Enacting Sacrament: Ritual and Agency in the Poetry of Spenser and Milton

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Enacting Sacrament: Or, Can Theology Become Literature and Still Know Itself?
Introduction

I Threatned to observe the strict decree
Of my deare God with all my power & might.
But I was told by one, it could not be;
Yet I might trust in God to be my light.
Then will I trust, said I, in him alone.
Nay, ev'n to trust in him, was also his:
We must confesse that nothing is our own.
Then I confesse that he my succour is:
But to have nought is ours, not to confesse
That we have nought. I stood amaz'd at this,
Much troubled, till I heard a friend expresse,
That all things were more ours by being his.
What Adam had, and forfeited for all,
Christ keepeth now, who cannot fail or fall.[1]

The speaker of George Herbert's 1633 sonnet "The Holdfast" finds, with each exchange with his interlocutor, that his ability to act in the service of God is curtailed. At first he promises to obey God's decrees with all his "power & might" and learns he cannot. Then he vows simply to trust in God, and finds he cannot do that either. Finally, he confesses that God is his "succour," and is told he cannot do even this. Hebert's sonnet demonstrates, in the steady reduction of what action the narrator can claim, a fundamental tenet of early modern Protestant belief: that humans are utterly reliant upon God, not only for their salvation, but for any good they do, any worship they perform, any faith they hold. But, as "The Holdfast" evinces, this principle has confounding implications for human agency. If all obedience and faith is owing to God, what room is left for human striving? As Stanley Fish observes, the speaker cannot "admit that nothing is required of him, for to do so would be to give up his sense of personal worth, the

[1] George Hebert, "The Holdfast" in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 143.

feeling that he was in some way 'needed.'"[2] In the sonnet's final lines, the stunned and "Much troubled" speaker is only able to make sense of this principle by attaching himself to Christ, such that "all things [are] more ours by being His." He does not, then, accept a vision of humans as passive puppets who "have nought," but claims a sense of merit and power through the backdoor by cleaving to Christ. While Herbert's poem demonstrates this Protestant principle through a brief conversation, my project turns to poetic narrative to see how this idea is enacted—and how its incomprehensibility is managed—in narratives in which characters are presented as agents who fight, quest, reason, and love. How does the poet show humans' dependency upon God while presenting real human dramas?

More specifically, this project takes up this question in scenes of sacrament in the poetic narratives of Edmund Spenser and John Milton. The Protestant tenet that humans are utterly reliant upon God for salvation was reflected in the reformers' sacramental theology. Sacraments had, in the Catholic Church, been said to function *ex opere operato* ("by the work worked"), meaning that they conferred grace reliably so long as they were performed correctly. Protestant reformers, on the continent and in England, rejected this doctrine as part of larger reforms that foregrounded faith over outward works and ceremonies. They worried that under *ex opere operato*, sacraments were made into works wherein humans could, by their own actions, win grace from God. But because reformers also insisted upon the authority of Scripture, they could not do away with the sacraments entirely, as both baptism and the Eucharist were instituted in the Bible. Reformers consequently sought to explain how the two sacraments (they rejected the other five

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[2] Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 174-175.

Catholic sacraments) conferred grace that would not make that grace a consequence of human action. They insisted, instead, that sacraments are divine gifts, which believers receive through no work of their own. But sacraments, of course, require human action: a believer steps forward to be baptized or to receive the Eucharist, and a minister administers the sacraments by reciting certain words from the Book of Common Prayer and performing certain gestures.

Enacting Sacrament seeks to understand this paradoxical teaching about human and divine agency in the sacraments by turning to depictions of sacrament in narrative poetry. In doing so, this project claims that narrative poetry offers ways of thinking theologically that differ from and augment the discursive arguments of theologians. More precisely, it examines how Spenser and Milton use allegory and metaphor in their depictions of sacrament in order to test and interpret this paradoxical teaching. That figurative language emerges as a powerful tool both to enact sacramental theology and reveal its consequences should come as no surprise, as the sacraments are themselves deeply metaphorical: outward washing and eating are, depending on the theologian, said to cause, coincide with, or represent an inward, spiritual washing of sins and nourishment of the soul. The figurative nature of the sacraments became particularly salient in the Reformation, as heated debates over Eucharistic presence (i.e., whether Christ's body and blood is corporally present in the bread and wine) became debates over figurative language. As Judith Anderson and Sophie Read both argue, the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli's innovation to read Christ's statement at the Last Supper, "This is my body," figuratively, so that "is" could mean "signifies," was revolutionary for language as much

as for theology.[3] While Martin Luther and John Calvin rejected Zwingli's reading, both recognized the figurative nature in the outward signs of eating and washing in the sacraments. In England, Archbishop Cranmer also explicitly acknowledges the metaphorical nature of sacraments, though for him, as for other reformers, their metaphorical nature did not make them ineffectual. He writes that "although the sacramental tokens be only significations and figures, yet doth Almighty God effectually work, in them that duly receive his sacraments."[4] This project seeks to understand what happens when Protestant sacraments, which are already figurative, are enacted through allegory and metaphor. On the one hand, the readings that follow demonstrate how allegory and metaphor are especially suited to capture the paradoxes of Protestant sacrament. Because figurative language allows the poet to say multiple things at once, it can set forth the seeming contradictions of sacramental theology. But on the other, this project traces how allegory and metaphor can, in the process of enacting Protestant sacrament, reveal consequences and lay bear the contradictions that theologians' discursive arguments might obscure.

