its thrones, dominations, angels, archangels. All this is hierarchized, and roles are very precisely defined. And Bachelard knows how to separate himself from this ensemble of values. He knows how to separate himself from it by reading everything and by confronting everything with everything.’¹⁸⁴ Foucault notes, with what seems genuine fondness, Bachelard ‘doesn’t hesitate to bring together in the same analysis the most important poets and a minor poet he might have discovered by chance browsing through a small bookshop.’¹⁸⁵ He is reminded by Bachelard’s method, of ‘skilled chess players who manage to take the biggest pieces with pawns.’¹⁸⁶ The King, Queen, and Bishop undone by the small people. The poetics is political, aesthetics is shown to be more than surface prettiness, and the institutional Church, threatened, is offered a lesson in what a healthy form of unity might look like. As Mary McAllester Jones notes, Bachelard’s reading of poetry is a way of constructing a new coherence, of creating new possibilities in the world and in ourselves.¹⁸⁷

This playful undoing is, as Foucault understands, quite complex and subversive. But because it is playful, joyous and optimistic, it is perhaps mistakenly viewed as ‘*dépassé*’.¹⁸⁸ Bachelard is mistakenly believed by many readers, myself included, ‘to be a student only of the joyful side of human experience.’¹⁸⁹ But what is key to hold on to, it seems to me, is this area where reading and joy intersect. I have been guilty of dismissing Bachelard myself, thinking him naïve, passé, simple, but then when I returned to read him again, the image of David appeared. In the remarkable introduction to his *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard writes about being modest, of reading with ‘a touch of pride’, a secrecy, and maybe what might be termed a certain kind of discretion. ‘As for me,’ he writes, contrasting his practice with the ‘simplex of superiority’ shown by the literary critic and

¹⁸³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

¹⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Michel Foucault: Gaston Bachelard’, video interview with Jean Claude Bringuier, 2 October 1972, prod. Office national de radiodiffusion télévision française, available online at <http://www.ina.fr/sciences-et-techniques/sciences-humaines/video/I06268520/michel-foucault-gaston-bachelard.fr.html>; accessed 23 January 2012.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Jones, *Gaston Bachelard, Subversive Humanist*, 175.

¹⁸⁸ Gaudin, *Gaston Bachelard*, xi.

¹⁸⁹ Joanne H. Stroud, foreword to Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell, The Bachelard Translation Series, ed. Joanne H. Stroud and Robert S. Dupree (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation-The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1983 [1942]), viii.

the professor of rhetoric, ‘being an addict of felicitous reading, I only read and re-read what I like, with a bit of reader’s pride mixed in with much enthusiasm.’¹⁹⁰

Colette Gaudin remarks that it is as a reader that Bachelard is most exemplary, that in his ability to let the poem astonish and provoke while engaging other texts in conversation, he never lets go of the mystery of the poem.¹⁹¹ It is his profound perception, his ability, as Kearney puts it, to reveal ‘the creative role of listening in our poetic relationship with a nature that *signifies* and *speaks*’,¹⁹² that my imagining of David forbade me from forgetting. The rare combination of open wonder and joy, expressed at least by the early David, strike me as being the essence of Bachelard’s reading.

I am not alone in this perception. Richard Kearney sees the ‘Archimedean point’ of Bachelard’s poetics as what Bachelard calls ‘the very ecstasy of the newness of the image.’¹⁹³ This experience is dynamic, the basis for Bachelard’s poetic phenomenology, where imagination is ‘a perpetual interaction between the human subject which imagines and the image itself.’¹⁹⁴ In this schema, ‘imagination and reality make and remake each other.’¹⁹⁵

What we are really talking about here is how Bachelard challenges us to read and live more joyously and deeply and hence more poetically. For the remainder of this chapter, I will explore how that challenge might help us toward a poetics of Church through a reading, or rather, multiple readings, of Bachelard’s magical book *The Poetics of Space*.

Entering a poetics of space

If we dream a bit . . .¹⁹⁶

For Bachelard, it is the daydream that sets us free. Without it, the imagination, the poem, his book, and perhaps life itself would remain inaccessible on any but the most superficial

¹⁹⁰ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xxv.

¹⁹¹ Gaudin, *Gaston Bachelard*, xxvii-xxviii.

¹⁹² Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 108.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 97; Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xv.

¹⁹⁴ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 97.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 81.

level. ‘The values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity at its depths’, he believes.¹⁹⁷ To plumb those depths, he explores the particulars of the daydream and the house to reveal how our inner selves and our inhabited spaces are intimately related. The first house shelters our daydreams; our daydreams recreate the house, particularly its ‘original warmth’, so that the house becomes the most potent daydream, dynamically and persistently present throughout one’s life.¹⁹⁸ Thus it is a perfect ‘tool for analysis of the human soul,’ which is also ‘an abode,’ where we ‘learn to abide within ourselves’ in our remembered spaces.¹⁹⁹

In Bachelard’s text, such inner and outer geographies inform one another, meld together in ways that make interior/exterior worlds often indistinguishable. What risks he is willing to take and to invite us to take! Boundaries are blurred or erased completely as he explores a dialectics of inside/outside, the threshold between unreality and reality, geographies of habitations and of the soul, coining the term topoanalysis to move his spatial placement of our memories in houses to another level beyond psychoanalysis and metaphysics, to that of poetry and imagination.

The latter is difficult territory to explore, especially as it requires another way of being to do so—a willingness to join the author in the liberating space of not knowing, that methodic unknowing of Kearney’s where data become questions. To study the poetic imagination, Bachelard rejected his previous methods as a philosopher of science, and so was better able to imaginatively analyze the poetic imagination, the transcendent non-knowing condition of poetry. He does this by being receptive and attentive to the newness and suddenness of the poetic image both in his own response and in the response of the poet.²⁰⁰ In other words, he dwells as a poet while exploring the relationship between dwellings and poetry.

To read Bachelard fruitfully, perhaps one must approach the work as its author reads poetry: with joyful enthusiasm, abundant daydreaming, and an openness to allowing oneself to be *seized* by the poem.²⁰¹ In the domain of the daydream, he argues, ‘reading on

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., xxxvii.

²⁰⁰ See Bachelard’s introduction to *Poetics of Space*.

²⁰¹ Note, for example, Bachelard’s disdain for the ‘realistic mind’ for its inability to embrace the unreal as opposed to ‘the poetry lover who reads with joy and imagination’ (60) and who knows ‘the poem possesses us entirely’ (xxii). The joy and optimism of Bachelard’s reading practices, however, must not

the conceptual level [. . .] would be insipid and cold; it would be purely linear'.²⁰² This domain is also that of the poem, where 'dream values communicate poetically from soul to soul. To read poetry is essentially to daydream'.²⁰³

I accepted his challenge to let go into the daydream (as he does when he lets himself 'drift into the intoxication of inverting daydreams and reality').²⁰⁴ He gives credence to my desire when he suggests that 'when we dream, we are phenomenologists without realizing it'²⁰⁵ and, more precisely, '[a phenomenological attitude] asks us to produce within ourselves a reading pride that will give us the illusion of participating in the work of the author of the book'.²⁰⁶

As a naïf phenomenologist, then, I undertook a brief personal experiment in an attempt to read anew. This began early on in the book, when I suddenly felt I must put it aside and dwell in the 'oneirically definitive house' that he claims puts us 'on the threshold of a daydream'.²⁰⁷ (Imagine my surprise when I turned the page and discovered that the reader must be induced to the 'state of suspended reading' the author had cleverly just enticed me into!) But then he gave me pause. 'I shall therefore put my trust in the power of attraction of all the domains of intimacy',²⁰⁸ he writes of the houses 'inscribed in us'.²⁰⁹ 'There does not exist a real intimacy that is repellent. All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction. Their being is well-being'.²¹⁰

This happy picture stalled my experiment and raises questions. What if the memories one has of one's early homes are not primarily ones of attraction but repulsion? My childhood houses were often attractive outside but repellent inside. With that background, how to come to terms with his belief that 'life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm

be mistaken for a lack of rigour. As Gaudin points out (*Bachelard*, xxviii), 'his ethics point in fact toward asceticism. Throughout his work he developed the paradox that the primitiveness of poetic consciousness is not immediately given. It can only be a conquest. The Bachelardian reverie, far from being a complacent drifting of the self, is a discipline acquired through long hours of reading and writing, and through a constant practice of "*surveillance de soi*." Images reveal nothing to the lazy dreamer.'

²⁰² Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 99.

²⁰³ Ibid., 17.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 34.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 103.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 21.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 14.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

in the bosom of the house’?²¹¹ How could one reach greater sympathy and read with new eyes if Bachelard’s chord was so discordant with one’s own? On an ecclesial plane, what are the implications for an analogous situation in one’s religious ‘home’? Many people have been damaged by the churches they grew up in. How might Bachelard’s ideas apply to them, the exiles and the excluded?

I attempted the daydream again to see what images of early intimate and attractive places arose. Two came, though neither were images of conventional houses, yet they might suffice. The first was a large forsythia bush in the front of my grandmother’s house, the inside of which often provided shelter for dreaming. The second was my first ‘home,’ which I cannot possibly remember, yet it holds sway in family lore and in my own psyche: the incubator in which I spent the first two months of my life. In the daydream, this sterile box is my safe ‘first world’.²¹² Whether this is a ‘real’ memory or not is irrelevant in Bachelard’s constructions because it is an image outside time, the first of a ‘sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being’s stability’.²¹³

With this shift in understanding, the philosopher’s ideas could bear fruit for those burdened with a lack of home. Bachelard might disagree. He names the one without ‘the house’ ‘a dispersed being’.²¹⁴ The world is filled with dispersed beings. By his definition, I am one. Let us not dispense with the dispersed too quickly. Instead, we may begin to suggest on the basis of this little experiment that memorable oneiric spaces, those fixations in places of stability, are a universal human phenomenon, even when unconventional or lacking.

An associated question arises. Is it not possible to reach the same threshold of daydream through an inner appreciation of one’s current space? Another test dream seemed in order. My gaze settled on a chair in the corner of my room, each arm flanked by large windows, its back draped with a green paisley shawl, a gift from a dear friend that provides inner and outer warmth. A few days before, a spiritual director had insistently asked me about the chair because it is where I pray. I described it: dowdy, brown, uncomfortable, wooden arms. ‘No, that’s not it,’ he said. ‘Tell me about the *space* of the chair. What do you do? Where do you go? What is it in that space that makes it what it is, because it sounds to me it is a holy space.’ So I told him about the prayers, where they led me, and the shawl I’d

²¹¹ Ibid., 7.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 8.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

wrap around me that had excessive meaning (Bachelard, I would discover later, proclaims that “the surest sign of wonder is exaggeration”.²¹⁵) because I’d prayed with it through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It holds memories of an imaginary realm that are just as vivid as those from this world. (As I write this, I remember that many of those imaginings took place in the houses I had inhabited. As Bachelard claims, the house images are not at all vague, but full of sensate detail: the smell of salt air in a grandmother’s house by the sea, a rust diagonal pattern snaking across a kitchen floor in a city house, a never-repeatable taste of a Jewish rye bread shared in a suburban dining room. I was inside the houses, and they were inside me. Perhaps these contemplations were related to the ‘depths of repose’ Bachelard encourages for engagement of the oneiric image.²¹⁶)

After listening awhile, the director advised: ‘Pause before you enter the space of the chair. Be intentional about it. Make it sacred space.’ How much Bachelard would have liked this man! He reminded me of the value of ‘the space we love...eulogized space’.²¹⁷ He showed me how to inhabit both temporal place and transcendent space and how to make friends with a piece of furniture, as Bachelard puts it so wonderfully.²¹⁸ This second experiment also suggests the dispersed can access the poetic realm, for it gets at what Bachelard believes the poet is and does, a creator creating at the most primary and sublime level: ‘When a dreamer can reconstruct the world from an object that he transforms magically through his care of it, we become convinced that everything in the life of a poet is germinal’.²¹⁹

Entering a space of poetics

... this fibered space traversed by the simple impetus of words that have been experienced.²²⁰

What the director asked of me was to make my interior space exterior and vice versa during a time of intentional prayer, to create sacred space inside and outside. The simple action of pausing and being intentional about the prayer slowed time and created a sense of the sacred, similar to what the liturgical rhythms of communal worship offer us. There is a

²¹⁵ Ibid., 107.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 226.

²¹⁷ Ibid., xxxv.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., xxviii.

correspondence between that world of worship and what Gaudin suggests Bachelard offers us—lessons in ‘the art of living poetically’.²²¹ Prayer and poetry both arise from the same region of imagination and soul, the latter as word alone being, as Bachelard puts it, an ‘immortal word’ that ‘can, in fact, be poetically spoken with such conviction that it constitutes a commitment for the entire poem. The poetic register that corresponds to the soul must therefore remain open to our phenomenological investigations’.²²² The poetic register of the soul! Is that not also the space of prayer and contemplation?

In the face of so much interior exploration, I find it interesting that John Stilgoe places an emphasis on the exterior elements of Bachelard in his foreword to the 1994 edition, remarking ‘space can be poetry’.²²³ I would like to suggest that the more radical and critical conclusion that Bachelard presents us with is that poetry can be space. Maybe it is a difference in mindset. Stilgoe is an historian. The foreword to the 1964 edition by the philosopher Etienne Gilson, on the other hand, stresses poetry and imagination, the latter of which, as Gilson points out, is for Bachelard ‘a most secret power that is as much of a cosmic force as of a psychological faculty’.²²⁴

This power resides in the soul, says Bachelard, not the mind.²²⁵ In this distinction is a key to his investigation of the workings of the poetic imagination, for he realizes, through analysis of his own inner experience, that the poetic image is the distinguishing phenomena of the imagination.²²⁶ Its specificity and uniqueness give the poetic image “an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct *ontology*,” the subject of Bachelard’s study.²²⁷ Yet this very uniqueness prevent it from being studied, described, understood, grasped in conventional ways. Instead, the poetic image *grasps us*. “It is as though the poet’s being were our being...the poem possesses us entirely”.²²⁸ The poetic image reaches us at such depths that the result is transformational:

²²¹ Gaudin, *Gaston Bachelard*, xxviii.

²²² Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xx.

²²³ John Stilgoe, foreword to *Poetics of Space*, x.

²²⁴ Etienne Gilson, foreword to *The Poetics of Space*, xiii.

²²⁵ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xx.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, xv.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, xvi.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, xxii.

It takes root in us...It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being.²²⁹

Expression creates being! Here is an image itself pregnant with transfigural possibilities, uniting the sacred and the secular. Bachelard speaks of resonances and reverberations that result from the image. He shows us how the poetic image is relational in its transsubjectivity, reacting on independent hearts and minds, creating intimate connections between poet and receiver, some so intimate, if the reader is reading with joy and imagination and not with ‘prudence,’ that she may even become a reflection of the writer, ‘as though the reader were the writer’s ghost’.²³⁰

What are these ideas but expressions of communion, which is the heart of Christian faith and community? How might Bachelard’s conception of ‘deep sympathy’ and ‘harmony in reading’²³¹ bring new life to our sense of communion? (‘Communion’ in the ecclesial sense refers to relationship to the body of Christ as the community—‘the communion of saints’—and in the Eucharist, the latter broken and ‘given through bread, that is, something essentially both nourishing and convivial, indicating that there is a eucharistic body of the Lord only in view of his ecclesial body.’²³²) For one, it has the gift of dynamism, evident even in the language Bachelard uses in his delineation, which always goes beyond mere description. Words like fleeting, shimmering, iridescent, pure suggest that there is nothing whatsoever mediocre or static in this interplay.²³³ The emphasis in both communion and Bachelard’s sympathy is on gift and relationship and their potential to transform those who are participating.

Bachelard’s writing is often a mix of excessiveness, a tendency toward the fanciful, and an attention to the particular and the concrete. Perhaps his poetic rigour is born out of this combination. Consider, for example, his meditation on roundness in which the bird exemplifies the ‘solid roundness’ of being.²³⁴ Quoting Jules Michelet, he cites these astonishing words:

²²⁹ Ibid., xxiii.

²³⁰ Ibid., xxvi.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 142.

²³³ See, for example, Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xx.

²³⁴ Ibid., 237-238.

The bird, which is almost completely spherical, is certainly the sublime and divine summit of living concentration. One can neither see, nor even imagine, a higher degree of unity. Excess of concentration, which constitutes the great personal force of the bird, but which implies its extreme individuality, its isolation, its social weakness.²³⁵

How delightful is this image! Yet, as Bachelard points out, it is ‘outside all realistic meaning’,²³⁶ beyond geometry, psychology, common sense. It has been ignored, which he finds extraordinary, an occurrence that leads him to a proposal likewise delightful: “[The image] would take on both interest and meaning if a philosophy of the cosmic imagination could be instituted, that would look for centers of cosmicity”.²³⁷

As suggested earlier, such enthusiasms, as well as the insistence on universality of imagination, may today strike us as overly optimistic and naive. The final goal of Bachelard’s phenomenology of the poetic image is when the writer’s particular image is realized as a general image that one can make one’s own.²³⁸ Yet in a world often insensitive, atomized and brutal, there is a welcome sensitivity to the spirit and attentiveness to how that might translate into a form of communion, into post-ecclesial Church. There is an uncanny sense in reading Bachelard of ‘place’ turning into ‘space’. Limits begin to disappear, replaced by a great expansion of interior space over against expectations of enclosure. Maybe it is an approach into poetic space, which Bachelard claims ‘does not enclose us in affectivity’²³⁹ and ‘goes from deep intimacy to infinite extent, united in an identical expansion, one feels grandeur welling up’.²⁴⁰ He enacts what he tells of.

But do not be too quick to judge him overly optimistic, as I did. He knows the depths as well as the heights when he writes, ‘In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls’.²⁴¹ And in contrast to his more positive inclinations and in response to Henri Michaux’s prose-poem *L’espace aux ombres* (which Maria Jolas translates wonderfully as ‘shade-haunted

²³⁵ Ibid., 237.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid., 238.

²³⁸ Ibid., 229.

²³⁹ Ibid., 201.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 202.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

space'²⁴²), he writes of a '“horrible inside-outside” of unuttered words and unfulfilled intentions, within itself, being is slowly digesting its nothingness.'²⁴³ There is no refuge here in this 'space-time of ambiguous being, [in which] the mind has lost its geometrical homeland and the spirit is drifting,' no comfort this time to be found in Bachelard's oneiric house of original warmth.²⁴⁴

Entering a poetics of church

If the Creator listened to poets, He would create a flying turtle that would carry off into the blue the great safeguards of earth.²⁴⁵

A phenomenology of the imagination necessarily shows us that an exacting investigation of the imagination is very much about the nuances of interior space and exterior place. I would like now to revisit some of Bachelard's nuances to see how they might free us into new visions of Church.

Incessantly, Bachelard stresses poetic images as the source of great power and oneiric depth in the imagination. They are 'invitations to start imagining again'.²⁴⁶ If the Bachelardian house shelters our daydreams, which in turn eventually recreate the house so it becomes oneiric, is there a poetic image of a 'first house' in the Christian imagination? The one that comes to the foreground of my own imagination is the image of the first Christian 'house,' the Jerusalem community of the Book of Acts.

Listen to Luke's description of the ones who are turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6):

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.—Acts 2.42-47

²⁴² Ibid., 216.

²⁴³ Ibid., 216-217.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 218, 7.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 54.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.

He describes them as being in awe, in wonder. These are people who know ‘the world is *charged* with the grandeur of God’.²⁴⁷ Charge and grandeur are words in which Bachelard is well-versed, and he encourages us to take on the same way of being, which happens to be that of the early Church.

The Jerusalem community is origin, ideal, a remembered space of early warmth, fit to be one of Bachelard’s great images. Ideal suggests impossibility, but I do not mean the word to disallow the truth and possibility of the image. (There is debate among scholars over the historical trustworthiness of Acts. But as Roger Haight, for one, reasonably points out, the historicity of Acts is irrelevant; what matters is Luke’s narrative of the development of the community.)²⁴⁸

Another figure enters my imagination. (Actually, haunts is a preferable verb.): Labadie the nomad, who appears near the end of Michel de Certeau’s *The Mystic Fable*.²⁴⁹ He comes for good reason, for the Jerusalem community was of great significance for him. It propelled his wanderings and provided ballast; it was origin and destination, his most potent daydream. Certeau writes:

Labadie went back to the origins of the Church [. . .] But how was that founding Spirit known to him other than through the spirit of his own childhood, by an inspiration making him contemporary with that past, which by his time had become corrupted? ‘I saw [. . .] that to make a true copy or painting of the Christian Church, it had to be drawn from its live original; this live original was the first Christianity, as founded by Jesus Christ, promised by the apostles, called for by the Gospel and described by the Acts.’²⁵⁰

This ‘live original’ functions for Labadie as an image similar to Bachelard’s as it is an interiorized space of home with many nuances open to potential excess and exaggeration. In his analysis of Labadie and his image, Certeau’s language sounds like Bachelard’s, with a twist:

The ‘copy’ or ‘portrait’ he draws of the origins is precisely the nowhere of his spirit, a ‘*borrowed residence*,’ [emphasis mine] a metaphor, a transport outside

²⁴⁷ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 128. Emphasis added.

²⁴⁸ Roger Haight, S.J., *Christian Community in History*, vol. 1, *Historical Ecclesiology* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 74.

²⁴⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume 1: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), ch. 9, ‘Labadie the Nomad’.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

oneself. His vision informed him that he was not at home. He was deprived of himself by the place in which he was [...] it is (it will be) especially the image, that other space, that makes him *see* his exile.²⁵¹

Here the memory of the original home increases alienation in its contrast to Labadie's homelessness. But it also provided and stabilized his vocation,²⁵² which was fortified by the kind of 'radical simplicity' Bachelard refers to when writing about this musing of Maurice Blanchot's:

About this room, which was plunged in utter darkness, I knew everything, I had entered into it, I bore it within me, I made it live, with a life that is not life, but which is stronger than life, and which no force in the world can vanquish.²⁵³

Put Labadie's image next to Blanchot's and there is a sympathetic reflection. Each man has a room he 'bears within himself, and which he has made live with a life that does not exist in life'.²⁵⁴

Another sympathetic figure enters the scene: Karl Rahner, who foresaw decades ago the critical need for imagination once the Church had become unmoored from its surrounding cultures. He called for an embrace of ambiguity, of not knowing, and a more mystic way of being Church that is perhaps not so distant from Labadie's eschatological vision and wandering ways:

God's truth remains the same, yet it is living and has always a history which will only come to an end in the vision of God. Until then even the enduring, permanently valid truth is only partial, spoken in images and parables, wandering and therefore changing on the pilgrim road of unpredictable history.²⁵⁵

What does the affinity between men of such disparate times indicate? Both were Jesuits. Though Labadie left the Society, it is likely that his training in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius did not leave him. It may be a sign of the strength of the imagination at the core level at which Bachelard examines it, something understood also quite well and deeply by Ignatius. The essential nature of the image and its formidable impact know no obstacles in

²⁵¹ Ibid., 276.

²⁵² Ibid., 274.

²⁵³ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 228-229.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 229.

²⁵⁵ Rahner, *The Christian of the Future*, 25.

space and time. Therefore, ecclesiological images from Christian origins ought to help create new forms of being Church if only we are willing to ‘dematurize ourselves’ so we may ‘hope to experience the shocks that being receives from new images, shocks which are always the phenomena of youthful being’.²⁵⁶

Ah, the phenomena of youthful being! I can hear the cynics laughing. How might *that* be recovered, particularly in a Church such as mine barnacled by an aging and restorationist male hierarchy? The answer comes from Bachelard: Listen to the poets! This is from a man who read poetry every day.²⁵⁷ Who tells us ‘the great function of poetry is to give us back the situations of our dreams’.²⁵⁸ Gerald A. Arbuckle, in *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership*, cites Rahner’s call for leaders with ‘creative imaginations’ (poets of sorts, or at least those who could hear the poet’s voice?) who could interpret and make real the documents of Vatican II.²⁵⁹

Arbuckle himself calls for ‘dreamers who *do!*’²⁶⁰ Though Arbuckle’s book is almost two decades old, its relevance increases, as fissures dividing the Catholic Church grow ever wider.

Sandra Schneiders articulates the current state of the Catholic Church well:

For the past four decades religious [...] have been living into the vision inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council of the Church as the People of God who are the ministerial Body of Christ in this world. And as they have lived into this reality themselves religious have been, for many, the most convincing corporate witness in the Church to the truth and power of the Conciliar vision of Christian identity and vocation. They have been calling the laity and even some of the clergy to be Church in a new way, and modeling the possibility of that kind of Christian faith and life. However, beginning seriously with the pontificate of John Paul II, the hierarchical Church began a retrenchment from Vatican II which has become increasingly a tridentine restorationism under the current Pope. These two visions of Church are running, one forward and one backward, on parallel ecclesiological tracks.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 236.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 49.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 15.

²⁵⁹ Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leaders* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993), 6.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

²⁶¹ Sandra Schneiders, IHM, “Tasks of Those who Choose the Prophetic Life Style,” in *National Catholic Reporter*, 7 January 2010; available online at <http://ncronline.org/news/women/tasks-those-who-choose-prophetic-life-style>.

Schneiders makes strong reference to the main image of Church to appear in Vatican II documents: the People of God. The origin of the phrase is scriptural, a *poetic image*. It is an inclusive and vital view of Church, an image drawn from that of Israel as a priestly people, chosen by God to be in covenantal relationship, a pilgrim people ‘called out of darkness into his marvelous light’ (1 Peter 2.9). Now ‘the people of God is no longer to be defined by race but by faith in Christ,’²⁶² who is and does ‘the new thing’ promised by the poet/prophet Isaiah centuries before (43.19).

Vatican II was an imaginative reconception of Church away from static, institutional images such as a perfect society toward more pastoral images such as pilgrim and servant.²⁶³

However, until there is a new heaven and a new earth where justice dwells (cf. 2 Pet 3.13), the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, takes on the appearance of this passing world. She herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons [and daughters] of God (cf. Rom 8.19-22).²⁶⁴

I quote this passage in part because it reveals that the institutional Church is, in fact, capable of great imagination. The documents, positive and pastoral in tone, begin with imaginative encounters with images and symbols from scripture and move toward concrete experience of the human family. Like Labadie, the Church of Vatican II returns to the image of the origins and in so doing recognizes its transitory and mysterious nature.²⁶⁵

Bachelard convinces. The approach is a non-approach, in that it is a *reception* of poetic image, a *letting go* into the daydream. How liberating for persons and communities if they tried this phenomenological non-approach, which seems quite compatible with a mystic, contemplative way—to be attentive, to wait until one is possessed by the poem or the prayer. We are led not to the place of temple, church, synagogue, or mosque by Bachelard but to the *space* of his wonder over poets in his chapter “The Dialectics of Outside and Inside,” where he expresses the sacred quality and potentiality of poetry:

²⁶² Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 25.

²⁶³ See, for example, Donald R. Campion, S.J.’s introduction to *Gaudium et Spes*, in Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), 185.

²⁶⁴ Abbott, *Lumen Gentium*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, 48.

But why not take the poet's verse as a small element of spontaneous mythology? [...] why should we not react to sacralization through poetry, through a poem of our own time, tinged with fantasy, perhaps, but which is in harmony with primal values.²⁶⁶

Bachelard leaves us with the gift of questions and the possibility of alternative spaces of poetics to keep in mind as we move forward.

²⁶⁵ My view of the Vatican II Church in this regard contradicts that of Balthasar and Beattie, both of whom believe the Church, at least as experienced in its liturgical practice, lost its sense of mystery and became more masculine and bureaucratic. (See Beattie, 'From Rosaries to Rights', 223-224.)

²⁶⁶ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 223.

Intersection One: Transfigurations

A word on intersections

Intersections, as I've named the two passages between the three sections of this thesis, are intended as attempts at the three-fold way of proceeding presented in the previous chapter, as suggested by Cixous' regard for titles as generative, encouraging a process of freeing, collecting, and unfolding. She writes that these titles, stages in her writing process, occur to her on the way, not before. 'I am on a quest and there are stages—that I see very clearly; not beforehand, as it happens, they unfold.'²⁶⁷ She speaks of their strangeness, strange 'because they are stages on the road of strangeness'.²⁶⁸ I may have had an inkling of what she means in those instances I have already mentioned—the astonishment of knowing something before reading it on the page, the appearance of David in my imagination, or a title, or a word, such as 'intersection', that insist themselves, their purpose initially inchoate but there perhaps as glimmers of different ways of knowing. There is a resonance, perhaps a presumptuous one, in the distinction Heidegger made between Greek and Latin thinking. Timothy Clark offers the example of what happens to the Greek word *physis*, 'commonly translated as "nature" (cf. "physics") but more precisely the "self-unfolding emergence" in which individual things come forth from obscurity' when it changes into Latin '*natura*'.²⁶⁹ The sense of a world unfolding, of emergence, is lost. What replaces it is the language of empire, a world occupied and mastered. That distinction is at the heart of this thesis, epistemologically and ecclesiologically, one that continues to insist itself against my own desires for mastery and occupation.

What of intersections? What unfolds? Phenomenology is a walking back through the pathways of thinking, at least that is how I see it, so etymologies and definitions may prove helpful. Heidegger was partial to them, as they brought him closer to the origins of thinking.²⁷⁰ And I am partial to Heidegger, at least in this instance. So I choose in our concerns of choosing paths and going forth the following beginning definition of intersection: 'A point at which two or more courses of action diverge; a critical turning

²⁶⁷ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 45.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Clark, *Martin Heidegger*, 32.

²⁷⁰ See, for example, Heidegger's essay 'The Thing': 'The truth, then, here and elsewhere, is not that our thinking feeds on etymology, but rather that etymology has the standing mandate first to give thought to the essential content involved in what dictionary words, as words, denote by implication.' *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 175.

point.²⁷¹ These intersections are meant to function as way stations of sorts, in-between spaces, thresholds, perhaps, which are favourite images of Yves Bonnefoy's, so much so that his life's work is arranged around the fulcrum of a collection titled *The Lure of the Threshold* (*Dans la Leurre du Seuil*).²⁷²

Heidegger writes of the threshold, 'It sustains the middle in which the two, the outside and the inside, penetrate each other.'²⁷³ To bring us back to Church, threshold expresses the ambivalence and ambiguity experienced by many in the Church today, particularly women. In their book *Guard the Chaos: Finding Meaning in Change*, Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild portray threshold for women believers as a space neither inside nor outside, neither of belonging nor of exile. To be in this space is to erase those boundaries, for 'by standing on the threshold they keep a door open (or create a passageway) between one side of the boundary and the other, allowing people and ideas to cross backwards and forwards.'²⁷⁴

Intersections, then, may also be considered as transfer points, and as aids to translation, the transfer of language. Sarah Cornell provides an apt etymology of the word 'translate' in a conversation about the seminars of Hélène Cixous:

from the Latin word *translatus* which is the past participle of *transfere* meaning "to transfer" or "to translate". *Ferre* also gives the idea of "to carry". Translation is in fact the process of transferring or carrying across. It creates a bridge from one language to another and thus opens a passageway towards the encounter of the other where he or she dwells, speaks, cries or sings in a different tongue.²⁷⁵

Vocation, essentially the movement towards an other where he or she dwells, and translation come together again here with Bonnefoy, to whom I turn to guide us through this passage between home and exile, temple and text. For Bonnefoy, writing is movement, action, wandering, approach. 'He is often at thresholds, at doors, on river banks or at crossroads. At the point of emergence: sometimes on the threshold of rediscovered

²⁷¹ OED Online, December 2012, Oxford University Press, s.v. 'intersection'.

²⁷² Yves Bonnefoy, *Poems: 1959-1975: A Translation by Richard Pevear of Pierre écrite and Dans le leurre du seuil*, (New York: Vintage, 1985), 63-177. See especially the final poem of the collection, 'The Scattered, the Indivisible': 'Yes, by the broken arch/Of the threshold/Whose missing stone we had found/—Flow, river of peace, make/The carnation of this shore flower again.' (167)

²⁷³ Heidegger, 'Language', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 204.

²⁷⁴ Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, *Guard the Chaos: Finding Meaning in Change* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1995), 100.

²⁷⁵ Susan Sellers, *Writing Differences*, 147.

presence; sometimes at the point of the intersection of worlds.²⁷⁶ With him alongside, we are called forward into texts, into this text at the same time, and toward his ‘true place’.²⁷⁷ What does Bonnefoy mean by this expression? It is an imagined place of reconciliation, depth, restoration, timelessness, redemption. ‘In the true place, elementary realities reveal they are not confined to place and moment, that they partake less of the nature of being than that of language; that they can compel whatever appears beside them to speak to us, in a whisper, of an unforeseeable future.’²⁷⁸ The poet knows this is an illusion, a mirage, an unattainable ideal nonetheless brought nearer through the seeking of it in the real experience of living. This seeking is itself the ideal, the path poetry provides, which is expressed in one of Bonnefoy’s poems titled, ‘Imperfection Is the Summit.’ (‘Love perfection because it is the threshold/But deny it once known, once dead forget it,/Imperfection is the summit.’)²⁷⁹

What I should like to do here then is to turn to three instances in Bonnefoy’s writing that have to do with incidents of ‘imperfection’ or ‘failure’ that may bring us closer to a true place. The first Bonnefoy experiences while translating a text. The second is a failure of art by a friend, the artist Alberto Giacometti. The third is his thwarted desire to make a home in a farmhouse in Provence, an experience that will haunt and inspire his poetry for decades. In Bonnefoy’s three vocations—translation, criticism, and poetry—these experiences of failure are transfigured into new ways of being in the world, a way more like that of a world unfolding than one mastered. I do not think the poet would object to this approach, for he noted that ‘deficiency has one virtue, which is to recognize itself as such and thus lead us to a passionate knowing’.²⁸⁰

Translation

‘It would cost me almost nothing to be literal.’²⁸¹

Our concern here are some of the problems encountered by Bonnefoy in his work in translation and how the solving of those problems affected his poetics. Alice Jardine, after

²⁷⁶ John T. Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7.

²⁷⁷ For a discussion of the ‘true place’, see especially Bonnefoy’s essay ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, 114-116.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁷⁹ Yves Bonnefoy, *Yesterday’s Wilderness Kingdom (Hier régnant désert)*, trans. Anthony Rudolf (London: MPT Books, 2000), 36.

²⁸⁰ Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, 113.

²⁸¹ Yves Bonnefoy, ‘Translating Poetry’, in *The Act and the Place of Poetry*, 140.

Jacques Derrida, points out a central one: the common view of translation is the classical, and reductionist, one that makes a claim for a one to one correspondence, a 'logic of transportation' in which 'for any text there is an ideal "text" (the text's meaning) that must simply be transported to another text'.²⁸² She refers to it as 'intellectual, conceptual imperialism', though in the larger context of comparativism and analogical thinking she believed prevalent in U.S. scholarship, at least a few decades ago, in contrast to French thought.²⁸³ Bonnefoy points out a different kind of reductionism in Anglo-American criticism, which, he claims, tends 'to view the poem as a thing, rather than an *activity*'.²⁸⁴ Bonnefoy sees the French tending toward the Platonic, the English, Aristotelian, one pointing up to the skies, the other to the earth, as it were.²⁸⁵ This makes for a particular dilemma in a business already fraught with difficulty, as the poem, Bonnefoy says, cannot be translated.²⁸⁶ And yet, he persists in doing just that (by making a distinction between the form of a poem and the greater flexibility of poetry), and is highly respected for his translations of Shakespeare and Yeats into French. In the essay 'Translating Poetry' he provides instances from his translations of those works that illuminate what he means by this 'no/yes' paradox of translating poetry, an aporia that is not an obstacle but an opening into new possibilities. Translation in this sense is a creative act; 'it is merely poetry re-begun'.²⁸⁷ Recognizing that his life experience and writing are interdependent with his translating, Bonnefoy uses personal examples, setting them up with a charming, disarming description of them as 'nothing to pride oneself on (nor to be alarmed at: discrete fragments, with no value except as tokens)'.²⁸⁸

The first is Shakespeare's use in *Hamlet* of the word 'jelly' (Horatio tells Hamlet of his companions' fear after the appearance of the ghost of his father: 'By their opprest and fear surprized eyes, within his truncheon's length; whilst they, distill'd Almost to jelly with the act of fear, stand dumb and speak not to him.'²⁸⁹), an everyday word, 'so English', Bonnefoy remarks. The English want language direct, uncomplicated; the French prefer

²⁸² Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 14.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, 16.

