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Reading “Martyred Signs”: Reformation Hermeneutics and Literature

By

Stephanie Meredith Bahr

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor David Landreth, Chair

Professor Maura Nolan

Professor Ethan Shagan

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Abstract

Reading “Martyred Signs”: Reformation Hermeneutics and Literature

by

Stephanie Meredith Bahr

Doctor of Philosophy in English

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This dissertation—Reading “Martyred Signs”: Reformation Hermeneutics and Literature—contends that Reformation struggles over Biblical interpretation generated a violently unstable hermeneutic environment and exerted a defining influence on Renaissance literature. Although the Reformation hinged on the most fundamental question of literary study—how to interpret texts—most literary scholars encounter these Biblical hermeneutics only indirectly, reduced to doctrinal bullet points. Such a distillation misrepresents as stable product an unstable process fraught with violence, in which the stakes of interpretation were torture, execution, and damnation. Through close analysis of Catholic Thomas More’s and Protestant William Tyndale’s theological polemics, my first chapter shows that the very hermeneutic distinctions often reified by current scholarship—that Catholics embraced myriad allegorical senses, whereas Protestants insisted on a solitary literal sense—were actually in perpetual collapse. Although More’s and Tyndale’s interpretive *theories* are wildly different, their interpretive *practices* become nearly indistinguishable. I argue that their vicious print battle and its violently unstable hermeneutics shaped Renaissance textuality, poetics, and the fraught categories by which Renaissance readers understood reading.

The dominating pressures of these theological hermeneutics cannot be limited to explicitly religious contexts, nor is their influence a purely passive, environmental phenomenon. My next three chapters demonstrate that Thomas Wyatt’s lyric poetry, Edmund Spenser’s epic allegory, and William Shakespeare’s commercial drama actively take up the challenges these violent and contradictory hermeneutics present. Both stylistically and thematically, Wyatt’s verse hangs poised between More and Tyndale’s hermeneutic ideals, expresses a profound longing for Tyndale’s ideal of the stable, literal sense that it treats as unachievable due to the irredeemable corruption of the multitude on whom More’s ideals depend. Whereas Wyatt’s poetry embodies the uneasy tension between Protestant ideals and Protestant practice, Spenser’s poetry seeks to resolve that tension. Confronted with the iconoclasm and anti-aestheticism of the many Protestants who (like Tyndale) condemned romance, allegory, and poetry, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* implements all three to create an orthodox depiction of Protestant doctrine and hermeneutics. Figural allegory is the only way for Spenser to transform the inward, illegible process of reading-as-salvation into an externally legible pedagogical narrative, yet this narrative is inescapably violent—populated by demonic doppelgangers and rife with physical and psychological torture, murder, and rape. A similar brutality dominates Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. In *Titus*, Reformation disputes about whether to read figuratively or literally play out on stage as characters brutally literalize the conventional metonymic fragmentation of the body and as the Romans and Goths enact narratives on the bodies of their enemies. *Titus* dramatizes the interpretive instability of the Reformation as rape, murder, dismemberment, and cannibalism. By reinvesting in early vernacular theology, my project recovers one of the earliest

sources of hermeneutic theories in English, which yoked the physical and psychological violence of the Reformation to the very act of interpretation.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents:	i
Acknowledgements:	ii
Introduction: Confessional Battles and Interpretive Violence:	iii
Chapter One: The Reformation Hermeneutics of Thomas More and William Tyndale:	1
Chapter Two: Thomas Wyatt's Hermeneutic Longing and the Reformation:	35
Chapter Three: Faith and Violence: <i>The Faerie Queene's</i> Hermeneutic Accommodation:	51
Chapter Four: <i>Titus Andronicus</i> and the Interpretive Violence of the Reformation:	80
Bibliography:	101

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Introduction

Confessional Battles and Interpretive Violence

Writing one-hundred years after William Tyndale first printed his translation of *The New Testament*, John Donne's *Expostulation 19* vividly expresses a fundamental hermeneutic and spiritual tension for Reformation Protestants and Catholics. He writes:

My God, my God, thou art a direct God, may I not say a literal God,
a God that wouldst be understood literally and according to the plain
sense of all that thou sayest. But thou art also (Lord, I intend it to
thy glory, and let no profane misinterpreter abuse it to thy
diminution), thou art a figurative, a metaphorical God too . . .¹

Here, Donne describes God by both of the hermeneutic categories—literal and figurative—that were so thoroughly integrated into Reformation strife. When and whether to interpret the Bible literally or figuratively was a focal crux of the Reformation, and such seemingly abstract distinctions held the very tangible dangers of torture and execution. Donne's uneasy caveats reflect the primacy of the literal sense in Protestant England; however, Donne's invocation of the simultaneously metaphorical in God's Word and God's self also illustrates the uneasy truth that literal and figurative are inescapably interdependent. From the earliest days of the English Reformation, the very hermeneutic distinctions that lend Donne his tone of anxiety—that Protestants insisted on a solitary literal sense, whereas Catholics embraced myriad allegorical senses—were radically unstable. Maintaining such distinctions in practice proved a precarious challenge, leading to a pivotal hermeneutic collapse: although Catholic and Protestant interpretive *theories* are wildly different, their interpretive *practices* are nearly indistinguishable. Catholic Thomas More and Protestant William Tyndale's vicious debate about Biblical interpretation, widely circulated in print and the vernacular, defined the terms and obsessions of English hermeneutic thought that haunt Donne into the seventeenth-century; yet neither passionate debate nor state violence could yield a doctrinal consensus or a consistent interpretive method. This dissertation contends that these violently ambiguous Reformation hermeneutics exerted a defining influence on English Renaissance literature across forms and genres, from Thomas Wyatt's lyric poetry to Edmund Spenser's allegorical epic and William Shakespeare's commercial stage.

Starting in the 1520s with Thomas More and William Tyndale and continuing through to the intense confessionalizing of Elizabethan London, the English interpretive landscape was dominated by religious strife, ambiguity, and interpretive violence.² I use this phrase “interpretive violence” throughout my dissertation to designate several interrelated concepts. First, it refers to the historical violence fueled by Biblical interpretation, particularly the torture and burning of heretics under Henry VIII and Mary I. Here, the relationship between violence and interpretation is quite direct: one's interpretation of scripture under questioning could save one from, or lead one to, torture and execution.³ This first kind of interpretive violence in turn becomes a locus of interpretation—

¹ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 124.

² Peter Marshall, “Choosing Sides and Talking Religion in Shakespeare's England,” in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, ed. David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore, 2015, 43–44; Felicity Heal, “Experiencing Religion in London: Diversity and Choice in Shakespeare's Metropolis,” in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, ed. David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 63–66.

³ See for example the examination of Anne Askew in John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Select Narratives*, ed. John N. King, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22–34. As Brad S. Gregory points out, torture was rare in heretical interrogations themselves (particularly when compared to Continental judicial torture) since “[t]orturing people to make them confess their beliefs would have undercut the idea that heresy reflected a willful choice”; “[w]hen torture was employed, authorities wanted heretics to name names, to identify fellow believers, not to make their own confessions.”

Renaissance punishments were often designed to be read as compact allegories, in which the punishment fit the crime.⁴ When hanged, drawn, and quartered, traitors' divided bodies mirror the violent fragmentation their treachery intended for the body politic; burning heretics at the stake foreshadows their eternal burning in hell.⁵ As Thomas More wrote of Thomas Hitton's burning, "the spiryte of errour and lyenge, hath taken his wreched soule wyth hym strayte from the shorte fyre to [the] fyre euerlastyng."⁶

Yet these punishments remain open to shifting and contested interpretations. John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* famously credits the Protestant Hugh Latimer with saying at the stake, "we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as (I trust) shall never be put out," thus recasting the Catholics' hellfire of execution as the Protestants' light of faith.⁷ One faith's "martyr" is the other faith's "heretic" or "traitor," and both sides of the Reformation claim the term of "martyr" for themselves.⁸ In this way, the hermeneutic differences that helped fuel the schism of the Reformation in turn generated more interpretable texts: the bodies and narratives of both Catholic and Protestant "martyrs" became ongoing interpretive battlegrounds. These early martyrdoms, and this most direct mode of interpretive violence, are some fifty years removed from the audience of *Titus*, but their importance had not faded. Rather their deaths became foundational narratives crucial to national Protestant identity on one side and recusant Catholic identity on the other.⁹

How to interpret violence remained an urgent concern throughout the sixteenth century. In the tumultuous years of the later sixteenth century, Queen Elizabeth's government struggled—often unsuccessfully—to distinguish between sacred and secular occasions of force, in their violence against not only Jesuits and seminary priests but also against non-conformist Protestants.¹⁰ In 1583, for example, Elizabeth's cabinet issued an official pamphlet to combat martyrological accounts of Jesuit Edmund Campion's execution and to defend their use of torture "for the examination of certaine traitors . . . unjustly reported to be done upon them for matters of religion."¹¹ These

Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, Harvard Historical Studies 134 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 77. Gregory's distinction is an important one, but does not dissolve the cause and effect: Anne Askew is questioned by the prelates, then—being found a heretic—turned over to the authorities for torture and execution.

⁴ Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 209–13; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 42–50. For example, boiling a poisoner externalizes the death by liquid he inflicted, cutting off the writing hand of a slanderous pamphleteer removes the instrument of her crime, and it was common practice to hang the instruments of their crimes around criminals' necks. As Dolven points out, this use of symbolic sentencing effectively conflates evidence and punishment; anyone punished in such manner will more than likely appear guilty, 211.

⁵ Lorna Clymer, "Cromwell's Head and Milton's Hair: Corpse Theory in Spectacular Bodies of the Interregnum," *The Eighteenth Century* 40, no. 2 (July 1, 1999): 79.

⁶ Thomas More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, ed. Louis Schuster et al., vol. 8, *The Complete Works of Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 16/35-7.

⁷ Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs Select Narratives*, 154.

⁸ John N. King, "Religious Writing," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500-1600*, ed. Arthur F Kinney (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 125.

⁹ Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Third Anstey Memorial Lectures in the University of Kent at Canterbury, 12-15 May* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 12–16; Jesse Lander, "Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Printing and Popularizing the Acts and Monuments," in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Debora Shuger and McEachern Claire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 71–72; Peter Lake and Michael C Questier, *Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethan England* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011), 76–106.

¹⁰ King, "Religious Writing," 125; Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 137.

¹¹ Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England*, 31–32. Those who insist that there were no executions for heresy under Elizabeth have the official records of her regime on their side, but rather take her word for it over the more

extremely public struggles over the interpretation of new sectarian violence maintained a close dialogue with originary Reformation violence and martyrologies, making interpretive violence an ongoing and urgent concern. These are two senses in which I adopt the phrase “interpretive violence”: bodily violence *based upon* textual interpretation and that violence itself then *subjected to* interpretation by onlookers and commentators.

Yet there is also a third aspect of Reformation interpretive violence that informs Renaissance literary production: the psychological violence produced by a cultural landscape where interpretation poses a threat to body and soul, since the stakes of interpretation are torture, execution, and damnation.¹² Some scholars critical of broadening conceptions of violence wish to impose sharp distinctions between literal and figurative injury, the physical and the non-physical.¹³ Yet in addressing the theopolitical challenges of the Reformation, Tudor law blurred these very distinctions between words and deeds. In 1534, a new law “made it treason to attempt, *whether through actions, writings or words*, to deprive the king, queen or heir of their rightful titles and dignities” or “to call the king a heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or usurper of the Crown.”¹⁴ Sir Thomas Wyatt, subject of my second chapter, was imprisoned on charges of treason in part for allegedly saying that “he feryd that the kinge shulde be caste owte of a Cartes arse and that by goddis bloude yf he were so, he were

nuanced evidence of the period. That the victims of this violence experienced it as religious and that many of their fellow Englishmen and women agreed is evidence enough we should not follow the government’s word absolutely. In Elizabethan England more broadly—where the head of state is head of the Church—it is virtually impossible to separate sacred and secular, even when that head of state herself is attempting to make such a division.

¹² James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 29. In his vibrantly polemical attack on Protestant triumphalism, Simpson’s account of Reformation psychological violence emphasizes soteriological anguish as essentially Protestant and prioritizes this over other forms of psychological violence, like the fear of torture or execution, which are dimensions of sixteenth century experience, for both Catholics and Protestants, I wish to preserve.

Under Elizabeth, between 1570 and 1603, 189 Catholic priests and layfolk were put to death, and there survive vivid accounts of the constant state of fear experienced by non-conforming Catholics. For example, Parsons describes recusants and animals constantly under hunt, “carr[ying] their lives always in their hands” while Robert Southwell writes of officials approaching Catholics’ homes as if “to fight in a field” and then to “ransack every corner—even women’s beds and bosomes—with such insolent behaviour that their villanies in this kind are half a martyrdom,” Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Crammer to Hooker, 1534-1603* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 155.

¹³ Pieter Spierenburg, “Violence: Reflections about a Word,” in *Violence in Europe: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Sophie Body-Gendrot and Pieter Spierenburg (New York: Springer, 2008), 19. Spierenburg wishes to reject “all attempts to extend the definition of violence beyond the realm of intentional encroachment upon the body’s physical integrity” (19). He suggests, following an argument by Jonathan Rauch, that conceptualizing “verbal violence” as violence would in effect authorize responding to injurious words with bullets. To be sure, verbal or psychological violence is different from physical violence, and that distinction is profoundly important; however the repetition of the word “violence” in these phrases does not automatically conflate discrete phenomena and eliminate any sense of distinction. By this logic, using the same term—violence—to refer to a punch thrown in a bar fight and Lavinia’s fate in *Titus* would conflate rape and dismemberment with a sock on the jaw. To repeat the word violence draws attention to elements of similarity across acts and concepts without collapsing all types and degrees of violence into mushy equivalency. Moreover, although Spierenburg defines violence as “intentional encroachment upon the body’s physical integrity,” he focuses primarily on physical injury while rejecting the psychological elements of violence. It is then, perhaps, unsurprising that he omits any explicit consideration of rape which, though undoubtedly “intentional encroachment upon the body’s physical integrity,” may leave little or no physical injury and rather inflicts its greatest harm psychologically.

¹⁴ Emphasis added. Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51; Rebecca Lemon, *Treason by Words: Literature, Law, and Rebellion in Shakespeare’s England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006).

well served, and he wolde he were so.”¹⁵ Starting under Henry VIII, the Tudors placed increasing scrutiny on what could be said, printed, and performed, and the penalties for any individual breach ranged unpredictably from “fining and imprisonment to mutilation and death.”¹⁶

Although, in Elizabethan London, the threats posed by interpretive acts extended well beyond their origins in Biblical hermeneutics, they nevertheless remained rooted in them. Early modern print censorship first began to prevent the spread of heresy; books, like heretics, were publicly burned.¹⁷ Similarly, the initial impulse for dramatic censorship came from the desire to suppress the mystery plays and eradicate vestiges of the old religion and associated cultural practices.¹⁸ In 1581, Elizabeth extended the duties of the Master of the Revels, giving him power to license and suppress plays and to fine or imprison players or playwrights. The origins of this censorship were religious, and the challenges of censorship were explicitly hermeneutic. As Lord Burghley wrote to Elizabeth, she needed someone she could trust to meet the “connyng of the office” by “understanding of historyes, in judgment of comedies tragedyes and showes, in sight of perspective and architecture.”¹⁹ William Shakespeare would have been intimately familiar with the potential dangers of playwriting, and he necessarily submitted his work to the Master of the Revels for inspection. Explicitly religious violence over matters of Biblical interpretation expanded to inform the entire hermeneutic culture. That verbal utterances could be legally treated as equivalent to violent physical action was not merely theoretical or confined to Biblical interpretation alone. As a result, the lines between physical and abstract harm, between figurative and literal, became deeply uncertain.²⁰

¹⁵ Thomas Wyatt, “A Declaration Made by Sir Thomas Wiatt Knight of His Innocence Being [in the Tower] Uppone the False Accusation of Doctor Bonarde Bisshope of London, Made [unto] the Coucill the Yeaere of Our Lorde 15[41],” in *The Life and Letters of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1963), 198.

¹⁶ D. M. Loades, *Politics, Censorship, and the English Reformation* (London; New York: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 104. Catholic sympathizer William Carter’s execution for treason was primarily on the charge of “clandestine printing” while, on the opposite confessional divide, ardent Protestants John Stubbs and John Penry faced harsh penalties on the sole charge of seditious writing. Stubbs’ right hand was cut off and Penry hanged for felony in 1593.

¹⁷ David Scott Kastan, “Naughty Printed Books,” in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 291–99. Historians debate whether early modern English censorship was sufficiently effective and ruthless to be accurately considered “repressive” and any individual instance might fall on a scale from truly draconian to exceedingly moderate. I would suggest that the very irregularity of Tudor enforcement would hold an additional menace in its unpredictability.

¹⁸ Janet Clare, *Art Made Tongue-Tied by Authority: Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester; New York; New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ Thomas More himself was executed for treason based on his refusal to sign the Act of Supremacy and on testimony about his alleged words. At no point did the prosecution allege violent physical action—words and inaction were enough. Initially, at More’s trial, the king’s attorney general claimed that “even though we have no word or deed to charge upon you, yet we have your silence, and that is a sign of your evil intention and a sure proof of malice.” Cited in Karen Cunningham, *Imaginary Betrayals: Subjectivity and the Discourses of Treason in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 11. Later, after the testimony of Master Rich regarding a conversation he allegedly held with More, the charge listed in Thomas More’s indictment was that he “falsely, treasonously, and maliciously, **in his words** [was] persevering in his treason and malice . . .” Cited in Henry Ansgar Kelly, Louis W. Karlin, and Gerard Wegemer, *Thomas More’s Trial by Jury: A Procedural and Legal Review with a Collection of Documents* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2011), 37, emphasis added. Nor were high-ranking officials the only ones under scrutiny; as Henry VIII’s Lord Chancellor, Thomas Cromwell, was inundated with letters from everyday English folk informing on their neighbors. For more, see: G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1972), 327–82; Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, 220–21; Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 227–29.

This dissertation addresses vexed issues of Biblical hermeneutics, sectarian violence, and religious identity through the lens of two large categories: “Protestant” and “Catholic.” Recent scholarship has ably demonstrated the intense heterogeneity of religious belief and belonging in England in the sixteenth century, both across and within confessional categories.²¹ There is considerable dispute about the best terms for scholarship on these early modern confessional divides, each with a variety of pro’s and con’s. Since any useful set of terms will necessarily generalize and fall short in some respects, especially in light of this complex multiplicity, I opt for the large and familiar categories of Catholic (including both recusants and conforming ‘church papists’) and Protestant (including non-conforming ‘Puritans’ and the adherents of the episcopal Church of England).²² I reject “Reformer” for Protestant since Catholicism too had a vibrant reform movement, one that arguably held the seeds of the Protestant Reformation as well as the Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation. I likewise reject “papist” as too pejorative and Roman/ist as having an isolating focus on the pope, when some doctrinally Catholic English were content with the Royal Supremacy.²³ And I have avoided “evangelical” for Protestants as having an intense and distorting presentist association, one James Simpson uses to calculated effect in *Burning to Read*.²⁴ Moreover, though their usage has naturally changed over time, the terms Catholic and Protestant are perhaps not quite such anachronistic terms as some scholars have suggested. In a diplomatic letter in 1539, Sir Thomas Wyatt refers to the German princes who rejected the anti-Lutheran Diet at Worms as the “Protestants,” and within the next twenty-five years the more familiar sense of the word was in frequent use.²⁵ The term catholic—universal—was highly contested and claimed by both sides of the main confessional divide.²⁶ Thomas More’s overwhelming emphasis on the “known” or “visible” “*Catholic Church*” in his polemics and his execution for loyalty to the papacy played a role associating the word Catholic with the Roman Church, doctrine of transubstantiation, and traditional religious practices like pilgrimage and intercessory prayer.²⁷

Yet recent scholarship has not only addressed the challenges of nomenclature, but the more fundamental difficulty in defining categories. After all, even in the sixteenth century, the question of who should be considered Catholic or not was a matter of urgent intra-Catholic debate, while the label of “papist” was frequently used by the ardent Protestants to deride the established Church of England for its liturgical practices. As Elizabethan Bishop John Whitgift remarks on the “wicked tongues” of his Protestant adversaries who “call [him] . . . pope [and] papist.”²⁸ Moreover, what constitutes evidence of a person’s religious affiliation? For Catholic revisionists, compliance with the official Church is only ever mere compliance, while for Protestant Triumphalists it is evidence of an

²¹ See: Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*; Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity, and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA: Boydell Press, 1993); Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Lake and Questier, *Trials of Margaret Clitherow*; Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*.

²² Walsham, *Church Papists*; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*.

²³ See for example the discussion of terms in: Carol V Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 4–5.

²⁴ Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 8–9.

²⁵ “Protestant, N. and Adj.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/153194>; Kenneth Muir, *Life and Letters of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1963), 90; Peter Marshall, “Is the Pope Catholic? Henry VIII and the Semantics of Schism,” in *Catholicism and the “Protestant Nation,”* ed. Ethan Shagan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 24.

²⁶ Marshall, “Is the Pope Catholic? Henry VIII and the Semantics of Schism,” 25–26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ John Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift*, ed. John Ayre, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1853), 606.

inevitable longing for a new sort of religion.²⁹ Debate about the confessional commitments of William Shakespeare afford a vibrant example of this very problem and scholars seeking out his doctrinal commitments are inclined to nearly infinite slight of hand. Those advocating the idea of a Catholic Shakespeare take the very lack of concrete evidence for a further proof of their point.³⁰ None of this is to my mind particularly profitable. Rather, my interest here is in the shared tensions, confusions, and violence experienced by Reformation Christians in England in the sixteenth century—for regardless of their individual theology or institutional commitments, they were united in their shared experience of the Reformation itself as a period of recurring rupture and interpretive instability.

To demonstrate the violence and instability of English Reformation hermeneutics, I begin by reevaluating the foundational print battle waged by Thomas More and William Tyndale in the 1520s and 1530s. More's and Tyndale's basic hermeneutic positions are well known: for Protestant Tyndale, scripture "hath but one sense which is the literal sense," whereas, for Catholic More, scripture contains "many godly allegories" beyond the literal sense.³¹ This outline of their theories, however, reifies the distinctions that I argue are constantly collapsing in their writing: the distinction between "literal" and "allegorical." To be sure, William Tyndale utterly rejects the Catholic Church's long history of reading scripture with complex layers of allegory and cautions readers to "beware of subtle allegories" which are "feigned lies" used by the Pope and the clergy to lock up the literal sense.³² But Tyndale can only define "the literal" against its antithesis, allegory. Although he usually makes "allegory" a term of condemnation for Catholic Biblical interpretation that strays from the "literal sense," he actually defines "allegory" as any "strange speaking or borrowed speech"—for example, "look ere thou leap."³³ This capacious definition encompasses all figurative meaning, not just Biblical allegoresis, and Tyndale makes no attempt to clarify the distinction. By his own definition, Tyndale's advice that his readers "abhor [allegories] and spew them out of [their] stomach[s] forever" is itself an allegory (metaphor) for rejecting allegory (Biblical allegoresis).³⁴ Tyndale readily acknowledges that "scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories as all other speeches do," but contends "that which the proverb, similitude, riddle or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense."³⁵ So the literal sense is merely sense itself; it means *meaning*.

Thomas More uses the same logic to produce the opposite claim. More writes that "our savior himself sometime spake his wordes in such wise, that the letter had none other sense then mysteries & allegories as commonly all his parables be."³⁶ More not only defends the validity of the Church's traditional allegorical interpretations, but also asserts that there can be entirely non-literal meaning; that is, if the exclusively true sense of a passage is allegorical, then its literal sense would be nonsense. This is a provocative inversion of Tyndale's insistence that all sense is literal—and yet ultimately the two claims converge. More and Tyndale use opposite terms, in effect, for the same thing: meaning. Moreover, More and Tyndale give the same direct interpretive advice to readers: be attentive to context and keep essential doctrines constantly in mind while reading in order to prevent

²⁹ Ethan Shagan, "Introduction: English Catholic History in Context," ed. Ethan Shagan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1–21.

³⁰ Michael Davies, "The Transubstantial Bard: Shakespeare and Catholicism," in *The Poetics of Transubstantiation: From Theology to Metaphor*, ed. Douglas Burnham and Enrico Giaccherini (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 26–43.

³¹ William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, ed. David Daniell (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 159; More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:635/35.

³² Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159.

³³ *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁶ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:635/35-636/1.

confusion. The unsettling result bears repeating: although More's and Tyndale's interpretive *theories* are wildly different, their interpretive *practices* are at times nearly indistinguishable, making these bitter enemies into hermeneutic doppelgangers. More's and Tyndale's vast print battle brought "literal" and "allegorical" into wide circulation as analytic categories that helped to structure conceptions of reading for Renaissance English men and women; however, the opposition between their paradigms of reading—and between the two major terms on which those paradigms are built—constantly breaks down. The new English theological vernacular that More and Tyndale produced in the 1520s and 1530s yielded an uncertain interpretive environment that nevertheless violently insisted on certainty, where the phrase "burning question" was not yet a dead metaphor and held the real threat of death at the stake.

As a courtier writing in the same deadly environment as More himself, Thomas Wyatt bore direct witness to the violence of the King's break with Rome and his terrifying theo-political caprice, which twice sent Wyatt to the Tower. In his poetry and his translations of the penitential psalms and Petrarch's erotic verse, Wyatt performs for English poetics a vernacular innovation that, I argue, not only mirrors More's and Tyndale's innovations in vernacular theology, but also expresses the instability, anguish, and violence this theology produced. From his satires to his epigraphs, Wyatt's poetry demonstrates a recurring desire for plain speaking and stable language, for a world where words and meanings have a transparent one-to-one relationship. Yet though scholars have long characterized Wyatt's verse "plain" (unadorned) and Wyatt writes obsessively about plainness, hermeneutically his poetry's knotted syntax and punishing ambiguities are anything but "plain" (clear). I argue this seeming contradiction in Wyatt's poetry expresses a thwarted longing for Tyndale's ideal of the stable, literal sense, while More's competing linguistic ideal of the common consent of the multitude remains equally beyond reach since it is the "press" who have corrupted language itself.

Edmund Spenser's English epic takes up the national, theological, and poetic challenges of this inheritance. Whereas Wyatt's poetry embraces the uneasy tension between Protestant ideals and Protestant practice, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* seeks to resolve it. Though many Protestants (including Tyndale) took an anti-aesthetic stance against romance, allegory, and poetry, Spenser appropriates all three in the service of orthodox Protestant doctrine. Protestant orthodoxy emphasizes the importance of reading scripture, but insists that no human action—no good works, no reading of scripture—can contribute to salvation, which comes only from God's saving grace. I argue that, in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser uses allegory—the very mode Tyndale denigrated so vocally—to solve the problem of *representing* Protestant reading. Allegory gives Spenser a narrative model for understanding *in terms of action* an inward theology of grace and reading that rejects the very possibility of action. By merging the processes of salvation and interpretation, Spenser's allegory turns the inward, illegible process of reading-as-salvation into an externally legible pedagogical narrative; the hero's journey through projected psychic dangers is one of both reading and salvation. Yet this narrative is inescapably violent, populated by demonic doppelgangers and rife with physical and psychological torture, murder, and rape. When he projects the inward conflicts of Protestant devotion outward, Spenser exposes the violence of England's recent religious conflicts—violence the poem treats as a figure for interpretation itself.

The brutality of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* likewise manifests in emphatically interpretive violence. In my final chapter, I demonstrate that, despite the state censorship that attempted to suppress any religious controversy on stage, *Titus* not only critiques Reformation sectarian violence, but also interrogates its underlying hermeneutic basis. The shared texts of *Titus*'s warring factions—Ovid, Seneca, Virgil—act as a cipher for the Bible in the Reformation, directly enabling these factions' mutual violence. As they brutally recreate textual narratives on the bodies of their enemies through rape, murder, and dismemberment, the play's factions relate to their shared texts in a

manner at once allegorizing and literalizing, dramatizing the slippage in More and Tyndale's hermeneutics. *Titus's* gruesome literalizing operates not only intertextually, but also linguistically, as *Titus's* characters literalize conventional synecdoches of the body with severed heads and hands, then make these body parts the objects of a macabre punning that emphasizes the tension between figurative and literal. The play's gruesome bodily transgression of the boundaries between literal and figurative meaning enacts the contradictory, self-destructive work of Reformation hermeneutics, which produces violence in the place of meaning. *Titus*, in other words, dramatizes the interpretive instability of the Reformation *as* violence: rape, murder, dismemberment, and cannibalism. In their shared texts, shared interpretive modes, and shared violence, the supposedly distinct factions of *Titus* become indistinguishable, and signs themselves are "martyred."

Chapter One

The Reformation Hermeneutics of Thomas More and William Tyndale

In *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528), William Tyndale claims that the pope and his ilk “rent and teare the scripture with theyr distinctions and expound them violently, contrary to the meanyng of the texte.”³⁷ Here and elsewhere Tyndale depicts Catholic interpretation as violence; it is Tyndale’s goal to save not only readers, but scripture itself from this violence. Yet the violence of the Reformation was not limited to texts or metaphors. As Tyndale writes: “they saye, they loue you so wel that they had leuer burne you then that you sholde haue felowe-shyppe with Chryste,” an observation he glosses with “The prelates haue a burning zeale to theyr chyldren.”³⁸ Tyndale’s grim punning here reveals not only the stakes of interpretation in the Reformation—literal burning—but suggests their underlying hermeneutic basis, namely the tension between literal and metaphorical meaning. His quip depends on the conventional, figurative use of ‘burning’ to mean ‘ardent,’ and its dialectic with the quite literal burning of heretics, the very fate Tyndale himself would eventually suffer.³⁹ Both books and bodies burn easily.⁴⁰ When and whether to read the Bible figuratively, literally, or with some combination of those two strategies, was a foundational crux of the Reformation and fueled the very violence Tyndale here mocks with his wordplay. As this dissertation will argue, this interpretive violence exerted a defining influence upon the literary and hermeneutic culture of England long after the theological debate had been settled, officially at least, in favor of Elizabethan Protestantism.

This chapter begins to make that case by reexamining the Reformation hermeneutics found in the vernacular theology of Thomas More and William Tyndale. Their vast and vitriolic print battle of the 1520s and 1530s defined hermeneutic discourse in English and brought “literal” and “allegorical” into wide circulation as interpretive keywords.⁴¹ Both More and Tyndale engage with Reformation debates on the Continent—especially those of Erasmus and Luther—and are crucial to “Englishing” these debates with translations, coinages, and their own theological innovations. For early vernacular readers, More and Tyndale were the dominant voices of the Reformation both at home and abroad.⁴² Long after both More and Tyndale were martyred, their hermeneutic arguments were quoted, paraphrased, repeated and repurposed by their successors, from Harding and Jewel to

³⁷ William Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (London, 1549), 12–13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

³⁹ Fortunately for Tyndale, however, his body was publically burnt only after he had received the more merciful death of strangulation. A commuted sentence is something he also shares with his enemy Thomas More; the day of More’s execution the king commuted his sentence and he was beheaded rather than hung, drawn, and quartered. See: David Daniell, “Introduction,” in *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), xix; Jeffrey L. Morrow, “Thomas More on the Sadness of Christ: From Mystagogy to Martyrdom,” *The Heythrop Journal*, March 1, 2015, 7.

⁴⁰ The association between burning books and burning heretics is calculated to act as a reminder, a symbolic deterrent. Tyndale describes one of the Bishop of Rochester’s arguments and offers a neat reply: “Martin Luther hath burned the Pope’s decretals: a manifest sign, saith [Rochester], that he would have burnt the Pope’s holiness also, if he had him. A like argument (which I suppose to be rather true) I make. Rochester and his holy brethren have burnt Christ’s testament: an evident sign verily that they would have burnt Christ himself also if they had had him.” Naturally, Rochester—and More—would reply that it was not Christ’s gospels they burnt, but rather *Tyndale’s* and, indeed, they would happily burn Tyndale himself as well. Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 79.

⁴¹ See: Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 187–222.

⁴² Tyndale played an essential role in disseminating Luther’s works to the English people, though often without attribution. Yet even texts that scholars have generally referred to as discreetly unattributed “translations” of Luther are full of Tyndale’s own original material. For instance, only an eighth of Tyndale’s *Prologue* for Romans was a translation of half of Luther’s *Preface*, something not recognized by most readers in the sixteenth century, including Thomas More. Ralph S Werrell, *The Theology of William Tyndale* (Cambridge [England]: J. Clarke, 2006), 15–16.

Hooker and Cartwright.⁴³ Yet in seventy years neither passionate debate nor state violence could force doctrinal consensus or a consistent interpretive methodology. Rather, the essential tensions articulated by More and Tyndale become naturalized to England's hermeneutic and religious culture. The new English theological vernacular that they produced in the 1520s and 1530s yielded an uncertain interpretive environment that nevertheless brutally insisted on certainty, where the phrase "burning question" was not yet a dead metaphor.

As the most influential figures of England's rapidly developing vernacular theology, the basic outlines of their positions are rightly familiar to us.⁴⁴ For Protestant Tyndale, scripture "hath but one sense which is the literal sense," and allegories are the "feigned lies" the Pope uses to lock scripture away from the faithful.⁴⁵ Scripture is "playne and evident," the sole repository of authority and truth, so God, not the Church, will help the individual Christian reader to interpret scripture correctly. For Catholic More, by contrast, scripture is a challenging text with layers of allegorical meaning that reach beyond the literal sense. God guides the Church to the correct interpretation of scripture, which the Church then transmits to the individual. The Church, not scripture, is therefore the ultimate authority. Though accurate as far as it goes, this broad-strokes version of their positions flattens their internal complexities and self-contradictions, which have received increasing scholarly attention of late.

Moving away from the old hagiographic traditions, recent studies of More and Tyndale have reflected various negotiations between the extreme poles of Protestant triumphalism on the one hand and Catholic revisionism on the other.⁴⁶ Although More's polemics remain relatively little studied compared to his other works, recent scholarship on early Reformation hermeneutics has brought them under new scrutiny and worked to integrate the polemics into a broader view of early literary culture.⁴⁷ In a study ranging from Erasmus and Luther to Donne and Milton, Brian Cummings' magisterial *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* argues that sixteenth century innovations in the *ars grammatica* enabled Reformation innovations in theology and exerted a lasting influence on literary culture. James Simpson has launched a recent series of works attacking

⁴³ Shakespeare and his contemporaries, for example, would have had ready access to Tyndale, whether in the original printing or in Foxe's 1573 edition of *The Whole Works of William Tyndale, John Frith, and Doctor Barnes*, "the most important collection of Tudor religious prose," while More's works also circulated in the reign of Elizabeth (with a certain circumspection) in their original editions, in Richard Tottel's *Complete Works* (1557), and in extended quotation by later recusant Catholic writers and martyrologists. King, "Religious Writing," 115.

⁴⁴ Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 188–89.

⁴⁵ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159.

⁴⁶ Studies of both More and Tyndale have a long tradition of hagiographic criticism, but recent scholarship has moved to more critical studies. For work in the hagiographic strain, see: C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958); J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1937); David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); G. R. Elton, "The Real Thomas More?," in *Reformation Principle and Practice: Essays in Honor of Arthur Geoffrey Dickens*, ed. Peter Newman Brooks (London: Scholar Press, 1980); Richard C. Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1984); Richard Rex, "Thomas More and the Heretics: Statesman or Fanatic?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, ed. George M. Logan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 93–115.

⁴⁷ Following the example of C.S. Lewis, early work on More tended to divide More's career into the following categories: Humanist, Polemicist, and Martyr. More recent scholarship, however, has begun to take a more holistic view of More's writing, exploring the continuities between these genres rather than trying to separate and contain them. See for example: Dale B. Billingsley, "The Messenger and the Reader in Thomas More's Dialogue Concerning Heresies," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24, no. 1 (1984): 5, doi:10.2307/450346; Brenda M. Hosington, "Thomas More's Views on Language and Translation and Their Place in the Classical and Humanist Tradition," *Moreana* 40 (2003): 69–98; Thomas Betteridge, *Literature and Politics in the English Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); William J. Rogers, "Thomas More's Polemical Poetics," *English Literary Renaissance* 38 (2008): 387–407.

Tyndale's hermeneutics and arguing they are not the seeds of the "liberal tradition," but rather of Christian fundamentalism to which Thomas More was a laudable opponent.⁴⁸ Simpson exposes various logical paradoxes of Tyndale's thought and argues that these generate "textual hatred" and a tortured, inwardly authoritarian reading culture.⁴⁹ Yet long before Simpson's pugnaciously polemical *Burning to Read*, Tyndale's works received a series of New Historicist (following Stephen Greenblatt) and revisionist (following Eamon Duffy) studies exposing the internal paradoxes of Tyndale's hermeneutics.⁵⁰ Together these studies offer a robust rebuttal to Protestant triumphalist accounts of Protestant hermeneutics as commonsensical, clear, and inevitable.⁵¹ As Greenblatt points out: "Tyndale's notion of the literal sense by no means amounts to a coherent theory of interpretation."⁵² The work of Douglas Parker and Mary Jane Barnett (with varying levels of sympathy) illuminates Tyndale's continued reliance on the allegorical exegesis he demonizes, and the logical difficulties of claiming scripture is "clear and open" while striving to control its interpretation with complex textual apparatus.⁵³ More recently, essays by Isabella Gray and Rudolph Almasy have examined how Tyndale tries to negotiate some of the tensions intrinsic to his hermeneutics.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 3; James Simpson, "Tyndale as Promoter of Figural Allegory and Figurative Language: A Brief Declaration of the Sacraments," *Archiv Für Das Studium Der Neueren Sprachen Und Literaturen* 160 (2008): 37–55; James Simpson, "Faith and Hermeneutics: Pragmatism versus Pragmatism," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 2 (March 20, 2003): 215–39; James Simpson, "Sixteenth-Century Fundamentalism and the Specter of Ambiguity, or the Literal Sense Is Always a Fiction," in *Writing Fundamentalism* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, xvii, 2009), 133–53.

⁴⁹ Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 68–108.

⁵⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

The Whiggish narrative of Protestant triumphalism has been justly displaced and complicated, but—as myriad critics have pointed out—Duffy's depiction of late medieval piety in *Stripping of the Altars* makes the entire Reformation seem the sole product of a few powerful fanatics and the power of a repressive state. Though we should not underestimate the power of such a repression, it seems clear that for many sixteenth century Englishmen and women the Reformation was a welcome experience or, at least, (as Shagan ably demonstrates) one they could adapt to their own purposes.

Simpson's account of Protestant hermeneutics is, like Duffy's account of the Reformation, rather too totalizing. Simpson emphasizes the most extreme and paradoxical end point of Tyndale's ideology. From this extreme, Simpson then imagines a possible readerly experience—one of oppression, anxiety, and self-hatred—and supposes it was, if not universal, very near to it. That some readers experienced Tyndale and Luther's textuality in this way seems accurate, as evinced by his various quotes from More, Fisher, and Gardiner and, looking ahead, to the moments of horror in works like *Grace Abounding*. That this was the *only* possible response to the extremes of Tyndale's hermeneutic, however, seems highly doubtful. For one thing, like Eamon Duffy's account of the Reformation in *Stripping of the Altars*, Simpson's account of Reformation textuality would make its success unbelievably baffling, reducing it solely to the product of a repressive regime.

⁵¹ For representative studies in the Protestant triumphalist tradition, see: Mozley, *William Tyndale*; John A. R Dick, "To Dig Again the Wells of Abraham: Philology, Theology, and Scripture in Tyndale's The Parable of the Wicked Mammon," *Moreana: Bulletin Thomas More* 28 (1991): 39–52; Daniell, *William Tyndale*.

⁵² Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 100.

⁵³ Mary Jane Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory," in *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 63–73; Douglas H. Parker, "Tyndale's Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 87–101; Rudolph P Almasy, "I Am That I Preach: Tyndale as Mediator in The Parable of the Wicked Mammon," *Ren&R Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 26, no. 2 (2002): 5–22.

⁵⁴ Sophie Isabella Gray, "Tyndale and the Text in the Heart," *Reformation* 16 (2011): 93–111; Almasy, "I Am That I Preach."

That neither More nor Tyndale can offer a stable practicable hermeneutic may, on some level, be taken as a given—if not by the work of previous scholars then by a basic understanding of the slippery nature of interpretation itself. The idea of stable language and wholly transparent meaning has been alien—if not anathema—to literary scholarship for decades, from Derrida to de Man.⁵⁵ Yet both More and Tyndale are compelled to make such claims for their hermeneutics, when both souls and lives hang in the balance of interpretation. My goal in this chapter is not merely to revisit the clear failures of More’s and Tyndale’s hermeneutics, but to demonstrate how these gaps and fissures generate a recurring slippage between their positions. Although More and Tyndale maintain very different hermeneutic ideals, the differences to which they are so committed erode and fracture under close scrutiny. Their practices, though not their doctrines, become nearly indistinguishable. Their hermeneutics were embroiled in—and at times central to—efforts to demonize their opponents; in doing so, they insist on a rigid distinction between their hermeneutics, presenting their own methods as the only wholesome possibility and their opponent’s as hopelessly diseased. This congruence between theological adversaries creates an uncertain interpretive environment. Nevertheless, both More and Tyndale insist on the absolute certainty—and, arguably, precisely because of their congruence—this insistence becomes violent. Where hermeneutic differences collapse, violence works to create difference. And what both Catholic and Protestant hermeneutics necessarily have in common is their violence; whether one experienced the ‘literal sense’ or the ‘allegorical’ as the affirming and reassuring sense, both existed under the very real threat of the sword and in a destabilized context of conflict and physical danger.

To create a clearer picture of early Reformation hermeneutics, I begin with an analysis of Tyndale’s religious writing which places Scripture and the literal sense at its heart. Tyndale’s relationship to allegory and the literary is far more complex than it appears from a cursory examination or from its distillation into bullet points. He offers a complex—at times conflicted—account of figurative and literal, with a literal sense nearly as capacious as the Catholics’ allegorical sense and just as in need of a guiding textual *apartatus*. In grappling with these difficulties, Tyndale advances two very different visions of reading: one intangible and idealized; the other tangible, practical, yet almost indistinguishable from that of his Catholic enemies. To validate individual scriptural reading, Tyndale imagines the faithful united with God in sacred textuality, through the “scripture written on the heart;” this inward state, however, cannot offer readers a practicable method. Tyndale balances this inward textual state with an outward practical method. He advises readers to be attentive of context and read with essential doctrines constantly in mind, the very method More promotes. Where Tyndale’s idealized hermeneutic departs radically from his Catholic enemies, his practical hermeneutic becomes virtually indistinguishable from theirs.

Whereas scripture is the heart of Tyndale’s writing, the Church is the heart of More’s. I argue that More not only seeks to refute Tyndale’s hermeneutics directly, but that he also makes a broader argument that the key characteristics of the Church are also the key characteristics of interpretation, reading, and the production of meaning. Like the church, meaning and language are communal, consensual, and evolve over time. For More, the Church is not only the ultimate interpreter, but the very stuff of interpretation itself, thereby naturalizing the Church’s interpretive authority. To abandon the Church is to abandon communal, consensual meaning for a false ideal of

⁵⁵ For an engaging account of the ways contemporary literary criticism—like Reformation hermeneutics—tends to replicate its own points of interest, see: Simpson, “Faith and Hermeneutics.” As Simpson points out, interpretive movements both religious and secular have centered on key concepts for centuries: “The surface features of the text are symptoms of the ground, evidence to be ‘seen through.’ For Hegel, the ground was the World Spirit working through History; for Marxists, it was the Class Struggle; for neo-Kantians like Croce and the New Critics, the ground was Art; for Foucauldians it was Power; for Freudians, the Unconscious; and for Deconstruction, it’s Textuality. Each of these movements produces its own allegorizing, since for each the text ‘says one thing but means another,’” 219.

absolutist, isolationist hermeneutics, to fall not only from order to chaos, but also to fall from sense to nonsense.

Although More and Tyndale's debate is crucially about scripture and scripture specifically, in the course of their polemics they make arguments about language, metaphor, and meaning, rather than clearly treating scriptural language as separate from language itself. Moreover, their use of literary terms—poetry, allegory, fable—brings their debate into direct dialogue with not only larger linguistic issues but with the literary specifically. In my larger project, I argue that More and Tyndale's hermeneutic strife and its attendant violence haunts the literary landscape of Renaissance England; however, these polemics are also haunted *by* the specter of the literary. In the final section of this chapter, I examine More's and Tyndale's fraught relationships to poetry, fiction, and wordplay. For Tyndale, "poetry" is synonymous with a deceitful, imaginative lie. It is the term he applies to the veneration of saints, the doctrine of purgatory, More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, and of course *Utopia*; for Tyndale, "poetry" is at once a sign and a cause of More's corruption. He argues that the Church has lost sight of scripture so entirely that they conflate the sacred text with filthy, pagan poetry, and that their glosses stray so far from the literal sense that they are mere "imagination." For Tyndale, the fictive and poetic is a locus of recurring anxiety to be shunned; he is not, however, entirely alone in this anxiety. Though even in his polemics More displays his devotion to the "merry tale" and *studia humanitatis*, during his polemic career it becomes increasingly difficult for him to imagine a safe space for fictive play or redemptive enabling fictions; the literary becomes a dangerous tool that can cut both ways. Ultimately, both Tyndale's and More's frequent invocations of the literary—whether condemnatory, celebratory, or something in between—only bring poetry and theology into closer and more fraught dialogue, extending their hermeneutic strife from sacred to secular where it haunts poetic production into the reign of Elizabeth.

William Tyndale

I.