Renaissance Poetry and the Reformation

Enacting Sacrament joins a long tradition of reading Renaissance literature in light of the period's religious upheavals and disputes. Indeed, much of the scholarship touching on Renaissance literature and religion is framed by the two major religious conflicts that took place in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first,

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[3] Judith H. Anderson, *Translating Investments: Metaphor and the Dynamic of Cultural Change in Tudor-Stuart England* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 36-60; and Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[4] Thomas Cranmer, *The Works of Thomas Cranmer*. 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1844-1846), 1.148.

the English Reformation, is marked by stops and starts as the nation converted from Catholicism to Protestantism under Henry VIII and Edward VI and then again under Elizabeth I after a brief return to Catholicism under Mary. The second major conflict occurred amongst Protestants, between high church ceremonialists (or Laudians), who, while still Protestant, sought to return some of the ceremonies and accouterments that had been abolished during the Reformation, and puritans, who feared that the English church under Archbishop Laud was backsliding into Catholicism. The dispute between these two groups, while not the only factor, would contribute to the Civil War that broke out in 1642. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, much of the scholarship that approaches Renaissance literature from a religious angle seeks to discern the religious allegiances and influences of the poet and his poetry. Scholars such as Louis Martz, William Halewood, Barbara Lewalski, Anthony Raspa, Achsah Guibbory, and R. V. Young have asked, not only if a poet is Catholic or Protestant, Laudian or puritan, but more precisely, how the poetry of the period bears the marks of these religious disputes.[5] Just as historians of the English Reformation have sought to determine whether Tudor England was residually Catholic or militantly Protestant and whether Stuart England was more on the side of the ceremonialists or the puritans, so too have literary scholars attempted the characterize the

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[5] See Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954); William H. Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes and Structures in English Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Anthony Raspa, *The Emotive Image: Jesuit Poetics in the English Renaissance* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1983); Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); R. V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry: Studies in Donne, Hebert, Crashaw, and Vaughan* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000).

period's poetry. While some studies attempt to nail down the religious commitments of a poet and his poetry, many have, more interestingly, shown how unstable and porous religious identity was in early modern England.

A critical interest in positioning individual poets within England's religious conflicts is evident in the scholarship of the subjects of this study, Spenser and Milton. In Spenser studies, Virgil Whitaker, Anthea Hume, John King, Harold Weatherby, Darryl Gless, and Carol Kaske have sought to describe the exact character and influences of Spenser's Protestantism.[6] As for Milton, critics have debated the precise nature of his theological opinions and when in his life he came to them. His peculiar beliefs on divorce, the Trinity, and soteriology have been traced and debated by Miltonists, with some, like C. A. Patrides and William Hunter arguing for a more orthodox Milton and others, following John Rumrich and Stephen Fallon, insisting upon the heterodox or heretical nature of his beliefs.[7] But, while much has been written on the religious beliefs of both Spenser and Milton and while, as this project will show, both are undeniably distrustful of idolatry and ceremony, the two react primarily to different conflicts. For Spenser, writing from the 1570s through the 1590s, the dispute between Catholicism and Protestantism is most salient and the threat that England might fall to a Catholic monarch

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[6] Virgil Whitaker, *The Religious Basis of Spenser's Thought* (New York: Gordian Press, 1966); Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); John N. King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Harold L. Weatherby, *Mirrors of Celestial Grace: Patristic Theology in Spenser's Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Darryl J. Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Carol V. Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[7] See for example the essays in *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology,* eds. William B. Hunter, C. A. Patrides, and J. H. Adamson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971) and in *Milton and Heresy*, eds. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

after the death of Elizabeth was an acute danger. For Milton, writing from the 1630s through the 1660s, Catholicism remains a threat, but for him, the nearer and more urgent concern is the Laudian church. *Enacting Sacrament*, while no doubt mindful of these disputes and of Spenser's and Milton's relationship to them, does not turn to their depictions of sacraments in order to shed light on the poets' personal religious beliefs. Rather, I study these scenes for what they reveal about the ability of poetry to engage in theological questions and disputes.