²⁸⁵ See, for example, Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, 16-17.

²⁸⁶ Bonnefoy, 'Translating Poetry', 137; 'The translator meets too many contradictions that he cannot eliminate; he must make too many sacrifices.'

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 139.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 140.

²⁸⁹ *Hamlet*, act I, scene II, lines 203-206.

heightened and heroic. What to do? ‘It would cost me almost nothing to be literal,’ he writes, and use *bouillie* (gelatine), but he takes a greater risk and does otherwise. As David Jasper notes, ‘The act of translation is, for Bonnefoy, an act of looking and listening.’²⁹⁰ I would venture that it is a spiritual practice, reminiscent of Bernard of Clairvaux’s urging to his monks in his third sermon on the Song of Songs, ‘Today we read the book of experience. Let us turn to ourselves and let each of us search his own conscience about what is said.’²⁹¹ Bonnefoy decides to ‘listen to Shakespeare until [he] can anticipate him in [his] own writing and not merely mirror him.’²⁹² Though he does not elaborate on his choice, *cendre* (‘ash’), he does say it is his own word, ‘derived from another set of associations’.²⁹³ Bonnefoy has turned to himself to discover a word more true than an external word-for-word transfer. He has failed on the literal level, but the failure opens up another path, other possibilities, for ‘the *act* of translating has begun.’²⁹⁴

The second example, an elaboration of this process of reading one’s interior, comes from a listening to his inner voice as he attends to Yeats’ ‘The Sorrow of Love’, specifically where the poet writes of the girl with ‘the red mournful lips’ who is ‘doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships’, the ‘labouring ships’ presenting a particular challenge.²⁹⁵ Bonnefoy considers the various senses of the word ‘labouring’—long sea crossings, distress and grief, birth, sowing the earth. This time an answer insists itself before he can even ask the question of how to proceed, though he knows it fails to express the nuances of the original: ‘*qui boitent/au loin*’ (literally ‘that limp/afar’)²⁹⁶, an echo of Verlaine’s ‘*Ô vous, comme un qui boite au loin, Chagrins et Joies*’.²⁹⁷ These words come to him ‘by a more roundabout route’ than the common perception of a circuit running between texts through the translator, as they arise from a memory that provided the image

²⁹⁰ David Jasper, ‘“*La Même Voix, Toujours*”: Yves Bonnefoy and Translation’ in *Translating Religious Texts: Translation, Transgression and Interpretation*, ed. David Jasper (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 107.

²⁹¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, ‘Sermons on *The Song of Songs*’, in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G.R. Evans, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 221.

²⁹² Bonnefoy, ‘Translating Poetry’, 140.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.; emphasis mine.

²⁹⁵ W.B. Yeats, ‘The Sorrow of Love’, *W.B. Yeats: Selected Poems* (London: Phoenix, 2002), 8.

²⁹⁶ Hoyt Rogers, ‘Yves Bonnefoy and the Art of Translation’, in Yves Bonnefoy, *The Curved Planks*, trans. Hoyt Rogers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 215.

²⁹⁷ Paul Verlaine, ‘*Ô vous, comme un qui boite au loin, Chagrins et Joies*’, available online at: www.poesie.webnet.fr/lesgrandsclassiques/poemes/paul_verlaine; (accessed 14 March 2013); Bonnefoy, ‘Translating Poetry’, 141.

of a limping ship.²⁹⁸ Returning home from Greece, he writes, he imagined the boat ‘labouring in just this way, by night, off the coast of Italy—was itself fleeing and searching. With Verlaine in the back of my mind, I sketched out a kind of poem, in which the ever-rolling sea also played its part’.²⁹⁹ Bonnefoy never finished the poem, a failure of sorts. Twelve years later he destroyed the fragment ‘to give life to [his] translation’,³⁰⁰ eventually reincarnating it again and again as the image of a faltering boat in various iterations recurred in his poetry. (In ‘The Scattered, the Indivisible’, the final poem of *In the Lure of the Threshold*, a specific reference to a limping boat is repeated: ‘*L’énigme, le soleil rêvé, la barque rouge/ Passe, boitant sa mort.*’ ‘The enigma, the dreamt sun, the red boat/Passes, limping its death.’³⁰¹) In a very physical, embodied way, it seems to me, Bonnefoy moves through a process of kenosis, the truest and most glorious kind of translation, from divine to human form, ‘the descent of that into life which continues to grant possibility and hope’.³⁰²

Bonnefoy’s art of translation is thus religious in both its language and action. Such is translation as transfiguration. As Frank Burch Brown suggests, we come to know transfiguratively when our knowing is strikingly more and different from what we would ordinarily understand.³⁰³ Because of our finitude (a state well recognized and illuminated in the work of Bonnefoy), Brown notes, ‘every discovery of some essential truth concerning ourselves or the realities to which we are inherently related is just that—a discovery [. . .] a transformation of our prior understanding.’³⁰⁴ With Bonnefoy’s translations, the original is taken apart and changed, given new life out of disintegration and renewal undergone by the translator, who in the process reveals greater truths in the poem and in himself. What allows this to happen is the path taken to get there, one that accepts human limitation and allows for failure, which then encourages a listening and unfolding, and does not impose itself upon the text. As David Jasper beautifully puts it, in his 1993 essay ‘“*La Même Voix, Toujours*”: Yves Bonnefoy and Translation’, the process is one of ‘eschewing imposition for the deconstructed shared existence which is the deeply religious experience of

²⁹⁸ Bonnefoy, ‘Translating Poetry’, 141.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Bonnefoy, *Poems: 1959-1975*, 147.

³⁰² Jasper, ‘La Même Voix, Toujours’, 111.

³⁰³ Frank Burch Brown, *Transfiguration: Poetic Metaphor and the Languages of Religious Belief* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 166.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

translation and its hope of salvation, its fragility of goodness.³⁰⁵ What deeply matters in his experience of translating Yeats, Bonnefoy writes, is that ‘the relationship between what was there feeling its way and my concern with the poetry of Yeats became the most important, the true development. It was the English-speaking poet who explained me to myself, and my personal experience that imposed the translation upon me. It is in the sympathy of destiny for destiny.’³⁰⁶ As is true for all the companion poets in various ways, Bonnefoy insists that ‘at its most intense, reading is empathy, shared existence’³⁰⁷ (and translation is reading at its most intense), and that the work we read must compel us.³⁰⁸ In reading, it is the only thing worth following.³⁰⁹

Art

And in our possessions, our intentions, our practices, what a sudden feeling of thinness!³¹⁰

Bonnefoy, in his essay ‘Giacometti’s Stranger’, compares this feeling of thinness to what he sees when he looks at the work of his friend, the artist Alberto Giacometti.³¹¹ He is able to impart the same feeling to the reader of this piece, a reflection, in part, on the death of his friend and on the experience of a universal absence through a particular one. For our purposes, it is especially significant that he opens with a scene at a threshold to a sacred space, the doorway of a chapel in the Swiss Alps. A woman is there, ‘carrying flowers soon to be thrown into the opened earth’.³¹² Immediately we realise someone has died, and the opened earth is perhaps made as holy if not more so than the interior of the chapel. The woman pauses, glances at the surrounding mountain peaks, and says, ‘Are they not like knives?’³¹³ The images of thinness, blades, and a strange beauty are set forth in the opening paragraph.

³⁰⁵ Jasper, ‘La Même Voix, Toujours’, 112.

³⁰⁶ Bonnefoy, ‘Translating Poetry’, 141.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 138.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 142.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Yves Bonnefoy, ‘Giacometti’s Stranger’, trans. John T. Naughton, in *The Lure and the Truth of Painting: Selected Essays on Art*, ed. Richard Stamelman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 117.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid., 115.

³¹³ Ibid.

The reader is made uneasy, yet also attracted, neither completely in the text, nor outside it. There are more thresholds than the one of chapel entrance: the one between life and death, another between earth and sky, an intersection ('intersect' from the Latin *intersecare*, from *inter* (between) + *secare* (to cut))³¹⁴ sharply delineated by the participants' geography. The poet and the unnamed woman are surrounded by mountain peaks, pressing in upon them, in 'dazzling, cold light'.³¹⁵ The vertical axis is from under the ground to the heavens, the horizontal is perhaps that sky where Hölderlin suggests humans find their spiritual measure,³¹⁶ God's true dwelling place, as we are ironically reminded in Solomon's dedication to the temple. '*O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.*' (1 Kings 8:27-30) We are reminded too of the transfiguration of Jesus, by the language and the landscape. '*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.*' (Mark 9:2-3)

I feel a certain affinity with Peter in the scene of the transfiguration, with the way he passionately and clumsily (Is it terror, or, rather, awe, that causes the clumsiness?) says to his teacher, 'let us make three dwellings' (Mark 9:5), the word for dwelling the same as that in the prologue of John ('And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us', literally 'pitched his tent/tabernacle', a reference to the ark of the covenant made for God so that God might dwell among his people in their desert wanderings of Exodus.³¹⁷). He misses the double ironies of wanting to give Moses and Elijah tents (Hadn't they had enough of tent dwelling when they were on earth?) and of desiring permanence in the impermanence of tents.³¹⁸ And with how he stumbles out of the cloud, down the mountain, not seeing anew even after the manifestation of the divine. Mark makes the disciples so dense in their inability to understand Jesus, tempting the reader to feel superior because,

³¹⁴ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition, s.v. 'intersect'.

³¹⁵ Bonnefoy, 'Giacometti's Stranger', 115.

³¹⁶ Recall the opening poem, Hölderlin's 'In Lovely Blueness...', 'Is God unknown? Is he manifest like the sky? I'd sooner believe the latter. It's the measure of man. Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth.'

³¹⁷ Exodus 25; n. on John 1:14, *New American Bible*, St. Joseph Ed. (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1992); Marva Dawn, *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 43.

³¹⁸ That Peter suggested the tents because he wanted to hold on to the experience and stay on the mountain is the most common interpretation. But it doesn't answer how his suggestion of temporary shelters would result in permanence. See, for instance, Dorothy A. Lee, *Transfiguration*, New Century Theology (London: Continuum, 2004), 20. Unless, as I've suggested, it is another case of misunderstanding, but it seems unlikely that Peter would make that kind of mistake. Why tents? Why three tents and not six? Or one? It would be interesting to read this passage with an opposite sense, as if Peter were asking the One he followed whether we should live as if in tents, provisionally, ready always to pull up stakes and move on towards wherever we are called to go.

after all, *we know*. Or at least we like to think we do. ‘*They looked around and all they saw was Jesus*’ (Mark 9:8) What to make of that line? The gift half understood? Graham Ward stresses the displacement of Christ’s body in the transfiguration. He seems positively relieved that the physical body is no longer an obstacle to desire, no need, after all, to ‘flounder on questions of sexuality’.³¹⁹ But maybe that’s what really mattered, that they could come down off that mountain after being overwhelmed by the divine and still see Jesus as he had been to them all along, as teacher, friend, man. What if what changes in them is that they are given the ability to make the descent as well as the ascent? They see Jesus embodied, alive, human, just like them, except for his divine gift of having revealed to them the divine gift they already carried within themselves. As Dorothy Lee puts it, ‘In the end, it is as much about their transfiguration, the luminous glory shining in the ordinariness of their flesh, as it is about Jesus’ transformation.’³²⁰ Paul comes to mind here, naturally, as foreigner and pilgrim, courageously crossing borders, geographical and otherwise, erasing boundaries and creating new spaces. In his first letter to the incorrigible Corinthians, he writes, ‘Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven,’ (1 Cor 15:49) and ‘we will be changed’ (1 Cor 15:52), which he repeats several times, emphatically, perhaps ecstatically.

An emphasis on interior change, descent and non-recognition is perhaps more in line with Bonnefoy’s writing than one on ascent and divine glory (In *The Lure of the Threshold*, for instance, Bonnefoy writes, ‘*L’éternité descend/Dans la terre nue/Et soulève le sens/Comme une bêche.*’ ‘Eternity descends/Into the bare earth/And brings up meaning/Like a spade.’³²¹) In his essay, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, he speaks of such a moment as the transfiguration, where something has happened of great depth and gravity; we were offered a gift, but ‘were unable to grasp it’.³²² He tells the story of Lancelot, ‘who, having come to a closed chapel and fallen asleep on its threshold, suddenly sees it lit up by a great fire, sees the Grail issue from its gates and hears a knight cry out, as he suddenly emerges from the darkness: “*Ha, guéri suis!* I am cured!”—while he himself remains sunk in the lethargy of his fatal sleep, remote from God.’³²³ The failure is

³¹⁹ Graham Ward, ‘Bodies: The displaced body of Jesus Christ’, in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 166 [163-181].

³²⁰ Lee, *Transfiguration*, 2.

³²¹ Bonnefoy, ‘In the Lure of the Threshold’, in *Poems 1959-1975*, 121.

³²² Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, 112.

³²³ *Ibid.*

nevertheless a moment of transfiguration. ‘And yet, in spite of this missed opportunity, *we are no longer the same*, we are no longer so poor, some hope remains.’³²⁴

Perhaps it is too much to suggest that we are no longer the same because of imperfection and enough to say there is a proximity. And yet, it would seem that Bonnefoy and Giacometti experienced such transfigurative moments born out of lack. In his Giacometti essay, Bonnefoy suggests a kind of interior divine manifestation through an encounter not with a divinity but with a darker entity, which he refers to as the Stranger, who calls the self into question. He is haunted by a memory of his encounter with this negation³²⁵. As a child he would walk home from fetching milk at a farm in the evenings. After a dark bend in the road (‘It was a long childhood by the dark wall’, he writes in a poem in *Pierre Écrite* (*Written Stone*),³²⁶ he would come out suddenly by a new house, all lit up. One night he sees through a window of the house, as if a shadow on a white wall, a silhouette of a man bending over. The poet is forever changed by this simple incident, transfigured, for his life has new significance. The man is for him the Stranger, the knight of darkness who marks the loss of his childhood, reduces his vision of the world from colour to black and white, replaces the symbol with object—‘opaque and frozen [. . .] impenetrable and *strange*’—a stage on the road to strangeness. ‘What was is no longer,’ Bonnefoy writes.³²⁷

Bonnefoy seems to suggest that his friend’s work was an intense attempt to restore what was no longer, the essential presence of a thing, to move from object, in the modern sense, to symbol. The artist and his art had an air of impermanence about them. Giacometti, Bonnefoy writes, ‘was not at all concerned with material possessions; in life he turned away from experiences of *having* and towards those of *being* with the same inevitable rapidity as in his work as a sculptor.’³²⁸ The artist, it seems, did not care very well for himself, at least in a material sense. In the studio, on café counters, were stale hardboiled eggs, cognac, coffee, his daily fare. A book and other objects, undescribed by the poet, lay about on a torn sofa or on the edges of tables. They seemed ‘to have lost their usefulness,’ Bonnefoy writes, ‘since the advent of an obscure event . . . in which time ceased to

³²⁴ Ibid., emphasis mine.

³²⁵ Bonnefoy, ‘Giacometti’s Stranger’, 117.

³²⁶ Bonnefoy, ‘A Stone’, *Words in Stone* (*Pierre écrite*), trans. Susanna Lang (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 59.

³²⁷ Bonnefoy, ‘Giacometti’s Stranger’, 120

³²⁸ Ibid., 122.

exist.³²⁹ It strikes the poet that the artist inhabited a still life, yet Giacometti was tirelessly active. The artist believed himself and his art a great failure and would flee his studio to wander the streets of Paris all night, ‘brought back’ to the clay each dawn, Bonnefoy relates, stubbornly sculpting his strange elongated figures until they were thin as knife blades, nothing more left to cut unless he were to destroy them, which sometimes he did. Bonnefoy remarks that the museums saved Giacometti from ‘the despair of endless rebeginnings’ by providing a place for him to abandon his ‘never-to-be-finished’ statues.³³⁰

Bonnefoy’s essay is also a reflection on his friend’s death, an absence he mourns and perhaps tries to come to terms with through memory and writing. He notes that if the Stranger’s view is of an empty and unintelligible world, it is redemptive to remember that the Stranger is also nothing. To dispel this spectre, he writes, one only needs a ‘simple, interiorized relation with a chosen thing: the felicitous intimacy with it and thus with fate’.³³¹ Surprisingly, it was painting and not sculpture that was restorative for Giacometti. As Bonnefoy puts it, painting helped his friend learn to see and brought him to a ‘primal faith in the world [that] suddenly strengthened by a touching memory, can chase the Stranger away’.³³² Bonnefoy too is taught to see and given faith through his love of painters and their art. In chapter five, I will present him in the role of poet as painter.

Poetry

For a moment, the usual reading of the world, that network of figures which keeps Presence hidden, is neutralized, torn open; we stand before each thing as

³²⁹ Ibid., 121.

³³⁰ Ibid., 122; Giacometti’s studio has been a source of fascination for several other writers, including Jean Genet (‘The Studio of Alberto Giacometti’, in *The Selected Writings of Jean Genet*, ed. Edmund White [Hopewell, N.J.: The Ecco Press, 1993]), whose description of the studio reminds me of Bonnefoy’s poetry at its best—all that is false stripped away to what is real. ‘And the whole studio vibrates and lives. [. . .] This ground-floor studio, moreover, is about to collapse from one moment to the next. All the wood is worm-eaten, there is nothing but gray dust, the statues are made of plaster with the string, oakum, pieces of wire showing through, the canvases, painted gray, have long since lost that peacefulness they had at the art-supply store, here everything is spotted and broken-down, everything is precarious and about to collapse, everything is tending to dissolve, everything drifts: now, all this is somehow apprehended, in an absolute reality. When I have left the studio, when I am out in the street, it is then that nothing of what is around me is real anymore. Shall I say it? In this studio, a man is slowly dying, consuming himself, and before our eyes turning himself into goddesses.’ (327-328) When Giacometti was asked by friends why he never sought a better residence, even after his art began to sell, he replied, ‘Since one has got to die, one’s dwelling can only be indifferent, provisional.’ (Bonnefoy, *Alberto Giacometti: A Biography of his Work*, trans. Jean Stewart [Paris: Flammarion, 1991], 17.)

³³¹ Bonnefoy, ‘Giacometti’s Stranger’, 123.

³³² Ibid., 126.

though before the entire universe, in an absolute that seems to welcome us.
And this is why we write poems.³³³

Bonnefoy's answer to the question 'why poetry?' resonates with the transfiguration, a world torn open to reveal an absolute that seems to welcome us. Graham Ward writes of transfigurations as incarnations of divine beauty and goodness, 'disclosures [that] establish economies of desire within which we are invited if not incited to participate'.³³⁴ This definition of transfigurations is also a fitting one for the poems of Bonnefoy, particularly the ones haunted by his beloved house in Valsaintes, in Haute Provence, an influence felt for more than two decades. What I should like to do here is to present a kind of threshold into these poems that invite, and perhaps even incite, us to participate in them, to inhabit them. I will do this by sketching an introduction, or invitation, to the house, focusing on Bonnefoy's failure both to keep the physical house and to let go of the one in his memory and dreams, failures that are transfigured through the writing of the poems.

The house begins to make its presence known in Bonnefoy's third collection of poetry, *Pierre écrite*, which he was writing at least partly while staying at Valsaintes, a refuge from the busyness and noise of Paris. As Emily Grosholz notes, Bonnefoy begins writing the Valsaintes poems in the house, but its presence at first, in the poems of *Pierre écrite* (1965), is muted, for 'it was the condition for the possibility of their existence, not their theme.'³³⁵ As Valsaintes becomes less the idyllic space the Bonnefoys desired and strived to create, the house takes on a greater role, and, in a sense, begins to write the poems. In a letter to Grosholz, Bonnefoy writes that the book articulates 'the worry created by the

³³³ Bonnefoy, 'Interview with Yves Bonnefoy', interview by John Naughton, in *In the Shadow's Light (Ce qui fut sans lumière)*, trans. John Naughton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1987]), 163.

³³⁴ Graham Ward, 'Bodies: The displaced body of Jesus Christ', 166.

³³⁵ Emily Grosholz, 'The Valsaintes Poems of Yves Bonnefoy', *L'Esprit Créateur* 36 (Fall 1996): 53. While I have found Grosholz extremely helpful in providing details about the actual house and the Bonnefoys' experience of and love for it, the only scholar I know of who has done so, my concern is different. She seeks to provide concrete particularities to Anglo-American readers to ease their way into Bonnefoy's work, which is, as Sarah Lawall puts it, 'difficult poetry in simple language. Individual images and scenes are beautiful in themselves, individual statements appear simple and clear; yet the total effect is often paradoxical, or tantalizingly open-ended.' [Introduction to *Pierre écrite*, xii.] My interest in the house is how it performs as metaphor, allowing the poet to confront illusions of perfection and tranquillity and to suggest for us alternative textual spaces that may be considered sacred. Though I look at Bonnefoy's relationship to the house in reality, my interest is not so much his experience in the house as much as how that experience is translated, transfigured, through his memories into his poetics. Though the house is so much a presence in his poetry, Bonnefoy himself warns against emphasizing a poet's life when considering his poetry. 'It matters little, in fact, what a man's life was. It is not necessary to know about it in order to grasp the sense of what he has accomplished. All the more so in that his life grows simpler the moment his work touches greatness. The vocation of creativity has very little need of the accidents of destiny.' As David Jasper points out, despite Bonnefoy's poems being 'saturated with his own life', our attention in his poetry is turned 'away from the self to the deeply religious themes of hope and salvation and the tactile sense of *incarnation*' ('*La Même Voix, Toujours*', 106).

place, which became for me a metaphor of all desire, of all illusion, of all reflection, of all attempts at lucidity, of wisdom' ('*le souci créé par le lieu, devenu pour moi métaphore de tout désir, de toute illusion, de toute réflexion, de tout essai de lucidité, de sagesse*').³³⁶ The poet's desire for permanence is frustrated; he realises that 'protective structures prove illusory'.³³⁷ (In 'The Earth', in *The Lure of the Threshold*, Bonnefoy writes, 'And all attachment/Smoke'.³³⁸) Yet he also sees gift in this desolation because the impermanence grants him movement and becoming.³³⁹ Still, long after he believes he ought to have let the house go, he is dreaming of it, writing of it. The house inhabits him.³⁴⁰

What fosters this is the poet's desire for home, something akin to what Michel de Certeau refers to when he speaks of the articulation of a desire of the mystics of the 17th century, a nostalgia, a homesickness for the 'One who is no longer to be found'.³⁴¹ Bonnefoy is ultimately concerned with 'a desire for being, instead of for knowing' that begins with the memory of moments of 'plenitude' and starts the struggle between this brief 'consciousness of being-in-the-world and the goals of conceptual thought'.³⁴² These moments are the sound and music of words, 'fragments of sensory reality', which for him, signal a 'raw, undivided, unvanquished reality lying beyond language'.³⁴³ The 'music', or, poetry, is a call to the poet to respond, dislocating the assured 'self' and encouraging a positive response of awareness of a unity that is shared.³⁴⁴ In this space of consciousness is created 'a common place and time, where the questioning of the ways of existence replaces the elaboration of abstract knowledge'.³⁴⁵ This desire and consciousness is both poetic and religious. As is true of all the companions, this is a move away from 'the conceptual use of things to the apprehension of their totality, their infiniteness, in an experience where they will have value as occasions for reflecting on life—as *symbols*. The world is once again

³³⁶ Grosholz, 'The *Valsaintes* Poems', 53.

³³⁷ Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, 15.

³³⁸ Bonnefoy, 'The Earth', in *Poems: 1959-1975: The Lure of the Threshold*, 117.

³³⁹ Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, 6.

³⁴⁰ Grosholz, 'The *Valsaintes* Poems', 53.

³⁴¹ Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 2.

³⁴² Bonnefoy, preface to *The Lure and the Truth of Painting*, xv.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, xiv.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

“inhabited,” as Hölderlin demanded it be.³⁴⁶ This interaction between struggle, desire and memory constitute Bonnefoy’s poetics.³⁴⁷

This desire for a lost object from the past combined with those brief glimpses of eternal moments shift our understanding of time and space. In other words, we are transformed. Grosholz describes the eventual effect of Bonnefoy’s *Valsaintes* poems as time opening up sideways, damming up, turning into space.³⁴⁸ Bonnefoy, writing about the act of poetry, insists on the possibility of ‘presence’ even when existing on the edge of ‘nothingness’, without faith, myth, or formula. In one moment of eternity, what has been lost is restored, and ‘we have stepped out of space, we have slipped out of time’.³⁴⁹ What was it about *Valsaintes* that helped Bonnefoy shift space and time?

In an interview with John Naughton, a long-time translator and interpreter of the poet’s work, Bonnefoy describes how he and his wife happened by chance upon the *Valsaintes* house in a rainstorm in 1963. They had been searching for a house in the area but had found none until that day when ‘at the end of a road that wasn’t on the map [. . .] long walls suddenly appeared with low, vaulted doors, that disappeared on all sides beneath the heavy downpour.’³⁵⁰ Inside, they discovered a labyrinth of rooms, which held an unlikely combination of piles of hay and paintings. They realized they were in a nave, then a chancel, then chapels, in what was once a monastery that had been converted to a farm after the Revolution.³⁵¹

Here there is an association with the transfiguration as a meeting place, an intersection, of the human and the divine, one so deeply in relationship with another that the two are inseparable. The Gospel of John comes to mind and its author’s notion of ‘abiding’: ‘You know [the Father], because he abides with you, and he will be in you.’ (John 14:17) ‘Abide in me as I abide in you.’ (John 15:4) So often the author of John writes of sight and recognition, which one receives only through this divine abiding.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Grosholz, ‘The *Valsaintes* Poems’, 57.

³⁴⁹ Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, 112.

³⁵⁰ Bonnefoy, ‘Interview’, *In the Shadow’s Light*, 165.

³⁵¹ Ibid.; Grosholz, ‘The *Valsaintes* Poems’, 52.

Perhaps this sense of abiding is what Bonnefoy experiences at Valsaintes, which in turn gives him a new, more intense, way of seeing and knowing. In that same interview, he speaks of his attraction to the place being its incarnational aspect. ‘There is no doubt that the house of Valsaintes had such a powerful attraction for me because, being at one and the same time a church and a granary—a monastery and a place where sheep and goats still made their home—it seemed to suggest a fusion of those things that speak of the divine and forms of daily existence, a fusion adding resonance and intensity to the surrounding countryside, which, in those days, was still completely given over to the spell of the eternal.’³⁵²

The place was half in ruins and as a result the distinctions between inside and outside were often erased. When the Bonnefoys first lived in the house, the situation was very basic, with crumbling walls, broken windows, and no electricity. In such conditions, the aspects of life outdoors we may have become immune to in modern life reassert themselves, as is hinted at in the poem ‘The Light of Evening’:

Evening.
These birds, indefinite; their voices,
Biting; and the light.
The hand which moved on the bare flank.

We have not moved in a long time.
We speak softly.
And time lies in pools of color around us.³⁵³

The arrival and departure of sunlight become much more noticeable (‘You too love the moment when the light of lamps/Fades and dreams into daylight.’³⁵⁴), those hinges of the day marked by canonical hours, once prayed by the monks of the monastery. Little is known of the history of the place, called abbaye de Boulinette by villagers and since restored as a small tourist attraction, beyond that it was Cistercian, probably a place of retreat for monks from a larger monastery.³⁵⁵ This in itself is enough for us to see how fitting it was for Bonnefoy to fall in love with the place. In the 11th century the Cistercians, responding to what they saw as corruption among the Benedictines, founded a

³⁵² Bonnefoy, ‘Interview’, in *In the Shadow’s Light*, 166.

³⁵³ Bonnefoy, ‘The Light of Evening’, *Pierre écrite*, (Lang translation), 91.

³⁵⁴ Bonnefoy, ‘The Tree, the Lamp’, *Poems: 1959-1975: Pierre écrite*, 35.

³⁵⁵ See the website for the restored abbey at <http://www.valsaintes.org/abbaye/en/home-page.php?lang=EN> (accessed 21 March 2013); Grosholz, ‘The Valsaintes Poems’, 52.

new order.³⁵⁶ Their desire for simplicity, a constant concern of Bonnefoy's,³⁵⁷ can be seen in the designs of their churches. Like the poems of Bonnefoy, particularly the earlier ones, these spaces are spare yet full of meaning that arises not so much from the objects they hold as from the action that takes place within them.³⁵⁸

Again, I find Certeau's distinction between place and space that I referred to in the previous chapter helpful, for it is exactly the gift of Bonnefoy to move us from 'place' to 'space' that may most effect understandings that are truly transfigurative, that is, ones that are definitively *different* and *more*.

Space, as opposed to place, is determined 'through *operations* which, when they are attributed to a stone, tree, or human being, specify "spaces" by the actions of historical *subjects* (a movement always seems to condition the production of a space and to associate it with a history). Between these two determinations, there are passages back and forth, such as [. . .] the awakening of inert objects (a table, a forest, a person that plays a certain role in the environment) which, emerging from their stability, transform the place where they lay motionless into the foreignness of their own space.'³⁵⁹

Such a shift in understanding from the stability of place to a more fluid one of space has radical implications for considerations of Church. Liturgical action displaces sacred object in emphasis of worship, a notion articulated by the German Catholic architect Rudolf Schwarz. As Richard Kieckhefer notes, referring to Schwarz and the idea of 'holy emptiness': 'It is perhaps no coincidence that many of the most successful modern churches are those of monastic and other nonparochial religious communities: not only are the planners free from pressure from parish members but, more important, they can cultivate a symbolic minimalism with assurance that those in the community will bring a richness of associations to the liturgy independent of the liturgical environment.'³⁶⁰ Such a church is one that can be located anywhere, its boundaries delineated by the prayers spoken and sung, and the actions performed by the worshipping community. An emphasis

³⁵⁶ Marie Gildas, 'Cistercians', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908). Available online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03780c.htm>; accessed 21 March 2013.

³⁵⁷ As Sarah Lawall notes in her introduction to *Words in Stone* (*Pierre écrite*), xii (Lang translation), 'Simplicity is a word that recurs often in Bonnefoy's work, and it implies not superficiality but a basic rightness, a correspondence with *things as they are*.'

³⁵⁸ Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 273.

³⁵⁹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 118.

³⁶⁰ Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 273; See also David Jasper, 'The Sacred Community and the Space of Architecture', in *The Sacred Community: Art, Sacrament, and the People of God* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2012).

on actions rather than objects also reminds us that ‘sacraments belong to the order of “doing”; they are not “ideas”’.³⁶¹

Through the awakening of objects and richness of association, Bonnefoy creates a textual sacred space in his poetry that allows for a kind of liturgical experience, the same creative actions he takes in his translations, as I’ve suggested. Recognizing the dangers inherent in language and over attention to form, he disrupts expectations, providing associations from his own experience that are taken up by the reader and transformed in the action of reading. The action and disruption that occurs in the reception of the poems repudiate any inclinations toward passivity in reading or living.

I have wandered seemingly far from my intent to explore the ways failure is transfigured in the Valsaintes poems and to bring us at least to the threshold of that textual house. But my wandering will hopefully bear fruit, taking us down unexpected paths that unfold in unpredictable directions in the upcoming chapters, which was also my intention, at least in this intersection. The path shifted direction, strangely, towards beginning explorations into transfiguration, space, and habitation. The transfigurations that happen in Bonnefoy’s poetry are perhaps stimulated by the way in which the poet and his wife inhabited their house, which for them was a refuge and retreat, as it was for the monks who lived there before them. Bonnefoy is not unlike a humanist Bernard of Clairvaux, who was instrumental in the flourishing of the Cistercians. Both have the desire to reconcile the sacred and the profane, to resist the destructive duality of what is truly only one world, sacred *and* profane, if one only learns how to look.³⁶²

Readings: a poetic house church

In the beginning, I had made the place the material of a great dream, the dream of being able to live there, simply, in its atemporality and quiet transparency; I had spoken of it and loved it with the words of this dream.³⁶³

i. *Pierre écrite/Written Stone: La lumière, changée/The Same Light Changed*

We no longer see each other in the same light;
We no longer have the same eyes, the same hands.

³⁶¹ Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 85.

³⁶² Cf. Society of Jesus 35th General Congregation, Winter 2008, Decree 2, No. 10; available online from www.sjweb.info/35/documents/decrees.pdf; accessed 10 March 2013: ‘For ultimately, there is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look.’

³⁶³ Bonnefoy, interview, in *In the Shadow’s Light*, 163.

The tree is closer and the river's voice more lively;
Our steps sink deeper, among the dead.

God who is not, put your hand on our shoulder
And rough-cast our bodies from the weight of your return.
Still blend our souls with these stars,
Woods, these bird-cries, shadows, these days.

Renounce yourself in us, as a fruit tears itself apart;
Dissolve us in you. Unfold for us
The mysterious sense of what is only simple,
Or what would have fallen without fire,
Had words been without love.³⁶⁴

I have said that Bonnefoy's personal life would not and should not be an overriding concern for reading him, and it isn't. And yet, knowing that the poet was in love with his young wife, that they would conceive their daughter while they still had the house, affects the impression the poem makes, particularly the first stanza. Surely, 'we' are lovers, though this might be perceived even without any knowledge of the poet's life situation, for what most causes such a shift in seeing, such intensification of the senses, but love for another? Light and sound are brighter, sharper, everything seems more alive when one is in love. Away from the city, without a fixed schedule, in conditions Grosholz describes as 'a bit like camping out',³⁶⁵ I imagine the couple experienced the atemporality and quiet transparency Bonnefoy desired, which are also the conditions of a spiritual retreat.

As Grosholz suggests, during the writing of *Pierre écrite* perhaps the conditions for writing the poem, a spiritual exercise, were for the poet atemporal and quietly transparent, but the resulting creation is neither. Neither is it, or love, for that matter, all sweetness and light, though on my first reading, it was that I saw and not what is strange and dark in the poem. The poet does not shy away from the real, from death. Footfall sinking into the dead reminds me of the monks who are no longer there, the dead and dying Church, ruined monastery as evocation of the crumbling edifices of Roman Church and Christian theology. Is that a heavy-handed response? Perhaps. Am I seeing what I wanted to see instead of recalling Cixous's sense of unfolding, of reading poetically, as Bonnefoy suggests, seeing by listening to the sound of the words so as not to get caught up by the need to know what the poem means. *We no longer see each other in the same light*. A transfiguration. Time and space shifts, but we are still in this world, though it is a world into which God enters, an incarnational world. The exterior melds with the interior, the

³⁶⁴ Bonnefoy, 'The Same Light, Changed' (*La Lumière, Changée*), *Pierre écrit* (Lang translation), 99.

³⁶⁵ Grosholz, 'The *Valsaintes* Poems', 55.

outdoors is indoors, the new way of seeing extends from the lover to the world and to God, God who is not. How is it that the God who is not is the one most present? No, I misread. It is not that God enters, but that the plea is made by the poet for an intimate encounter with the divine. Intimate because the address is familiar: '*Dieu qui n'es pas, pose ta main sur notre épaule*'.³⁶⁶ Intimate because the lovers are one, asking to be dissolved into the divine, 'issuing a great cry of erotic longing for the beloved that is also an unfulfilled search', as David Jasper writes about another love poem, the Song of Songs.³⁶⁷ It is a love poem, addressed to an absent God, in the hope of divine union.

Am I recognizing this text? It does not seem so. It invites; I resist. Cixous writes, in images apposite to this discussion, that when a reader feels such resistance, it is because 'they cannot stand to have the stranger right here. If you haven't as a reader burned your house down, if you are still at home, then you don't want to go abroad.'³⁶⁸ This violent image may prove fruitful for my further reading to go alongside, depending on the textual circumstance, the letting go into Bachelard's oneiric house of origin and warmth. To overcome fear in reading. When I can stand the stranger, the transfiguration arises again, in this poem's meeting and melding of the human and the divine. Bonnefoy expresses a similar kind of strangeness and ambiguity as the transfiguration: the intense goodness of it, the mixing of divine and human, something supernal in the light, the dissolution of boundaries. One shoulder for two people who have become one. 'Dissolve us in you. Unfold for us/The mysterious sense...' Stephen Moore, referring to Mark, writes, 'Inside/outside: the wall that separates the two is as thin and fragile as a slash mark.'³⁶⁹ Now we are back to Bachelard's less pleasant inside/outside interactions and the effacing of boundaries.