In *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), Tyndale presents his most detailed account of the literal and the allegorical. In it, he writes a vehement condemnation of the traditional fourfold senses of scripture and a similarly vehement defense of the solitary literal sense; however, he also offers surprising definitions of both 'literal' and 'allegorical' which reveal how porous and complex the separation between literal and figurative (or "allegorical") can be. His definitions are far from plain and simple, and they illustrate the necessary complexity of Tyndale's position. Tyndale's definition of allegory encompasses both a hermeneutic method (allegoresis) and the object that demands that hermeneutic method: figurative language and consensual allegories, like *Piers Plowman* or Christ's parables.⁵⁶ Tyndale does not separate any of these discrete concepts into separate terms. In contrast to his manifold definition of allegory, Tyndale defines the literal sense as fundamentally singular. The "literal sense" is simply "sense;" it means *meaning*. The ambiguities of these definitions simultaneously obscure logical difficulties in Tyndale's hermeneutics, while also enacting his ideal conception of reading in which the faithful reader can always discard the husk of language and reach the kernel of meaning.

In *Obedience*, Tyndale's account of interpretation begins in negation thereby illustrating the interrelation of literal and allegorical. Although his primary interest is in championing the literal sense, Tyndale must define and reject the literal's nemesis, the allegorical, before he can define and defend the literal itself. He opens by explaining that the Catholic Church "divide[s] the scripture into

⁵⁶ The phrase "consensual allegory" is inspired by Copeland and Melville's discussion of "texts consensually held to be allegorical" (179). See Rita Copeland and Stephen Melville, "Allegory and Allegoresis: Rhetoric and Hermeneutics," *Exemplaria* 3 (1991): 159–87.

four senses, the literal, tropological, allegorical, anagogical” and that the Pope has “taken [the literal sense] clean away.”⁵⁷ Tyndale condemns under the name of “allegory” all three types of allegoresis found in patristic reading practice and dismisses the distinction between them with the mocking label “chopological.” He then writes that the Pope “hath partly locked it [the literal sense] up with the false and counterfeited keys of his traditions, ceremonies and feigned lies” and “partly driveth men from it with the violence of the sword.”⁵⁸ Even before he defines it, Tyndale immediately characterizes the allegorical as corrupt, presenting it as “Papist” and violent. By deferring an explanation of the literal sense until the second paragraph, Tyndale enacts the very problem he describes: the banishment of the literal sense. And so Tyndale begins, not by affirming what scripture *is* but by demonizing what it is not. When he does offer a definition of allegory it is very broad: “allegory is as much to say strange speaking or borrowed speech.”⁵⁹ From here, Tyndale transitions to the literal sense, thereby illustrating the difficulties of defining literal or allegory in isolation.

Having rejected allegory, Tyndale next makes his famous assertion that “Scripture hath but one sense which is the literal sense.”⁶⁰ He clarifies by writing, “Neverthelater the scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories as all other speeches do, but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense which thou must seek out diligently.”⁶¹ Tyndale's definition of literal, therefore, might aptly be glossed as “the literal means the meaning.” Meaning is always literal and the literal is always singular, as implied by Tyndale's use of the definite article and made explicit in his emphasis on “but one.” Although he readily acknowledges that individual words may on their own have multiple significations, for Tyndale a word can have only one meaning in context, a direct one-to-one correspondence between singular word and singular signification. Tyndale emphasizes utility—“scripture **useth** proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories”—but the devices themselves are meaningless. For Tyndale, the literal is a stable, singular, centrally located kernel of meaning; the vehicle is the husk to be discarded once the kernel of the tenor has been extracted. Though he affords allegories a powerful and positive place as a pedagogical tool, the figurative husk is not in itself meaningful. This account of reading and interpretation, allegorical and literal, reduces the figurative and its interpretation to a mere act of decoding.

Although Tyndale seeks to limit interpretation to a stable, singular, literal meaning, his own explanatory examples and even his own authorial practice often undermine this very ideal. In his most straightforward example, Tyndale explains that “look ere thou leapest” is an allegory “whose literal sense is, do nothing suddenly or without advisement.”⁶² This example is well-chosen considering Tyndale's insistence on the singular and stable nature of the literal sense. With a cliché so engrained in standard usage, it would be difficult to imagine another meaning or, to use Tyndale's terms, a different “literal sense.” This example creates the illusion of an isolated, commonsensical, and incontrovertibly stable literal sense. Tyndale's other examples, however, expose the communal and consensual nature of meaning. That “He is popish” contains the literal sense he is “superstitious and faithless” seems like an interpretation that would be far from universal, like his subsequent anti-clerical examples.⁶³ In these moments he reconstructs the community of meaning, not as all English speakers, but as all like-mindedly anti-papist English speakers. What Tyndale may gain in polemic

⁵⁷ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 156.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 156–57.

⁶³ See also: Parker, “Tyndale's Biblical Hermeneutics,” 97–99.

points with these anti-papist examples comes at the price of exposing the fragility of the singular, literal sense.

Tyndale displays and rejects literalist misreadings in service of defending the literal; however, his examples illustrate once again the consensual, communal nature of meaning and the fragility of the literal. Tyndale writes: “So, when I say Christ is a lamb, I mean not a lamb that beareth wool, but a meek and patient lamb which is beaten for other men's faults.”⁶⁴ Here Tyndale offers an imaginary literalist misreading—the idea that Christ is actually a wool-bearing lamb—and yet his interpretation of the figure of the lamb is based on convention rather than the literal. Lambs in the world of animal husbandry are not “beaten for other men's faults.” Christ as lamb is drawn typologically from the paschal lamb in Exodus, from direct address in John 1:29, and from imagery in the book of Revelations. This theologically based metaphor enters popular conceptions of Christ and becomes utterly normalized and conventional. As with “look ere thou leapest,” the relationship between figurative and literal is defined by consensus; yet, this conception of the lamb is culturally constructed to an even higher degree. Like the example of “look ere thou leapest,” in such a profoundly Christian setting, the example of Christ as lamb holds a similar illusion of an absolute and inevitable literal sense. Both examples depend on conventions and consensus, but “look ere thou leapest” in no way depends on scripture to unlock it. By using a proverbial English cliché defined by consensus alongside scriptural metaphor, Tyndale collapses the sense of distinction between scriptural language and all spoken language.

Although deeply committed to the singular, literal sense, Tyndale by no means holds a simplistic idea of the rigidity of language; he explicitly acknowledges multiplicity, but not simultaneity. Interpretation is dependent on context, as Tyndale asserts in his earliest writing. Words and figures may contain multiple meanings *in potentia*, but only one meaning in context. As Tyndale writes earlier in *Obedience*: “one thing in the scripture representeth divers things. A serpent figureth Christ in one place and the devil in another. And a lion doth likewise. Christ by leaven signifieth God's word in one place, and in another signifieth therby the traditions of the Pharisees which soured and altered God's word for their advantage.”⁶⁵ That Tyndale identifies the same metaphor as meaning both scriptural truth and its opposite further illustrates the gaps between the literal as the letter or word itself, and the literal as *meaning*. These examples seem to validate (or at least don't obviously contradict) his insistence on solitary meaning. Yet his own authorial practice—particularly the grim punning he shares with his nemesis, Thomas More—calls attention to simultaneous meanings. These puns depend on dialectical meanings held concurrently in mind. In the example beginning this chapter—‘burning zeal’—one must recognize both the conventional, figurative use of burning for ‘ardent’ and its literal meaning regarding the burning of heretics. Although in many ways, they are stylistically opposed, here More and Tyndale converge in their love of macabre puns. On the surface, Tyndale seems to reject allegoresis and all figurative language under the name of “allegory,” yet in various contexts he reintroduces allegory in all its forms and even in his own authorial practice. Tyndale uses allegory (meaning figurative language) liberally in his own rhetoric and accords it startingly vivid praise.⁶⁶ He writes: “a similitude or an example doth print a thing much deeper in the wits of a man than doth a plain speaking, and leaveth behind him as it were a

⁶⁴ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 157.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁶ For a detailed reading of Tyndale's use of conceit in *Practice of Prelates*, see: Betteridge, “William Tyndale and Religious Debate,” 451.

sting to prick him forward and to awake him with all.”⁶⁷ The value of allegory is pedagogical; it must be instrumentalized. By Tyndale’s own definition of allegory, his praise for the literal sense as “the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never failleth” is another allegory. Indeed, his warning to “spew [allegories] out of [our] stomachs forever” is itself an allegory (metaphor) for rejecting allegory (Catholic allegoresis). Moreover, Tyndale often uses typologizing to attack his opponents, as here: “we borrow likenesses or allegories of the scripture, as of Pharaoh and Herod and of the scribes and Pharisees, to express our miserable captivity and persecution under Antichrist the Pope.”⁶⁸ Hostile typologizing is one of Tyndale’s favorite polemical weapons or, as he would see it, one of his best pedagogical tools; however, it is not the only way Tyndale uses allegoresis.

In *Obedience*, Tyndale uses allegoresis to illustrate the distinction between the singular, literal sense of scripture and a mere “similitude borrowed of the scripture.”⁶⁹ In a rare moment of positive and extended allegorical reading in his polemics, Tyndale gives a reading of the episode in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter cuts off the soldier Malchas’ ear and Christ then heals it. For Tyndale and all sixteenth century Christians, this is a historical event which took place at Christ’s arrest in the Garden; however, according to Tyndale it can also illustrate the relationship between the law and the gospel. Tyndale reads Peter cutting off the ear as the law which, when we hear it, “damneeth,” “killeth, and mangleth the conscience;” when Christ heals Malchas’ ear, this is the gospel.⁷⁰ This reading is perfectly consistent with Tyndale’s theology, but he insists it is *not* the literal sense or even a level of meaning contained within this passage of scripture: “This allegory proveth nothing neither can do. For it is not the scripture, but an example of a similitude borrowed of the scripture.”⁷¹ A Catholic, patristic theologian like More would argue that the universe is a legible text authored by God; therefore, the historical events were authored not only as themselves but also to provide the allegory and illustrate this higher truth. It is precisely this type of allegoresis that Tyndale rigorously claims to reject here: it is not the reading that he perceives as dangerous, but rather elevating the status of that reading to anything other than a pedagogical illustration.

Although Tyndale rejects his own reading *as scripture*, he believes the point he made with it to be true nevertheless. According to Tyndale’s hermeneutic assertions, his reading of Peter, Malchas, and Christ is correct because it conforms to direct, declarative sentences written by Paul in the Epistles.⁷² Tyndale’s allegoresis has simply directed us from one literal sense (the historical) to another (the declarative). In addition to paradoxically marginalizing Christ’s parabolic style in the Gospels for Paul’s assertive style in the Epistles, this interpretive approach has significant limitations. Tyndale’s reading is entirely dependent on the declarative; without it, his reading would be invalidated according to his own interpretive practices. Explicit declaratives, however, cannot ultimately clarify all the complexities of scripture. This hermeneutic difficulty becomes increasingly clear in studying Tyndale’s scriptural glosses, particularly in the Old Testament, as he ultimately reintroduces the very allegoresis he wishes to reject.

Not only does Tyndale embrace the figurative language and rhetorical, he practices Biblical allegoresis as well. Biblical allegoresis helped Christians reconcile the logical difficulties that arise from reading the Old and New Testaments as equally Scripture, despite their wildly different historical contexts and the even vaster gap between these contexts and that of medieval or

⁶⁷ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159. Tyndale uses both metaphor and simile in his work. One might expect Tyndale to favor simile over metaphor, more comfortable with linguistic comparison than linguistic substitutions. In fact, he seems equally at ease with both these forms of “allegory.”

⁶⁸ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 158–59.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 158–59.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 159.

Renaissance Christendom. The Protestant break with Rome in no way resolves this difficulty.

Whereas in the polemics Tyndale may largely avoid passages of scripture ill-suited to his hermeneutics, he does not have this luxury in the commentaries of his translation of the Bible. Having banished allegory as the church's wicked manipulation, Tyndale is still forced to reintroduce allegoresis in an attempt to make sense of books like Leviticus which contain a multitude of laws it would be impossible or alien for anyone in sixteenth-century England to fulfill.⁷³ (It would, for example, be difficult for Tyndale's contemporaries to obey Deuteronomy 20:16 without any "Hethites" or "Jebusites" to "destroy without redemption.")⁷⁴ Evaluating Tyndale's notes on the story of Ham, Parker suggests somewhat snidely that "Based upon this tendentious allegorical reading that leaves the literal sense far behind, it would seem that allegories, no matter how strained, are appropriate for an exegete if his name is William Tyndale and if such interpretations can be used to sideswipe his enemy the Church."⁷⁵ (This is, incidentally, almost identical to the accusation More lobs against Tyndale on this subject: "let vs deduce a thing neuer so straight, it can not be allowed. Let hym selfe drawe it neuer so farre a ry / yet wyll he swere y' it is ryght inough."⁷⁶) Tyndale's self-contradiction on this issue has drawn considerable and often harsh criticism, in the sixteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.⁷⁷ If, for Tyndale, the literal sense is meaning itself, then even interpretations that look like allegoresis can be reclaimed under the name of the literal, provided their author judges them substantial and "meaningful."

Thus Tyndale may practice allegorical reading under the name of the literal sense. Although Tyndale's use of allegoresis is frequent and well-documented, two moments of figurative reading seem especially revealing.⁷⁸ First, that he uses allegory to defend the literal sense. Second, that Tyndale reads Christ's words "this is my body" figuratively, essentially inverting his default hermeneutics. The first significantly illustrates a methodological tension which is then most prominently on display in the rejection of transubstantiation, since the Eucharist is a foundational Christian ritual.

Tyndale even uses an allegorical reading to defend the literal sense from St. Paul's seemingly unambiguous condemnation that "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 2-3).⁷⁹ Tyndale expands an argument by Augustine—also one of More's most cited authorities—explaining that "letter" is metonymy for "the law," that is "letters graven in two tablets of cold stone."⁸⁰ Tyndale follows Augustine's argument in *De spiritu et littera* to redeem the literal sense from Paul's seemingly unambiguous condemnation in 2 Corinthians: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."⁸¹ Augustine reads the "letter" as the "law of the Old Testament, a law that could only 'kill' the soul by making demands that a man could not possibly fulfill without grace."⁸² Tyndale adds to Augustine's argument, explaining that "letter" means "law" because it is metonymy for the law that

⁷³ James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 113.

⁷⁴ Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 192–99.

⁷⁵ Parker, "Tyndale's Biblical Hermeneutics," 98.

⁷⁶ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:258/38–259/2.

⁷⁷ Simpson and Parker are two of Tyndale's harshest recent critics, and their readings of Tyndale often align very closely with the same complaints made by Thomas More.

⁷⁸ Parker, "Tyndale's Biblical Hermeneutics"; Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory."

⁷⁹ Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 72–73.

⁸¹ Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory."

⁸² *Ibid.*, 70.

is “letters graven in two tablets of cold stone.”⁸³ Those using the passage to condemn the literal sense are themselves performing a literalist misreading.

Tyndale’s capacious sense of the “literal” is at its most visible in the Eucharistic controversy, which hinged on whether to interpret Christ’s words at the Last Supper—“Take, eat, this is my body”—literally, figuratively, or with a blend of methods.⁸⁴ First established in 1215, the doctrine of transubstantiation was upheld at the Council of Trent in *Decretum de sanctissimo eucharistia sacramento* (1551) and described thus:

Since Christ our Redeemer declared that to be truly His Body which He offered under the species of bread, this has always been believed in the Church of God; and this holy synod now confirms it afresh: through the consecration of bread and wine there takes place a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood.”⁸⁵

Although the external “accident” of bread and wine remained, the “whole substance” was transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. Thus the Mass was a present and constant (though phenomenally imperceptible) miracle that preserved the literal meaning of Christ’s assertion. This literal understanding, however, does not negate the symbolic significance of Christ’s words; rather, it seeks to collapse the distinction between literal and figurative into a miraculous mystery. Although unlike Zwingli or Luther, Tyndale does not eagerly throw himself into the Eucharistic controversy, he does, like Zwingli, ultimately emphasize the commemorative function of the rite (“Do this in remembrance of me”) and the purely figurative nature of “this is my body.”⁸⁶ In this most prominent inversion of Protestants’ and Catholics’ supposed default hermeneutics, instead of accusing their Catholic enemies of using allegory to alienate the literal sense, Protestants attacked the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation as perverse literalism. And yet, due to Tyndale’s almost infinitely flexible and capacious definitions of allegory and the literal, he need not admit to any inconsistency. If the literal sense is simply “meaning,” then Tyndale is still advancing the literal sense as he sees it: “This signifies my body.” Indeed, drawing on this tradition, Elizabethan bishop John Jewel offers this pithy summation in 1565: he charges his Catholic opponent with literalism—“M Harding saith these words, ‘This is my body,’ must needs be taken without metaphor, trope, or figure, even as the plain letter lieth, and none otherwise”; Jewel insists that the Mass ought to say, “*Hoc est corpus meum, hoc est, figura corporis mei*: ‘This is my body, that is to say, a figure of my body.’”⁸⁷ Jewel here translates Christ’s figurative words into his (Tyndalean) vision of the literal sense: their meaning.

Thus Tyndale’s definition of allegory encompasses allegoresis, all figurative language, and consensual allegories. By turns, he condemns allegory as papist corruption to be abhorred, praises it

⁸³ Ibid., 72–73.

⁸⁴ Tyndale’s translation, identical at Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22. In Luke the account is slightly different and Tyndale translates Christ’s words as “This is my body which is given for you. This do in the remembrance of me” (22:7). Beside these moments, Tyndale adds the marginal gloss “The sacrament is instituted.” Although a version of the Last Supper, or Lord’s Supper, appears in all four of the gospels, John’s account omits this particular command. William Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁸⁵ Cited in Timothy George, “Transubstantiation,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 170.

⁸⁶ For an account of Tyndale’s initial reluctance to engage this particular controversy, see: Simpson, “Tyndale as Promoter of Figural Allegory and Figurative Language,” 37–41.

⁸⁷ John Jewel, *The Works of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury*, ed. Rev. John Ayre, vol. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 1848), 453.

as a great pedagogical tool to be instrumentalized, and defines it as an inevitable part of language. He does all this using the word allegory, to which he gives an impressively capacious definition. Although Tyndale uses “allegory” so broadly—including both object and method—he does not subdivide these conceptions of allegory into differentiated terms. Moreover, this fluidity of usage and lack of distinguishing terms is exactly the sort of linguistic slippage for which he so vehemently criticizes More in his *Answer*.⁸⁸ The cynical explanation for this choice is the very accusation Tyndale makes against More’s use of the word “church”: that he uses terminological ambiguity to conceal the logical failings of his position. One might argue that Tyndale doesn’t dare to distinguish the terminology, since he needs allegoresis as much as he needs figurative language and there is no fundamental, conceptual difference between his use of allegory and that of the Catholic Church. To create separate terminology would only draw attention to the very paradox that causes Tyndale such discomfort: that he needs allegoresis to make sense of various “dark” passages of scripture. Indeed, he needs allegory to redeem the literal sense. Yet there is another less condemnatory, and by no means incompatible, interpretation of this definitional ambiguity.

The unresolved ambiguity of Tyndale's terminology also offers the reader a testing ground for interpretation entirely consistent with Tyndale's context-based theory of interpretation. He is performing his theory of the literal sense through the word “allegory.” Words and figures have, as Tyndale explains, multiple but mutually exclusive significations and it is by context that we are able to select the correct one at any given moment. So, it is up to the reader to determine which connotation of allegory Tyndale means in a particular passage. This then would illustrate his faith in the singularity of meaning: once the reader has selected the correct sort of allegory, Tyndale imagines a world in which the other connotations simply vanish. This, however, as any undergraduate close reader knows, is impossible. Having extracted the kernel, we are still left holding the husk. We may realize Tyndale means allegoresis, but the other connotations of “allegory” linger as well: figurative language, the parables, *Faerie Queene*, *Piers Plowman*, etc. Alternate readings might constitute a form of temptation, which his readers must perpetually resist. Perhaps Tyndale here embraces the multiplicity of meaning *in potentia* because he imagines that the singular sense truly does triumph and erase all alternate readings for the faithful reader. Yet his own authorial practice of punning depends on readers holding two meanings in tension with each other.

II

Tyndale is famous for his insistence that scripture is “plain” and easy, and for his desire to “strip away the [Catholic’s] veil of glosses” to deliver an accessible, unmediated text to the faithful.⁸⁹ As Tyndale’s critics have long observed, however, his authorial and editorial practices are in tension with these assertions. Thomas More writes incredulously, “If it be playne & easy: we can not thynke but that amonge so many of y^e old, holy, wyse, and well lerned doctors / some one at lest in all thys

⁸⁸ William Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, ed. Anne M O’Donnell and Jared Wicks, vol. 3, *The Independent Works of William Tyndale* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 10/1-15/6.

⁸⁹ The polemical motivation for this claim is clear and has drawn comment since the sixteenth century. Most recently, Simpson in “Tyndale as Promoter of Figural Allegory and Figurative Language,” 47, phrases it thus: “Anyone claiming to reform an institution on the basis of textual authority for institutional reform needed that text . . . to be unambiguous. They also needed to be able to claim that everyone could see the incontrovertible force of that unambiguous, prior textual authority” (“Tyndale as Promoter . . .” 47). Tyndale rejects earlier models of scriptural reading that are highly mediated, both by intertextuality (a key aspect of Scholasticism) and by Church tradition and authority. No mere man-made text, even Tyndale’s, should come between reader and divine text. Simpson, “Tyndale as Promoter of Figural Allegory and Figurative Language,” 47; Gray, “Tyndale and the Text in the Heart,” 97–102.

longe whyle shold haue ben as able to perceyue it as Luther and he now so sodeynly.”⁹⁰ Douglas H. Parker points out that Tyndale’s “extensive [Biblical] commentary runs counter to his view about the accessibility of the Scriptures to all Christians moved by the Spirit to accept God’s word.”⁹¹ In *Burning to Read*, Simpson repeatedly draws attention to the breadth and depth of textual apparatus in Tyndale’s Bible and the way in which Tyndale’s frequent interpretive interventions contradict his claims that scripture is plain and open. Tyndale’s extensive instructive writing and textual apparatus implicitly acknowledge that interpreting scripture is hard; despite his commitment to the unmediated text, Tyndale becomes its mediator.⁹² To address this difficulty, Tyndale presents a mystical ideal of interpretation and textuality, which eliminates the possibility of mediation or misreading: the scripture written in the heart. As Tyndale himself is aware, this ideal is not a practicable hermeneutic. In addition to this impossible and intangible ideal, Tyndale offers a practical model of reading and interpretation. This practical model, however, is nearly indistinguishable from the model Thomas More advocates. This compounds the slippage between Tyndale and his enemies already apparent in his relationship to allegory.

Tyndale not only insists that textual authority is the only authority, he also elevates textuality itself, presenting faith and God as text. Tyndale expands on the idea of Christ as *logos* by making God into scripture: “God is . . . that only which he saith of himself. God is nothing but his law and his promises. . . God is but his words.”⁹³ These words are, of course, only accessible as scripture. God is the scripture and, drawing on a passage from 2 Corinthians, Tyndale depicts the true faithful as having this scripture written in their hearts. Tyndale translates the passage as:

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, which is understood and read of all men: in that ye are known, how that ye are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us and written, not with ink: but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.” (2 Corinthians 3:2-3)⁹⁴

The imagery of this passage becomes a constant refrain for Tyndale, a metaphor for right reading. Using this passage, Tyndale depicts faith itself as a textual phenomenon; the elect “haue the law of god written in their hertes and fayth to be saud thorow christe written there also.”⁹⁵ God is not internalized by ritual consumption in the Eucharist; rather, God is already internal to the elect as scripture. God and faithful are united in sacred textuality.⁹⁶ In *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, Tyndale writes that “the law of God is writen and grauen in [the] herte [of the faithful]” and that:

He that hath not thys fayeth [grauen in his herte] is but an vnprofytable babler of fayeth, and workes, and woteth nether what he bableth, nor what he meaneth or where vnto his wordes pertayne. For he feleth not the power of faith nor the workynge of the spirite in his herte, but interpreteth the scriptures which speake of fayth and

⁹⁰ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:250/33-251/1. See also More’s parodic repetition of the phrase “playne and euydent” in *Confutation* 258/22-259/21.

⁹¹ Parker, “Tyndale’s Biblical Hermeneutics,” 87–88.

⁹² In his article, Almsay argues that Tyndale responds to the ideological challenges of mediating scripture by rhetorically subsuming his voice, striving to “become like the ‘voice’ of John the Baptist, which Tyndale understood as saying, ‘I am that I preach,’” 7. See: Almsay, “‘I Am That I Preach.’”

⁹³ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 24.

⁹⁴ Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, Corinthians 3:2-3.

⁹⁵ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:112/29-31.

⁹⁶ As Rogers points out: to More, Tyndale’s approach is a perversion of language that conflates God’s ‘words’ (*verba*) with God’s being as ‘the Word’ (*logos*),” William J. Rogers, “Thomas More’s Polemical Poetics,” *English Literary Renaissance* 38 (2008): 397.

workes, after his awne blynde reasone and folish fantasies and not of any felyng that he hath in his herte: as a man reherseth a tale of an other mans moute and woteth not whether it bee so or not as he sayeth, nor hath any experience of y(e) thyng(e) it selfe.⁹⁷

To Tyndale, the scripture in the heart ensures full understanding of the written scripture. It becomes the means of interpretation and interpretation's arbiter.

The scripture written in the heart acts as the "anterior text" that solves two of Tyndale's most pressing ideological problems: first, the problem of mediating scripture; second, the reality that scripture is difficult to understand.⁹⁸ By concentrating on the union of God and faithful in the text, Tyndale obviates any possibility of mediation. His glosses cannot come between text and reader, since text and (elect) reader are one.⁹⁹ The text in the heart offers constant, unmediated confirmation of the faithful's right reading. Tyndale describes it thus:

And therefore when thou art asked / whi thou beleuest that thou shalt be saved thorow christ and of soch like principles of oure faith / answeere thou wottest and felest that it is true. And when he asketh how thou knowest that it is true / answeere **because it is written in thine herte. And if he aske who wrott it / answer the spirite of God.** And if he aske how thou camest first by it / tel him / whether by **readynge in bokes or hear-ynge it preached / as by an outward instrument / but that inwardly thou wast taught by the spirite of God.** And if he aske whether thou beleuest it not because it is written in bokes or because the prestes so preach / answeere no / not now / but **only because it is written in thine hert and because the spirite of god so preacheth and so testifieth vn to thi soule.** And saye / though at the begynnyng(e) thou wast moued by readyng(e) or preachyng(e) / as the Samaritanes were by the wordes of the woman / yet **now thou beleuest it not therefore any lenger / but only because thou hast herd it of the spirite of God and red it written in thyne herte.**¹⁰⁰

In this passage, Tyndale gives a textualized depiction of faith as interpretation, one that elides the act of reading and the use of reason. The scripture in the heart remains illegible—we cannot literally read our internal organs; rather this inward text confers the ability to read correctly and to have faith in one's own reading. Here, Tyndale pairs this inward and inaccessible text with an external, accessible narrative. It is the story of a moment of revelation or conversion, followed by steadily increasing conviction and understanding. The intangible ideal of interpretation here is moored in a tangible, lived experience. The inward textuality does not offer a practicable pedagogy or hermeneutic, and Tyndale is not naively unaware of this reality. In addition to this vision of interpretation, Tyndale offers a much more practicable and common-sense vision of reading that emphasizes context and doctrine.

In addition to his mystical conception of interpretation—the text in the heart—Tyndale presents another practical vision of reading that he advocates both explicitly in his writing and implicitly with his authorial and editorial practice. In *Preface to the New Testament*, Tyndale offers the

⁹⁷ Tyndale, *STC* / 24457, 27–28.

⁹⁸ Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 139; Gray, "Tyndale and the Text in the Heart."

⁹⁹ Of course, this should also mean that Catholic glosses would be similarly unable to come between the text and the elect. Tyndale makes no mention of this possibility.

¹⁰⁰ Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 3:53/15-30.

reader doctrinal instruction—both in the preface and the glosses—and emphasizes the importance of context. Where Tyndale’s hermeneutics depart most concretely and consistently from those of his Catholic adversaries is in limiting the scope of inter-textual reading: only scripture can help to illuminate scripture. This is an important distinction, but one Tyndale often makes only implicitly. Though the glosses Tyndale rejects as false allegories are often those of a Scholastic practice inspired by Aristotle, over the course of his debates with More, they both limit themselves with increasing narrowness to scriptural intertexts and references to shared authorities like Augustine. This tends to obscure the distinctions between their methods.

Tyndale’s idealized conception of reading and interpretation does not blind him to the realities of lived human experience. Although he insists scripture is written on the hearts of the elect and that it is plain and open, he does not in fact present reading scripture as effortless. Like the scripture in the heart that is revealed over time, Tyndale’s practical vision of reading is also one that sometimes must unfold gradually. In his address to the reader prefacing *The New Testament*, he writes: “in many places, where the text seemeth at the first chop hard to be understood, yet the circumstances before and after, and often reading together, maketh it plain enough.”¹⁰¹ Context within scripture is central to right reading. And even as he breaks with Catholicism’s expansive intertextuality, Tyndale acknowledges scripture’s interpretive difficulties. He insists scripture is its own key: “One scripture will help to declare another. And the circumstances, that is to say, the places that go before and after, will give light unto the middle text. And the open and manifest scriptures will ever improve the false and wrong exposition of the darker sentences.”¹⁰² Here again Tyndale acknowledges that some passages of scripture may seem obscure initially—“darker” than the others—but eventually all will become clear, even if not “at first chop.” Tyndale’s myriad notes and glosses then may seem like an exercise in efficiency.

Although Tyndale emphasizes the simplicity and transparency of scripture overall, he also cautions against an overly curious and venturesome reading of scripture, a point where his position overlaps with More’s. Tyndale writes that “Scripture speaketh after the moost grossest manner. Be diligent therefore that thou be not deceyued with curiousnes. For men of no small reputacion haue ben deceyued with their owne sophistrye.”¹⁰³ In the *Preface to the New Testament*, Tyndale writes that, to combat Catholics’ deceitful glosses, he is preparing the “food” of scripture:

that I might be found faithful to my father and Lord in distributing unto my brethren and fellows of one faith, their due and necessary food: so dressing it and seasoning it, that the weak stomachs may receive it also, and be the better for it) I thought it my duty (most dear reader) to warn thee before, and to shew thee the right way in, and to give thee the true key to open it withal, and to arm thee against false prophets and malicious hypocrites, whose perpetual study is to leaven the scripture with glosses, and therefore to lock it up”¹⁰⁴

Some readers are less prepared—those with “weak stomachs”—for reading and ought rightly to rely on others, like Tyndale, to provide “the right way in.” What follows, however, is not a method—literal, figurative, intra-textual—for reading scripture, but the doctrines Tyndale believes the reader should hold in mind while reading.

¹⁰¹ William Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3.

¹⁰² Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 106.

¹⁰³ Tyndale, *STC / 24457*, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, 3–4.

To guide the reader, Tyndale asserts the centrality of context and the use of scripture as its own key. He offers readers doctrinal instruction in the form of introductions and glosses. In these moments of intervention, Tyndale does not explain *how* to read a passage in terms of method, but rather tells the reader directly what the passage means. In Tyndale's *Preface to the New Testament*, there is no account of the literal sense or the allegorical sense; instead, there is a general explanation of the new Protestant doctrines of scripture alone and faith alone, and explicit, hostile declarations against Catholicism.

In *Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale offers his rebuttal to a paraphrased Catholic attack on Protestant reading; however, the practical version of reading he uses against his opponents is actually one he shares with them. He writes:

“By this means then [they say], thou wilt that no man teach another, but that every man take the scripture and learn by himself. Nay verily, so say I not. Nevertheless, seeing that ye will not teach, if any man thirst for the truth, and read the scripture by himself desiring God to open the door of knowledge unto him, God for his truth's sake will and must teach him.”¹⁰⁵

This is exactly the sort of assertion Simpson dwells on: God will guide the reader to the truth, making systematic instruction superfluous and the Catholic hoarding of scripture not only unnecessary but evil. From here, however, Tyndale continues to imagine an ideal regimen of reading instruction which, “as a master teacheth a prentice to know all the points of the meteyard, first how many inches, how many feet and the half yard, the quarter and the nail, and then teacheth him to mete other things therby,” would involve first teaching everyone about original sin (“birth poison”), that we are damned by the law, saved by God's promise and Christ's sacrifice, and then “what the sacraments signify.”¹⁰⁶ He concludes then that:

“So would it come to pass, that as we know by natural wit what followeth of a true principal of natural reason: even so by the principles of the faith and by the plain scriptures and by the circumstances of the text should we judge all men's expositions and all men's doctrine, and should receive the best and refuse the worst. I would have you teach them also the properties and manner of speakings of the scripture, and how to expound proverbs and similitudes. And then if they go abroad and walk by the fields and meadows of all manner doctors and philosophers they could catch no harm. They should discern the poison from the honey and bring home nothing but that which is wholesome.”¹⁰⁷

In the larger passage, Tyndale appears to present elect readers as incapable of misreading, yet Tyndale tempers this ideal by offering a far more realistic vision of reading that requires labor and diligence. Though Tyndale's mystical vision of reading as scripture-in-the-heart seems necessarily to reject reason, here he explicitly embraces it. This version of reading instruction begins with doctrine and then approaches nuance and scriptural complexity from that solid groundwork. This model of reading, however, is essentially identical to the one Thomas More proposes in the *Dialogue*.

What Tyndale presents looks like methodologies of reading, but in fact neither of these things are methodologies, nor can they be. Practically, Tyndale cannot tell the reader how to read because he doesn't have a consistent practicable hermeneutic; ideologically, he cannot tell them how

¹⁰⁵ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

to read because right reading is, at least implicitly, predicated on a soteriological status. Negotiating the necessary internal tensions of his hermeneutics in turn precipitates Tyndale's slide towards the very hermeneutics he strives to repudiate. His capacious literal sense permits allegorical readings, sometimes as remote as those of the Church, and like More he bolsters his readings at times with the Church fathers, such as Augustine. Although Tyndale repudiates *intertextual* Biblical reading and scholasticism in both word and deed, these features cannot stand in for all Catholic Biblical exegesis. As Tyndale delights in reminding More, he has much in common with More's "derelynge Erasmus"¹⁰⁸ and—though neither will admit it—with More himself.

Thomas More

I

Scripture, and therefore text and textuality, lies at the heart of Tyndale's conception of God, faith, and authority; his hermeneutics, therefore, are at the heart of his polemics. For Thomas More, by contrast, the Church is the ultimate authority and safe-guarder of the faith and it inhabits the center of his polemics. Although hermeneutics and textuality are certainly a concern for More, particularly considering his literary sensibilities on the one hand and his need to battle Tyndale on the other, they are not More's focal point as they are Tyndale's. In fact, More does not define literal versus allegorical interpretation in his polemics at all until *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-3) when he responds to Tyndale paragraph by paragraph, allowing his opponent's text to control the emphasis and structure of his own.¹⁰⁹ More pressing to More's conception of scripture than the definitions of literal or allegorical is the necessary recognition that scripture is *difficult* and that it is always, unavoidably mediated.

More insists that scripture is and always has been mediated, since it is the Church that has always determined which texts constitute the scripture and since scripture has always suffered the indignities of human transmission. Scripture is also *difficult*, with its myriad allegorical and literal meanings, reflecting the vast mysteries of God. Even in the face of these profound challenges, however, More refuses to reject lay scriptural reading entirely, whatever his opponents say about Catholics "locking up" scripture and forbidding the vernacular.¹¹⁰ More proposes a cautious, meditative, and essentially uninterpretive mode of reading for the laity, particularly those reading in the vernacular—one oddly similar to that which Tyndale advocates above. Whereas for Tyndale the scripture in the heart—God's grace—guarantees right reading for the individual, for More the Church guarantees right reading for the community. The holy Church is the ordering principle at the heart of More's conception of the universe.

¹⁰⁸ Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 3:14/25.

¹⁰⁹ C.S. Lewis argues that here More loses the battle by conceding the structure, form, and emphasis of debate. William J. Rogers argues that in fact the *Confutation* is meant to be a manual for refuting Tyndale, a sort of glossary. The lack of index and textual apparatus to make such a use of *Confutation* practical, however, to my mind rather undermines this argument. See: C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 174; William J. Rogers, "Thomas More's Polemical Poetics," *English Literary Renaissance* 38 (2008): 387–407.

¹¹⁰ More repeats the Reformers' characterization of the Church as entirely banning lay reading of scripture with an air of affront. It is, More claims, untrue and he personally supports vernacular reading of scripture. In fact, even after Henry outlaws English Bibles in 1530, More does not amend *Dialogue* to conform to the new law, though in 1531's *Confutation* he does (Duffy suggests per necessity) claim to support Henry's decision. Eamon Duffy, "The Comen Knowen Multytude of Crysten Men': A Dialogue Concerning Heresies and the Defence of Christendom," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 207–8.

For More, it is the Church that confers order and meaning. When heretics threaten the Church, they threaten the realm with social disorder and the decay of meaning itself, a descent into mere nonsense. More defines the Church as:

the comon knowen catholyke people, clergy lay folke, and all /
whych what so euer theyr lyuyng be (amonge whom vndowtedly
there are of bothe sortes many right good and veruouse) do stande to
gether and agre in the confessyon of one trew catholyke fayth, wyth
all olde holy doctours and sayntes, and good chrysten people bysyde
that are all redy passed thys fyftene hundred yere byfore.¹¹¹

The Church is comprised of all those who consent to and participate in the consensus of belief, a vast community, comprised of all—better and worse, laity and clergy, dead and living—for the past fifteen hundred years. This community, the Church, is defined “agaynste” all heretics, like “Luther, a wyclyffe, zuinglius, Hutten, Husse, and Tyndale, & all the rable of such erronious heretykes.”¹¹² By withholding their consent, heretics are by definition outside of the Church, which is universal: “catholyk.”¹¹³

I argue that, in addition to refuting Tyndale’s assertions and defending the Church directly, More makes a broader argument that the key characteristics of the Church are also the key characteristics of interpretation, reading, and the production of meaning. Like the church, meaning and language are communal, consensual, and evolve over time. For More, the Church is not only the ultimate interpreter, but the very stuff of interpretation itself, thereby naturalizing the Church’s interpretive authority. To abandon the Church is to abandon communal, consensual meaning for a false ideal of absolutist, isolationist hermeneutics, to fall not only from order to chaos, but also to fall from sense to nonsense. Thus any division between textual interpretation and the authority of the Church is in fact a false dichotomy, one that the motions of More’s writing—structure, style, form—constantly seeks to expose.

II.

In 1528, Bishop Tunstall entreated Thomas More to write in the vernacular to help “the common man” to “see through the cunning malice of heretics.”¹¹⁴ Over the next five years, More produced over one million words of vernacular theology.¹¹⁵ More’s first salvo, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), is a comprehensive and broad-ranging assault on heresy; it is his most unconstrained polemic and shows More at his most literary.¹¹⁶ The *Dialogue* purports to be the written record of

¹¹¹ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:480/35-481-4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 8:481/3-5.

¹¹³ More’s definition of the Church as having universal consent is, of course, a somewhat circular one since he has defined the Church as all those who consent. Tyndale justifiably points out that when the Church wields the power of the sword, compliance cannot be called “consent.” As Tyndale writes in *Answer*: “As oure papistes beleue. Which moare mad then those Jewes / beleue nothyng by the reason of the scripture / but only that soch a multitude consent therto / compelled with violence of swerde / with falsyfienge of the scripture and fayned lyes” (70/1-5).

¹¹⁴ Thomas M. C. Lawler, “A General View of the Dialogue: An Anatomy of Heresy,” in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 6.2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 440.

¹¹⁵ Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 192.

¹¹⁶ For James Simpson, “reading scripture is at the heart of the *Dialogue*,” while Eamon Duffy insists that it is in fact fundamentally a text about late medieval practice, each scholar finding at the heart of the *Dialogue* the heart of their own research. To be sure, the 1529 title page promises a dialogue “Wheryn be treatyd dyuers maters / as of the veneracy-/ on & worshyp of ymages & relyques / praying to sayntis / & goynge on pyl / grymage,” giving religious practice top billing. Practice and scripture are not, however, straightforwardly separable and contemporary scholars insistence on such different focal points rather confirms my assessment of the *Dialogue* as a comprehensive treatise. Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 242; Duffy, “‘The Comen Knowen Multytude of Crysten Men’: A Dialogue Concerning Heresies and the Defence of Christendom,” 195.

More's conversations with an anonymous, heretically-leaning young man, referred to as "Messenger;" More's friend employs the Messenger as a tutor to his children and has sent him to More for orthodox instruction. Under the guise of repeating others' opinions, the Messenger attacks orthodox practices and doctrines, then receives More's gentle correction. *Dialogue* has rightly been praised as the wittiest, most urbane, and most literary of More's polemics.¹¹⁷ In it More rejects the temptation to create a mere straw man, and instead offers in the Messenger a charming if impetuous, a "bright, but erring" student.¹¹⁸ More's first entrance into Reformation polemic is richly illustrative of his ideals, both theological and literary. The *Dialogue's* form particularly reflects More's most fundamental concern—the integrity of the Church. For More, the Church is a communal body of consensus that has evolved logically over time, guided by the holy spirit; the dialogue form reflects these ideals with its genial conversation, communal eating, and logical progress towards consensus over the course of their debates.¹¹⁹

For More, Protestants are heretics who are out of order, indeed *disordered*, in two key senses. First, they are out of order in that they seek to "tourne vp so downe y^e ryght order of Crystes chyrch."¹²⁰ The Church is the basis for all social order and without it there would be chaos. Second, the Protestants are out of order in the more chronological sense that they fail to understand temporal order as it relates to the lived human experience. The Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* attacks both types of order. It attacks the social order by attacking the authority of the church, the governing structure of More's worldview; however it is also out of order in the sense that the heretics treat scripture as though it preceded the faith, when historically it is the other way around. More depicts Protestants as neglecting the logic of chronological reality, both in their doctrines and their conception of reading practices. This is a point that More makes repeatedly, both explicitly and implicitly on the level of authorial play.

Where Tyndale privileges direct declaratives, both in his hermeneutic theory and in his style, More often delights in the elliptical, the narrative, the allegorical. In *Dialogue* More's use of form and style seeks to exemplify and show his argument, rather than merely assert it; he demonstrates the unique potentialities of the modes he defends by using them. In structure, style, and form the *Dialogue* enacts More's hermeneutic theory and seeks in its every motion to expose the Protestants' disorder to the reader.

More's use of repetition—both *repetitio* and reiteration—in the *Dialogue* depicts the heretics as disordered, both socially and temporally.¹²¹ The Messenger returns to *sola scriptura* and other Protestant first principles again and again and More highlights these returns as repetition:

¹¹⁷ Duffy, "The Comen Knowen Multytude of Crysten Men": A Dialogue Concerning Heresies and the Defence of Christendom," 191–92.

¹¹⁸ The Messenger and their dialogue was most likely inspired by More's own son-in-law, William Roper, who flirted briefly with Lutheran heresy before More ushered him back to orthodoxy. Lawler, "A General View of the Dialogue: An Anatomy of Heresy," 444.

¹¹⁹ It is, however, one of only two dialogues in More's polemic career and after its publication heresy raged on all around the increasingly embattled More. In his *Answer*, Tyndale heaped scorn on More's use of the dialogue form in particular, claiming that More's arguments are as fictional as his choice of literary form. In More's next work, *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-3), he limits himself to a paragraph by paragraph response to Tyndale's attack. The space for literary play is shrinking steadily. See Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 277-282.

¹²⁰ Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, ed. Thomas Lawler, Germain Marc'hadour, and Richard Marius (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1981), 334/17-23.

¹²¹ More uses the rhetorical device of *repetitio*—the strategic repetition of words and phrases in close proximity, common to both the Classical and medieval traditions—as well as reiterations that vary in diction. Although a sixteenth century rhetorician might consider these reiterations to be more like *amplificatio* rather than *repetitio*, More himself explicitly constructs them as repetitions.

Are ye there yet agayne quod I? We haue sondry wayes proued and
 agreed bytwene vs / that this knowledge and fayth was before
 scrypture & wrytynge / and many thynges of necessitye / to be bothe
 byleued & done that are not in holy scrypture. And yet after all this to
 long to be repeted ye retourne agayne to the fyrst poynt so often
 confuted / that nothyng is lerned nor knowen but by holy
 scrypture.¹²²

They have, More says, reached consensus— “agreed bytwene” them— and then the Messenger regresses. A few chapters later, when More reiterates that the Church and scripture cannot be inconsistent, the Messenger asks, once more, “Wherby shall I knowe . . .?” More turns it into a joke—“Why be we at that poynte yet . . . ? haue we so sone forgotten . . .”—and then repeats in condensed form the points he made previously.¹²³ “Nay,” the Messenger says after More’s reiteration, “I perceyue yt well whan I remember it / but yt was not redy in remembrance.”¹²⁴ Certainly, More’s use of repetition serves the conventional function of reiterating anew his most essential points; although More claims his argument is “to long to be repeted,” the Messenger’s forgetfulness gives him an opportunity to do precisely that. However, it also helps More to make his point about social order and illustrates some of his assumptions about reading.

In the *Dialogue*, More attempts to recreate the social order of the Church community, both within the text by bringing the Messenger back into the community, and also in the world beyond the text. More’s humor draws readers in, inviting them to be a part of this community. He offers them two likable characters as objects of readerly identification. By drawing attention to this conventional device, More’s use of repetition becomes a running gag, particularly in the later chapters of the *Dialogue*. It is a joke the reader is invited to share. These repetitions also characterize the Messenger as rather silly and impetuous and More himself as a kind and patient interlocutor. More ominously, the need for repetition occasioned by the Messenger’s backsliding suggests the dangerous and regressive folly of a heretical mindset: once heretical ideas have taken hold it is hard to maintain orthodoxy even after one has truly been persuaded, even repeatedly, by well-reasoned arguments.¹²⁵ Consider, for example, Thomas Bilney, whose case figures so prominently (if anonymously) in Book III of *Dialogue*. In 1527, Bilney was interrogated by a panel of bishops—including Wolsey, Fisher, and Tunstall—and abjured his preaching against images and relics; within two years, however, he resumed his preaching and was burned in 1531. More’s patience and teasing appears all the more sympathetic in light of the real dangers these moments represent in the narrative. More—both the character and the author—is willing to invest his time and patience here in painstakingly rebuilding the community and social order, without, as Tyndale accuses, immediate “violence of the sword.”¹²⁶

More uses repetition to depict Protestants as having a diseased relationship to temporality in two ways: first, they reject the chronological order of history and history as a developmental process; second, they reject the temporality of dialectic, and with it, reason. More’s *repetitio* and *tautologia* depicts Protestants as obsessed with first principles that lead them to overlook the necessities of human experience and the development of argument beyond its premises. In their debate, the Messenger will frequently agree to individual parts of More’s argument, but when More brings a

¹²² More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 175/3-9.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 182/9-12.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 182/34-5.