In doing so, my project joins many others that, after the New Historicism of the 1980s and 1990s, have turned back to religion, treating it not as a mere stand-in for more important political or material forces, but instead as a pervasive and meaningful aspect of early modern English life in its own right. Scholars like A. B. Chambers, Ramie Targoff, and Timothy Rosendale, for example, have explored the connection between literature and liturgy.[8] Studies on sacrament and literature have also proliferated. Theresa DiPasquale, Robert Whalen, Regina Schwartz, Sarah Beckwith, Sophie Read, and Kimberly Johnson have, with different emphases and methods, sought to understand how changes in sacramental theology brought on by the Reformation are reflected in literature of the period.[9] Beckwith and Schwartz both argue that literature fills a certain void left by

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[8] A. B. Chambers, *Transfigured Rites in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1992); Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[9] Theresa DiPasquale, *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999); Robert Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Sophie Read,

the Reformation's demystification of the sacraments. Read and Johnson, along with Anderson, have explored how changes in sacramental theology alter and enliven figurative language in the period, which they see reflected in early modern devotional poetry. Many of these studies have focused on devotional lyrics (Whalen, Read, Johnson) and many are preoccupied by the debates over Eucharistic presence (Whalen, Schwartz, Read, Johnson). My project, in contrast, focuses on the issue of sacramental efficacy: who or what makes the sacraments effective and what role humans play (or do not play) in them. This theological interest is reflected in the objects of this study, for I argue that narrative poetry, which depicts the sacramental act within a larger sequence of events, provides a better testing ground in which to understand the relationship between human and divine agency in the sacraments than would, say, devotional lyrics. While a sonnet by Hebert or Donne might, as Read and Johnson argue, capture something of the transcendence of ritual or the power of signs, my project is concerned with exploring depictions of sacrament in narrative poetry in order to determine how the poets present these acts of human ritual in accordance with the Protestant teaching that they are gifts from God, not human works.

This project also seeks to trace a connection between Spenser and Milton, two poets who, though the former is an undeniable influence on the latter, are not often studied together. The reasons for this are, perhaps, understandable. Though both Renaissance poets, the two writers bracket the period, with Spenser often read alongside the medieval writers whose language he imitates, while Milton's mature poetry, including

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Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination; and Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

Paradise Lost, was only published after the Restoration. The two are also opposed politically: Spenser's epic celebrates the monarchy under Elizabeth, while Milton's prose and poetry is firmly republican. And yet, several scholars have drawn connections between the two poets on various grounds. Patrick Cullen has explored their shared interest in temptation, while Richard Mallette has observed their uses of the pastoral mode and their investment in poetry as a vocation.[10] Linda Gregerson has read *The Faerie Queene* alongside *Paradise Lost* to determine how Protestant epics work to influence the reader without becoming idolatrous, and Maureen Quilligan has traced a connection between the two in their shared focus upon the reader and the ethics of reading.[11] *Enacting Sacrament* reinforces many of these connections. Spenser and Milton's shared distrust of idolatry and ceremony shapes their depictions of sacrament, but it is particularly their concern with modeling ethical action for their readers that heightens the stakes of their treatment of human agency in the sacraments. In *Areopagatica,* Milton calls the "sage and serious" Spenser a "better teacher" than Duns Scotus or Aquinas, because he demonstrates temperance for readers by having the knight Guyon travel through the cave of Mammon so he "might see and know" earthly pleasures and "yet abstain."[12] In the narratives explored in this project—Redcrosse's quest, the Lady's journey, and Adam and Eve's process of repentance—Spenser and Milton strive to model virtuous action. This commitment on their part is frequently in tension with Protestant

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[10] Patrick Cullen, *Infernal Triad: The Flesh, the World, and the Devil in Spenser and Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); and Richard Mallette, *Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance Pastoral* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1981).
[11] Linda Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).
[12] John Milton, *Areopagitica*, ed. Ernest Sirluck, vol. 2 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 516.

sacramental theology, which insists upon divine, not human, agency. Enacting the sacramental event within poetic narrative, particularly within the narratives of Spenser and Milton, I argue, thus offers a unique way of exploring the relationship between human and divine agency in Protestant sacrament.

Not Illustrating But Enacting: The Relationship between Religion and Literature

In describing Spenser's and Milton's poetry as "enacting" sacrament, I mean to suggest that their poetry does not simply reflect or illustrate sacramental doctrines, but that it provides a means through which sacramental theology is tested and interpreted. I borrow the term "enacting" (as well as the question found in this introduction's title) from philosopher Stanley Cavell, who turns to literature, particularly to Shakespearean tragedy, in his study of skepticism.[13] His approach, which seeks "the participation of philosophy and literature in one another," is particularly notable for the relationship it imagines between the two disciplines.[14] In *Disowning Knowledge,* Cavell explains that he is most troubled by the perception that his project is one of "the application of some philosophically independent problematic of skepticism to a fragmentary parade of Shakespearean texts," which are put "into the service of illustrating philosophical conclusions known in advance."[15] He is not, he argues, merely applying philosophical principles to a literary text or using Shakespeare to illustrate his philosophical argument. Rather, he writes that understanding his project depends upon "unsettling the matter of

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[13] Cavell concludes *The Claim of Reason* with the (unanswered) question, "can philosophy become literature and still know itself?" Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 496.
[14] Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 12.
[15] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.

priority" between literature and philosophy that is "implied in the concepts of illustration and application."[16] Instead of treating literature as an inferior form of knowledge used merely to illustrate the far superior discipline of philosophy, Cavell argues that Shakespeare's plays themselves "form respective interpretations of skepticism."[17] In this scheme, the poet (and the literary critic) has something to teach the philosopher.