Something else Peter said on the mountain comes to mind, in his confusion, right before he suggests putting up tents. 'Rabbi', he says to his teacher, 'it is good for us to be here.' (Mark 9:5) Such an odd, underwhelming statement, considering the circumstances. His teacher's divine identity has been opened up to Peter, and that's all he can say? Mark provides a comment on Peter's sayings that may be meant as clarification but is mainly puzzling. Peter 'did not know what to say, for they were terrified.' (Mark 9:6) Is he simply

³⁶⁶ Bonnefoy, 'The Same Light, Changed' (*La Lumière, Changée*), *Pierre écrit* (Lang translation), 99.

³⁶⁷ Jasper, *The Sacred Body*, 37.

³⁶⁸ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 81.

³⁶⁹ Stephen Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 23.

stammering then? Or maybe his responses come from a desire to restore some familiarity to the scene. By calling Jesus ‘Rabbi’ and not ‘Messiah’, Peter perhaps expresses a need for surety of the most basic kind, the assurance that his friend is human.

Perhaps a desire for familiarity and comfort like Peter’s coloured my reading. This desire is a recurring one for Bonnefoy in both his life and his work. For him, ‘the desire for habitation, for centrality, for place is [...] a permanent one which [he] experiences intensely and never seeks to deny. In his vision, however, this desire is forever frustrated, and protective structures prove illusory or ephemeral in order to assure movement and becoming.’³⁷⁰ He is as committed to greeting the ‘stranger’ and going abroad as Cixous, who writes of reading that transports, ‘with which we go off on a voyage, not knowing where’.³⁷¹

At first reading of this poem, I felt kept in-between, neither in, nor out of the text, on the threshold, about to enter, yet uncomfortable doing so, a similar response as that to the essay on Giacometti: an uneasy attraction, and also that resistance. But the discomfort this time felt slightly different, the same unearthly sense I’d known, for instance, hearing a screech owl scream one urban night or being caught in a summer sunlit rainstorm that seemed to electrify every drop that hit the pavement. Something unexpected occurred, an unbelonging.

Certeau hits it when he writes of the animation of inert objects transforming their familiar place into strange space. The feeling the poem evokes is a sense of the uncanny, that which is unfamiliar, or as Freud put it, referring to the work of Eric Jentsch, ‘something one does not know one’s way about in’.³⁷² The poem and the transfiguration are perfect instances of the feeling of the uncanny, which Freud defined, in part, as ‘that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.’³⁷³ The German word for uncanny is especially apt in this exploration: *unheimlich*, ‘un-home-like’, the opposite of *heimlich*, ‘belonging to a house’. Freud examines the word’s etymology and discovers that the word itself is ambiguous, for it means both ‘what is familiar and agreeable’ and ‘what is concealed and kept out of sight’.³⁷⁴ This definition goes towards explaining both Peter’s

³⁷⁰ Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, 15.

³⁷¹ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 8.

³⁷² Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003 [1899]), 132.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 623.

response to the uncanny transformation of his friend and my response to Bonnefoy's poem. It is not enough to say *unheimlich* is the opposite of *heimlich*, that it is something unfamiliar that causes fear. It is both familiar and unfamiliar in a way that unsettles and disturbs, especially regarding a confusion of inanimate things and animate things such as trees that move, rivers that speak, dead that come closer, gods who touch and sculpt lovers. Heidegger comes to the foreground here because one of his gifts was to make 'thing' into a verb,³⁷⁵ which Bonnefoy, the poet, does constantly, for 'the things we know are turned inside out'.³⁷⁶ We are no longer home nor comfortable with ourselves. Bachelard's oneiric home of warmth and protection seems already quite a distance away.

ii. *Dans le leurre du seuil/The Lure of the Threshold: La terre/The Earth* (excerpts)

...to sacrifice my desire, to love without having.³⁷⁷

I cry, Look,
Light
Was living so near us! Its store of water
Is here, still transfigured. Wood
Is here in the shed. Here is some fruit set
To dry in the vibrations of the dawn sky.

Nothing has changed,
These are the same places and the same things,
Almost the same words, but see,
In you, in me, the undivided
And the invisible come together.

And she! Is it not
She who smiles there ('I the light,
Yes, I consent') in the certainty of the threshold,
Bending down, guiding the steps
Of what looks like a child-sun over the dark water.

...

Flame
Our last-year's room, mysterious
As the prow of a passing ship.

Flame the glass
On the table in the deserted kitchen
At V.
In the rubble.

³⁷⁵ Heidegger, 'The Thing'.

³⁷⁶ Lang, 'Translator's Note', in *Pierre écrite*, xix.

³⁷⁷ Bonnefoy, interview, in *In the Shadow's Light*, 164.

Flame, from room to room,
The plaster,
All indifference, in the daylight.

Flame the bulb
Where God was not
Above the stable door.
Flame
The vine of lightning, there,
In the stamping of dreaming beasts.
Flame the stone
Where the dream's knife has worked so much.

Flame,
In the peace of the flame,
The sacrificial lamb kept safe.³⁷⁸

Reading 'The Same Light Changed', I mistook Bonnefoy's expression of desire for something that has already happened. A meeting of god and human hasn't taken place, only the desire and request for it. The expression of desire for a greater intimacy with God is prayer, which opens up possibilities, extends horizons. (Another companion, Ignatius, also knows the value of making the familiar unfamiliar in relation to prayer through the imaginative, potentially poetic inhabiting of Gospel passages.) Yet, as Bonnefoy writes, 'in this time when grand narratives have collapsed', when 'each turns to seek his own meaning',³⁷⁹ I wonder, to whom is that prayer and longing directed?

I was moved by this question when I heard it posed by Gianni Vattimo at a conference by way of a personal anecdote.³⁸⁰ He was in a car driven by his nephew, who was playing music on the radio. Vattimo said he took out his rosary and began to pray, like his old auntie used to do when he would drive her places. He felt the desire to pray, did it automatically, but no longer had the certainty of his youth that there was a God to pray to. Then to whom was he praying? What was this desire without an object? Vattimo went on to speak of the end of metaphysics, thoroughly unnerving his audience, which consisted of many Jesuits and more conventional thinkers, which then unnerved him. Though I did not quite see it at the time, the strong responses on both sides were indicative of the radical nature of what had been expressed so vividly in the philosopher's simple story. He was

³⁷⁸ Bonnefoy, 'The Earth', 117.

³⁷⁹ Yves Bonnefoy, 'On the Translation of Form in Poetry', in *World Literature Today* 53, no. 3, An Homage to French Poet Yves Bonnefoy (Summer 1979), 374-379 (377).

³⁸⁰ Gianni Vattimo, 'Poetry as Prayer' (paper presented at 'The Power of the Word: Poetry, Theology and Life' conference, Heythrop College, London, 18 June 2011).

making a radical claim that probably threatened much of what Jesuits had believed and taught at their school for generations. The purpose of Vattimo's tale was not to illustrate a personal loss of faith, as might be at first presumed, nor even to say that such a faith was no longer possible, even if both were true, but rather to suggest that a more truthful faith is to be discovered in 'the life of every person, that is, with the commitment to transform [the articles of faith] into concrete principles that are incarnate in one's own existence, and irreducible to a formula.'³⁸¹

There are at least two temptations, or 'lures', Bonnefoy recognizes here. First, the collapse produces mourning and nostalgia for what has been lost, which could tend toward despair or gnosticism. Second, the turn to seek one's own meaning could lead to narcissism. He defeats these temptations through an insistence on hope for a world restored here and not elsewhere and on the importance of objects and our relationships to them. His work is situated therefore between memory and hope, between a lost world and a future dwelling place that is transfigured here and now. One can see this in this poem's inclusion of concrete, essential things and elements: flame, light, water, stone, wood—sacramentals placed into a post-Christian context, along with Christian images of stable, vine, and sacrificial lamb. Though the poet states that things are the same, experiencing a unity with his beloved, they are not the same. Now in this collection, Valsaintes is named, its decay, specified. The Bonnefoys were abandoning the house at the time these poems were written, unable to keep up the vast repairs, the 'thousand impossibilities' that prevented them from making their dream a reality.³⁸²

Consider the poem. What does it say to us? There is a melancholy feeling, a longing in the naming of a God who is no longer there, an empty stable, a sacrificial lamb. But there is also hope in those images as well as the image of boat, a constant metaphor in Bonnefoy's work for journey, wandering, movement between realms, and of the woman at the threshold, who may be Ceres, wandering in her search for her daughter, knocking on doors of the homes of others, asking for help, as she does in the Elsheimer painting, *The Mocking of Ceres*, both the goddess and the painting, favourites of Bonnefoy.³⁸³ Only the goddess this time has found a child. Wandering among the ruins, mixing dream, symbol, concrete objects, sacramentals, a peacefulness is discovered and expressed. Yet the repetition of

³⁸¹ Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 77; quoted in Jasper, *The Sacred Body*, 126.

³⁸² Bonnefoy, interview, in *In the Shadow's Light*, 166.

³⁸³ See, for example, Yves Bonnefoy, 'Elsheimer and His Legacy', in *The Lure and the Truth of Painting*.

‘flame’ creates a sense of instability. Shadow and light flicker on the walls as one moves from room to room in candlelight. Time is understood as moments providing glimpses of something divine, that transfigurative absolute.

iii. *Ce qui fut sans lumière/In the Shadow's Light: Le Souvenir/The Memory* (excerpts)

And so I dream of ‘continuations’ that might be transfigurations—absolutely unexpected, miraculous...³⁸⁴

I am haunted by this memory, that the wind
All at once is swirling over the closed up house.
There is a mighty sound of flapping sail throughout the world,
As if the stuff that color is made of
Had just been rent to the very depths of things.

...

And the house is breathing, almost soundlessly,
The bird in the valley, the one we could not name,
Has faintly thrown out, too close to us,
Its two almost indistinct notes that seem mocking,
And yet not without compassion which is frightening.
I get up, I listen to this silence,
Once again I go to the window
That looks out over the country I have loved.
O joys, like an oarsman in the distance, barely
Moving on the bright expanse; and further still
The torches of the mountains, the rivers, the valleys
Are burning, far from any earthly sound.
Joys—and we never knew if it was in us,
Like idle murmurings and the glowing of dream,
This succession of rooms and of tables
Laden with fruit, with stones and with flowers,
Or if it was what some god, seeing how
Willing we were, had wanted to prepare
For a summer's celebration in his childhood home.

...

From this tranquil earth, I turn away,
I cross the rooms of the upper floor
Where much of what I was is still asleep,
I go down into the night of the arches below
Toward the fire languishing in the church,
I lean over it, and it stirs suddenly,
Like someone sleeping who is touched on the shoulder,
Then rises a little, lifting towards me
The epiphany of its ember face.
No, rather return to sleep, eternal fire,

³⁸⁴ Bonnefoy, interview, in *In the Shadow's Light*, 166.

Draw your cape of ashes over yourself,
Go back to your dream, since you too
Drink from the cup of fast flowing gold.³⁸⁵

...

The Bonnefoys attempted a restoration, a reconstruction, of both the house's physical structure and sacred character. To some extent, they succeeded. 'There was more of the real here than anywhere else,' Bonnefoy says in his interview with John Naughton in *Ce Qui Fut sans Lumière*, 'more immanence in the light on the angle of the walls or in the water from new storms.'³⁸⁶ But caring for the house became too difficult, and they are forced to abandon it. Years after the fact, Bonnefoy's dreams and poems, the ones in this collection, are haunted by his yearnings for the house long after he had believed he had overcome them. Yet, in the poetry these failures are transfigured into the 'sacred order' Bonnefoy never found in the real house. Through the use of Christian imagery and symbol, these poems become religious—in reading them, the world and the reader are transfigured by a poetics of faith created by the poet.

The French title of the collection translates as *What Was without Light*. The poem 'Memory', which opens the collection, is dreamlike, speaks of depths, moves from the shallows of the top floor (the conscious mind?) to the depths of the cellar (the unconscious?). Graham Ward's descriptives of the transfiguration as inviting, inciting desire strike me now as too tame. Even incite is too nice a word for what is happening here, for the effect of the poem on its author and readers. The poem is unreal, with a house alive that breathes, colour that is rent. The images are violent, frightening, uncanny, the familiar made unfamiliar, a strangeness that disconcerts and does not invite the reader into the house. Bonnefoy frequently stresses the importance of reaching into the depths of his memories and experiences in order to write, to illuminate that which was without light, that otherness in himself, 'that was still asleep'. If there is distancing and resistance in my reading, there is also the opposite. There is an attraction, a desire to be in the house with him, to see the oarsman approach, to wonder why he feels joy with an image so often associated with an ancient figure of death, to look out over the fields and know joy, to move into the depths and sense an absent presence of God, to find some light in the darkness of oneself, some 'uneasy trace' of a sacred or religious past that might yet offer hope.

³⁸⁵ Bonnefoy, 'The Memory', in *In the Shadow's Light*, 3-4.

³⁸⁶ Bonnefoy, interview, in *In the Shadow's Light*, 166.

Part II: Leaving Home: ‘From Temple to Text’

Karl Rahner was familiar with the intersections of faith and poetry (which will be explored further in Intersection Two). I like to think he would have relished the paradox of this thesis, for what is essentially sought is ultimately something that cannot be found, that primal and primary space of desire for divine union expressed in Holderlin’s poem, a dwelling place that is both *terminus ad quo* and *terminus ad quem*, a calling into an imagined future that makes being a becoming.

As Rahner wrote:

We are pilgrims in faith and hope in ever new temptations and trials, by always accepting God’s grace anew in freedom. We come from Adam and the land of darkness and look for the eternal light and bright perfection. [. . .] Here is realised the being-by-becoming of the creature. One can only recognise created man in his historical being-by-becoming, in his tension between beginning and end, by pointing to the beginning and the end. Every moment of this becoming is characterised by both, since this movement has an *ad quo* and an *ad quem* [. . .] This ‘at the same time’ is not a simultaneity of beginning and end, but an ‘at the same time’ in the tension between both.³⁸⁷

Though Rahner speaks of time and not space, time is here conceived in a way that perhaps allows for a different understanding of space as dwelling. The dwelling is now enlivened by people who realize they are on a journey, people who are in the process of becoming the new creation recognized by the poet/prophet Isaiah.

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.³⁸⁸

Francis Landy, in one of his many analyses of this poetic/prophetic book, notes how it brings the exiles and the readers of the text out of the temple and into ‘an imaginary homeland, a homeland of the text’, toward ‘an expansion, reconstitution and displacement of sacred space.’³⁸⁹ James Alison remarks on the incredible long and sustained creation of

³⁸⁷ Karl Rahner, “Justified and Sinner at the Same Time” in *Theological Investigations, Volume VI: Concerning Vatican II*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger, O.F.M. (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), 229.

³⁸⁸ Isa. 43.19-21.

³⁸⁹ Francis Landy, ‘Reading, Writing, and Exile’, in *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmVH & Co. KG, 2010), 268.

the book, a reading, re-reading, writing, and editing ‘that required people, readers, scribes, a school of Isaiah, call it what you will, to be receiving and understanding something and keeping it alive over a period of something like two hundred years.’³⁹⁰ I would like to take those Isaian qualities forward into this thesis, that is, move into a homeland of text in which sacred space is expanded, reconstituted, displaced, and to not do so alone. To make such an undertaking requires companions of the sort Alison mentions, only the thing received, understood, and kept alive may be something elusive, delicate, musical, and ambiguous, something like the divine appearance in the story of Elijah waiting in the cave for God, who comes not in the wind, nor the fire, but in the sound of silence.

³⁹⁰ James Alison, *Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-in* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 25.

Chapter 3:

What Is Church When Church Is Not?: Exploring Poetic Spaces of ‘Church’ with Hélène Cixous and Yves Bonnefoy

Introduction

Who better to lead us into poetic spaces of Church, into textual spaces and away from temple, than our poet companions Yves Bonnefoy and Hélène Cixous. Yet placing the two in Church caused some anxiety and struggle, as clearly a part of me was still within the walls of the temple with Beattie and Balthasar. This was an unconventional, perhaps radical, move away from the place that I had long felt was my spiritual home. And how did these poets fit into any Church as we usually understand the word? Neither is ‘religious’ per se, but in truth both are very much so, as I have certainly already shown at least in the case of Bonnefoy. That Cixous is Jewish, and I am placing her in Church, is controversial and uncomfortable, yet I do so because she has a more profound awareness of grace, love, joy, community, soul—the real elements of ‘Church’—than many Christians. I ‘borrow’ her because she has transformed and challenged my own Christian identity.

I had thought to lead with the poets, or, rather, to let them lead me, but there was a persistence and fecundity around the title of this chapter, and it seemed Church must be defined before alternatives to it could be explored. One needs definitions and a point of departure, I reasoned, a clear line.

(Bonnefoy, insistent as the title, breaks in: the poet, he says, deals ‘the fatal blow of the irregular line.’³⁹¹ I ignore him and attempt to proceed in linear fashion.)

First, what do we mean by ‘Church’? Upper or lower case? Western, Eastern, Catholic, Protestant, Nondenominational, Postdenominational? Architectural sacred place? Interior spiritual space? To what biblical communities do we look for guidance? To which epistles? Are images and models, such as those proposed in classic ecclesiological texts by Avery Dulles, Paul Minear, Richard Niebuhr, and more recently, by biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann, still useful?³⁹² If so, which ones and in what combinations? Institution?

³⁹¹ Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, 113.

³⁹² See, for example, Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 2002); Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960); H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers,

Sacrament? Mystery? Herald? Servant? People of God? Community of Disciples? Exile? Friend? Pilgrim? Is there a model for poets, who so often disrupt and destabilize? If so, what model would be both stable and flexible enough to be helpful? If Bonnefoy's 'true place' is made of 'words appearing before us in the space of our waiting'?³⁹³ And if Cixous speaks of an 'elsewhere' 'outside everything' 'absolutely unsubdued' that 'remains to be invented on the basis of a change of the mental structures of the whole of Western society'?³⁹⁴ If she says that a gift of reading Clarice Lispector, a favourite writer of hers, is 'seeing something entirely different. It is something that is not given as a model'?³⁹⁵

Second, what do we mean by 'Church is not'? That Church is more itself when it is not? Or, on a more prosaic level, that Christianity is long gone? That the Church is unmoored from surrounding culture? That we are, as Karl Rahner put it, in a wintry season of Church,³⁹⁶ especially in the Roman one? Here the words of Bonnefoy, 'When, in relation to what is, all landmarks, all frameworks, all formulae have been questioned or obliterated, what can we do but wait, hoping in the substance of words',³⁹⁷ have a particular poignancy, as they spoke to my sorrow over scandal and increasing regression by the institutional Church into clericalism, triumphalism, and juridicism. Those three characteristics marked the original schema of Vatican II's 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church', also known as *Lumen Gentium*, 'Light of the Nations'. The document was radically revised by the more reform-minded of the council into a more biblical, historical and dynamic vision of Church, one that exhibited a dramatic shift in understanding of self and the other and which allowed Pope John XXIII to proclaim a Church that was 'loving mother of all'.³⁹⁸ Fifty years on, the pastoral images and vision of Vatican II often seem to have been obliterated.

Explicit references to *institutional* Church by Bonnefoy and Cixous are rare, but here are two that may offer vivid examples of 'when Church is not':

1951); Walter Brueggemann, 'Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture,' *Theology Today* 48 (July 1991).

³⁹³ Bonnefoy, 'The Act and the Place of Poetry,' 116.

³⁹⁴ Cixous, 'First Names of No One,' in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 31.

³⁹⁵ Hélène Cixous, 'Agua viva: How to Follow a Trinket of Water', in *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, 13.

³⁹⁶ See, for example, Karl Rahner, S.J., *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Herder & Herder, 1989).

³⁹⁷ Bonnefoy, 'The Act and the Place of Poetry,' 114.

³⁹⁸ Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 716.

First Bonnefoy, from his collection *Yesterday's Wilderness Kingdom*, composed during what he has called his 'darkest seasons':³⁹⁹

The fire has drawn away, which was my church,
I am no longer even frightened, I do not sleep.⁴⁰⁰

Now Cixous, referring to an incident from her childhood in Algeria:

One evening my brother climbed onto the roof. From there you could see the new little church built at the edge of the Arab shantytown, to scoff at it. A young priest came out surrounded by a little French flock. The little Frenchman shouted Dirty Jew! seeing my brother on his own roof. The little priest began to laugh, my brother tells me.⁴⁰¹

In the first instance, 'Church is not' perhaps because it has absented itself, leaving the poet to attend to the Other alone. In the second, the loving mother of all has been corrupted by her inability to attend to the other, her first children and descendants of her founders and spiritual ancestors. Church is community, which at its most essential is the encounter of the subject with the other and Other in a movement from self-regard into divine and human love. When it stops being itself, no longer attending to the Other or the other, is perhaps exactly when the voice of the poet needs most to be heeded.

'And yet we believe,' a teacher likes to remind me. At least some of us do, and even more curious, 'yet we stay!' another likes to remind me. At least some of us stay, often existing ambivalently in an uncomfortable space of postmodern Christian aporia called Church. At least in the West. Yet this may be a happy fault, for such confused profusions of meanings and the yes/no movements of counterintuitive faith through doubt may push us into the arms of poets, who may show us radical and life-giving ways of thinking and being Church, which is at its core a matter of attending to the Other and the other.

Into exile with the poets

Walter Brueggemann, increasingly radical in his preaching and writing, believes and stays, never ceasing in his advocacy of Church as a space of liberation and disruption, a space requiring the poet. He describes Church as 'an alternative community that is evoked and

³⁹⁹ See John E. Jackson's foreword to *Yesterday's Wilderness Kingdom*, 5; and Yves Bonnefoy, *The Arrière-pays*, trans. Stephen Romer (London: Seagull Books, 2012), 117.

⁴⁰⁰ Bonnefoy, 'Threats of the Witness', in *Yesterday's Wilderness Kingdom*, 15.

⁴⁰¹ Hélène Cixous, 'My Algeriance: in other words To Depart not to Arrive from Algeria,' in *Triquarterly*, Fall 1997, 259.

sustained precisely by preaching.⁴⁰² The living words themselves create and sustain the space of Church in the absence of the Living Word. In his essay ‘Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture’, he opens up a path to the poetic through an imaginative use of models. Though he was writing twenty years ago, he makes several points that remain crucial, if fairly obvious. Models ‘must be voiced and practiced in ways that take careful account of the particular time and circumstance into which God’s people are called. Every model must be critically contextual.’⁴⁰³ And ‘dominant models of Church have been fashioned for modernity and depend on its presuppositions, presuppositions that no longer prevail.’⁴⁰⁴ In the face of the collapse of Church and society in the U.S., what he sees as its ‘drift toward empire’, he proposes models of ‘wilderness-exile,’ seeing an echo in our times of the post-exilic community of Israel, one that was extraordinarily pluralistic and imaginative in its faith practice and ‘literary inventiveness’.⁴⁰⁵ We might move, then, he suggests, from temple to text, as ‘these besieged Jews’ did, struggling ‘with the text in all its truth and in all its dangerous subversiveness, continually witnessing to another mode of reality.’⁴⁰⁶

(Now Cixous intrudes, to remind me that a state of exile holds unexpected possibilities. She calls exile its own country, ‘uncomfortable’ and simultaneously ‘magical’, as in transformative.⁴⁰⁷ ‘Some exiles can draw joy from rage’, she writes, ‘those who are able to benefit from this strange experience relearn, recapture what we have lost. [. . .] We have lost all the small and great secrets of joy.’⁴⁰⁸)

Perhaps the poets intrude because I have neglected them. Though we have already spent a good deal of time with Bonnefoy at the crossroads, he did not receive a proper introduction. Though it comes late, let us take time to greet the two together. Bonnefoy has been writing for more than half a century and is still writing in this his 90th year. Long considered France’s most important post-war poet, he is the author of nine major collections of poetry, as well as memoirs, literary and art criticism, translations and prose. In 1981, he was elected to the Chair of Comparative Poetics at the Collège de France,

⁴⁰² Walter Brueggemann, *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 3.

⁴⁰³ Brueggemann, ‘Rethinking Church Models’, 128.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁰⁷ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 120.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

succeeding Roland Barthes after his death, and has been professor emeritus there since 1993. As noted in the first Intersection, his influences and interests have been wide-ranging—philosophy, mathematics, Surrealism, the theology of Lev Shestov, mythology, the paintings of the Italian Quattrocento, the sculpture of Alberto Giacometti, the poetry of Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Shakespeare, and Yeats, the photography of Cartier-Bresson, and that is only a partial list. His great breadth has not prevented him from exploring the depths and may have even assisted his dives. After translating Shakespeare, he reflected deeply and intensely on that experience as ‘a ‘testing’ of one way of thinking by another’⁴⁰⁹ that may lead to new levels of awareness. As I’ve already shown, he has had an abiding interest in painting and sculpture, and here again it is his openness to and experience of the visual and the tactile, deeply reflected upon, that fuels his impossible desire to express the immediate and material in words. He is interdisciplinary in the best sense—his criticism, translations and poetry flow into each other, an interior fluidity paralleled in a lifelong love of travel. As he writes, ‘nothing is more authentic, and thus more reasonable, than to go wandering, for [. . .] there is no method for returning to the true place.’⁴¹⁰ His mode, then, is that of the wanderer, the one who is therefore all the more cognizant of where we have come from and why we must remember in order to move onward.

Cixous is not strictly a poet, as commonly understood. Yet she has called herself one, using a definition worth taking as our own as we set forth, as it expresses our concerns. She writes, ‘I call ‘poet’ any writing being who sets out on this path, in quest of what I call the second innocence, the one that comes after knowing, the one that no longer knows, the one that knows how not to know.’⁴¹¹ Cixous thinks and writes poetically, regardless of the genre she is working in. She has said, ‘I have never conceived of poetic writing as separate from philosophy.’⁴¹² And indeed, as Susan Rubin Suleiman has put it (in an introductory essay aptly entitled for this juncture of our journey—‘Writing Past the Wall or the Passion According to H.C.’), ‘One wall these texts [the essays in the collection *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*] most definitely get past is the wall of genres.’⁴¹³ In France, Cixous is best known for her plays, in America, for her theory and criticism, which gives an idea of her range. She has written more than forty books and over a hundred articles—drama,

⁴⁰⁹ Yves Bonnefoy, ‘Shakespeare and the French Poet’, *The Act and the Place of Poetry*, 20.

⁴¹⁰ Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, 113.

⁴¹¹ Hélène Cixous, ‘The Last Painting or the Portrait of God’, in ‘*Coming to Writing*’ and *Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jenson, trans. Sarah Cornell et. al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 114.

⁴¹² Cixous, preface to *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, xxi.

⁴¹³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, ‘Writing Past the Wall or the Passion According to H.C.’, in ‘*Coming to Writing*’ and *Other Essays*, xi.

novels, memoir, philosophy, literary theory, criticism—yet such a list is misleading because of those walls of genres and disciplines she has breached.

To return to the poets paired, Bonnefoy and Cixous have been professors of poetry and literature respectively in Paris for decades. Though both are remarkably prolific and wide-ranging, it is their depth rather than their breadth that leads me to link them. I have not seen them in tandem elsewhere, nor have I found evidence that they have ever met or read one another. They are good companions with whom to move into exile and to even have the possibility of flourishing there. For Bonnefoy, ‘poetry is what tries to make music of what occurs in life.’⁴¹⁴ For Cixous, ‘The true poet is a traveler. Poetry is about traveling on foot and all its substitutes, all forms of transportation.’⁴¹⁵

Their early years very much shaped the concerns and forms of their life work, as we have already seen with Bonnefoy, particularly themes of home, homelessness, seeking lost homes, and being at home in exile—biblical and eschatological themes even if not stated as such. As noted earlier, Bonnefoy eschews biography as being critically important to one’s art, yet his work is deeply influenced by certain places of his past—in particular his grandfather’s house in southern France, where he spent boyhood summers, and the Valsaintes house.⁴¹⁶ The importance of place and space, the *here*, and the moment, the *now*, to Bonnefoy’s life and art cannot be overstated, even as he is tempted by an alternative of a non-place outside *chronos* time. It is one of the wonders of his *oeuvre* that he recognizes the temptation to escape the world, struggles with the temptation, and in the process is able to provide in the concreteness of life glimpses of the supernal. As we have seen, he succeeds in creating out of words those sacred dwellings to be inhabited in his poems that I think of as a poetic house church, as he does here in a poem entitled ‘The Scattered, the Indivisible,’ from the collection *In the Lure of the Threshold*:

Yes, by the afternoon
When all is silent, being endless,
Time is sleeping in the ashes of yesterday’s fire
And the wasp that knocks against the window has
Already sewn up a great deal of the tear in the world.

⁴¹⁴ Bonnefoy, ‘Interview with Yves Bonnefoy’, *In the Shadow’s Light*, 169.

⁴¹⁵ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 64.

⁴¹⁶ For biographical information on Bonnefoy see: John Naughton’s interview with Bonnefoy, *In the Shadow’s Light*, 161-179; Naughton’s introduction to Yves Bonnefoy, *New and Selected Poems* (ed. John Naughton and Anthony Rudolf. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996), xiv-xv; David Jasper, ‘La Même Voix, Toujours’, 106; Naughton, *The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy*, 4-7; Collège de France biography (available online at http://www.college-de-france.fr/default/EN/all/historique/yves_bonnefoy.htm).

We sleep, in the room upstairs, but we also
Walk, and forever, among the stones.⁴¹⁷

These spaces are irresistible and mysterious, built of concrete particulars, sacramental signifiers—stone, ashes, fire—that speak to an elsewhere, a nonplace. There is an unsettling effect from Bonnefoy's use of his past that leaves one with a sense of simultaneous nearness and distance. We are simultaneously at home and in exile.

The same state of existence can be said of Hélène Cixous, who was born in 1937 in Oran, French Algeria, to Jewish parents who were part of the diaspora, her father from Spain, her mother from Germany. She grew up among Arabs. As a schoolgirl, she fell in love with the French language, perhaps the only space in which she felt at home. 'Neither France, nor Germany nor Algeria,' she would write in 'My Algeriance' in 1997, 'No regrets. It is good fortune. Freedom, an inconvenient, intolerable freedom, a freedom that obliges one to let go, to rise above, to beat one's wings. [. . .] *I feel perfectly at home, nowhere.*'⁴¹⁸

Perhaps that common understanding of the potential of exile, a place of absence, to be transformed into home and paradoxical presence is partly why Brueggemann, American Protestant scripture scholar, makes an appearance in a chapter about French thinkers, neither of whom are religious in any conventional sense. He provides a helpful starting definition of Church and a simple linkage between Church and the poets. More importantly, he gives expression to the ideas of moving from Church into text, from home to wandering, pilgrimage, exile. Though I suspect it's more personal than that. He became as insistent as the title and the poets, though I tried to discard him as old-fashioned and irrelevant. Not so long ago, he was part of a threshold I experienced in divinity school, his writing among others turning me toward the poet and the importance of imagination as a mode of knowledge. Now, as I waver on the threshold of institutional Church, he gives me reason to stay and perhaps also to not abandon this project of seeking ecclesiological spaces of poetics. He does it as a preacher, which somehow makes all the difference, as we listen to the utterance of a preacher with, as he puts it, hoping to hear a word 'from outside our closed system of reality that could open the system—personal or public or both—to fresh air and new light.'⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Bonnefoy, *New and Selected Poems*, 115.

⁴¹⁸ Cixous, 'My Algeriance', 155.

⁴¹⁹ Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 4.

In our discussion of Tina Beattie, we have seen more clearly how and why women have been excluded or worse in Christian community, a closed system that could do with more light. In denying women ordination, the Catholic Church forbids them from proclaiming the Gospel or preaching at Mass. Any discussion of this silencing is itself silenced. The implications for the Catholic community as a whole fester in this dark muteness. So silenced, it is important for women to speak in symbolic ways, to recover their own identity, voice, and worth from their traditions. One way they are doing this is by retrieving a gift of the Jews for storytelling, the tradition of interpretation, the midrash.

Midrash is an appealing vehicle for feminists who cherish their religious identity but also wish to argue with it and re-vision it. We have freely adapted the potential of this Jewish tradition, in which the scriptural narratives become the starting point for debate, a forum for personal reflections and the inspiration for new stories which begin at the point where the authoritative text leaves off.⁴²⁰

In a compelling example of this process, Heather Walton, in what she terms ‘fictions of faith’, retells the story of the encounter of Solomon and the two mothers through the eyes of Sheba. In the retelling, Solomon does not see true and chooses the wrong woman. He chooses wrongly because he asks the women no questions. The women are not given the opportunity to tell the details of their stories. He does not look the women in the eyes and so misses what the Queen sees. The woman who stole the other’s baby, struck with fear and remorse, cries out to save the baby. The real mother, in defiant rage, tells the King to cut the child in two. The counterfeit leaves with the baby; the real mother is left with the other’s dead child. ‘Mothers of the dead,’⁴²¹ the Queen and the mother prepare the infant for burial. They wash it, name it, rock it, sing to it, ‘wrap it in rough linen and lay it in a cradle of earth.’⁴²²

What is happening here? As we have seen with the poetry of Bonnefoy, one way to access depths of perception, to engage the imagination, is through the concrete. Walton argues that the particular is often dismissed because it is seen as false and subjective. ‘The problem with this position is that it tends toward abstraction, idealism and the unwitting reinscription of dominant cultural values—the voice of the disembodied universal is

⁴²⁰ Heather Walton, *Imagining Theology: Women, Writing and God* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 64.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

always the voice of the dominant male.⁴²³ Through this fiction, she reveals the muteness and empathy of women, and perhaps of all who are dismissed, excluded, rejected. She claims convincingly ‘that there exists within culture a mute zone, or a dark zone if you like, that is not the subject of public discourse,’ which is controlled by the dominant group.⁴²⁴

One might object, or at least wonder, then, how it is I now turn to Bonnefoy and Brueggemann, as examples of subversions of this unjustly gendered space, and not to the voices of women. Though I will only touch on it briefly here, I wish to cite again as a reminder Conley’s definition of *écriture féminine*, which refers

less to a writing practiced mainly by women than, in a broader logical category, to textual ways of spending. It suggests a writing, based on an encounter with another—be it a body, a piece of writing, a social dilemma, a moment of passion—that leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most conscious life.⁴²⁵

From the pulpit, Brueggemann is doing what Bonnefoy and Cixous also do: pointing us toward an alternative economy of textual spending, which entails gift without expectation of return. Writing in his book *The Word Militant* of preaching as a trafficking ‘in a fiction that makes true,’ an enabling of imagination of Gospel worlds as opposed to a description of them, he enters the world of our poets: ‘The proposal of this alternative script is not through large, comprehensive, universal claims, but through concrete, specific, local texts that, in small ways, provide alternative imagination.’⁴²⁶

Little pieces, fragments, were the currency of the Romantics in a time of instability. The small, the concrete, the particular, as expressive of the general, are elements of the sacramental, leading us into the realm of art and symbol. Word and Sacrament are the living foundation of Church, and I wonder if it isn’t that same spiritual energy I revel in when experiencing the rhythm and symbol of Bonnefoy and Cixous: The life of the Church changed in understanding and resurrected by poets in terms unsystematic, not universal, abstract, or linear, both immanent and transcendent. Maybe Brueggemann now points us to that other mode of reality, witnessed and created by the person in the process of becoming

⁴²³ Ibid., 69.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁴²⁵ Conley, introduction to *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, vii.

⁴²⁶ Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 28.

who inhabits the text as a space of faith, a beginning deconstruction and reconstruction of 'Church.'

There is a subversive resonance with Cixous when she writes

The same struggle [of deconstruction] existed, in other forms, and was led in other ways; perhaps more violently, because more desperately, with the bare text, less subversive, and more offensive. The same bastions were to be destroyed, for the German Romantics as for the French: logocentrism, idealism, theologism, everything that supports society, the scaffold of the political economy and the subjective economy, the pillars of property.⁴²⁷

In his book *Finally Comes the Poet*, Brueggemann speaks of the need for poetic alternatives in thinking of Church. He sees the poet as political; the poet destabilizes and breaks open systems of domination. He quotes the poet/prophet Isaiah (51:1-2), who 'returns his listeners to neglected memory'⁴²⁸:

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Listen to Bonnefoy, who in one of his later prose poems echoes Isaiah as poet/prophet, returning listeners to neglected memory:

We struggled hastily, pulling stones from the undergrowth. Big stones. Grey stones. Stones that glittered in the dark.

With both hands we raised them above our heads. How heavy they were, higher and wider than anything in the world. How far we would throw them now, throw them over there to that other side without a name, that abyss without a high or low, with no roaring waters, no star. And we looked at each other, laughing as moonlight spilled from everywhere, under a cloud-lidded sky.