¹²⁵ See: Eamon Duffy, “‘The Comen Knowen Multytude of Crysten Men’: A Dialogue Concerning Heresies and the Defence of Christendom,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 205; 195–6.

¹²⁶ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 156; Rex, “Thomas More and the Heretics: Statesman or Fanatic?”

series of points together to build a larger argument, although the Messenger has conceded every point, the Messenger will then reject the necessary conclusion, returning instead dogmatically to first principles. The Messenger regurgitates these principles, which function like slogans or sound bites that are catchy, but hollow. He is incapable of dealing with an argument unfolding logically in time just as his fetishization of a notion of first principles is perverse to the developmental character of Roman Catholic doctrine. More's arguments emphasize reason and practice; this is parallel to his vision of right scriptural interpretation which unfolds gradually over the centuries as the church, through reason and divine inspiration, moves steadily to fuller and fuller understanding of the scriptures' meaning. *Sola scriptura*, which is most often the impetus for repetition, is a doctrine that, like the Messenger in these moments, overlooks the past in which a consensus has already been established. It requires a dangerous sort of forgetfulness, one that erases history, the temporal extension of argument, and the consensus of the Church "thys fyftene hundred yere byfore."¹²⁷

Although in the *Dialogue* More is mostly unconcerned with more abstract hermeneutic questions, he is very concerned with the practical realities of lay reading. More's use of repetition, highlighted in these humorous moments, provides insight into his imagined readers and their presumed reading practice. More's sophisticated dialogue rewards careful analysis and close reading, but it also accommodates skimming. For the skimming reader to absorb them, key points need to be repeated strategically in order. Repetition is a written practice with a parallel reading practice. Repetition helps inattentive, harried, or struggling readers in particular by ensuring that they have recurring opportunities to absorb key ideas. More does not presume that his own readers will perform close reading; he has a similar assumption about the ways the majority of readers will approach other texts, including scripture. Readers cannot be universally trusted to read carefully. Tyndale generally eschews *repetitio* and *amplificatio*; and he assumes a more attentive reader, both for his own text and also for the scriptures. Their respective stylistic decisions illustrate their assumptions about readers and reading.

Repetition simultaneously depicts his opponents as disordered and illustrates More's serious concerns about misreading. More offers safeguards against misreading—to trust the creed and the Church and to practice an essentially non-interpretive mode of reading that accepts the challenges of reading scripture and the necessity of mediation. The question of order returns as More describes the necessity of reading scripture according to the articles of the faith. This account of reading—to begin grounded in essential doctrine—is identical to Tyndale's practical method in *Obedience*. The idea that one's reading of scripture should be informed by knowledge of the key doctrines of the faith is an entirely conventional idea, new in neither More nor Tyndale's work;¹²⁸ however, More parodically depicts the Protestants as necessarily rejecting it, as this seems to him the logical end point of *sola scriptura* and the rejection of the Church's mediation. According to More, *sola scriptura* is already a doctrine strangely out of order, both socially and chronologically and, if Protestants desire an unmediated scripture and reject the Church's authority of instruction, this is surely the result: illogic, disorder, confusion, and heresy. To be sure, More is in one sense thoroughly unjust to Tyndale, misrepresenting his position and claiming solely for Catholics a reading practice they in fact share; however, More does so by exploiting an intrinsic tension in Tyndale's position, thus rendering an effective polemic.

In their debate, the Messenger, ostensibly representing Protestants, objects to the idea that one should read scripture according to the articles of faith. He asserts that to "brynge the fayth wyth vs all ready / as a rule to lerne the scrypture by / when we come to y^e scrypture to lerne the fayth

¹²⁷ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:481/4.

¹²⁸ See for example, Augustine, *De Doctrina* I.39-40 and II.9-11.

by” is “as yf we wolde go make the carte to drawe the horse.”¹²⁹ The problem is one of ordering. More replies, borrowing the Messenger’s figure of speech: “we shall se anone whyther the carte draw the horse or the horse the carte. Or whyther we be yet happely so blynde / y^t we se not well whiche is the carte / whiche is the horse.”¹³⁰ More’s point here is one he will make more explicitly elsewhere in the *Dialogue*: the tenets of faith precede the written accounts of scripture that preserve them. Tyndale and his coreligionists are out of order. To illustrate the necessity of the reading practice that the Messenger rejects here, More constructs two narratives. The first features a child approaching scripture for the first time; the other imagines an old idolater who has long worshiped the moon, but has recently come upon scripture and converted.

More uses narrative play to insist on lived human experience, to consider the temporal realities of reading and instruction, and to depict his opponents as absurdly out of order. Just as the faith preceded and shaped scripture in historical reality, so too the creed must precede and shape the reader’s encounter with scripture. Although the Messenger concedes that a child should learn the creed before he is old enough to read, he does not admit that this means he should “iudge and examyne holy scrypture therby.”¹³¹ More then constructs a plausible misreading which reading by the creed would prevent. More narrates the child reading that we are all the children of God, then supposing that Christ is therefore son of God in the same sense as himself. More argues that, if the child does not read with the articles of faith in mind, there will be a time in which he must lapse into heresy. Reading by the creed is a practical necessity. The Messenger concedes this point (though he will later forget that he has done so).

More then shifts between his two examples, emphasizing the temporal realities of reading by imagining time passing in the world of his narrative. More sets up the example with the child and then shifts to the example of the old idolator, saying: “let this cristen chylde of ours alone for a whyle.”¹³² Then, after spending some time with his other example, he shifts again, saying:

than / syth he [the former idolator] shall not at the leste wyse fynde them [the articles of faith] out all on a day / let vs leue hym a lytell whyle in sekyng / and we shall retourne agayne after to hym & loke what he shall haue founden. And in the meane season we shall go loke agayne vpon our good lytell godson the boy parde that we crystened ryght now and taught hym his crede and set hym to scrypture.¹³³

More’s narrative technique here suggests that time passes within the world of the page; this reflects the issue of temporality so essential to his argument. What initially looks like mere rhetorical whimsy, actually helps to illustrate More’s argument as he refutes the Messenger’s proposed reading practice as one flawed by the reality of reading as a temporal experience. More’s authorial play depicts not only the practical realities of reading, but also shows how the Protestants are at once doctrinally wrong, as well as absurdly and nonsensically impractical. The strength of More’s argument is continuity: the continuity in belief and understanding that the church provides and the continuity of his proposed reading practice with one’s actual experience of reading and understanding scripture. By turning with ease from one narrative example to another and then turning back again, he demonstrates the fortitude of this continuity. His argument retains strength without being pinned to one particular textual moment.

¹²⁹ More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 133/7-11.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 133/12-14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 133/31.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 134/1.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 134/32-136/3.

More is committed to the idea of lay vernacular reading, but only if it is orderly. He advocates a humble, meditative, and essentially non-interpretive mode of reading as a failsafe against heresy and impiety. One must read scripture according to the articles of the faith; this is orderly both chronologically—as More has already argued, since the faith preceded the scripture—and socially, since it involves consent to the mediating authority of the Church. That scripture is difficult is one of More’s essential beliefs. As a result, neither More nor any other exegete can offer the reader an easy hermeneutic mode to straightforwardly explain all of scripture. Instead, More must refer the reader out of the text (both the *Dialogue* and scripture) to the authority of the Church. For More, this is in no way an ideological problem. That the Church mediates for readers is entirely appropriate—scripture is itself, by necessity, mediated as More repeatedly points out. To reject this mediation is to be a disordered reader.

In *Dialogue*, More uses metaphors of consumption and their conventional epistemological associations to create the necessary contrast between pious, meditative reading and impious, venturesome interpreting. The Messenger complains that the “comen people” are treated:

as infantys that muste be fedde but with mylke and pappe. And yf we haue stronger mete it must be chammed afore by the nurse and so put into the babys mouth. But me thynke though they make vs all infantys / they shall fynde many a shrewde brayne among vs / that can perceyue chalke fro chese well ynough and yf they wolde ones take vs our mete in our owne hande. We be not so euyll tothed but that within a whyle they shall se vs cham it our selfe as well as they.¹³⁴

The author’s word choices here undermine the Messenger’s argument—to be “a shrewde brayne” is not the same as to be wise and even the Messenger imagines only some of scripture’s readers will be shrewd.¹³⁵ The assertion that the laity will “cham” “as well as” the clergy lacks the humility More finds essential to the study of scripture. The Messenger implies that interpreting scripture is as simple as knowing the different between chalk and cheese, an absurd suggestion that shows his failure to grasp the vast complexity of scripture. As the Messenger’s conceit develops, the vehicle indecorously overwhelms the tenor, thus lending greater credence to More’s fears about readers debating scripture impiously at “mete and at mele.”

Rather than refuting the Messenger’s assertions, More exploits the epistemological associations of his metaphors of consumption. The reasonable objection to English scripture is *not* that it be read, but that it be chewed: “Not for the redyng & receyuyng / but for the bysy chammyng therof / & for moche medlyng with suche partys therof as lest wyll agre wyth theyr capacitytes.”¹³⁶ More immediately links this to the sinful eating-as-knowledge personified by Eve, whom the Messenger recently invoked. More answers: “For vndoutedly as ye spake of our mother eue / inordynate appetyte of knowledge is a meane to dryue any man out of paradyse. And inordynate is y^e appetyte whan men vnlerned though they rede it in theyr langage / wyll be bysy to enserch and dyspute the grete secrete mysteres of scrypture.”¹³⁷ These metaphors of consumption have a conventional epistemological meaning in Christianity: there is the corruptive knowledge of the forbidden fruit, and the nourishing, redemptive food of Christ crucified in the Eucharist.¹³⁸ More objects not to the idea that the laity consume scripture, after the model of moderate,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 333/4-11.

¹³⁵ More the author is, after all, putting words into the Messenger’s mouth at every moment.

¹³⁶ More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 333/16-20.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 333/20-25.

¹³⁸ More makes frequent use of these metaphors of consumption, as does his nemesis Tyndale. They use the conventional metaphors in essentially the same manner, familiar to them both from centuries of Christian use.

restorative eating in the Eucharist, but that they rend and gnaw at it with the sinful appetitive eating of Eve.

For More, the only way for the laity to protect themselves from misunderstanding and error is to consent to the creed and the Church's role as interpreter. More justifies the clergy's mediation with a conventional allegorical reading of Moses on Mount Sinai. He writes "in Exody" that "Moyses ascendynge vp vpon the hyll where he spake with god and the people taryenge bynethe sygnyfyed that y^e people forboden to presume to medle with the hygh mysteryes of holy scripture but ought to be contente to tary bynethe & medle none hygher than is mete for them."¹³⁹ This is an orderly consumption of the divine; it maintains the social order in which priests are appointed to be the interpreters and communicate meaning to the laity. More adds "And as for the hygh secrete mysteryes of god / and harde textes of hys holy scripture / [this incident] let[s] vs know that we¹⁴⁰ be so vnable to ascende vp so hygh on that hyll / that it shall become vs to saye to the prechours appoynted therto as the people sayd vnto Moyses / here you god and let vs here you."¹⁴¹ For More, Moses' ascent and the people's patience down below illustrates that only some are intended for the high mysteries and those few are meant to mediate the people's experience. To trust in the Church's reading of scripture is to allow Moses to go up the mountain and remain patiently below; it is to maintain the proper order.

In his account of virtuous lay reading, More makes a clear distinction between readers and interpreters. Increased vernacular literacy gives the unlearned the illusion that they are wiser than they are and they suppose that the act of decoding letters to words to sentences authorizes them to interpret, a grave error to More's mind. As precedent, More invokes Jerome who "sheweth playnly y^t they shall haue euyll prefe therein / that wyl reken them selfe to vnderstande [scripture] by themselfe without a reder."¹⁴² This point receives additional emphasis in the form of a marginal notation: "*Holy scripture can not be vnderstanded without a reader.*" Here More excludes these "comon ley people" from the word "reder." They are not themselves "reders;" they may know what the words say, but they cannot be fully trusted with their *sentence* alone. Individuals, but especially lay readers, cannot "vnderstande [scripture] by themselfe," reading in isolation; they need an intermediary "reader," an expert interpreter (whether text or person) who is part of the larger interpretive community of the Church. In this moment, the lay reader is excluded from the very word "reader." Since scripture *is* difficult, even for the well-trained, so "far more vnable must [the untrained] nedys be / that boldely wyl vpon the fyrst redyng bycause he knoweth the wordys / take vpon hym therfore to teche other men the sentence . . ."¹⁴³ Here, More again imagines a type of literacy in which the layman is able to decode the words of the text, but he presents a gulf between this decoding and real reading which would lead to the *sentence*. More uses St. Paul as another precedent for this division between reader and interpreter. More reminds the Messenger that St. Paul "in dyuers of his epystles sayth / god hath by his holy spyryte so instytute & ordeyned his chyrch / y^t he wyl haue some reders and some herers / some techers & som lerners / we do playnly peruerte & tourne vp so downe y^e ryght order of Crystes chyrch / whan y^e one parte medleth with y^e others offyce."¹⁴⁴ Mere literacy does not transform the hearer/learner into the reader/teacher and such presumptuous pride is a disorderly perversion that will "tourne vp so downe y^e ryght order." As with

¹³⁹ More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 333/29-34.

¹⁴⁰ It is worth noting that here and elsewhere in the *Dialogue*, More includes himself (perhaps a bit disingenuously) as one of the imperfect lay readers.

¹⁴¹ More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 333/29-334/8.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 334/12-15.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 335/11-18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 334/17-23.

the example of Moses on Mount Sinai, More makes explicit here the importance of the social order appointed by God.

More imagines the scene of social disorder as one where the inexperienced, reckless “chammers” devour scripture as they devour their suppers, thus invoking the earlier metaphors of consumption. He writes:

And thus in these matters yf the comen people myght be bolde to cham it as ye say and to dyspute it / than sholde ye haue the more blynde y^e more bolde / the more ignoraunt the more besy / the lesse wyt the more inquysytyfe / the more fole the more talkatyfe of great doutys and hygh questyons of holy scrypture and of goddes great and secrete mysteryes / and thys not soberly of any good affeccyon / but presumptuously and vnreuerently at mete and at mele. And there whan the wyne were in and the wytte out / wolde they take vppon them with folyshe wordys and blasphemye to handle holy scrypture in more homely maner than a songe of Robyn hode.¹⁴⁵

More here depicts lay interpreting of scripture as synonymous with the scene of social disorder. To be sure, to be “blynde” and “ignoraunt” is not a positive thing, but it only becomes impious and shameful if it is disordered by being “bolde” and “besy.” The scene of conviviality in the tavern is not in itself a bad thing, as More’s use of merry tales elsewhere in the *Dialogue* suggests. (Indeed, convivial eating helps structure the *Dialogue*.) Nor are stories of Robin Hood bad in themselves, they are merely worrisome as a pattern for irreverent interactions with scripture. The happy ruckus of a tavern and its lowborn inhabitants are fit for debating Robin Hood, not scripture. It is a question of decorum and *degre*. More concludes, “And therefore as I say foresothe I can in noo wyse agree with you that it were **mete** for men vnlearned to be busy with the chammynge of holy scrypture / but to haue yt chammed vnto them.”¹⁴⁶ More and the Messenger themselves go immediately to their own meal after this section of the *Dialogue* and More uses their breaks for meals as a sign of their convivial discussion.¹⁴⁷ Their serious theological discussions, however, do not take place *while* they are eating. They are wise and reverent enough to keep their shared meals apart from these serious discussions.

The impious possibilities of vernacular scripture, however, are not sufficient to outlaw it entirely. To protect unlearned readers from error and impiety, More proposes a humble mode of reading in which the lay reader does not struggle with the complexities of scripture, but rather encounters it as a meditative, uninterpretive act of devotion. More writes:

. . .yf we wolde no further medle therewith but well and deuotly rede it / and in that / that is playne and euydent as goddes commaundementes and his holy counsyls endeuoure our selfe to folowe wyth helpe of his grace asked therevnto / and in his greate and merueylouse myracles consyder hys godhed / and in his lowly

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 335/21-31.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 337/2-4. Though here used in the sense of ‘fitting or proper,’ the juxtaposition of ‘mete’ and ‘chamming’ suggests also a pun on “meat” which More (or his typesetter) consistently spells “mete.” This pun seems all the more likely considering the recurring and distasteful possibility that unlearned readers will discuss scripture at their “mete.”

¹⁴⁷ More also closes the *Dialogue* with a similar moment, writing: “And this prayer quod I seruyng vs for grace / let vs nowe syt downe to dyner. Which we dyd. And after dyner departed he home towarde you / and I to the courte” (435/28-31). This conclusion draws attention to the centrality of eating in the dialogue, both as a source of metaphor and as an illustration of cordial discourse and continued bonds of fellowship; it also helps to remind the reader in closing of the author’s privileged position as the King’s close advisor. His reminder that he goes “to the courte” appears just above the official “Cum priuilegio regali.”

byrthe / his godly lyfe / and hys bytter passyon / exercyse our selfe
 in suche medytacyons / prayour / and vertues / as the matter shall
 mynyster vs occasyon / **knowledgyng our owne ignoraunce**
 where we fynde a doute / and therein lenynge to the faythe of the
 chyrche / wrestle with no suche texte as myght brynge vs in a doute
 and werestye of any of those artycles wherein euery good crysten
 man is clere / by this maner of redynge can no man nor woman take
 hurte in holy scrypture.”¹⁴⁸

Ignorance is not shameful so long as readers know their own ignorance and “lean to” the faith of the Church. Some parts of the scripture—the commandments, miracles, and stories of Christ’s life—are better suited to simple readers and, even with the challenging portions, no reader can “take hurte” if she remembers the creed and relies on the Church for interpretation.¹⁴⁹

More’s vision of scripture is a broadly inclusive though unequal one. More asserts that: “These boke are tempred by the secrete counsayle of the holy goost so playne and symple / that euery man may fynde in them that he maye perceyue. And yet so hygge agayne and so harde / that no man is there so connyng / but he may fynde in them thynges farre aboute his reche / farre to profoude to perce vnto.”¹⁵⁰ Scripture is at once too hard for the most learned, yet simple enough for even the most humble. These implied examples of solitary readers are necessarily insufficient, however. All readers need the Church, regardless of their *degree*. The need to rely on Church interpretation is certainly a question of social order, but it is also (as More demonstrates elsewhere) a practical one necessitated by the fact that scripture is *difficult*. More invites the unlearned reader to participate in the scripture, but only to encounter it as an act of devotion, as humble worshippers *not* readers and interpreters.

On the one hand, More’s vision of reading is rooted in the demand to submit to institutional authority; on the other, it is a reassurance that readers can have faith in the church to interpret correctly and that their own abilities in this area have no bearing on salvation. Having to refute Tyndale forces More to double down on authority as the limiting factor, the cordon around communality, consent, and linguistic play. More builds a wall of authority around interpretation—anything goes until the Church says it doesn’t. This is at once a permissive space and an entirely authoritarian one.

III

William Tyndale’s insistence that scripture is plain is intimately connected to his belief in solitary and literal meaning; More’s insistence that scripture is difficult is intimately connected to his belief in the manifold allegorical senses of scripture. More rejects Tyndale’s insistence on singular literal meaning as a perverse break with long-standing Church tradition, but also as an absurd impossibility in the face of textual complexity. More points out that Protestants necessarily continue to read and write figuratively and, at various points, it is the Catholics who maintain the strict literal sense. For More, scripture is necessarily mediated and its meaning unfolds through communal and consensual labor over time. The church is made up of myriad consenting bodies cooperating together; so too, scripture can embrace multiple simultaneous readings. To insist on a single, literal

¹⁴⁸ More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 335/38-336. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁹ David Scott Kastan, “‘The Noyse of the New Bible’: Reform and Reaction in Henrician England,” in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Debora K Shuger and Claire McEachern (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59.

¹⁵⁰ More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 144/12-7.

sense is perversely authoritarian. He attacks Tyndale's solitary vision of meaning and insists that meaning—in texts and in individual words themselves—is like the Church itself: communal, consensual, and constantly evolving.

More's most direct engagement with literal and allegorical meaning comes in *The Confutation* when More responds quote by quote to the entire text of Tyndale's *Answer*. Tyndale attacks allegory with vividly metaphorical language, writing that the priests have used allegory to close the gates of heaven and “haue made theyr own belyes the dore” so that “throw theyr belyes muste thou crepe, and there leue all thy fatte behynde the.”¹⁵¹ In his response, More first engages Tyndale's use of figurative language, then his accusation of clerical abuse, and last his hermeneutic claims. More appropriates Tyndale's metaphor with a literalizing flight of fancy, writing:

as for hys crepyng thorow fokes belyes, wherof he so sore
complayneth: I wolde he had declared how he crepte in, and into
whose mouth he crepte, and by what crafte he scaped the teeth for
bytyng, and how longe he lay in the bely, and howe he gate downe
thorow the smale guttes, and in the crepyng oute what stykkyng his
face founde byneth, & how myche grece he lefte there behynde hym
/ & for the bely grece that he lefte behynde hym, whyther he
brought oute any gutte grece with hym.¹⁵²

In a satirical voice reminiscent of More in *Utopia*, he expands Tyndale's metaphor into an absurdly literalized conceit. He imagines in comic grotesque what it might mean to creep literally through the priests' bellies, an exercise that, incidentally, allows him to depict Tyndale covered in shit. Here More ridicules Tyndale's insistence on the literal sense by turning his own metaphor against him. It is not enough to declare Tyndale's hermeneutics erroneous; More must enact that argument as viscerally as possible with his style as well. After enacting this critique, More takes a moment to ridicule and reject Tyndale's claims about priestly greed; only then does he delve into the literal and figurative.¹⁵³

Whereas Tyndale insists on successive singular meaning, More embraces proliferation and simultaneity of meanings in keeping with the patristic authors.¹⁵⁴ More writes that Tyndale “sayeth that the clergy vseth to dystroye the lyterall sense of the scripture with false fayned allegoryes / this is falsely sayd of hym. For the allegorye neyther destroyeth nor letteth the lyterall sense / but ye lyterall sense **standeth whole bysyde.**”¹⁵⁵ More's construction here inverts what we might expect as the natural order, in which the literal is the stable and central locus of meaning to which the allegorical stands to the side.¹⁵⁶ For Tyndale, there is only the literal sense and, for the patristic writers, the literal is the foundational sense on which the others are built. In *Confutation*, however,

¹⁵¹ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:634/25-6.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 8:634/29-36.

¹⁵³ Although Lewis' point about the way Tyndale controls the structure of *Confutation* is apt in some ways, even within this larger structural constraint, the text remains very much in More's control. He structures his response to Tyndale's assertions about the literal sense first as a playful satire, then addresses the allegations of clerical greed, and only then explicitly treats the question of literal versus allegorical interpretation. Though he responds to Tyndale quote by quote, More remains in control of the emphasis and structure of his response. Even More's explicit account of literal and figurative reading is secondary structurally to his defense of the Church's integrity.

¹⁵⁴ Richard C. Marius, “Thomas More's View of the Church,” in *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, ed. Louis A. Schuster et al., vol. 8.1-3, *The Complete* (New Haven, CT; London, England: Yale University Press, 1973), 1354.

¹⁵⁵ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:635/22-5. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁶ For more, see: Brian Cummings, “Literally Speaking; Or, the Literal from Augustine to Lacan,” *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* 21 (1998): 200–226, doi:10.3366/para.1998.0004; Paul De Man, “The Epistemology of Metaphor,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 13–30.

More presents both the literal and the allegorical as whole, mutually compatible, yet potentially distinct loci of meaning. It is the allegory that is central and the literal that is beside it, not the other way around. In fact, More not only insists on the possibility of simultaneous literal and allegorical meaning, but also on their potential independence. He writes, for example, that “our sauour hym self somtyme spake his wordes in such wyse, that the letter had **none other sense** then mysteryes & allegoryes / as comenly all his parables be.”¹⁵⁷ More thus asserts that there can be solitary, non-literal meaning. If the true sense here is located in the allegorical, then the literal is nonsense. This is a provocative inversion of Tyndale’s insistence that all sense is literal. For Tyndale, meaning is always the literal sense; for More, sometimes meaning is purely allegorical. They might read a parable the same way, but Tyndale would call its meaning “literal” while More would call its meaning “allegorical.” They have labeled *meaning* with different terms.

Overall, More bases his defense of allegoresis on a patristic understanding of the universe as text with God as its author. God writes all events, objects, geography, etc and gives authorial intent to myriad correspondences which are therefore legible.¹⁵⁸ In keeping with this tradition, More describes God as the divine author of scripture’s events, its literal sense, and the allegories which those with “grace to fynde” them add to the communal reading of scripture. Theologically, this is an entirely familiar concept, but More’s description of it prioritizes the pressing concerns of his debate with Tyndale: multiplicity, mediation, and development over time. More writes that:

“Luther and Tyndale wolde haue all allegoryes and all other senses taken awaye, sauynge the lytterall sense alone. But god whose **plenuouse** spyryte **endyghted** the scrypture, foresaw full well hym selfe that **many** godly allegories holy men sholde by hys inspyracyon **at dyuers tymes** draw out therof. And [our sauour hym self] . . . expowned some [of his parables] him self & some he expowned not, but hath left them to be expowned by holy doctours **after hys deth** / and some of them hath he holpen **dyuerse** to expoune **dyuersly**, as his high wysdome saw that dyuers goode frute sholde folowe and ensew theruppon. . . .¹⁵⁹

More is explicit here and elsewhere about how “plenuous” and “dyuerse” divinely inspired allegories can be and that these interpretations develop and grow over time. In More’s description of patristic hermeneutics, he places special emphasis on multiplicity and human labor. More’s use of the verb “endyghted,” frequently repeated in the larger passage, is particularly significant since it carries both the authorial connotation of “to put into words, compose (a poem, tale, speech, etc.); to give a literary or rhetorical form to” and the mediated connotation of “dictate.”¹⁶⁰ God is both author and dictator of allegories, as God is both author and dictator of scripture itself. God’s authorship of text and its interpretation is mediated by human labor. For More our relationship to scripture is always mediated. It is fitting and right that the Church mediate scripture; it does so by necessity and always has. The holy consensus of the Church determines what is scripture and what is an authorized reading of it. Protestant attempts to efface this mediation are anathema to More as it also effaces human involvement. He emphasizes the developmental nature of interpretation and the role the

¹⁵⁷ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:635/35-636/1. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁸ As Marius notes, More’s exegesis is most indebted to the fathers, and he makes essentially no use of Erasmus’ Biblical commentary or those of his other Catholic humanist peers. See: Marius, “Thomas More’s View of the Church,” 1351–63.

¹⁵⁹ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:635/31-636/5. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁰ “Indite, v.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed April 23, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/94620>.

humanity plays in this development—the “holy men” and “holy doctors,” the authorized readers. He adds:

[God] hym selfe both foresaw the frute [allegories], and deuysed those textes in suche wyse also, that thorow **good folkes labour** wyth the swete warmth of his owne inspyracyon, such holsome frute shold plentuously sprynge therof.”¹⁶¹

More is committed to the idea of man’s capacity for goodness which he believes Tyndale’s doctrines undermine and to the notion of “good folkes labour” or “good works” which Luther and Tyndale explicitly reject. Authorized allegories, like scripture, are inspired by God and mediated by the Church; its interpretation is a divinely inspired, collective process evolving over Church history. For More, the correct reading of scripture is a communal, consensual work which unfolds gradually over time as God’s spirit inspires the Church.

More’s hermeneutics in *Confutation* are consistent with the less explicit treatment of hermeneutics of the *Dialogue*. In *Dialogue* too, More insists on the necessity of mediation and attacks Protestant willingness to read allegorically when it benefits them. Although Tyndale claims the scripture “hath no sense but the literal sense” which the Church has “locked [] vp,” More points out that in fact Tyndale and his followers rely on figurative readings and the Catholics have by no means abandoned the literal. In *Dialogue*, the Messenger’s wrongheaded figurative reading seeks to efface the mediation of scripture and once again overlooks logical order in time.

The Messenger reads Christ’s words too figuratively, neglecting the literal sense and obscuring the realities of scriptural mediation. The Messenger argues that Christ’s promise to be with his followers now and forever is fulfilled by the continued presence of the scriptures. He authorizes this reading with a precedent in the Old Testament: just as Abraham “answered the ryche man in hell sayenge they haue Moyses and the prophetes / not meanyng that they had them all at that tyme present with them / but onely that they had theyr bokys.”¹⁶² Here Moses is metonymy for what he wrote and the Messenger imagines Christ thinking of himself with the same textual metonymy. More objects to the Messenger’s analogy, answering that:

“Cryst lefte neuer a booke behynde hym of his owne makynge / as Moyses dyd and the prophetes . . . yf he had spoken and mente of scripture / he wolde haue sayd that they sholde haue with them styll his euangelystes and wryters of his gospels as Abraham sayd they haue Moyses and the prophetes / whiche were the wryters of the bokes that the Iewes had.”¹⁶³

More points out the non-correspondence of the Messenger’s analogy: Moses was a writer here on earth, but Christ was not. Moses wrote a book to leave behind him, whereas Christ built a Church to leave behind him. The Messenger’s incorrect parallel and over-allegorizing seeks to eradicate the mediation of scripture, conflating divine inspiration with divine authorship and removing human mediation.

More also raises a temporal objection to the Messenger’s reading: “Cryst also sayd / I am with you tyll the ende of the worlde / not I shall be / but I am.”¹⁶⁴ More points out that this is particularly significant since “I am” is the name God gives to Moses and is a defining part of his godhead, which is without beginning or end.¹⁶⁵ This refutes the Messenger’s analogy since “he was

¹⁶¹ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:637/36-638/2. Emphasis added.

¹⁶² More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 114/11-4.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 114/32-115/3.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 115/3-5.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 115/5-11.

not in his holy scrypture / for that had begynnyng. And at those wordes spoken / was not yet all wrytten. For of the chefe parte which is the newe testament / there was yet at y^e tyme neuer one worde wrytten.”¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Christ’s promise that his words would never pass away “mente not that of his holy scrypture in wrytynge there sholde neuer a iote be lost / of whiche some partes be all redy lost / more peradventure then we can tell of. And of that we haue the bokes in some parte corrupted with mysse wrytynge.”¹⁶⁷ For More the imperfections caused by scripture’s necessary mediation make the Protestant insistence on it as sole repository of truth both impossible and absurd. They fetishize the text just as they accuse their enemies of fetishizing and venerating images. Furthermore, as More argues in chapter thirty, the Church determines what is scripture: “sauing the authoryte of the chyrche / menne coulde not knowe what [is] scrypture.”¹⁶⁸ More uses the literal sense against the Messenger’s over-allegorizing.

Yet elsewhere in *Dialogue*, the Messenger repeatedly echoes one of Tyndale’s crucial complaints about allegory: that it is arbitrary. As Tyndale writes, “allegories which euery man maye fayne at his pleasure can proue nothyng.”¹⁶⁹ More’s account of language and signification draws attention to language itself as arbitrary and meaning as derived only through consent and consensus. Stable, isolated, literal meaning is a fiction. More points out the non-correspondence of words and their referents and the arbitrary construction of their meaning. He writes, “And yet all these names spoken / and all these wordes wrytten / be no naturall synges or ymages but onely made by consent and agrement of men / to betoken and sygnyfye suche thyng.”¹⁷⁰ More’s conception of linguistic meaning is parallel to his conception of the church, emphasizing the necessity of consent and consensus. More’s description of language also opens the question of where might one situate the “literal” in an arbitrary system of signs by consensus. No sound, word, or sentence has a stable, unassailable literal sense that can transcend signification by consent and consensus. To strip language of these things is to strip it of meaning and descend into nonsense.

More demonstrates the necessity of consensus for language in an unusual foray into “merry tales” in *Confutation*. He writes that these new heretics are like the Lollards who “put a pygge in to the water, on good frydaye / and sayd go in pygge and come oute pyke / and so when they had chaunged the name, they toke yt for fyshe and ete yt.”¹⁷¹ Here, in a way similar to Tyndale’s “myscheuous” translation, the small number of deluded heretics manipulate language to their own ends, making what is—to any sensible English speaker—a nonsensical claim. Here the Lollards suppose that they are performing some sort of linguistic magic as though words themselves confer meaning and substance. The meaning of “pygge” and “pyke” are “no naturall synges” and could just as easily be inverted, except for the “consent and agrement of men / to betoken and sygnyfye suche thyng.”¹⁷² Lacking the common consent and consensus, their actions are humorous nonsense.¹⁷³

More emphasizes the consent and consensus of meaning once more in attacking Tyndale’s translation, particularly objecting to Tyndale replacing “church” with “congregation,” “priest” with

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 115/12-15.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 115/20-5.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 179/11-2.

¹⁶⁹ Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 3:92/8-9.

¹⁷⁰ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:46/26-29.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 8:122/1-6.

¹⁷² Ibid., 8:46/26-9.

¹⁷³ Of course, the Lollards’ actions offer a critique of both unnecessary dietary restrictions and the doctrine of transubstantiation, depicting it as absurd nonsense. More’s account of them, however, reads them as absurdly deluded and turns their critique back on them.

“senior,” and “charity” with “love.”¹⁷⁴ Though of course More objects to the doctrinal implications of these changes, he criticizes Tyndale explicitly for linguistic usage rather than dogma.¹⁷⁵ Tyndale defies common usage, unmooring meaning with his strange coinages, and descending towards nonsense. More objects that “in our englysshe tonge this worde senyor sygnyfyeth no thyng at all / but is a frenche worde vsed in englysshe more than halfe in mockage / whan one wyll call another my lorde in scorne.”¹⁷⁶ To More, Tyndale’s translation manipulates the text with coinages against the common consent and seeks to impose new theology through new words “myscheuously” mistranslated.

Yet More here as elsewhere overlooks—or refuses to recognize—the continuities between his position and Tyndale’s. Tyndale too realizes that consensus determines the meanings of words and symbols. His description in the *Answer* overlaps with More’s: “A signe ys no sygne vn to him that vnderstondeth nought therby: as a speche is no speche vn to hym that vnderstondeth it not.”¹⁷⁷ This non-correspondence of words and meaning is a point Tyndale emphasizes in describing his translation. Tyndale concludes his account of “repentance or (as they used) penance” by writing, “Wherefore now, whether ye call this *metanoia*, repentance, conversion or turning again to God, either amending and etc. or whether ye say repent, be converted, turn to God, amend your living or what ye lust, I am content so ye understand what is meant thereby, as I have now declared.”¹⁷⁸ Tyndale is indifferent to the word itself so long as they understand the doctrine he has exhaustively enumerated.

Both More and Tyndale claim their vision of linguistic and hermeneutic clarity is the only wholesome possibility. Their practices, however, all too easily blend into one another: they share the same basic understanding of language and meaning; they are both committed Humanists who scorn Scholastic quibbling; they both advocate a cautious method of vernacular lay reading that depends on doctrinal instruction; and, though under different names, they both embrace a capacious, flexible “sense” that can accommodate their doctrinal readings. Ultimately, they are divided more by faith than logic, something Tyndale acknowledges explicitly: “And thus as M. More feleth that the pope is holy church / I fele that he is antichriste. And as my felynge can be no proffe to him / no moare can his with all his capiuating his wittes to beleue phantasyes be vn to me. Wherefore if he aue no nother probacion to proue that the pope is holy church then that his hert so agreeth vn to his lernynge / he ought of no right to compel me with swerde vn to his secte.”¹⁷⁹ Over the ensuing decades, sect and sword change hands, but the threat of violence—one unresponsive to reason or reading—haunts England and its poetry. The new English theological vernacular that More and Tyndale produced in the 1520s and 1530s yielded an uncertain interpretive environment that nevertheless violently insisted on certainty.

The Offense of Poesy

Writers in the early Reformation inherited a long tradition of debates about the morality of poetry, from antiquity through the middle ages. To condemn poetry and literature for an array of vices is by no means novel in the sixteenth century; however, as figures like More and Tyndale

¹⁷⁴ Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 192–93; Evan Gurney, “Thomas More and the Problem of Charity,” *Renaissance Studies* 26, no. 2 (April 2012): 197–217, doi:10.1111/j.1477-4658.2011.00718.x.

¹⁷⁵ Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 192; Hosington, “Thomas More’s Views on Language and Translation and Their Place in the Classical and Humanist Tradition.”

¹⁷⁶ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 8:286/14–7.

¹⁷⁷ Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 3:176/27–9.

¹⁷⁸ Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, 10.

¹⁷⁹ Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 3:144/12–9.

created innovations in vernacular theology, “poetry” acquired new polemical meanings. Tyndale uses “poetry” as a term of condemnation, synonymous with lies—a charge More is poorly equipped to combat. Although opinions on literature and poetry were heterogeneous across confessional divides, this new and darker sense of poetry as a term of contested theology helps to bring early Reformation hermeneutics into dialogue with the literary texts that make up the following chapters of this study.

Tyndale’s hostility to “poetry” is almost as infamous as his hostility to allegory and is similarly entwined with his depiction of theological falsehood. Tyndale condemns the clergy for controlling access to scripture while making no attempt to suppress secular literature. Tyndale takes this as evidence of the clergy’s indifference to the care of souls: “they permit and suffer you to read Robin Hood and Bevis of Hampton, Hercules, Hector and Troilus with a thousand histories and fables of love and wantonness and of ribaldry as filthy as heart can think, to corrupt the minds of you withal, clean contrary to the doctrine of Christ and his apostles.”¹⁸⁰ Courtly love and secular romance is particularly vilified for its “wantonness,” yet also perhaps for its recontextualized use of religious terms like “grace.” Tyndale’s objections to poetry, however, are more theologically inflected than mere disapproval of secular poetry’s content.

Tyndale accuses Catholics of failing to preserve the necessary distinction between scripture and literature: “Yea thou shalt find enough that will preach Christ, and prove whatsoever point of the faith thou wilt, as well out of a fable of Ovid or any other poet, as out of Saint John’s gospel or Paul’s Epistles.”¹⁸¹ Catholics have marginalized the literal sense of scripture so completely that they can even replace it with another text entirely, in this case filthy, pagan poetry; their hermeneutics are so arbitrary that the text is literally irrelevant. The association between poetry and misinterpretation here is made more explicit elsewhere in Tyndale’s writing as he condemns the veneration of saints as “the poetry which ye [Catholics] haue fayned / and not true doctrine”¹⁸² and writes that “because [purgatory] is not gods worde ner like godis doctrine / I think it no damnable synne to beleue it poetrie.”¹⁸³ Poetry is not merely fiction but lies. The language of poetry—the fictive, the imaginative, the figurative—is grafted onto Reformation language of misbelief, deceit, and idolatry.

Since Tyndale uses “poetry” and “lie” interchangeably, More’s status as poet—or more precisely, creator of *fiction*—is unsurprisingly the subject of frequent attack. To Tyndale’s mind, More is guilty of both types of poetry: lying Catholic doctrine and imaginative writing. The one helps to condemn the other. The fictionalized framework of More’s *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* is the first thing Tyndale attacks in his *Answer*: “In the first Chapter to beginne the boke with al / to bringe you goodlucke and to geue you a saye or a taste what trueth shall folowe / he fayneth a letter sent from no man” and “Where vnto Master More answereth vnder the name of / quod he” [i.e. writing as both voices in the *Dialogue*].¹⁸⁴ Tyndale offers More’s fictionalized framework in the *Dialogue* as evidence of his doctrinal lies and refers to both as “Master Mores deceytfull poetrye.”¹⁸⁵ “They dyd well to chose a poete to be their defender,” Tyndale writes and, when words apparently fail him, he merely exclaims, “O poete with out shame.”¹⁸⁶ Poetry is, Tyndale suggests mockingly, habit-forming and infectious: “How be it M. More hath so longe vsed hys figures of poetrie / that (I suppose) when he erreth most / he now by the reason of a longe custome / belieueth him selfe / that he saith most true.”¹⁸⁷ More’s poetry is both a cause and a sign of his corruption.

¹⁸⁰ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 24.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁸² Tyndale, *An Answere Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 3:130/25-8.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3:120/30-32.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:79/3-5; 147/14-5.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:122/2.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:158/24; 188/30.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:14/6-13.

This condemnation of poetry and More as poet is frequent and straightforward; however, in Tyndale's attempts to typologize More as Judas, More's literary connections are involved in a seemingly conflicting manner. Tyndale's typologizing of More as Judas does more than offer another example of Tyndale's propensity for hostile allegorizing; it becomes closely entwined with his condemnation of secular literature and poetry, and it ultimately reveals his complex and conflicted relationship with literature, paralleling and overlapping his complex and conflicted relationship with allegory itself. In *Answer*, Tyndale mocks More's friendship with "hys derelynge Erasmus" who "made Moria in his housse," meaning he composed *In Praise of Folly* there.¹⁸⁸ Tyndale adds, "Which boke [*Praise of Folly*] if were in englishe / then shulde euery man se / how that he then was ferre other wise minded than he nowe writeth."¹⁸⁹ Though the most obvious referent for "he" is Erasmus himself, the construction suggests More as well. Tyndale then continues to type More as Judas:

But verelie I thinke that as Iudas betraid not christ for any loue that he had vnto the hie prestes / scribes and phareses / but only to come by that wherfore he thirsted: euen so M. More (as there are tokens evident) wrote not these bokes [the polemics] for any affeccyon that he bare vnto the spiritualtie or vnto the opinions which he so barelie defendeth / but to obtayne only that which he was an hongred fore.¹⁹⁰

Here Tyndale depicts More as Judas, motivated by gold to do the bidding of the clergy, a reference to the fact that Bishop Tunstall commissioned the reluctant More to enter the polemic fray; however, it also suggests that More is specifically a betrayer. Tyndale later makes this point more explicitly in the *Commentaries*, writing that More "knew the truth and for covetousness forsook it again" and that "covetousness blinded the eyes of that gleering fox more and more, and hardened his heart against the truth, with the confidence of his painted poetry, babbling eloquence, and juggling arguments of subtle sophistry, grounded on his unwritten verities, as true and authentic as his story of Utopia."¹⁹¹ That Tyndale supposed More once "knew the truth" is deeply startling.

In both these examples of More typologized as Judas, Tyndale mentions not only More's greed, but also his association with humanist literary texts: Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* and More's own *Utopia*. By invoking them here, it seems that More's *Utopia*, in conjunction with his relationship with Erasmus and *Praise of Folly*, is the very thing which leads Tyndale to suppose he was once "ferre other wise minded." Ideologically, *Folly* is closely aligned with the reformer's preoccupations: condemnation of superstitious medieval religious practice, indulgences, church hypocrisy, and general anti-clericalism, while *Utopia*'s satire which seems to promote religious freedom, priestly marriage, and the abolition of private property might appeal to Tyndale as well. If Tyndale is using *Utopia* in this manner, however, he commits "a crude form of the error which finds in the *Utopia* a liberalism inconsistent with More's later career."¹⁹² *Utopia* is neither revolutionary nor, to be sure, proto-Protestant.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 3:14/28.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 3:14/28-30.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 3:14/24-15/6.

¹⁹¹ William Tyndale and Rev. Henry Walter, *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of the Holy Scriptures, Together with the Practice of Prelates*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 100.

¹⁹² Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, 170.

¹⁹³ On the one hand, *Utopia* shows a world at ease with an authoritarianism in which there is a certain freedom of thought, with lines that cannot be crossed. But whereas there's little space for play in *Utopia*, *Utopia* itself is an act of play—a satirical semi-serious playful text written for a small circle of wits and friends. The polemics contain both elements of this vision of More.

If Tyndale takes *Utopia* as proof More “once knew truth,” it is also the very work which Tyndale conflates with lies and helps Tyndale to label More derisively as “poet.” Even in this passage, he uses *Utopia* to condemn More’s theology as fictive, his doctrines “as true and authentic as his story of Utopia.” What then is the status of right-thinking literary texts? Are they damnable lies—always “painted poetry?” Or, can a work like *Piers Plowman*, itself an allegory and much beloved of Protestants, be one of those “similitudes” which “leaveth behind him as it were a sting to prick him forward and to awake him with all?”¹⁹⁴ Tyndale offers this rather grim assessment in *Parable of Wicked Mammon*: “It be commeth not then the lordes servaunte to use raylynge rymes, but goddes worde which is the right weapon to slay sinne, vice and all inequitie.”¹⁹⁵ Tyndale gives a far more negative assessment of the literary than his contemporary John Bale, who made literary propaganda an essential tool of Reformation. By involving both allegory and poetry in the discourse of theological deceit, Tyndale helps solidify a precedent which continues to haunt subsequent writers. It is easy to hear echoes of Tyndale’s thought when Spenser worries in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh that, “to some . . . this Methode [of allegory] will seeme displeasaunt, [and they] had rather haue good discipline deliuered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they vse, then thus cloudily enwrapped in Allegoricall deuises.”¹⁹⁶

Like Tyndale, More also worries about the potential conflation of scripture with mere literature, however, it is not the learned clergy he imagines may be guilty. More expresses concern that, engaging with vernacular scripture:

“the more fole [will be] the more talkatyfe of great doutys and hygh questyons of holy scrypture and of goddes great and secrete mysteres / and thys not soberly of any good affeccyon / but presumptuously and vnreuerently at mete and at mele. And there whan the wyne were in and the wytte out / wolde they take vppon them with folyshe wordys and blasphemye to handle holy scrypture in more homely maner than a songe of Robyn hode.”¹⁹⁷

The “songe of Robyn Hode” is for More neither lie nor deception and poses no threat in itself, but it offers a worrisome example of the laity’s possible interpretive practice. Their simple understanding of Robin Hood is the worrisome pattern by which they may read scripture, debating it irreverently at their “pot parliaments” in alehouses or at dinner.