But how, exactly, does literature do the work of philosophy? For Cavell, the power of literature to interpret skepticism derives from the power of ordinary language; philosophers, he argues, have lost sight of what doubt really is, and tragedy offers the opportunity to enact the problems of knowledge as humans actually experience them. Philosophers have approached skepticism, Cavell points out, in a peculiar way; the philosopher will ask, for example, if the table before him is really there. But in this scenario, the philosopher is not reliant upon another person's account of the table, but only upon his own five senses. This sort of radical skepticism, Cavell argues, "in which *the best case* of knowledge shows itself vulnerable to suspicion" transforms "a scene of knowing for oneself into a sense that true knowledge is beyond the human self, that what we hold in our minds to be true of the world can have at best the status of opinion, educated guesswork, hypothesis, construction, belief."[18] Through this "mad" quest for certainty, Cavell argues, alluding to the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the "concept of belief is turned from its common course," it is used "outside its language game(s), apart from its ordinary criteria."[19]

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[16] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 1.
[17] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 1.
[18] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 7.
[19] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 8, 7.

Cavell argues instead that "Doubt, like belief, is most fully, say originally, directed to claims of others, of speakers," rather than to our "absolute relation to the world."[20] And so by considering the violent jealousy of Othello, for example, as an enactment of doubt, we are able to return the "animism" to the philosophical problem of doubt, to recognize its emotional aspects and its rootedness in the claims of others.[21] The jealousy of Othello also, it should be said, enacts a particular kind of doubt, one that is masculine and that "seems to interpret the ambition of knowledge as that of exclusive possession."[22] Shakespearean tragedy, then, does not find solutions to the problem of skepticism nor does it simply illustrate it, but rather, in the case of Othello's violent jealousy for example, it "studies the human use of knowledge under the consequence of skepticism."[23] The study of tragedy for Cavell can thus yield "reconceptions of what drives skepticism—of what its emotion is, of what becomes of the world in its grip, its stranglehold, of what knowing has come to mean to us."[24] Tragedy, then, by enacting doubt in particular dramas with particular characters, is able to reveal something of how humans actually experience doubt in a way that does not simply illustrate or apply philosophy, but tests and interprets it.

This project seeks to extend Cavell's insights into the power of literature to test philosophy to its ability to test sacramental theology. It explores sacramental episodes in Spenser and Milton with the conviction that by enacting Protestant sacrament in particular narratives (i.e., with specific characters, in specific settings, as part of a specific

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[20] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 7.
[21] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 7.
[22] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 10.
[23] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 9.
[24] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* 6.

story), the poetry is able to test and interpret sacramental theology. That is, this project argues that the scenes of sacrament do not merely represent or illustrate the theological opinions of say, Calvin or Luther, but actually produce theological knowledge by testing theological doctrines and putting them into action. I see the power of literature to create this unique sort of knowledge as deriving from two main factors.

First, I argue that the mimetic capacities of narrative poetry, that is, its power to depict human beings as actors within a story, allows it to serve as a proving ground of Protestant sacramental theology; by setting forth or enacting sacramental doctrines in a mimetic representation of sacrament, poetry is able to lay bare the paradoxes and implications of those doctrines. That is, a theological precept concerning the sacraments might be expressed straightforwardly in a discursive argument, but when that same precept is enacted in a poetic narrative, we can come to realize its complications and consequences because we see it "in action," as it were. For example, Calvin writes in his *Institutes* that "in receiving the sacraments believers do nothing to deserve praise, and…even in this act (which on their part is merely passive) no work can be ascribed to them."[25] Within his theological treatise, this statement might make perfect sense; Calvin means to emphasize the power of God and the inability of humans to merit salvation. He consequently presents sacraments as divine gifts rather than human works. But if a poet attempts to depict a sacramental event in which the receiver is "passive" and does "nothing to deserve praise," as Spenser does at the end of Book I of *The Faerie Queene,* a number of consequences follow that do not readily appear in Calvin's text. As I show in my first chapter, the Redcrosse knight's passive reception of the sacraments seems to

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[25] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.14.26.

suggest that he receives them without awareness and thus without conscious faith in the grace they promise. By considering what Calvin's words would mean in action and setting them forth in narrative, Spenser's poem thus reveals a tension between the Protestant positions that humans receive the sacraments passively and that they do so with faith. This is one way that narrative poetry is able to serve theology; by putting its precepts into practice, by imagining what consequences might arise if they were enacted, poetry is able to uncover sacramental theology's consequences and in some cases, its contradictions.