Hands that were shredded soon. Bloody hands. Hands pushing roots aside, digging at the earth, gripping the rock that strained against our grasp. Blood crimsoned our faces too. But always we raised our eyes from the devastated ground toward other eyes, again with that laugh.⁴²⁹

Like Isaiah, Bonnefoy returns us to earth and reminds us of our creation. Only this creation is one we participate in, humans with divine qualities? Mythic creatures able to throw stones larger than anything known? Into the inexplicable and mysterious abyss, God? Nothing? The nothingness of God? Yet they are limited and human, Christlike in the

⁴²⁷ Cixous, 'First Names of No One', 32.

⁴²⁸ Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 126.

⁴²⁹ Bonnefoy, 'Throwing Stones,' in *The Curved Planks*, 179.

divine/human mix and bloodied hands and heads, eyes seeking earth, sky, and the other, able in devastation to experience joy. Bonnefoy undoes complacency through the use of contrast and opposition, favourite methods of his. Light and dark, human and divine, earth and sky, suffering and joy are common themes set in opposition. He does not shy away from life. Things are stripped to the essential in Bonnefoy's poetry. Yet he is passionate in his dispassion. Here is a point of similarity in difference with Cixous. She, in marked contrast, is effusive, excessive, sometimes, over the top. Yet in her exuberance she strips away all that is irrelevant and banal. This stripped down nature of their art to what seems most true is what most appeals to me in both poets. In form and content, they take a stand for life, over against what is safe, mediocre, conventional. Cixous expresses the poetic as surging life force.

What is most true is poetic because it is not stopped-stoppable. All that is stopped, grasped, all that is subjugated, easily transmitted, easily picked up, all that comes under the word concept, which is to say all that is taken, caged, is *less* true. Has lost what is life itself, which is always in the process of seething, of emitting, of transmitting itself.⁴³⁰

To come at this another way, I would like to turn to another reflection by Bonnefoy on translation in a 1979 issue of *World Literature Today* that was an homage to his life and work. Bonnefoy helps us explore our initial question of this chapter in the broader sense we have begun to touch on, i.e., where do we find our spiritual sustenance when the old forms are in decay. He does so in the context of translating form in poetry. New translations of Osip Mandelstam's poetry into English free verse had not long before occasioned the opprobrium of Joseph Brodsky, who had insisted that 'meters in verse are kinds of spiritual magnitudes for which nothing can be substituted. [. . .] They cannot be replaced by each other and especially not by free verse.'⁴³¹ Bonnefoy believed otherwise, and his rationale, in part, had to do with the rigidity, and impossibility, of applying 'the old regular forms' when we have been deprived of 'the old spirit, which had been for such a long time their principal cause'.⁴³²

Bonnefoy recognized something seemingly so simple and obvious, yet it remains always a stumbling block for those of a fundamentalist bent: by the end of the 19th century, the world had changed and had continued to change in such basic ways that there was no

⁴³⁰ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 4.

⁴³¹ Yves Bonnefoy, 'On the Translation of Form in Poetry', 374.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 376.

question of returning to old ways of living, writing, believing. The loss of traditional forms and the move toward free verse in poetry reflected losses and movements in the culture poetry engaged and expressed.

Bonnefoy wrote,

[I]f the use of regular verse signifies thus the actual existence of an orthodoxy, of a common set of beliefs, then free verse, reciprocally, can appear only when no common truth rules any longer the spirits of men—that is, when everybody is fumbling about for his own personal system of values, for his form: a variety of possible solutions which the infinite potentialities of the new prosody alone will be able to reflect. As a matter of fact, it is almost exactly at the same moment that Nietzsche himself exclaims, ‘God is dead,’ a sentence which means that no spiritual unity remains alive in society, so that men will be entitled from now on to try everything; and the same moment that Mallarmé observes, in his famous lecture at Oxford, that ‘*On a touché au vers*,’ that some young poets have, for the first time in history, broken the great conventional forms which till then had ruled poetic invention. At the end of the nineteenth century Christianity is no longer a universal evidence, the Orient is nearer, the specter of revolution is haunting Europe, terrible wars are at hand, Freud is born—and, simultaneously, some rather obscure symbolist poets decide to break up prosody. No mere coincidence, I believe; perhaps the crystal ball of the clairvoyante. At first in France, but later everywhere in the Western world, will free verse be only the broken mirror or, in the fragments, a new light?⁴³³

Bonnefoy is free to experiment, contrary to Brodsky, he is able to find his ‘spiritual magnitudes’ in substitutions. At the end of this piece, he remarks on an example in his translation of Shakespeare. He recovers and alters an old traditional form that he believes expresses the spiritual quality he finds in reading Shakespeare. He writes, ‘This meter was making me more able to apprehend the relationship between the act of writing and existence, between form and time. It was helping me to live.’⁴³⁴

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 379.

Chapter 4:

The Poet Sets the Path:

A Reading of Hélène Cixous' *Manna*:

'The Fruit of a Haunting'

As much as a path can be 'set' considering the conditions we have suggested thus far, Hélène Cixous is the one to do so, and this is the place for it. The setting is not a setting, of course, but a following of the path that unfolds, as we have previously introduced, remarking on her nod to Heidegger. What matters here is approach, the walking of the text in order to find the 'rules' of reading, writing, living. With that in mind, our reading will be structured as three varying approaches that arise out of the reading itself and not before. Instead of a reductionist possession of the book by the reader, there are alternative possessions that happen in the reading practice.

In her experimental novel *Manna for the Mandelstams for the Mandelas*, Hélène Cixous writes that the book would happen, if it did happen, as 'the fruit of a haunting'.⁴³⁵ The 'if' is erased by the plain fact of the reader holding the fruit in her hands. It is an intrusion made acceptable by its playful irony and intimacy. We are startled but not unpleasantly so, as a disarming confidence has been offered, a signal of potential vulnerability. 'If it sees the light of day', the author says, 'this book will be the fruit of a haunting.' She turns herself into a companion. Suddenly the reader is made a part of 'the universe of production of writing',⁴³⁶ brought into the space of writing, of creation. It is as if the creator stops, looks up, brings the reader into a place of secrets, contingency and play: '*If I finish the book, but maybe I won't, and no one will know except you, the one I've told, the one I've implicated, but you won't know because if I don't finish, you won't read this unless in a dream.*' The playful vulnerability is, in truth, strength, a forging of attachment, a reminder that the writer is there and will not let us forget her. In this way, and others more subtle, Cixous performs what she says and who she is; in her offering of the fruit, she haunts. The reader is warned: We will not rest reading this text.

⁴³⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Manna for the Mandelstams for the Mandelas*, trans. Catherine A. F. MacGillivray (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 9.

⁴³⁶ Hélène Cixous, 'Writing and the Law: Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, and Lispector', in *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, trans. and ed. Verena Andermatt Conley (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 2.

*First approach: the text possesses the author,
not the other way around*

What is this text that it has this effect? A tantalizing response is immediately offered by the first word of the title, ‘manna’, meaning ‘What is it?’⁴³⁷ The answer to the question is the question, which implies a double identity of form and content, making ‘manna’ more signifier than signified.⁴³⁸ Of manna in this sense, Louis-Marie Chauvet writes, ‘What is there is an object so fragile that it has all the traits of the inconsistency of an ‘anti-object’, of a ‘sign’ rather than a thing’.⁴³⁹

Manna is the mysterious life-giving ‘bread’, ‘fine as frost’, given gratuitously and graciously by God to the Israelites in the desert in the book of Exodus (16: 13-15).⁴⁴⁰ As symbol, it is, writes Heather Walton, ‘language, a food for exiles that is both words and flesh.’⁴⁴¹ As scriptural synecdoche, it brings up many associations. The mind recalls how the rime melts away to nothing in the desert sun. How fragile the gift. The people ignore God’s desires and seek more than each day’s allotment. How wavering the gratitude, but how enduring the lesson: This gift, as Chauvet writes, ‘defies the laws of capitalization and stockpiling.’⁴⁴² Wandering for forty years in the desert, the Israelites are sustained by manna, until they reach a ‘habitable land’ (Ex 16:35). As the first word encountered, ‘manna’ suggests the journey with *Manna* will be difficult, fragile, nourishing, grace-filled and hence unpredictable, ‘an encounter with literature that deepens our sense of wonder and strangeness and pain—rather than one that confirms us in our convictions and comforts us in our sorrows.’⁴⁴³

Questions of identity occur throughout *Manna*. Who is speaking? The author? If so, which one of her many ‘I’s’?⁴⁴⁴ Which one of the real persons re-formed by her into characters who she inhabits and vice versa? Often it is difficult to tell; they are each as if possessed by the other. Cixous says as much. ‘We both become somebody else, it’s a maddening

⁴³⁷ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (NRSV), n. Exodus 16.15.

⁴³⁸ See Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 88.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Walton, ‘Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat in the Heart of the World’, 159.

⁴⁴² Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 88.

⁴⁴³ Walton, ‘Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat in the Heart of the World’, 146.

⁴⁴⁴ See Catherine MacGillivray’s discussion of ‘the plural and provisional quality of [Cixous’] own author’s ‘I’s’ in ‘Introduction: The Political Is—(and the) Poetical’, in *Manna*, xlii.

experience. . . . You have to live another life. You have to get up, and instead of putting on your own clothes, you put on the body and the story of someone else.’⁴⁴⁵ One ‘invades’ and ‘overwhelms’ her, a mutual re-creation.⁴⁴⁶

It is this alternative sense of possession Cixous performs in her poetics, as she experiments with gender, identity, and space, that I often found myself wishing Beattie had turned to as a resource in her interrogation of Balthasar’s twisted gender constructions. For in Beattie’s analysis, the absence of woman is not the core problem of Balthasar’s rigidly gendered theology but rather the possession of the identity of woman by man after the elimination of man. Man is eliminated because symbolically in this traditionally gendered Christian scenario, ‘he’ is the divinity of Christ, true representative of God, creator; ‘she’ is the body of Christ, the Church, creation.⁴⁴⁷

But he is not God, and in order to become other than God [. . .] to experience the desire that draws ‘man’ to God, he must become what he is not—he must become ‘her’. She is his fulfillment and completion because only she allows him to know who he is in relation to God, i.e. he is not-God, and because she is not-man, and God is masculine, he must become ‘she’ in order to remind himself that he is not-God.⁴⁴⁸

Cixous’ playful putting on of the stories and bodies of others is an alternative to the type of appropriation of the other that occurs in the masculine order, in the phallogentric binary thinking that underlies Western thought, of which Balthasar is representative. In an early polemical text, one for which she is best known, ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays’, Cixous begins to address the question: ‘What would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble?’⁴⁴⁹ Though she leaves behind the polemics, this question informs Cixous’ writing as she seeks in her poetics to fracture that rock. This chapter begins to explore how she does this in a practice of poetry that is also political, even if no longer polemical.

Cixous, in analyzing her writing, recognizes its unruly fluidity and its origin in her depths.

⁴⁴⁵ Hélène Cixous, ‘Interview with Hélène Cixous’, in the ‘Cixous Dossier’, ed. and trans. Catherine A. Franke, *Qui Parle: A Journal of Literary Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 152-79 (167); quoted in MacGillivray, ‘Introduction: The Political Is—(and the) Poetical’, xli-xlii.

⁴⁴⁶ Cixous, *Manna*, 9.

⁴⁴⁷ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 114-115.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

When I write, it always happens in this manner. Either I sense that I am in this stream, or I let the metaphor come, exactly as if I were dreaming. I do not take it from the exterior. It truly comes from the inside. I do not see how one can write otherwise than by letting oneself be carried away on the back of these funny horses that are metaphors. On the other hand, I write texts that are very much in movement. *Mouvementés*. Eventful. That is what I imagine, at least.⁴⁵⁰

Mouvementés. Eventful, turbulent, stormy, rough. Cixous as writer and reader descends into the interior, a plunge that is also a climb. Her reasoning behind this paradox has a deeply spiritual aspect. She refers to her attraction to the texts of favoured writers as a call, a secret music attuned to her heart.⁴⁵¹ The metaphor is one of movement; writing is an animated ladder. To her and her most beloved writers,

this ladder has a descending movement, because the ascent, which evokes effort and difficulty, is toward the bottom. I say ascent downward because we ordinarily believe the descent is easy. The writers I love are descenders, explorers of the lowest and deepest. Descending is deceptive. Carried out by those I love the descent is sometimes intolerable.⁴⁵²

Here is reason the reader will not rest. *Manna* is a text that is always moving, its characters forced by oppressive regimes to move into the desert, whether one inside or outside themselves; its metaphorical language constantly shifting meanings and opening the text and therefore its reader to deeper depths. This movement of characters and meaning acknowledges space, a space of textuality in which we might move into identities and lives that are exilic, as in unfixed and liberated, at home when never at home. The food that sustains the characters of *Manna* is often language, whether in the form of poem, or letter, or symbolized as birds flying across the sky, like black letters on a white page ('a sky swarming with worms of verse'⁴⁵³), writing possibilities in impossible conditions. Yet perhaps the impossible conditions increase the probability of possibility in the form of writing as an act of love, resistance, and avowal of life—the greater chance of good occurring, grace.

Manna is very much about grace, about seemingly small gifts, fine as frost, in desert experiences: the interrupted pleasure of the wedding cake of Nelson and Winnie Mandela,

⁴⁴⁹ Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays' in *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986 [1975]), 65.

⁴⁵⁰ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 28.

⁴⁵¹ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 5.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Cixous, *Manna*, 2.

a piece of candy thrown to Osip Mandelstam through the window of his train into final exile.⁴⁵⁴ In these instances, Cixous goes to the depths to push to the heights. What is the cake? It is the love of the Mandelas, 'a cake of superhuman resistance. It had all their good qualities.'⁴⁵⁵ The cake begins to crumble under the oppression, when Zami (Winnie's tribal nickname) and her daughter Zindzi are deported, thrown into the dust of Africa, the 'ill, mute, paralyzed, destitute mother.'⁴⁵⁶

Is it legitimate for Cixous to write about Africa as she does? Even if Africa is maternal metaphor, what right does Cixous, white, educated professor/poet have to not only write about it but to appropriate the continent into her body ('If I write in a broken way it is because I am in the process of contemplating in me the South African landscape.'⁴⁵⁷), to allow it to inhabit her? Despite my initial ambivalence, she wins me over. The move succeeds as a sort of creative haunting. Cixous is a mother, a daughter of a midwife. In her creation of new creation narratives, she uses maternal images of birth, creation, bonding, and is concerned with 'an economy of positive lack',⁴⁵⁸ a remaking of Lacan's theory of lack, in which the mother's experience of birth is a positive loss that is also inscribed upon the offspring, the other. Having grown up in French Algeria, she knows what it is to be colonized.⁴⁵⁹ In imagining Africa, site of origins, within her, she is, one might say, colonized by the colonized. All the bodies in play—continent, mother, author, characters, reader—are on notice that they are about to be transformed, reborn out of a mythic womb.

Thoughts born in Africa are grandiose and sloped like those that come to us in a cathedral. They go from lowest to highest. They start at nothingness and cast themselves into the sky, hoping to find a port. I am nothingness flown over by flocks of migrating birds.⁴⁶⁰

Cixous claims it is the cake—love, resistance, goodness, Africa?—that gives her the courage to write, the conviction 'that there be pastry in hell'⁴⁶¹ making her bold. The writing itself then is the cake, the love, resistance, goodness that sweetens the hell. The

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., particularly the chapters 'The Parting of the Cake' (109-116) and 'On the Move . . .' (127-144).

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁵⁸ Cixous, 'Extreme Fidelity,' in *Writing Differences*, 24.

⁴⁵⁹ See, for example, Cixous, 'My Algeriance'.

⁴⁶⁰ Cixous, *Manna*, 7-8.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 12.

small piece of chocolate thrown to Osip, the Russian Jewish poet, by a stranger makes it easier to live.

Though does it? Is a stranger risking punishment for a gift of chocolate enough to ease the suffering of a man who wrote these words in his last exile? 'Like a boy following grown-ups into wrinkled water/I seem to be walking towards a future,/But it seems I shall never see it,/Now that our tribe is troubled by a shadow,/Twilight's intoxications, hollow years.'⁴⁶² He wrote that the same year, 1937, as a poem in which he cries out for the readers and engagement forbidden him: 'And I gasp after them, yelling/At some frozen wood-pile:/Just a reader, someone to speak with, a doctor!/A conversation on the bitter stairs!'⁴⁶³ The following year, he would die in a Siberian camp.⁴⁶⁴

Yet, it seems it would be enough. The candy is as much a symbol of love, grace and resistance as the Mandelas' cake. Nedezhda, his wife, and Akhmatova, his friend, both poets very much in their own right, saved Osip's poems at great risk and gave him the readers and engagement he desired, posthumously.⁴⁶⁵ They concretized in life Cixous's idea of a female writing of the body. The women carrying the words, bringing the poet back to life, writing their bodies against political oppression.

Cixous, in a wondrous ending, places the women together on Pushkin Street without fear of the world, made of goodness (a Visitation?). At the end of *Manna*, Osip visits his wife in a dream (an Annunciation?) and 'recites his last poem. She carries it in her body and in her own writing out into the world where it is set free like a flock of birds.'⁴⁶⁶ Cixous makes the stranger by the train female, creator, mother, God herself incarnate as 'the unknown woman trudging along in the frozen night, toward the train full of the forsaken, with a star in her hand.'⁴⁶⁷

The ending is also an echo of the epigraph, which is a quote from Dante's *Paradiso* of the spirits like 'birds risen from the shore' writing in the sky (MacGillivray calls *Manna* 'a text

⁴⁶² Osip Mandelshtam, *Mandelshtam: Selected Poems*, trans. James Greene (London: Penguin, 1991), 77.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁶⁴ Donald Rayfield, 'Osip Mandelshtam: an Introduction', in *Mandelshtam: Selected Poems*, xlii.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ Walton, 'Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat in the Heart of the World', 159.

⁴⁶⁷ Cixous, *Manna*, 132.

of the sky',⁴⁶⁸ and we are called back to the opening poem and Hölderlin's spiritual measure.) the first verse of the book of Wisdom: 'Love righteousness, you who rule the earth.'⁴⁶⁹ The latter command was meant for Gentile rulers of Jews in diaspora in the Greco-Roman era.⁴⁷⁰ Osip translated Dante, who became for him a source of survival and inspiration.⁴⁷¹ He serves a similar role for Cixous as she traverses her creation. She calls Dante her 'grandmother.'⁴⁷² He guides her to paradise and hell, to paradise in hell. One can see how Osip would attract Cixous: He descended to the depths of hell, guided by Dante, to rise to poetic heights.

The idea that paradise may be found in hell, that Adorno's question is less important than the realization that poetry is in Auschwitz, Cixous credits to her reading of Etty Hillesum, who 'wrote in an extraordinary way, within the precincts of despair. She was on her way to Auschwitz, and she knew it.'⁴⁷³ She boarded the train with poems of Rilke⁴⁷⁴ and kept reading and writing until the end. In the last known journal entry, Hillesum wrote:

I always return to Rilke [. . .] Sadly, in difficult times we tend to shrug off the spiritual heritage of artists from an 'easier' age, with 'What use is that sort of thing to us now?' It is an understandable but shortsighted reaction. And utterly impoverishing. We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.⁴⁷⁵

There is a strange scene in *Manna* that stands in stark contrast to all the rest.⁴⁷⁶ For a few pages, there is only hell. Colleagues who have read the book don't recall it. Maybe the horror causes forgetfulness. It is the recounting of a rape and murder of a bush couple by three white police officers. For their crime, they pay three pounds. There is no balm, no poetry, only silence and brutality. Yet there has been so much poetry and biblical echoes throughout, that it comes to mind unbidden from Dante and the Wisdom author: 'Love

⁴⁶⁸ MacGillivray, 'Introduction: The Political Is—(and the) Poetical', xxxvii.

⁴⁶⁹ See MacGillivray, 'Introduction: The Political Is—(and the) Poetical', xvi, and n. 1 in 'Notes to Manna,' 274, quoting *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), Canto XVIII of the *Paradiso*.

⁴⁷⁰ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, introductory notes to 'The Wisdom of Solomon,' 70 (Apocrypha).

⁴⁷¹ Rayfield, 'Osip Mandelshtam: an Introduction,' xxxiv.

⁴⁷² Cixous, *Manna*, 11.

⁴⁷³ Cixous, 'Cixous Dossier', 169; quoted in MacGillivray, 'Introduction: The Political Is—(and the) Poetical', xiv-xv.

⁴⁷⁴ MacGillivray, 'Notes to the Introduction,' n. 5, 256

⁴⁷⁵ Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941-43*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (London: Persephone Books, 1999), 281-282.

⁴⁷⁶ Cixous, *Manna*, 200-202.

righteousness, you who rule the earth.’ In the same chapter, titled ‘The Day of Condemnation,’ Nelson is sentenced to life imprisonment and Mandelstam dies. ‘And the earth of 1964 is as poetless as the snow of 1939.’⁴⁷⁷ No, I am wrong about the scene’s being out of place. It is followed by pages of increasing emotional intensity and speed. They are filled with violent imagery of hooked, tortured, bloodied bodies, with lamentation, references to dereliction, crucifixion, and the suffering and cries of Job. The little ones are mourned, the criminals, condemned. There is not much in the way of hope, but there are songs, music, a defiant smile and feathered hat from Winnie.

This book will not be without sugar, without eggs, without spices, without succulence. Nor without famine, nor without desert. It is the cake’s story that is sweet and nourishing. The cake itself might be rancid, but its essence is inalterable.⁴⁷⁸

Etty Hillesum has had an indelible effect on Cixous.

*Second approach: the author possesses the reader,
who does not possess the text*

Manna is itself life-giving, an intricate, often magical, interweaving of poetry, myth, animal tales, politics, history, and dream, to create something quite new and unforgettable. The already heroic (at least in 1988 at the time of writing) persons of Nelson and Winnie Mandela of South Africa under apartheid and Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam of Stalinist Russia are recreated, exalted, by Cixous into what Catherine MacGillivray has called ‘oneiric “figures.”’⁴⁷⁹ Cixous’s descending/ascending ‘authors are dreamers’ who understand ‘the unconscious is at the source’, in the sense of an energy source of writing rather than a Freudian sense.⁴⁸⁰ Her characters are of dreams because Cixous is a dream-writer like her authors. She has said that the sort of interweaving exemplified in *Manna* is not a question of mastery but an involuntary process, happening in the

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁴⁷⁸ MacGillivray, ‘Introduction: The Political Is—(and the) Poetical’, xxii.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., xliii.

⁴⁸⁰ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 88; See Walton, ‘Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat in the Heart of the World’, 149: ‘The ‘religious writing’ to which [Cixous] aspires is not to be found in any particular text or type of creative work but is to be understood as an energy source (in her work it is to be compared with the unconscious, desire or the dangerous memories of marginalized people).’

deepest depths. The signified and the signifier work together without my being able to say which one leads, because the one calls for the other. And vice versa. How? A kind of work takes place in this space that we do not know. . .⁴⁸¹

This creative process is relational, communal, nonhierarchical, reminiscent of a master/disciple relationship. At least thinking in those terms might help answer an initial question: How does one approach a fluid and affective text that causes such a dramatic response, one that is more of an ‘undergoing’⁴⁸² than a deliberate grasping? As Verena Andermatt Conley notes in an introduction to one of her books on Cixous, ‘The question arises on how to proceed. How does one write ‘on’ someone who is plurivalent, mercurial, and as mobile as the style of her writing?’⁴⁸³ Though Conley is writing on Cixous’ entire *oeuvre*, the dilemma still appears, if in miniature, in the reading of this one work. The fluidity and multivalence she speaks of are always evident and deliberately so. While this might seem to contradict the oneiric origins of Cixous’s writing, it requires rigour to remain willing to be open to the depths she honours.

Conley decides on a chronological reading and comes to an insightful, if obvious, understanding for a way forward based on her own skill in listening to the author and thereby coming to know what and how she does what she does. ‘Cixous herself performs in relation to other texts what she invites the reader to do, that is, to *accompany* her, remark

⁴⁸¹ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 28.

⁴⁸² This notion of ‘undergoing’ as a way to describe the experience of God the Creator among us is defined and explored theologically by James Alison in *Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-in*. Simultaneously active and passive, the verb suits Cixous, at least in the way Alison unreels it. It is a ‘space’ of active passiveness, which could be seen as feminine, though he doesn’t make the claim. Or perhaps he does incidentally in an example in which he makes use of the feminine pronoun: ‘So, what we can describe as we undergo something is more akin to what a slow-motion surfer might describe of what she can see from the constantly shifting position of the waves on which she finds herself as she heads for shore than it is to someone standing stably on a mountaintop with a clear vision all round. With the difference that when someone is undergoing something, it is not only what they see, but who they are who is doing the seeing, which is in a process of change’ (3-4). Alison goes on to credit a teacher who had explained to him the idea that ‘doing theology implies a certain *pati divina*—an undergoing of “divine things”, from Aquinas—who considered himself first and foremost a teacher (see, for example, Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon, 1962)—who borrowed it from Dionysius the Areopagite (4). This digression has a purpose, if only to suggest that ‘doing theology’ may still be possible, and if it is, it may be that it is possible through a retrieval and/or recognition of a theological thinking that is a reorientation toward ‘divine things’ and a willingness to ‘undergo’ them, the kind of transformation Cixous encourages through her ‘possession’ of her readers. Aquinas and Cixous are an odd couple, yet I see a correspondence in their view of the ‘student’ and ‘reader’ as complex and embodied and of ‘learning/reading’ as spiritual as well as intellectual growth (see Pieper, 95, and Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 52-53). Like the sequence of teachers leading from Dionysius to Alison, Cixous is part of a lineage, though it is literary and philosophical, rather than theological, a line including Joyce, Lispector, Heidegger and Derrida of a vibrant poetic tradition.

⁴⁸³ Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), xiv.

certain terms, follow turns, and risk new formulations.⁴⁸⁴ In Conley's journeying alongside Cixous, she makes a critical and useful, even if again somewhat obvious, distinction. This way of reading with Cixous makes it 'less *on* than *of* Cixous. *Of* is understood not in a possessive [. . .] but as a partitive; that is, a book that treats of certain aspects and does not claim to reconstruct a totality to which the name is attached.'⁴⁸⁵

Now I see a relation between the reading and its effects: Perhaps my small struggle mirrors two themes of possession perceived in *Manna*, both being about male/female forms of possessing, one a 'female' active passivity of 'undergoing,' not unlike contemplation, the other, a 'male' grasping desire to own. Is it a simplistic perception, or solipsistic? Maybe, yet it reflects Cixous's early writings that express her ideas of a libidinal economy and the aforementioned *écriture féminine* that is as much body and soul as mind, reflecting not so much sexual difference according to gender but something more fluid and dynamic ranging widely in either man or woman, a bisexuality that is not defined by lack.⁴⁸⁶ Possessed by real people, heroic figures she makes more so through her re-creation, she is freed to 'possess' them herself, inhabiting, for example, the character of Nelson Mandela. How did she accomplish this metamorphosis?

How I did it I do not know,' she answered in an interview. 'It was a bit dreamlike. Afterwards, I had to conclude that of course it wasn't complete, I couldn't do everything, but I think it must have been homosexual; that is, it was my own knowledge of a woman's body that I could transfer to Mandela's body. That was very strange. But I do not think I lied in doing that, I think it is the woman in Mandela—because he is also a woman—who really inscribed this scene in the text.'⁴⁸⁷

More than a decade before *Manna*, Cixous wrote about female voice at a primal, primary level: 'In feminine speech, as in writing, there never stops reverberating something that, having once passed through us, having imperceptibly and deeply touched us, still has the power to affect us—song, the first music of the voice of love, which every woman keeps alive.'⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ See, for example, 'Sorties' and Heather Walton, 'Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat in the Heart of the World'.

⁴⁸⁷ 'Interview with Hélène Cixous,' in 'Cixous Dossier', 178; quoted in MacGillivray, 'Introduction: The Political Is—(and the) Poetical', xlv.

⁴⁸⁸ Cixous, 'Sorties', 93.

This ‘voice of love’ is what Cixous herself enacts in *Manna*, what simultaneously possesses, powerfully affects, and brings me up short. This response seems a piece of an ongoing personal realization indicative of larger phenomena and concerns around liberation. One is about gender injustice, the silencing of women, particularly spiritually and ecclesiologically in the Catholic Church, as noted in the previous chapter. Cixous’ combination of poetics, writing, body, recourse to biblical and mythical themes, expression of intense joy, and stance for life offer a way to untie the gags. Another concern is theological and hermeneutical, asking how we read and why such a question might matter in our pragmatic and disconsolate times. The approach to this and other deeply poetic work requires a spiritual and epistemological shift on the part of the reader, the work in itself demands such transformation, which holds promise for a badly needed transformation toward ‘thinking theologically’.

Third approach: spaces of dispossession/de+possession: the approach of non-approach

We have begun to discover forms of alternative possession made possible in textual spaces of ‘Church’, where connectedness and equality is encouraged instead of isolation and dominance. The space of dispossessed woman may be found in or near to what Cixous refers to as ‘territories of de+possession’,⁴⁸⁹ the interiors one of her favorite writers, Dostoevsky, visits. These are territories of ambivalence, of the possessed who are also ‘de+possessed’, where ‘losing and gaining embrace each other undeniably and endlessly.’⁴⁹⁰ The space of aporia, yes and no, out of which something new arises—or not; A playful place, an approach of non-approach, and perhaps the aforementioned space of Cixous’ that we do not know, where a kind of work takes place. Maybe this is an area beyond my abilities, a space meant to be unexplored. Yet I see it continually before me, though shadowed and distant.

I imagine Heidegger, like Dostoevsky, knew how to reach it. Yet even he wrote in one of his own poems that ‘the poetic character of thinking is still veiled over. Where it shows itself, it is for a long time like the utopism of a half-poetic intellect.’⁴⁹¹ He comes to the foreground in this effort to join the concerns of dispossessed woman, which is more than a

⁴⁸⁹ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 73.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Martin Heidegger, ‘...The Thinker as Poet...’, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 12.

symptom of the disintegration of Church but rather an infection, as Beattie rightly called it, and of reading deeply in a shallow age. In such circumstances, new theologies are desperately called for, not old theologies repackaged as new, nor new ways of ‘doing’ theology, but new ways of thinking theologically, led by the poet’s way of being in the world. David Jasper, following an example of an artist thinking beyond conventional religious forms, writes,

You see here how we have moved beyond any possible conventional religious formula and we see the artist ‘thinking theologically’. That is a phrase that is drawn from the philosopher Heidegger’s notion of *Denken*, or ‘thinking’, distinct from any thinking of theology or religion, but actually thinking *theologically*. When that happens, and when we begin to read and interpret literature and art in such a manner, we have moved beyond anything like a specific ‘Christian criticism’, to something that is more difficult, more elusive and often recognized only in glimpses—and which acknowledges the deep and original seriousness of the artist in his or her vocation.⁴⁹²

Here we have also moved way beyond objectification into the realm of awe and wonder, where we remember that the world is ‘charged’ with grace. As Timothy Clark writes, regarding Heidegger’s thoughts on reading Hölderlin, ‘Heidegger’s approach is not a reading in terms of historical context, nor the elaboration of some sort of ‘content’, nor a formal analysis of the linguistic and other structures of the text, nor an evaluation. All these familiar modes render the poem a totalized object laid out before the critic [. . .] If any kind of event is to transpire in the encounter with the text, we must avoid submitting Hölderlin to the measure of our time, but submit ourselves, but not thoughtlessly, to the measure of the poet. *The transformation of the reader is at issue.*’⁴⁹³ [Emphasis mine.]

It is the work itself that demands this transformation, the kind of graced transformation that might open up spaces for women in Church. To return to Cixous, who has never been absent, she often writes of the great transformations she has undergone through reading the work of the writers she loves most. These texts ‘all speak with insistence of a going toward, or of an active orientation. It is this movement toward something or somebody that opens what I would call “being in the direction of chance.”’ Heidegger and Hölderlin make an appearance here too, for the response to this movement toward life is a submission, ‘a playing to find while losing. A thousand poets promise that if we lose

⁴⁹² David Jasper, ‘Interdisciplinarity in Impossible Times: Studying Religion through Literature and the Arts’, in *Literature and Theology: New Interdisciplinary Spaces*, ed. Heather Walton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 4.

⁴⁹³ Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger*, 108.

ourselves—and we must—there always remains the path. That's what Heidegger told us in his *Holzwege*, his paths that lead nowhere. We have to let the path work.⁴⁹⁴

The path is a spiritual one. At a 1985 seminar on 'poetry, passion, and history,' Cixous said, 'I want to plant some paths, some slowness, some trees, some thought and silence. The texts that accompany me on this journey work on this inside of an outside, on an inside-outside. [. . .] These texts make us travel so that from an apparently immobile contemplation we are led to infinite discoveries.'⁴⁹⁵ Cixous's own poetic texts such as *Manna* perform such journeys of intricate interior and exterior exploration, her reading of others and our reading of her can be experienced as both contemplative and active, a movement that resonates with theology, at least a theology that takes into account the delicate relations between interior and exterior, between sacred and profane, and the permeable threshold between when one is willing to go on journeys such as those Cixous invites us on. Such journeys are poetic, political, ethical, elliptical, a combination Mireille Calle-Gruber refers to as 'poethics'.⁴⁹⁶ By walking those paths, Cixous has provided glimpses of the veiled spaces. It is not surprising, considering the gift she has that she believes comes out of a flawed vision, intense nearsightedness: 'I see the invisible more easily than the visible,' she writes. 'So I close my eyes, and I see the landscape of the soul, its hell, its heaven.'⁴⁹⁷

Cixous is Jewish; I am Roman Catholic. Do we see the same landscape of the soul? I worry that there is something offending in my great affinity for her, a concern that I break her rules, an inaccurate description of her delineations, if the affinity strays into the area of appropriation. Yet there are constant correspondences. I see a spiritual movement in *Manna*, as new creation story, in the final words of Mass: '*Ite missa est*'. The sending forth. 'Thanks be to God'. And in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, who created them as a path to greater intimacy with God. He based the exercises on his own interior experience, but the exercitant is expected to move out from the interior into the world, a world that is not then considered profane but infused with the divine discovered initially in the depths of one's soul.

⁴⁹⁴ Hélène Cixous, 'Poetry, Passion, and History: Marina Tsvetayeva', 112.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 79.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 89.

And isn't this the same space in *Manna* in which Winnie, or rather, Zami, inhabits while waiting for her upcoming wedding to Nelson? Inhabits is too claustrophobic a word, for she cannot stay still, flapping 'the air with thousands of permitted wings'⁴⁹⁸ on her way not only to her wedding but also to the resistance and passion of a 'black Jerusalem'. She is both inside and outside, passive and active, thinking this among a multitude of incrowding thoughts: 'What I'm missing is the time to pray and to not possess.'⁴⁹⁹ She fears the abundance of love, the too strong grace, and she is right to fear it, for what she lacks comes to her in the form of waiting and separation, a dispossession of herself from herself and Nelson, the object of her love.

Hauntings, possessions, sudden appearances of the strange in what is familiar. Heidegger knows this territory well. What does he tell us about it? What is it that he desires for us as readers? To wait, in a space of dispossession, akin to contemplation, in silence finally, which is, perhaps, to be in a space of 'being theologically,' a horizon extended beyond thinking theologically? What does he do when he reads Hölderlin? How is it that he is transformed? (For he is transformed—or, rather, transfigured, if we recall the first Intersection. About his reading encounter with Hölderlin, he will write that an 'earthquake' hit him.⁵⁰⁰) Does he never ask, 'what is this poem about?' He does, though not as a scholar but as a thinker. Recall Clark's comment, 'the transformation of the reader is at issue.' The question turns into 'what is it about this poem that transforms thinking unlike any other thing?' Cixous was influenced by Heidegger, took an 'ascetic' turn because of it, as Conley notes, and is willing to both experience and implement the spiritual measure he uncovered in the poems of a few, though overwhelmingly of Hölderlin. How might we 'be' theologically, dwell poetically? He answers questions with questions, turning signifieds into signifiers perhaps, as Cixous does when we asked of *Manna*, 'What is this text that it has this effect?' To the question of what Hölderlin is about in his mention of measure in our opening poem, he responds:

'We must pay heed to the kind of taking here, which does not consist in a clutching or any other kind of grasping, but rather in a letting come of what has been dealt out. What is the measure for poetry? The godhead; God, therefore? Who is the God?'⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸ Cixous, *Manna*, 90.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁰⁰ Clark, *Martin Heidegger*, 98.