In his battle with Tyndale, More’s acclaim as a literary figure continues to dog his moral reputation—something More comments on in the *Dialogue*. The Messenger affirms that he trusts “More’s” honesty, but adds, “But ye vse (my mayster sayth to loke so sadly whan ye mene merely / y^t many tymes men doubtte whyther ye speke in sporte / whan ye mene good earnest.”¹⁹⁸ The danger is that after writing fiction or satire, one’s sincerity is always under attack. Indeed, Tyndale attacks More constantly on this premise. Early in More’s polemical career, however, he still finds a productive and even redemptive potential in fictions and “poetry.”

In *Dialogue*, More uses the layers of fiction to create a safe space for discussions of heterodox ideas—sometimes, fiction is neither lies nor harmless play, it is an active social good. The enabling fiction of the *Dialogue* has two parts. Firstly, the hypothetical messenger cannot be attached to any specific young man in Henry’s realm. More importantly, however, is the space More creates within the *Dialogue*. Like the use of *repetitio*, the Messenger’s dodging becomes a running joke. When More

¹⁹⁴ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159.

¹⁹⁵ Tyndale, *STC* / 24457, 6.

¹⁹⁶ Edmund Spenser and A. C. Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene* (London; New York: Longman, 1977), 22–23.

¹⁹⁷ More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 335/25–36.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68/35–69/2.

responds to the Messenger's doubts about miracles saying "which thyng . . . ye seme to impugne," the Messenger says, "Nay syr . . . I pray you take me not so as though that *I* dyd impugne it / but as I shewed you before / I rehersed you what I have herde *some other* say." At another point the Messenger interrupts More with "Nay . . . where *they* say" to which More replies, "Well . . . so be it, where *they* say. For here ever my tonge tryppeth." More plays along, but makes something of a joke of it. It isn't a lie exactly, or not a very good one—the Messenger hasn't fooled More—and More makes it clear that they both know what is really going on. But to have the sort of conversation they have, their mutual orthodoxy is an enabling fiction.¹⁹⁹ This is, in a sense, serious play. More uses the repetition of these moments to humorous effect, but the need for this enabling fiction is quite serious: it is the difference between conversation and interrogation. This fiction is necessary, productive, and even redemptive—the enabling fiction creates the space in which More, by bringing the Messenger (like his own son-in-law, Roper) back to the true faith, is in fact *redemptive*.

The space for fiction, however, appears to be shrinking. Under pressure from Tyndale, More soon abandons the dialogue form, and it is clear there is little he would not sacrifice to turn the tide of heresy, his own life and literature included. In *Confutation*, More says he would happily see the very texts Tyndale mentions—Erasmus's *Moria* and More's *Utopia*—consigned to the flame and "would help to burn them both with [his] own hands."²⁰⁰ For More, the literary has been successfully implicated in the rise of heresy. Though poesy and fiction will find other defenders, on both sides of the confessional divide, these new dangers and associations cast a long shadow, extending from Wyatt's poetry to Shakespeare's stage.

¹⁹⁹ Duffy, "The Comen Knowen Multytude of Crysten Men": A Dialogue Concerning Heresies and the Defence of Christendom," 193–94.

²⁰⁰ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:177/15. That More does not actually burn either text or try to suggests that he saw such action as futile; it is too late to stem the tide by burning these books. Ultimately poetry—or rather, fiction—is involved but not explicitly to blame. In the end, More would rather burn Tyndale and associates than *Utopia* or *In Praise of Folly*.

Chapter Two

“Thy Word Stable”: Sir Thomas Wyatt’s Hermeneutic Longing and the Reformation

Throughout the world, if it were sought,
Fair words enough a man shall find.
They be good cheap; they cost right naught;
Their substance is but only wind.
But well to say and so to mean—
That sweet accord is seldom seen.
—Wyatt Epigraph LXX

While imprisoned in the Tower of London on charges of treason in 1541, Sir Thomas Wyatt wrote of the charges, “these be the ii markes wheare vnto myne accusors directe all ther shott of eloquence—A dede and a saying.”²⁰¹ The deed Wyatt was accused of was that he “hade intelligens with the kinges rebell and traytor, Pole,” while the “sayenge” was “that same Wiatt, beinge allso Imbassadoure, maliciously, falcely and traytoursly said that he feryd that the kinge shulde be caste owte of a Cartes arse and that by goddis bloude yf he were so, he were well served, and he wolde he were so.”²⁰² Although collaborating with a convicted traitor would seem the more deadly accusation, in the document Wyatt prepared for his defense he treats the “dede” and the “sayenge” with comparable gravity. In making his case, Wyatt deconstructs the metaphor, claims his accusers have impersonated his style, and invokes the subtle, fragile nature of words and interpretation. Wyatt points out “yt is a smale thyng in alteringe of one syllable ether with penne or worde that may mayk in the conceavinge of the truthe myche matter for error” and that even “the settinge of the wordes one in an others place may mayke greate dyfferaunce, tho the wordes were all one – as ‘a myll horse’ and ‘a horse myll’.”²⁰³ Both the charges against Wyatt and his defense speak to the intense danger posed by words in the deadly years after Henry’s split with Rome; a charge of treason may hinge on how to interpret a folksy metaphor, giving a figure of speech power over life and death.

The subtle variations in diction and syntax Wyatt describes in his *Defense*, however, had not only political but also theological implications, holding the threat of burning as well as beheading. In the vitriolic polemical battle of Thomas More and William Tyndale to which Wyatt bore witness, both claimed that, as Wyatt puts it, the “alteringe of one syllable” did indeed “mayk in the conceavinge of the truthe myche matter for error.” Huge portions of More and Tyndale’s dispute hinge on a single word’s difference—that word, often but one syllable—in translating the Bible. As I demonstrate in the previous chapter, the Reformation language of scriptural controversy addressed fundamental issues of translation, language, and hermeneutics with a new and violent urgency, an urgency echoed in Wyatt’s poetic career.

From his epigrams and satires to his *Paraphrase* of the Penitential Psalms, Wyatt demonstrates a longing for plain speaking and linguistic clarity, for a world where words and meanings have stable one-to-one relationships. Wyatt’s obsession with the clarity of language has most often been read in terms of the political pressures of Henry’s court where, as Wyatt knew firsthand, words could be deadly.²⁰⁴ Yet this ideal of pure meaning is also vividly expressed in the theological works of William Tyndale, with which Wyatt was both familiar and sympathetic.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Wyatt, “A Declaration,” 188.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁰⁴ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 115–56.

²⁰⁵ R. A. Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” in *Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Complete Poems*, ed. R. A. Rebholz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 453; William T Rossiter, *Wyatt Abroad: Tudor Diplomacy and the Translation of Power*, 2014,

For Tyndale, scripture “hath but one sense which is the literal sense,” and the clergy uses allegories and glosses to obscure an otherwise legible text.²⁰⁶ Although Tyndale acknowledges that not all passages of scripture are equally transparent, his rhetorical emphasis falls on the clarity of scripture that has been corrupted by the Pope and his church. He claims his own commentary on scripture “do[es] but onely wye away the filthie and roten Gloses wherewith the Scribes and the Phariseis haue smered the law” and “gloss” becomes a constant keyword for interpretive corruption.²⁰⁷ Tyndale presents a world of linguistic stability and transparency that—uncorrupted by deceit—would be entirely self-evident or, at least, discernable with hard work. As I discussed previously, Tyndale pairs this depiction of language with a spiritual ideal that offers an intangible validation for interpretation: the scripture in the heart.

Scholars have long remarked on the “plainness”—in the sense of unadorned—of Wyatt’s poetry and have read this plainness as a “Protestant poetics” (to borrow Barbara Lewalski’s term) that “captures the authentic voice of Early English Protestantism.”²⁰⁸ Hermeneutically, however, Wyatt’s verse is anything but “plain” as Tyndale uses the word: clear and easily understood, a term Tyndale associates with the literal sense and contrasts with the allegorical or figural.²⁰⁹ I argue that both stylistically and thematically Wyatt is torn between the impossible ideals of More and Tyndale. Wyatt’s desire for linguistic stability resonates with Tyndale’s ideal of the plain, clear scripture; however, whereas Tyndale validates this stable language with the “scripture in the heart” that can overcome any linguistic manipulation or error, for Wyatt this spiritual ideal remains constantly out of reach. Yet More’s compelling alternative—the common consent of the multitude—is equally unachievable for Wyatt; it is the sinful, duplicitous multitude of the “press” that has corrupted language beyond redemption. Thematically, Wyatt’s poetry expresses a longing for the straightforward plainness of Tyndale’s ideals, but he does so with the verbal play, ambiguity, and literary indirections more characteristic of More’s style and hermeneutics than Tyndale’s. The ambiguities of Wyatt’s verse offer a vision of linguistic abjection—he can no more write plainly than he can earn salvation—and his verse expresses the hermeneutic longing of the Reformation in the shadow of very real interpretive violence.

I. Wyatt’s Unplain Plainness

In reading Wyatt particularly, style and morality have often been linked. For example, Thomas Greene claims the “drabness of Wyatt’s language is of course essential to his moral style,” and Stephen Greenblatt remarks Wyatt’s “country simplicity” is at once “a life style and a literary

157–58. Tyndale’s works are credited as a source for Psalms and Wyatt was closely connected to pro-Tyndale figures at court, like Thomas Cromwell. Anne Bolyn was another close acquaintance of Wyatt’s and, we believe, introduced Henry to *Obedience*.

²⁰⁶ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159.

²⁰⁷ William Tyndale, “An Exposition Vppon the v. Vi. Vii. Chapters of Mathew, Which Three Chapters Are the Key and the Dore of the Scripture, and the Restoring Agayne of Moses Law Corrupte by the Scribes and Pharises. And the Exposition Is the Restoring Agayne of Christes Lawe Corrupte by the Papistes.,” in *The Vrbolke Workes of W. Tyndall, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes, Three Worthy Martyrs, and Principall Teachers of This Churche of England Collected and Compiled in One Tome Together, Beyng before Scattered, [and] Now in Print Here Exhibited to the Church. To the Prayse of God, and Profite of All Good Christian Readers* (London, 1573), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>.

²⁰⁸ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 115.

²⁰⁹ See for example: Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 22; 159; Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, 3. Tyndale also makes frequent use of the word “plain” and “plainly” for emphasis to mean “obvious” or “obviously.”

style.”²¹⁰ Kenneth J. E. Graham’s excellent essay, “The Performance of Conviction: Wyatt’s Antirhetorical Plainness,” advocates the term “plainness” for Wyatt as a sixteenth-century term that engages both the moral and the stylistic registers: it means “direct, emphatic, lacking subtlety and artfulness, and strongly implies the moral values of honesty and conviction.”²¹¹ In his essay on Wyatt’s style, Jeff Dolven sums up this consensus in saying Wyatt’s “poems are studiously plain, neither Latinate nor aureate,” “studded with proverbs,” and “largely innocent of the languages of mythology or philosophy.”²¹² These assessments of Wyatt’s plainness are read by turns in light of Senecan philosophy, Tudor court politics, and Protestant aesthetics. To be sure, Protestants were eager to claim for themselves plain-speaking English as contrasted to the deceptive, “rhetorical” aureation of Catholicism; however, in so doing they were appropriating a long medieval tradition, not inventing a new genre from whole cloth.²¹³ Chaucer’s ballade “Truth” is a fine example of this tradition and one that finds clear imitation in Wyatt’s “What Vaileth Trowth.”²¹⁴ In Wyatt, however, this aesthetic, moralizing plainness remains powerfully at odds with another crucial aspect of “plain” speaking: clarity.

That Wyatt’s verse seems challenging and full of ambiguity is not merely the product of our own modern conventions of syntax and punctuation, or shifts in vocabulary and usage. Less than twenty years after Wyatt’s death, Tottel famously makes clarifying emendations. Yet well before Tottel, Wyatt’s friend and contemporary, Nicholas Grimald, edited Wyatt’s Egerton Manuscript to reduce ambiguity by altering multifaceted word choice and by introducing punctuation.²¹⁵ The ambiguity, difficulty, and density of Wyatt’s style has drawn increasing critical attention of late. Jeff Dolven refers to Wyatt’s “often tangled syntax, his ambiguous pronouns, and his spacious use of prepositions” and characterizes Wyatt’s style as “uncertain and imprecise.”²¹⁶ Maura Nolan sees “ambiguities [as] central to Wyatt’s style—which tends to layer clause upon clause in order to establish a series of tensions (syntactical, metrical, prosodic, thematic) upon which each poem depends.”²¹⁷ These apt characterizations of Wyatt’s “dense textuality” and hermeneutic difficulties appear in tension with previous studies of Wyatt’s “plainness.” Wyatt’s style is at once plain and anything but plain; stripping away aureate diction, Latinate vocabulary, mythological and philosophical terminology, etc., does not automatically generate perfect clarity.

“Madam Withouten Many Words” offers a classic and oft-anthologized example of Wyatt’s “plainness”: a terse bluntness, devoid of aureate or Latinate vocabulary, and with seemingly simple syntax. It is also one of the many poems that expresses Wyatt’s demand for simple, direct speech, yet even this poem contains unexpected moments of uncertainty:

Madam withouten many words
Once I am sure ye will or no
And if ye will then leave your bourds
And use your wit and shew it so

²¹⁰ Thomas M Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 256; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 129.

²¹¹ Kenneth J. E. Graham, “The Performance of Conviction: Wyatt’s Antirhetorical Plainness,” *Style* 23, no. 3 (1989): 376.

²¹² Jeff Dolven, “Reading Wyatt for the Style,” *Modern Philology* 105, no. 1 (August 1, 2007): 85. Dolven’s turn of phrase—“innocent of”—tellingly reiterates the moral valence of plainness.

²¹³ Elizabeth Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry* (London; New York: Longman, 1998), 118.

²¹⁴ Ibid.; Maura Nolan, “Style,” in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature (Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2010), 396–419.

²¹⁵ Nolan, “Style,” 414.

²¹⁶ Dolven, “Reading Wyatt for the Style,” 65–66.

²¹⁷ Nolan, “Style,” 411.

And with a beck ye shall me call
 And if of one that burneth always
 Ye have any pity at all
 Answer him fair with yea or nay
 If it be yea I shall be fain
 If it be nay friends as before
 Ye shall another man obtain
 And I mine own and yours no more²¹⁸

Here Wyatt's bluff style initially seems fully-matched to the matter at hand: the demand for clear speech. The first two lines of the poem, however, are syntactically incomplete; they seem to be missing a verb. This leaves their meaning oddly suspended—what is it the speaker will do “once [he is] sure [she] will or no”? Does “withouten many words” apply to the lady or the speaker? The incomplete syntax of the opening lines and their imprecise relationship to the following ones leads to editorial emendations with punctuation (which I have chosen to omit) and interpretive notes. R.A. Rebholz glosses the first two lines as “I will not use many words once I am sure you will or not” but this involves introducing a verb and tense not found within the poem and forecloses the possibility that “withouten many words” may be not a promise from the speaker but an exhortation to the lady.²¹⁹ One might just as easily gloss the first line in isolation and the present tense as, “Madam, I’m not using many words” or imperative “Madam, don’t use many words.” Syntactically these opening lines are only loosely connected to the next lines, yet the rest of the poem is decidedly plain and its basic sense unobscured. The vocabulary is curt and abrupt; “withouten” stands out as the only trisyllabic word in the poem. The speaker aggressively demands a clear answer in a tone that suggests circumlocution is the deplorable norm. The syntactic oddities of the opening lines do not obscure the poem’s central meaning, but leave the reader suspended; one must determine one’s reading of them retrospectively. Even a famously plain poem like this one has unexpected moments of interpretive imprecisions that risk being concealed by the overly decisive notes and that seem at odds with its demand for clear and open speech.

The unrealized desire for truthful speech is a frequent theme of Wyatt’s epigraphs. Tottel, however, prints this poem under the title “The lover professeth himself constant”:

Within my breast I never thought it gain
 Of gentle minds the freedom for to lose.
 Nor in my heart sank never such disdain
 To be a forger, faults for to disclose.
 Nor I cannot endure the truth to gloze,
 To set a gloss upon an earnest pain.
 Nor am I not in number one of those
 That list to blow retreat to every train.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Thomas Wyatt, *Sir Thomas Wyatt, The Complete Poems*, ed. Rebholz, R. A. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 132; Richard C Harrier, *The Canon of Sir Thomas Wyatt’s Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975), 128. I have emended Rebholz’s version by removing the editorial punctuation in consultation with Harrier’s transcription of the Egerton Manuscript, which contains no punctuation.

²¹⁹ Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 409.

²²⁰ Wyatt, *Sir Thomas Wyatt, The Complete Poems*, 101. As a poem surviving only in Tottel, this work’s provenance is less secure than those surviving in Wyatt’s own manuscript or autograph. Here I treat it as Wyatt’s based on Tottel’s attribution of its characteristic syntactic ambiguities and the overlapping vocabulary of glossing and glozing found in Wyatt’s autograph in the *Paraphrase* of the penitential psalms. The punctuation is not Wyatt’s and, based on his habits in the Egerton Manuscript, the poem likely lacked any.

Tottel's less-than-apt title for the poem suggests that it posed an interpretive challenge to the editor in 1557, as this epigraph is less concerned with the constancy of a lover than the honesty of the speaker. Again, the first two lines are particularly difficult to parse. With simplified syntax, we might render it "Within my breast I never thought it gain / to lose the freedom of gentle minds." It offers the obvious contrast of 'gain' and 'lose' and of the inward—"within my breast"—and outward—the "freedom" of the "gentle minds"; the effect of these contrasts, however, remains abstract and suggestive rather than concrete. Although it seems most syntactically logical for the "freedom" to belong to the "gentle minds" this reading remains obscure, thus reopening the possibility—less syntactically likely but thematically plausible—that the freedom is that of the speaker, a reading one might render as: "Within my breast I never thought it gain to lose my freedom [because] of gentle minds." As with so many of Wyatt's poems, the ambiguities rest in prepositions: "of" and "for." Rebholz interprets these opening lines as meaning: "to lose that detachment from obsession, that self-possession, which characterizes truly human, virtuous minds. It is this 'freedom' which prevents the possessiveness that leads to jealousy and cruelty in love and friendship."²²¹ Although this reading is plausible it not only depends on a retrospective reading in light of the rest of the poem, but brings in significant extra-textual matter, since friendship, obsession, and jealousy are never explicitly mentioned.

The ensuing lines follow a similar pattern, but with greater clarity. The next two lines begin with an inwardness—"in my heart"—that mirrors the first line's "Within my breast" that contrasts the bad behavior of others: "Nor in my heart sank never such disdain / To be a forger, faults for to disclose" (3-4). The sense is relatively straightforward: disdain has never led him to create a false story to disclose another's faults. The disdain absent from the speaker's heart may be twofold: he has neither felt such contempt for another, nor has he behaved in a way so beneath his own dignity.²²² The next two lines likewise contrast the speaker's honesty with the implied actions of others: "Nor I cannot endure the truth to gloze, / To set a gloss upon an earnest pain" (5-6). These lines gesture to issues of textuality and interpretation under new and urgent pressure in the Reformation.

Here and elsewhere in his works, Wyatt uses "gloze" and "gloss" as terms of deceit, a usage that has roots in a medieval tradition and gestures to the Reformation present. Gloze means at once "marginal note or exposition" as well as "flattery, deceit," and both these meanings predate the Reformation.²²³ "Gloss," a clear variant of "gloze," however, comes into use in the early sixteenth century and is deeply involved in Reformation controversy. The Oxford English Dictionary gives its first attestation of "gloss" to Nicholas Udall's 1548 translation of Erasmus's *Paraphrases of the New Testament*—"Like as by a glosse ye subuerte the commaundement"—but the term gloss as a note, exposition, or interpretation was used earlier than this and with the same emphatic link to falsehood and religion.²²⁴ Well before Udall, and in works Wyatt likely read, Tyndale makes "gloss" a keyword: for example, Scripture has been "evil darkened with glosses"; the prelates have "blinded the

²²¹ Rebholz, "Introduction and Notes," 382.

²²² "Disdain, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 3, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54122>.

²²³ "Gloze, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 3, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/79233>.

²²⁴ "Gloss, n.1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 3, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/79130>.

Scripture . . . with glosses”; and with “glosses corrupt they God’s word.”²²⁵ Wyatt mixes the conventional, medieval “gloze” with the newer and Reformation-inflected “gloss.” While the end-rhymes are conventional in this poem, this shift has a phonic impact: “disclose” and “gloze” present an emphatic rhyme; “gloss” echoes alliteratively with both (via initial “s” and “l” in “disclose” and via the “g” and “l” in “gloze”), but the vowel in “gloss” fails to match the full “o” of either word. The effect in reading this partial correspondence is bittersweet—rhyme followed by thwarted rhyme. Expectations are hinted at, but the words will not be coerced. Such poetic effects in Wyatt’s verse evoke a sense of melancholy that strongly resonates with the “earnest pain” which follows. The psychological and emotional impact of Wyatt’s poetry is found between “gloze” and “gloss” in the disappointed expectation of sweet accord.²²⁶

The epigraph concludes with fairly clear syntax—“Nor am I not in number one of those / That list to blow retreat to every train”—but admits an array of meanings with its concluding word (7-8).²²⁷ The most obvious reading would be to take ‘train’ in the now obscure sense of “artillery and other equipment for a battle or siege,” thus following the martial metaphor of “blow retreat.”²²⁸ The more common uses of “train” from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, however, are “Treachery, guile, deceit, trickery; prevarication,” “trick” or “artifice,” and “A trap or snare for catching wild animals.”²²⁹ This additional meaning is consonant with the poem’s overall interest in deceit, while the associations of the verb form of “train” bring an additional complexity. Its first definition (closely related to the noun) is “To entice or induce into a mistake; to lead astray, deceive, take in,” but it may also carry the very opposite sense of “To entice or induce into something beneficial or desirable.”²³⁰ These syntactically straightforward and easily understood lines contain manifold, even opposed, associations. This epigraph exemplifies a recurring stylistic and thematic tension for Wyatt: the speaker sets himself apart from the common corruption and claims honesty and plainness in a manner fraught with ambiguity. He despises deceitful glosses, but his words would do well with explanatory glosses.

Like the epigraph above, Wyatt’s epistolary satire “Mine own John Poyntz” contrasts the speaker’s virtue with the corruption of the majority and addresses the moral implication of honest speech with similar Reformation allusiveness. The poem imitates Pietro Alamanni’s *Satira X*, which Wyatt sometimes translates closely and sometimes only very loosely, adding and omitting material freely.²³¹ Wyatt Anglicizes various moments from Alamanni and introduces material that seems to demand a biographical reading. Based on these references and codicological evidence, the scholarly consensus places the poem’s composition to Wyatt’s house arrest at his family home, Allington

²²⁵ Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, 207; Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 66; 119; Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 453. Rebholz lists Tyndale’s scriptural commentaries and treatises as sources for the *Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms*.

²²⁶ Here I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the fruitful conversation with Anna S. Morrison on Wyatt’s poetics that helped to generate the analysis of sound above.

²²⁷ Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 382. Rebholz glosses the final line as “who wish to withdraw from every enterprise [of, for example, love or friendship],” but I find no attestation in the Oxford English Dictionary of “train” being used in the broad sense of “enterprise” and, as with the previous example, introduces many new terms.

²²⁸ “Train, n.2,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 4, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204407>.

²²⁹ “† Train, n.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 4, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204408>.

²³⁰ “Train, v.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 4, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204410>. Used in the second sense, the OED offers a Reformation example: Coverdale’s translation of Erasmus’s *Paraphrases of the New Testament*, “Howe easly you were trayned from the supersticion of your forefathers..vnto the true wurshippe of God.”

²³¹ Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 439; Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 132–35.

Castle, after his release from the Tower in 1536; the speaker places himself in “Kent” and with “a clog [that] doth hang yet at [his] heel,” a move that indeed seems calculated to construct the speaker as Wyatt himself (100; 86).²³² By emphasizing these references and minimizing the conventionality of the anti-court satire, some scholars have read this as a deeply subversive political poem, yet more recent attention has emphasized how even this appearance of subversion plays a traditional role in courtly discourse.²³³ Claiming to be a bad courtier makes Wyatt appear noble and trustworthy, and his claim that he cannot manipulate language is central to this stance.

The poem opens thus:

Mine own John Poyntz, since ye delight to know
 The cause why that homeward I me draw
 (And flee the press of courts whereso they go
 Rather than to live thrall under the awe
 Of lordly looks) wrapped within my cloak,
 To will and lust learning to set a law,
 It is not because I scorn or mock
 The power of them to whom Fortune hath lent
 Charge over us, of right to strike the stroke; (1-9)²³⁴

The speaker denies that he grudges the power “Fortune hath lent” to rulers, but has fled the “press of courts” both to avoid “liv[ing] thrall under the awe / Of lordly looks” and “To will and lust” to “learn[] to set a law.” This last may offer another biographical reference since in 1536 Wyatt was released into his father’s care at Allington with instructions from the King to learn to “adres hym better.”²³⁵ Despite this apparently biographical touch, however, the opening of the poem situates it firmly within the traditions of anti-court satire and plain-speaking English poetry, like Chaucer’s “Of Truth,” which likewise begins with the phrase “Flee from the prese.”²³⁶ Yet these opening lines hold a subtle menace, since “prese” is the Middle English “crowd”—often used referencing the court—but also a mode of execution and a torture device at the disposal of those with the power to “strike the stroke” and to which Wyatt makes more explicit reference later in the poem.²³⁷

The sartorial specificity—that the speaker “wrapped within [his] cloak”—may seem at once trivial and literal, however, it gestures subtly to the larger hermeneutic issues the poem will engage. Cloaks and veils were conventional metaphors for describing allegory, which recent Reformation discourse treated as antithetical to the sort of direct, unvarnished speech Wyatt idealizes in this poem. And, indeed, Wyatt uses “cloak” in this negative sense within the same poem; he tells his friend he “cannot frame [his] tune to feign, / To **cloak** the truth for praise, without desert, / Of them that list all vice for to retain” (18-20). This repetition may be intended as a point of contrast: whereas the corrupt courtier (metaphorically) cloaks truth, the speaker’s only cloak is a (literal) garment. Yet the repetition might just as easily undermine the claim that the speaker “wrapped

²³² Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 437–38; H. A. Mason, *Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period; an Essay*. (London: Routledge and Paul, 1959), 202–5; Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 126–27.

²³³ Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 118–40.

²³⁴ The first fifty-two lines of “Mine own John Poyntz” do not survive in the Egerton Manuscript and are therefore not reproduced by Harrington. I therefore follow Rebholz exactly. On editing these lines see: Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 438-86.

²³⁵ Muir, *Life and Letters of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, 35.

²³⁶ Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 118; Nolan, “Style.”

²³⁷ “Press, n.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/150765>; “Press, v.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/150768>; Lake and Questier, *Trials of Margaret Clitherow*, 3–12.

within [his] cloak” is unable to cloak anything else.²³⁸ G. Nott suggests that “wrapped within my cloak” alludes to Horace’s “wrapped in my virtue” in *Odes* III xxix, but if so the substitution of a cloak—here associated with deceit—for virtue would undermine the speaker’s claims to virtue and simplicity rather than reinforcing it.

Like “Madam withouten many words,” “My Own John Pontz” has the appearance of bluff, blunt, clarity, but admits moments of unexpected ambiguity. The speaker admits that he does at times desire courtly honor, but is unfit to pursue it:

I grant sometime that of glory the fire
Doth touch my heart; me list not to report
Blame by honour and honour to desire.
But how may I this honour now attain
That cannot dye the colour black a liar? (14-18)

Like this epistolary satire overall, the vocabulary is generally simple with frequent repetition and the syntax straightforward. Characteristic of Wyatt’s style, ambiguity clings to his use of prepositions: “Me list not to report / Blame by honour and honour to desire.” “By” admits various readings: is the speaker sorry to report he has deserved blame by pursuing and desiring honor?²³⁹ Or is it, as Rebholz suggests, that he is speaking ill of honor while also desiring honor? Some of these ambiguities arise from the preposition, some from the density of style—various potentially clarifying words are omitted from the compact verse. The repeated use of the term “honour” itself, however, helps generate this uncertainty. Wyatt describes the speaker’s desire for worldly status in line 14 as “glory” and in line 17 as “honour,” but honor has two distinct associations: “respect, esteem...glory, renown” of the worldly sort, as it’s used at line 17, and also “nobility of mind or spirit” and “a fine sense of, and strict adherence to, what is considered to be morally right or just.”²⁴⁰ The repeated use of “honour” in line 16 holds these two definitions in tension. The poem goes on to decry the false and deceitful use of language, where words become alienated from their true meanings; his use of “honour,” however, demonstrates the innate possibility for linguistic double meanings. These lines depict honor as potentially incompatible with honor: the pursuit of worldly honor must come at the expense of inward, moral honor.

The poem goes on to enumerate the ways the speaker is not merely unwilling to compromise his virtue for courtly success, but actually unable to do so, with an insistent repetition of “cannot” every third line for fifteen consecutive lines. He “cannot frame [his] tune to feign, / To cloak the truth for praise, without desert,” “cannot crouch nor kneel . . .,” etc, and he “cannot . . . turn the word that from my mouth is gone” (22-36). Rebholz glosses this last as “cannot take back, renege on, my word or promise.”²⁴¹ However, “turn” also suggests the sense of twist, torture, or distort, forcing a false meaning on a word retrospectively. (If the accusations that sent Wyatt to the Tower in 1541 were true, then this was an essential skill he had—to turn the word and the meaning of the metaphor against his accusers by interpreting it into obscurity.) This suggests not merely the breaking of an oath, but twisting words to negate the oath in the first place—another manipulation of language like those at the heart of the poem.

As the list of the speaker’s virtuous inabilities grows steadily longer and more sinister, the emphasis and clarity of the negation becomes more obscure. The early litanies of negation—“I cannot” repeated five times in rapid succession (22; 25; 28; 31; 34)—grow less frequent and the use

²³⁸ Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 439.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 440.

²⁴⁰ “Honour | Honor, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88227>.

²⁴¹ Rebholz, “Introduction and Notes,” 441.

of “nor” to maintain the negation fades as well. This places the descriptions of vice further and further from their condemnation, leaving them suspended in the reader’s mind as if possibilities. The closest negation is four lines away when Wyatt writes:

With the nearest virtue to cloak alway the vice
And as to purpose likewise it shall fall
To press the virtue that it may not rise (61-3)²⁴²

Here Wyatt revisits the “cloak” as a tool of deceit, again undermining the seeming virtue of the speaker’s description “wrapped within [his] cloak.” These lines also echo the opening with the repetition of “press,” but in its verb form. The corrupt “press” of the court will “press the virtue that it may not rise,” most obviously in pressing it down but with another more sinister implication. “Pressing” was one of the most gruesome forms of execution under Common Law, and entailed being crushed to death such that the rib cage split open on the rock placed under the spine.²⁴³

Wyatt’s satire presents the manipulation of language as the quintessential corruption of the court. The speaker insists on a perfect and clear relationship between words and their meanings, one that is deliberately thwarted by deceitful courtiers who “cloak always the vice” by calling it by the name of “the nearest virtue”:

As drunkenness good fellowship to call
The friendly foe with his double face
Say he is gentle and courteous therewithal
And say that Favel hath a goodly grace
In eloquence and cruelty to name
Zeal of justice and change in time and place
And he that suffereth offence without blame
Call him pitiful and him true and plain
That railleth reckless to every man's shame
Say he is rude that cannot lie and feign
The lecher a lover; and tyranny
To be the right of a prince's reign
I cannot I no no it will not be (64-76)

Here “the conception of language the poem implies is one of perfectly concrete reference, allowing no play of meaning and no room for disagreement.”²⁴⁴ There is the plain literal sense, the true meaning, and its opposite, the distorted cloak. This resonates with the linguistic elements of More and Tyndale’s debate about words and meaning. Wyatt’s speaker, like Tyndale, longs for a straightforward, one-to-one relationship between words and meaning, but he presents this ideal as beyond reach. Language has been corrupted and he has no recourse to Tyndale’s ideal, spiritual hermeneutic; the speaker’s virtuous conviction can no more reinstate right meaning than Tyndale’s

²⁴² Here and for the rest of the poem, I maintained Rebholz’s modernized spelling and regularized capitalization, while replicating the lack of punctuation in Harrier’s transcription of the Egerton Manuscript to render the ambiguous, free-flowing style Wyatt favors in his autograph works: Harrier, *The Canon of Sir Thomas Wyatt’s Poetry*.

²⁴³ Lake and Questier, *Trials of Margaret Clitherow*, 107–8.

²⁴⁴ Graham, “The Performance of Conviction: Wyatt’s Antirhetorical Plainness,” 381. I am not the first to note this poem’s profound interest in hermeneutic issues, but the fruitful connection of this obsession to religious as well as political issues has gone unremarked. Graham argues that in Wyatt’s first satire, “My Own John Poyntz,” Wyatt places his emphasis on perversions of language: “In this linguistic satire, verbal distinctions are moral distinctions, and they are all black-and-white; the conception of language the poem implies is one of perfectly concrete reference, allowing no play of meaning and no room for disagreement.” He then reads these linguistic issues and Wyatt’s plainness in light of Seneca as both a philosophical and a stylistic inspiration.

scripture-in-the-heart could resolve Reformation hermeneutic controversy. Both satisfy only the self; neither can stabilize meaning. In More's competing hermeneutic ideal, words, meanings, and interpretation are defined and stabilized by "the common consent of the multitude," but in "My Own John Poyntz" that multitude of the "press" is the very force that has corrupted language.

Indeed Wyatt's satire does not—or cannot—enact its own linguistic ideal. Whereas the opposed definitions of "honour" are intrinsic to the word itself, in "My Own John Poyntz" Wyatt's varied use of the word "wit" enacts the referential slight of hand his speaker attributes to wicked courtiers. Near the poem's halfway mark, the speaker claims he cannot learn courtly dissembling and adds "My wit is nought" (57). "Wit" in this context is another facet of courtly wickedness, but the use of the word shifts when the speaker claims he cannot esteem those who "weigh . . . A chip of chance more than a pound of wit" (78-9). This proverbial use of "wit" seems sincere and positive, but the word shifts again in his description of Spain as "where one must him incline / Rather than to be outwardly to seem / I meddle not with wits that be so fine" (91-3). The phrase "wits that be so fine" is a composite of the first negative use and the second positive use of "wit." Here real wit appears now as a positive virtue not merely a term of corruption, but the statement must be taken sarcastically. Sarcasm is a device radically opposed to the one-to-one ideal of language previously articulated in the poem; sarcasm depends on saying one thing and meaning the very opposite. Wyatt's "linguistic satire" presents an ideal of language it cannot achieve.²⁴⁵

"My Own John Poyntz" concludes with an idyllic description of life as an English country gentleman, but after the Act of Supremacy (1534) it takes on a distinctly nationalist and Reformation flavor. The speaker walks "in lusty liberty" and minimizes the limitations of the "clog" at his "heel" with "No force for that for it is ordered so / That I may leap both hedge and dike full well" (86-8). Read biographically, these lines seem like an assurance that Wyatt doesn't resent the terms of his release from the Tower while also undermining the depiction of perfect liberty. The speaker contrasts his simple, virtuous pleasure—the hunt, hawk, bow and book—with the immoral practices abroad, ending with: "Nor I am not where Christ is given in prey / For money poison and treason at Rome / A common practice used night and day" (97-99). Wyatt's jab at the corruption of the Church in Rome finds precedence in Alamanni's source material; however, in England when Wyatt pens his verse these lines have distinctly Reformation resonance. Conventional and medieval anti-clerical satires and Catholic reformist critiques of the Church took on new and inescapable meanings after Luther's emergence on the international stage and then Henry's break with Rome.²⁴⁶ Wyatt's verse immediately contrasts the corruption of Rome with "Kent and Christendom," thus not only criticizing Rome's corruption but excluding Rome and its Church from a reimagined, English Christendom.²⁴⁷ The poem's concluding contrast is not between court and country, but England and Rome, gesturing to the Reformation and helping to solidify the Reformation hermeneutic resonances at play in the poem as a whole. The reverberations of the Reformation that sound throughout Wyatt's erotic, epigraphic, and satirical work grow at once louder and yet become naturalized to Wyatt's *Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms*.

II.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. I borrow this phrase from Graham but am more skeptical of Wyatt's ability to enact the ideals of language he seems to advocate in the poem.

²⁴⁶ For example, Erasmus' anti-clerical satires and ecclesiastical critiques became famously embroiled in Reformation debates, and later English Protestants tended to read any church satire—like those in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—as proto-Protestant or Wycliffe.

²⁴⁷ Rebholz, "Introduction and Notes," 445. As Rebholz notes, this phrase is also a play on the proverbial "Kent or Christendom," which referred to the fact Kent was still unconverted to Christianity in the rule of King Ethelbert, thus not a part of Christendom.

Wyatt's *Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms*

Much scholarly ink has been spilled on political and doctrinal readings of Wyatt's *Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms*, and their Protestant inclinations are a critical commonplace.²⁴⁸ Mason suggests that although Wyatt "had a detailed exposition before him in Fisher of the stages of penance, he avoids all that is characteristic of the Catholic account."²⁴⁹ Drawing on Mason, Rebholz argues that Wyatt's alterations to the source material are calculated to present "a Reformed Christian's view of the individual's experience of redemption rather than a Roman Catholic's" and that Wyatt (with limited success) attempts to "make David the type of the Reformed Christian who experiences the genuinely profound, almost despairing sense of his sinfulness only once before the critical act of believing that God forgives him, justifies him by imputing righteousness to him, loves him, and will make him holy."²⁵⁰ Alexandra Halasz argues against consensus to show the *Paraphrase* ends with an unregenerated David, but—like the consensus she critiques—to show reads the poems as advice to princes and a commentary on the role of the poet in the corrupt court of David/Henry VII.²⁵¹ For Greenblatt, Wyatt's paraphrase "captures the authentic voice of Early English Protestantism."²⁵² In his view, Wyatt carefully maintains "deniability" while creating a subversive critique of Henry's adulterous desire for Anne that also aligns the arbitrary Protestant God with his similarly arbitrary and terrifying wordly deputy in England, the King.²⁵³ Wyatt's psalms have thus been read as doubly subversive: first, as concealing a genuine (and potentially ardent) and unacceptable Protestantism; second, as a political allegory condemning Henry VIII as an adulterous tyrant. Wyatt's contemporary, the Earl of Surrey, certainly read Wyatt's psalms in such manner, writing that in them "Rulers may see in a mirror clear / The bitter fruit of false concupiscence," though this reading may tell us more about Surrey than Wyatt.²⁵⁴ (After all, it is Surrey, not Wyatt,

²⁴⁸ Rossiter, *Wyatt Abroad*, 152–55. Dating the *Penitential Psalms*—like dating Wyatt's works more broadly—remains difficult and full of speculation. Scholars generally date the psalms to shortly after 1536 or 1541, linking the work to a period of Wyatt's incarceration in part for thematic reasons. Rossiter points out an echo of one of Luther's 1538 commentaries, suggesting either later date or shared source material. Those eager to read allusions to Henry's desire for Anne in David's desire for Barsebe prefer a date near 1536. If, on the other hand, we take the 1541 dating, then the topical reference seems more likely to Wyatt's own adultery than Henry's Great Matter since Wyatt was forced to reconcile with his wife and give up his lover as a condition of his release.

²⁴⁹ Mason, *Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period; an Essay*, 213.

²⁵⁰ Wyatt, *Sir Thomas Wyatt, The Complete Poems*, 454.

²⁵¹ Alexandra Halasz, "Wyatt's David," in *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C Herman (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 197–98..

²⁵² Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 115.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 121; Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, 230; John N King, "Henry VIII as David: The King's Image and Reformation Politics," in *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 78–92. The idea of "deniability" is one that Greenblatt perhaps overemphasizes, or at least treats as uni-directional. He pictures Wyatt being able to deny that David's adultery might allude to Henry, but doesn't acknowledge that by bringing the accusation Henry himself would be validating the comparison. That said, given the broad consensus on Henry's irascible nature and his repeated disregard for English lay, mere "deniability" seems scant protection if the *Paraphrase* were so unmistakably subversive as Greenblatt implies. Often contentions of Wyatt's subversiveness depend on separating his poetry from its medieval literary traditions, like advice to princes, court satire, and the genre of scriptural paraphrase itself; read in dialogue with longstanding poetic traditions, it may even seem, as C. S. Lewis suggested, so far from political issues as to be merely generic, "a little music after supper." It also seems worth noting that Henry already read himself typologically as King David, though he admittedly turned a blind eye toward David's faults.

²⁵⁴ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 121; Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 158–59.

who was ultimately executed for treason.)²⁵⁵ Although in many cases apt, scholarly attention has focused so heavily on the political implications of the *Paraphrase*—whether as a critique of Henry or of concealed Protestant theology as an act of political subversion—other fruitful areas of inquiry more stylistic analyses have remained underdeveloped.

I concur with the scholarly consensus that Wyatt's devotional work inclines towards Protestant doctrine; however, as with Wyatt's style more generally these intimations of doctrinal inclination remain ambiguous, conflicted, and densely knotted. Earlier critics have often treated this ambiguity as protective camouflage for Wyatt's unacceptably ardent Protestant belief, but I would suggest that we may treat seriously such moments of ambiguity and tension. As Wyatt himself remarks incredulously in the *Defense* when accused of collaborating with Pole, "I thynke I shulde have more adoe with a great sorte in Inglande to purge my selffe of suspecte of a Lutherane then of a Papyst."²⁵⁶ Here Wyatt places himself on a sliding scale between the unacceptable poles of "Lutherane" or "Papyst" and delicately avoids avowing himself as anything but a Christian, since in early Reformation England the only safe faith was that of his unpredictable King. That Wyatt's *Paraphrase* is likewise doctrinally diplomatic need not necessarily imply that it is insincere.²⁵⁷

In Wyatt's *Paraphrase* of the penitential psalms, hermeneutic and spiritual longing explicitly merge, and create increasing linguistic and spiritual abjection. Wyatt's psalms depart noticeably from the more direct and seemingly "plain" style of "Madam Withouten Many Words" or "My Own John Poyns." The *Paraphrase* is syntactically knotted and ambiguous, showing a "dense textuality" that increasingly departs from his source material.²⁵⁸ The repetition, word play, and syntactic ambiguity of Wyatt's erotic verse, epigraphs, and satires are intensified along with the emotional, hermeneutic, and now soteriological stakes of his poetry. Wyatt's David and his commentator (the name I give to the 'P' of the *Paraphrase* distinct from David and scriptural source material) recognize that no amount of wit or verbal slight of hand can deceive or please God, who "delights in no such gloze"; however, David as the divinely inspired author of psalms both has the scripture written in his heart and the experience of externalizing that in song, an experience Wyatt depicts in his extra-scriptural material. Thus God's word is stable for David alone (and even then only imperfectly); the poet and reader are left longing for an inaccessible ideal, one that Wyatt represents with a linguistic abjection expressing spiritual anguish.

Wyatt remains full of ambiguity, longing for clear language and playing with the boundaries between political, religious, and erotic that were so porous in the court. This results in overlapping imagery—particularly the heart and the eyes—that emphasizes the religious and the Petrarchan. Like "My Own John Poyns," the *Paraphrase* leads with a retreat from the world into isolation and like so many of Wyatt's Petrarchan sonnets opens with the wounding look. Wyatt's *Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms* begins with an immediate ambiguity: "Love, to give law unto his subject hearts" (1). From this first line it is unclear if "Love" is God's love, as "law" and "subject hearts" might suggest, or whether "Love" is a general noun, a personification, or the pagan god, Cupid.²⁵⁹ For the opening line or two of Wyatt's poem to contain an immediate ambiguity only resolved on continued reading is a common move in his erotic verse as well. The initial uncertainty is soon dispelled and, as the first stanza unfolds, Love resolves into a personification:

²⁵⁵ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 121; Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 158–59.

²⁵⁶ Wyatt, "A Declaration," 195–96.

²⁵⁷ See also: Rossiter, *Wyatt Abroad*, 156–60.

²⁵⁸ Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 161.

²⁵⁹ Another recurring ambiguity in Wyatt's *Penitential Psalms* is whether the "foes" of the Psalms are literal or allegorical opponents. See for example in Psalm 6, Wyatt seems to personify them (152–66) but these personification remain ambiguous. Such play between literal, abstract, and figurative meanings similarly resonates with More's and Tyndale's debates about allegoresis.

Love to give law unto his subject hearts
 Stood in the eyes of Barsabe the bright
 And in a look anon himself converts
 Cruelly pleasant before King David sight
 First dazed his eyes and further forth he starts
 With venomd breath as softly as he might
 Touched his senses and overruns his bones
 With creeping fire sarpled for the nonce. (1-8)²⁶⁰

The syntax here is dense. Rebholz suggests two possible readings of 3-4: “(Love) at once changes himself into a cruelly pleasant look before King David’s sight” or “into a look (Love) changes himself, cruelly pleasant before King David’s sight.”²⁶¹ There is a subtle pronoun ambiguity in the use of “his” and “he” as the referent slides from Love to David and back as if to blur the boundaries between the personification and the King in a manner that calls Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* to mind. The wounding look—both in the eyes of the beloved, and the gaze of the lover—here becomes more darkly associated with sin, and the tormenting Love’s “venomd breath” and “creeping” obliquely suggest the serpent, Satan. “And when he [Love] saw that kindled was the flame / The moist poison in his heart he lanced / So that the soul did tremble with the same” (9-11). Here it is not the “sword of the spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17) that pierces David’s heart, but the “poison” of lust, with the medically suggestive “lanced”—sin as sickness (9-10).