Second, this project asserts a real value in not only enacting sacramental doctrines in poetry, but doing so in stories about particular characters, with particular pasts, strengths, and weaknesses, for whom the sacrament is administered at a particular moment in narrative time. When theologians write about the sacraments, they typically treat the sacraments on an abstract, intellectual level; they set out to describe what happens when the rite is administered, what its consequences are, what the precise relationship is between the outward sign and the inward effects. They are not so concerned, however, with the impact of the sacrament on any one person's salvation. The 39 Articles of 1563, for example, is understandably general in its description:

> Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him… The sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or

> operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation, as St Paul saith. (XXV)[26]

Such a statement certainly articulates crucial information about the sacraments—of how they work and what they offer to worthy receivers. But it is a statement that is necessarily abstract, not about any particular person or any particular instance of sacrament. Devotional lyrics of the period concerning sacrament work in a similar way, praising the sacrament and describing its effects, but often doing so through the voice of a speaker for whom the reader can easily substitute herself. Consider, for example, Robert Vaughan's "The Feast" (1650):

> O drink and bread
> Which strikes death dead,
> The food of mans immortal being!
> Under veyls here
> Thou art my chear,
> Present and sure without my seeing. (ll. 37-42)[27]

Vaughn's poem, much like a scripted prayer, allows any reader to take the position of the speaker, to see the Eucharist not only as the speaker's "chear," but as her own.

While the 39 Articles and Vaughan's devotional poem offer one kind of knowledge of the sacraments, this project argues that enacting sacramental theology within narrative poetry offers knowledge of a different sort. In narrative poetry, the sacramental event is not treated in a vacuum, but occurs at a specific moment in a specific character's quest, and this necessarily influences how we think about the sacrament and the grace it provides. In my study of Milton's *A Masque Presented at*

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[26] "The Thirty-Nine Articles, 1563," in *Religion & Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook,* eds. David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 75-76.

[27] Henry Vaughan, "The Feast," in *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 534-536.

Ludlow Castle, for example, it matters a great deal that the receiver of the sacrament is a young lady, that the virtue she must prove is her chastity, and that the sacramental officiant is female. Similarly, Milton's account of Adam and Eve's confession before God in *Paradise Lost* is inextricably linked to the human drama that unfolds between them, as they learn to love and forgive one another after the Fall. To be clear, it is not that these particular instances of sacrament are more "realistic"—they are far from the typical sacramental experience. And, as Cavell acknowledges, there is certainly something more complicated about turning to a particular case. But doing so serves to recover some of the "animism" of sacramental theology: to remind us of what the sacrament offers to a particular person who battles specific vices that no doubt affect not only his relationship with God but his relationship with others as well. In turning to particular cases, then, in setting forth the sacrament in a specific human drama, narrative poetry offers something that the theologian and the devotional poet do not.

This project, then, imagines a particular kind of relationship between literature and religion. It does not set out simply to point out religious language, rituals, or concerns when they appear in the poetry, nor does it approach literature as primarily transmitting or reflecting religious doctrines. Instead, it treats narrative poetry as a particular way of doing theology, as a distinct means of producing theological knowledge. In making such an argument, I am not suggesting that Spenser and Milton are better theologians than Luther or Calvin, nor do I mean to suggest that one can derive a systematic theology from the poems examined here. But what this project does argue is that the narrative poet has something to teach the theologian, not because he is necessarily a better theologian, but because narrative poetry provides a unique means of testing theological ideas. This

project thus sets out to delineate the specific ways in which narrative poetry can engage in theological questions, and in doing so, it aspires to reimagine the possible relationship between religion and literature in the Renaissance and beyond.

The Reformation and the People

This project, in considering the poetry of Spenser and Milton not as merely illustrating Reformation doctrines but as engaging with them, follows in the footsteps of historians of the English Reformation, who in recent decades have turned their attention to the ways ordinary people responded to the period's religious shifts. As Christopher Haigh argues, the focus on ordinary people, instead of solely on theologians and princes, is necessary because

> The English Reformations were not composed simply of the books of Tyndale, the statutes of Cromwell, the sermons of Latimer, and the liturgies of Cranmer, nor of the six wives of Henry VIII and the 280-odd martyrs of Bloody Mary. They also included the responses of millions of men, women, and children, whose names we will not know, but whose presence and participation are facts of history.[28]

Historians like Haigh, Patrick Collinson, and A. G. Dickens have sought to uncover the beliefs and attitudes of ordinary people, often by mining the court documents, wills, and parish records of a particular locality.[29] This approach is also evident in the work of historians like Alexandra Walsham, who has traced how Protestant beliefs about providence were taken up, adjusted, and applied by ordinary people to explain all manner