⁵⁰¹ Heidegger, ' "...Poetically Man Dwells..." ', 225.

Chapter 5: (Trans)Forming Faith with Yves Bonnefoy, Hélène Cixous and Ignatius of Loyola

I maintain that nothing is more authentic, and thus more reasonable, than to go wandering.⁵⁰²

Letting the path work

We may be lucky in our wanderings to travel at least a trace of Heidegger's poetic paths to nowhere. For both Heidegger and Cixous, poetry, at least poetry at a certain level, is essential for authentic human living, even salvific. Yet they also recognize poetry matters little if at all to an increasingly utilitarian, technological world. Heidegger asks in an essay of the same title, 'what are poets for?', after a phrase in Friedrich Hölderlin's poem 'Bread and Wine': 'What are poets for in a destitute time?'⁵⁰³

Heidegger answers after Hölderlin in his poem: In these most destitute times the poet is able to 'discern the danger that is assailing man', she is the one 'capable of seeing the threat of the unhealable, the unholy' and by that discernment, unveiling tracings of the gods and the god who have fled.⁵⁰⁴ The destitution is made more so by human ignorance of its severity, and because of this lack of awareness, 'there fails to appear for the world the ground that grounds it' and the world hangs in the abyss.⁵⁰⁵ There is hope, however, if the world turns away from the abyss (A cosmic metanoia? Why not?), which is only possible through the poet, who reaches into the abyss unlike any other human and restores awareness of the poetic in our being.⁵⁰⁶

Cixous puts the problem poetically, echoing a passage of the aforementioned essay:

[I]n these feeble and forgetful times, when we are far away from things, so far from each other, very far from ourselves, in these sad and forgetful times, of feeble looks, too short, falling aside from things, far from living things, where we don't know how to read, to let senses radiate, and we are cold, a glacial air

⁵⁰² Yves Bonnefoy, 'The Act and the Place of Poetry', 115.

⁵⁰³ Martin Heidegger, 'What Are Poets For?', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 91, 117.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

is blowing around our souls, around the words, around the moments, our ears are frozen, the years have four winters and our ears hibernate, we have need of translation.⁵⁰⁷

We have need of translation. Who will translate for us? Who will open our ears, remind us how to read, discern the dangers, thaw our souls, reach into the abyss? Heidegger urges us to learn how to listen to true poets who know their vocation in this destitute time, ours the same as Hölderlin's, traced from the time of the gods' departure. And therein is the crux of this chapter: If poets are defined as those who best serve as such translators, then my three unlikely 'word-fellows': Cixous, Bonnefoy, and Ignatius, may indeed all be called poets, for they not only perform such translations, but they do so because they themselves were the beneficiaries of others' translations they experienced as transformative. Their creative and spiritual lives come to life as they allow poetical texts to deeply affect them, which Heidegger tells us, 'does not consist in a clutching or any other kind of grasping, but rather in a letting come of what has been dealt out.'⁵⁰⁸

In this understanding, poetry matters because it knocks us off those straight and narrow paths of mediocrity and utilitarianism into something out of the ordinary. Both Yves Bonnefoy and Cixous know this very well. Sandra Gilbert has described one of Cixous' works, *The Newly Born Woman*, with a description that can easily be extended to all three poets: reading Cixous, she writes, 'is like going to sleep in one world and waking up in another'.⁵⁰⁹ Ignatius, Bonnefoy and Cixous go to sleep in one world and wake up in another by reading. In our reading of them, we are offered the same opportunity if we are willing to let their work take our own spiritual measure.

Cixous and Heidegger place paths that encourage fruitful exploration of the texts of the poets: the idea of turning, or metanoia; the transgression of the boundary between inner and outer; movement within immobility; and *Gelassenheit*, a term used by Meister Eckhart and developed by Heidegger, that is, in the words of Robert Detweiler, 'a condition of acceptance that is neither nihilistic nor fatalistic but the ability—and it may be a gift—to

⁵⁰⁷ Cixous, *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange*, 46-48; I am thinking particularly of this passage from Martin Heidegger, 'What Are Poets For?', 117: 'The essence of technology comes to the light of day only slowly. This day is the world's night, rearranged into merely technological day. This day is the shortest day. It threatens a single endless winter. Not only does protection now withhold itself from man, but the integralness of the whole of what is remains now in darkness. The wholesome and sound withdraws. The world becomes without healing, unholy.'

⁵⁰⁸ Heidegger, ' "...Poetically Man Dwells..." ', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 225.

⁵⁰⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert, 'Introduction: A Tarantella of Theory', in *The Newly Born Woman*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), x.

move gracefully through life's fortunes and accidents, or to wait out its calamities.⁵¹⁰

These paths are hermeneutical and spiritual, and thus my main concern here is to suggest that in reading and creating as poets this odd trio may show us as readers how to believe as poets, transforming our 'insides' so that we might transform our 'outsides' by poetically finding 'God' in all things. I will here attend to those moments in the poets' lives and texts where the two intermingle most intensely. In this poetic realm, texts are taken into bodies and bodies enter texts, making for a transgressive and unstable environment ripe for transformation.⁵¹¹

'From an apparently immobile contemplation . . .'

Here is a commonality that mobilizes a joint attack on binaries of spirit/body, inner/outer, remaindered from the past. The three poets each undergo a transformation by chance, or grace, depending on your beliefs, while in what I will call spaces of immobility. They are transformed in these spaces by reading books given to them or stumbled upon, accidental readings, wonderful accidents, gifts that must be grace (and there I show my hand). The immobility of Ignatius is physical and forced upon him. Cixous is stilled by mourning and desperation. Bonnefoy, by ennui and mediocrity. Living and reading become so close in this consideration that it is sometimes difficult to see where one lets off and the other begins. For Cixous, writing is the energy of life/the energy of life is writing. For Ignatius, the text is something he becomes. For Bonnefoy, the poem is a dwelling created out of words and empty spaces that surround them.

The pilgrim poet

Let us begin our little textual pilgrimage with Ignatius, the one, recall, who calls himself 'the pilgrim' in his autobiography, which he narrated to another Jesuit.⁵¹² His experience of immobility and the transformation it generated is the most obvious and easily delineated of the three. He is the most outwardly religious and the least likely to be considered a poet, though that judgment is worth critique if not here, then elsewhere. This immobilization is

⁵¹⁰ Detweiler, 'What is Reading Religiously?', 35.

⁵¹¹ I am grateful to David Jasper for conversations on the destabilizing nature of the mingling of texts and bodies. In his book *The Sacred Body* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), 182, Jasper delves beneath the surface of things, making transgressive moves from body to text and back again. 'Texts into bodies and bodies into texts,' he writes, eventually daring us to join him in what is both a deeply theological and hermeneutical journey by asking the question 'For what is it to dive into the depths, to risk the impossible vertical?'

⁵¹² Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 13.

crucial for the foundational event of the saint's spiritual life: his conversion experience. In 1521, Ignatius, then soldier, spends nine months recuperating from a horrible battle injury suffered when a cannonball shatters his leg in the battle of Pamplona.⁵¹³ After a few months he is well enough to want to read his favorite fare, chivalrous romances, but his sister-in-law Magdalena, matron of the Loyola castle, gives him the only books she has: Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* and Ludolph of Saxony's *The Life of Jesus Christ*.⁵¹⁴ What does Ignatius do in this immobility of the body? He is compelled by outside circumstance to turn inside, the outer immobility allowing for an inner dynamism.⁵¹⁵ He reads, and reads poetically, a letting go into the text that becomes part of him as he reacts to his reading. He enters the narratives of the saints, especially perhaps of Francis and Dominic, as they are mentioned specifically in the autobiography:

While reading the life of our Lord and those of the saints, he used to pause and meditate, reasoning with himself: 'What if I were to do what Saint Francis did, or what Saint Dominic did?' Thus in his thoughts he dwelt on many good deeds, always suggesting to himself great and difficult ones, but as soon as he considered doing them, they all appeared easy of performance. Throughout these thoughts he used to say to himself: 'Saint Dominic did this, so I have to do it too. Saint Francis did this, so I have to do it too.'⁵¹⁶

The tough soldier begins to note his affective responses to his reading, an embodied reading, for the emotions are experienced bodily. (Recall Cixous, 'These texts make us travel so that from an apparently immobile contemplation we are led to infinite discoveries. . . .') Ignatius begins his interior pilgrimage as he starts to perceive a difference in his responses to the religious and adventurous texts. From this initial distinction, will arise the practices of the discernment of the spirits, the core of the *Exercises*,⁵¹⁷ and the prayer of the senses. Michael Ivens describes the latter as 'the exercise which culminates the contemplative day [. . .] characterized by a concentrated sense-presence with a minimum of discursive thinking. The sensing is bodily/imaginative and its immediate object is the physical realities of persons and things.'⁵¹⁸

From the autobiography:

⁵¹³ Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, chapter 1. Ignatius is wounded May 1521 and leaves for Jerusalem February 1522.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 43, 44.

⁵¹⁵ I am grateful to David Jasper for this wording.

⁵¹⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 47.

⁵¹⁷ See, for example, Avery Dulles' preface to *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, xv.

⁵¹⁸ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 97.

There was this difference, however. When he thought of worldly matters, he found much delight; but after growing weary and dismissing them, he found that he was dry and unhappy. But when he thought of going barefoot to Jerusalem and eating nothing but herbs and imitating the saints in all the austerities they practiced, he not only found consolation in these thoughts, but even after they had left him he remained happy and joyful. He did not consider nor did he stop to examine this difference until one day his eyes were partially opened, and he began to wonder at this difference and to reflect upon it. From experience he knew that some thoughts left him sad while others made him happy, and little by little he came to perceive the different spirits that were moving him; one coming from the devil, the other coming from God.⁵¹⁹

I suggest that Ignatius has gone so far inside himself in his reading that he incorporates the texts into his body. His reading spurs him to an eventual incredibly intricate and delicate awareness of his bodily responses, which he transmutes in an equally intricate and delicate way into the workings of his *Exercises*. Yet, within the rigid structure of the *Exercises* are a flexibility and playfulness, and a recognition of the importance of the senses, the freedom of the human person, and the delicate movements of the soul. He has read to an excess in his immobility, not only desiring to imitate but to be what he in fact was already becoming.

I think of Ignatius most often as pilgrim and poet. Therefore, it was with delight that I re-encountered a forgotten text by Roland Barthes (the eponymous *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, an even odder threesome than my own), the only one I know of who has insisted on calling Ignatius a writer and his *Exercises* writing. Not only writer, but inventor of a new language, one that the exercitant must learn to be able to converse with God. Barthes reads the *Exercises* as writing, releasing the text from its bond of religion, he claims, and by doing so is able to discover multiple texts and an alternative economy, one, like Cixous', of gift. First there is the literal text, which Ignatius gives to the director of the retreat. The director interprets that text and offers it to the retreatant, in the process creating a new text. The retreatant performs it, imperfectly, as the gift offered to God, who receives it and offers God's own text back to the exercitant. Each giver and receiver is also a writer, writing a new text, creating a new language.⁵²⁰ Though he does not use this wording, this language is truly incarnational. 'The body in Ignatius is never conceptual: it is always *this* body: if I transport myself to a vale of tears, I must imagine, see *this* flesh, *these* members among the bodies of the creatures'.⁵²¹ As Barthes notes, Ignatius founds 'meaning on

⁵¹⁹ Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 48.

⁵²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 41-44.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

matter and not on concept'.⁵²² In Barthes' reading, resonances can be felt with Cixous' idea of writing the body. Like Cixous, he reads with great pleasure. In the process, he brings Ignatius to life, into greater intimacy with himself. Though some miss the wild joy of Ignatius, preferring a static domesticated version of the saint, piously bedecked in luxurious robes in Rome, Barthes through his visceral reading knows it: 'What I get from Loyola's life are not the saint's pilgrimages, visions, mortifications, and constitutions, but only "his beautiful eyes, always a little filled with tears."' ⁵²³

*The poet-thinker*⁵²⁴

Hélène Cixous describes herself as 'only a poet,' in her essay 'The Last Painting or the Portrait of God'. 'But not without God; being only a poet, I am really obligated to count on God, or on you, or on someone.'⁵²⁵ Perhaps that is reason enough for a linking with Ignatius. Still, they are an odd couple. So distant and yet somehow so close. I imagine they would have been great correspondents. As disciple of Jacques Derrida and author of the playful book *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a young Jewish Saint*,⁵²⁶ Cixous reminds me of Ignatius in her mimetic excess. What do I mean by that phrase? There are at least two aspects. Again I turn to Edith Wyschogrod, who brings the texts and lives of saints and postmodern writers into conversation. First, she notes that the imperative of the hagiography is 'listen', but the successful response is not one of replication, but an identification with the 'spiritual rebirth and transformation' of the saint whose story is being told that inspires 'a new catena of moral events appropriate to the addressee's life'.⁵²⁷

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid., 8. Barthes assists my project by naming Ignatius a writer. He notes that the Jesuits deny their founder this privilege and sees in this something more telling: 'Here we find once more the old modern myth according to which language is merely the docile and *insignificant* instrument for the serious things that occur in the spirit, the heart or the soul. This myth is not innocent; discrediting the form serves to exalt the importance of the content: to say: *I write badly* means: *I think well*.' (39)

⁵²⁴ I borrow this appellation from Jacques Derrida who applied it to Cixous, whom he considered an intellectual and spiritual companion. The feeling was mutual (see, for example, *Rootprints*, 80, where Cixous writes that she has "a very great proximity with Derrida whom I have always considered to be my 'other'."). On the cover of *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, he called her the greatest writer in the French language. "For a great writer must be a poet-thinker, very much a poet and a very thinking poet."

⁵²⁵ Cixous, 'The Last Painting or the Portrait of God', in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, 106.

⁵²⁶ Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a young Jewish saint*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). In her author's note (vii), Cixous writes, 'You will of course have guessed that this portrait is to be somewhat unorthodox. UnCatholic in other words. What is a Young Jewish Saint [*Saint Juif*]? Given that its subject is Jacques Derrida, the inventor of *différance*, the poet who makes writing and hearing—and what an extraordinary sense of hearing he has—pair up and dance, this portrait is sotto voce and homophonically—do you hear?—that of a young *sainjuif*, I mean a Jewish monkey [*singe juif*], if there is such a thing, and why shouldn't there be a saintly monkey or a monkey of a saint?'

⁵²⁷ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 10.

The ultimate imperative of the Christian saint, to imitate Christ, is impossible, unrealisable, thus, as previously mentioned, there are no rules for the creation of new texts and lives; instead they are created in the living of the life without rules, which is one of excess as it strives to bring into being one's own new transformative texts.

Is this not the space of imperatives Cixous says she inhabits with Derrida? 'There is a relationship to writing in which I find my primary exigency, I would say, and which is his primary exigency.'⁵²⁸ Saint Jacques tells her a secret: 'one-step-more. When you arrive "at the end" (of a thought, of a description etc.) take one more step. When you have taken one more step, continue, take the next step.'⁵²⁹ The 'more' for Ignatius and for Cixous is not one of quantity but quality and intensity, as, for example, number 319 in the first Rules for the Discernment of Spirits at a time of desolation, there is a recommendation not to insist upon more prayer but to 'insist more upon prayer'.⁵³⁰ *'Whenever he made up his mind to do a certain penance that the saints had done, he was determined not only to do the same, but even more.'*⁵³¹ And then there is their shared attention to the physical practice of writing. *'We know that Ignatius had 'attractive penmanship' and at Loyola, wrote on 'polished and lined paper.'*⁵³² *'He sets out for Jerusalem carrying with him a notebook in which he has copied passages from his reading in convalescence. 'He took an account book—it was quarto in size and had three hundred pages—and in it he wrote our Lord's words in red ink, just as he had seen them in Ludolph's Life of Christ, but it was his own idea to record those of our Lady in blue.'*⁵³³ *'He relates that the book 'afforded him much consolation'.'*⁵³⁴ *'He will carry this book in his wanderings through Europe, scribbling notes constantly about his reading of the movements of his spirit, which make their way into letters to spiritual companions like Isabel Roser, his longtime friend, benefactress and, briefly, 'Jesuitess'.'*⁵³⁵ *'Later, as superior general, he will write thousands of letters from Rome,'*⁵³⁶

⁵²⁸ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 84.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵³⁰ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, no. 319.

⁵³¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 56.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, Tylanda commentary, n. 11.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵³⁵ See Hugo Rahner, *Saint Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*.

⁵³⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings: Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters, including the text of The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin, 1996), 113-115.

another enforced immobility of sorts and an ironic destiny for one who wanted nothing more than to plant paths and walk them.

Cixous is incredibly prolific. The seeds of this production are notes, notes as seeds, written on scraps of paper, in journals, anywhere and everywhere. ‘I keep scores of little bits of paper, for I note at top speed what presents itself all the time, in a café at a minigolf, while walking along the street, I have small notebooks in my pockets, I scribble on a paper napkin.’⁵³⁷ Writing is a spiritual exercise. ‘I try to organize it: beginning with silence. With the conditions of retreat, yes, the conditions of an interior voyage. With the least resistance possible.’⁵³⁸

The conditions of an interior voyage. Ah, Ignatius and Cixous are hermeneuts of the soul. I had had my doubts, but now I see reason to keep pursuing this linking of Ignatius and Cixous. They illustrate why refusal to engage postmodernism in Catholic theology is an anathema and not the other way around. As Wyschogrod points out, ‘the antiseptic atmosphere of modernism does not allow the saints to breathe’ and failed ‘to create a continuity with the past’.⁵³⁹ In its paradoxical refusal and embrace of language, its playful, excessive and reflexive nature, its acknowledgement of materiality and imagination, and its refusal of meta-narratives and acceptance of ambiguity, the postmodern is an atmosphere in which the saint may flourish. How so, specifically? Because ‘the old does not simply disappear. It is displaced within specifiable discursive contexts—art, literature, philosophy—through critique.’⁵⁴⁰

Cixous’s writing practices are critique enacted with as much body and soul as mind. Her continuous development of the idea of *écriture féminine*, or ‘feminine writing’, with ‘its willingness to defy the masculine and seek new relations between subject and the other through writing’,⁵⁴¹ may prove helpful as a lens into ways of reading anew hagiographies as narratives expressing, in Wyschogrod’s words, ‘the primacy of the other person and the dissolution of self-interest’.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁷ Cixous, *Hélène Cixous: The Writing Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Susan Sellers (London: Continuum, 2004), vii.

⁵³⁸ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 105.

⁵³⁹ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, xiv, xvii.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁵⁴¹ Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Authorship, Autobiography and Love* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 5.

⁵⁴² Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, xiv.

The space of Helene Cixous' immobility and the creative movement it impels are not as obvious as Ignatius's physical restriction. Though, like his, hers are formed out of intersections of life and body and text and writing, apropos, as she is proponent and practitioner of an aspect of *écriture féminine* she refers to as writing the body.

As Heather Walton writes, regarding the latter term, 'Cixous assumes Derrida's barely submerged mythology of writing as a female revolt against authority. Women's writing is a volcanic force, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the truth with laughter. She incarnates this feminine writing in the symbolic figure of the woman who writes her body.'⁵⁴³

As we have seen in the previous chapter's reading of *Manna*, Cixous's texts are dynamic, in constant movement, and it is difficult to make a claim for stillness at any point in her long and prolific career. Yet there are references to an immobilization she experienced followed by her liberating reading encounter with Clarice Lispector. The most vivid depiction of this event is expressed in *To Live the Orange*,⁵⁴⁴ a text that is also an example of *écriture féminine*, which because of Cixous's resistance to defining the practice, is perhaps best illuminated through her performance of it. The encounter with Lispector is expressed in terms of a revelation:

I wandered for ten glacial years in over-published solitude, without seeing a single human woman's face, the sun had retired, it was mortally cold, the truth had set, I took the last book before death, and behold, it was Clarice, the writing. [. . .] The writing came up to me, she addressed to me, in seven tongues, one after the other, she read herself to me, through my absence up to the presence. [. . .] I saw her face. My God. She showed me her face. I had my vision.⁵⁴⁵

The reader is reminded of the book of Revelation: the number seven, sign of the divine, visions of God, a revelation by an angel, the dead who come to life, body made present in and through text. 'I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich.' (Rev 2:9) In this apocalypse, God is she, and the meeting with her is holy.

Cixous has made the hermeneutical and spiritual shift to the embodied way of reading, a different mode of knowing, undertaken by Ignatius and suggested by Heidegger. I wonder

⁵⁴³ Heather Walton, *Literature, Theology and Feminism*, 148.

⁵⁴⁴ See page 13 in Introduction(s).

⁵⁴⁵ Cixous, *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange*, 48.

what Cixous would make of Ignatius' prayer of the senses? Would she consider him a practitioner of writing the body, of *écriture féminine*, which, again, she does not restrict by gender?

In the Fifth Contemplation of the Second Week of the Exercises, the exercitant is asked at the end of the day of prayers and repetitions on the Nativity to apply the five senses 'with the aid of the imagination,' to see, hear, touch, to 'smell the infinite fragrance, and taste the infinite sweetness of the divinity.'⁵⁴⁶

How does one respond to such vivid and felt prayer and writing? Have the two not shown evidence of being those who can reach into Heidegger's abyss and contribute toward a turning? Are not the reader and retreatant moved to awaken in another world, one of awe and wonder? The prayer of the senses is one of sinking, deepening, a hopefulness for the fruits of the day's contemplations to be made present. The response is no response. It is the gift of gracefully waiting.

The poet-painter

It was Bonnefoy who led me to see the transformative potential of immobility through the reading of his first major poetry collection, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, an alternating series of prose and verse about the life, death and new life of a woman lover, Douve.⁵⁴⁷ His own immobility occurred as a result of a lack of art and literature in the provincial town of his childhood. Then one day his philosophy teacher brings him a book from Paris, a collection of surrealists. He describes it as 'a real thunderbolt' and 'a whole world.'⁵⁴⁸ He was attracted by the surrealist image, felt a kind of calling, that 'going toward' Cixous speaks of. In an interview in 1976, he recalls the moment, ' "If only there were sun tonight", I read, and it seemed to me that a road whose presence I had not even imagined opened in front of me, in this night I recognized as my own, and as deep as ever, but now suddenly murmuring, initiatory—the first step toward the first true light . . . '⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 101-125.

⁵⁴⁷ Bonnefoy, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, trans. Galway Kinnell (N.P.: Ohio University Press, 1968; reprint, Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1992).

⁵⁴⁸ Yves Bonnefoy, 'The Origins and Development of My Concept of Poetry: An Interview with John E. Jackson (1976)' in *The Act and the Place of Poetry*, 143.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

Bonnefoy constantly refers to Presence, “a sacred order [. . .] at the very heart of daily things.”⁵⁵⁰ He becomes disenchanted with surrealism out of a concern of distorted vision of this Presence, but he never loses interest in painting and becomes an art historian, one who is unusually poetic in his critique, as we saw in his writing about Giacometti and will see again in the final chapter.

He shares with Ignatius and Cixous an acceptance of death and a fierce affirmation of life. Like them, he is willing to go into the depths and invite us to go with him. The sparseness and beauty of his poems disguise their ability to disorient the reader and shift her thinking. In the midst of reading Douve, I realized I no longer recognized the landscape into which he had invited me. Yet I desired nothing more than to remain there, not as an escape but as the opposite: to wait in hope of a fleeting glimpse of the presence of something eternal held within those elemental and sacramental objects he writes into his poetry.

We end in that poem, ‘The Orangery’, where we began, planting paths of thoughts and silence:

So we will walk on the ruins of a vast sky,
The far-off landscape will bloom
Like a destiny in the vivid light.

The long-sought most beautiful country
Will lie before us land of salamanders,

Look, you will say, at this stone:
Death shines from it.
Secret lamp it is this that burns under our steps,
Thus we walk lighted.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵⁰ Yves Bonnefoy, “Interview with Yves Bonnefoy,” in *In the Shadow’s Light*, trans. John Naughton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 163.

⁵⁵¹ Bonnefoy, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, 119 (page citation is to the reprint edition).

Intersection Two: Poetry and Prayer: ‘An Inner Kinship’⁵⁵²

. . . like a poem they give voice to what could not speak . . .⁵⁵³

This phrase from Michel de Certeau’s *The Mystic Fable* has insisted itself into this project and refuses to go away. Something so persistent must be paid attention. I have struggled with it, yet I am not satisfied. What am I missing? Am I asking the wrong questions? Am I not listening? Have I taken a wrong turn by attending to it and thus neglecting what I had set out to do? I had intended an exploration into areas where the kinship between poetry and prayer might be illuminated: descending into inner depths, listening for the poetic word, experiencing joyous seriousness, three areas discussed in an essay titled ‘Poetry and the Christian’, by Karl Rahner.⁵⁵⁴ Three of our poet-companions would accompany us: Bachelard, Cixous, and Ignatius. Like Rahner, they have perceived these characteristics at the threshold of poetry and prayer, albeit in very different ways and not always explicitly. As we have seen, Bachelard, in his phenomenological analyses of poetry, listens to poets with great joy, often turning to the metaphor of verticality to get closer to the essence of the human imagination. As we have also seen, the latter is the site where Ignatius believes God is most intimately and joyously encountered, and his spiritual exercises encourage interior descent. In her turn, as I have tried to show, Cixous reads and writes poetically, as a spiritual practice, engaging those writers willing to travel ‘deep inside [. . .] down below’.⁵⁵⁵ She links depth and joy together as integral to the transgressive nature of the poet. I had hoped that by listening, descending, experiencing, we would disclose an inner kinship between poetry and prayer.

But now the original plan lies in ruins, while I am haunted by this scrap of text. And yet that seems a fitting interruption to this journey and may portend that I have learned to listen more perceptively than before I made the acquaintance of my poet companions. Cixous has something to say here. When asked in an interview how her writing notebooks helped her plan, she replied that she didn’t plan, ever. Instead, she trusted. ‘The only thing

⁵⁵² I have taken the quoted phrase from Karl Rahner, S.J., ‘Poetry and the Christian’, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 365.

⁵⁵³ Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 232.

⁵⁵⁴ Rahner, ‘Poetry and the Christian’, 357-367.

⁵⁵⁵ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 118.

I plan is not planning, but I don't even plan that. I just have a feeling which is a very strange feeling of trust. It's as if I believe that if I go to the place of appointment, it will come.'⁵⁵⁶ To reiterate, Conley remarks that Cixous' reading of Heidegger's later writing on poetry was the equivalent of a religious turn, ascetic in nature.⁵⁵⁷ Heidegger opens his essay ' . . . Poetically Man Dwells . . . ' with a focus on the phrase within the poem, of giving thought to it by listening and responding freely.⁵⁵⁸ I wonder if that will help me set a way of proceeding that will arise from a space both poetic and prayerful, out of which comes a possibility that the form will enact what the content speaks.⁵⁵⁹ I will make an attempt. My approach, then, will be poetic in nature, taking a cue, too, from a similarity among dissimilarities of Rahner and Cixous, who both work by processes of unfolding,⁵⁶⁰ allowing themselves to be drawn forward into life and into texts, rather than imposing themselves upon either. Let us begin then to see how things unfold. Let us ask that phrase a question and see how it replies, follow it, as Heidegger suggests.⁵⁶¹

What does Certeau's phrase then tell about poems and their gift for giving voice to the unspeakable, the unsayable, the silenced? Who are the 'they' of the phrase who are like a poem giving voice to what cannot speak? What can they tell us about what it is to be like a poem? They are the words of a peasant child who Jean-Joseph Surin, a 17th-century Jesuit, encountered in his travels and came to see as spiritual master. The relationship between the two is surprising, disruptive, and spiritually close. The world has been turned upside down. The Jesuit sits at the feet of the boy, who speaks of how to relate to God, of asking in prayer what can be given of oneself to God rather than what God can give to oneself. 'I thought he was an angel', the Jesuit writes in a letter that is copied and shared throughout France. He 'says marvelous things'.⁵⁶² The original letter and its copies sound poetic and

⁵⁵⁶ Hélène Cixous, 'Magnetizing the world': an interview with Hélène Cixous', interview by Susan Sellers, in *The Writing Notebooks of Hélène Cixous*, trans. and ed. Susan Sellers (London: Continuum, 2002), 122.

⁵⁵⁷ Conley, introduction to *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, xiv.

⁵⁵⁸ Heidegger, ' . . . Poetically Man Dwells . . . ', 213.

⁵⁵⁹ As we have seen, this is also essentially the way of Ignatius, to listen to the heart and mind and respond in freedom.

⁵⁶⁰ We have discussed Cixous and her unfolding paths of thinking/writing. As Harvey Egan notes, Rahner's theology 'contained a movement of unfolding' in which the love and joy of God could be found in 'every dimension of human life'. (Harvey D. Egan, S.J., foreword to *Karl Rahner: I Remember: An Autobiographical Interview with Meinhold Krauss*, trans. Harvey D. Egan, S.J. [New York: Crossroad, 1985], 4.)

⁵⁶¹ I recognize that the conditions of this reading are not to be conflated with those of Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin, in which he returns the phrase to the poem and follows what strikes me as the resonances or tones of thought he hears in the poem through following the phrase. We have moved outside the poem, but the concerns of Heidegger are shared here.

⁵⁶² Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 229.

prayerful; Certeau describes the language in these texts as ‘full of life’, transforming into ‘a spoken word, a “song”’.⁵⁶³ The text is fluid, shifting each time it is retold, resulting in a textual kinship of its readers. As Certeau remarks, the style of the letters ‘does not arise within oneself but within others and their hospitality.’⁵⁶⁴

I see in the two figures an image of a liberating relation between poetry and prayer, the two engaged in conversation out of which both tend toward greater authenticity, or, greatness, as Rahner phrases it when he speaks of poetry.⁵⁶⁵ There are shared elements, a kinship of sorts, which is our concern: fluidity, authenticity, song, disruption, that which is life-giving and transformative, as well as that which is disturbing and upending. Which figure is poetry, which prayer? It is not clear, and maybe that’s the point. Perhaps it’s not the figures that are imaging poetry and prayer but the action in between the two, the texture of the conversation. What matters is the dynamism and fruits of what passes between them, the words about prayer that are like a poem. Still, I am unsatisfied. There is more there to be uncovered.

Another phrase. It flows naturally from the first.

... the poet speaks to others, and hence to non-poets, and hence that they too come of themselves into relationship to poetry and poets, and must know what poetry is about.⁵⁶⁶

So writes Rahner in the beginning of his essay ‘Poetry and the Christian’. He sees the writing, speaking and reading of poetry as relational, a communal undertaking, involving call and response. The essay evidences many of the qualities of Rahner’s life and work, qualities that lend themselves to an exploration into the affinities between poetry and prayer: a humility in his approach to the eclectic subjects he engaged, his emphasis on the freedom of the graced human person, his commitment to a way of work and life that arose out of prayer.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 233.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ See Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, ‘Karl Rahner: Toward a Theological Aesthetics’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 231.

⁵⁶⁶ Karl Rahner, ‘Poetry and the Christian’, 357.

Rahner's approach to poetry is as a Christian and lover of poetry; he makes no pretense of being a literary critic, and he expresses some humility as a theologian writing on poetry. Yet that makes him a superb reader of poetry.

(This statement seems to go against so much of what I have claimed in this thesis, particularly regarding the inability of Balthasar and Beattie to move out of theological into more poetic readings of texts, that some further clarification is needed to that provided in chapter one (see page 28), one that can be teased out in a necessarily very brief comparison of Balthasar and Rahner, two of the most significant Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century. Though both men joined the Jesuits and were deeply affected by their experiences of the *Spiritual Exercises*, their paths diverged, so much so that today the two figures have come to represent two distinct paths Roman Catholic theology itself can take. As mentioned previously, this picture is fostered by the different perspectives of two journals associated with the theologians, *Concilium* (Rahner) and *Communio*, which Balthasar founded in reaction to trends in the Church after Vatican II he found alarming and often associated with Rahner, particularly attempts to adapt theology to the pluralism of the modern world and emphases on the person's encounter with God and experience of grace. For Balthasar, Rahner's theology overemphasised the importance of the human being. For Rahner, Balthasar's view of 'the whole of Catholic truth [as] a harmony' denied the existential truth that 'pluralism is such that the creeds can no longer present a unity of the world'.⁵⁶⁷ It would be a mistake to present a dichotomy of the theological vs. the poetical, rather, in this mention of the differences between the two theologians is hinted a distinction of theological approach. To reiterate what David Jasper notes in reference to Balthasar's reading of Hopkins, Balthasar 'finally bypasses the poet's aesthetic, ascetic theology by beginning at the wrong end in the theological tradition and reading only from the outside inward, a theology of surface only that can now be sustained simply through an intellectual concurrence.'⁵⁶⁸ Rahner, influenced by German philosophy, including Heidegger, with whom he studied for two years, and, more importantly, by the *Spiritual Exercises*, reads from the inside outward, beginning his theology with the subjectivity and relationality of the human person.⁵⁶⁹) In Rahner's consideration of poetry, he simply asks as a Christian and a human being, what can one say on the subject of poetry and the Christian, which turns the query to one of theological reflection that asks is there

⁵⁶⁷ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Method in Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 80.

⁵⁶⁸ Jasper, *The Sacred Body*, 174.

⁵⁶⁹ On the influence of German philosophy and the *Spiritual Exercises* on Rahner, see Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 2-7.

something about being Christian that calls for ‘a receptive capacity for the poetic word’?⁵⁷⁰ Characteristically pastoral and self-effacing, he immediately puts himself and his readers at ease in reflecting on poetry, for we may be ‘consoled and encouraged’ though we are not poets, by several considerations that enable us to engage it. As noted, the poet speaks, and in speaking brings us into relationship with poetry. Rahner consoles with Paul’s words to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:15) that those who are ‘led by the Spirit of God, may judge all things’.⁵⁷¹ Here is a reminder of things unfolding, of being led into life poetically. In these times when so often one hears from the official Church that things of the world are to be battled or avoided, how refreshing to read this reminder from a theologian who contributed to the Church’s opening up to the world fifty years ago with Vatican II: ‘Theology as reflective faith cannot be completely alien to what fills the lofty hours of man and so must be gathered home to God as a whole, since the one seed sown by the one God must ripen in all diverse fields of the world.’⁵⁷²

Maybe today Rahner’s language can seem overblown, overly optimistic, and non-inclusive, yet it rings true. ‘We must go to the Mass of life as we go to the Mass of the altar,’ he urges. In other words, in an echo of the founder of the Order to which he belonged, there is nothing in the world profane if only one knows how to look.⁵⁷³ And how to listen. When one does know how to look and listen, he writes, ‘all the senses of the spirit are at one’.⁵⁷⁴

‘Really great Christianity and really great poetry have an inner kinship.’⁵⁷⁵ This seemingly simple statement from Rahner’s essay strikes me as quite radical and remarkable even now, more than forty years after it was written. We have begun to explore the implications of considering poetry and prayer as kin by following after, albeit briefly, the aforementioned phrases. Kinship is about inescapable relationality, a deep connection, whether through blood, ritual, character, or affinity. To be kin is to listen to, speak to, give voice to an other who is or who will soon be close.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ This spiritual maxim is frequently expressed in Jesuit works. See, for example, Egan’s foreword to *Karl Rahner: I Remember*, 4; 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, January 2008, Decree 2, No. 10.

⁵⁷⁴ Rahner, ‘Poetry and the Christian’, 358.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 365.

Rahner notes that Christianity must have a special relationship with the poetic word because of its 'special intrinsic relationship to the *word*'.⁵⁷⁶ To be a Christian, one must be open to the grace, Rahner believes, of certain requisites: First, one must have ears open to words that have 'the power of naming the nameless'.⁵⁷⁷ Second, one must have the power of hearing and understanding 'words of the heart', 'sacral, even sacramental' words, helping 'to effect what they signify and penetrate into the primordial centre' of the human being.⁵⁷⁸ Third, the power of hearing authentic, reconciling words.⁵⁷⁹ Fourth, 'the power of becoming aware of the *incarnational* [. . .] of hearing the Word made flesh'.⁵⁸⁰ Rahner asks, then, what is the word of 'silent mystery', which 'touches the heart', 'gathers and unites', and embodies 'the eternal mystery'?⁵⁸¹ 'It is the word of poetry,' he replies, 'this power to hear means that one has heard the poetic word and abandoned oneself to it in humble readiness, till the ears of the spirit were open for it and it penetrated his heart.'⁵⁸² What an astounding message from Rahner: at the heart of the Christian message, of its life, is the grace to be open to the gift of poetry.

As Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen notes, Rahner was exploring the relationship between poetry, theology and Christian living 'in the context of the decline of Christian themes in literature (and art) in modernity', asking 'whether at a more fundamental level, this decline had actually taken place. Perhaps it is simply through new and renewed symbols, forms, and images that something of the spiritual and/or religious is expressed'.⁵⁸³

It is at this fundamental level of both language and the human subject that the work of Gaston Bachelard in a poetics of imagining takes place. He is not explicitly spiritual or religious, yet his work can be experienced as such, and for precisely the reasons suggested by Rahner's essay. He is not a poet, yet he has clearly the 'open ears' Rahner speaks of that allow him to be called by the poets into their world. In his engagement of that world, he

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 357.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 358.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 360.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 361.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 362-363

⁵⁸² Ibid., 363.

⁵⁸³ Thiessen, 'Karl Rahner: Toward a Theological Aesthetics', 231.

uses religious language such as soul, communion, eulogy, *logos*. ‘Poetry is a commitment of the soul’, ‘poetic revery [. . .] a phenomenology of the soul’, ‘Our soul is an abode.’⁵⁸⁴

Rahner suggests that ‘poetry is one way of training oneself to hear the word of life’.⁵⁸⁵ Perhaps the greatest relevance of Bachelard here then is what he might reveal about the *practice* of listening for the poetic word. He is an exquisite listener, and it is perhaps this gift that causes him to make the distinction between the mind and the soul. ‘The soul is so sensitive to these simple images’, he writes regarding birds’ nests and simple houses in *The Poetics of Space*, ‘that it hears all the resonances in a harmonic reading.’⁵⁸⁶ For Bachelard, the poetic word— though he refers always to the poetic image, it is a linguistic image⁵⁸⁷— is not static but rather act and origin. As I noted in chapter two, it reaches us at such depths that the result is transformational, a transfiguration, in that the word makes us what it speaks. The reader becomes a participant in an intense kinship.

Rahner refers to the depths of one’s heart as the place where both God and the poetic word is to be encountered. Perhaps it is the same space as what Bachelard refers to as ‘soul’. It may be where that kinship between prayer and poetry happens, because, as Rahner writes, ‘great poetry only exists where man radically faces what he is. In doing so, he may be entangled in guilt, perversity, hatred of self and diabolical pride, he may see himself as a sinner and identify himself with his sin. But even so, he is more exposed to the happy danger of meeting God, than the narrow-minded Philistine who always skirts cautiously the chasms of existence, to stay on the superficial level where one is never faced with doubts—nor with God.’⁵⁸⁸

Reading Rahner, Bachelard, and Cixous, praying with Ignatius, the depths of the heart are never forgotten. Cixous is a constant visitor to the depths, a connoisseur of the interior descent. This is what she says about depths and writing, and, like Rahner, she is speaking of ‘great’, as in, authentic, writing. She mentions here several of her favourite writers, the ones, as we now know, whom she refers to as ‘descenders’: Lispector, Genet, Kafka, Joyce, Kleist, a few others she returns to again and again:

⁵⁸⁴ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xxi.

⁵⁸⁵ Rahner, ‘Poetry and the Christian’, 364.

⁵⁸⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 99.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., xxvii: ‘the poetic image is an emergence from language’.

⁵⁸⁸ Rahner, ‘Poetry and the Christian’, 365.

it comes from deep inside. It comes from what Genet calls the ‘nether realms’, the inferior realms (*domaines inférieurs*). We’ll try to go there for a time, since this is where the treasure of writing lies, where it is formed, where it has stayed since the beginning of creation: down below. The name of the place changes according to our writers. Some call it hell: it is of course a good, a desirable hell.⁵⁸⁹

(This relation between writing and depths is one we will be revisiting in the next section.)

She writes this in *Three Steps in the Ladder of Writing*, or, rather, speaks it, as the book was first given as the Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory at UC Irvine in 1990. The steps in the ladder, which one ascends as one descends, are structured as three schools of writing: the school of the dead, the school of dreams, the school of roots. Theory becomes practice, spiritual practice. On the following page, of this poetic text I have come to experience as spiritual—though, to reiterate, like Bachelard, Cixous would not be considered a ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ writer in a conventional sense, she is, in fact, very much one—sometime, I don’t recall when, I wrote in the margin, ‘cf. Igs.—the interior descent, joy, not in despair’. I had forgotten it and not followed the phrase, as Heidegger had inspired me to do here, to see what kinship Cixous might have with Ignatius of Loyola.

This is what I discovered when I read the page again that must have put me in mind to draw them together into conversation:

Since we are shaped by years and years of all kinds of experiences and education, we must travel through all sorts of places that are not necessarily pleasant to get there: our own marshes, our own mud. And yet it pays to do so. The trouble is we are not taught that it pays, that it is beneficial. We are not taught the pain nor that in pain is hidden joy. We don’t know that we can fight against ourselves, against the accumulation of mental, emotional, and biographical clichés. [. . .] *It is a fight one must lead against subtle enemies.*⁵⁹⁰

What must have resonated in Cixous’ poetic writing was the spiritual writing of Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises*, which I have come to experience as poetic. The First Week of the 30-day retreat in which the exercises are undertaken, the exercitant asks, basically, where have I been caught in the mud? As Ignatius words it in his instruction in the First Exercise of the First Week, ‘In a case where the subject matter is not visible, as here in a meditation on sin, the representation will be to see in imagination my soul as a prisoner in this corruptible body, and to consider my whole composite being as an exile here on earth, cast

⁵⁸⁹ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 118.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119 (emphasis mine).

out to live among brute beasts.⁵⁹¹ As the retreatant moves through the exercises, she comes to know that hidden joy Cixous speaks of. The movement is the same: the review of the past, sometimes hellish, but beneficial and with hidden joy.

But it is their mutual recognition of the damage we do to ourselves that is most striking. The language is too close for two who are so far apart in time and place. It is too strange, but it comes, I imagine, out of the same origin: the two are students of the interior depths we have been discussing, where the kinship between poetry and prayer is most likely to be illuminated. Listen to what Ignatius says about the subtleties of the enemy in his 'Rules for Discernment of Spirits'. He refers to 'the customary deceits of the enemy', the way the 'evil one' works subtly to draw one who is experiencing spiritual joy into 'his own wicked designs', and how we must face 'temptations boldly'.⁵⁹²

To return to my beginning, I wonder if I have in the end uncovered more of that phrase that would not leave me. The question I will ask when I follow the phrase again is, what is it that could not speak? But perhaps it is a question I have already begun to answer and will continue to do so in the upcoming two chapters, a return to home transformed.

⁵⁹¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 47.

⁵⁹² Ibid., nos. 334, 325.

Part III:

Return to Home Transformed

And if God's incomprehensibility does not grip us in a word, if it does not draw us on into his superluminous darkness, if it does not call us out of the little house of our homely, close-hugged truths into the strangeness of the night that is our real home, we have misunderstood or failed to understand the words of Christianity. For they all speak of the unknown God, who only reveals himself to give himself as the abiding mystery, and to gather home to himself all that is outside himself and clear—home to him who is the incomprehensibility of silent love.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹³ Rahner, 'Poetry and the Christian', 359.

Chapter 6: ‘But Now My Eye Sees You’: Reading Dennis Potter’s *The Singing Detective* and the Book of Job with Hélène Cixous

The light that bathes the Bible has the same crude and shameless color as the light that reigns over the unconscious. We are those who later on transform, displace, and canonize the Bible, paint and sculpt it another way.⁵⁹⁴

Introduction

In the second Intersection, I attempted to open paths toward a home transformed, a space transfigured. Inspired by Heidegger’s poetic reading of poets, we followed phrases about hearing the voice of poets written by two Jesuit scholars who were attentive listeners to the word of poetry. By giving in to that alternative to my intended plan, I nevertheless touched upon the initial concerns of joyous seriousness, descent into inner depths, and listening for the poetic word and did so in a manner that attempted authentic listening to the voice of poets and to my own voice. In this way, I practiced the ways of reading set forth in the first Intersection by letting the path unfold and not imposing upon the texts.

In this chapter, I continue this pursuit, with some changes. I begin to ‘apply’⁵⁹⁵ the sense of sight, as well as that of hearing, as I turn, in part, to ‘reading’ the visual arts of television and painting. I consider two characters who undergo great spiritual transformations as a result of seeing anew: Job and Philip Marlow, the protagonist of Dennis Potter’s 1986 BBC television series *The Singing Detective*.⁵⁹⁶ In the central part of the chapter, I read the Potter work as a retelling of the book of Job, bringing into play my own experience of spiritual transformation using the method of autobiographical biblical criticism and the accompaniment of Hélène Cixous, who will guide us with a light akin to that noted in the quote above, the one she claims illuminates both the Bible and the unconscious. The sense of hearing is not abandoned, however, as texts and other readers are engaged as conversation partners.

⁵⁹⁴ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 67.

⁵⁹⁵ I am thinking here of Ignatius’ application, or prayer, of the senses, the first instance of which occurs the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* at the contemplation of the incarnation, when the exercitant begins to enter into narrative of the life of Jesus. The purpose is to engage the whole person in the prayer, beyond the intellect alone, into greater depths of their being.

⁵⁹⁶ Dennis Potter, *The Singing Detective*, Jon Amiel, dir. (London: BBC, 1986), television series, 6 episodes; Dennis Potter, *The Singing Detective* (published script) (London: Faber and Faber, 1986); Dennis Potter,

Though there have been many unusual associations of poets and texts in this thesis, the addition of Dennis Potter and *The Singing Detective* may seem at first a mismatch. Television is a popular medium, disdained by some in the academy and elsewhere, and we have been dealing with poets, philosophers, mystics, not television writers. Yet Potter and the medium itself belong here for several reasons. Prominently, there is the spiritual transformation that takes place in his protagonist that relates to the transformations and transfigurations discussed in this thesis and the focus of much of this chapter. Potter himself undergoes a similar trajectory, driven inwards as a young man, like Ignatius, through an immobilising illness, a skin disease.⁵⁹⁷ He is a newspaper journalist when the disease strikes, and he's given the job of television critic since the work could be done from home.⁵⁹⁸ The television becomes a window to the world but also a window into the mind of Potter. His reflections on it shape him and his view of the world; he comes to see it as having transformative potential, an 'ideal which he carried into his writing of trying to create a common culture',⁵⁹⁹ an inclination toward reading and writing as a communal practice, an aspect we will continue to develop in this chapter.

What is the relation of the book of Job to *The Singing Detective*? As noted above, the latter centers on the plight of Philip Marlow, a writer of detective stories (What else could he have become, he asks, with a name like that?⁶⁰⁰) who is in hospital with a crippling skin disease. It is a searing portrait of isolation and suffering, reminiscent of Job on the dung heap,⁶⁰¹ covered in 'loathsome sores.' (Job 2:7-8) That similarity is obvious, as is an explicit reference in one episode. However, my suggestion that the entire television series be read as a retelling of the book of Job is unusual. Few scholars have been willing to address the work's religious dimension,⁶⁰² let alone emphasize it, though Potter himself

The Singing Detective, Jon Amiel, dir. (London: BBC Worldwide, 2004), DVD. (When I refer to *The Singing Detective* as 'text', I am engaging it as television, though I rely on the script as needed.)

⁵⁹⁷ As one of his biographers, John R. Cook, notes, 'Disease forced [Potter] to turn inwards; its unpleasant eruptions transformed him into something of a recluse [. . .] this reclusiveness through illness suited the life of a writer.' (*Dennis Potter: A Life on Screen* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995], 19.)

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ Potter, 'Skin', *The Singing Detective*, disc 1, episode 1; Potter, *The Singing Detective*, script, 22. 'Christ Almighty. What else could I have done except write detective stories?' Marlow asks a nurse. '[My mother] should have called me Christopher.'

⁶⁰¹ The NRSV translates as 'ashes.' Job on the 'dung heap' has common usage, and is found in the Septuagint. See, for example, Samuel Cox, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), 49: 'For "ashes" the Septuagint reads "dung". The two words mean the same thing.' Cox goes on to describe the referent *mezbele*, dung ashes outside villages that were compacted into large mounds over time by rain.

⁶⁰² A notable exception is Neil Vickers' 'Religious Irony and Freudian Rationalism in Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986)' in *Literature & Theology* 20, no. 4 (December 2006): 411-423. He argues that

acknowledged it, as he did in an interview shortly before the American premiere of the series: ‘My characters may be stretched, may be anguished, may be bizarre, may be driven absolutely around the bend. [. . .] They’re trying to be sovereign human beings, sometimes against impossible odds. The dominant motif in nearly all my work is of someone saying, ‘God, are you there? And if not, why not?’⁶⁰³ And who is Job but someone trying to be a sovereign human being against all odds who cries out for God? As Ulrich Simon writes, ‘Job never becomes a slave to fate.’⁶⁰⁴ Neither does Marlow.

The series has perhaps been most succinctly defined as ‘a psychological case history, told as a detective story, set to music.’⁶⁰⁵ But its relevance here is essentially in what that description leaves unsaid, in what I perceive as sympathies with the book of Job and sources of delight in the work that are deeply interconnected and strongly definitive: the work’s humour and the spiritual transformation of its protagonist. Some commentators neglect such delight in both works perhaps because the suffering overwhelms, but there is much humour, beauty, and spiritual movement to be found amid their darkness.⁶⁰⁶

By holding these two texts in conversation, this chapter attempts to provide at least a glimpse of those qualities and of themes that have carried through this thesis—transformation, formation and transfiguration; movements between interior and exterior ‘texts’, between sin and redemption, sickness and healing, light and darkness, light *in* darkness. In an echo of the risky behavior of Tina Beattie encountered in the beginning of our journey, I will engage in the perhaps riskier undertaking of creatively writing poetically and dialogically about poetic and dialogical texts because that, it seems to me, is what they demand if they are to be approached as subjects and not objects. The dialogue is

the Christian dimension is as important as the psychoanalytical, but does so somewhat tentatively and apologetically. Vickers notes that the majority of the more than a dozen articles on the series that appeared before its 20th anniversary in 2006 focused on Marlow’s psychotherapy and neglected the religious narrative (412). He mentions Job several times, but only referencing the one scene in which Job is explicitly mentioned. But Vickers is not alone. Mention must also be made particularly of John R. Cook’s *Dennis Potter: A Life on Screen* (see especially 211-239). Cook argues that Potter’s life work reveals ‘a growing preoccupation with religious or spiritual themes’ (7) and stresses the spiritual renewal Marlow experiences in *The Singing Detective* (231-232, 237-238). See also Vernon W. Gras, ‘Dennis Potter’s *The Singing Detective*: An Exemplum of Dialogical Ethics’, in *The Passion of Dennis Potter*, 95-108.

⁶⁰³ Alex Ward, ‘TV’s Tormented Master’, *New York Times*, 13 November 1988; quoted in Vickers, 412-413.

⁶⁰⁴ Ulrich Simon, ‘Job and Sophocles’, in *Images of Belief in Literature*, ed. David Jasper (London: Macmillan, 1984), 50.

⁶⁰⁵ Director Jon Amiel quoting actor Patrick Malahide in voice-over commentary on *The Singing Detective*, ‘Skin’, disc 1, episode 1.

⁶⁰⁶ There is apparently a long tradition of ignorance of the Bible’s humour. See, for example, *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1990); especially Radday’s ‘On Missing the Humour in the Bible: An Introduction’, 21-38.

between and within texts, between texts and self, between interpretations of the texts, and between my 'different selves'.⁶⁰⁷ In this way, the transformations of the characters in the texts and of myself as reader may be more likely to be unveiled. Why is this risky? Both author and reader must give up a sense of control in their reading/writing, to be, as Cixous puts it, 'aboard, though not with us at the steering wheel.'⁶⁰⁸ My approach, then, is a form appropriate to both texts and myself, an attempt at deconstruction as once defined by Cixous as 'the gesture of thinking that permits the discovery of the quick of life under the immurements.'⁶⁰⁹

Desire, fear, interpretation

In reading we seek a coming together, a convention.⁶¹⁰

Cixous often writes about being enticed by the authors she reads and then entices others to read them with her, forming reading/writing communities. Her seminars are an invitation to a conversation about the conversations we have with texts and with each other as we read, re-read, write, and re-write them, as we hold them in conversation. This sense of invitation and conversation reminded me of what most matters to me as a reader when I turned to the book of Job and *The Singing Detective*, which is to engage in reading that is invitational and conversational. Robert Detweiler affirms our approach when he writes, 'as critics such as Gaston Bachelard and Roland Barthes have shown us, one can learn a variety of reactions to a text, of which interpretation is only one. Sometimes texts need to be absorbed, taken in and then offered up not to a relentlessly analytical readership but rather to a contemplative fellowship'.⁶¹¹

This is particularly appropriate for the book of Job and *The Singing Detective* because of their complexity and wiliness. They demand it in their refusal to be captured and possessed. They are untameable. For instance, interpreters are forever puzzled by the book of Job's strange structure with its framing of the poetic dialogues with the prose prologue

⁶⁰⁷ See, for example, Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger's discussion of her shifting identity, especially as shaped by her biblical reading, in 'Flowing Identities', in *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism: Between Text and Self*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (Leiden: Deo, 2002), 79-96 (92).

⁶⁰⁸ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 156.

⁶⁰⁹ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 82.

⁶¹⁰ Jean E. Kennard, 'Convention Coverage or How to Read Your Own Life', *New Literary History* 18 (1981): 69-88 (86); quoted in Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, 'Pre-liminaries: Conventions, and Other Experimental Occasions', in Kitzberger, ed., *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism*, 10.

⁶¹¹ Detweiler, 'What is Reading Religiously?', 34.

and epilogue, the latter of which seems to undo all that has come before, its words that may mean one thing or another, its disturbing message that, after all is said and done, the pious man is rewarded by God. Or is he? Job requires readers, David Clines tells us, who delight in 'irony, exaggeration, misdirection and whimsy'.⁶¹² Detweiler suggests that we engage in a form of 'religious reading', in which one finds 'a group of persons engaged in gestures of friendship with each other across the erotic space of the text that draws them out of their privacy and its stress on meaning and power.'⁶¹³

I have been fortunate with this project to have both the friends and the erotic space of texts to draw me out by inviting and conversing. But when the time came to write this chapter, I was not in the mood for conversation. Between the time of the initial idea and the time to write it, things had changed, I had changed, and not always for the better. I love these texts, enough to call them 'my' texts, out of love,⁶¹⁴ but I am not an expert on either, nor am I a biblical scholar. I am not a theorist.⁶¹⁵ Theory sometimes frightens me.⁶¹⁶ What authority did I have? In addition, I was having trouble writing. I was depressed, afraid. '*I am not at ease, nor am I quiet.*' (Job 3:26) What did I fear? I love these texts, but they would not be likely to ease my melancholy and immobility. I feared they would only send me into worse depths.⁶¹⁷ Marlow is a writer who can't write, hasn't written anything in months. '*Nurse*

⁶¹² David J.A. Clines, 'Why Is There a Book of Job and What Does It Do to You if You Read It?', in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 122-144 (124).

⁶¹³ Detweiler, 'What is Reading Religiously?', 35.

⁶¹⁴ I used to feel guilty over this love. An academic needs critical distance, after all. But then I read Cixous, who writes in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (73), 'My authors, those I love'. She celebrates her love for certain authors and texts in her readings, using the possessive not because she desires to grasp and possess her texts but because she adores them. On a good day my guilt turns to pleasure, and I am not ashamed.

⁶¹⁵ I therefore do not even have either the recourse or comfort of David Pellauer's position, for example, in his essay 'Reading Ricoeur Reading Job' (John Dominic Crossan, ed., *The Book of Job and Ricoeur's Hermeneutics: Semeia* 19 [1981]: 73-83 [74]) as 'someone who knows something about recent hermeneutical theory, but who is an amateur when it comes to the historical study and exegesis of biblical texts.' But I am grateful to him for showing me an alternative way of proceeding, that is, 'to approach our specimen text[s] experimentally', though I resist the objectifying term 'specimen'.

⁶¹⁶ I realized recently that this is not actually true when I read Mieke Bal's essay 'Scared to Death: Metaphor, Theory, and the Adventure of Scholarship' (*In Good Company: Essays in Honor of Robert Detweiler*, ed. David Jasper and Mark Ledbetter, American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion, ed. David E. Klemm, no. 71 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994], 11-31 [28]). I also discovered I was not alone in my fear. Bal found that what many of us are afraid of about theory is 'theory' as 'something finished, complete, something you can succeed or fail to master' rather than 'a way of interacting with objects [. . .] a practice, a form of interpretation, not the pinnacle of objectivity as much as touching stone for subjectivity, not abstract but empirically anchored.'

⁶¹⁷ I knew this depression was not nearly as severe as the worst I suffered almost 20 years ago. But it felt close enough to scare me. William Styron writes in *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (New York: Random House, 1990), 77, that the depressed person at his or her worst is 'in a state of unrealistic hopelessness, torn by exaggerated ills and fatal threats that bear no resemblance to actuality. It may require on the part of friends, lovers, family, admirers, an almost religious devotion to persuade the

*Mills: You write detective stories. Don't you? Marlow: (Almost hostile) Who told you that? Nurse Mills: Oh, a little bird. Marlow: Well, the little bird is wrong. I used to write them. Used to. Used to. His voice is threatening to go out of control.*⁶¹⁸

Marlow, like his creator, suffers from psoriatic arthropathy, which John R. Cook describes as

a combination of psoriasis and arthritis which enflames the skin and cripples the joints. [. . .] Potter's was an extreme case in which his whole body could become one hundred per cent psoriatic—with purple scales and deep lesions forming on the skin, as well as intense arthritic pain affecting the joints. At its peak, the illness could leave its victim unable to walk, talk, even move, while the body's temperature soared out of control. In turn, this could lead to hallucinations. From the time it struck him down at the age of 26, Potter had to cope with periodic bouts of this disease.⁶¹⁹

Potter would never be able to type because it was too painful. He wrote on paper, which was painful enough.⁶²⁰ *Marlow: Will I ever be able to move properly? Will I ever be able to hold a pen again? Tell me that. Come on. Tell me!*⁶²¹

I forget about invitation and conversation, worry that this writing about myself is irrelevantly and irreverently self-indulgent. Isn't it absurd to introduce my own minor sufferings that pale in comparison to Job's, Marlow's, and Potter's? Maybe, but both texts are about individuals arguing, narrating out of their own experience. As I am lacking authority in more conventional areas of academic argument, my own experience in this case seems fitting. The only claim I can make authentically is that I am a reader, of texts, of myself.

Nahum N. Glatzer notes disdainfully that many interpreters of Job carry their 'intellectual preoccupations' into their reading and remake the book in their own image.⁶²² But who doesn't? I revel at least in the former accusation, if not the latter. Clines graciously

sufferer of life's worth, which is so often in conflict with a sense of their own worthlessness.' Unlike Job, I have been gifted with the devotion of such friends, in which grouping I include my texts.

⁶¹⁸ Potter, *The Singing Detective*, 21.

⁶¹⁹ Cook, *Dennis Potter*, 18-19.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶²¹ Potter, *The Singing Detective*, 21.

⁶²² Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Dimension of Job: A Study and Selected Readings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 11; quoted in David J.A. Clines, 'Job and the Spirituality of the Reformation', in *Interested Parties*, 145.

suggests such readings are a sign of the amenability of the book to many different interpretations. In a clever but slightly frightening phrase, he also notes the opposite problem: the book ‘has its way with its readers—which is, no doubt, what we mean when we call it a great and powerful work of literature.’⁶²³

Remaking a text, a text having its way—this language is aggressive, with reader and text in opposition. Reading is violent; there is good reason for fear. ‘I’ll take up my axe again’, Cixous writes, referring back to Kafka, who wrote, ‘A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.’⁶²⁴ Then she writes the unexpected: ‘We’ll clear a trail through the forest. Moving forward in the axe’s light.’⁶²⁵ The movement into the texts is by the light and not the blade. The violence and fear dissipate. I can breathe, and write, maybe. The method, or anti-method (at least against some of the theological methods I was trained in as a divinity student), that makes sense here is one I wish to begin to develop, a poetic existentialism, let us call it, along the lines of Cixous, who has already entered into the conversation, at least into the background, for she exemplifies in her practice a conversational model.⁶²⁶

Cixous is foremost a reader with a passion for her texts, and she acknowledges their transformative impact on her. Her way of reading disrupts the desire to grasp and possess a text for its knowledge. It is a striving for ‘passivity in activity’,⁶²⁷ akin to Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*, which Detweiler, in terms of his idea of religious reading, refers to ‘as ‘releasement’ or ‘abandonment’, but it also conveys relaxation, serenity and nonchalance.’⁶²⁸ To read as Heidegger urged, ‘we must conceive ourselves as addressees of and participators in the poem, and no longer as its historians or its aesthetic connoisseurs.’⁶²⁹

⁶²³ Clines, ‘Why Is There a Book of Job?’, 144.

⁶²⁴ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 17, quoting Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken, 1978), 16.

⁶²⁵ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 57.

⁶²⁶ I am grateful to Sarah Elizabeth Anderson for articulating this aspect of Cixous’ work. In ‘Writing a Material Mysticism: H.D., Hélène Cixous and Divine Alterity’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 2011), 9-10, Anderson calls Cixous ‘the reader’s theorist’ and illuminates what she names as Cixous’ conversational model, a ‘reading-writing practice’ enacted through ‘extended conversations with other writers’, out of which she develops theoretical frameworks and ‘a creative slant on dialogism and intertextuality’.

⁶²⁷ Verena Andermatt Conley, introduction to *Hélène Cixous, Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, xiii.

⁶²⁸ Detweiler, ‘What is Reading Religiously?’, 35.

⁶²⁹ Clark, *Martin Heidegger*, 115.

Cixous lives this ideal of participatory reading and thus is intensely interested in her texts, 'interest' understood in an enlivening sense of being caught by a text that then intensifies and transforms one's desire to know the text on more intimate terms. Mieke Bal reminds us of the importance of passion in reading by restoring a liveliness to 'this rather flat word, a word of politeness and often polite dismissal', and by encouraging us to reflect on 'how knowledge thrives on interestedness—the opposite of Kant's ideal of aesthetic contemplation, defined as *disinterestedness*.'⁶³⁰ David Jasper uses the word similarly in terms of reading when he notes, 'what is interesting is why some [texts] strike one as desperately important and others are instantly forgettable.'⁶³¹ An apt definition of the word is 'the feeling of wanting to know or learn about something or someone'.⁶³² In English, there is no distinction between knowledge of things and persons, but in French, for example, there is *connaître*, to know someone, as opposed to *savoir*, to know something. The interest I have in these texts is in the former sense. I desire to know them on that level of personal intimacy. In my desiring, which they have evoked and nourished, my depression is slowly lifted.

Now I have strayed far from my texts, but there was a need to set a path, or a non-path since there is no one theory or path I rely on, nor does Cixous, and even if I had chosen one, it would not be able to pin down two such slippery texts. Instead, we start off with desire for intimacy in a wandering into two texts poetic enough to be called poems (for those who may have felt a start at my comfort with calling them poems above). While the path may wander, there is also a vertical movement, a diving into the texts in order to participate. This is another reason for my brief but hopefully apposite personal revelations, as a participatory move towards another way of reading.

Let us begin then to dive into the texts.

Difficult and delightful dialogues

[T]his is what is involved in describing the process involving author, text and reader as a communicative one; the whole point is to achieve a change in the reader. Job creates us as readers as we seek to create a coherent reading of Job. We are left in the grip of a book which has made us its readers and yet refuses

⁶³⁰ Mieke Bal, *Loving Yusef: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 7.

⁶³¹ David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion: an Introduction*, 2d ed. (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992), xv.

⁶³² See <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/interest>; accessed 3 October 2011.

our demands that it lay bare its meaning. [...] We can survive our reading of Job by denying its capacity to change us, or otherwise defending ourselves against the possibility of being changed by it. If, however, we decide to open ourselves to it, we will be left bearing wounds.⁶³³

The genesis of this chapter was a paper on the topic for a symposium on re-tellings of the Bible, and as such, its creation happened in the midst of a community of scholars.⁶³⁴ There was in the symposium invitation an alliterative phrase that particularly caught my attention and led me to read *The Singing Detective* as Job. It was about a stance an interpreter might take towards a text: ‘A sometimes difficult, sometimes delightful kind of dialogue.’⁶³⁵

For both texts are at heart difficult and delightful kinds of dialogue. The bulk of the book of Job consists of some 40 chapters of dialogues between Job, an innocent sufferer, and the so-called friends who ostensibly come to console him, and between Job and God. The story of Marlow is structured as a mosaic of four narratives, three of which are located in the protagonist’s interior world: Marlow’s hospital experience, his memories of his childhood, his imaginary detective story, and his hallucinations, the latter of which are distorted versions of the other three. 1940s music is lip-synced by various characters, helping to move the viewers between the narratives, providing humour,⁶³⁶ and illuminating what is hidden from Marlow, what he ‘*doesn’t* know about . . . what he finds out gradually’.⁶³⁷ *The Singing Detective* is the story of a guilty sufferer who engages in dialogue with his past and present self, his psychiatrist, his wife, various authority figures and fellow patients, and God. Dialogues are critical to the reconstruction both Marlow and Job undergo. The structure of each work is dialogical, with a mixture of narratives and genres—folktale, prose, poetry, situation comedy, *noir*, musical, psychodrama, theater of the absurd, Greek chorus—in constant interplay.

As Edith Wyschogrod notes, such eclecticism is a tendency of postmodernism, which, I suggest, ought to make Job especially appealing to the postmodern sensibility. She cites

⁶³³ Hugh Pyper, ‘The Reader in Pain: Job as Text and Pretext’, in *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson*, ed. Robert P. Carroll (JSOTSup, 138; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 252.

⁶³⁴ Jennifer Reek, ‘“But Now My Eye Sees You”: Reading Dennis Potter’s *The Singing Detective* as a Retelling of the Book of Job’, (paper presented at ‘A Symposium on Re-Writing the Bible: Devotion . . . Diatribe . . . Dialogue’, Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts, University of Glasgow, 14-15 June 2010).

⁶³⁵ Flyer for ‘A Symposium on Re-Writing the Bible’.

⁶³⁶ Jon Amiel discusses the purpose of the music in voice-over commentary for *The Singing Detective*, ‘Skin’, disc 1, episode 1.

⁶³⁷ Dennis Potter, ‘Potter’s Art’, interview by Steve Grant, *Time Out*, 8 October 1986, 25; quoted in Cook, *Dennis Potter*, 211.

The Singing Detective as an example of ‘a new postmodern television idiom’ because of its disruptive combination of modernist and popular art forms. Wyschogrod is the rare scholar seeking to reread traditional spiritualities through a postmodern lens and notes that in the texts of the lives of the saints subjected to critique, the ‘textual oddities such juxtaposition creates are intended not as jolts for their own sake but to help the reader see what is at stake.’⁶³⁸ Vernon W. Gras calls *The Singing Detective* a ‘great postmodern work in how it answers the questions of our moment’,⁶³⁹ but it is also a great postmodern work for its ability to laugh in the dark and for its valorization of questions over answers, two traits shared with the book of Job I hope to at least touch upon as we proceed.

To place such complicated works in conversation is a daunting task. The form and content of each alone are frightfully complex and maddeningly elusive. They have bedeviled interpreters from Jerome, who, comparing the book of Job to an eel, wrote ‘if you close your hand to hold an eel or a little muraena, the more you squeeze it the sooner it escapes’,⁶⁴⁰ to modern British critics ‘making the naive and reductionist error of seeing the ‘memories’ of the past and of childhood contained in [Potter’s] work as straightforward biography’,⁶⁴¹ missing, says Cook, ‘what, for Potter, is clearly the more complex *interrelationship* between fact and fiction, memory and fantasy.’⁶⁴² Yet it is exactly the impossibility and evasiveness of the works that appeal and continue to attract interpreters of all stripes. As Carol Newsom puts it, ‘The book of Job lends itself well—perhaps too well—to being read in light of shifting philosophical and hermeneutical assumptions. Its complex and elusive nature allows interpreters to see mirrored in it perspectives congenial to the tenor of their own age. This adaptability is truly not to be regretted, for it is what gives the book its perennial value.’⁶⁴³

To make the same sort of claim of perdurability and flexibility for Potter’s work would be too much of a stretch, yet an acknowledgment of the elaborate and slippery nature of both may bear fruit. It is perhaps that unnerving quality the works share that is paradoxically most attractive and repellant. Might this slipperiness encourage the placement of a biblical

⁶³⁸ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, xx.

⁶³⁹ Gras, ‘Dennis Potter’s *The Singing Detective*: An Exemplum of Dialogical Ethics’, 96.

⁶⁴⁰ Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

⁶⁴¹ John R. Cook, ‘“Lost Lands?”: Dennis Potter, Childhood and the Quest for the Sovereign Self’, in *The Passion of Dennis Potter*, 159-173 (164).

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 3.

text, a 're-telling', its authors, and its readers within an intensely dialogical relationship that can be viewed as intensely self-reflective for all the dialogue partners?

The latter observation was an early intuition based on my own initial trepidatious approach to the works. The fear I felt urged me to pay attention and reminded me that the initial approach and response of a reader to a text can be most telling and originary. The recognition of the fear allowed me to move through it and use it as a tool to see what might have remained unseen otherwise. For one, this response itself, one of reflection on inner experience, may be the most relevant and deeply human connection between the two texts, what both the author of the Book of Job and Dennis Potter emphasize and hence challenge us to embrace: a recognition of the importance of human experience and reflection on it as a means of transformation.

I assumed at first that my fear was of the difficult and complex nature of these texts. I feared I was not up to the task of reading one, let alone both. I have spoken of exploring alternative epistemologies, different ways of knowing and reading, and it was unexpectedly exactly that which showed me there was more to my fear than I was initially willing to admit. My readings of Cixous here come to the forefront of my consciousness, for she is attentive to the role of dreams and images as ways of spiritual and intellectual knowing. In the text of hers I love most, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, she speaks about 'a school of dreams', which we enter 'by making a vast detour'.⁶⁴⁴ The detour is into the depths of memory and imagination. (This is the vast detour Marlow makes in his recovery, which is simultaneously spiritual, physical, and psychological.⁶⁴⁵) Reading Job jarred someone from my memory before I wrote the paper for the symposium, someone I had known ten years before, my friend Ellie. She refused to leave me alone. I did not know why, and I was afraid. She went away after I wrote a poem about her, of which the following is an adaptation. What she had done was to invite me on a detour so I might know newly how to proceed in life and in texts.

⁶⁴⁴ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 58.

⁶⁴⁵ Vickers ('Religious Irony and Freudian Rationalism in Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986)', 412) claims a dualism in Marlow's recovery between the spiritual and psychological, the 'spiritual cure, figured in Biblical terms which, owing to their religious nature, have nothing to do with Marlow's personal past'. I fail to see the evidence of this argument either in the text or in my own or others' experience. Why would the spiritual not have to do with one's past? Marlow is fragmented, yes, but his cure is not, nor is his past or present split into spiritual vs. material terms.

Ellie and the robins

I never liked Washington much, except for the glorious springs, which made the rest of it even duller by contrast. One certain spring Sunday stands out as exceptionally spectacular. I had accompanied my friend Ellie to Mass and was walking her home when suddenly we were surrounded by thousands of migrating robins. Millions of them must have flown into town that day. They were crazy hungry, happy to be warm, singing like mad to impress the girls, making everything red—setting lawn, tree, sky on fire. We stood in that flaming swirl and felt life surge, taking it as a sure sign that Ellie's recovery was true. Later that summer, she would hold a celebration of life, inviting old Peace Corps friends, a priest who seemed the real thing, and me, a momentary companion. The summer passed, colors turned, and winter brought a death sentence. She refused it, railed against her God, who, as she saw it, had betrayed her. She fought death so hard it seemed obscene, off-kilter to love living that much. But then I wasn't the one close to death. I was angry when she died, at God, I suppose. What kind of God holds out that bit of hope only to snatch it away. Sadistic bastard, I thought. What kind of God are you?

I did not know how to grieve. I still carried around ancient sorrow from the death of my grandmother decades before. No one had ever taught me how, and in the home I grew up in, only one person was permitted to express her feelings, and she wasn't me. I knew Ellie through a program at our parish for visiting the sick and elderly, of which she was one. As experts in pastoral care, surely they could help me? They sent me to an ex-priest. He was a little oily, too casual and intrusive for someone unknown. Five minutes in, he wanted to talk about my mother. I sat as far away as possible, went inside myself even farther. You don't know, I thought, but I can go so far that I disappear. But what I said was, 'I want help with sorrow and loss. I want to know how to mourn.'