In the psalms, repetition is one of Wyatt’s most frequently used devices, but it creates two distinct effects: one of linguistic slippage of the sort explored above in Wyatt’s epigraph and satire; another of negation and evacuation. In the prologue, he writes that David “**blinded** thinks this train [plot to send Urie to his death] so **blind** and close / To **blind** all thing that naught may it disclose” (31-2). In these lines—added by Wyatt and not found in Arétino—the word “blind” shifts. First, it refers to David as so “destitute of intellectual, moral, or spiritual light” as to think his plot is “secret, obscure, privy” and will “close the eyes of the understanding or moral perception [and] deceive” all those around him.²⁶² Though these shades of meaning are closely interrelated, such shifts between them demonstrate the slippery nuances a single word may contain. In the landscape of Wyatt’s verse, even repetition of the same word may not lend straightforward emphasis or point to stability of meaning. The repetition of blinded/blind/blind is of a very different sort from the later repetition of dread in Psalm 6: “O Lord I **dread** and that I did not **dread** / I me repent and evermore desire / Thee thee to **dread**” (83-5). The meaning and connotation of dread does not alter across the passage; its effect is hermeneutically unambiguous, but emotionally menacing. Or the following darker passage: “My flesh is troubled. My heart doth fear the spear / That dread **of death of death** that ever lasts / threateth of right and draweth near and near!” (100-1). This exact consecutive repetition “of death” seems stuttering, their speaker overwhelmed by fear and trembling. Some of Wyatt’s repetition has a fumbling effect, as if the speaker were reaching out to confirm the position

²⁶⁰ As above, here and in the following passages I remove editorial punctuation from Rebholz’s edition in consultation with Harrier’s transcriptions of the Egerton Manuscript. Wyatt, *Sir Thomas Wyatt, The Complete Poems*, 195–220; Harrier, *The Canon of Sir Thomas Wyatt’s Poetry*, 214–54.

²⁶¹ Wyatt, *Sir Thomas Wyatt, The Complete Poems*, n 3-4, 456.

²⁶² “Blind, Adj. (and Adv.),” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20224>; “Blind, v.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20225>.

of the word he has just touched. Consider Wyatt's addition here found in none of his sources: "Such joy my joy thou hast to me prepared" (267).

Such instances of repetition indicate that language cannot provide stability for the speaker and demonstrate his continued, desperate reaching for this ideal of word-as-pillar. While this repetition-as-slippage effectively evokes urgency, when Wyatt uses repetition in service of negation and evacuation, there is an even more profound impact on the spiritual states enacted by the poem.

Consider Wyatt's use of repetition before psalm 38:

This song ended David did stint his voice
And in that while about he with his eye
Did seek the cave with which withouten noise
His silence seemed to argue and reply
Upon this **peace** this **peace** that did rejoice
The soul with **mercy** that **mercy** so did cry
And found **mercy** at **mercy's** plentiful hand
Never denied but where it was withstand (293-300)

Although Wyatt explicitly describes the silence, the repetition feels like an echo—but like an echo, it is a repetition that diminishes with each instance. Despite the positive connotations of all the repeated words, their effect becomes oddly sinister. The double repetition of "peace" and fourfold repetition of "mercy" seem not like augmentation, but diminishment.²⁶³ This diminishing actually confuses the syntax; the repetition makes the content less rather than more clear as it seems to slide towards a nebulous personification.

Wyatt's narrative prologue (which initially follows his source, Pietro Aretino's paraphrase, closely) draws on imagery and romantic conventions of Petrarchan love poetry and Wyatt's adaptations of it. The language and imagery of David's complaint to God mirror at various points the conventions of Petrarchanism or courtly love. Removed from their large context, various passages might be mistaken for a romantic lament, rather than a spiritual one, just as Wyatt's love lyrics are often indistinguishable (or nearly so) from political complaints.²⁶⁴ For example, when David plays, "seeking to counterpoise / His song with sighs and touching of the strings / With tender heart" (70-2). This potential ambiguity recurs in the paraphrases, as before Psalm 32 Wyatt writes:

Tuning accord by judgment of his ear
His heart's bottom for a sigh he sought
And therewithal upon the hollow tree
With strained voice again thus crieth he (212-16)

David, however, plays not the lute, but the harp and he must learn to be played *by* God rather than *for* God; as with so much of Wyatt's verse, the prepositions make the crucial difference.

Wyatt describes "the form that Love had printed in [David's] breast" (15); David should have "scripture in the heart" but instead holds the image of Bathsheba. Over the course of the *Paraphrase* David must turn his heart—the central image for both Petrarch and scripture—from Bathsheba to God. He must be pierced again. Departing from his source material, Wyatt depicts David as transfixed by a sunbeam:

This while a beam that bright sun forth sends
That sun the which was never cloud could hide
Pierceth the cave and on the harp descends
Whose glancing light the chords did overglide

²⁶³ On Wyatt's repetition as diminishment, see also: Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 230–31.

²⁶⁴ Heale, *Wyatt, Surrey, and Early Tudor Poetry*, 162–64.

And such lustre upon the harp extends
 As light of lamp upon the gold clean tried
 The turn whereof into his eyes did start
 Surprised with joy by penance of the heart (309-16)

David has sung to God, and God replies by piercing the cave and David's heart, allowing David to turn from Petrarch to scripture: "He then inflamed with far more hot affect / Of God than he was rest of Barsabe" (317-8). Scripture that he then sings—not only for God, who is author of David's psalms all along—but for all Christendom.

Like many of the psalms and Wyatt's narrative interludes, psalm 51 deals with God's mercy; however, Wyatt's translation is doctrinally Protestant-leaning and also linguistically and hermeneutically attentive:

. . . Pardon thou then
 Whereby thou shalt keep still **thy word stable**
 Thy justice pure and clean because that when
 I pardoned am then forthwith justly able
 Just I am judged by justice of thy grace
 For I myself lo thing most unstable. . . (451-6)

This dense repetition draws heavily on—or perhaps translates directly—Luther and expresses with evacuating repetition the paradox of salvation by grace.²⁶⁵ The phrase "keep still thy word stable" refers to God's promises, the "goodness and grace" and "mercies' number without end" referred to previously in the psalm (427; 431). The addition of "stable," however, extends beyond God's mere act of keeping his word to depict God's will as linguistically stabilizing: only God renders words stable. But this stability of language is the very thing that continually escapes Wyatt's verse and speaking personas.

After psalm 51, David has a greater understanding of his own song. In another section of the *Paraphrase* that departs from Wyatt's sources, Wyatt depicts David startled by his own song: "The greatness did so astone himself a space / As who might say 'Who hath expressed this thing? / I sinner I! What have I said alas?'" (514-6). David decides to "consider and repeat" his song:

And so he doth but not expressed by word
 But in his heart he turneth and poiseth
 Each word that erst his lips might forth afford
 He points he pauseth he wonders he praiseth
 The mercy that hides of justice the sword
 The justice that so his promise accomplisheth
 For his words' sake to worthless desert
 That gratis his graces to men doth depart (517-24)

David expresses himself "not . . . by word" outwardly, yet with words that "in his heart he turneth and poiseth" (517-8). In contrast to "My Own John Poynts," where turning one's word had a negative and deceitful connotation, here David's turning is contemplative, devotional. The outward "word" turns to the inward "word" and David's understanding of God's "words' sake" in grace and—at least briefly—there is a shift in the patterns of repetition. The repetition of "justice" is bookended by "mercy" and "grace," and in the next stanza the effect of repetition is one of comfort:

Here hath he comfort when he doth measure
 Measureless mercies to measureless fault
 To prodigal sinners infinite treasure
 Treasure termless that never shall default (525-9).

²⁶⁵ Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 230.

In contrast to earlier evacuating uses of repetition, this one seems hopeful: a way of expressing the impossible mathematics of grace. However, none of the stylistic shifts Wyatt makes in writing the *Paraphrase* remain constant. The sinister use of repetition early in the *Paraphrase* turn hopeful, only to turn despairing and then back again. In these devices is neither consistency nor stable conversion: they turn and turn, expressing the cyclical abjection where reading and salvation are uncertain.

III.

Wyatt's famously tortured verse—emotionally anguished and stylistically knotted—hangs poised between impossible ideals and impossible practices. His longing for clear, perfect language resonates with Tyndale's commitment to the literal sense, but Wyatt finds neither linguistic stability nor emotional comfort by turning inward towards the 'scripture in the heart.' Pure meaning and soteriological certainty exist only in negation for a poetic voice by turns ornery, bitter, turbulent, and despairing. With the "stable word" always out of reach, Wyatt's emphatically unplain 'plain' style creates a recurring sense of linguistic abjection that in the *Paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms* merges the soteriological and hermeneutic registers: hope and despair, clarity and confusion, emphasis and evacuation. At this crucial moment of violence and rupture, Wyatt not only translates the Petrarchan sonnet into English, but the Reformation into poetry, expressing the profound longing and abjection of hermeneutic impossibilities.

Chapter Three

Faith and Violence: *The Faerie Queene's* Hermeneutic Accommodation

When the Redcrosse Knight visits the House of Holiness in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, he encounters “a booke . . . / Wherein darke things were writt, hard to be understood” (1.10.13.8-9).²⁶⁶ The book is scripture, but the description of it as a book “wherein darke things were writt, hard to be understood” may also aptly describe *The Faerie Queene* itself. In *The Letter to Raleigh*, Edmund Spenser famously describes his “continued allegory” as a “darke conceit” and admits that “to some . . . this method will seeme displeasaunt, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of percepts or sermoned at large as they use then thus clowdily enwrapped in allegorical devices.”²⁶⁷ Spenser’s vocabulary for allegory—dark, cloudy, covering, veiling—has its roots in the conventional hermeneutic language of scripture. The dominant language for textual interpretation in the sixteenth century was fundamentally scriptural, whether its object was literary or Biblical. The language of allegory—and even of poetry—was implicated in both Reformation controversy and its attendant violence.²⁶⁸ William Tyndale makes both “allegory” and “poetry” terms for Catholic theological deceit, synonymous with lies; like Errour, good Protestant readers should “spew [allegories] out of [their] stomachs forever.”²⁶⁹ Broadly speaking, this chapter explores how Reformation Biblical hermeneutics shape Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and can shed light on our own readings of this Protestant allegorical epic.

Scholars have long agreed that Book I of *The Faerie Queene* is the spiritual journey of a Christian everyman *and* a journey of reading; however, in a profoundly Biblical culture of *sola scriptura* these journeys become not merely coterminous, but inextricably bound. I here examine *The Faerie Queene's* relationship to reading through the lens of the particular concerns and obsessions manifest in Thomas More’s and William Tyndale’s respective theology as described in Chapter One. In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser must negotiate the new pressures of not only Reformation theology, but of a new hermeneutic culture and by extension a new literary culture. I argue *The Faerie Queene* uses allegory to depict in one narrative the dialectical Protestant hermeneutic advocated by Tyndale: the ideal version of reading as “scripture in the heart,” accessible only to the elect and therefore depending on grace; and the practical version of reading that Tyndale describes as hard work. Book I moves between two registers: the soteriological, which exists outside of time and human agency; and the moral, which exists within time and calls for human striving. Allegory allows the accommodation of both a moral and a salvific narrative in a predestinarian theology that denies works any contribution to salvation. The difficulties of balancing allegorical and literal, moral and salvific registers, however, open various gaps in the narrative; these gaps and tensions are expressed in a violence that reflects the Reformation’s own interpretive violence.

In his theological tracts, polemical battles, and Biblical commentary, William Tyndale advances a dialectical hermeneutic: an idealized, spiritual vision of reading and a practical model informed by human experience. Drawing on Biblical imagery, particularly 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, Tyndale repeatedly depicts the ideal reading as that of elect readers united with God in sacred textuality by the “scripture in the heart.” In *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, for example, Tyndale writes that “the law of God is writen and grauen in [the] herte” of the faithful Christian.²⁷⁰ Tyndale

²⁶⁶ All citations from *The Faerie Queene* are from the Hamilton edition. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 2001), 1.10.13.8-9.

²⁶⁷ Edmund Spenser, “Letter to Raleigh,” in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Hamilton, A.C. (London: Longman, 2001), 714/4; 715/21-716/23.

²⁶⁸ See Chapter One of this dissertation for more.

²⁶⁹ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159.

²⁷⁰ Tyndale, *STC / 24457*, 27.

asserts he “that hath not thys fayeth [grauen in his herte] is but an vnprofytable babler” and “woteth nether what he bableth, nor what he meaneth or where vnto his wordes pertayne,” but rather “interpreteth the scriptures . . . after his awne blynde reasone and folish fantasies and not of any felyng that he hath in his herte.”²⁷¹ The scripture written in the hearts of the true faithful liberates them from both mediation and misreading.²⁷² This invisible and mystical hermeneutic, however, offers no practical advice on interpretation. Tyndale therefore pairs this spiritual ideal with a more practical model of reading rooted in doctrinal instruction and the literal sense, and he emphasizes context and the use of scripture as its own key. As Tyndale puts it, “in many places, where the text seemeth at the first chop hard to be understood, yet the circumstances before and after, and often reading together, maketh it plain enough.”²⁷³ In Tyndale’s model, reading requires both grace—figured as the “scripture in the heart”—and also constant striving to understand scripture’s “darker sentences.”²⁷⁴

As Tyndale’s Catholic opponents point out, however, this hermeneutic’s emphasis on the individual and reading-as-grace could have punishing psychological effects. As Stephen Gardiner describes it, “each one man” would “be alone, alone, alone, mine own self all alone, and then to be devoured by the devil alone, without comfort in the wilderness alone.”²⁷⁵ The emotional dangers of Protestant hermeneutics became more rather than less visible over time as intra-Protestant conflicts revealed the flexibility of the literal sense and the impossibility of creating consensus by means of the “scripture in the heart.” Sixteenth-century Protestant sermons turned increasing attention to the despair of one’s election and one’s reading.²⁷⁶ In *The Faerie Queene* Spenser represents Tyndale’s dialectical hermeneutic, and confronts its more sinister potential. Redcrosse’s encounter with Despayre normalizes the “fear and trembling” in the face of scripture and assimilates it into the narrative of redemption, revelation, and reading.

This chapter thus brings together two longstanding focal points of Spenser scholarship: *The Faerie Queene* as a narrative invested in the act of reading and *The Faerie Queene* as both a theological and a nationalist project. Spenser’s profound investment in theology has rightfully drawn much scholarly attention. Anthea Hume’s *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* helped to open theologically informed readings of Spenser’s work, focusing on early modern Protestant writings and doctrines.²⁷⁷ Harold Weatherby charts Spenser’s theological debt to patristic writers whose works continued to be readily available and widely read alongside explicitly Protestant theology.²⁷⁸ Both John King and Stephen Greenblatt read *The Faerie Queene* as essentially iconoclastic and Spenser as grappling with the implications of that stance for his poetic project.²⁷⁹ Richard Mallette’s study of Spenser argues he was informed by the sermonic traditions of his time and his characters frequently take the role of preacher.²⁸⁰ More recently, Tiffany Werth’s *Fabulous Dark Cloister* charts how post-Reformation

²⁷¹ Ibid., 27–28.

²⁷² Please refer to the first chapter of this dissertation. See also: Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 138–41; Gray, “Tyndale and the Text in the Heart.”

²⁷³ William Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, ed. David Daniell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3.

²⁷⁴ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 106.

²⁷⁵ Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 183.

²⁷⁶ Ann E. Imbrie, “‘Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture’: Parodic Sermons in *The Faerie Queene*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 17 (1987): 142–55, doi:10.1111/j.1475-6757.1987.tb00929.x.

²⁷⁷ Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

²⁷⁸ Harold L. Weatherby, *Mirrors of Celestial Grace: Patristic Theology in Spenser’s Allegory* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

²⁷⁹ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 157–92.

²⁸⁰ Richard Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

romance engaged with the challenges of a denigrated Catholic genre.²⁸¹ In her work on Spenser, she focuses on the ways *The Faerie Queene* appropriates and transforms the Catholic trappings of romance into the stuff of theological and moral instruction. Joseph Campana's *The Pain of Reformation* argues that the trauma of the Reformation creates a crisis of masculinity from which Spenser attempts to reclaim a virtuous yet vulnerable male subject in the world of religious and political pressures.²⁸²

In the following work, I am most indebted to the exemplary studies of Carol Kaske and Darryl Gless.²⁸³ Darryl Gless's *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* examines theological cruxes in *The Faerie Queene* in light of Elizabethan theological heterogeneity. Gless demonstrates that the flexible multiplicity of readings the poem offers could accommodate various confessional commitments. He treats early modern theology with admirable fluidity, aware that—like Spenser's protean poem—theology and doctrine are not fixed points that can be used to pin down the literary text. The uncertainties and instabilities of theology similarly form an essential aspect of my own work, which examines *The Faerie Queene* in terms of both theological and hermeneutic instabilities. Carol Kaske's *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* argues persuasively that the poet's work—particularly *The Faerie Queene*—mirrors the poetic practices of the Bible and is best illuminated by early modern conceptions of Biblical reading and the Bible's poetic features: *distinctiones* of Biblical imagery *in bono et in malo*; typology; corrective imagery; and propositional contradictions. Like Gless and Kaske, I will consider *The Faerie Queene* from both an intentionalist perspective and that of a reader-response critic, with an eye to the process of reading the text and how it unfolds in time. This method is particularly rewarding with *The Faerie Queene* since the poem itself is so deeply invested in issues both of temporality and of reading.

The Faerie Queene's narrative exists in time, and Redcrosse (like the reader) must move through time; however, salvation in a predestinarian model exists outside of time. Redcrosse is, was, and always shall be elect, even in the many moments when his fallen nature is conspicuously visible. Thus his journey of Holiness is one that may progress in moral terms—he may behave better or worse as he moves through time, and learns from his experiences—but he cannot progress in soteriological terms. Much scholarship on *The Faerie Queene* puts forward a vision of a fundamentally Protestant and predestinarian poet, yet describes Redcrosse's journey in terms better suited to works-oriented Catholic theology.²⁸⁴ Understanding Book I as Redcrosse's journey *to attain* true Holiness occludes the complex art of accommodation the poem performs: Redcrosse's journey can be one of moral improvement, but not soteriological success. The good Protestant can and must strive for moral virtue, but must not mistake that striving for the attainment of—or even a contribution to—salvation.

²⁸¹ Tiffany Jo Werth, *The Fabulous Dark Cloister: Romance in England after the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

²⁸² Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10539021>. Although Campana shares my understanding of Reformation as a locus of profound trauma—one Spenser confronts in the violence of his magnum opus—like Catherine Bates, I find it difficult to square this account of masculinity with later books of *The Faerie Queene* or with Spenser's violent involvement in Ireland. CATHERINE BATES, "The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2012). Katherine Eggert does not buy it either (Katherine Eggert, "Spenser's Ravishment: Rape and Rapture in The Fairie Queene," *Representations* 70 (2000): 1–26).

²⁸³ Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics*; Darryl J Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁸⁴ See, for example, Suttie 79. Suttie argues that Redcrosse not only misreads in Book I, but he is reading within an entirely incorrect value system: he reads himself as a medieval (and Catholic) knight in a world where works contribute to salvation. He falls for 'papist' villains because he is fundamentally unreformed. Paul Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene*, *Studies in Renaissance Literature*, 18 (Cambridge, England: Brewer, 2006), 79. See also: Tiffany Jo Ibid., 76–78; Werth, *The Fabulous Dark Cloister*, 46–59.

Spenser dramatizes Tyndale's dialectical hermeneutics laid out in my first chapter: the ideal hermeneutic, in which reading is linked to salvation and both are enabled solely by God's grace; and a vision of moral and hermeneutic striving that requires doctrinal instruction and dutiful labor. Spenser's poem operates in two registers: a narrative of moral instruction and of salvation, which can only be represented narratively through allegory. Allegory is a mode of accommodation for the theological demands of *sola fides* and *sola scriptura*. Both the hermeneutic registers in the poem relate to reading because reading is an act simultaneously of morality—in which one must strive—and one of salvation—in which no amount of striving can effect any change. But in representing both registers, *The Faerie Queene* inadvertently replicates the doppelganger effect of More's and Tyndale's hermeneutics. Just as More's and Tyndale's reading methods are not as different as they seem, Spenser's two registers collapse into one another. Here, also, epistemological challenges result in interpretive violence.

In my Introduction I lay out three different, but interconnected, meanings for the phrase “interpretive violence”: physical violence motivated by interpretation, such as the torture and execution motivated by scriptural interpretation; physical violence made subject to interpretation, such as reading someone burnt at the stake as either martyr or heretic; and the violent psychological effects of this reading culture in which interpretation poses a threat to both body and soul. Both *The Faerie Queene* and *Titus Andronicus*, the subject of my next chapter, engage and dramatize interpretive violence; moreover, both contain attempted rape or rape. As violence, rape has a particularly deep hermeneutic status. What differentiates sex from rape is fundamentally hermeneutic: the distinction depends on consent. It is perhaps this essential interpretive component that makes sexual assault such a powerful figure for (mis)interpretation in *The Faerie Queene*. Even Sir Philip Sidney, poetry's great defender, “acknowledged that poetry could be a ‘nurse of abuse’ and a ‘mother of lies;” as in *The Faerie Queene* the dangers of poetry are very specifically gendered as female.²⁸⁵ Spenser repeatedly genders and even eroticizes misinterpretation as feminine: Errour's monstrous motherhood; False Una's seduction; Duessa as first deceptive lady love, then witch, and later dismissed rape victim. In the opening of Book II, Spenser presents a radical reimagining of his own poem as Duessa and Archimago accuse Redcrosse of rape. This is one of the most hermeneutically rich incidents in all of *The Faerie Queene*—and from a feminist perspective, deeply chilling—yet has remained shockingly under-examined by feminist, hermeneutic, and Reformation criticism. I argue that the gaps between literal and allegorical and between narrative (or historical) time and soteriological time generate an epistemological and hermeneutic crisis that manifests within the poem as interpretive and sexual violence.

Canto 1: Reading Redcrosse's Reading

Although scholars often treat *The Letter to Raleigh* as the definitive and authorial word on how to read *The Faerie Queene*—and I too could not resist opening with it—the dedication, proem and narrative of Book I canto 1 originally introduced readers to Spenser's allegory. The *Letter* was not printed as a preface; rather it appears as an appendix to the 1590 edition and was even omitted in 1596.²⁸⁶ And so readers encountering *The Faerie Queene* in the sixteenth century did not begin with Spenser's explanatory, defensive letter describing his “continued allegory” as a “darke conceit,” and providing in potentially anxious tones the conventional Classical defense that poetry delights and instructs. *The Faerie Queene* begins with a strange temporal disruption, formally and narratively. The

²⁸⁵ Garthine Walker, “Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England,” *GEND Gender & History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 65.

²⁸⁶ Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene*, 5.

Letter discloses the poem's overall structure and the events that preceded the first canto of Book I, including how Redcrosse became Una's champion. Spenser explains that he has laid out these previous events at the "wel-head of the History" so that we may "from thence gather[ing] the whole intention of the conceit" "which otherwise may happily seeme tedious and confused."²⁸⁷ Spenser's placement of the *Letter* after the poem fits into a larger project of disrupting temporal readings, asking readers to reimagine what they've already read in light of what they now read, and he admits that our introduction to the poem may indeed be "confused." The dedication and proem do little to prepare us for being dumped into the middle of the "plaine," and we know Redcrosse as little as it seems he knows himself. We're thrown into the story without a guide; it's not the *Letter* but Redcrosse's encounters with the Wandering Woods, Errour, and Archimago that act as our first introduction to how to read the poem. What emerges is a gradually unfolding emphasis on reading as negatively depicted through Redcrosse's frequent—and violent—misreadings. Yet this first canto also introduces the complex temporal balancing of Redcrosse's narrative experiences—which occur in time—and his soteriological state—which occurs outside of time. Various seeming paradoxes gesture to this duality, setting up a tension in the first eight cantos that seems resolved in the House of Holiness only to be problematized once more soon thereafter.

When the argument of the first canto describes Redcrosse as "The Patrone of true Holinesse" various scholars have regarded this either as fact—he can be patron of true holiness even despite the character flaws he demonstrates in the first nine cantos—or as prolepsis—"holy" is what he will become once he goes through the trials of Book I and emerges from the House of Holiness and his battle with the dragon. I argue that this either/or approach obscures the delicate accommodations that allegory allows Spenser: Redcrosse simultaneously is *already* the knight of holiness, because he is elect, yet he must *also* work to become the knight of holiness because even by the doctrine of *sola fides*, "if ye cease working, the spirit queneth again and ye cease to be partakers of the promise [of God's grace]."²⁸⁸ Book I balances a moral and a soteriological narrative and therefore must balance different conceptions of time. In the first canto of *The Faerie Queene*, Redcrosse appears to struggle—and fail—yet there are gestures toward not merely his future success, but his own invisible state of election.

The initial description of Redcrosse mirrors the duality in his identity: Holiness as something both present (because elect) and future (because still demonstrably flawed and striving). The first lines describe his "mightie armes and siluer shielde, / Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine / The cruell markes of many' a bloody fielde," which initially depicts a veteran knight, then undercuts it with "Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield" (1.1.1.2-5). The *Letter* explains with narrative the seeming paradox of Redcrosse's appearance—he's wearing "the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul v. Ephes" that Una brought to the court of the Faerie Queen for her champion to wear in battle against the dragon. At 1.1, however, this narrative explanation is not yet explicitly available, so it affords the reader an emblem of the temporal oddities at play in *The Faerie Queene*. Like his label of "the Knight of Holiness," Redcrosse's wearing of battle-tested armor without being battle-tested himself blurs the temporal lines between his seeming present and his future self. It is as if Redcrosse is already wearing armor that has been tested by his own battles, before he himself has fought them. Allegory allows these accommodations of lived experience—which like *The Faerie Queene's* narrative necessarily unfolds in time—with a theology that places salvation outside of human time: the elect are, were, and always shall be elect, outside of time with God.

²⁸⁷ Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," 718/82-85.

²⁸⁸ Tyndale, *Tyndale's New Testament*, gloss, Philippians 2:12.

Whereas Redcrosse's description gestures to the poem's temporal oddities and habits of scriptural allusion, Una's appearance gestures to *The Faerie Queene's* status as an allegorical poem. Una's "vele" (1.1.4.4) suggests not only Una's modesty and her mourning, but offers a visual image for allegory itself. Metaphors of covering and clothing were conventional for describing allegory and became embroiled in Reformation polemics, as demonstrated in my first chapter. Una's modest veil offers a covering with positive connotations; however, in these opening stanzas it finds an echo in the repeated variants of "shrowd," which has multiple connotations as a shelter, a garment, a veil, and (a new sense in the late sixteenth century) a funeral cloth.²⁸⁹ The travelers are caught in the "hideous storme of raine" that falls "so fast, / That euerie wight to **shrowd** it did constrain, / And this faire couple eke to **shroud** themselues were fain"; they then enter the "couert" of a "shadie groue" of trees "therein **shrouded** from the tempest dred" (1.1.6.6-9; 1.1.8.3 bold mine). The "shrowd" that gives them shelter turns out to be the Wandering Wood, a part of their allegorical landscape not yet legible to them. The insistent repetition of "shrowd," though with a different application, suggests what we later learn: that the trees (like the rest of the poem) have a larger meaning that is intermittently veiled and unveiled. They sought a "shrowd" (shelter) and got a "shrowd" (obscuring veil), losing their "path," to be left in "diuerse doubt," and then discover Error's cave (1.1.10.8-9). The subtle evocation of the language of allegory in these early stanzas—which is then repeated over the course of the poem—sets the stage for Redcrosse's encounter with personified Error, which offers a far more explicit demonstration of Redcrosse's journey as an allegorical and interpretive one.²⁹⁰

Redcrosse's encounter with the monstrous snake-woman Error repeatedly highlights issues of textuality and interpretation. When Una warns Redcrosse not to battle Error, her language draws attention to the act of reading: "This Error's den, / a monster vile, whom God and man does hate:/ Therefore I **read** beware" (1.1.13.6-8 bold mine). "Read" here primarily means "counsel, or warn"—already a somewhat archaic usage in Spenser's time—but also underscores Error's connection to textuality: *caveat lector*.²⁹¹ Error's connection to textuality becomes all the more explicit when she attacks the knight with her deadly "vomit" which is "full of bookes and papers":

Therewith she spewd out of her filthie maw,
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke,
His grasping hold, and from her turne him back:
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke (1.1.20.1-7).

Here, books and papers are poisonous tools of evil, uncontrollable and projectile, connected to death, decay, and the unnatural. Error's vomit alludes to the "vnclene spirits like frogges come out of the mouth of the dragon," the "beast," and the "False Prophet," in Revelation 16:13, glossed liberally in the Geneva Bible to link this image to the "great deuil the Popes ambassadours which are euer crying and croking like frogs."²⁹² The books in Error's "filthy parbreak" are often read as

²⁸⁹ "Shroud, n.1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 20, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/178930>.

²⁹⁰ Spenser repeatedly borrows this language of clothing over the course of Book I, as for example when he describes "The false *Dnessa*, cloaked with *Fidessaes* name" (1.7.1.9) or Archimago "clokt with simplenesse" as the Messenger (1.12.34.6).

²⁹¹ A few stanzas later Spenser emphasizes reading again, using "reed" to mean "see" in the poem's first epic simile (1.1.21.9). On Spenser's use of "read" as a recurring keyword that takes on a multiplicity of meanings, see: DeNeef 1982, 142-56 and Ferry 1988: 9-48.

²⁹² Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 77-79.

specifically theological errors and Catholic propaganda since she is the personification of error with a scriptural connection to apocalypse and its anti-Catholic glosses. The exact nature of the vomited texts, however, remains unspecified. Error's spew might be any book, even perhaps *The Faerie Queene* itself, a possibility raised by the characters' 'erroneous' readings, the reader's potential for misreading, and the poet-figure of Archimago who soon appears.

On the literal level, Redcrosse seems to emerge victorious from his encounter with Error. He soon beheads her and then her vast monstrous brood—"blacke as inke"—devour their dead mother's blood and explode in a foul parody of transubstantiation.²⁹³ But did Redcrosse actually defeat Error? And if so, what does that mean? He fails to interpret her correctly and his motives in the fight are described as chivalric rather than holy: he's driven by fear of "shame" (1.1.12.7) and "greedy hardiment" (1.1.14.1). Una's reminder to him to "Add faith vnto [his] force" prompts "gall" and "high disdain" followed by martial success, but no evidence of pious or holy might (1.1.19.3; 6). It is Una, not Redcrosse, who "reads" Error and the Wandering Woods. Not only does Redcrosse fail to read them, he fails to truly hear the reading Una gives him; he is at this point "spiritually illiterate and hard of hearing."²⁹⁴ Una's words do not penetrate his senses. The scene thus enacts a common theme for Elizabethan preachers: one may have only a carnal rather than a spiritual hearing of the word of God and so not truly internalize it.²⁹⁵ Una's preaching remains imperfect, however, since she congratulates him on his "vanquist foe" and his "great glory won this day," taking his outward victory at face value (1.1.27.4-7).²⁹⁶

Though Redcrosse kills the singular, personified Error, error in its more general sense remains distressingly alive and well in subsequent episodes of *The Faerie Queene*.²⁹⁷ Even the first canto's argument, that "*The Patrone of true Holinesse, / Foule Error doth defeate,*" leaves a syntactic ambiguity as to whether Error defeats him or he defeats her. This ambiguity admits both possibilities simultaneously, which aptly describes the incident: Redcrosse beheads Error, but is still mired in error, resulting from the original sin symbolized in Error as simultaneously the serpent and the female. Error offers the readers a first lesson in the tension between the literal level of the romance and the poem's allegorical meanings by dramatizing Redcrosse's literalist misreadings of the world around him as univocal, without allegorical or theological significance.²⁹⁸ The fullest interpretation of the scene lays in the balance between the personification itself and that which it represents. Redcrosse's literal victory foreshadows his victory over the dragon and gestures toward his state of election; however, that does not make him devoid of error—the original sin symbolized in Error, his own poor motives for the fight, and his pridefulness afterward. What looks outwardly like an unqualified victory may be undermined by inward motivations; Redcrosse's reward is worldly praise, not treasure in heaven. Good deeds performed for the wrong reasons—like pride—cannot be credited as truly good. As Christ cautions at Matt. 6:16: "Moreoure when ye faste be not sad as

²⁹³ See 1 Corinthians 11:27-9: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat of this bread, or drink of the cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. . . For he that eateth of drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh his own damnation, because he maketh no difference of the Lord's body." Transubstantiation was a particular point of obsession for Protestant preachers and polemicists and one that powerfully demonstrates the crux of Reformation disputes about figurative and literal meaning.

²⁹⁴ Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England*, 25.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

²⁹⁶ Some scholars have taken Una's positive assessment at face value; however, more recent scholarship on Spenser tends towards the more skeptical reading. See: Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene*, 62; Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 84.

²⁹⁷ Redcrosse's encounter with Error has been the object of particularly heterogeneous interpretation ranging from an almost unqualified victory to a complete failure. For example, see Frederick Morgan Padelford, "The Virtue of Temperance in the Faerie Queene," *Studphil Studies in Philology* 18, no. 3 (1921): 334–46. Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 84.

²⁹⁸ John N King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 209–13.

the hypocrites are. For they disfigure their faces that they myght be sene of men how they faste. Verely I say vnto you they have their rewarde.”²⁹⁹ The connection here seems all the more apt since Redcrosse, who seemed “to solemn sad,” decapitates Errour, and next encounters the figure identified in the canto’s argument as “Hypocrisie.”

Although Redcrosse successfully leads the way out of the Wandering Wood after Errour’s death, both he and Una are duped by Archimago, despite his unmistakably Catholic appearance with his “long black weedes,” the “bidding [of] his beades,” and talk of “Saintes and Popes” with strewn Ave Mary’s (1.1.29.2; 30.7; 35.8-9). Despite these clear signs any Protestant reader would recognize, Una and Redcrosse are taken in and follow him to his hermitage where the theme of textual danger introduced with Errour becomes all the more explicit and casts a long shadow over *The Faerie Queene* itself.

Archimago appears as a poet-figure able to create false variants of characters within *The Faerie Queene*. Having lured the travelers to his house for the night, Archimago then finds inspiration in the “magick bookes” from which he, “choosing out few words most horrible, / (Let none them read) thereof did verses frame” to summon a “Legion of [damned] Sprights” (1.1.36.8; 37.1-2; 38.2). Here Spenser’s language waxes metaliterary as Archimago uses books and verses to conjure evil false images. Although, like Archimago, Spenser uses verses to evoke images in the reader’s mind, he defends his reader from Archimago’s corrupt text by censoring these evil verses: “Let none them read.”³⁰⁰ Archimago uses the sprights summoned by his magical poetry, selects “the falsest” who is “fittest for to forge true-seeming lyes,” and he then:

. . . with charmes and hidden artes,
Had made a Lady of that other Spright,
And fram’d of liquid ayre her tender partes
So liuely and so like in all mens sight,
That weaker sence it could haue raiisht quight:
The maker selfe for all his wondrous witt,
Was nigh beguiled with so goodly sight: (1.1.38.6-7; 45.1-9; 46.6-9)

In creating False Una, Spenser devotes considerable attention to the seductive nature of this false reproduction, and her “tender partes” invites a less than innocent reading, so well-executed that even its creator could nearly be duped by it, “rauisht quight” (1.1.45.5).

Redcrosse’s reaction to this false variant is a misreading bound up in violence and eroticism. After sending Redcrosse a demonic wet-dream from which the knight awakens “bathed in wanton blis and wicked ioy,” Archimago presents the still-aroused Redcrosse with this false reprint of Una who, “halfe blushing [offers] him to kis,/ With gentle blandishment and louely looke” (1.1.49.7-8).³⁰¹ Redcrosse is “halfe enraged at her shamelesse guise” and “He thought haue slaine her in his fierce despight” (1.1.50.2-3). This scene combines eroticism and violence with misinterpretation and introduces the first instance of the false doubles that haunt *The Faerie Queene*. Although Redcrosse resists her seduction and his own murderous impulse, he does not in fact read False Una correctly. He repeats this misinterpretation and violent impulse when he sees False Una and Archimago’s conjured squire, “In wanton lust and leud embracement”: he “burnt with gealous fire” and “would haue slain them in his furious ire / But hardly was restrained of that aged sire” (1.2.5.5-9). That

²⁹⁹ Unless noted otherwise, for all quotes from the Christian Scriptures I refer to Tyndale, *Tyndale’s New Testament*. Edited by David Daniell. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1989.

³⁰⁰ See also: Ernest B Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Kenneth Gross, *Spenserian Poetics: Idolatry, Iconoclasm, and Magic* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

³⁰¹ For an analysis of erotic dreams in *The Faerie Queene*, see: Sheila T Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires: Female Sexuality in the Faerie Queene* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 42–74.

Redcrosse doesn't kill False Una is offered to us not as a triumph of restraint—as when Guyon stays his hand in II.1 before attacking Redcrosse. Rather, it is a misreading and one that would have been discovered had he given in to this highly misogynist violent impulse. Redcrosse's repeated inability to read False Una correctly, to perceive that she is a mere corrupt textual variant, sets Redcrosse up for further mishap as he flees straight to "Fidessa,"³⁰² whose seeming faithfulness dupes him as surely as does False Una's seeming faithlessness.

False Una as the corrupt textual variant offers a personified representation of a recurring strategy in *The Faerie Queene*. As Spenser offers us his narrative in a dizzying array of versions, variations, and revisions, we like the characters must choose between them and balance them against one another: the 'literal' events of the poem as depicted by the narrator; Duessa's story about Redcrosse told to Sansjoy; the Dwarf's account of cantos 1-7 to Una; Una's account of these events to Prince Arthur; Despayre's retelling of events to Redcrosse; Redcrosse's account of himself to the people of Eden; Archimago and Duessa's revision of Book I told to Una's father; and finally Redcrosse's and Una's own revisions to their accounts of Book I. Where the villains are concerned, the narrator readily constructs their versions as lies, but in fact these less-than-factual retellings are common to characters depicted as both good and evil. These constant readings, revisions, and misreadings form a marked and complex strategy that constantly demands the reader, like the characters, reevaluate what has happened and shows the moral dimensions of interpretation.

Spenser's use of allegory, however, not only attempts to demonstrate the moral aspect of interpretation, but to accommodate the soteriological as well. Figural allegory allows for these overlapping registers, yet there remain various gaps and tensions between them. Book I canto 1 introduces readers to these tensions between the moral and soteriological registers of *The Faerie Queene* through a series of seeming paradoxes: Redcross is Holiness yet flawed; he fells Error yet falls to error; and Una is Truth yet mistaken. The first canto of *The Faerie Queene* offers a diagnostic introduction to the issues of interpretation highlighted within the poem and under deadly pressure from Reformation hermeneutic disputes. Acts of violence in *The Faerie Queene* are readily conflated with interpretation, and yet this violence fails to produce stable interpretations; rather, it generates more violence. This violence takes a particularly sexualized form, as Error's monstrous maternity suggests. In canto 10 Spenser seems to harmonize these apparent contradictions, and Redcrosse's reformation in the House of Holiness seems to offer a solution for both misreading and violence.

Cantos 9-10: Holy Despair and Protestant Reading

In Redcrosse's encounters with Despayre and the denizens of the House of Holiness reading and salvation become most explicitly linked. Redcrosse's brush with Despayre shows his failures as a reader, his continuing ignorance of scripture, and the need for external intervention. In many respects Redcrosse's encounter with Despayre parallels his encounter with Error: his wrongful eagerness for the fight; his prideful assurance of his own success; the cave-dwelling adversary with an undisguised allegorical identity; and his need for Una's timely intervention. However, while his brush with Error had the appearance of success—garnering praise even from Una—with Despayre that veneer is lost and Redcrosse fully experiences the necessary abjection to be outwardly reformed and to reveal what had always been the case: he is elect. Whereas the encounter with Error appears to be a victory, but represents a spiritual failing, narratively, Redcrosse's encounter with Despayre appears to be a failure, yet represents a spiritual necessity.

³⁰² When she first meets Redcrosse, Duessa, the "two-faced" allegorical representation of the Catholic church, Whore of Babylon and witchcraft, introduces herself as "Fidessa" to further her disguise (1.2.26.2).

In both Despayre's cave and the House of Holiness, personification allegory allows Spenser to depict narratively an inward emotional, soteriological, and hermeneutic experience. Despayre represents—and thus wards off—an essentially Protestant version of misreading, the very one Stephen Gardiner predicted. This misreading, however, can ultimately be productive and helps propel Redcrosse to the House of Holiness for orthodox instruction. Protestant orthodoxy emphasizes the importance of reading scripture, but insists that no human action—no good works, no reading of scripture—can contribute to salvation, which comes only from God's saving grace. Right reading (like good work) relates to salvation, but right reading (like good work) springs from one's salvation rather than causing or contributing to it. I argue that, in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser uses allegory to solve the problem of *representing* Protestant reading. Allegory gives Spenser a narrative model for understanding *in terms of action* an inward theology of grace and reading that rejects the very possibility of action. By merging the processes of salvation and interpretation, Spenser's allegory turns the inward, illegible process of reading-as-salvation into an externally legible pedagogical narrative. Allegory enables Spenser to render as narrative a vision of both reading and salvation that occurs outside of time.

The first appearance of the actual text of scripture in *The Faerie Queene* immediately precedes Redcrosse's encounter with Despayre and foreshadows Redcrosse's scriptural failings in that meeting. Redcrosse has presumably had scripture with him all along, and has been clothed in imagery from Ephesians; however, we have never seen him consult the Bible. Its presence is not revealed to readers until Redcrosse presents it to Prince Arthur in a courteous exchange of gifts.³⁰³ Scripture is described as “A booke, wherein his Saueours testament / Was writt with golden letters rich and braue; / A worke of wondrous grace, and hable soules to saue” (1.9.19.6-9). Here scripture is written with gold rather than blood as Redcrosse comes to understand it in the House of Holiness. This emphasis on the physical object and its rich, golden appearance shows Redcrosse's continued distraction by external appearances. It also suggests his potentially illiterate attachment to the book and the “talismanic magic associated with illuminated manuscripts and other books whose devotional illustrations conjured up Protestant fears of Catholic ‘superstition’ and ‘idolatry.’”³⁰⁴ Redcrosse has only a superficial and physical familiarity with scripture at this point, and as the book is physical and external he can be divided from it, unlike the “scripture in the heart” that he must come later to understand. Moreover, describing the book as a “worke of wondrous grace” evokes a central theological crux of the Reformation: the tension between “works” and “grace” in salvation. It is this very tension Spenser's allegory strives to accommodate and that Despayre then exploits.

The events leading to Redcrosse's encounter with Despayre foreground his failures as a reader. After giving Prince Arthur “his Saueours testament” as a farewell gift, Redcrosse and Una encounter “an armed knight” with “an hempen rope” “about his neck,” an emblem of suicide and despair (1.9.21.2; 22.7). Dismayed at Trevisan's “misseeming plight,” Redcrosse demands that he “aread who hath [him] thus arrayed” (1.9.23.7-9). Trevisan tells Redcrosse how he and Sir Terwin met “man of hell, that calls himselfe *Despayre*” who “fayre areeds / Of tidings straunge,” “pluckt from [them] all hope,” and enticed them to commit suicide (1.9.28-30). Sir Terwin succumbed and Trevisan only narrowly escaped. Trevisan rightly credits his escape from Despayre to “grace” with the suggestion of divine mercy. Redcrosse replies by using “grace” in a courtly sense, asking Trevisan “Of grace do me vnto [Despayre's] cabin guyde,” not so he can avenge Terwin as he later claims, but to try himself against “that treachours art” (1.9.26.8; 32.2-4). Terrified, Trevisan acquiesces “against [his] liking” “to doe [Redcrosse] grace” (1.9.32.4). Redcrosse's use of grace in the

³⁰³ Similar to naming Una at the appearance of False Una, this strategy of naming or revealing at the moment of loss or doubleness occurs frequently in *The Faerie Queene*.

³⁰⁴ King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*, 60.

wrong sense foreshadows his attempted suicide, even as Trevisan's experience of divine grace foreshadows the failure of that attempt. And, as with Errour, the repeated uses of homonyms for "read" emphasizes the importance of reading to these moments.

Redcrosse receives ample warnings about Despayre before entering his ghastly lair: the emblematic figure of Trevisan, the attempted suicide; Trevisan's narrative and explicit warnings; the sight of Terwin's still-bleeding corpse; and Despayre's very name which, like "Errour" rather than "Fidessa," is entirely undisguised. The events leading up to his encounter with Despayre offer a concise recap of the various levels on which Redcrosse has been a bad reader in cantos one through eight. Ultimately, despite all these warnings and exempla, Redcrosse fails to relate any of these signs to his own recent longing for death in Orgoglio's dungeon. He sounds like a hypocrite as he condemns Terwin and Trevisan's weakness in the face of mere "idle speech" (1.10.31.1). And so Redcrosse also nearly falls to "enchanted rimes" and "idle speech" with Despayre in one of *The Faerie Queene's* most virtuoso displays of rhetorical and theological dialogue.³⁰⁵

In cantos one through eight, Redcrosse's interpretive failures were of his own narrative and scriptural allusions and were largely under the surface in the poem's imagery; in canto nine, however, the appearance of a physical Bible marks a shift to explicitly scriptural hermeneutics as Redcrosse encounters Despayre. Despayre conforms to Protestant depictions of Satanic hermeneuts, but with a theologically Protestant rather than Catholic bent. As Anne Imbrie points out:

In their commentaries on [the Temptation in the Wilderness, Matthew 4] Protestant hermeneuts identify Satan as the prototype of the false preacher, abusing the word of God for his own purposes, demonstrating the heresies of scriptural interpretation with which moderate Protestants charged their adversaries: quoting out of context, deleting verses, and reading too literally or too allegorically."³⁰⁶

As Redcrosse's conflict with Despayre unfolds, Despayre's selective use of scripture parallels Satan's manipulation of scripture in the temptation in the wilderness, a particularly popular story for sixteenth-century Biblical commentators.³⁰⁷

In his exchange with Despayre, Redcrosse shows himself interpretively inept and scripturally ignorant. He may wear armour borrowed from Ephesians, but Biblical images are for him merely literal objects. As yet, he has little understanding of Biblical texts, making him easy prey for Despayre. On arrival at Despayre's cave, Redcrosse announces that he has come to punish the "authour" of Terwin's death: "What iustice can but iudge against thee right, / With thine own blood to price his blood, here shed in sight" (1.9.37.8-9). Redcrosse himself introduces "justice," a term Despayre easily turns against him both for his presumption in passing judgment and as an ideal that would necessarily condemn Redcrosse, who has committed grave sins. Their exchange and its insistent repetition of variants of judge/justice suggests Matthew 7:1-2—"Judge not that ye be not iudged. For as ye iudge so shall ye be iudged"—a logic Despayre exploits against Redcrosse. As their dialogue moves from Terwin to the arguments for suicide and then to Redcrosse's own state, Despayre shows himself a diabolically brilliant rhetorician. He takes scripture out of context and

³⁰⁵ See: Ann E. Imbrie, "Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture": Parodic Sermons in *The Faerie Queene*," *English Literary Renaissance* 17 (1987): 142-55; Patrick Cullen, *Infernal Triad: The Flesh, the World, and the Devil in Spenser and Milton*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 59-61; King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*, 214-16.