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[28] Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 19.
[29] See Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); and A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558* (London: Hambledon Press, 1982).

of political and natural events, and Judith Maltby, who has studied the attitudes of ordinary people toward the Book of Common Prayer.[30]

This historiographical turn to the beliefs and attitudes of ordinary people has led to a dramatic revision of the English Reformation and its causes. Historians such as Haigh, J. J. Scarisbrick, and Eamon Duffy have pushed back against the prevailing wisdom that the English Reformation was a rapid popular movement "from below" that was spurred by the people's frustration with the superstitious and corrupt Catholic Church.[31] Instead, these historians have shown that many English people in the sixteenth century approved of the medieval church and were resistant to reforms; as Scarisbrick puts it, "on the whole, English men and women did not want the Reformation and most of them were slow to accept it when it came."[32]

In particular, these historians have demonstrated the people's unwillingness to give up the assurances provided by rituals and ceremonies, their reluctance to transition from a religion of works to a religion of faith, whether those works were performed in the Catholic or the English church. Haigh and Maltby both document cases in which parishioners complained or worshipped elsewhere when priests refused to administer the sacraments as directed by the *Book of Common Prayer*.[33] For Haigh, parishioners' insistence upon the correct administration of the sacraments reveals the difficulty of

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[30] Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[31] Haigh, *English Reformations*; J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); and Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
[32] Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People,* 1.
[33] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 289-290; and Maltby, *Prayer Book and People,* 48-56.

accepting the Protestant teaching of *sola fide*. The Catholic system of justification by works, he argues, included all in an "achievable salvation system," that could save both "comprehending" and "unthinking" Christians.[34] This was not, however, the case for Protestantism, which held that salvation was achieved, not by habitual good works, but through faith, which required "understanding, decision, [and] interior conviction," that is, "informed belief."[35] According to Haigh, although the English people became virulently anti-Catholic by the end of Elizabeth's reign, their reliance upon a religion of works was not easily eradicated. Distinguishing between the English Reformation's political consequences and its religious ones, he writes,

> The political Reformations had succeeded in driving Catholic public worship from the churches; but the Protestant Reformation did not destroy essentially Catholic views of Christian life and eternal salvation. The political Reformations had succeeded in imposing more Protestant ways of worship; but the Protestant Reformation did not generate widespread attachment to Protestant doctrines of justification.[36]

Many English men and women, he continues, still "expected to be saved through the Church, as their forebears had been" and while "the external actions of prayer and praise had changed…the benefits anticipated from them had not."[37] What Haigh and others trace, then, is the difficulty on the part of many English people to accept the Protestant doctrines of justification that emphasized faith over works. Not, he suggests, because their allegiances were with Rome, but because the Catholic religion of works provided them with some measure of control and the confidence that their outward actions reliably resulted in inward, spiritual effects.

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[34] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 286.
[35] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 286.
[36] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 289.
[37] Haigh, *English Reformations*, 289.

By drawing attention to the responses of ordinary people, historians of the English Reformation have thus been able to reveal how protracted and difficult the process of Reformation was. But, perhaps more importantly, their methods have treated as consequential and significant the reception of and responses to Protestant theology by ordinary people, and in doing so, they have widened the circle of meaningful participants in the Reformation. It is not just Henry VIII, Cromwell, or Luther whose beliefs and opinions mattered, but also those of regular people who, albeit in more minor ways, engaged with the religious questions of their day. This project offers Spenser's and Milton's poetry as one such engagement.

To be sure, Spenser and Milton were, in many ways, not ordinary men. Both were more educated and more privileged than the average man (or woman, for that matter) in Renaissance England. But their poetry shows a testing of the sacramental doctrines, a working out of their implications that, I would argue, speaks to the same difficulty of accepting the limited role for human agency that these historians have traced. Spenser and Milton show how, even for the literate and educated who were capable of reading and interpreting Scripture, the Protestant doctrines of justification raised difficult questions about the relevance of human action and merit, questions that were particularly pressing for poets invested in modeling virtuous action for their readers.

Contents: Overview and Chapter Summaries

Over three chapters, one each focused on Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Milton's *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, and his *Paradise Lost,* I aim to describe how poetry can engage in the questions sacramental theology poses. Each chapter focuses on a particular sacramental episode and a particular poetic trope, showing how, in Spenser's

and Milton's hands, allegory and metaphor can scrutinize theological doctrines, uncover their implications, and embody their paradoxes.