Do you know what he told me?

'You need to run outside your castle walls', he said. '*Run and play!*'

I was indignant. I had a full-time job working for pathological people, a daughter to care for, a household to run, parish work. I heard my mother's dramatic voice echoing through the decades: 'Playtime is over!' she would announce, not realizing how effectively she would ensure in other ways that the theatre would become reality. I heard her, refused the ex-priest's silly advice, and made the church pay the bill.

I have since realized that there was more to that glib glad-hander than I could then see. So many people have said the same to me that I no longer spurn it. Unlike Job, I have friends who see true.

This is my Job:

I ask God again, what kind of God are you?

God replies: Look at the robins.

I later realized the memory of Ellie is what gave me the insight into the spiritual movement from suffering to lamentation to contemplation,⁶⁴⁶ the structure of the original paper, the following section, and the spiritual recovery of Job, Marlow, and me. The memory, reflections upon it, and writing of it led me to engage my texts more deeply than I might have otherwise, for they evidenced in the relationship between texts and reader what Paul Ricoeur refers to as ‘a kinship of thought’,⁶⁴⁷ an ability of an interpreter to live ‘in the *aura* of the meaning [she] is inquiring after’.⁶⁴⁸ He was not speaking of an emotional or psychological connection, per se, but something more, quoting Bultmann, a ‘vital relation’⁶⁴⁹ that orients one in an enlivening way to ‘the thing about which the text speaks’.⁶⁵⁰

The thing about which the text speaks: suffering

Suffering is not explained, ethically or otherwise; but the contemplation of the whole initiates a movement which must be completed practically by the surrender of a claim, by the sacrifice of the demand that was at the beginning of the recrimination, namely, the claim to form by oneself a little island of meaning in the universe, an empire within an empire.—Paul Ricoeur, referring to the culminating poem of the book of Job, God’s answer ‘out of the storm’.⁶⁵¹

The location of suffering is an apposite site for getting to know Job and Marlow, both of whom suffer immensely. Our first meetings with these men reveals much about their suffering and its meaning or lack thereof. Job is introduced in the opening lines of the

⁶⁴⁶ This is not the aforementioned type of disinterested and distanced contemplation, but its opposite.

⁶⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 352.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 351.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 321.

book's prose prologue in the manner of a fairy tale: 'There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.' (Job 1:1) He is a man who has everything: family, friends, land, wealth, status, health. But Satan wagers with God that Job will no longer fear God if everything is taken from him. God accepts the bet, and Job is stripped bare. (And so is Marlow. 'One thing about this place', he says in the first episode to Ali, the Indian man in the bed next to him, 'it strips away all the unimportant stuff—like skin—like work—love—loyalty—like passion and belief.'⁶⁵²) R.A.F. MacKenzie has suggested Job as Adam in reverse, the Unfallen Man thrown out of paradise simply to see how he will respond.⁶⁵³ There is humour here, in the gamble between God and Satan, the accuser, in the man thrown into unwanted circumstance as a sort of plaything. Perverse humour, but humour nonetheless, mixed with tragedy. As Ulrich Simon notes, in a dark and beautiful essay, 'But irony does not lessen the seriousness of this narrative. The comedy of the celestial interview between God and Satan has dimensions of terror.'⁶⁵⁴

We first encounter Marlow, played wonderfully by Michael Gambon, in a voice-over to a Chanderlesque plot he is constructing in his mind because he is in so much pain he cannot hold a pen to write it. The show opens with a moody street scene of London, 1945. An old busker plays 'Peg of My Heart' on a harmonica. A rough-looking doorman stands by a nightclub, rubbing a stain off the back of his hand. 'The doorman of a nightclub can always pretend that it's lipstick and not blood on his hands', Marlow's voice says. 'But how'd it get there? Let's be economical. Nothing fancy. If he smacked some dame across her shiny mouth, then he's got both answers in one.'⁶⁵⁵ Marlow is cynical, despairing, hallucinating from pain. He is loud, obnoxious, alienating, cruel. But he is also funny, persevering, and creative, as is Job, who parodies psalms and uses sarcasm against his friends' false speech (Job 12.2, for example). Both men begin without insight.

In the suffering of the men, the correspondence between the works is most evident. For me, one of the most poignant literary depictions of suffering are the few stark sentences describing Job inflicted with 'loathsome sores', scraping himself with a potsherd on the 'dung heap' outside the city in which he had so recently been held in high esteem. (Job

⁶⁵² Potter, *The Singing Detective*, 13.

⁶⁵³ R.A.F. MacKenzie, S.J., 'The Transformation of Job', *Theology Bulletin* 9 (1979): 51.

⁶⁵⁴ Simon, 'Job and Sophocles', 50.

⁶⁵⁵ Potter, 'Skin', *The Singing Detective*, disc 1, episode 1.

2:7-8) One can easily imagine the exclusion, the pain, the repulsion Job elicits in others. Out in the open, his festering skin there for all to see, he is completely vulnerable.

Dennis Potter replicates this picture of Job in an early scene of the first episode, appropriately titled 'Skin', that is the series' only explicit reference to Job. The scene opens with a view from above of Marlow in a hospital bed, naked except for a diaper (A reference to Christ on the Cross?), covered in raw, scabrous, cracking skin. Doctors on their rounds gather at the foot of the bed. Yet, like the 'friends' of Job, these supposed comforters only highlight the suffering man's alienation, increasing his isolation the more they talk about him. Here is a key perhaps to the failure of Job's friends and why God ends up judging them and not Job—the doctors, like the friends, talk *about* the suffering man; they talk around him, above him, at him, but never with him in anything resembling empathy or solidarity. The doctors, like the friends, support the status quo, which both protagonists loudly and vigorously reject.

The thing about which the text speaks: lamentation

'Therefore I will not restrain my mouth', Job cries out to God. 'I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.' (Job 7:11) Job, unlike any other characters in his eponymous book, talks directly and constantly to God. Always he is in conversation, and it is perhaps for this that God rewards him in the end. Neil Vickers believes this is the greatest relevance of Job to *The Singing Detective*—as exemplary sufferer because he is in constant conversation with God. Through the Job reference, Vickers notes, 'the viewer is put on notice that Marlow's cure will entail his opening himself up to God as well as to men. The situation itself is quintessentially religious.'⁶⁵⁶

Again, like Job, Marlow will be changed profoundly. As the scene above progresses, he (and Potter too, most likely, as he suffered the same excruciating malady he's inflicted on his creation), like Job, has had enough. He begins a lamentation, a plea for someone to *listen* to him. 'Please, please, listen to me', he begs the doctors. 'I've reached the end of my tether. Christ, I'd like to get out of it. Truly I can't stand it. I can't get on top of it. I can't see clear of it. I can't find my way through it, and if I don't tell someone, if I don't admit it, I'll never, never beat it.' The tough writer of *noir* begins to sob. 'Oh tears! Even bloody tears. Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, the shame, oozing bloody tears hurt the skin on my

⁶⁵⁶ Vickers, 'Religious Irony and Freudian Rationalism in Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986)', 416.

face! God, talk about the book of Job! I'm a prisoner inside my own skin and bones and I, I

. . .⁶⁵⁷

Like the author of Job, Potter shows us the feelings and responses that arise from the experience of pain so unbearable it transmutes into suffering—the qualities of which include shame, intense aloneness, sorrow, confusion, desire for any alternative, and a crying out for help. The pouring out of these emotions constitutes lament.

Potter likewise 'retrieves' the use of suffering and lament for his own brand of poetry. He also takes for his own a similar irony, wit and sarcasm. Job's anguish and his unmasking of the deceptions of convention are echoed. (Think of these verses, for instance: 'As for you, you whitewash with lies; all of you are worthless physicians. If you would only keep silent, that would be your wisdom! Hear now my reasoning, and listen to the pleadings of my lips.' (Job 13:4-6) At the end of his lament, the patient begins to weep again. The doctors, unhearing, begin a syncopated commentary on what to prescribe. Like Job's friends, it is not healing they are interested in but in making Marlow more compliant. 'Librium', says one. 'Valium', suggests another. 'Antidepressants'. 'A barbituate'. 'A barbituate'. 'An antidepressant'. 'Valium'. 'Librium'. Whereupon Marlow begins hallucinating from the pain, and the medical staff begins to dance and break into song, Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians' 'Dry Bones': 'Ezekiel cried, 'dem dry bones'! Ezekiel cried, 'dem dry bones'! 'Now hear the word of the Lord'!⁶⁵⁸ It is a fabulous scene, surreal and funny, of a chorus line of nurses hitting skeleton bones with reflex hammers and doctors dancing and singing, all dressed like the patrons from Marlow's fictional nightclub, Skinscape's, where his alter ego, the singing detective, moonlights.

The choice of song, with its biblical reference, is not an accident. It is worth noting here that Potter's childhood in the Forest of Dean on the Welsh border was infused with scriptural references. As a boy, he saw its geography as that of the Holy Land. 'I always fall back into biblical language', he said in an interview with Melvyn Bragg conducted not long before his death from cancer in 1994, 'but that's, that again, you see, is part of my heritage, which I in a sense am grateful for.'⁶⁵⁹ Potter would have known Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones and its hopeful message of resurrection and return from exile.

⁶⁵⁷ Potter, 'Skin', *The Singing Detective*, disc 1, episode 1.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.; Potter, *The Singing Detective*, 28-29.

⁶⁵⁹ Dennis Potter, 'An interview with Melvyn Bragg, Channel 4, April 1994', interview by Melvyn Bragg, in Dennis Potter, *Seeing the Blossom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 12.

‘Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’ (Ezek. 37:5-6) (I recall the desire, the interest, in knowing another intimately.)

There is a corollary made in the book of Job between suffering and a turning of the heart and mind toward God. Gustavo Gutiérrez marvels that the poet/author of Job chooses ‘the most difficult of all human situations, that of physical and moral suffering’ to address ‘the possibility of disinterested religion.’⁶⁶⁰ As he points out, the question that arises in such conditions is not of the mystery of suffering, but how one is to speak of God in the midst of it. He notes two resulting difficulties that force the person’s ‘radical questioning of God.’⁶⁶¹ Either intense suffering forces us to ‘turn in upon ourselves and see ourselves as the center to which all must be related [Ricoeur’s ‘little island of meaning’]: other persons and even God, whom we thus idolatrously turn into our servant.’⁶⁶² Or, alternatively, when injustice is added to insult and loss, one resents and rejects ‘the presence and existence of God, because God’s love becomes difficult to understand for one living a life of unmerited affliction.’⁶⁶³

Potter expresses similar sentiment, with a characteristic twist, about Marlow’s predicament in at least one interview, that strengthens Vickers claim for the relevance to Job: ‘It is the illness which has stripped him—it’s the Job part, if you like [. . .] in dramatic terms, it needed exactly that, that starting point of extreme crisis and no belief, nothing except pain and a cry and a hate, out of which were assembled the fantasies, and the fantasies became facts and the facts were memories and the memories became fantasies and the fantasies became realities, and all of them allowed him to walk.’⁶⁶⁴

Despite Marlow’s focus on his own memories and fantasies, he does make a turn outwards, as does Job (In 10:2b, Job moves into personal speech to God), in a moment of empathy for another and in a cry for help. Several key moments signal Marlow’s shift away from self-obsession. First, a young registrar, this doctor genuine and warm, asks Marlow a

⁶⁶⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 13.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Dennis Potter, ‘An interview with Alan Yentob, BBC2, 1987’, interview by Alan Yentob, in *Seeing the Blossom*, 71-72.

charged question: 'What do you believe in?' The response is venomous but humorous. Marlow rattles off a list that ranges from Malthusianism to vomit.⁶⁶⁵ The doctor is not deterred. He suggests a psychiatrist. Marlow tells him coolly to 'fuck off', but after the doctor flees, Marlow has another encounter that reveals a different, more vulnerable side.

Marlow has befriended the Indian man, Ali, who dies of a heart attack, leaving Marlow grief stricken. Tears roll down his face. The viewer's feelings toward him shift in the poignancy of a moment that has not the least touch of sentimentality. Marlow's grief does seem to change him. He gradually is less alone and increasingly in relationship with others. He sees the psychiatrist, to whom Potter gives a godlike self-assurance and knowledge, and engages in talk therapy (a modern form of lamentation?). It is this 'god' who will be most instrumental in Marlow's recovery.

The thing about which the text speaks: contemplation

What is it that God asks of Job in the end? Faced with unjust suffering, he is to consider the leviathan and the behemoth. It is too absurd! Yet the absurdity and strangeness has an appeal, especially to the postmodern mind. Aesthetics becomes ethics in the final chapters of Job. God speaks finally to Job, out of the whirlwind, and shows him another way of seeing, which Job acknowledges when he says 'but now my eye sees you'. (Job 42:5) God brings him into the world of the animals, now no longer inferiors but subjects in their own right. Newsom says it well: 'God populates Job's world with beings that he has never had to take into account as genuine others. Job's previous organizing metaphors were those of mastery and dependence drawn from the social world of village patriarchy. Now he is presented with creatures whom he must understand in relations of nondependence and nondomination.'⁶⁶⁶ After all the dialogues, Job is asked to silently contemplate creation and his limited place in the cosmos, to accept the mystery of God, which will lead him to becoming 'more fully a man'.⁶⁶⁷ In the epilogue, Job's fortunes are restored. (Job 42:10) A few details signal his new way of seeing. His three new daughters, unlike the ones he's lost, receive an inheritance like the brothers and are given names: Jemimah ('Dove'), Keziah ('Cinnamon'), and Keren-happuch ('Horn of Eyeshadow'). (Job 42:13-15) What is the *Imago Dei* of Job? It is considered a Wisdom book. A feminine image of God seems

⁶⁶⁵ Potter, 'Skin', *The Singing Detective*, disc 1, episode 1.

⁶⁶⁶ Newsom, 'The Moral Sense of Nature: Ethics in Light of God's Speech to Job', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 15 (1994): 25.

⁶⁶⁷ MacKenzie, 'The Transformation of Job', 56-57.

fitting. She would delight in contemplating the animals and giving the daughters some identity and some means of independence.

But what now is the relevance to Potter's creation? One possibility is the love Marlow had as a boy for a special tree he would climb in the forest, a forest in which he often addressed God directly and contemplated the treetops and listened to the birdsong. But I prefer a less obvious relation. Remember the quote from the beginning of the series, about smacking the dame? Marlow's views of women are distorted to say the least; his relationship to his estranged wife, often vicious and demeaning. What is the origin of his misogyny?⁶⁶⁸ He 'confesses' to the psychiatrist that he witnessed his mother committing adultery with a neighbor. She kills herself after he tells her he saw it. But the deed that haunts and then frees him once he recalls it is another ancient betrayal. In spiritual terms, he tells of the sin, yet he sees it in the context of the sin of all. As a schoolboy, he had blamed another, the son of the adulterer, for something the young Marlow had done: defecating on the teacher's desk. His schoolmates also turn on the innocent, who is beaten mercilessly by the teacher. Marlow recognizes the infectious nature of sin and the unjust punishment of an innocent: 'I sat at my desk, perjurer, charlatan, and watched and listened as one after another after another they nailed that poor boy's hands and feet to my story', he tells the psychiatrist. 'I've not seriously doubted since that afternoon that any lie will receive almost instant collaboration ... if the maintenance of it results in someone else's pain.'⁶⁶⁹ Marlow breaks down and weeps. The doctor tells him to stand up and walk, and he does, yelling, 'Whoopee!' He is transformed, full of a new joy, and maybe restored faith. He replies to a skeptical nurse: 'You should behave more like one of the disciples when they saw *our Lord* walking on the water [emphasis mine].'⁶⁷⁰ His skin has healed. He greets others he had formerly disdained. He speaks to his wife without malice. They walk out of the hospital together, hand in hand, in new relationship.

⁶⁶⁸ Potter himself was accused of having the same misogynistic views as some of his male characters, which he strongly denied. In an interview with John Cook in 1990 (Cook, *Dennis Potter*, 281), he gave the following defense: 'I believe that men treat women badly. I know they do . . . I take it for granted that men exploit women as a fact to deal with and show. That doesn't mean that a) I do (because I don't believe I do as a person) but b) that I approve of it . . . I'm at a loss when given that as an attribute of my work.' Cook argues, reasonably, that rather than Potter's portrayal of women being problematic, 'his work is trying to explore and expose this as problematic at the very heart of patriarchy itself.' (Ibid., 280) By 'dramatising what goes on inside his male characters' heads, Potter is ultimately investigating the nature of patriarchy itself and how men have been traditionally taught by their culture to view women.' (Ibid.) As Cook notes, this perspective fits the progression that Marlow makes in his views of women, away from his disgust at sexuality and imaginings of violent deaths of his women characters, towards a more liberating space in which men and women relate nonviolently as equals. (Ibid.)

⁶⁶⁹ Potter, *The Singing Detective*, 'Who Done It', disc 2, episode 6.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

Dennis Potter always expected a writer to write true. He hated phonies. I have not done nearly enough to do his work justice, but I have tried to write true. There are indications that Potter underwent the shift in seeing Job experiences. He knew he was dying, and he was in horrible pain. Yet in that suffering, he saw with new eyes:

The only thing you know for sure is the present tense, and that nowness becomes so vivid to me that, almost in a perverse sort of way, I'm almost serene. You know, I can celebrate life. Below my window in Ross [. . .] the blossom is out in full now . . . it's a plum tree [. . .] last week looking at it through the window when I'm writing, I *see* it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be, and I can see it. [. . .] The fact is, if you can see the present tense, boy do you see it! And boy can you celebrate it.⁶⁷¹

Blessing and curse

It would doubtless be convenient if words could only be used to mean one thing at a time; there would be fewer misunderstandings. But there would be much less poetry; and the whole field of human experience that exists only because language exists, with all its treacheries and ambiguities and those magical powers we honour when we use euphemisms, would dwindle to almost nothing.⁶⁷²

Something feels off about my reading; it's ill-fitting, like badly made clothes. I am left with the sense that I've not been able to see and unveil the life under the immurements. For all my talk of seeing with new eyes, I can't say that I've read these texts more truly this time than times before. Nor have I articulated the humour, transformation, and beauty in them as I desired. I'm not comfortable with my comments on the epilogue. I'm not convinced they really are happy endings. Neither Marlow nor Job have been cured of their physical diseases, even in the restoration of so much else in their lives. The daughters are named after cosmetics!⁶⁷³ Their value is in their beauty as determined by the male gaze. Where is Job's wife? She will have spent another seven and a half years pregnant with the new batch of children. As Hugh Pyper comments, maybe the extra 140 years given to Job by God are more a curse than a blessing.⁶⁷⁴ And as Lori Rowlett points out, 'The book of

⁶⁷¹ Potter, 'An interview with Melvyn Bragg', 4-5.

⁶⁷² Frank Kermode, 'The Uses of Error,' in *The Uses of Error* (London: Collins, 1990), 428.

⁶⁷³ Without irony, a note to Job 42:14 in a Catholic Bible reads, 'Job's daughters had names symbolic of their charms: *Jemimah*, dove; *Keziah*, precious perfume [. . .]; *Keren-happuch*, cosmetic jar—more precisely, a container for a black powder that was used like modern mascara.' (*New American Bible*, Saint Joseph Edition [New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1992], 602).

⁶⁷⁴ Pyper, 'The Reader in Pain', 246.

Job is ripe for deconstruction. By restoring Job's fortunes, the book undermines its own premise.'⁶⁷⁵ Like Rowlett, I'm left with questions and no answers. Did I allow the book to wound me? Did I make it into my own image? By focusing on the interior movements of Job and Marlow, what did I neglect? Did I fall off the path of my Cixousian non-method? I've come late to autobiographical biblical criticism, which seems to have fallen by the wayside too.

But perhaps I have been too harsh and deserve one more chance to know differently and more intimately my texts. . . .

Another 'haunting' of sorts took place when I attempted to write this chapter. This time a painting of Job 'caught' and discomfited me, eliciting similar responses of attraction and repulsion as my texts. What I should like to do now is to continue exploring the texts' indeterminate nature by taking a counterintuitive tack away from them, this time to a painting that is a retelling of Job that may prove promising in hinting further at the inner workings of both the texts and we who are affected by them. I do not mean here to suggest a lack in the visual art of *The Singing Detective* or in film or television as an art form. In fact, Potter's work opens us up into an unusual space that is like returning home to a form of Church in its union of word and image and song, its movement from interior to exterior, its concern for the transformation and flourishing of the human being, its celebration of life even in the midst of darkness. Then why turn to a painting? In part, out of my own desire for a still place to quiet my dissatisfaction with my engagement of the texts. As Cixous says, 'I write. But I need a painter to give a face to my words.'⁶⁷⁶ A face has immediacy, works against objectification. Both Cixous and Bonnefoy write of wanting to be painters and write about painting in ways that 'call into question the conceptual discourse [. . .] so as to replace it with another way of speaking about—or speaking with—works.'⁶⁷⁷ These two poets share a desire to relive the creative act beyond language, to 'sense the terrific beating of the painter's heart, the vertigo, the urgency.'⁶⁷⁸ There is a quality of wordlessness about the 'text' of a painting that may allow for a more immediate and visceral reading and discernment of the elusive and complex nature Newsom articulates. What interests me is not only that this nature allows for timeless interpretation but that its

⁶⁷⁵ Lori Rowlett, 'My Papa was Called Bubba, but His Real Name was Leroy: Violence, Social Location, and Job', in Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism*, 162-163.

⁶⁷⁶ Cixous, 'The Last Painting or the Portrait of God', 108.

⁶⁷⁷ Bonnefoy, preface to *The Lure and the Truth of Painting*, xiii.

⁶⁷⁸ Cixous, 'The Last Painting', 108.

endless adaptability and ambiguity is consistently present in creative interpretations of the Book of Job and the responses of those who encounter them and who encounter them, as Bonnefoy puts it, ‘in a more fundamental way, at another level than meaning.’⁶⁷⁹

Consider then Georges de la Tour’s 1650 painting ‘Job and his wife’.⁶⁸⁰ We are back at the dung heap. Job’s wife makes her entrance and says the only lines she has in the drama: ‘Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.’ (Job 2:9) The de la Tour image is of Job seated on a wooden box, potsherd at his feet, his hands, which look to be covered in boils, clasped in supplication. He is a skinny, bearded old man, clad in a loincloth, and if you have ever suffered from a skin disease, you will recall how painful it is to wear clothes and you will understand. He is gazing up at his wife, who stands above him, returning his gaze. She is speaking, and he is listening to her and perhaps responding. In sharp contrast to her husband, she is clean, unscarred, at least outwardly,⁶⁸¹ and finely outfitted in a red dress, white headdress, and earrings. Her left hand is raised, palm upwards, the kind of pose struck by people who are fond of communicating with hand gestures. She holds a candle, at Job’s level, the only source of light in the dim scene. The light shines most brightly on what strikes me as the most ambivalent and disturbing piece of the painting.⁶⁸² To this spot, the eye is compellingly drawn: Job’s blistered hands gripped together in what must be painful prayer. The mutilated hands in prayer force a question the book provokes: How can one remain faithful to a God who allows and perhaps is the cause of such suffering?

For de la Tour and the Europe he inhabited this was not an idle question. When he painted this work, his native Lorraine had been devastated by the plague. The artist was ‘firmly

⁶⁷⁹ Bonnefoy, preface to *The Lure and the Truth of Painting*, xiii.

⁶⁸⁰ Georges de la Tour, *Job raillé par sa femme*, oil on canvas, ca. 1650, Musée départemental d’art ancien et contemporain, Epinal. See <http://www.vosges.fr/Domaines-d'action/Musée-départemental.html>. The museum’s title of the painting, ‘Job scolded by his wife’, is itself a sign of the ambiguity of the biblical text and its interpretation. The painting has also been called ‘Job and his wife’. See, for example, Anthony Swindell, ‘Latecomers: Four Novelists Rewrite the Bible,’ in J. Cheryl Exum, *Retellings: The Bible in Literature, Music, Art and Film* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 48.

⁶⁸¹ Job’s wife lost ten children. I do the math. She carried them within her for a total of seven and a half years and spent decades more raising them, yet no mention is made in the book or in later retellings, at least that I’ve found, of her scars, her loss and pain. Instead, she is portrayed as a virago, ‘regarded as one of Satan’s chief instruments’ (Kermode, ‘The Uses of Error’, 425).

⁶⁸² The ambiguity most often commented upon in the painting and the verse, however, involves the words and depiction of Job’s wife. The ambiguity of interpretation of the verse hinges on the Hebrew word for blessing, which is used as a euphemism for the word ‘curse.’ Jerome translated the word directly as ‘bless’ in the Vulgate, and, as Frank Kermode (‘The Uses of Error’, 428) suggests, it is possible De La Tour knew this translation and had ‘seen Job’s wife as tender, however foolish she might be; she may be saying that death is the only way out of such misery and that he should seek it, and make a good end.’

rooted in the Counter-Reformation tradition',⁶⁸³ and 'Job was a "plague saint"', whose intercession 'was sought for power to endure under its affliction'.⁶⁸⁴ Wyschogrod says that the believers who interpreted the lives of the saints, sought understanding through 'a *practice* through which the addressee is gathered into the narrative so as to extend and elaborate it with her/his own life.'⁶⁸⁵

Perhaps here is a clue to a source of my disquiet and a hint of why the painting lingers.⁶⁸⁶ The saintly practice it depicts that one might take on as one's own is prayer, a desire for greater intimacy with the Other, a truly sometimes difficult and sometimes delightful dialogue. To enter into the narrative of Job, one must participate in such a dialogue as relentlessly as he did, it seems to me, praying to a God who makes the prayer itself almost unbearably painful and masochistic in God's silence and absence. '*My face is red with weeping, and deep darkness is on my eyelids, though there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure.*' (Job 16:16-17)

My disquiet comes from memories the painting stirs, of silence, pain, prayer and healing. Ulrich Simon describes Job's experience as salvific, at least when seen through the eyes of Blake, whose vision we cannot escape when we read Job. 'It is an inner struggle which ends in healing, a kind of therapy, from insanity and fantasies of destruction to sanity and integration',⁶⁸⁷ which is the journey Marlow makes.

Frank Kermode notes rightly that 'We may see in the [author of Job's] 'bless/curse' fidelity to our own experience, indeed to human experience in general.'⁶⁸⁸ Kermode goes on to cite Freud's interest in 'primal words' with 'antithetical sense.'⁶⁸⁹ Such words 'bear impossible double senses, especially words having to do with love.'⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸³ Frank Kermode, 'The Uses of Error', 427.

⁶⁸⁴ J.M.M. Furness, *Georges de la Tour of Lorraine: 1593-1652* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1949), 55.

⁶⁸⁵ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, xxiii.

⁶⁸⁶ Though I also realize it is the quiet of the painting that causes the disquiet. I want to know what Job and his wife are saying to each other. I want to know the answer to the puzzle of whether she said 'bless' or 'curse,' to 'an ambiguity we are very unlikely ever to resolve; and it has existed, potentially, ever since the author of Job wrote "bless" when he meant "curse"'. (Kermode, 'The Uses of Error', 428)

⁶⁸⁷ Simon, 'Job and Sophocles', 48.

⁶⁸⁸ Kermode, 'The Uses of Error', 428.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

But there is something else, too. Cixous brings us to it in her essay 'The Last Painting or the Portrait of God', in which she speaks of her love of painting and her great desire to verge towards painting with the words she writes. Painting and writing are gestures of fidelity. Cixous tries to see true and embraces the ambiguity and ambivalence of life. She both blames and thanks God for her poor eyesight. She is nearsighted, which she is able to see as a gift enabling her to write, to love. She sees close up the beauty of little things, but wishes she had the painter's 'torturous adoration of the light'.⁶⁹¹ (Theory as practice and touching stone for subjectivity.) She offers a paradox that saves me at a time when I have been so desperately afraid of falling into that old despair: 'the courage to be afraid', that is, to allow oneself to be afraid of suffering but to know nevertheless that 'the world has to be suffered'.⁶⁹²

And the courage to feel the old-fashioned definition of fear, as awe. 'If I were a painter I would see, I would see, I would see, I would see [. . .] if I were a painter, I would die endlessly of wonder.'⁶⁹³ I wonder at the de la Tour painting, at Job's hands in prayer and the gaze between husband and wife that some interpret as loving and others as not. The painter illuminates with light what Cixous does with words. What we discover more deeply is a way of knowing and seeing more truly that admits we don't know. 'We have our private experience of such mysterious exchanges, such indissoluble ambiguities, and need not deny them to picture or text; they are part of language and part of life.'⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹¹ Cixous, 'The Last Painting', 108.

⁶⁹² Ibid., 121

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 108.

⁶⁹⁴ Kermode, 'The Uses of Error', 428-429.

Chapter 7: Believing as a Poet: ‘Writing All the Way Down.’⁶⁹⁵

When you have come to the end, only then can Beginning come to you.⁶⁹⁶

Though this thesis is not explicitly about home, the notion of home has been very much an undercurrent throughout. We have moved from Beattie and Balthasar’s Roman fortress, a static image of ‘home’ as place, to more fluid textual spaces of interior homes, constructed out of the imaginative reading/writing practices of Bachelard, Cixous, Bonnefoy, Ignatius and Potter. In the beginning of this exploration I suggested we would be transformed after an engagement with poetic thinking. I sought to discover my own ‘true place’,⁶⁹⁷ a space I

⁶⁹⁵ I borrow this phrase from David Jasper’s *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 59, where he uses it in a chapter on mysticism and modernity. He makes an unusual link between Charles de Foucauld, the Little Brother of the Sahara Desert, and thinkers and mystics of the 20th century—Heidegger, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Don Cupitt and Thomas Merton, through their common concern for ‘the language of Being’. Like the poet-companions of this work, they ‘make a strange community.’ And ‘with them we begin with writing—writing all the way down.’ Whether in actual deserts or in interior deserts of their own making, they come to discover that their origins and destinations are in ‘the creative word’. It is there, in the creative word, that transformation takes place. As Cupitt puts it, ‘St. John of the Cross did not first have a language transcending experience, and then subsequently try to put it into words. On the contrary, the very composition of the poem was itself the mystical experience. The happiness is in the text; it lies in the fact that John, in prison, has been able, through the imagery of the poem, to make religious happiness out of the conflicting forces bearing upon him and the personal suffering that he is undergoing. Writing is redemption; religious experience is self-expression in religious art. Mysticism is mystical writing: that is, it is writing and only writing that reconciles conflicting forces and turns suffering into happiness’ (*Mysticism After Modernity* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 74-75; quoted in *The Sacred Desert*, 61). Perhaps that one succinct statement ‘The happiness is in the text’ expresses the pith of this thesis, what the work of Cixous, Bonnefoy, Potter and his alter ego, Marlow, gives to us in the way it transforms its authors and readers, the givers and receivers.

⁶⁹⁶ Cixous, ‘Coming to Writing’, 41. What does Cixous mean by this phrase? She begins to write out of a place of great loss, the death of her father. Cixous lives and urges movement into the depths of oneself, out of death into life, towards having what I like to think of as an integrity without flinching: ‘One can emerge from death, I believe, only with an irrepressible burst of laughter. I laughed. I sat down at the top of a ladder whose rungs were covered with stained feathers, vestiges of defeated angels, very high above the rivers of Babylon that twisted between the lips of the Land that is always promised.’ (41) Elsewhere, she writes slightly more prosaically about the liberating and consoling possibilities of language when all has been lost, the space of home words can create: ‘When I wrote *Dedans* [her first text] it was in a certain sense inside and outside of the tomb of my father, or of every man, or, as Shakespeare would say, of neither man nor woman, in resistance to loss. My father my mother my country, they all lose, my language plays my father loss my mother sea my fathers my tongues. All is lost except words. This is experience as a child knows it: words are our doors towards all the other worlds. At a certain moment for the person who has lost everything, whether that means, moreover, a being or a country, language is what becomes the country. One enters the country of words.’ (‘From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History’, 5)

⁶⁹⁷ See the first ‘Intersection’ and chapter three for previous mentions of Yves Bonnefoy’s ‘true place’. For me, one of the texts in which Bonnefoy’s at least initial understanding of this ‘place’ is most strongly articulated is the poem that opens the third section of his first collection of poetry, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*. The section is titled ‘True Place’, and the poem is known as ‘The Wanderer’ (145): ‘Let a place be made for the one who approaches,/He who is cold and has no home./He who is tempted by the sound of a lamp,/By the bright threshold of only this house./And if he stays overcome with anguish and fatigue,/Let be uttered for him the healing words./What needs this heart which was only silence,/But

named believing as a poet. In this final chapter, I will call upon the poetic thinking we have engaged and enacted to explore that space as home, built out of the imagination, a house of poesis. To do this, I will focus on the themes of home and writing into and out of the depths, concerns of all our poet companions. By bringing them together more explicitly, I hope to further illuminate the spaces we have visited to see if together they do in truth invite us into a home that can be called the space of believing as a poet.

As has been true throughout, the way of proceeding will be non-linear, as it continues to be a way of attentiveness, listening and letting be, in those ‘texts in which we believe ourselves to be’. To keep from straying too far off the path, I will look at ‘endings’ of three poet-companions for guidance: Potter, Cixous and Bonnefoy, as it has been their reading and writing practices, reflected upon through the critical and spiritual lenses of Bachelard and Ignatius, that have most fruitfully opened up our poetic spaces. I ask in what ways do their destinations and more importantly the horizons they point us toward lead us to a space of believing as a poet.

Potter: an optimism of a strange and complex sort

I begin with Potter. This third section, framed as a return to home transformed, opened with the previous chapter’s reading of *The Singing Detective*, which ends with Marlow leaving the hospital for home, hand in hand with his estranged wife, Nicola. There are a few pertinent things worth noting here. While there are many images of home in Potter’s series, most of them exploding the myth of the happy nuclear family, the one I am most interested in is, clearly, the interior home Marlow builds out of a reconstruction of himself through a reading of the texts in which he believes himself to have been. Humphrey Carpenter, one of Potter’s biographers, charts this movement in language resonant of a shift from old to new home that is apparent especially at the end of the final episode, ‘Who Done It’, in which Marlow’s psychiatrist Gibbon notes that ‘ “Chronic illness is an extremely good shelter . . . A cave in the rocks into which one can safely crawl . . .” ’ Carpenter goes on, ‘In the final moments of *The Singing Detective*, Marlow emerges from the cave; the direction describes him, as he leaves the hospital, struggling “along the corridor to freedom” which is “resonant with . . . birdsong and the sound of the wind in the leaves”. And he is “leaning on Nicola”.’⁶⁹⁸ I had recalled this ending as a happy one, and it

words which are both sign and litany,/And like a sudden bit of fire at night,/Or the table, glimpsed in a poor man’s house?’

⁶⁹⁸ Humphrey Carpenter, *Dennis Potter: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 442.

is, suggesting the broken relationship between the couple has been healed. Marlow's movement is one out of a space of exile into one of healing and home, a space in which I had hoped we would arrive.

Yet such a clear-cut reading makes for a far too simple and obvious ending both for Potter and for this thesis. When I watch that final episode again, I find a much more ambiguous conclusion than Carpenter and I first noticed and remembered. The director Jon Amiel and producer Kenith Trodd note in the voiceover commentary, 'it all comes together' here,⁶⁹⁹ but what, exactly, comes together? Marlow says goodbye to the hospital patients and staff, his family and home of sorts, and walks away with his wife, wearing the trench and fedora of the alter ego detective he has killed off in his imagination, as he successfully became a detective of his own psyche, explorer of the landscape of his own soul.

Music begins, a sentimental Vera Lynn World War II song, 'We'll Meet Again',⁷⁰⁰ ironic, as so many never did. Potter knows this and plays it up.⁷⁰¹ As Lynn sings, 'I know we'll meet again some sunny day,' the viewer sees the author at his worst, with the doctors in the scene in which Marlow is most Job and/or Christ-like. A montage follows, filled with ambiguous references to home: An ominous scarecrow in a field, waving to Marlow as a boy as he travels by train with his mother in a move to London, unwanted home, during the war. His cuckolded father waving goodbye to the same train as it pulls from the station, taking Marlow from the only home he has known. His mother on Hammersmith Bridge, presumably before she throws herself into the Thames. Hospital orderlies rolling a gurney

⁶⁹⁹ Jon Amiel and Kenith Trodd, voice-over commentary for 'Who Done It', *The Singing Detective*, episode 6, disc 3, DVD.