³⁰⁶ Imbrie, "Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture," 143. Of course, the dangers of overly literal or overly allegorical reading apply to *The Faerie Queene* as well.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 143-46.

truncates quotations to sever God's law from God's promises, thereby offering a demonic parody of a sermon.³⁰⁸

Echoing Redcrosse's exchange with Trevisan, Despayre's next assault parodies Psalm 69 to describe the "grace" of helping others to the "rest" of death" (1.9.43.3).³⁰⁹ In turn Redcrosse answers not with scripture but with a martial metaphor, likening suicide to a soldier abandoning his post before the Captain/God ordered (1.9.41.2-9). Despayre likewise turns this metaphor against Redcrosse: "All those great battels, which thou boasts to win, / Through strife, and bloud-shed, and auengement, / Now praysd, hereafter deare thou shalt repent: / For life must life, and bloud must bloud repay" (1.9.43.3-6). Despayre attacks the ideals of martial endeavor and the basis of chivalric striving, then reminds Redcrosse of his manifest failures in that area: "Witnesse the dongeon deepe, wherein of late / Thy life shut vp, for death so oft did call" (1.9.45.5-6). Despayre here reminds Redcrosse and the reader of very recent events: when Arthur arrived to rescue him, Redcrosse had indeed called out "O who is that, which bringes me happy choyce / Of death . . . O welcome thou, that doest of death bring tydings trew" (1.8.38.3-9). (It is perhaps no coincidence that Redcrosse called out for death in stanza thirty-eight and it is in stanza thirty-eight of the next canto that Despayre addresses him for the first time.) Redcrosse's first encounter with Despayre is not his first—nor will it be his last—encounter with despair or suicidal longing.

Similarly, Redcrosse has fallen short by chivalric standards in his treatment of Una, as he reminds Redcrosse that "to this Ladie milde / Thou falsed hast thy faith with periurie, / And sold thy selfe to serue *Duessa* vilde, / With whom in all abuse thou hast thy selfe defilde" (1.9.46.6-9). Despayre's strategy of reminding Redcrosse of his past sins again replicates the strategy Elizabethan preachers warned Satan would use against the faithful. For example, John Knox warned Spenser's contemporaries of the ways Satan "useth and inventth dyvers argumentis. Sumtymes he calleth the sins of thair youth, and whilk thae half commitit in the tyme of blindness, to their remembrance," and William Perkins warns that in using scripture one must not "wrest the same from the proper meaning of the holy ghost to serve [one's] own conceit [which] is the practice of Satan."³¹⁰ Like Satan, Despayre does precisely this: after reminding Redcrosse of his failure against Orgoglio and his infidelity to Una, Despayre next offers further distortion of scripture.

Despayre advances the proposition that it is impossible for Redcrosse or any mortal to take action outside God's will and that, if Redcrosse kills himself, it will be because God wills it; this line of argument is indeed distressingly close to predestination and reflects the anxious tension between predestination and continued belief in free will (1.9.41-2). Here we see an essentially Protestant version of error rather than the predominantly Catholic ones depicted in cantos 1-7.³¹¹ This change reflects Redcrosse's necessary movement away from a mistaken belief in the power of his own works and striving.

Scripture (quoted out of context) and Christian doctrine (selectively used) form Despayre's arsenal. Despayre argues on God's justice, or "commandments," and neglects God's grace, or "promises":

Is not he iust, that all this doth behold
From highest heauen, and beares an equall eye?

³⁰⁸ Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England*, 38; Imbrie, "Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture," 147; Cullen, *Infernal Triad*, 59–61.

³⁰⁹ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 1.9.43.3. There is an added irony here, since Redcrosse had vowed "hence shall I neuer rest, / Till I that treachours art haue heard and tried" (1.9.32.1-2).

³¹⁰ Imbrie, "Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture," 146.

³¹¹ One notable exception is the figure of Envy whom Redcrosse encounters in the House of Pride, who distorts the doctrine of *sola fides* thus: "who with gracious bread the hungry feeds, / His alms for want of faith he [Envy] doth accuse" (1.4.32.3-4).

Shall he thy sins vp in his knowledge fold,
 And guiltie be of thine impietie?
 Is not his law, Let euery sinner die:
 Die shall all flesh? what then must needs be donne,
 Is it not better to doe willinglie,
 Then linger, till the glasse be all out ronne?

Death is the end of woes: die soone, O faeries sonne (1.9.47.1-9).

Despayre's language here is scriptural, but mangled. The "equall eye" of Psalm 145.9 is just yet benevolent.³¹² And, like Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, Despayre gives Redcrosse only the first half of Romans 6:23: "For the reward of sin is death: but eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The verses Despayre distorts are some of the most famous and essential passages for Protestant theology—passages Spenser's readers would undoubtedly succeed in completing where Redcrosse fails.

Despayre is the narrative projection of misreading. Throughout the episode, there are various suggestions that Despayre is internal to Redcrosse: Redcrosse's previous longing for suicide in Orgoglio's dungeon; the pronoun ambiguities between Redcrosse and Trevisan; Trevisan's unspoken disappearance after leading Redcrosse to the cave, as if he'd been a projection all along; and the discrepancies between Trevisan's account of Despayre and Redcrosse's experience. Although Trevisan described Despayre as "Inquiring of [their] states, and of [their] knightly deedes" before he "pluckt from [them] all hope," Despayre doesn't have to ask Redcrosse what he has done. Despayre already knows, further suggesting that Despayre is a projection of Redcrosse's own mind and therefore of Redcrosse's own errors. Repeated pronoun ambiguities in Redcrosse and Trevisan's interactions draw further attention to their similarities, and Trevisan disappears at Despayre's cave without any mention in the narration, as if he's simply been folded back into Redcrosse's own psyche. Like the inward ideal of reading embodied by the denizens of the House of Holiness, Despayre is an externalization of a hermeneutic principle in both moral and soteriological registers.

It is ultimately Despayre's mangled scripture that penetrates Redcrosse's senses to bring him to the brink of suicide:

The knight was much enmoued with [Despayre's] speach,
 That as a swords point through his hart did perse,
 And in his conscience made a secret breach,
 Well knowing true all, that he did reherse,
 And to his fresh remembrance did reuerse
 The vgly vew of his deformed crimes,
 That all his manly powres it did disperse,
 As he were charmed with inchaunted rimes,
 That oftentimes he quakt, and fainted oftentimes (1.9.48.1-9).

Whereas in canto 12 Redcrosse shifts the blame for his various misdeeds, here Redcrosse accepts responsibility and blame for the sins Despayre has charged him with: "Well knowing true all." Redcrosse is brought to this full awareness of his sins when Despayre's speech "That as a swords point through his hart did perse, / And in his conscience made a secret breach" (1.9.48.2-3). Phrases like "Swords point" and "sworde of the spirit" were "commonplace sixteenth-century epithets for the word of God" and the image of the sword is particularly associated with the law.³¹³ As described in Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is

³¹² Imbrie, "Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture," 18.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 148.

a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”³¹⁴ Soon Redcrosse is so “charmed with inchaunted rimes” that he “resolu’d to worke his final smart, / [and] lifted vp his hand” with “a dagger sharpe and keene” (1.9.48.8; 51.2-9).³¹⁵ Redcrosse’s misreading is to literalize violently a Biblical image with a dagger that, like God’s word, is “sharp,” by making physically and literally real the wound given to his heart. Anne Imbrie suggests “That the knight’s heart was pierced by Despayre’s words may indicate a certain sensitivity on his part to scriptural material; but his responding as he does to the abuse of scripture shows that his sensitivity is dulled to the true meaning of the text cited.”³¹⁶ Like all readers, Redcrosse is lost without external intervention; Una, acting as God’s grace, prevents Redcrosse’s suicide and brings him from Despayre to the House of Holiness. Redcrosse’s encounter with Despayre initially looks like an unmitigated disaster; however, it is in fact a necessary misreading. I would argue that Despayre’s role is even more positive than this, however, since the guilt Redcrosse experiences is the same sort described as the first step in the journey of salvation and despair recurs in the House of Holiness under ideal hermeneutic instruction.

Una performs a divine intervention, acting as God’s grace when “out of Redcrosse’s hand she snatcht the cursed knife” (1.9.52.4). She intervenes both physically and verbally as she performs the role of good preacher.³¹⁷ She expresses the “Promises” Despayre had separated from the “Law,” yet the verses that she completes would be easy for anyone with a modest familiarity of the Bible, something Spenser might take for granted in a reader. The reader can complete the verses that Despayre manipulates and can therefore feel unified with Una, when she articulates the “promises” that go with “the law.” Just as Faustus’ apparently reprobate failure to read can reassure an audience of their competence and hope for election, in reading the incident with Despayre, the well-trained reader is simultaneously experiencing Despayre’s manipulation and anticipating the work of grace Una then performs. Una addresses Redcrosse thus:

...Fie, fie, faint harted knight,
 What meanest thou by this reprochfull strife?
 Is this the battell, which thou vauntst to fight
 With that fire-mouthed Dragon, horrible and bright?
 Come, come away, fraile, seely, fleshly wight,
 Ne let vaine words bewitch thy manly hart,
 Ne diuelish thoughts dismay thy constant spright.
 In heauenly mercies hast thou not a part?
 Why shouldst thou then despeire, that chosen art?
 Where iustice growes, there grows eke greater grace,
 The which doth quench the brood of hellish smart,
 And that accurst hand-writing doth deface,
 Arise, Sir knight arise, and leaue this cursed place. (1.9.52.6-53.9)

As elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene*, Una’s speech treats misinterpretation as feminine and erotically charged. Despayre’s distorted scriptures are “vaine words” that Redcrosse shouldn’t allow to

³¹⁴ Robert P Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds., *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 4:12.

³¹⁵ Despayre’s use of “inchaunted rimes” suggests Spenser’s recurring unease over poetic morality, and echoes Archimago in 1.1, who finds inspiration in the “magick bookes” from which he, “choosing out few words most horrible, / (Let none them read) thereof did verses frame” to summon a “Legion of [damned] Sprights” (1.1.36.8; 37.1-2; 38.2).

³¹⁶ Imbrie, “Playing Legerdemaine with the Scripture,” 148. Imbrie reads “as a swords point through his hart” as primarily a reference to Luke 2.35 and “the first New Testament reference in the passage,” when in fact it is a much clearer reference to Hebrews 4.12.

³¹⁷ Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England*.

“bewitch [his] manly hart.” Redcrosse’s interpretive failing is a gendered threat to the ideal of his “manly” heart, already shown susceptible to being “bewitched” in his liason with Duessa. The depiction of Redcrosse’s effeminacy here—“perced” by Despayre’s words—suggests both his death wish in Orgoglio’s dungeon and the lassitude of his sexual encounter with Duessa. Una doesn’t dispute the Law Despayre has quoted to Redcrosse nor does she deny the truth of Despayre’s account of Redcrosse’s sins. She even condemns him as “fraile, feeble, fleshly,” but she offers the second half of these truncated scriptures and assures Redcrosse that he is “chosen” for a part in “heavenly mercies.”³¹⁸ Redcrosse is not facing scripture as Stephen Gardiner described, “alone, alone... devoured by the devil alone”; he has Una.

Redcrosse’s encounter with Despayre propels him to the House of Holiness. Only the blindly self-righteous (and fallen) can encounter scripture without despair. It is not one’s own reading that saves, but rather the external act of God’s grace, first represented by Una’s intervention and later by Redcrosse’s training with Fidelia. Redcrosse’s training in the House of Holiness teaches him lessons of salvation and reading, and that the experience of despair in fact is a normative element of both. As Carol Kaske has so compellingly argued, Spenser’s work is informed by Biblical poetics, like the repeated use of an image *in bono et in malo*, a technique particularly visible in *The Faerie Queene*. In the House of Holiness we find the positive, *in bono*, version of various things seen previously as evil, *in malo*: Caelia’s “beades” vs. Archimago’s; the good hermitage vs. Archimago’s hermitage; Fidelia’s cup of salvation vs. Duessa’s cursed chalice; and so on. It is tempting, therefore, to see Redcrosse’s encounter with Despayre as the *in malo* version of his despair in the House of Holiness; however, I’d suggest that the division between *in malo* and *in bono* is particularly muddy in the instance of Despayre/despair since these are not merely poetic images, but rather an emotion. Moreover, the encounter with Despayre makes a direct contribution to Redcrosse’s reformation in the House of Holiness, and no comparable link exists between the sorts of images previously listed. All of this works to emphasize the significance of Redcrosse’s encounter with Despayre and to suggest that his apparent utter failure was, in fact, necessary to his ultimate spiritual success.³¹⁹ Before following Redcrosse to the House of Holiness, Spenser’s narrator makes one of the most famously direct statements of dogma found in *The Faerie Queene*:

What man is he, that boasts of fleshly might,
 And vaine assurance of mortality,
 Which all so soone, as it doth come to fight,
 Against spirituall foes, yeelds by and by,
 Or from the field most cowardly doth fly?
 Ne let the man ascribe it to his skill,
 That thorough grace hath gained victory.
 If any strength we haue, it is to ill,
 But all the good is Gods, both power and eke will. (1.10.1.1-9)

³¹⁸ D. W Doerksen, ““All the Good Is God’s”: Predestination in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Book I,” *Christianity & Literature* *Christianity & Literature* 32, no. 3 (1983): 14.

³¹⁹ Although scholars have frequently claimed that the House of Holiness is one of the most explicit and unambiguous events in *The Faerie Queene*, this claim is belied by the incident’s remarkably heterogeneous interpretations, as Darryl Gless points out (147; 244). On the subject of predestination, for example, arguments range from Spenser supporting it explicitly, opposing it implicitly, and self-contradicting on the issue, while his attitude to monastic life has received similarly varied readings. See: Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser*; Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics*. I concur with Darryl Gless in supposing that Spenser realized there was an advantage to maintaining a certain ambiguity on vexed matters of doctrine and with Carol Kaske in allowing space for tensions between meanings, in the style of Biblical *contradictiones*.

First, the stanza's rhetorical question implicitly passes judgment on Trevisan, Terwin, and Redcrosse in the recent events of *The Faerie Queene*, and draws the reader into this rhetorical condemnation with the unspecified "what man." The answering statement—a corrective for the previous question—seems at first glance unambiguously Calvinist.³²⁰ Yet even here, there is a delicate accommodation of predestination and free will: although "grace" is the vehicle by which one may "gain victory," not one's own "skill," the active verb "gained" still implies cooperative human striving. Similarly, the conditional "if any strength we have" leaves the question open, rather than foreclosing the possibility of humans possessing "any strength." The stanza draws obviously on three widely familiar Biblical quotations: Eph. 2.8-9 ("For by grace are ye made safe through faith, and that not of yourselves. For it is the gift of God, and cometh not of works, lest any man should boast himself."); Rom. 13.1 ("For there is no power but of God."); and Phil. 2.13 ("For it is God which worketh in you, both the will and also the deed, even of good will."). Tyndale's gloss for the preceding passage of Philippians, exhorting the faithful to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," reads: "As ye be saved from sin through faith so work according to the covenant until ye come to the salvation of glory. For if ye cease working, the spirit queneth again and ye cease to be partakers of the promise." Any ambiguity or contradiction in Spenser's vision of predestination and voluntarism can be found in scripture itself. Moreover, this gloss addresses the challenges of Redcrosse's attainment of perfection—as depicted in the House of Holiness—and the seeming paradox of his backsliding in canto 12, the issue I take up in the next section. Reading and salvation call for human striving, but are equally dependent on grace.

In the House of Holiness, Redcrosse reunites with a physical copy of scripture, carried by Fidelia, the personification of faith. Although Redcrosse now encounters scripture in a more positive setting than Despayre's cave, scripture's darker side remains. Spenser describes Fidelia as:

. . . araied all in lilly white,
 And in her right hand bore a cup of gold,
 With wine and water fild vp to the hight,
 In which a Serpent did himselfe enfold
 That horroure made to all, that did behold;
 But she no whitt did change her constant mood:
 And in her other hand she fast did hold
 A boke that was both signd and seald with blood,
 Wherin darke things were writt, hard to be vnderstood (1.10.13.1-9).

Fidelia carries the "boke" "Wherin darke things were writt" in one hand and a Serpent, an object of "horroure," in the other. Scholars have noted that the Serpent in the cup is the emblem of Aesculapius, the symbol of healing, as well as the serpent lifted up by Moses (Num. 21.9) that was typologically interpreted as Christ crucified.³²¹ Though these readings are apt, I find they do not fully account for the more sinister side of the Serpent which "did himselfe enfold / That horroure made to all, that did behold" (1.10.13.4-5). This "horroure" inspiring Serpent would surely *also* (if not even more powerfully) suggest Satan, the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, original sin, and Despayre himself, who was likened to a snake in the previous canto (1.9.28.8). Thus, with her right hand Fidelia provokes horror, the remembrance of sin, and Despayre, as well as simultaneously a reminder of Christ crucified, healing, and salvation. With her left hand Fidelia holds scripture, the "boke" "signd and seald with blood," which like the Serpent should provoke both horror and

³²⁰ Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser*, 148–50.

³²¹ see: Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 126 n. 13.

comfort for the (elect) reader. Fidelia presents emblematically the theological tensions Spenser uses allegory to accommodate narratively.

The figure of Speranza further underscores the persistent connection between despair and hope. Spenser writes that Speranza, “Was clad in blew, that her beseemed well; / Not all so chearefull seemed she of sight, / As was her sister; whether dread did dwell, / Or anguish in her hart, is hard to tell” (1.10.14.2-6). Dread and anguish are the “complementary emotions afflicting those without hope, i.e. in despair” (n. 126). Here, the allegorical figure for hope appears to be in despair. Rather than a paradox, however, this demonstrates the constantly dialectical nature of hope—it must be in opposition to something, as demonstrated by her clinging to the “anchor of hope”: “Vpon her arme a siluer anchor lay, / Whereon she leaned euer” (1.10.146-7). Hope is an active process, as Speranza simultaneously experiences despair in the face of the Law and takes comfort in God’s Promises, dialectical rather than a stable, static allegory. Her experiences are closer to those of Redcrosse. When he too experiences holy despair in the face of the Law, she can therefore give “him comfort sweet” by teaching “him how to take assured hold / Vpon her siluer anchor, as was meet” (1.10.22.1-3).

Scripture does not immediately cure despair—in fact, Redcrosse’s encounter with the “sacred Booke” renews his despair, though in a different form. With her presentation of scripture, Fidelia is “hable, with her wordes to kill”—like Despayre—but unlike Despayre’s distorted reading, Fidelia is also able to “rayse againe to life the hart, that she did thrill” (1.10.19.8-9). Spenser writes that “the faithfull knight now grew in litle space . . . To such perfection of all heuenly grace” that:

That wretched world he gan for to abhore,
And mortall life gan loath, as thing forlore,
Greeud with remembrance of his wicked wayes,
And prict with anguish of his sinnes so sore,
That he desired, to end his wretched dayes:
So much the dart of sinfull guilt the soule dismayes.

.

In this distressed doubtfull agony,
When him his dearest *Vna* did behold,
Disdeining life, desiring leaue to dye,
She found her selfe assayld with great perplexity (1.10.21.1-22.9)

When receiving scripture in the House of Holiness, Redcrosse still longs for death, rejecting worldly things and in anguish over his own sinfulness. There are echoes from Despayre’s cave in both theme and language, as the dart of “sinful” guilt echoes the sword’s point. Though one might read Redcrosse’s desire for death in the House of Holiness as a sign of Despayre’s lingering hold on him, this longing for death and “distressed doubtfull agony” occurs *after* Redcrosse has grown to “perfection of all heuenly grace” (1.10.21.3). This is mirrored in the figure of Speranza. Redcrosse’s despair in Despayre’s cave is the same despair he feels in the House of Holiness, further complicating narrative time in these incidents. As we move into the House of Holiness, event sequencing and narrative becomes deeply strange—time operates differently in salvific and narrative time, and the temporal oddities of House of Holiness gesture towards this. Speranza must help Redcrosse hold on to her anchor, “Else had his sinnes so great, and manifold / Made him forget all that *Fidelia* told” (1.10.22.4-5). This illustrates that emotional anguish, far from being incompatible with salvation and scripture, is indeed an integral part of an ongoing dialectic of hope and despair.

In the House of Holiness, Spenser expends considerable poetic energy on the subject—but not the scene—of instruction. He writes that, upon Una’s request, Fidelia:

. . . taught [Redcrosse] celestial discipline

And opened his dull eyes, that light mote in them shine.
 And that her sacred Booke, with blood ywritt
 That none could reade, except she did them teach,
 She vnto him disclosed euery whitt,
 And heauenly documents thereout did preach,
 That weaker witt of man could neuer reach,
 Of God, of grace, of iustice, of free will,
 That wonder was to heare her goodly speach:
 For she was hable, with her wordes to kill
 And rayse againe to life the hart, that she did thrill (1.10.18.8-19.9).

The account of this lesson is distant and *The Faerie Queene's* readers are left outside Fidelity's preaching. In the House of Holiness, readers are divided from Redcrosse at the moment of his transformation, as he is born again, confident in his knowledge of himself as elect. Whereas, in Despayre's cave, we too heard Redcrosse and Despayre's entire conversation verbatim, in the House of Holiness we are outside the lesson. Although Fidelity "vnto [Redcrosse] disclosed euery whitt" of that sacred book, we get only a list of topics—"Of God, of grace, of iustice, of free will"—not the content. *The Faerie Queene* cannot teach as scripture can and Spenser must refer us, indeed push us, out of his own poem.

Yet not only does Spenser withhold a précis of Fidelity's lesson, he never shows Redcrosse reading at all. Indeed, Fidelity's lessons to Redcrosse are a specifically auditory event and at no point thereafter do we see him perform the act of reading himself. Since the image of the solitary reader was such a key image for Protestantism, this may initially seem perplexing. If, however, we read the passage with more allegorical distance, Redcrosse's inability to read the text independently is entirely appropriate; Faith must read it to him.

In the House of Holiness, Spenser offers a lesson in Reformed Biblical hermeneutics not by teaching readers how to balance the literal and the allegorical, but by dramatizing the inward, invisible, anterior text of scripture in the heart. Tyndale describes it thus, saying that when questioned on your beliefs, you should say you believe:

**only because it is written in thine hert and because the spirite of
 god so preacheth and so testifieth vn to thi soule.** And saye /
 though at the begynnyng thou wast moued by readyng or
 preachyng . . . yet **now thou beleuest it not therefore any lenger /
 but only because thou hast herd it of the spirite of God and red it
 written in thyne herte.**³²²

In the House of Holiness, Spenser dramatizes this very scene described by Tyndale. Una sends Redcrosse to Fidelity's "schoolehouse":

That of her heauenly learning he might taste
 And heare the wisdom of her wordes diuine.
 She graunted, and that knight so much agraste,
 That she him taught celestially discipline,
 And opened his dull eyes, that light mote in them shine (1.10.18.4-9).

These lessons are specifically auditory, and they open Redcrosse's eyes. Even after his eyes are open, however, he remains unable to read scripture. Scripture is Fidelity's:

sacred Booke, with blood ywritt
 that none could reade, except she did them teach,

³²² William Tyndale, *An Answere Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 53/15-30.

she vnto him disclosed euery whitt,
And heauenly documents thereout did preach,
That weaker witt of man could neuer reach, (1.10.18.8-19.9).

And so scripture is not merely, as when first introduced, a book “Wherin darke things were writt, **hard** to be vnderstood”; it is a book “none could read, except she [Faith] did them teach.” Fidelia makes Redcrosse a perfect reader and—using this “darke conceit”—Spenser delivers the orthodox “good discipline” and “precepts” of Tyndale’s internal ideal of reading. Yet the exact content of Fidelia’s lessons is necessarily elided, and we cannot see Redcrosse reading.

No poet can ventriloquize the lesson of Faith within the soul and, even if Spenser could, his readers could not internalize the lesson any more than Redcrosse could learn from the emblems of despair in canto nine: salvific reading must be of scripture and is predicated on one’s spiritual state. By the theology of *sola fides*, no human agent can teach anything that might contribute directly to salvation. In order to have a narrative about salvation, one must enter the realm of figural allegory, but remain at a distance. And so, the despairing reading of these scenes would be to accept that if only scripture is profitable and that profit is predicated on our soteriological status, then Spenser’s attempt at instruction is doomed from the start; the very ideals Spenser depicts here must deny his poem, his readers, and his project any agency. This, however, would be to read the “law” without the “promises,” to replicate Redcrosse’s misreading in Despayre’s cave. In fact, this despairing reading of *The Faerie Queene* exists in a dialectic with the following more hopeful reading.

Although *The Faerie Queene* cannot teach the scripture or teach like the scripture, it can represent and therefore clarify the process of learning scripture as it occurs within the reader. In Despayre’s cave and the House of Holiness, Spenser represents the inward process of salvation and scripture; he provides a narrative model for understanding *in terms of action* the inward theology of *sola fides* which not only doesn’t call for action, but rejects the possibility of action. By using figural allegory, Spenser makes a legible, external narrative (which occurs in time) out of an inward, illegible, and timeless state of being. Allegory allows Spenser to create an idealized depiction of Protestant reading practice which incorporates and normalizes the despair of individualized reading experience, thereby reducing its terror. In *The Faerie Queene* Spenser delivers orthodox Protestant soteriology and hermeneutic ideals “cloudily enwrapped in allegorical devices” and poetry, transforming them from feigned lies into the ideal medium for illustrating Truth. Allegory allows Spenser to harmonize this timeless soteriological register with a vision of moral and hermeneutic striving that reflects Tyndale’s gloss for Philippians: “if ye cease working, the spirit quencheth again and ye cease to be partakers of the promise.” The balance between soteriological and romance narratives achieved in canto 10 remains harmoniously balanced in Redcrosse’s battle with the dragon—an entirely appropriate object for both chivalric and Christian violence. This hermeneutic harmony and Redcrosse’s visible perfection, however, are both short lived.

After defeating the dragon, *The Faerie Queene*’s soteriological and moral registers begin to pull apart once more as the narrative continues rather than reaching the conclusion canto 11’s apocalyptic imagery might suggest. The allegorical accommodations of *The Faerie Queene* are destabilized not only by the natural tensions of literal and figurative meaning but by Spenser’s own narrative. In Book I canto 12 and Book II canto 1, Spenser’s characters offer retellings and revisions of *The Faerie Queene*’s narrative that highlight the literal-figurative tensions of his allegorical project and return us to the difficulties introduced in Book I canto 1 with Redcrosse’s encounters with Errour, Archimago, and False Una. In canto 12, Redcrosse must grapple once again with a textual variant, not in the form of a personification but as a revision of his own narrative; however, Redcrosse’s corrective account seems comparably false and fraught with error that continues into Book II. Guyon’s opening encounter with Archimago and Duessa echoes Redcrosse’s challenges in Book I canto 1 both structurally and thematically. Yet Guyon’s outward victory over “misreading”

and error is even more fraught than Redcrosse's encounter with Error. These tensions manifest in a disturbing interpretive violence that risks conflating holiness and rape.

Rereading and Rape: the Threat of Literalism

Spenser's use of figural allegory works to harmonize Tyndale's dialectical hermeneutics, balancing the inward ideal and the outward practice of Protestant reading. Another aspect of Protestant hermeneutics, however, presents a particular threat to Spenser's project: the solitary literal sense. According to Tyndale, scripture "useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories as all other speeches do," but "that which the proverb, similitude, riddle or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense which thou must seek out diligently."³²³ Allegories and figurative speech are mere containers for meaning, since scripture (and by implication all texts) can have "but one sense which is the literal sense."³²⁴ At the end of Book I and opening of Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, I argue that Spenser demonstrates the impossibility of rigidly separating tenor and vehicle in this manner. *The Faerie Queene* is not only unable to accommodate the ideal of a singular, stable literal sense, but actively problematizes it.

To demonstrate the ways Spenser problematizes allegorical and literal meanings I here examine retrospective revisions of Book I's events: those told by Redcrosse, Una, and Duessa in Book I canto 12 and those of Duessa and Archimago in Book II canto 1. Scholars have written skeptically about Redcrosse's and Una's recountings of Book I in canto 12, asking what Redcrosse's failings mean to his newfound moral perfection and what the implications of his backsliding might be. This emphasis on Redcrosse's dishonesty and half-truths, however, tends to neglect the reverse side of the same coin: Duessa's half-truths and the dialectic between these things. Moreover, the comparably-half-true and exceptionally disturbing account of Duessa's rape has been shockingly underexamined and scholarly accounts seem always privileges the "virtuous" male perspective at the expense of the female. Tiffany Werth, for example, dedicates an entire chapter to arguing that Book II is fundamentally concerned with how to read romance after the Reformation, yet skips over Duessa's accusation entirely and devotes only one paragraph to Guyon's confrontation with Redcross where she credits Guyon's reading skills in averting their combat by "read[ing] the scene of combat carefully and soberly" and "rewrit[ing] the chivalric victory in this early battle as one of reading rather than of arms."³²⁵ She treats Duessa's accusation as false by implication, a point Richard Mallette makes repeatedly explicit, referring to "the false tale of Duessa's rape," the "bogus tale," and the "feigned rape victim."³²⁶ The inattention to Duessa's version of events presented to Guyon is all the more surprising since her version of Book I retold to the King and Queen of Eden has so much attention. At issue in all these revisionist accounts are the boundaries between sexuality and violence, and between literal and figurative. I argue that the half-truths of these revisions told by good and evil characters alike spring from the tension between narrative and allegory, presenting literalist misinterpretations of *The Faerie Queene* that, like Error, must be strangled. But as in Book I canto 1, there can be no easy victory and Spenser exposes the flaws in the very hermeneutics he seeks to celebrate and narrativize.

In Book I canto 12, both Redcross and the narrator prove unreliable in their presentation of events. After defeating the dragon and enjoying a victory feast, Redcrosse recounts the story of his adventures, like a hero of Classical epic. As with Fidelia's lesson in the House of Holiness, the reader

³²³ Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 156.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Werth, *The Fabulous Dark Cloister*, 116.

³²⁶ Ibid.; Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England*, 50;52.

is excluded from Redcrosse's story. The narrator reports that Redcrosse "From poynt to poynt, as is before exprest, / Discourst his voyage long, according to [the King of Eden's] request" (1.12.15.8-9). His audience's immediate response to the story already suggests that there are gaps in his account, as they perceive him as blameless: "they did lament his lucklesse state, / And often blame the too importunate fate, / That heaped on him so many wrathfull wreakes: / For neuer gentle knight, as he of late, / So tossed was in fortunes cruell freakes" (1.12.16.4-6). The heavy emphasis on luck, fate, and fortune shows his auditors' flawed understanding of Divine Providence as well as hinting at Redcrosse's elision of his relationship with Duessa, abandonment of Una, or any wrongdoing on his part—an elision made explicit after the arrival of Duessa's letter.

Duessa's letter depicts Redcrosse as her faithless lover and echoes Despayre's language in canto nine. She counsels—even menaces—the King of Eden not to marry Redcrosse to Una because he "already plighted his right hand" and "was affiaunced long time before" to her (1.12.26.8; 27.2). She calls Redcrosse a "False erraunt knight, infamous, and forswore" and writes:

Witnesse the burning Altars, which he swore,
And guiltie heauens of his bold periury,
Which though he hath polluted oft of yore,
Yet I to them for iudgement iust do fly,
And them coniuere t'auenge this shamefull iniury. (1.10.27.5-9)

Duessa echoes Despayre's accusation that Redcrosse had "falsed [his] faith with periuree," though Despayre's accusation referred to Redcrosse's infidelity to Una not Duessa (1.9.46.7). Duessa's claim that Redcrosse is a serial offender—"oft of yore"—likewise alludes to his similar abandonment of Una. Moreover, her demand for "iudgement iust" and vengeance again suggests Redcrosse's exchange with Despayre, where Redcrosse himself introduced these terms and had them used against him. On the surface, this aligns Duessa with another figure of false hermeneutics; but it was Despayre's use of scripture rather than his list of accusations that was false. When faced with Despayre's accusations Redcrosse "Well knowing true all, that [Despayre] did reherse" acknowledges his guilt (1.9.48.4). Now, though, Redcrosse rejects Duessa's accusations as entirely false and depicts himself as her hapless victim. By invoking the language of Despayre and Redcrosse's exchange where the knight admitted his guilt—"Well knowing all true"—Duessa's letter emphasizes the dishonesty of Redcrosse's attempt to displace all the blame in canto 12.

The King's surprised response to Duessa's letter demonstrates that Redcrosse's first account of himself was not, as the narrator claimed "From poynt to poynt, as is before exprest" (1.12.15.8).³²⁷ The King rebukes Redcrosse and tells him to "Let nought be hid from [him], that ought to be exprest" (1.12.29.9). When the King repeats Duessa's accusations Redcrosse tells the king to "be nought hereat dismayd, / Till well [he] wot . . . / What woman, and wherefore doth me vpbrayd / With breach of loue, and loialty betrayd" (1.12.31.2-5). Redcrosse puts the identity of his accuser—"what woman"—before the reason for the accusation or his own innocence. As elsewhere, Duessa's identity as a witch discredits her and justifies any action against her; Redcrosse conflates her identity with his innocence. He then offers an exculpating further revision of Book I. He begins to tell how he "did find" Duessa, but then corrects himself to say "or rather I was fownd / Of this false woman," diminishing his own agency and thus his guilt (1.12.32.1). Redcrosse describes her with heavy repetition as: "this false woman, that *Fidessa* hight, / *Fidessa* hight the falsest Dame on

³²⁷ Jacqueline T. Miller, "The Omission in Red Cross Knight's Story: Narrative Inconsistencies in The Faerie Queene," *ELH* 53, no. 2 (1986): 279–88; Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene*, 94–5. Miller offered the first sustained examination of Redcrosse as not only "an inveterate misreader who so often misinterprets," but in canto 12 as "a speaker who actually *misrepresents*," and she proposes that this constitutes an exhortation that the reader be critical in their readings of both *The Faerie Queene* and the world more broadly, 280.

grownd, / Most false *Duessa*” (1.12.32.2-4). The repetition of “*Fidessa* hight, / *Fidessa* hight” suggests Duessa’s doubleness, but places this repetition—and one that gestures to Falsehood—in Redcrosse’s mouth, along with the litany of false, false, falsest. Redcrosse’s repetition sounds defensive and unpersuasive at this moment when he is at his most false. He claims Duessa “inuegle[d his] weaker sight” and “Who by her wicked arts, and wylie skill, / Too false and strong for earthly skill or might, / Vnwares me wrought vnto her wicked will, / And to my foe betrayd, when least I feared ill” (12.32.5-9). Redcrosse claims he is blameless in his own seduction, and Una corroborates his story. She tells her father that she knows of “secret treasons” “wrought by that false sorceresse” (1.12.33.5-6). Una depicts Duessa as the sole cause of Redcrosse’s fall: “She onely she it is, that earst did throw / This gentle knight into so great distresse, / That death him did awaite in dayly wretchednesse” (1.12.33.7-9). Una then reveals the Messenger as Archimago—“clokt with simplenesse”—who is captured and taken to the dungeon. The King accepts Redcrosse’s and Una’s version of events and the happy ending is seemingly restored.

Redcrosse’s and Duessa’s versions of events are both half-truths compared to that “from poynt to poynt, as is before exprest” in *The Faerie Queene*’s narrative. Yet in some respects, Duessa’s account seems the more ‘faithful.’ To exculpate himself, Redcrosse presents himself as a passive victim, when in the narrative of *The Faerie Queene* he actively pursued Duessa and initiated their liaisons. The dynamic between Duessa and Redcrosse in cantos 2-6 more closely resembles her claims than Redcrosse’s defense. Although Duessa did use a false name and spells to alter her appearance, Redcrosse actively pursued and courted her as “*Fidessa*.” After Redcrosse’s victory over Sansfoy, “the lady” actually “from him [Redcrosse] away fled with all her powre; / Who after her hastily gan scowre . . . Her soone he ouertooke, and bad to stay” (1.2.20.1-8). Redcrosse chases her, which rather undermines later accounts of himself as her victim who “was fownd” by her. Elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene*, virtuous maids like Florimel flee from would-be rapists and would-be rescuers alike, and so Duessa’s flight conforms to this pattern in the poem.³²⁸ In his account to the King, Redcrosse depicts Duessa as casting a spell on him, but in fact nothing beyond a pleasing exterior was necessary to lead Redcrosse into his liason with “*Fidessa*” as “his new Lady” (1.2.29.7). Redcrosse was particularly susceptible to the visual, since while Duessa spins her tale, “He in great passion al this while did dwell, / More busying his quicke eies, her face to view, / Then his dull eares, to heare what shee did tell” (1.2.26.5-7). Duessa’s literal spell is cast on herself, to alter her appearance; the spell she cast on Redcrosse was the figurative “enchantment” of female sexuality constructed by a gynophobic culture.

Redcrosse actively courts “*Fidessa*” and initiates their erotic interlude. Redcrosse meets Fra Dubio because he wanted “those braunches greene to frame / A girlond for her [*Fidessa*’s] dainty forehead fit” (1.2.30.6-7), and when Duessa “with feigned feare” seems to “swowne,” Redcrosse “with trembling cheare / Her vp he tooke . . . And oft her kist” (1.2.45.1-8). Redcrosse is far from a passive victim and initiates the physical aspects of their relationship. When Duessa finds him again after he abandoned her in the House of Pride, their ensuing encounter is quite explicitly sexual as they “gan of solace treat, / And bathe in plesaunce of the ioyous shade” (1.7.4.1-2). Though enfeebled by the fountain (which he found on his own and was not Duessa’s creation), Redcrosse: “Yet goodly court he made still to his Dame, / Pourd out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd, / Both carelesse of his health, and of his fame” (1.7.7.1-3). Redcrosse’s sexual encounter finds some

³²⁸ On Florimel’s indiscriminate flight and the threat of masculine pursuit, even from supposedly good knights, see: Sheila T. Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires Female Sexuality in The Faerie Queene* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 22–24; Suttie, *Self-Interpretation in The Faerie Queene*, 11–13. Although Duessa’s flight might retrospectively be read as a further element of her disguise—that she knows the conventions of virtuous women and can emulate them—the fact of Redcrosse’s pursuit remains and contradicts his passive depiction of himself.

parallels with that of Verdant in the Bower of Bliss. Both have set their armor aside and both scenes are linked to liquid, suggesting sexual fluids: Redcrosse “poured out in loosnesse,” Verdant’s “lips bedewd” and “humid eyes,” and there is water imagery and fountains in both the landscapes (2.12.73; 76).³²⁹ However, where Acrasia acts upon the unconscious Verdant, it is Redcrosse who makes “goodly court” to Fidessa, a fact that later undermines his and Una’s assertions that he was preyed upon and “onely she” is to blame.

So, Redcrosse abandoned two ladies,³³⁰ actively pursued “Fidessa,” and initiated their sexual relationship, bringing the “poynt by poynt” version of *The Faerie Queene* closer to Duessa’s than Una’s or Redcrosse’s. Redcrosse’s half-truths in Eden have rightly drawn critical attention. Jacqueline Miller, the first scholar to devote serious attention to the discrepancies, sees in Redcrosse’s omissions an exhortation for readers to be more skeptical and diligent interpreters. Harry S. Berger sees here potential for a subversive Spenser, challenging his own narrative and assumptions, while Paul Suttie sees Redcrosse’s imperfect storytelling as a look behind the curtain of emblem making. In Suttie’s account, the seeming paradox of Redcrosse’s post-reform backsliding disappears for an audience used to the idea that the exemplary is a moment in a life to be idealized, not every moment of that person’s life. This is apt, but doesn’t fully address the fundamentally hermeneutic nature of Redcrosse’s moral failing.

I would suggest that Redcrosse’s less-than-truthful tale at the banquet in canto 12 marks a shift in registers from the more idealized and soteriological scenes of the cantos 10 and 11. Both Redcrosse’s and Una’s failings in canto 12—as in the previous cantos—are best read in the moral rather than the soteriological register. Showing Redcrosse’s flaws immediately after his perfection and triumph is jarring, and, in doing so, Spenser offers a powerful illustration of salvation by faith alone. Redcrosse’s flaws and the shift in registers mark the important distinction between morality on earth—since no fallen human may ever attain perfection or even true goodness—and salvation, which appears outside of time at God’s mercy. Spenser zooms in and out of narratives depicting salvation and those depicting morality. It’s no contradiction for Redcrosse to simultaneously be elect and imperfect; indeed, that idea is at the very heart of Protestant doctrine. That Redcrosse’s moral lapse is a hermeneutic one, however, has implications for our own reading and Spenser’s project.

The first canto of Book II revisits with variations the issues highlighted at the beginning of Book I. We once again encounter Archimago creating a false lady and textual variant, but this time the poem he uses for his forgery is Spenser’s own *The Faerie Queene*. This twice told tale—first, the stripping of Duessa; second, a gentlewoman’s rape—demands active reading, as we remember the events of book I and zoom in and out of Guyon and the narrator’s perspectives. Even as this incident demands active reading, however, it reminds us of our failings. Spenser dramatizes an unsettling version of interpretive grace that draws attention to Guyon’s failures as a reader and the challenges of balancing literal and figurative meanings.

Unlike Book I, Book II begins, not with our hero Guyon, but with “That conning Architect of cancred guyle” who we are told is full of “malicious mynde / to worken mischeife and avenging woe” against Redcrosse knight. The “falsed letters” of Book I canto 12 failed, so now he plans new “forged treason,” gesturing towards textuality again: forgery (1.3;3.3). We first see Guyon when Archimago “him fortunèd to meet” (2.1.5.6) and are again told explicitly of Archimago’s “uncouth wyle” and “wicked gyle” (8-4). We have no opportunity to misread Archimago. When Archimago asks Guyon “vouchsafe to stay your steed for humble misers sake,” and Guyon then “stayed his

³²⁹ See also: Campana. Joseph Campana, “Boy Toys and Liquid Joys: Pleasure and Power in the Bower of Bliss,” *Modern Philology* 106, no. 3 (2009).

³³⁰ Harry Berger Jr, “Displacing Autophobia in Faerie Queene I: Ethics, Gender, and Oppositional Reading in the Spenserian Text,” *ELR English Literary Renaissance* 28, no. 2 (1998): 171.

steed for humble misers sake,” we are distanced from Guyon; the repetition sounds nearly mocking since we know what Guyon does not—Archimago is no humble miser and Guyon should not stop. (8.9;9.1). Spenser’s narrator repeats Archimago’s own words verbatim; Archimago then repeats Spenser’s narration, though we’re insistently told this version is a false forgery.

Once Guyon stops, Archimago launches into a moving account of a Lady’s rape, wishing Guyon had been near to intervene: “When that lewd rybault with vyle lust aduauunst / Laid first his filthie hands on virgin cleene, / To spoyle her dainty corps so faire and sheene” (2.1.10.1-5). A. C. Hamilton rightly glosses Archimago’s speech as referring to the “stripping of Duessa” in Book I canto 8, but it seems unlikely that the majority of sixteenth century readers (or perhaps any at all?) would make the connection at this point in Book II. Framed by the narrator’s constant insistence that Archimago is feigning and deceitful, we might expect his story to be pure fabrication and the “Lady” a created spright, like False Una in Book I. But rather than merely creating a false variant of a character within the poem (like False Una), it is the events of Book One that Archimago now conjures and seemingly twists into error. Whereas Duessa’s letter in canto 12 depicts events the reader has seen and can identify, Book II’s accusation unfolds gradually, initially leaving them in the dark.

Guyon’s response to Archimago’s impassioned story is decidedly strange and shows him—like Redcrosse—to be a poor reader. Guyon says (half wroth): “How may it be . . . that knight should knighthood ever so have shent?” (2.1.11.1-2). First, as Harry Berger points out, Guyon “does not ask Where is she? or How is she holding up? . . . His first reaction is not to the injustice against the lady, but to the shame against knighthood.”³³¹ This is apt. But I’d suggest that what makes this moment even more strange is that Guyon himself is the one to supply “knight” as the identity of the rapist. Thus far, Archimago has described the villain only as “lewd ribald,” which with the low class connotation of lewd—‘lewed’—would rather suggest the opposite. Guyon has no reason to assume that the rapist is a knight and, as his incredulous “how may it be...?” suggests, he finds it hard to conceive of. So, he simultaneously assumes and doubts, a tension that mirrors the way his assumption is both correct and incorrect—correct, in that Archimago is referring to Redcrosse; incorrect in that the narrator insists—perhaps too emphatically—that this is utterly false and without merit. This is the first in a series of strange interpretive leaps—or UN-interpretive leaps—Guyon makes in the first canto.