The first chapter explores how allegory enables Spenser to present the invisible, abstract concepts of sacramental theology in visible, material terms in the early books of *The Faerie Queene*. I begin by explaining why the Redcrosse knight's falls into the well and balm at the end of Book I should be understood as representations of baptism and the Eucharist. In the course of doing so, I lay much of the theological groundwork that later chapters will rely upon, explaining what a sacrament is, the difference between Catholic and Protestant understandings of sacramental efficacy, and the various positions taken by reformers on the continent and in England as to how sacraments work and what makes them effective. The chapter then shows how Spenser's allegory exaggerates and literalizes tenets of Protestant sacramental theology: Redcrosse's unintentional, unconscious sacramental experiences make the point that sacraments are not human works; the medicinal, surgical confession he undergoes in the House of Holiness reflects the "healing" powers of confession; and Spenser's choice to incorporate holy wells in his depictions of baptism characterizes the sacrament as both a form of healing and a divine gift. In each case, allegory's capacity to enact the theology, to make invisible, abstract theological principles visible and material, allows it to teach readers. But I also show how allegory, in presenting doctrines in visible, material form, places those doctrines under a unique form of scrutiny, as readers, by seeing doctrines "in action," can come to realize the theology's implications and its contradictions.

While the first chapter focuses on allegory's capacity to exaggerate or literalize the abstract ideas it depicts, Chapter Two takes on a different quality of allegory: its

ability to convey several meanings simultaneously. "Saying it All at Once: Allegory and Sacrament in *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*" reads Sabrina's rite that frees the trapped Lady as a sacramental act, one that operates on both a mechanical, literal level and a spiritual, abstract one. I argue that allegory's capacity to hold multiple meanings at once is an ideal way to enact the complex relationships between matter and spirit and between God's agency and the officiant's in the sacraments. While Protestant reformers insisted that neither the outward act nor the officiant made the sacraments effective, their descriptions of the sacraments betray an interest in explaining the outward sign and in describing, not the elimination of the officiant's agency, but its coincidence with God's. Sabrina's rite, I argue, because it unfolds within an allegory and can therefore express both abstract and concrete meanings simultaneously, is able to capture both the physical, material aspects of the sacrament and its spiritual effects, and it can show divine and human agency working together through the figure of Sabrina. If Chapter One shows how allegory enables the poet to reveal the contradictions and consequences of Protestant sacramental theology, Chapter Two shows that the mode is particularly well-suited to enact the theology's paradoxes—and prompt the reader to wrestle with them—precisely because it can say multiple things at once.

The third and final chapter turns to *Paradise Lost* and studies Adam and Eve's confession in Books X and XI as an enactment of the poem's Arminian vision of salvation, in which humans are saved through a cooperation of human and divine agency. The chapter examines Milton's use of metaphor in Adam and Eve's confession scene, arguing that metaphor allows Milton to prove God just in Adam and Eve's salvation, because it allows a sort of lie. Through it, Milton is able to suggest—but not assert—a

greater degree of power and efficacy in Adam and Eve's actions. The chapter concludes by turning away from the powers of figurative language to the reader who must interpret such language correctly. While this project is in large part concerned with demonstrating how poetic tropes allow Spenser and Milton to embody and test Protestant sacramental theology, I end by examining an instance in which the figurative nature of the sacraments is misunderstood. Adam, I argue, misinterprets the analogous relationship between human reconciliation and penance, and this in turn leads him to overestimate his own ability to win salvation.

Making the Invisible, Visible: Allegory and Sacramental Theology in *The Faerie Queene,* I-II
Chapter One

Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* opens with the knight Redcrosse and his lady Una forced to seek refuge from a "hideous storme of raine" in a "shadie groue."[1] They soon lose their way in the "wandring wood," which, they realize, is home to Error, a half-serpent, half-woman beast (I.i.13). As her name suggests, the monster is an allegorical figure for Error, but she is not a symbol for error in name only. Rather, her outward appearance and behaviors can all be read allegorically, each signifying different characteristics of the abstract concept. She is described as "vgly," and "Most lothsom, filthie, foule" (I.i.14). Her large tail is coiled and knotted, but "Pointed with mortall sting" (I.i.15). She is surrounded by offspring that feed from her "poisnous dugs," and hide in her mouth whenever "light vpon them shone" (I.i.15). When Redcrosse approaches, she rushes out of her den, "hurling her hideous taile," but immediately wishes to turn back because, like her children, she hates the light, "Ay wont in desert darknes to remaine / Where plain none might her see, nor she see any plaine" (I.i.16). She vomits, spewing out undigested food, books, papers, and blind frogs and toads. And when, at last, the knight beheads her, her offspring gather around her to drink their mother's blood. They drink too much, though, and then burst and die, leaving Redcrosse with nothing more to do, for "His foes haue slaine themselues, with whom he should contend" (I.i.26).