⁷⁰⁰ Rupert Christiansen, 'Dame Vera Lynn's We'll Meet Again: her reputation is secure', *The Telegraph*, 16 September 2009; available from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/rupert-christiansen/6198558/Dame-Vera-Lynns-Well-Meet-Again-her-reputation-is-secure.html?fb>; accessed 1 March 2013.

⁷⁰¹ From what he has called 'those sickly and sugared old tunes' but also 'those wisps of song [that] were chariots of grace, like the Psalms of David', Potter insists we can find moments of transcendence: 'But there are a few still-lingering and probably still-mocking syncopations which can remind us, however faintly, however ambiguously, that the usual deadening materiality of things out there, or the insistent present tense of the implacably busy world, is other than just what we see. There is too a "wonder" in and of our shrunken mortality and our scrabbling appetites which maybe prayer and maybe drama and maybe just a song or a dance or a breeze in the air can sometimes fleetingly catch hold of.' Transcendence and redemption are not portrayed piously or as cheaply earned. At the end of *Pennies from Heaven*, for example, Potter allows Arthur Parker, 'the haplessly dishonest and helplessly adulterous sheet-music salesman', to recognize some goodness in 'his tawdry soul' when listening to the song 'Painting the Clouds with Sunshine'. A moment of grace before Potter hangs him, an ending too dark for Potter's BBC superiors to allow. ('The James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture, Edinburgh Film Festival, 1993', in *Seeing the Blossom*, 43-44.)

with, one assumes, the corpse of his mother covered by a sheet. Young Marlow walking with his father through the forest after he has returned home after his mother's suicide.⁷⁰²

Meanwhile, Lynn sweetly sings, 'And I will just say hello to the folks that you know, tell them you won't be long. They'll be happy to know that as I saw you go, you were singing this song.'⁷⁰³ The juxtaposition of the images of death with the sweetness of the song turns the happy ending into something ambiguous, unsettling. It strikes me as similar somehow to the ambiguity and mysterious unknowing Kermode speaks of in the intimacy between Job and his wife, between all who are in intimate relationships. Such 'matters are not so simple', Kermode says, a basic but crucial message the poet-companions offer us in these black-and-white times of increasing political polarization and religious fundamentalism.⁷⁰⁴

The last word in Potter's script comes from Marlow as a boy, in an original scene, or, rather, a scene of origins. 'When I grow up,' he says in his borderlands dialect, 'I be going to be a detective.'⁷⁰⁵ He has climbed high in a tree (to an almost unbelievable height, as he is above almost all the surrounding trees) in his beloved forest, the one home he never wanted to leave, filmed in Potter's Forest of Dean.⁷⁰⁶ Here in a wild place not usually perceived as home, outside the normal boundaries of family and village life, the boy Marlow is paradoxically truly at home, but finds that which is considered a real home conventionally, the cramped one of his father's parents in the village and more so that of his mother's family in London, to be strange and alien places. Anthony Vidler in his book *The Architectural Uncanny* refers to such anxiety as 'a fundamental insecurity [. . .] [of a class] not quite at home in its own home'.⁷⁰⁷ Marlow the boy is of this class, an outsider inside, the other, who speaks a dialect the mother's family cannot understand. He is mocked and ridiculed by his relatives, seen as an oddity, the stranger. In anger, perhaps even anguish, the boy names the trees of the forest in a kind of litany of longing: 'The oak and the beech and the ash and the elm. The oak and the beech and the ash and the elm.'⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰² Potter, 'Who Done It', *The Singing Detective*, episode 6, disc 3, DVD.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Kermode, 'The Uses of Error', 428.

⁷⁰⁵ Potter, *The Singing Detective*, 249.

⁷⁰⁶ In his James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture, Potter describes his first (and last) home affectionately as 'the Forest of Dean, which rises steeply in ever tighter layers o'f green and grey in what is purely coincidentally a heart-shaped mound between the Severn and the Wye, close to the border with Wales.' (*Seeing the Blossom*, 41.)

⁷⁰⁷ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 3-4.

⁷⁰⁸ Potter, 'Who Done It'.

Potter's script directions suggest it be said 'like an odd incantation', and so it is.⁷⁰⁹ The strange boy disturbs and in doing so breaks open the contented domestic surface of the home to reveal the uncanny in the cruelty and uneasiness of the responses of the family members, in the suggestive touch on the boy's shoulder by his uncle that is held just a bit too long. As Freud writes, quoting Schelling, 'the term "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open.'⁷¹⁰ And further, 'The uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, 'the unhomely') is in some way a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homely').'⁷¹¹

But the boy in the treetops, resting in the sound of birdsong and the leaves in the wind, is in his element, familiar in the unfamiliar, or perhaps, in opposition to the uncanny of the mother's home, here is found the canny, as defined as 'supernaturally wise, endowed with occult or magical power',⁷¹² a quality by its nature suggesting a talent for being at home anywhere and everywhere. He has returned to his beginnings, a return Romantic in its longing for origins and 'its heightened sensitivity to the natural world'.⁷¹³ Literally and metaphorically, he has climbed great heights, ascended, by descending to great inner depths. In the treetops, boy Marlow in the memory of the man he will become seems not quite human, and I am reminded here of another strange character from fiction who lived in the trees, Rima the Bird Girl, from W.H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*. Rima comes to a bad end, perhaps as punishment for being not quite human. Familiar but unfamiliar, otherworldly, she undergoes a crucifixion when the local natives set the forest on fire to burn her alive trapped in the trees.⁷¹⁴ But Marlow moves out of his crucifixion into resurrection, and in the last shot of *The Singing Detective*, the boy in the tree looks at the

⁷⁰⁹ Potter, *The Singing Detective*, 185.

⁷¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003 [1899]), 132.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷¹² OED Online, December 2012, Oxford University Press, s.v. 'canny, adj.' <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27143?redirectedFrom=canny> (accessed January 31, 2013).

⁷¹³ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 2d, rev. ed. (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 29. Koerner's chapter on Romanticism is an excellent and helpful resource for this project, particularly in its reminder that the Romantics' search for origins, where 'one finds *again*' (31, quoting Novalis), is conducted in a new way, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary and vice versa. This process is always in motion, 'unknown, indeterminate, open-ended' (*ibid.*). These qualities allow for the Romantic reading of the world. 'Romanticizing means simultaneously reading the world as if it were a book, and imagining, or writing, a book that would be consubstantial with the world.' (*ibid.*)

⁷¹⁴ W.H. Hudson, *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest* (New York: Random House, 1944), 258-259. 'While the men cut and brought trees, the women and children gathered dry stuff in the forest and brought it in their arms and piled it round. Then they set fire to it on all sides, laughing and shouting, "Burn, burn, daughter of the Didi!" [. . .] the flames went up higher and higher with a great noise; and at last from the top of the tree, out of the green leaves came a great cry, like the cry of a bird [. . .] through leaves and smoke and flame it fell like a great white bird.' (259)

camera and smiles, imagining himself becoming a detective but having no way of knowing what we and his future self know, that is, the depths in himself he will uncover in his becoming. ‘That’s the note we leave you on,’ Jon Amiel says on the final episode’s voiceover commentary, ‘optimism of a strange and complex sort.’⁷¹⁵ It is a note I wish to continue playing.

*Cixous: everything ends with flowers*⁷¹⁶

It is the note Cixous hears when she discovers in the texts of the authors she loves best—Kafka, Genet, Lispector—that they share a gift for intense and delicate attentiveness to flowers. It is a transgressive, subversive and disruptive love that disallows a reader’s conventional expectations of time and thus forbids any kind of desired closure. There will be no usual satisfaction of the status quo. Hierarchies are dismantled, borders erased ‘between sexes, between species, and also between the high and the low.’⁷¹⁷ If any desire has been satisfied as far as our text is concerned, it is that here I sense the poetic and the political in shocking embrace, another space in which I hoped we would arrive. In an echo of words of Bonnefoy (‘*we have slipped out of time*’⁷¹⁸), she writes of the technique of Genet’s ‘rapid border crossings’ in *The Thief’s Journal*: ‘*Time falls out of step* and indicates the crossing. It’s a time that doesn’t preserve our ordinary logic.’⁷¹⁹

What does Genet do to disrupt our ordinary logic? For one, he makes the acquaintance of flowers and of himself in doing so, though the question of identity is darkly playful, never set as it shifts between human/nonhuman, male/female.

Whenever I meet broom [*genêt*] blossoms on the heaths—especially at twilight on my way back from a visit to the ruins of Tiffauges where Gilles de Rais lived—I feel a deep sense of kinship with them. I regard them solemnly, with tenderness. My emotion seems ordained by all nature. I am alone in the world, and I am not sure that I am not the king—perhaps the sprite—of these flowers. They render homage as I pass, bow without bowing, but recognize me.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁵ Amiel, voice-over commentary for ‘Who Done It’.

⁷¹⁶ A subtitle in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (151). Cixous writes, ‘In the texts and biographies of Kafka, Genet, and Clarice Lispector, everything ends with flowers. In my opinion it is not an accident.’

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁷¹⁸ Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry’, 112; see Intersection I.

⁷¹⁹ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 125.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

We see and experience here several echoes of recurring images and themes: Romantic views of nature and solitude, wandering a world in ruins, the in between time of dusk, the uneasy combination of innocent appearances covering a darker reality, transgression of borders, here of day into night, even human into vegetal, a clear facing of death and a disturbing transfiguration. Engaging Kafka and Lispector, Cixous links flowers with endings and death, but does not do so with Genet, at least not here and not explicitly, as she is more concerned with his transgression into another world. Yet, in this passage death and life intermingle in a most unsettling and horrific way. What may seem initially the pleasant wandering of Genet through a field of flowers takes a darker turn in the appositive phrase—‘especially at twilight on my way back from a visit to the ruins of Tiffauges where Gilles de Rais lived’—and leads us into those depths Cixous urges us to go to. She notes that both Genet and Lispector know and name them, Genet calling them the ‘nether realms’, Lispector preferring ‘hell’, though a hell in which joy, a ‘difficult joy’, granted, may be found.⁷²¹ In the 15th century Gilles de Rais, companion-in-arms with St. Joan of Arc (but destined for an opposite path except for death by fire), was accused and convicted of kidnapping, torturing, raping and murdering perhaps hundreds of children at Tiffauges. The details of the crimes are hideous, yet ‘up to the end he was naïvely a good and devout Christian. A few months before his death [burned at the stake yet granted an excessive funeral by Church officials], still free, he confessed and approached the Sacred Altar.’⁷²² Reading Cixous reading Genet, the possibility appears that the remains of the children mingle with the soil, nourishing the flowers, the ones who know Genet as he passes. Do they know him because they see themselves in him, their murderer in him, or both, or neither? At the end of the passage, Genet writes, ‘They are my natural emblem, but through them I have roots in that French soil which is fed by the powdered bones of the children and youths buggered, massacred, and burned by Gilles de Rais.’⁷²³

These are not Wordsworth’s daffodils. But there is a likeness in the intense appreciation and anthropomorphism of the flowers and the inward wealth they bring. If Cixous calls it a difficult joy, it is perhaps because it is not easy to perceive, to come by; such joy comes from what is un-easy. She remarks on a ‘leitmotif of uneasiness’ in *The Thief’s Journal*.⁷²⁴ As she puts it, Genet takes a sort of joy in creating this unease. ‘Contrary to what we might

⁷²¹ Ibid., 114-126.

⁷²² Georges Bataille, *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*, trans. Richard Robinson (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991 [1965]), 12.

⁷²³ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 125.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 142.

imagine, if we are unaware of Genet's cunning, the uneasiness we dread is what he desires most, *uneasiness is the great figure of desire*. "I was uneasy" is almost the equivalent of "I was alive"; it's almost the equivalent of an erection.⁷²⁵

Cixous sees an unease of a different sort with Kafka and Lispector, whom she suggests is Kafka as woman⁷²⁶ and always calls by her given name, perhaps because she is the author with whom she is on most intimate terms. As Susan Rubin Suleiman writes, these women are 'two authors who are not one, but who are very close, very close; so close that in rereading Clarice's texts in order to understand the last work she wrote before she died (*The Hour of the Star*), H.C. is brought to reread, and rewrite, several of her own.'⁷²⁷ (The last words of this text are 'My God, I just remembered that we die. But—but me too?! Don't forget that for now it's strawberry season. Yes.'⁷²⁸ Out of death, life. Paradise and joy in hell.)

In the texts of these authors, again, especially in texts of ending and death, Cixous sees an incredibly delicate interaction with life and what I suggest is a spiritual movement (and can Genet's visits to the 'nether world' and challenges to us who remain on the surface not be considered spiritual?). She discovers that Kafka's dying thoughts are filled with flowers, is startled when she finds 'that, strangely enough, Clarice had died with flowers' too.⁷²⁹ I am startled when I recall Potter's attentiveness to the blossom outside the window of his writing room as he was dying, how he sees it newly as he nears the end. Cixous writes of this astounding commonality in her own ending to *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (the text of hers I have said gives me the greatest pleasure) which we may recall takes the nonviolent approach of following the axe's light, not the blade, to clear a trail through the forest, Kafka's axe of reading that breaks the frozen sea inside us. Recall that the steps in the ladder are apprenticeships of writing, schools of death, dreams, and, finally, roots, as Cixous has determined the ascent of writing is descent, as we have seen also demonstrated in the work of the poet-companions. She ends in beginnings, the roots reaching down to origins and into the earth where some of the seeds strewn on the paths of reading/writing

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Cixous, 'From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History', 10. Here, in another description of her liberating first encounter reading Lispector, Cixous writes, 'And then as I went on in the text I discovered an immense writer, the equivalent for me of Kafka, with something more: this was a woman, writing as a woman. I discovered Kafka and it was a woman.'

⁷²⁷ Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Writing Past the Wall or the Passion According to H.C.', xv.

⁷²⁸ Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, trans. Benjamin Moser (New York: New Directions, 2011 [1977]), 77.

⁷²⁹ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 153.

have begun to grow. As she writes of Lispector's *The Stream of Life*, so it is true of her, 'she has descended so exactly to the place of writing that no matter where we are, we are always in the middle of writing.'⁷³⁰ The path she set with the light of Kafka's axe ends in a well-lit forest clearing filled with flowers.

At least that is how I see the space I have sensed before me as I reach the end. At first I think I am being silly and sentimental, but in fact I am not far off. The final scene of Cixous' text, the last 'step' of 'the school of roots', is the room where Kafka died of consumption. He could no longer talk and communicated by writing on small pieces of paper. Cixous finds them 'magnificent' and urges us to read them.⁷³¹ They are, and we should pause and take note. '*Do you have a moment?*' Kafka asks a friend in his room of flowers. '*Then please lightly spray the peonies.*'⁷³²

Perhaps it was his doctor he asked, the one who saved the slips of paper, which were later published at the end of a collection of his letters under the title 'Conversation Slips'. What type of conversation is Kafka's last? His great lifelong friend, companion, and helper, Max Brod, describes the notes as 'mere hints; his friends guessed the rest.'⁷³³ He tells us what we already know once we've read them, that is, that they 'show that Kafka's intellectual powers, profound kindness, and imagination remained unclouded to the end.'⁷³⁴ '*I'd especially like to take care of the peonies because they are so fragile.*'⁷³⁵ Cixous is so moved by this conversation that she claims she 'loved Kafka because of these scraps of paper', which she describes as belonging to an economy in which 'there is something extraordinarily tender and precise.'⁷³⁶

A colleague once told me she didn't understand this book of Cixous'; what does it mean? she asked. But that is the wrong question, it seems to me, as it often is with reading Cixous—she thwarts that question—and it is the wrong question for Kafka, at least here, in this space of writing cleared by Cixous. '*Yesterday evening a late bee drank the white lilac*

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 133.

⁷³¹ Ibid., 151.

⁷³² Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977; reprint, Richmond: Oneworld Classics, 2011), 417 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁷³³ Ibid., 493, n. 1.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., 417.

⁷³⁶ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 151.

dry.⁷³⁷ What matters are the effects of this terribly fragile space on us as we read, as we listen at the border of life and death. The transformation of the reader is the issue, and not in an individualistic sense but communally. ‘*And if you weren’t there to help me enjoy it, living would be unbearable*’, Cixous writes in *Limonade tout était si infini*, a work that springs from what she, and I, experience as the most marvelous and mysterious ‘slip’ of Kafka’s final conversations: ‘*Lemonade it was all so boundless*.’⁷³⁸

Heather Walton describes this work as one of a number of Cixous’ that are ‘experiments at constructing a writing of love and respect [. . .] sketches or studies Cixous uses as she struggles to find an adequate form for the mystical writer.’⁷³⁹ *Limonade* is written as both a love and an antiwar letter. As she does in *To Live the Orange*, Cixous wrestles here with the question of the responsibility of the writer to the outside world. The woman writing the love letter to another woman that is, in part, a cry of protest against ‘war against women and similar beings’, decides that love is not enough.⁷⁴⁰ Love must be armed ‘in these dire political circumstances’.⁷⁴¹ Though *Limonade* was written 30 years ago, it retains its relevance, paradoxically, by not being relevant. That is, what matters are not the particulars of the dire circumstances of any era but the realization that the oppression is systemic and ongoing and must be resisted.

The form of resistance is the form of the mystical writer, for how does Cixous arm love? With the light of Kafka’s axe. In *Limonade*, the letter writer writes of gratitude, joy, peace, mysteries, a happiness in being a woman, of being alive.

So wanted to write the little letter of four silences which she would send to her right in broad daylight, right in her presence, if by misfortune, even though they were in the same house, they were once again besieged and bombarded all day long. And this letter would begin with “listen . . .” It would be magical, it would play a little melody of peace right in the midst of cacophony, she

⁷³⁷ Kafka, ‘Conversation Slips’, 421.

⁷³⁸ Hélène Cixous, *Limonade tout était si infini* (Paris: des femmes, 1982); idem, ‘Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite’, in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers, trans. Ann Liddle (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994 [1982]), 108; In ‘The Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History’ (9-10; n. 5), Cixous writes of being enticed and inspired by this phrase: ‘*Limonade es war alles so grenzenlos* is a sentence of Kafka’s. This isn’t a sentence from Kafka—the writer. It is a sentence from Franz, the man, no longer writing books, agonizing, writing only rapid and sublime messages of life, life-phrases, flashes of eternity. It is a last sentence. Perhaps the last. Its purity, its symbolic and yet concrete strength, its density, make it one of the most beautiful poems in the world. Yet it was not a poem. Only a sigh. And also the portrait of Regret.’

⁷³⁹ Walton, ‘Hélène Cixous and the Mysteries that Beat in the Heart of the World’, 156.

⁷⁴⁰ Cixous, ‘Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite’, 111.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

encouraged herself. “Even if there was a war going on, especially because of the war.”⁷⁴²

This letter would begin with listen, like the urging of Bachelard, Heidegger and Rahner to listen to the poets! There is an urgency placed upon us to read poems that arise from the depths. As Heidegger insists, referring to Hölderlin and Rilke, ‘We others must learn to listen to what *these* poets say.’⁷⁴³ Such a simple idea, yet so difficult in practice. Alice Jardine wonderfully phrases the problem of our difficulty in learning to listen when she writes of the ideology of Cixous’ *écriture féminine* and its seeds in the thought of Heidegger: ‘For Heidegger, the human subject in the modern world has come to be not-himself because he has simply forgotten how to let Being be in language. “Modern Man” must slow down. He is no longer astonished by the quiddity of things: the redness of red, the wordness of a word.’⁷⁴⁴ Cixous remarks how the noise of the world keeps us from listening, from silence:

Let us call the world around us “noise machines,” in opposition to Mandelstam’s “noise of time.” We listen to the radio, watch television; we read the newspaper and we can say that the noise of machines is invading everywhere. [. . .] The air in which we breathe life is given over to values that are the death of humankind, that are low-level, oriented by speculation, money, and profit. [. . .] In the place of the word, reflection, or thought, we need noise.⁷⁴⁵

To remember where we began this thesis, we can see that now we have moved a vast distance from the dogmatic certainties of the institutional Church to something much more delicate and authentic.⁷⁴⁶ On a prosaic level, we can point out, like Frederick Crowe, S.J., that a teaching Church must be a learning Church and therefore a listening Church—and it would seem today it has not the ears to hear.⁷⁴⁷

On a poetic level, we may note that the home transformed is that shared ‘house’ in *Limonade* of listening and play in the midst of death and cacophony, paradise even in war,

⁷⁴² Ibid., 109.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁴⁴ Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis*, 108.

⁷⁴⁵ Cixous, ‘Poetry, Passion, and History: Marina Tsvetayeva’, 111-112.

⁷⁴⁶ I am indebted to David Jasper for our conversations about the shift from dogmatic to poetic thinking.

⁷⁴⁷ Crowe, ‘The Church as Learner’, 373-374. Crowe writes, ‘we have laid so much stress on the teaching Church [. . .] as an office belonging to certain people [. . .] that we have not attended to the learning function, though it is primary in regard to the Church as a whole [. . .] Thus, we are like a bird that has one wing hugely overdeveloped, while the other, through lack of exercise, has been allowed to atrophy: we can hardly take flight on wings of eagles in that condition’.

a space of and for women, most likely, but not exclusively. The letter writer recalls writing a book, from which she learns this secret:

which is that “having” paradise isn’t impossible; because “being in paradise” doesn’t mean having your residence there; it means knowing that you can return there. [. . .] Because it was only in the beginning that paradise was a garden with a precise address. But ever since, it can take place anywhere, at any moment, we have to work and struggle to let it take place. It’s a state of joy which prolongs itself throughout the whole life of those people who have the strength to be wild, women for the most part.⁷⁴⁸

A few lines later, I am startled when I read that to attain ‘the state of being-in-paradise’ one must be ‘capable of discovering the treasures of life lying in store under the window, within our reach, within our embrace’,⁷⁴⁹ sentiments that sound so similar to Potter’s remark about ‘seeing the blossom’ below his window. There is another resemblance when in an interview with Alan Yentob he is asked about the state of the world and how he might affect it. He responds by talking about his vocation as a writer, sounding very much as if he had entered that ‘state of paradise’ as described by Cixous. ‘I do care [about the direction the world is moving], but I don’t care in the way that I want to scream in the street about it. [. . .] you have to attend to that which you can attend to [. . .] if I do what I can do myself with the pen on the page, within the very medium that [. . .] seems to be the voice of the occupying power, then the resistance ought to take place within the barracks as well as outside.’⁷⁵⁰

The poetic is political in the way these coincidences, correspondences, if you like, recur across space and time. To believe as a poet is perhaps to create those states of paradise out of language into texts in which we can rest and seek to be redeemed. As hinted above, this is a communal activity. Cixous, in language of excess, describes such a space:

the country of words [. . .] where poets live, those whom Kafka calls the “watchers” and whom Clarice Lispector would call the “secret agents”; the people who have in common the saving of the almost imperceptible keys to the world of survival. In this country the spatial terrestrial geographic frontiers and also the time frontiers are erased: from century to century, the inhabitants communicate and transmit. This is the work of all those who teach and transmit and all those who practice an art. There everything is exile and nothing is exile.

⁷⁴⁸ Cixous, ‘Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite’, 110.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Potter, *Seeing the Blossom*, 72.

A *Correspondance à trois* [a reference to her *Correspondence à trois*: Rilke, Pasternak, Tsvetaïeva] is formed, into thousands.⁷⁵¹

Cixous often writes about the Russian poets who formed communities of mutual love and support, which I touched upon in the reading of *Manna*, and then there are the intertextual communities she builds through her critical work. Perhaps most striking are the reading communities she fosters through her seminars. In all of them, I like to think there is something of a love not unlike that described as the love of the early Christian disciple, a subversive and counter-cultural love, as evidenced at least in Luke's portrayal of the original Christian community in Jerusalem. It is a love that floods our hearts (Rom 5.5) and turns the world upside down (Acts 17.6), one that radically transforms those who are open to it. In 'Conversations', a conversation about Cixous' seminars, she says:

Working together, our seminar is constituted as a group of people almost "religiously", in the etymological sense of the word. Our "religion" is a religion of thinking. What groups us together is our desire to think and our belief that thinking is best done in a group, that one thought helps another advance. I believe thinking is most powerful when it is poetic. Strictly speaking, thought has philosophy as its synonym. But philosophy proceeds in a manner which I find restrictive. I prefer thinking in a poetic overflowing.⁷⁵²

Thinking poetically, theologically, dwelling and believing poetically. I fear I have not articulated the distinctions between them, though I am not sure I would know what they are and how to mark the boundaries. And perhaps that is exactly what has been best explored, the unmarking of the boundaries between theology and literature, how they encounter and disrupt one another in conversation. But it is the poetics I am most drawn to, despite my theological work, and I, at least, am convinced by my poet-companions that there is something *theologically* worthwhile in this idea of believing as a poet. They have enticed me to pursue it, in the same way Cixous was enticed by the last words of Franz Kafka, whom she addresses by his first initial when writing of him in *Limonade* because of her passionate thinking. The protagonist, the letter writer, wishes to write a 'last book' made of phrases like his. Aphoristically, she writes, 'Elegance of a grasshopper: elegance of F. Ethereal slenderness. Because one is in another economy. Totally free?'⁷⁵³ But the writer fails at writing this book 'free of habits, obligations, proprieties.'⁷⁵⁴ The poetic economy discovered in Kafka in which there is something extraordinarily tender and precise is, as

⁷⁵¹ Cixous, 'From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History', 5.

⁷⁵² Cixous, 'Conversations', in *Writing Differences*, 141-2.

⁷⁵³ Cixous, 'Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite', 115.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

we have said, difficult to come by. As Cixous notes elsewhere, ‘Coming to the delicacy of Kafka is not given to everyone, it is only on the horizon of what one can hope for.’⁷⁵⁵

Bonnefoy: opening up the labyrinth

In Intersection 1, I noted the way Bonnefoy discovered what might be termed an abundance in the experience of failure, though perhaps plenitude and finitude would be the language he would prefer (‘*But how is it then that the moment of failure is precisely the moment at which I have the feeling—when my growing anxiety is nipped in the bud—of a reality both deepened and rejoined?*’ he asks, and we are again sounding the depths.⁷⁵⁶) and in Chapter 5, I discussed Cixous’ positive lack, which resonates with the Bonnefoy discussion through its twist of expectations and paradox of gain in loss, bounty in diminishment. But it was only as I was writing this final chapter that I realised both of them write in these terms about unfinished books, a key piece and trajectory also of the story of Marlow with his troubles with writing and imaginary stolen scripts. Of course, one of the most wondrous aspects of these crosswise narratives is that the stories of the failed texts are in those that came to fruition. The stories of the unwritten texts in a strange way bring life to the completed ones: *The Singing Detective*, *Limonade*, and the text I will turn to now, *The Arrière Pays* (the translator decided against translating this term because the English approximations, such as ‘back country’ or ‘interior’ proved too unequivocal⁷⁵⁷). These stories of failed books, (fragments pointing to whole texts, whole lives?), transform their creators, by which I mean to include authors Cixous, Bonnefoy, Potter; narrators the woman letter writer, Bonnefoy the wanderer, Marlow the detective; and the readers of the texts. As Cixous writes in *Limonade*, this hoped for book ‘would be unbound and free. Even from being a book.’⁷⁵⁸

But it is to Bonnefoy I look for the last word, to his strange, lovely and unclassifiable book, *The Arrière-pays*, which has been described as a combination spiritual autobiography/piece

⁷⁵⁵ Cixous, ‘From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History’, 10.

⁷⁵⁶ Yves Bonnefoy, *The Arrière-pays*, trans. Stephen Romer (London: Seagull Books, 2012), 61.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.; see Bonnefoy’s preface, ix, where he writes, ‘The title of the book also proved to be a problem, since it takes on many nuances throughout the text. “Hinterland” has harsh, even military, associations to the French ear [. . .] “back-country” is too heavily charged with ideas of poverty or even backwardness, when my own *arrière-pays* is a dream of civilizations superior to our own.’

⁷⁵⁸ Cixous, ‘Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite’, 116.

of quest literature/essay on aesthetics.⁷⁵⁹ He is, in this book, among other things, a wanderer attempting to write a book about a traveler. He is a seeker, not unlike Marlow, and, also like Marlow, a writer, who through his writing, his failures at writing, is led back to his youth in order to see more clearly his present and the direction of his future.

I find this book, and him, extremely difficult to write about. And yet, as Cixous expressed the feeling regarding the writers she loves best, he entices me to write, even as I know that there is nothing I can write that will adequately express not so much what his work is about, though that way is always a temptation for its supposed clarity, but what it is doing, what effect it has.⁷⁶⁰ The effect I am left with is perhaps that of what the poet comes to know in his textual journey, what he calls ‘an unknown feeling’, the focus of the novel he decides to destroy because it lures him away from the world as it is, here and now, into a labyrinth of enigmatic beauty.⁷⁶¹ The structure of the book has the sense of a labyrinth, beginning not with Bonnefoy’s childhood, which comes in the middle, but with the haunting uneasiness felt at the crossroads we encountered in the first Intersection. He begins

I have often experienced a feeling of anxiety, at crossroads. At such moments it seems to me that *here*, or close by, a couple of steps away on the path I didn’t take and which is already receding—that just *over there* a more elevated kind of country would open up, where I might have gone to live and which I’ve already lost.⁷⁶²

Yet a little further on, he recognizes that temptation for what it is and writes

I love the earth, and what I see delights me, and sometimes I even believe that the unbroken line of peaks, the majesty of the trees, the liveliness of water moving through the bottom of a ravine, the graceful facade of a church—because in some places and at certain hours they are so intense—must have been intended for our benefit. This harmony has a meaning, these landscapes, and these objects, while they are still fixed, or possibly enchanted, are almost like a language, as if the absolute would declare itself, if we could only look

⁷⁵⁹ In his introduction to his translation of *The Arrière-pays* (1), Stephen Romer notes it is a work that escapes definition and refers to it as ‘excited reverie’, ‘a sustained essay on aesthetics’, ‘a spiritual autobiography’, ‘a belated addition to Quest literature,’ and even ‘a supernatural thriller’.

⁷⁶⁰ I am grateful to David Jasper for our many discussions about why and how we read, for his gentle reminders to ‘read religiously’ as his friend Robert Detweiler termed it, ‘to dive into the stories and the text, to embrace them and instantiate them in yourself’ (*The Sacred Body*, 144).

⁷⁶¹ Bonnefoy, *The Arrière-pays*, 128.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 25.

and listen intently, at the end of our wanderings. And it is here, within this promise, that the place is found.⁷⁶³

Bonnefoy's wandering is both exterior and interior, like the walking of a labyrinth, which is the final image of this text, a photograph of a 12th century one at the Cathedral of San Marino in Lucca, Italy.⁷⁶⁴ The meditative walking of a labyrinth tends to stymie the overly busy mind, as does the initial anxiety of getting lost in the circle, of not finding one's way in and out. In the centre, one comes to a gentle stop and waits in the silence before returning back to the beginning. What is the centre of the labyrinth for Bonnefoy? Perhaps the chapter on his childhood, where the tension between the ideal and the real first arises in him, for he sets in opposition the two most important places of his formative years: Tours, with its 'deserted streets [. . . and] small, poor houses' contrasted with his grandparents' house in Toirac, a place of endless summers.⁷⁶⁵ Here we have another strange solitary boy 'at the evening meal, under the yellow bulb [trying] to find the mysterious point at which the crust ended and the crumb began.'⁷⁶⁶

Frank Kermode, in his classic text *The Sense of an Ending*, writes about what happens to us when we recognize our place 'in the midst' and our time as that of the angels,⁷⁶⁷ and this is, it seems to me, where Bonnefoy arrives and where he entices us to go and why, I now see, that it is such an uneasy encounter. To distinguish the angels from God and humans, Kermode says, Aquinas granted them a third order of time, in which they are 'out of time, their acts have a before and an after', which Kermode suggests is literary time.⁷⁶⁸ Bonnefoy as angel suits, as he moves between the eternal and the finite, knowing that 'interval' Kermode perceives between the 'tick' and the 'tock' that is *kairos* time.⁷⁶⁹ Bonnefoy does not get lost in the labyrinth, but, as he says of Bernini, he 'opens it out' through acceptance and assimilation, but not through appropriation, a shift in seeing the poet undergoes and invites us to as well.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 143, 218.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 98-102 (98).

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁶⁷ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 74.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁷⁰ Bonnefoy, *The Arrière-pays*, 142.

As Anthony Rudolf, one of Bonnefoy's English translators, says of him,

There are no answers. A root is planted in the womb, and spiritual awareness is born. From such awareness the route of personal salvation is plotted: begin where you find yourself, build your own community through the word, then unwrite yourself out of the poem—to “broken bread” and “simple stone,” to “ripe fruits” and “transhuman stars,” to “a fire caught sight of in the sudden night,/like the table glimpsed in a poor house.”⁷⁷¹

Like many other readers encountered in this thesis—Cixous, Bonnefoy, Heidegger, Bachelard, Ignatius—Rudolf was transformed by a reading encounter. He describes it in language similar to Cixous'. A book of Bonnefoy's finds him, not the other way around. There is a connection felt, an affinity, a falling in love, a turning. This is how he recounts the meeting:

Yves Bonnefoy's second book, *Hier régnant désert*, found me in a Cambridge bookshop in 1963, when I was twenty-one. I began reading it, and my life was changed, changed because, to start with, I knew it *would* be changed. An affinity was elected . . .⁷⁷²

As a result of this textual encounter, Rudolf enters into 'a life in writing', describing the experience of reading Bonnefoy as 'deeper than any word, found beyond telling'.⁷⁷³ He writes of taking 'the measure' of the poet, yet, though he doesn't use the wording, what is more interesting is how the poet has taken Rudolf's measure, which takes us back to the beginning of this thesis, to the poem in which we are presented with these questions of love, measuring and turning, all aspects of the poetic dwelling Heidegger discovers in his striving to think 'the same thing that Hölderlin is saying poetically'.⁷⁷⁴ Heidegger makes an important distinction in his definition of 'the same' as opposed to 'equal or identical' that are important to this discussion, for poetry, for Church.

The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say "the same" if we think difference.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷¹ Anthony Rudolf, foreword to *New and Selected Poems*, by Bonnefoy, xi.

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ Ibid., ix.

⁷⁷⁴ Heidegger, “ . . . Poetically Man Dwells . . . ”, 218.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

In this ending, I sometimes mistakenly located the beginning of this thesis in the institutional Church, though that was *a* beginning. When I began this project, I had thought the ending would be a return to that beginning, along the lines of Eliot's *Little Gidding*, that out of the exploration, we would 'arrive where we started and know the place for the first time'.⁷⁷⁶ As a theologian, I initially anticipated and intended that we would return to the Church of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Tina Beattie with the Church transformed by the kind of theological work undertaken through the *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* of Vatican II, somehow undertaken poetically, though I knew not how. How foolish and uninteresting that now seems, for we have instead arrived at a destination more like that of Blanchot's space of literature, or Cixous' space where 'a kind of work' takes place,⁷⁷⁷ that involuntary process remarked upon by her in chapter four, an elusive, mysterious and discomfiting space I have attempted to reveal above in the texts of endings and the explorations of the poets' work. This thesis opens not in institutional Church but in the poem of Hölderlin that takes our measure as it asks us what it might mean to dwell poetically. Beginning with the poet opened up a more fluid space, a poetic space, in which I could begin to bring into Church the question of poetic dwelling. In order to do this, Heidegger's distinction was made, though I cannot claim I made it consciously at the outset. It happened as a result of my gradual recognition of a 'belonging together of what differs' in the 'gathering by way of difference' of our poet companions. Their gathering kept at bay any temptation to reductionism and to uniformity posing as unity, faults abundant it seems to me within the restorationist movement of the current Roman Church. I tried to hear the invitations of the poets and to write my responses to their invitations as a beginning at least of a poetic building of 'Church', 'divining paths',⁷⁷⁸ as Heidegger puts it, by following the poets' building so that we might enter into their creations and begin to think differently. Thus there is a rightness in ending with *The Arrière-pays*, in which Bonnefoy's journey is a series of continual approaches toward inner and outer horizons that call him to faith through an acceptance of what is.

⁷⁷⁶ T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 43.

⁷⁷⁷ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 28.

⁷⁷⁸ Heidegger, ' "... Poetically Man Dwells . . . " ', 219.

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