Archimago’s description and Duessa’s appearance conform to the early modern expectations of a rape victim, and together offer a text for Guyon to read and judge. Archimago’s depiction of Duessa as “a gentle Lady” and “gentle Damzell” lends gravity to her rape, and both Guyon and Spenser’s readers would be expected to differentiate between committing “rape upon a maid of quality” and “ruffl[ing] a harlot,” as Aphra Behn later phrased it (2.1.13.5;17.8; 19.3).³³² Archimago similarly calls Duessa “virgin cleene . . . Of chastity and honour virginall,” since, like her rank, a woman’s sexual virtue determined whether or not her violation would constitute a “rape” (2.1.10.3;8).³³³ Furthermore, since early moderns considered rape a crime of excess desire,

³³¹ Harry Berger, *The Allegorical Temper; Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser’s Faerie Queene*. (Ithaca, Conn.: Archaon Books, 1967), 195.

³³² Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Works*, ed. Janet Todd (London, England; New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1992), 4.5.1223-5.

³³³ In her investigation of over one hundred rape narratives and trials from the seventeenth-century, Garthine Walker notes that men repeatedly redefined rape as a sexual act rather than a violent one, thus enabling them to shift the blame onto their female victims. The most common defence was “that sex, not rape, had occurred [and men] dramatised female consent verbally (by a woman’s assent or invitation), physically (by her acquiescence or little resistance), and association (by claiming that she was of ‘lewd’ disposition)” Walker, “Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early

Archimago describes her beauty to make her an object “worthy” of rape.³³⁴ When Archimago depicts Duessa crying out in vain for help, Guyon first expresses some incredulity, asking Archimago, “And liues he yet . . . that wrought this act,/ And doen the heauens afford him vitall food?,” thus reflecting the myth of the inviolability of the virtuous woman, which conflicts with Archimago’s narrative (2.1.12.2-3).³³⁵ Once Guyon sees Duessa, however, his skepticism vanishes, as Duessa presents the stereotypical early modern female response to rape.

Duessa herself becomes a rape text and conforms to readerly expectation. She provides physical evidence, as her face is covered in scratches and she wears “garments rent, and heare dicheueled” (2.1.15.5;13.6).³³⁶ At this point, Duessa is in fact more clad than Redcrosse and Arthur had left her— “naked all”—but the torn clothes are a symbol necessary to construct her rape (1.8.46.4). When Guyon asks who raped her, Spenser writes: “Ne would she speake, ne see, ne yet be seene, / But hid her visage, and her head downe bent, / Either for grieuous shame, or for great teene” (2.1.15.6-8). Duessa’s shamed hesitance to speak or name her aggressor also conforms to early modern expectations for a raped woman’s behavior.³³⁷ When Duessa finally does speak, her words are self-condemnatory, calling herself a “wofull wretch,” insisting that nothing could possibly comfort her, and asserting that she would rather die than continue living with the shame of her violation (2.1.17.3-5). Duessa asks Guyon, “why should euer I henceforth desyre,/ To see faire heauens face, and life not leaue,/ Sith that false Traytour did my honour reauē?” (2.1.17.2-4). As for so many women (mythological, literary, or historical), Duessa’s preference for death is another

Modern England,” 6. Since a ‘lewd’ disposition was sufficient grounds to dismiss an accusation of rape, it was essential to preface an accusation with an impeccable report of the woman’s virtue.

³³⁴ In rape literature, men often blame the woman’s excessive beauty for their “excessive passion” (Suzanne Gossett, “Best Men Are Molded out of Faults’: Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama,” *English Literary Renaissance* 14, no. 3 (1984): 318). Examples of this commonplace appear elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene*, including Braggadoccio’s attempt to rape Belpheobe (2.3.42.2-4) and Sansloy’s assault upon Una: “Then gan her beautie shyne, as brightest skye, / And burnt his bestly hart t’efforce her chastitye” (1.6.4.8-9).

³³⁵ The expectation that God defends truly pure maidens is reinforced by both mythology and hagiography. In William Caxton’s translation of medieval saints’ lives, God strikes Eufemia’s would-be rapist with sudden impotence. Similarly, the Holy Ghost prevents Lucy, Agatha, Agnes, and Irene from being raped to death in a brothel (Karen Bamford, *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s, 2000), 27. St. Ambrose confidently declared virtuous Christians were inviolable, writing that, “the virgin of Christ can be exposed to shame, but not contaminated. . . Neither can brothels defame chastity; rather chastity banishes the infamy of the place” Ibid., 29. Although no longer in religious circulation under Protestantism, these hagiographical traditions had become a cultural myth which influenced early modern society and *The Faerie Queene*. Consider, for example, Marina in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*.

³³⁶ In the medieval treatises of Bracton, he describes a raped woman’s necessary course of action thus: “She must go at once and while the deed is newly done, with the hue and cry, to the neighboring townships and there show the injury done to her to men of good repute, the blood and her clothing stained with blood, and her torn garments” (Bamford, *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage*, 3. Duessa conforms to this rape victim protocol.

³³⁷ Pressing charges often had very negative effects on outspoken victims, making them understandably hesitant to take action. The 1631 case of Margery Evans and Philibert Burghill powerfully illustrates the dangers of pressing charges. After her rape, the fourteen-year-old girl immediately raised the required hue and cry, and for her pains she was “arrested, physically abused, detained for two days, and soon after imprisoned again . . . for almost a month without charge” (Gossett, “Best Men Are Molded out of Faults,” 313; Bamford, *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage*, 5). Burghill himself spent less time in jail than Evans and was ultimately acquitted, thanks largely to his wealth and connections (Gossett, “Best Men Are Molded out of Faults,” 313). Even in cases with significant and convincing physical evidence, women hesitated to come forward. Sara Kempe remained silent about her brutal rape until her mother noticed the physical damage and summoned a physician who declared that “her secret part was very ill rent and torne thereby” (Walker, “Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England,” 17. Although the damage proved sufficient evidence for her rapist to be hanged, Kempe kept silent until her brutal rape was accidentally discovered (Ibid. Duessa’s hesitance to speak illustrates historical reality.

signifier for her virtue.³³⁸ In both its general outlines and a multitude of particulars, then, Archimago's and Duessa's narrative conforms to early modern readers' expectations of the demeanor and self-presentation of a raped woman.

Duessa's accusation of rape exists largely in metaphor and ellipsis. Like Guyon who supplies "knight" as the identity of her assailant, readers and Guyon are the ones to construct rape as the accusation from the text Duessa and Archimago created. Though this is surely their intent, these ellipses and euphemisms leave their account even closer to the truth than is our inference of rape.

Guyon, in fact, takes no time to deliberate on Archimago's moving account of Duessa's rape and does not initially question the accusation, asking Archimago to lead him to the rapist so he can slay him and promising Duessa to avenge her rape (2.1.12.7-9; 14.7-9). Only after realizing that Redcrosse is the accused rapist does he begin to doubt their accusation, saying:

. . . much I muse,
How that same knight should do so fowle amis,
Or euer gentle Damzell so abuse:
For may I boldly say, he surely is
A right good knight, and trew of word ywis (2.1.19.1-5).

Although he hesitates here, Guyon does not dismiss Duessa's and Archimago's claims, but rather promises more temperately that, "Nathlesse he shortly shall againe be tryde,/ And fairely quit him of th'imputed blame,/ Els be ye sure he dearely shall abyde" (2.1.20.1-3). A rousing speech from Archimago, however, prompts Guyon to attack Redcrosse without preamble or formal challenge, thereby breaking the chivalric imperative not to attack unprovoked³³⁹ (2.1.25.8).

Although we know the squire is Archimago, the gentle Lady remains unnamed until stanza twenty-one and Spenser writes a long and moving account of the woeful Damzel who conforms in every respect to early modern expectations of a rape victim: physical signs of struggle, ripped clothes, shamed reluctance to name her attacker, and a longing for death. Over nine stanzas of this damsel's interaction with Guyon and Archimago-as-squire, the most explicit gesture Spenser makes to her falseness is the ambiguous phrase, "*as in* despightfull wise / She *willfully* her sorrow did augment" (2.1.15.1-2). Guyon reads her as a rape victim and highlights interpretation in their exchange, using the word "read" twice, with shifting meaning: First when Guyon declares "False traytur certes . . . I read the man that euer would deceaue / a gentle lady, or wrong her through might" (2.1.17.7), then again when he asks the Lady to "read who ye hath wrought this shameful plight" (2.1.18.2). Even when she names—or to use Spenser's word "reads"—Redcrosse as her attacker, Guyon does not immediately dismiss the charge. Despite expressing a certain surprised incredulity, he concludes by promising her that even Redcrosse "shall againe be tried / and fairley quit him of the'imputed blame / els be ye sure he dearly shall abyde / or make you good amendment for the same" (2.1.20.1-4). This seems very promising. Before Guyon can encounter Redcrosse, though, Spenser devotes three stanzas to revealing Duessa—personified Falsehood—as the rape victim.

³³⁸ Even when their rapists were publicly convicted, rape victims were still held at least partially responsible for their violation. In 1631, the Earl of Castlehaven and his servants were beheaded for the gang rape of his own wife and his twelve-year-old daughter-in-law (Gossett, "Best Men Are Molded out of Faults," 313). Although their rapists were executed for their crimes, these noblewomen were rejected by their own family members who refused to have them in the house until the King had officially pardoned them (Ibid., 314). The Countess testified that she had attempted to commit suicide to escape the rapes, but they prevented her. Her failure to commit suicide was perceived by some as demonstrating her lack of sincerity and complicity in her own rapes (Ibid., 313).

³³⁹ Shirley F. Staton, "Reading Spenser's Faerie Queene in a Different Voice," in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987), 155–56.

As before in canto 12, the accusation isn't depicted as false because the events are wholly misrepresented: they are false because the victim is Falsehood. Her identity determines whether the action is in fact a crime. Spenser tells us explicitly that "under simple shew and semblant plaine / lurkt fase Duessa secretly unseen / as a chaste virgin, that had wronged beene: / so had false Archimago her disguysed" (2.1.21.3-6). Any readers who did not infer that the damzel was Duessa when she named her assailant as Redcrosse are now caught up and Spenser makes the reimagined "stripping of Duessa" even more explicit. He tells us how Duessa

"late fornon and naked had he [Archimago] found
where she did wander in waste wilderness
lurking in rocks and caves far under ground
and with greene moss cousing her nakednesse
Sith her Prince Arthur of proud ornaments
And borrowed beauty spoyle" (2.1.22.1-5).

Spenser offers this explicit reminder of the stripping of Duessa, but with a strange alteration: here, Spenser names Prince Arthur—and *only Prince Arthur*—as the responsible party, leaving out Redcrosse's equal share in the action. When Duessa and Archimago retold the story, they left out Arthur; when the narrator retells it, he leaves out Redcrosse, as if reminding us Redcrosse had indeed ripped Duessa's clothes off would be too near Duessa's version of the narrative. With this new lens placed upon it, Duessa's accusation seems all too true: Redcrosse did indeed threaten her life; the knights (as we were just reminded) "ne spared ... to strip her naked all"; and they examined her naked body and "nether parts" with the intensity of a long and disgusting anti-blazon (1.8.46.4-48.9).

Upon rescuing Redcrosse, Prince Arthur offers Duessa to him for punishment. No sooner does Arthur hand Duessa over to Redcrosse than Una cries out, "To doe her die. . . were despight,/ And shame t'auenge [yourself upon] so weake an enemy," thus suggesting that Redcrosse's first impulse is indeed to kill her (1.8.45.7-8). Instead, Una advises them to, "But spoile her of her scarlot robe, and let her fly" (1.8.45.9). Una suggests only that they strip off Duessa's rich outer robe, yet Arthur and Redcrosse do "So as she bad [them do]" with suspect relish and thoroughness (1.8.46.1).³⁴⁰ Spenser writes:

that witch [Duessa] they disaraid,
And robd of roiall robes, and purple pall,
And ornaments that richly were displaid;
Ne spared they to strip her naked all (1.8.46.1-4).

Not stopping at Duessa's "scarlot robe," as Una instructed, they "Ne spared... to strip her naked all" (1.8.14.3). The phrase "ne spared" suggests that they treat Duessa with a lack of mercy inconsistent with Una's intentions. A detailed anti-blazon further emphasizes that Duessa is "naked all" and goes on to catalogue her from head to toe, including her "dugs" and "neather parts" (1.8.47.6; 48.1). Although in Book I, Spenser does not depict Redcrosse as raping Duessa by physical penetration, his act is far nearer to rape than the other sexual assaults found Books I and II; no comparable descriptions are given in the villains' assaults on Una or Belphoebe (1.6.1-8; 2.3.42). Sansloy's sexual assault on Una, for example, occurs mainly in the realm of polite metaphor and it is unclear if he ever touches her body, even when snatching off her veil (1.6.4.7). In contrast, it is obvious not only that Redcrosse must have touched Duessa, but that her body has been subjected to his and Arthur's penetrative gaze. The allegorical base of this scene—that Holiness must strip Catholicism of its

³⁴⁰ By placing these words in a female character's mouth, perhaps Spenser seeks both to desexualize Duessa's stripping and gloss over any prurient interest Redcrosse and Arthur might have in their victim's naked body.

idolatrous icons and aesthetic seductions to reveal its inner corruption—would be indisputably appropriate to a Protestant reader; on the level of narrative, however, Redcrosse's actions are deeply problematic, as Book II illustrates.

The truth—or at least, near truth—of Duessa's rape accusation is for me one of the most disturbing moments of the poem, rendered all the more disturbing by Spenser's sudden attempt to foreclose the very reading he just introduced. Charging furiously, just before crossing blades with Redcrosse, Guyon suddenly stops:

suddenly that warrior gan abace
his threatened speare, as if some new mishap
had him betide or hidden danger did entrap
And creid, Mercie Sir knight, and mercie lord
for mine offence and heedless hardiment
that had almost committed crime abhored
and with reproachful shame mine honour shent. (2.1.26-7)

Once again, Guyon's interest in the rape victim has been replaced by his interest in knighthood and honour. Here he uses the exact terms—abhored, honor, shent—to describe his breach of chivalric etiquette as used for the lady's rape. In a display of "court'sies meet," Redcrosse places the blame on himself and, rather absurdly, apologizes for preparing to defend himself (2.1.28; 29.4). Following their mutual proclamations of guilt, they engage in chivalric ritual and affirm homosocial bonds (2.1.29.1-4). Guyon's promise to the lady that Redcrosse would be tried is one he fails at, both on first seeing Redcrosse enflamed with rage by Archimago, but ALSO after he apologized for his unannounced attack. Guyon never makes the accusation or asks Redcrosse about it.

Only after many chivalric niceties does Redcrosse ask why Guyon attacked him. Guyon promptly declares with a sudden and inexplicable insight:

. . . I shame to tell
The fond encheason, that me hether led.
A false infamous faitour late befell
Me for to meet, that seemed ill bested,
And playnd of grievous outrage, which he red
A knight had wrought against a Ladie gent;
Which to auenge, he to this place me led,
Where you he made the marke o' his intent . . . (2.1.30.1-8).

Guyon is now as convinced of the accusation's falsehood as he was before of its veracity. There is no logical explanation for Guyon's insight into Redcrosse's "innocence" since he has no new information. Although the catalyst for Guyon halting his attack was the sight of the "sacred badge of [his] Redeemer's death / which on your shield is set for ornament," this isn't new information—the damzel explicitly named her assailant as one who on "his silver shield . . . bore a bloody cross." Guyon's sudden and bewildering insight closes out the incident. There is no big reveal: there's no repeated stripping of Duessa, nor any confrontation, nor any mention that there might be one. In 1.12, the accusation against Redcrosse is far shorter than his fully narrated rebuttal; in 2.1, the accusation is far longer than the nonexistent rebuttal. The incident vanishes, at least from the explicit narrative.

On the one hand, we may, I think, read Spenser's intervention on Guyon's behalf as an act of interpretive grace, showing us the limitations of our own perception while also emphasizing the need for ever more active reading. Spenser draws the curtain back for us—explicitly telling us the characters' deceit—then lets it fall back to "cloudily enwrapp" the narrative, putting us in Guyon's position, only to let us peek behind the curtain again; with every oscillation, Spenser builds a testing ground that demands active reading. Reading may depend on grace that no more excuses us from

the hard work of interpretation than the doctrine of salvation by faith alone excuses one from good works; we are imperfect interpreters and must strive all the more ardently as a result. This reading seems all the more promising since the Palmer—once he catches up—congratulates Redcrosse on his recent victory, to which he answers “His be the praise that this achievement wrought.” Guyon should offer the same praise of God’s grace for his aborted attack on Redcrosse, averted through no interpretive act of his own.

Yet this interpretation of Guyon’s insight as grace for imperfect readers cannot account for the disturbing truth of Duessa’s accusation nor the strangeness that Spenser creates this monstrous variation of his own text only to try and strangle it again. Certainly, it is a call to ever more attentive reading, yet this too seems insufficient. I’d like to conclude by suggesting that—in addition to its inescapably disturbing misogyny—this incident critiques the difficulties of literal and figurative reading Tyndale sought to gloss over with the scripture in the heart that Spenser dramatized in the House of Holiness.

As Spenser himself demonstrates, reading the stripping of Duessa by a simplistic version of “but one sense, the literal sense” brings us closer to Rape than Holiness. This would be a simplistic misreading of Tyndale as well as *The Faerie Queene*, but I think that in this tension lurks a critique of Tyndale’s hermeneutics. Although Tyndale does not in fact “spew allegories out of his stomach forever,” he conceives of allegories and figurative language as mere vehicles for meaning. Once we have extracted the kernel of meaning—which is the literal sense—then the allegory or figure may be discarded as an empty husk, itself devoid of meaning. Spenser’s retold version of the stripping of Duessa dramatizes the impossibility of separating tenor and vehicle, romance and allegory; for doing so risks transforming Holiness into rape.

Chapter Four

Titus Andronicus and the Interpretive Violence of the Reformation

“Yea thou shalt find enough that will preach Christ, and prove
whatsoever point of the faith thou wilt, as well out of a fable of Ovid
or any other poet, as out of Saint John’s gospel or Paul’s Epistles.”
--William Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian Man*

Facing the brutally silenced Lavinia in Act III of *Titus Andronicus*, Titus claims initially that he can “interpret all her martyred signs” (3.2.36).³⁴¹ He quickly backtracks, however, and acknowledges that study and devotion will be necessary, too:

In thy dumb action will I be as perfect
As begging hermits in their holy prayers.
Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,
But I of these will wrest an alphabet
And by still practice learn to know thy meaning.
(3.2.40-45)

Through phrases like “martyred signs,” “begging hermits,” and “holy prayers,” Titus figures the interpretive clarity to which he aspires in terms of Christian piety. This association aligns the play with Biblical hermeneutics, which was the dominant mode of textual interpretation in Shakespeare’s England, at work not just in the complex disputations of learned clerics but also in the weekly sermons of country parsons. The irony of Titus’s promise to his brutalized daughter is that Reformation debates about how to read the Bible in fact created a hermeneutic environment fraught with ambiguity and violence—the very two phenomena that Titus and his family try in vain to escape in the middle of the play. This irony suggests the extent to which the obsessions and dangers of early Reformation hermeneutics exerted a formative influence on England’s interpretive culture throughout the sixteenth century, expanding both forward in time and outward from a purely theological context to encompass even the commercial and apparently secular venue of Elizabethan theater.

Reformation hermeneutics are a valuable lens through which to read *Titus* in particular because they allow us to link the three seemingly heterogeneous elements that dominate the play and its criticism: its recurring play on figurative and literal meanings, its insistent use of classical texts, and its grotesque and lurid violence.³⁴² The interpretive disputes staged by *Titus* enact the contradictory, self-destructive work of Reformation hermeneutics, which produces violence and instability instead of the secure meaning that Titus promises his daughter. Titus’s own work of

³⁴¹ Quotations are from *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate, Arden Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1995).

³⁴² These indisputably central aspects of the play have received considerable attention, but tend to be studied separately, even though they overlap in the characters’ brutal literalizing of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. On Classical sources, see: Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1993); Cora Fox, *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion in Elizabethan England* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Vernon Guy Dickson, “‘A Pattern, Precedent, and Lively Warrant’: Emulation, Rhetoric, and Cruel Propriety in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (June 2009): 376–409; Albert H Tricomi, “The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*,” in *Shakespeare and Language* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 226–39; Gillian Murray Kendall, “‘Lend Me Thy Hand’: Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989): 299–316. Katherine A Rowe, “Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*,” *SQ Shakespeare Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1994): 279–303.

interpretation thus becomes shot through with the very violence that occasioned it, in a mode that the play presents as grimly typical of Christian hermeneutics in the century of Reformation.

From the 1520s to the intense confessionalizing of Shakespeare's London, the English interpretive landscape was dominated by religious strife and interpretive violence.³⁴³ As described in detail in the Introduction, I use the phrase "interpretive violence" in three interrelated senses: first, the brutality against bodies fueled by Biblical interpretation in the Reformation, where torture might hinge on the distinction between a figurative and a literal reading; and second the hotly contested interpretation of this violence. Both sides of the Reformation claim the term of "martyr" for themselves; one faith's "martyr" is the other faith's "heretic" or "traitor."³⁴⁴ In this way, the hermeneutic differences that helped fuel the schism of the Reformation in turn generated more interpretable texts: the bodies and narratives of both Catholic and Protestant "martyrs" became ongoing interpretive battlegrounds. *Titus* dramatizes these two dimensions of interpretive violence quite explicitly, yet it is also informed by a third aspect of Reformation interpretive violence: the psychological violence produced by a cultural landscape where interpretation poses a threat to body and soul, since the stakes of interpretation are torture, execution, and damnation.³⁴⁵ Some scholars remain critical of expanding conceptions of violence and prefer to maintain strict distinctions between literal and figurative injury, the physical and the non-physical.³⁴⁶ Yet to address the religious and political challenges of the Reformation, Tudor law blurred these very distinctions between words and deeds. In 1534, a new law "made it treason to attempt, *whether through actions, writings or words*, to deprive the king, queen or heir of their rightful titles and dignities" or "to call the king a heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or usurper of the Crown."³⁴⁷ Starting under Henry VIII, the Tudors placed increasing scrutiny on what could be said, printed, and performed, and the penalties for any individual breach ranged unpredictably from "fining and imprisonment to mutilation and death."³⁴⁸

Although in Shakespeare's London the threats posed by interpretive acts extended well beyond their origins in Biblical hermeneutics, they nevertheless remained rooted in them. Early modern print censorship first developed to prevent the spread of heresy and dramatic censorship arose from the suppression of the mystery plays to stamp out vestiges of the old religion and its cultural practices.³⁴⁹ In 1581, Elizabeth gave the Master of the Revels authority to license and suppress plays and to fine or imprison players or playwrights. The origins of this censorship were religious, and the challenges of censorship were explicitly hermeneutic. As Lord Burghley wrote to

³⁴³ Marshall, "Choosing Sides and Talking Religion in Shakespeare's England," 43–44; Heal, "Experiencing Religion in London: Diversity and Choice in Shakespeare's Metropolis," 63–66.

³⁴⁴ King, "Religious Writing," 125.

³⁴⁵ On soteriological terror, see: Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 29. Under Elizabeth, between 1570 and 1603, 189 Catholic priests and layfolk were put to death and there survive vivid accounts of the constant state of fear experienced by non-conforming Catholics. For example, Parsons describes recusants and animals constantly under hunt, "carr[ying] their lives always in their hands" while Robert Southwell writes of officials approaching Catholics' homes as if "to fight in a field" and then to "ransack every corner—even women's beds and bosomes—with such insolent behaviour that their villanies in this kind are half a martyrdome," Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 155.

³⁴⁶ Spierenburg, "Violence: Reflections about a Word," 19.

³⁴⁷ emphasis added. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, 51; Lemon, *Treason by Words*.

³⁴⁸ Loades, *Politics, Censorship, and the English Reformation*, 104. Catholic sympathizer William Carter's execution for treason was primarily on the charge of "clandestine printing" while, on the opposite confessional divide, ardent Protestants John Stubbs and John Penry faced harsh penalties on the sole charge of seditious writing. Stubbs' right hand was cut off and Penry hanged for felony in 1593.

³⁴⁹ Clare, "Art Made Tongue-Tied by Authority," 13; Kastan, "Naughty Printed Books," 291–99. Historians debate whether early modern English censorship was sufficiently effective and ruthless to be accurately considered "repressive," and any individual instance might fall on a scale from truly draconian to exceedingly moderate. I would suggest that the very irregularity of Tudor enforcement would hold an additional menace in its unpredictability.

Elizabeth, she needed someone she could trust to meet the “connyng of the office” by “understandinge of historyes, in judgment of comedies tragedyes and showes, in sight of perspective and architecture.”³⁵⁰ Shakespeare was intimately familiar with the potential dangers of playwriting, and *Titus* was necessarily submitted to the Master of the Revels for inspection. Explicitly religious violence over matters of Biblical interpretation expanded to inform the entire hermeneutic culture. That verbal utterances could be treated as legally equivalent to violent physical action was not merely theoretical or confined to Biblical interpretation alone. As a result, the lines between physical and abstract harm, between figurative and literal, became deeply uncertain.³⁵¹ It is this uncertainty about the physical and verbal, literal and figurative, that *Titus* dramatizes so grotesquely, bringing its interpretive violence into dialogue with Reformation hermeneutics by means of Christian anachronisms like those in Titus’s promise to his daughter.

I argue that we should read the meta-interpretive themes of *Titus* in light of the theological hermeneutics that fueled such gruesome violence in sixteenth-century England. In *Titus*, the Goths, the Moor, and the Romans all share the same textual heritage—Ovid, Seneca, Virgil—and these texts directly inform their mutual violence. Comparably, Protestants and Catholics shared a (mostly) identical set of texts—the Bible itself—which served as the basis of their own forms of interpretive violence. Classical texts in *Titus* thus offered Shakespeare an oblique way of staging the dangerous, and officially censored, questions of Reformation Biblical interpretation that fueled sectarian violence. As the characters brutally recreate textual narratives on the bodies of their enemies through rape, murder, and dismemberment, the play’s factions relate to their shared texts in a manner both allegorizing and literalizing. They thereby dramatize the hermeneutic tension at the heart of the Reformation: the vital question of whether Christ’s words, and the text of the Bible more broadly, should be interpreted literally or allegorically. *Titus*’s characters literalize conventional synecdoches of the body with severed heads and hands, then make these body parts the objects of a macabre punning that emphasizes the tension between figurative and literal—as for instance when Titus famously asks for Aaron’s help chopping off his hand, saying: “Lend me thy hand [figuratively] and I will give thee mine [literally]” (3.1.188). *Titus*’s two meta-interpretive foci—classical intertexts and figurative-literal play—culminate in Tamora’s allegorical performance as Revenge and Titus’s bloody feast upon her sons, which stage both the Eucharistic controversy and its underlying hermeneutic basis as murder and cannibalism. *Titus* holds a mirror to the hermeneutic culture generated by the Reformation and shows it as a self-perpetuating, self-devouring cycle of interpretive violence.

I.

Despite the play’s pre-Christian setting, the characters in *Titus*—Moor, Goths, and Romans alike—evoke a variety of Christian phenomena, including “martyr[dom]” (3.1.82 and 108, 3.2.36), “Saint Stephen” (4.4.32), “ever-burning hell” (3.1.243), a child’s “christen[ing]” (4.2.72), and “popish tricks and ceremonies” (5.1.76).³⁵² In this ambiguous landscape, an active Roman Senate House

³⁵⁰ Clare, “*Art Made Tongue-Tied by Authority*,” 11.

³⁵¹ Thomas More’s indictment, for example, was that he “falsely, treasonously, and maliciously, **in his words** [was] persevering in his treason and malice . . .”, but high-ranking officials were not the only ones under scrutiny. As Henry VIII’s Lord Chancellor, Thomas Cromwell was inundated with letters from everyday English folk informing on their neighbors. Cited in Henry Ansgar Kelly, Louis W. Karlin, and Gerard Wegemer, *Thomas More’s Trial by Jury: A Procedural and Legal Review with a Collection of Documents* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2011), 37, emphasis added; G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police; the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 327–82; Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, 220–1; Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 227–9.

³⁵² Even Tamora’s promise to “massacre them all” (1.1.455) has a particularly Reformation inflection, as the word entered English in 1578 the aftermath of the St. Bartholomew’s Massacre and maintained a close association, particularly

coexists with the “wasted building” of a “ruinous monastery,” like those scattered across the English countryside after their dissolution by Henry VIII (5.1.21-3).³⁵³ These anachronisms do not contrast a unitary pagan culture with a unitary Christian one; charged as they are with the images and ideas of the English Reformation, *Titus*' anachronisms use the schismatic present of Christian belief to characterize the savage strife of the play's pagan past.³⁵⁴ These temporal interlacings integrate the play's disturbing brutality with Reformation sectarian violence. Yet *Titus*'s allusions to the Reformation resist any consistently partisan or polemical reading.³⁵⁵ Recent work on Shakespeare and religion has moved from the confessionalizing model—seeking to uncover in the plays consistent evidence of his secret theology and thereby situate him as Protestant, Catholic, Puritan, Anglican, Calvinist, *etc.*—to a more environmental model. This model not only accepts that Shakespeare's own beliefs are beyond certain recovery, but admits the possibility (or probability) that those beliefs were ambiguous, shifting, or even contradictory. The environmental model proposes that for Shakespeare and his audience, religion in England was a far more complex and conflicted experience than suggested by any set of doctrinal bullet points.³⁵⁶ I contend that the period's Biblical hermeneutics were particularly fraught with confusion and contradictions, for even as the Reformation violently demanded consistency and stability of interpretation, its interpretive methods generated instability and inconsistency. In *Titus*, Shakespeare dramatizes these violent ambiguities, his mangled characters embodying the interpretive tensions between literal and figurative meaning and demonstrating how shared texts were tearing Christendom apart instead of holding it together.

In the 1520s and 1530s, issues of Biblical interpretation acquired new urgency for English Christians, and seemingly abstract questions of literal or figurative meaning held power over life and death. At this initial point of violence and rupture, the Catholic Thomas More and the Protestant

for a regular theater audience, since Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* had recently dramatized the events. Lisa Hopkins, *Cultural Uses of the Caesars*, 20-21.

³⁵³ For more on space and religion in *Titus* see: Helga L Duncan, “‘Sumptuously Re-Edified’: The Reformation of Sacred Space in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Comparative Drama* 43 (2009): 425–53, doi:10.1353/cdr.0.0083; Eamon Duffy, “Bare Ruined Choirs: Remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare's England,” in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 40–57.

³⁵⁴ Nicholas R Moschovakis argues that Reformation anachronism transforms the cyclical violence of *Titus Andronicus* into a graphic condemnation of sectarian violence in “‘Irreligious Piety’ and Christian History: Persecution as Pagan Anachronism in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 (2002): 460–86. Jennifer Rust links religious anachronism and *Titus*'s figurative and literal dismemberment of the body politic to argue that “these motifs allude to the derangement of a traditional *corpus mysticum*” rather than merely the body politic, as the long-standing commonplace would have it. She reads the “shattering” violence of *Titus* as Reformation “trauma” and finds it “haunted equally by Foxe's martyrs and the sacramental world of traditional religion”. Jennifer R Rust, “‘Ruinous’ Monasteries and ‘Martyred Signs’: Sacramental Travesty and the Corpus Mysticum in *Titus Andronicus*,” in *The Body in Mystery: The Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticum in the Literature of Reformation England* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 67–102.

³⁵⁵ Although there have been some attempts to read Catholic or Protestant sympathy onto these anachronisms, I concur with Moschovakis's and Rust's conclusions regarding the play's deep ambivalence about both sides of the conflict and its unwillingness to be divided into partisan camps or be read as an allegory of the Reformation. Like Rust, however, I am not wholly convinced that aversion to sectarian violence represents affirmative irenic commitments, as Moschovakis suggests. For more work on *Titus*'s Reformation context see also: Jonathan Bate, “Introduction,” in *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1995), 19–21; Lukas Erne, “‘Popish Tricks’ and a ‘Ruinous Monastery’: *Titus Andronicus* and the Question of Shakespeare's Catholicism,” in *The Limits of Textuality*, ed. Lukas Erne, Guillemette Bolens, and International Conference on the Limits of Textuality (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2000), 136–55; Maria F. Fahey, “‘Martyred Signs’: Sacrifice and Metaphor in *Titus Andronicus*,” in *Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama: Unchaste Signification* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 49–73.

³⁵⁶ Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 9–11; Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010); David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore, *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, 2015; Peter Iver Kaufman, *Religion around Shakespeare*, 2013.

William Tyndale defined the terms of hermeneutic discourse in English for their era and for generations to follow.³⁵⁷ Their vast and vitriolic print battle brought “literal” and “allegorical” into wide circulation as interpretive keywords, and their innovative works of vernacular theology remained readily accessible to Shakespeare and his contemporaries.³⁵⁸ Long after both More and Tyndale were martyred, their hermeneutic arguments were quoted, paraphrased, repeated and repurposed by their successors, from Harding and Jewel to Hooker and Cartwright; yet in seventy years neither passionate debate nor state violence could compel doctrinal consensus or a consistent interpretive methodology. Rather, the essential tensions articulated by More and Tyndale become naturalized to England’s hermeneutic and religious culture, the culture which Shakespeare inherits and to which *Titus* will hold a mirror.

The basics of More’s and Tyndale’s hermeneutic positions are well known: for Protestant Tyndale, scripture “hath but one sense which is the literal sense,” while, for Catholic More, scripture contains “many godly allegories” beyond the literal sense.³⁵⁹ Although accurate as far as it goes, this distillation of their positions overlooks the recurring slippage between the theologians’ apparently opposed paradigms. Catholics and Protestants shared not only the same sacred texts but also the same set of interpretive methodologies; it is ultimately far easier to change *what* one thinks than *how* one thinks.³⁶⁰ As I demonstrated in my first chapter and will briefly reiterate below, although More and Tyndale maintain very different hermeneutic ideals, these differences to which they are so committed erode and fracture in their own authorial and interpretive practices, creating a strange doppelgänger effect by which each resembles the other more than we might suppose (or they would like). From the very outset of the Reformation, literal and figurative reading practices did not map directly and singularly onto Protestants or Catholics, and hermeneutic and confessional boundaries become more rather than less porous over time.

The Catholic Church’s long history of reading Scripture with complex layers of allegory is anathema to Tyndale—whose works form “the bedrock of the English Protestant tradition”—and he cautions readers to “beware of subtle allegories” which are “feigned lies” used by Pope and clergy

³⁵⁷ Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have had ready access to Tyndale, whether in the original printing or in Foxe’s 1573 edition of *The Whole Works of William Tyndale, John Frith, and Doctor Barnes*, “the most important collection of Tudor religious prose,” while More’s works also circulated in the reign of Elizabeth (with a certain circumspection) in their original editions, in Richard Tottel’s *Complete Works* (1557), and in extended quotation by later recusant Catholic writers and martyrologists. Even among Elizabethan Protestants, More continued to be celebrated as a great English wit and humanist, and was a figure of demonstrable interest to Shakespeare as evinced by his involvement in the composition of *Sir Thomas More*. King, “Religious Writing,” 115; John Jowett, “Introduction,” in *Sir Thomas More* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011), 10; 26-8.

³⁵⁸ King, “Religious Writing,” 115; Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), 35. Although Shakespeare’s religious reading habits have received relatively little attention, scholars have found documentary evidence to show that he at the very least read from the Geneva Bible and its commentary, various sermons by Calvin, Richard Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Samuel Harsnett’s *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), and either the Jesuit Robert Parson’s or the Protestant Edmund Bunny’s version of *Book of Christian Exercise* (1582 /1584). Considering Shakespeare’s remarkable breadth of reading and Tyndale’s importance and influence, it is at the very least plausible if not likely Shakespeare was familiar with his work. Regardless, Tyndale’s ideas and his formulations were so integrated with the discourse of interpretation in English that Shakespeare could hardly have avoided encountering them in some form. *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵⁹ William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, ed. David Daniell (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 159; Thomas More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 635/34.

³⁶⁰ As Steinmetz rightly points out, early Protestants not only shared the Catholics’ scripture, but their theological training and teachers as well. It is on some level unsurprising then that early Protestants in particular had moments of interpretive convergence with their Catholic enemies. David C Steinmetz, “Divided by a Common Past: The Reshaping of the Christian Exegetical Tradition in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27, no. 2 (1997): 245.

to lock up the Bible's literal sense.³⁶¹ But what is the literal sense? This turns out to be a tricky question, and Tyndale begins in negation, defining the literal against its antithesis, allegory. Although Tyndale's polemics usually make "allegory" a term of condemnation for figurative interpretations of Scripture, he actually defines allegory as any "strange speaking or borrowed speech," including his example, "look ere thou leap."³⁶² This capacious definition of allegory encompasses all figurative meaning, not just Biblical allegoresis, and Tyndale makes no attempt to clarify the distinction. By his own definition, Tyndale's advice that his readers "abhor [allegories] and spew them out of [their] stomach[s] forever" is itself an allegory (a metaphor) for rejecting allegory (Biblical allegoresis).³⁶³ Tyndale readily acknowledges that "scripture useth proverbs, similitudes, riddles or allegories as all other speeches do," but contends "that which the proverb, similitude, riddle or allegory signifieth is ever the literal sense."³⁶⁴ The literal sense is sense itself: it means *meaning*.

Tyndale's nemesis, Thomas More, uses the same logic to produce the opposite claim. More writes that "our sauyour hym self somtyme spake his wordes in such wyse, that the letter had none other sense than mysteryes & allegories / as comenly all his parables be."³⁶⁵ More not only defends the validity of the Church's traditional allegorical senses, but also asserts that there can be entirely non-literal meaning. If the entirety of true sense is located in the allegorical, the literal is nonsense. This is a provocative inversion of Tyndale's insistence that all sense is literal. More's and Tyndale's conceptions of meaning thus converge despite their opposed nomenclature. If, for Tyndale, the literal sense is meaning itself, then even interpretations that look like allegoresis can be reclaimed under the name of the literal, provided their author judges them substantial and "meaningful."³⁶⁶ (For example, Tyndale defends the literal sense from St. Paul's seeming condemnation in 2 Corinthians that "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" by reading allegorically; he argues the "letter" is metonymy for "the law," that is "letters graven in two tablets of cold stone," that "could only 'kill' the soul by making demands that a man could not possibly fulfill without grace."³⁶⁷) Comparably, for More if even "the letter" (the root-word of "literal," as the learned More clearly knew) could have "none other sense than ... allegories," as he claims above, then the putative opposition between literal and figurative—and, from there, Catholic and Protestant—starts to collapse.³⁶⁸ This blurring is further compounded by the fact that More and Tyndale give the same practical advice to readers: be attentive to context and keep essential doctrines constantly in mind while reading in order to prevent confusion.³⁶⁹ More and Tyndale often differ in the interpretations they produce, but their

³⁶¹ King, "Religious Writing," 115; Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 159.

³⁶² Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 156.

³⁶³ Ibid., 159. Tyndale's depiction of allegory as something ingestible and the body's role in expelling it is suggestive of the metaphors of the body and of consumption key to transubstantiation which finds expression in *Titus* at the cannibal feast of act five.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 156.

³⁶⁵ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 635/35–636/1.

³⁶⁶ As Tyndale's critics often point out, despite ostensibly banishing allegory as papist, he and his successors need it, both hermeneutically and rhetorically. Evaluating Tyndale's notes on the story of Ham, Douglas H. Parker suggests that "Based upon this tendentious allegorical reading that leaves the literal sense far behind, it would seem that allegories, no matter how strained, are appropriate for an exegete if his name is William Tyndale and if such interpretations can be used to sideswipe his enemy the Church," "Tyndale's Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 98; and see Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 192–9.

³⁶⁷ Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory," 70–73.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 70.

³⁶⁹ Indeed, Tyndale and More even use the same metaphor—the yardstick and ruler—to describe this reading process. See: Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 22; More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 8:132/30–133/2.

methodologies become nearly indistinguishable, despite their attempts to demonize one another as radically different.

The ready slippage between supposedly Catholic and Protestant ideals of literal and figurative interpretation is at its most visible in the Eucharistic controversy, which hinged on whether to interpret Christ's words at the Last Supper—"Take, eat, this is my body"—literally, figuratively, or with a blend of methods.³⁷⁰ In this most prominent inversion of Protestants' and Catholics' supposed default hermeneutics, instead of accusing their Catholic enemies of using allegory to alienate the literal sense, Protestants attacked the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation as perverse literalism. First established in 1215, transubstantiation was upheld at the Council of Trent in *Decretum de sanctissimo eucharistia sacramento* (1551) and described thus:

Since Christ our Redeemer declared that to be truly His Body which He offered under the species of bread, this has always been believed in the Church of God; and this holy synod now confirms it afresh: through the consecration of bread and wine there takes place a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood."³⁷¹

Although the external "accident" of bread and wine remained, the "whole substance" was transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. Thus the Mass was a present and constant (though phenomenally imperceptible) miracle that preserved the literal meaning of Christ's assertion. This literal understanding, however, does not negate the symbolic significance of Christ's words; rather, it seeks to collapse the distinction between literal and figurative into a miraculous mystery.

Protestants universally rejected transubstantiation, and early English theologian-martyrs like Tyndale, Frith, and Cranmer instead emphasized the purely commemorative function of the rite ("Do this in remembrance of me") and the purely figurative nature of "this is my body."³⁷² In John Foxe's account of Alice Driver's interrogation for heresy, when her Catholic examiners define "a sacrament" as "a sign," she replies "You have said the truth, sir, . . . it is a sign indeed, I must needs grant it; and therefore seeing it is a sign, it cannot be the thing signified also."³⁷³ Writing against the Catholic recusant Thomas Harding in 1565, Elizabethan bishop John Jewel charges him with literalism—"M Harding saith these words, 'This is my body,' must needs be taken without metaphor, trope, or figure, even as the plain letter lieth, and none otherwise"—and insists that the Mass ought to say, "*Hoc est corpus meum, hoc est, figura corporis mei*: 'This is my body, that is to say, a figure of my body.'"³⁷⁴ Jewel here translates Christ's figurative words into his (Tyndalean) vision of the literal sense: their meaning. Protestants thus attempted to reinstate the separation of figurative and literal that the doctrine of transubstantiation sought to blur. Yet even within Protestantism, the rigidity of this separation was a source of tension, from Luther and Zwingli through to Queen Elizabeth's difficulties with Puritan non-conformists.³⁷⁵ The external threat of Catholicism served an

³⁷⁰ Tyndale's translation, identical at Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22. Although Tyndale does not eagerly throw himself into the Eucharistic controversy, , unlike Zwingli or Luther, he ultimately settles on a purely figurative and mnemonic reading of the Last Supper. See: Simpson, "Tyndale as Promoter of Figural Allegory and Figurative Language," 37–41.

³⁷¹ Cited in Timothy George, "Transubstantiation," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 170.

³⁷² Simpson, "Tyndale as Promoter of Figural Allegory and Figurative Language," 38–40.

³⁷³ From John Foxe's account, cited in John N. King, ed., *Voices of the English Reformation: A Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 288.

³⁷⁴ Jewel, *The Works of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury*, 3:453.

³⁷⁵ Although there were various early attempts to bring Luther and Zwingli into accord on Eucharistic theology, they all were unsuccessful and at the acrimonious Colloquy at Marburg in 1527 Luther famously brought Zwingli close to tears

important role in Elizabeth's attempts to unify an increasingly divided Protestant England, for when Puritans turned accusations of "popery" against the established Church, Elizabethan bishops and polemicists were eager to redirect the hostility toward real "papists" and their gruesome obsession with devouring Christ.³⁷⁶ This potent rhetorical weapon united Protestants in their attack on Catholics' perceived over-literalism. Protestants mockingly depicted their enemies both as cannibals—feasting gruesomely at a bloody slaughter like Titus's feast in Act Five—and as absurdly deluded fools blind to the simple, literal reality of bread.³⁷⁷

More's and Tyndale's debate proved irresolvable by either reason or violence, and in the succeeding decades English theologians and polemicists quote, repeat, and repackage the essential arguments of their foundational polemic battle.³⁷⁸ Yet over time the terms "literal" and "allegorical" only grow more unsettled. Writing for the Elizabethan church in 1597, Richard Hooker contends: "I hold it for a most infallible rule in expositions of sacred Scripture, that where a literal construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst. There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changeth the meaning of words . . . makeeth of any thing what it listeth, and bringeth in the end all truth to nothing."³⁷⁹ Hooker's insistence on the literal sense sounds remarkably reminiscent of Tyndale, but whereas Tyndale's opponents were Catholic allegorists, Hooker's opponents are now Puritan anti-sacramentalists rejecting the use of water in baptism. In this debate amongst Protestants, both sides believe they have the literal sense—the true meaning—on their side. And so the Elizabethan Church must fight a battle on two fronts: against Catholics and their allegorical ideals and against non-conforming Protestants, whose shared outward

of frustration. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 172-3. In its treatment of Eucharist, the Elizabethan *Book of Common Prayer* (1559) shows the accommodating hallmarks of the Elizabethan Settlement. It blends the purely figurative and mnemonic position of Frith, Tyndale, Zwingli, *et al* with a more mystical Protestant vision of Christ's *spiritually* Real Presence without the transubstantiation of substances: "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ was geuen thee, preserue thy body and soule into euerlasting life: and take and eate this, in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feede on him in thy hearte by fayth, with thanks gyunge." Davies, "The Transubstantial Bard: Shakespeare and Catholicism," in *The Poetics of Transubstantiation: From Theology to Metaphor*, ed. Douglas Burnham and Enrico Giaccherini (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 32-3. Yet even this description remained contentious and the Elizabethan rhetoric of the Eucharist varied dramatically depending on audience or context. There was even considerable variation even within the space of the Protestant Establishment. Both Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker were, for example, "in the broadest sense, representatives of Renaissance orthodoxy"—favored by the government, having important high connections, and being allowed to speak for the established Church. And yet they held exceedingly different opinions on a variety of subjects, including the Eucharist. See: Debora K Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, 19; 38-48; Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored the Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547-c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-6.

³⁷⁶ The English Catholic community's need for seminary priests was bound up in the need to be able to attend Mass and to receive the Eucharist, which only a priest could transubstantiate. For more on the recurring English fear of a (often essentially imaginary) Catholic threat and the prominence of transubstantiation in Protestants' written responses to that threat, see: Davies, "The Transubstantial Bard: Shakespeare and Catholicism." 26-43

³⁷⁷ Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism*, 83.

³⁷⁸ See for example: In *Synopsis papismi* (1592), for instance, Andrew Willet draws heavily on Tyndale's refutation of the Catholic fourfold senses and, with the exception of added scriptural examples, does little but repeat Tyndale's work in *Obedience of a Christian Man*. John Marbeck's *A Booke of Notes and Common Places* (1581) for "those that desire the true understanding & meaning of holy Scripture" quotes or paraphrases Tyndale by name 279 times, devoting particular attention to Tyndale's defense of the literal sense in reading St. Paul's 2 Corinthians 2-3. Andrew Willet, *Synopsis Papismi, That Is, A Generall Viewe of Papistry* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1592); John Marbeck, *A BOOKE OF NOTES and Common Places, with Their Expositions, Collected and Gathered out of the Workes of Diuers Singular Writers* (London, 1581), 624.

³⁷⁹ Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. W. Speed Hill, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 252.

commitment to the literal sense further exposes the gaps between theory and practice even within the same faith.

In this battle, martyrs, theologians, and polemicists of all faiths recognized the spaces between literal and figurative meaning not only as a battleground, but as weapons in their armories. Foxe's martyrs frequently pun on their own gruesome fates, and literal-figurative play features prominently in Elizabethan attacks on the Catholic Mass. The martyrs in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* often mock the Mass as a literalist (mis)reading by imagining the "bready God" who is "grated with the tooth," while John Jewel points out with disgust that the "material substance" of the Eucharist "goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the privy."³⁸⁰ "The prelates haue a burning zeale to theyr chyl dren," Tyndale proclaims in the margins of *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, glossing the main text where he writes: "they saye, they loue you so wel that they had leuer [rather] burne you then that you sholde haue felowe-shyppe with Chryste."³⁸¹ Tyndale's grim humor here both reveals the stakes of interpretation in the Reformation—literal burning—and evokes their underlying hermeneutic basis, namely the tension between literal and metaphorical meaning. His conventional, figurative use of 'burning' to mean 'ardent,' and its dialectic with the quite literal burning of heretics, anticipates the punning that will characterize the brutal vengeance enacted in *Titus*.

Although Catholics and Protestants shared the same sacred texts and the same set of interpretive methodologies, those commonalities generated interpretive strife rather than consensus: an uncertain interpretive environment that nevertheless violently insisted on certainty. It is this violent interpretive instability that I identify in *Titus*'s brutal treatment of classical texts, figurative meanings, and staged bodies. *Titus* dramatizes the Reformation controversy over Biblical reading in its characters' gruesome obsession with their shared texts—works of Ovid, Virgil, Livy, Seneca, *et al.*—which plays out in a violence both literalizing and typologizing. In *Titus*, the Reformation habit of typology takes a disturbingly literal form: characters not only see the world in terms of typological relations drawn from their shared texts, but also violently recreate those relations by means of rape, dismemberment, murder, and cannibalism.

II.

After learning the identity of Lavinia's assailants, Titus sends young Lucius to Chiron and Demetrius with the "goodliest weapons of his armory" wrapped in lines of poetry (4.2.11). Chiron recognizes the scroll immediately as a "verse in Horace" that he "read [] in the grammar long ago": "*Integer vitae, scelerisque prus, / Non egit Mauri iaculis, nec arcu*" ("the man of upright life and free from crime does not need the javelins or bow of the Moor") (4.2.20-3),³⁸² Chiron, Demetrius, and Aaron all understand this untranslated Latin, but only the witty Aaron grasps its meaning: "the old man hath found their guilt" (4.2.26). These "weapons wrapped about with lines" create a vivid emblem for the inextricable link between shared texts and violence in *Titus* (4.2.27). From the very first scene, the Goths and Moor have referred to Roman texts, myths, and deities just as insistently and exclusively as the Romans do, despite *Titus*' outward staging of a conflict between Roman and "barbarian" cultures.³⁸³ The Romans, Goths, and Moor share a culture defined by literary allusion

³⁸⁰ Cited in Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 114–15. On "the trope of Catholic Host as excrement" in "Protestant propaganda" see: Robert Hornback, "Lost Conventions of Godly Comedy in Udall's *Thersites*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47, no. Spring (2007): 298–300.

³⁸¹ Tyndale, *STC* / 24457, 9–10.

³⁸² For an account of Chiron and Demetrius as students in humanist pedagogy, see: Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 107–8.

³⁸³ The world of *Titus* allows no division between literature and religion, since piety in ancient Rome was a matter for the state to adjudicate and enforce—as it was in Elizabethan England—and the pantheon of the *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses* is that of both Titus and his enemies. The only possible exception to this rule is Aaron's exclamation, "Now by the gods

and textual quotation: characters from all factions obsessively compare their own situations to textual “pattern[s and] precedent[s]” (5.3.43), invoking “Hecuba, Lucrece, Livy’s Virginius, Coriolanus, Dido and Aeneas, and a host of other *exempla*.”³⁸⁴ They exchange quotations and allusions as they exchange blows, thus evoking the volleys of scriptural quotation that pervaded Reformation polemics and heresy trials even as they emphasize that their mutual violence is predicated upon a shared textual heritage.³⁸⁵ These shared texts provide the governing structures through which both factions read the world around them, generating a violence at once literalizing and typologizing.

For Shakespeare and his audience, typology had three overlapping loci: biblical, classical, and polemical. First and foremost, typology is a mode of relating the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures that is modeled by both Christ and St. Paul within scripture itself.³⁸⁶ In this interpretive method, the type in the Hebrew Scriptures anticipates and is answered by its divinely authored fulfillment in the antitype; for example, Christ reads himself typologically as Jonah, whose time in the whale’s belly and eventual deliverance acts a type for Christ’s death, time in the tomb, and eventual resurrection (Matt. 12:40).³⁸⁷ Early Church Fathers like Origen blended this scriptural practice with Classical interpretive habits first applied to passages of Homer and Hesiod, thereby generating the expansive systems of Biblical allegoresis that Tyndale and his fellow Protestants so strenuously rejected.³⁸⁸ Yet in its most expansive sense—as a tool for relating past and present—typology permeated Renaissance culture beyond this Biblical context, as for instance when Tyndale labels the Pope as a type of Antichrist.³⁸⁹ This polemical typologizing was so commonplace that Richard Hooker critiques his Puritan opponents for constantly reading themselves into scripture as apostles and prophets, “as if purposely the Holy Ghost had [with Ezra and Nehemiah] meant to foresignify, what the authors of Admonitions to the Parliament . . . should either do or suffer in behalf of this their cause.”³⁹⁰ Yet extra-scriptural typologizing was not only a weapon of Reformation polemic, but also a way to relate the pagan past to Christian history and even to the Reformation present. Renaissance poets inherited a long allegorical tradition of reading classical poetry juxtaposed with Biblical truths, for instance making Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue foretell the birth of Christ and yoking “Ovid’s account of the creation . . . to that in Genesis, Deucalion’s flood to Noah’s, and so on.”³⁹¹ In the epistle of his “Englished” *Metamorphoses* (1567), Arthur Golding goes

that warlike Goths adore,” but these gods still remain unnamed and their distinction from Roman gods remains implicit (1.1.560). Although modern directors frequently use costuming to create a sense of otherness for the Goths and Moor, the earliest surviving illustration of a Shakespeare performance represents Tamora in Elizabethan dress. See: Bate, Jonathan, “Introduction,” 39.

³⁸⁴ Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 105.

³⁸⁵ When Demetrius plans to rape Lavinia, for example, he quotes Seneca, the same author whom Titus later quotes when Lavinia reveals Demetrius’ and Chiron’s guilt (1.1.635; 4.1.82). Bate, Jonathan, “Introduction,” 29–31.

³⁸⁶ Daniel Boyarin, “Origen as Theorist of Allegory: Alexandrian Contexts,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.

³⁸⁷ Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, 91; David S. Berkeley, “Some Misapprehensions of Christian Typology in Recent Literary Scholarship,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 1978): 91.

³⁸⁸ Boyarin, “Origen as Theorist of Allegory: Alexandrian Contexts,” 39. It is this longstanding interrelation between pagan poetry and Catholic allegoresis Tyndale gestures to when he writes that “thou shalt find enough [Catholic “sophisters” and “schoolmen”] that will preach Christ, and prove whatsoever point of the faith thou wilt, as well out of a fable of Ovid or any other poet, as out of Saint John’s gospel or Paul’s Epistles,” *Obedience*, 160.

³⁸⁹ Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 14/24-15/6.

³⁹⁰ quoted in Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, 28–29.

³⁹¹ Jan M Ziolkowski and Michael C Putnam, *Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 2008), 34–35; Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 26; Raphael Lyne, *Ovid’s Changing Worlds: English Metamorphoses, 1567-1632* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 26.

into detail “establishing the compatibility between Ovid’s cosmology and that of the Book of Genesis,” and then concludes that “Poets took the ground of all their cheefest fables out / Of Scripture.”³⁹² Classical myth afforded social and political typologies as well as religious ones: the story of Philomela so central to *Titus* was also an Elizabethan emblem for poetic production under state censorship.³⁹³ Golding likewise tells the reader that Ovid’s stories are “a myrroure for thy self” and that “under feyned names of Goddes it was the Poets [Ovid’s] guyse, / The vice and faultes of all estates too taunt in covert wyse,” and his translation, like *Titus*, is shot through with religious and cultural anachronisms.³⁹⁴ Shakespeare’s use of Classical texts exploits their perceived overlap with scripture to reflect on Reformation biblical hermeneutics and violence, getting around state censorship while gesturing to it, and thus holding the “myrroure” to Elizabethan interpretive culture and Reformation.³⁹⁵

The characters of *Titus* famously and self-consciously evoke the narratives of Philomela, Procne, and Virginia, further emphasizing the relationship between text and violence (2.1.43; 5.2.193-4). Before Chiron and Demetrius rape and mutilate Lavinia, for example, Aaron characterizes their violence as a reenactment of Ovid: “Philomel must lose her tongue today” (2.1.43). This textually inspired violence transforms Lavinia herself into a text to be read by her family.³⁹⁶ On finding Lavinia, “*her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and ravished,*” Marcus says, “But

The *Ovide Moralisé* is the most famous example of a systematically Christianized Classical text and featuring truly ingenious interpretations, for instance, “Lycaon, who plotted to make Zeus eat human flesh and was turned into a wolf for his pains, is read as Herod, and his plot as the attempt on the life of the infant Jesus; his destruction of sheep is made to represent the massacre of the innocents, and his metamorphosis into a wolf, Herod’s dethronement and damnation” Bate *Ovid* 26. Likewise, Dante’s *Convivio* assimilates non-Christian poetry to the “moral” level of the fourfold system of Scriptural allegoreisis. This adequation of pagan and Christian “morals” gets enacted not only in massive attempts at syncretism like the or *Convivio*, but also at the granular level in the humanist activity of commonplacings sententiae into “moral” categories without regarding their context, as Erasmus prescribes in *Copia*, thereby juxtaposing—and concealing the distinction between—Classical and Biblical quotations.

³⁹² Lyne, *Ovid’s Changing Worlds*, 49.

³⁹³ R. W. Malsen, “Myths Exploited: The Metamorphoses of Ovid in Early Elizabethan England,” in *Shakespeare’s Ovid: The Metamorphoses in the Plays and Poems*, ed. A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24–27. In the early 1560s, for authors like Thomas Peend and the *Narvissus* poet commentary on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* allows an exploration of “the problems of reading and writing in an oppressively hierarchical structure,” 24. George Gascoigne’s satire *The Steele Glas* (1576) draws on this legacy, making the link between Philomela and censorship even more explicit. He begins by applying the story of Philomela directly to the censorship of poetry, a censorship he knew firsthand since the ecclesiastical High Commission had removed his first two collections of poetry from circulation, 25. In *The Steele Glas*, Gascoigne “introduces us to a world where the *Metamorphoses* has subtly changed its status since the days of the early humanists. It is no longer a text to be read and commented on in an effort to recover its perennial moral secrets. Instead it serves as a tool whereby the secrets of contemporary culture—and especially the ruling classes—may be subjected to close reading and critical commentaries by the knowing poet,” 27. Malsen argues that the authors of Ovidian works in Tudor England responded not only to the original source material but to each others’ adaptations as well and he posits that *Titus* is informed by *The Steele Glas*.

³⁹⁴ Golding’s translation holds a decidedly religious inflection, invoking the vocabulary of England’s present—and contentious—religious landscape: his Minerva puts “Arachne to hir neckerverse”; Envy mumbles a “Divels Paternoster” to herself; Ceres’ priest wears “A stately Miter faire and white with Tables hanging down”; and the word *impietas* (impiety) is surprisingly translated as “heresy”. Lyne, *Ovid’s Changing World*, 62-70

³⁹⁵ Scholars generally take for granted the idea that Shakespeare wrote about his political present through a distant political past to protect himself from censorship and possible criminal charges. See, for example, Bate’s reading of *Julius Caesar* as commentary on the succession crisis in *Soul of An Age*, 105. That similar arguments may be applied to religious matters seems equally reasonable, yet underexplored.

³⁹⁶ Mary Laughlin Fawcett, “Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*,” *ELH* 50, no. 2 (July 1983): 263. Attending to the play’s mediations among word, image, body, classical text, and present performance, Leonard Barkan declares, “the real translation of [Ovid’s] book is the girl who acts it out,” *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis & the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 246.

sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee / And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue” (s.d. 2.3;2.3.26-7). Not only does Marcus recognize the source text, he conceives of the loss of her hands as a variation on that text: “A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met, / And he hath cut those pretty fingers off, / That could have better sew'd than Philomel” (2.3.41-3). The Goths’ adaptation of Philomela deprives Lavinia of standard modes of communication and thus makes her status as an object of interpretation even clearer. Like Reformation martyrdoms of the sort I discussed earlier, this interpretive violence operates on two levels: first, the violence is textually inspired; and second, it makes its victim into an interpretable text.

The Andronici themselves make the link between the violence of martyrdom and the violence of *Titus*. On first seeing Lavinia after her assault, Lucius says, “Speak, gentle sister: who hath martyred thee?” and Titus mourns that she has no “tongue to tell [him] who hath martyred [her]” (3.1.82; 108). Titus later relates Lavinia’s status as the object of interpretation—a “map of woe”—to the Reformation with the claim that he “can interpret all her martyrdom signs” (3.2.12;36). Shakespeare’s repetition of “martyrdom” here deserves particular emphasis, since it is so atypical of his other works. *Titus* contains twice as many uses of the word ‘martyr’ and its variations as any other Shakespeare play, one-third of all instances in his corpus, and is the only Roman play to contain any.³⁹⁷ Lavinia is emphatically read as *both* Philomela *and* a martyr, acquiring both pagan and Christian resonance and gesturing to a broader overlapping of classical and Christian textual meaning.³⁹⁸ To call Lavinia a “martyr,” however, is a fundamental (though potentially compassionate) misreading; to be a martyr one must not only suffer, but must “suffer for something, must give witness to a higher truth, to Christ.”³⁹⁹ Lavinia’s suffering was neither willing nor a “witnessing,” so even as she embodies the position of martyr-as-text, she demonstrates that martyrdom itself was a fundamentally interpretive phenomenon fraught with the potential for misreading, even by sympathetic audiences.

At once inspired by and treated as text, the interpretive violence of *Titus* is both literal and typological. Scholars have tended to label the characters’ use of Ovid as “literalizing,” since it makes mythological narratives physically real.⁴⁰⁰ Yet the characters’ use of Ovidian myth and their mythologized past to order and comprehend experience mirrors Reformation Christians’ typologizing.⁴⁰¹ *Titus*’s typological habits break down the dichotomy between literal and figurative, since they present a mode of interpretive relation made materially real. And yet this “real” typology offers neither certainty of interpretation nor divine truth; like *Titus*’s vision of martyrdom, it becomes darkly evacuated of meaning.

This pattern emerges most clearly in the strangely shifting interpretations of Lavinia’s suffering. Although the Goths’ literalizing of Philomela upon her body was initially clearly legible to her family at first, by Act 4, the Andronici seem to have forgotten this reading entirely. When Lavinia chases her nephew for his copy of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for example, he sees her not as Philomela, but as Hecuba; the rest of her family is bewildered by her actions and in the course of a

³⁹⁷ According to *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare*, *Titus* contains four of the twelve references to martyrs or martyrdom in the Shakespeare corpus. There are no references to martyrdom in any other Roman plays, though the word appears once in *The Rape of Lucrece*. The next most frequent occurrence two instances in *Two Noble Kinsmen* and in *2 Henry 4*, after which the word makes only isolated appearances, often in the context of Petrarchan love conceits.

³⁹⁸ There is the added commonality that Foxe recounts tales of martyrs whose tongues were cut out—or were threatened with this mutilation—to silence their last words at execution.

³⁹⁹ Robert S Miola, “An Alien People Clutching Their Gods? Shakespeare’s Ancient Religions,” *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 54 (2001): 35.

⁴⁰⁰ See, for example, Maurice Hunt, “Compelling Art in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 28, no. 2 (April 1988): 197–218.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 197–98.

brief scene liken her to Cornelia and Lucrece, as well as Hecuba.⁴⁰² As she handles the book that inspired the form of her suffering, her father himself sounds surprised as he asks whether she was “surprised, sweet girl, / Ravished and wronged as Philomela was, / Forced in the ruthless, vast and gloomy woods?” (4.1.51-3). Though their habit of reading the world through textual precedent remains unchanged, the Andronici’s readings are subject to a strange forgetting that undermines the potential of stable interpretive meaning.

Unlike More’s vision of scripture as teeming with “many godly allegories,” this proliferation of possible readings for Lavinia does not enhance the characters’ understanding but rather multiplies the violence they enact.⁴⁰³ Titus’ forgetting obliges Lavinia to re-identify herself as Philomela: in order to name her violators, she must not only accept but re-assert the typology of their brutality. So prompted, Titus likewise adopts both the Goths’ text and their typological means for an Ovidian revenge that affirms Lavinia’s identity as Philomela. Before murdering them and serving them as meat pies, Titus tells Chiron and Demetrius: “worse than Philomel you used my daughter, / And worse than Progne I will be revenged” (5.2.193-4). Yet even this brutally obvious, apparently inescapable typologizing of *Metamorphoses* proves unstable, as the play ends with Lavinia made into Livy’s Virginia, not Ovid’s Philomela.

At the final gory banquet, Titus asks Saturninus if “it [was] well done of rash Virginus / To slay his daughter with his own right hand, / Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered” (5.3.36-8). When Saturninus replies that “[i]t was, Andronicus,” Titus calls it “A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant / for [him], most wretched, to perform the like” and—in one of the play’s most direct instances of interpretive violence—kills Lavinia (5.3.43-4).⁴⁰⁴ In this moment, Titus makes her not Philomela, who should exact her own revenge and fly away transformed into a nightingale, but Virginia, dead at her father’s hand.⁴⁰⁵ He thus adopts typology not only as a tool to avenge Lavinia—as when he took the role of Procne to turn Chiron and Demetrius into a cannibal feast—but also, like Chiron and Demetrius, as a mode of violence *against* Lavinia. Neither his methods (materializing textual precedent) nor the results (violence against Lavinia) distinguish Titus from his enemies; it is he who murders his own daughter.

This use of classical texts thus makes *Titus* a mirror of Reformation Christians’ own violent engagement with scripture. Like the Catholics and Protestants in the Reformation, the factions of *Titus* are nearly indistinguishable both in their brutality and in their modes of interpretation, and the play offers a nightmarish conflation of typological allegory with the directly real and present meaning with which Tyndale and his followers credited the literal sense. One can almost picture Chiron and Demetrius encountering St. Paul’s image of “the epistle of Christ . . . written . . . in fleshy tables of the heart”—a favorite image for both More and Tyndale—and looking for it with a penknife, as a

⁴⁰² Fox, *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion in Elizabethan England*, 121. Young Lucius is also well trained in reading the world through textual precedent: seeing in Lavinia “Hecuba of Troy [who] / Ran mad through sorrow,” he fears “some fit or frenzy do possess her” (4.1.20-1). For Young Lucius, Hecuba’s narrative is one of “madness brought on by extreme grief” and holds the threat of the potentially irrational violence this madness brings. In contrast, in the first scene of the play, Demetrius hopefully imagines his mother as a very different Hecuba, saying: “The self-same gods that arm’d the Queen of Troy / With opportunity of sharp revenge / Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent, / May favor Tamora . . . / To quite the bloody wrongs upon her foes” (1.1.130-41). Demetrius reads Hecuba as a queen happily presented with a chance for revenge and “a model of how to seize an opportunity for power.” These two opposed readings of Hecuba’s narrative and its projection onto two such ostensibly opposed characters illustrates the fluid nature of interpretation and these warring factions’ shared textual heritage. Moreover, it displays the characters’ shared tendency for typologizing, reading the world around them through textual analogy.

⁴⁰³ More, *The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*, 635/34.

⁴⁰⁴ For an account of this phrase’s resonance with the discourses of humanist pedagogy and law, see: Dickson, “A Pattern, Precedent, and Lively Warrant.”

⁴⁰⁵ For Lavinia to turn into a bird and fly away, of course, would present considerable and obvious difficulties in staging.

vivisection.⁴⁰⁶ Literalism and typology alike are emptied of meaning, for Lavinia is not a transcendent resolution authored by God to realize the potential of Philomela or Virginia, as a Christian antitype should be; she is simply a woman who has been raped and mutilated by her enemies, then murdered by her father.

III.

The brutal literalism of *Titus* operates not only intertextually, with its bloody reenactments of Ovid, but linguistically as well: and here the play's Reformation context becomes more obviously ("literally," even) significant to its ironic force. In the first scene of *Titus*, Lavinia asks her father to "bless [her] with [his] victorious hand" and Marcus then asks him to "set a head on headless Rome" by becoming emperor (1.1.166; 189).⁴⁰⁷ These stately, conventional uses of metonymy early in the play are later violently literalized as severed heads and hands appear on stage and become the objects of frequent macabre punning that emphasizes the spaces between literal and figurative meaning.⁴⁰⁸ On seeing Lavinia's dismemberment, Titus asks "what accursed hand / Hath made thee handless in thy father's sight?" and before sacrificing his hand, he jokes to Aaron, "Lend me thy hand [figuratively], and I will give thee mine [literally]" (3.1.66-7; 188).⁴⁰⁹ Such puns have long been recognized as central to the play's grim humor. But puns depend upon shared comprehension, and as the play falls into ever greater brutality, the divisions between figurative and literal become focal points not only of humor but also of misinterpretation.

After Titus's dismemberment, the Andronici sit down to a dinner that combines Reformation anachronism and increasing layers of interpretive instability hinging on literal and figurative meaning. Titus suggests that, to express her grief, Lavinia "get some little knife between [her] teeth" and make a hole in her breast so that her tears may fill it and "drown" her "lamenting" heart (3.2.4-20).⁴¹⁰ Titus imagines in detail an action Lavinia could theoretically perform literally, even without her hands, but whose outcome would be purely figural—Lavinia's heart cannot literally drown since it does not breathe. Marcus takes Titus's speech literally and responds, "Fie, brother, fie! teach her not thus to lay / Such violent hands upon her tender life" (3.2.21-2), using the word "hands" figuratively. Titus, however, interprets "hands" literally and takes it as a sign that Marcus has gone mad, blind to reality. Titus replies: "How now, has sorrow made thee dote already? / Why, Marcus, no man should be mad but I. / What violent hands can she lay on her life?" (3.2.23-5). The figurative dismembering of the body has already become a literal reality, and in the absence of literal hands, Titus cannot imagine them signifying even metonymically. The fragmentation of the body corresponds with a fragmentation of language, and sense itself becomes increasingly unstable. This exchange illustrates the potential for misreading that lingers in the space between literal and figurative meaning and, further, associates this uncertainty with madness.

This moment of misinterpretation is swiftly followed by another as Titus returns to the language of martyrdom that emphasizes the Reformation context of *Titus*. Titus turns immediately

⁴⁰⁶ In *Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare revisits literalizing violence in a form that is even more explicitly scriptural. On Shylock's bond and the circumcision of the heart, see: Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations Christian and Jew in the Merchant of Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 108–33; Tyndale, *Tyndale's New Testament*, 264; Tyndale, *An Answer Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 53/15-30; Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 139; Gray, "Tyndale and the Text in the Heart."

⁴⁰⁷ Kendall, "Lend Me Thy Hand," 300.

⁴⁰⁸ The gruesome literalizing of figurative language has been the focal point of considerable scholarly attention. See particularly: Tricomi, "The Aesthetics of Mutilation in Titus Andronicus"; Kendall, "Lend Me Thy Hand"; Rowe, "Dismembering and Forgetting in Titus Andronicus." The connections between this violent literal-figurative play and Reformation hermeneutic disputes have previously gone unremarked.

⁴⁰⁹ Tricomi, "The Aesthetics of Mutilation in Titus Andronicus," 15–16.

⁴¹⁰ This again figures Lavinia as Philomela who, once transformed into the nightingale, pressed her breast against a thorn. Bate, *Titus Andronicus*, 207n.

from his misunderstanding with Marcus to his claim that he “can interpret all [Lavinia’s] **martyred signs**” and he promises:

Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought.
In thy dumb action will I be as perfect
As **begging hermits are in their holy prayers.**
Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps **to heaven,**
Nor wink, nor nod, **nor kneel, nor make a sign,**
But I of these will wrest an **alphabet**

And by still practice learn to know thy meaning” (3.2.36-45; emphasis added).

The process of interpretation here is figured in terms of studious labor—“learn,” “wrest,” “practice”—and also in religious terms—“hermits,” “holy prayers,” “kneel,” “heaven.” These terms not only reiterate the Reformation anachronism, but gesture towards Reformation hermeneutics’ deluded and violent insistence on their own stability. Titus’s promise to be “perfect” in “learn[ing] to know [Lavinia’s] meaning” is surrounded by moments of misreading that severely undercut his claim: when he misinterprets Marcus’s figurative use of hands; when he reads Lavinia as a martyr, as previously discussed; and then again when Marcus kills a fly.

Marcus draws Titus’s attention away from Lavinia when he kills a fly, which then replaces her as the object of interpretative strife between the two brothers. The scene unfolds:

Titus: What dost thou strike at, Marcus, with thy knife?

Marcus: At that that I have killed, my lord—a fly.

Titus: Out on thee murderer. Thou kill’st my heart.

Mine eyes are cloyed with view of tyranny;

A deed of death done on the innocent

Becomes not Titus’ brother. Get thee gone;

I see thou art not for my company (3.2.52-8)

Titus’s language here seems at once figurative and literal: on the one hand, Titus is correct that Marcus has committed a “deed of death,” but the intensity of his language (e.g., murderer, tyranny, innocent) suggests that he has anthropomorphized the fly in his own mind. Marcus protests, insisting on the literal sense: “Alas my lord, I have but killed a fly” (3.2.59). Titus responds by imagining the fly even more vividly in terms of kin, rejecting the petty inconsequence that Marcus’s “*but ... a fly*” implies: “How if that fly had a father and a mother? / How would he hang his slender gilded wings / And buzz lamenting doings in the air” (3.2.59-63). When Titus passionately projects his own recent familial sorrow onto the fly, Marcus abandons the literal sense and responds to Titus’s personification with another one, reimagining the fly as “a black ill-favored fly, / Like to the empress’ Moor. Therefore I killed him” (3.2.67-8). At this, Titus abandons his own narrative to participate in Marcus’s account, calling it a “charitable deed” and saying, “Give me thy knife; I will insult on him / flattering myself *as if* it were the Moor” (3.2.70-4 emphasis added). Titus’s vehement outrage on behalf of the fly—even to the point of banishing his brother from his sight—suggests that he literally believed the fly a murdered innocent, but, after shifting his interpretation, Titus clearly distinguishes between “it is the Moor” and “as if it were the Moor.”⁴¹¹ Marcus misses this distinction, however, and thinks Titus wholly mad. Such rapid shifts between the figurative and the literal dramatize the destabilized nature of interpretation.

The interpretive volatility of this scene repeatedly gestures towards the context of the Reformation, specifically that of the Eucharistic controversy, which was itself generated by disputes over the figurative and literal. Taking Titus’s reading of the fly as a sign of madness, Marcus exclaims, “Alas poor man! Grief has so wrought on him / He takes false shadows for true

⁴¹¹ Fahey, “Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama,” 62.

substances” (3.2.80-1 emphasis added). At the same dinner where Titus claims he can “interpret all [Lavinia’s] martyred signs,” Marcus cautions Titus not to teach Lavinia “to lay / Such violent hands upon her tender life” (3.2.21-2). Titus interprets Marcus’ figurative use of “hands” literally and takes it as a sign of madness: “How now, has sorrow made thee dote already? / Why, Marcus, no man should be mad but I. / What violent hands can she lay on her life?” (3.2.23-5). Titus’s failure to distinguish between literal and figurative continues as he anthropomorphizes a dead fly—first as an innocent victim, then as Aaron the Moor—until at last Marcus exclaims, “Alas poor man! Grief has so wrought on him / He takes false shadows for true substances” (3.2.80-1). Marcus’s words here link this scene of misinterpretation and madness to debates about transubstantiation—the doctrine Protestants treated as a mad inability to distinguish between literal and figurative meaning—and one that *Titus*’ final act will dramatize as cannibalism and murder.

Marcus’s claim that in his madness Titus “takes false shadows for true substances” echoes the official terminology of transubstantiation and Protestant refutations of it. The Thirty-nine Articles (1563) for the Elizabethan Church specified that: “Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.”⁴¹² These “superstitions”—particularly the veneration of the Host that Protestants regarded as rank idolatry—are often referred to in early polemic as “blynd shadowes,” and to believe in them is repeatedly treated as madness.⁴¹³ Tyndale depicts Catholics as misdirecting the “trust and confidence . . . to be geuen vn to Gods worde and Christes bloude . . . vn to the ceremonie it selfe as though a man were so mad to forgett that the bosh at the tauern dore did signifie wine to be solde within / but wold beleue that the bosh it selfe wold quench his thirste.”⁴¹⁴ This absurd image of the madman attempting to drink a sign became a common visual for transubstantiation.⁴¹⁵ The seemingly mad inability to distinguish between figurative and literal in *Titus* enables the play’s brutal climax, which offers a twisted vision not only of the Eucharistic controversy but also its underlying hermeneutic basis. Tamora’s allegorical play, in which she casts herself as “Revenge,” self-consciously collapses the divisions between true and false, figurative and literal. The failure of her allegorizing produces a cannibal Eucharist that embodies the hermeneutic controversy over the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Tamora’s allegory responds to Titus’s seeming madness and another emblem for textual violence. After Lavinia reveals her tormentors’ identities, Titus demands divine justice by sending the Andronici to seek the gods physically by wrapping petitions around arrows which he directs his

⁴¹² Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided, 1490-1700* (New York: Allen Lane, 2003), 289.

⁴¹³ Tyndale and Frith frequently describe the laity as “disceaued with shadowes” by the clergy drawing on Biblical imagery from Hebrews 8:5; 10:1 and Colossians 2:17. Paul depicts the bodily observance of the Hebraic Law as “shadowes” in contrast to the spiritual truth of Christ’s body. The Geneva Bible translates this verse as “[these observances] which are *but* a shaddowe of things to come; but the bodie is in Christ,” which it glosses with “The body as a thing of substances and pith, he setteth against shadowes.” Likewise, anti-Catholic Protestant rhetoric frequently uses incredulous assertions of the madness of their opponents’ position or an analogy to it, such as: “Now is there no man so mad, as to say, that Christ was a naturall stone (except he be a naturall foole) . . . therefore we may well conclude that the sacrament is not his naturall body, but is called his body, for a similitude that it hath wherein it signifieth & representeth his body” and “I thinke there is no man so mad, as to iudge that the breade is our body in deede.” Lloyd E Berry and William Whittingham, *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison; Milwaukee; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Tyndale, “An Exposition Vppon the v. Vi. vii. Chapters of Mathew, Which Three Chapters Are the Key and the Dore of the Scripture, and the Restoring Agayne of Moses Law Corrupte by the Scribes and Pharises. And the Exposition Is the Restoring Agayne of Christes Lawe Corrupte by the Papistes,” 699, 129, 160.

⁴¹⁴ Tyndale, *An Answere Vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, 2000, 75/25-30.

⁴¹⁵ See for instance “The foolishness of Transubstantiation” from Thomas Jenner’s *The Soules Solace* (1626) reproduced in Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage*, 116.

kinsmen to shoot into the heavens (4.3.50-63). Marcus reads Titus's physical search for the gods as madness. These arrows and scrolls together offer another emblem for textual violence, this time in a sort of weaponized prayer as Marcus directs the Andronici to "shoot all [their] shafts into the court" (4.3.62). It is this sign of Titus's madness that inspires Tamora to sabotage the Andronici's plans by disguising herself in "strange and sad habiliment" and saying she is "Revenge, sent from below / To join with [Titus] and right his heinous wrongs" (5.2.1-4).

Tamora's allegorical performance begins with religiously inflected discourse that foregrounds the play's Reformation context. On first seeing Tamora disguised, Titus tells her:

"I am not mad; I know thee well enough:
Witness this wretched stump, **witness** these crimson lines;
Witness these trenches made by grief and care,
Witness the tiring day and heavy night;
Witness all sorrow, that I know thee well
 For our proud empress, mighty Tamora" (5.2.21-6 emphasis added).⁴¹⁶

Titus's insistence on "witnessing" reiterates the language of martyrdom already so notable in the play since the Greek *μάρτυς*—the root of English "martyr"—means "witness."⁴¹⁷ Martyrs' suffering itself bears witness to God's truth while the outward signs of their suffering serve as witnesses for others. Similarly, Titus's witnessing here is twofold: even as Tamora is called on to "witness" his stump, bloody lines, *etc.*, these are also called as witness to the fact that Titus knows her for "mighty Tamora." Like Lavinia's "martyrdom" (3.1.82; 108; 3.2.36), however, this witnessing attests to no divine truth, merely Titus's certainty that he has recognized his enemy.

Tamora denies that she is Tamora and instead claims to be Revenge:

Know, thou sad man, I am not Tamora:
 She is thy enemy and I thy friend.
 I am Revenge, sent from th' infernal kingdom
 To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind
 By working wreakful vengeance on thy foes. (5.2.28-32)

Tamora styles herself as Revenge personified, like a figure from Senecan tragedy or a medieval morality play. Clearly, Tamora lies when she says, "I am not Tamora," but when she says "I am Revenge," the allegory is so apt it seems almost true of Tamora, the brutal revenger. In other words, while she presents her identity as Tamora and her identity as Revenge as mutually exclusive, these identities do not seem so easily separable. Moreover, her subsequent assertion that "[Tamora] is thy enemy and I [Revenge] thy friend" is also oddly true: Tamora is indeed Titus's enemy, but the abstract idea of revenge (to his mind at least) is indeed Titus's friend. Although Tamora dresses as Revenge hoping to serve her own vengeance, not Titus's, she unintentionally keeps her word to Titus since her appearance as Revenge inadvertently facilitates his revenge upon her. Act five scene two thus blurs the lines not only between allegorical and literal, but also between truth and falsehood.

This ambiguity persists through Titus's and Tamora's subsequent volleys of allegorical and literal constructions. Initially, Titus is incredulous and asks for proof that she is Revenge, insisting that she literalize her allegorical conceit:

Do me some service ere I come to thee.

⁴¹⁶ Titus takes up the language of witnessing once more as Titus kills Tamora with the same knife he used to kill her sons, saying "Witness my knife's sharp point" (5.3.62).

⁴¹⁷ "Martyr, N.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed October 27, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114474>.

Lo by thy side where Rape and Murder stands;
Now give some surance that thou art Revenge:
Stab them or tear them on thy chariot wheels (5.2.44-8).

Titus identifies Chiron and Demetrius, not by their names but by their crimes; he reads them metonymically. This metonymic reading, however, is dependent both on his knowledge of their guilt and the recognition of the princes' physical resemblance to the figures before him. Tamora quickly recasts Titus's allegory to her benefit, saying: "These are my ministers . . . Rape and Murder, therefore called so, / 'Cause they take vengeance on such kind of men" (5.2.60-4). This interplay between Titus's and Tamora's readings here emphasizes rape and murder as both motive for and means of revenge, which parallels an issue of personification: does a personification exemplify its concept, cause it, or both?

While seeming to participate in Tamora's allegory as the only reality, Titus repeatedly likens the allegorical to the literal, saying, "Good Lord, how like the empress' sons they are, / And you the empress!" and again "How like the empress and her sons you are!" (5.2.64-5; 84). He tells "Good Murder" and "Good Rapine" they can recognize their intended victims because they are "like to" themselves (5.2.99-103). Titus tells Revenge she will find his enemy at the court and will recognize her easily: "Well shalt thou know her by thine own proportion, / For up and down she doth resemble thee" (5.2.99-107). Titus's insistence on the literal, physical resemblance between Revenge and Tamora, Rape and Chiron, Murder and Demetrius, becomes a running gag which—like Titus's earlier punning on "hands"—hinges on the tension between literal and figurative. The humor and pleasure of the scene depend on the audience's awareness of these statements as literally false yet figuratively true. And, as Titus himself suggests, the literal is not necessarily always the most real.

As the scene unfolds, Tamora concludes that Titus "firmly takes [her] for Revenge" and is "credulous in this mad thought," but, by manipulating Tamora's allegory, Titus tricks her into leaving her two sons with him. Once she is gone, Titus calls his kinsmen onstage and jokes:

Titus: Know you these two?
Publius: The empress' sons I take them: Chiron, Demetrius.
Titus: Fie, Publius, fie, thou art too much deceived.
The one is Murder and Rape is the other's name,
And therefore bind them . . . (5.2.152-7).

When Titus refutes and even ridicules Publius's use of the princes' names he again strips them of their individual identities and reduces them metonymically to their crimes. As the unfolding scene makes clear, he is entirely aware of Chiron and Demetrius's literal identities and their status as his enemies; perceiving them as Rape and Murder does not prevent his recognizing them as Chiron and Demetrius. Tamora earlier tried to separate her allegorical and literal selves—"I am not Tamora . . . I am Revenge"—but Titus suggests that it is possible for a figurative meaning to be more real than the literal sense. To borrow the language of transubstantiation invoked earlier in the play, the Goths' true "substances" are those of Revenge, Rape, and Murder, even though the "accidents" of their particular identities remain—and *both* are clearly legible to Titus.

This scene self-referentially performs the hermeneutic slippage at the heart of the Eucharistic controversy, namely the uncertain distinctions between literal and figurative and their fraught relationship with the "real." Titus's manipulation of these unstable divisions and interpretive ambiguities directly enables his culminating act of vengeance: a cannibalistic vision of the Eucharist. Once Chiron and Demetrius are bound and gagged, Titus passes judgment on them, and with the help of Lavinia—"martyr" and Philomela—he completes both the play's subversion of the language of martyrdom and its literalization of Ovid. After he recounts their crimes, Titus asks Chiron and Demetrius, "What would you say if I should let you speak? / Villains, for shame you could not beg

for **grace**. / Hark, wretches, how I mean to **martyr** you” (5.2.178-80; bold mine). Here the possibility of divine mercy is raised and immediately negated, and the word “martyr” is used synonymously with “murder.”⁴¹⁸ The similarity of the words’ sound—martyr/murder—further emphasizes this substitution and completes the play’s evacuation of meaning from the language of martyrdom. Lavinia, the first victim, is now one of the executioners, and none of this violence bears witness to a higher truth. They martyred/murdered Lavinia, and now Titus and Lavinia will martyr/murder them; they typologized/literalized the story of Philomela, and Titus and Lavinia will complete it, as Titus makes explicit: “worse than Philomela you used my daughter and worse than Progne I’ll be revenged” (5.2.194-5).

The ensuing cannibalism both completes the story of Philomela and enacts the Eucharistic controversy whose hermeneutics the play has repeatedly thematized: in its literalizing of bodily synecdoche, its macabre figurative-literal play, and its interrogation of “true substances.” Before slitting Chiron and Demetrius’s throats onstage, Titus’s words suggest “a dark parody of the language of the holy Eucharist” as he says, “Lavinia, come, / Receive the blood” (5.2.200-1).⁴¹⁹ Of course, Chiron and Demetrius are even less Christ-like than they are martyr-like, and Titus labels theirs “guilty blood;” to associate Chiron and Demetrius’s murder with the crucifixion and the commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice is profoundly perverse, increasing this spectacle’s horror (5.2.183). It also continues the blurring between literal and figurative, visible and invisible, that helped generate the Eucharistic controversy itself. In the Mass, transubstantiation has a visible component—the elevation of the Host for veneration—but the miraculous change of substance itself is invisible.⁴²⁰ Titus’s instructions that Lavinia “receive the blood,” by contrast, would have required blood as a prop, likely a blood bag. Similarly, the audience does see Titus slit Chiron and Demetrius’s throats onstage; however, they do not see Titus transform them into the meat pies that are then eaten. To create this effect, Titus vividly imagines his cannibalistic cooking and forces Chiron and Demetrius to listen to the recipe:

Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to a dust,
 And with your blood and it I’ll make a paste,
 And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
 And make two pasties of your shameful heads . . .
 . . . Lavinia, come, /
 Receive the blood, and when that they are dead
 Let me go grind their bones to powder small,
 And with this hateful liquor temper it,
 And in that paste let their vile heads be baked (5.2.184-200)

It is this speech act, telling his plans to his victims and the observing audience, which imaginatively transforms the meat pies (which come onstage shortly thereafter) into the bodies and blood of Chiron and Demetrius. As in the Mass, the transformation occurs through speech.

Marcus’s innocent description of the feast at once links it to the ideals of the Eucharist and to the gruesome reality of Reformation violence. Marcus says, “The feast is ready which the careful Titus / Hath ordained to an honourable end, / For peace, for love, for league and good to Rome” (5.3.21-3). His description of the feast sounds like the ideal of communal eating theoretically

⁴¹⁸ Of course, “grace” has another, secular connotation as well, but juxtaposed with “martyr” the religious connotation seems all the more prominent.

⁴¹⁹ Bate, Jonathan, “Introduction,” n 197, 263.

⁴²⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 117–121.

embodied in the Eucharist. Peace, love and league are the ideals of the Eucharist, and yet controversy over its interpretation breeds violence. Marcus's words—"ordained" and "feast"—suggest an element of this divisive controversy, as Catholics believed that only an "ordained" priest could perform the miracle of transubstantiation, using the words of the Mass to turn bread and wine into the "feast" of the body and blood of Christ. Protestants attacked this doctrine as bloody-minded literalism and its Catholic adherents as simultaneously cannibals and fools blind to literal reality. Titus's unappealing invitations to eat highlight the physicality and carnality of the act, much as reformers offered revoltingly physical depictions of the cannibalistic consumption of Christ: "Although the cheer be poor, / 'Twill fill your stomachs. Please you, eat of it" and "Will't please you eat? Will't please your highness feed?" (5.3.28-9;53). Titus's words here suggest the emphasis that Protestant rhetoric placed on the physical horror of eating Christ's body literally, but Titus himself is responsible for generating this entirely literal cannibalism. Despite his seeming madness, Titus is *not* blind to reality, regardless of whether one situates the "real" in the literal identities of Chiron and Demetrius, or their allegorical identities of Rape and Murder. In *Titus*, the "ordained" feast brings not peace, unification, and life, but rather violence, division, and death; it suggests the ideals of the Eucharist, but delivers the worst realities of the Reformation.

At the end of the play, Marcus addresses the Goths and Romans with yet another corporeal metaphor: "O let me teach you how to knit again/ ... These broken limbs again into one body" (5.3.69-71). Such metaphors of the body are so firmly integrated into the violence of the text, however, that it is impossible for them to suggest any healing at all. The body cannot be knit harmoniously back together. Its figurative division has been literalized and the body has been devoured whole, leaving it with little hope of rebirth.

IV

Titus Andronicus enacts Reformation hermeneutic instability *as* violence: rape, murder, dismemberment, and cannibalism. The play defies any partisan reading of the Reformation, for it treats Goths and Romans not as Catholics and Protestants, but as *Reformation* Christians: with their shared texts, which structure their worldview; their shared interpretive strategies, at once literalizing and typologizing; and their shared experiences of interpretive collapse, chaos, and strife. *Titus* dramatizes recurring layers of emphatically interpretive violence—violence inspired *by* text and violence *as* legible text—but constantly evacuates these interpretations of stable meaning. Lavinia is neither martyr nor antitype, merely the victim of senseless cruelty. In his brutality, interpretive modes, and patterns of speech, Titus becomes indistinguishable from his enemies, realizing the strange doppelgänger effect of More's and Tyndale's hermeneutics. The play's interpretive collapse infects the conventional discourse of the body, manifesting as literal dismemberment, while macabre punning highlights the potential slippage of literal and figurative meaning. This slippage, which lay at the heart of Reformation hermeneutic controversy, defies any clear meaning; its only certainty is violence.

When Titus says he can interpret all Lavinia's "martyred signs," his claim of interpretive perfection is no more than a deluded fantasy, as the play so vividly demonstrates. Yet even his apparently tender fantasy contains the threat of violence in the promise that "of these [signs he] will wrest an alphabet" (3.2.44). To "wrest" has a tertiary sense of "forcing, or straining the meaning or purport of words," linking his speech once again to the misinterpretations that recur throughout the play. The primary meaning of "to wrest," however, is to turn forcibly.⁴²¹ This is the selfsame origin of the word "torture"—to "twist" or turn—and it was the articulated goal of Elizabethan torture "to

⁴²¹ "Wrest, n.1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230637>.

wreste from him [the victim] the truthe.”⁴²² Titus’ “martyred signs” speech contains thus not only the threat of misreading, but also the very interpretive violence of the Reformation by which signs themselves were martyred.

⁴²² Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England*, 40; “Torture, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203700>.

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