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[1] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2007), I.i.6-7. Subsequent quotations are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

I offer this brief summary of Redcrosse's encounter with Error as an illustration of Gordon Teskey's description of allegory: "a fiction told in such a way as to indicate…a clear structure of nonfictional ideas."[2] But we can go further to add that more precisely, in allegory, fictional characters and events—which are also presented as material, concrete, and visible—are made to represent a system of ideas—which are, of course, immaterial, abstract, and invisible. In the case of Error, not only is the concept "error" materially represented in the character of Error, but specific qualities of error are made material and visible as well: Error is presented as physically ugly and dirty, as twisting and constraining, as reproducing more error, and as self-defeating. Allegory, by presenting invisible and intangible ideas in this way, emphasizes and exaggerates them, which can serve a pedagogical purpose. But in this chapter I wish to explore another consequence of this feature of allegory: by presenting invisible, abstract ideas in physical and visible form, allegory is able to put ideas under a unique kind of scrutiny. By bringing ideas "to life," so to speak, and then exaggerating them, allegory affords readers the opportunity to find the implications, contradictions, and flaws in the idea being depicted. In this chapter, I explore how this capacity of allegory—its ability to transform the invisible and figurative into the visible and literal —allows Spenser to interrogate the doctrines of Protestant sacramental theology, particularly in the well and balm episode in Book I, Canto xi.

But before moving on to Spenser's depictions of sacrament, I wish to turn back to the Error episode in order to point out two crucial features of allegorical representation that I will discuss later in this chapter. First, Spenser's depiction of Error primarily works

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[2] Gordon Teskey, "Allegory," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia,* ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 16.

by taking figurative language used to describe the concept of error and making it literal. That is, Spenser's gruesome, unattractive depiction of Error is not cut from whole cloth, but rather is ingenious and powerful precisely because it draws from common truisms about truth and falsehood. The idea that error is ugly, while truth is beautiful, that error is serpentine while truth is straight, and that error loves darkness while truth loves the light are commonplace. Spenser's allegorical depiction of Error, then, works by taking metaphorical language and presenting it literally. When it comes to sacraments, which are already deeply symbolic and whose effects are often described metaphorically, presenting them allegorically affords readers the opportunity to scrutinize theologians' oft-used metaphors by seeing them in concrete, visible form. Second, while transforming a concept like error into a material figure can emphasize certain aspects of error, it inevitably excludes others. The figure of Error in I.i is depicted so as to symbolize primarily errors in religious belief that arise from corrupted readings and winding reasoning, as suggested by the books and papers she vomits and her coiled tail that, at one point in their battle, traps Redcrosse. But she does not represent, for example, inadvertent mistakes or moral failings, both of which were meanings of "error" current in the sixteenth century.[3] The tendency of allegory to emphasize certain features and exclude others, though, is not necessarily problematic; in the case of Error, the features stressed in Spenser's allegorical depiction of her are fitting given that the dangers Redcrosse will face in his quest are primarily those of knowing true religion from false. But, as I show below, when Spenser allegorically depicts precepts of sacramental theology by giving them visible and material form, others are inevitably excluded. This, however, is not a

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[3] *OED Online,* s.v. "error, n.".

defect, but an opportunity for the poetry to show where and how sacramental theology's precepts and rhetoric are in tension with one another.

The Well and the Balm of I.xi

Before examining how allegory might expose contradictions in sacramental theology, I wish first to make a case for why the well and balm in Book I, Canto xi ought to be read as sacraments in the first place. In the course of his three-day battle against the dragon holding Una's parents captive, Redcrosse falls into the well of life at the end of the first day and into balm from the tree of life at the end of the second. Redcrosse's immersions in these pools provide healing and rejuvenation that allow him to defeat his opponent. Consequently, they have traditionally been interpreted as referring to the sacraments, with his fall into the well of life symbolizing baptism, and his fall into the tree balm symbolizing the Eucharist. The dramatist Ben Jonson annotated the passages as such in his personal copy of *The Faerie Queene*, and R. E. Neil Dodge provided an early argument for identifying the well and balm as the sacraments in 1908.[4] Dodge's argument, however, was founded more upon his conviction that it is "unthinkable" that Spenser's legend of holiness would ignore the sacraments, than upon clear and convincing allusions to the sacraments in the passage.[5] He argues that the "holy water" into which the knight falls, along with his "baptized hands," connect the well of life to baptism, and so it follows that the tree of life must symbolize the Eucharist, the only other sacrament accepted by reformers (I.xi.36). Carol Kaske later offered an influential reading of Cantos xi and xii that succeeded in basing the identification of the well and

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[4] James A. Riddel and Stanley Stewart, *Jonson's Spenser: Evidence and Historical Criticism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1995), 167.
[5] R. E. Neil Dodge, "The Well of Life and the Tree of Life," *Modern Philology* 6, no. 2 (1908): 195.

balm with the sacraments upon something firmer than Dodge's sense of "superior probability."[6] According to Kaske, over his three-day battle with the dragon, Redcrosse, functioning as an Everyman figure, transforms from an unregenerate man to a regenerate Christian and then to Christ himself. Baptism enables the first transformation by bestowing grace and initiating Redcrosse into Christianity, and the Eucharist, by bestowing Christ's real presence, brings Redcrosse into "complete identification" with Christ so that he can defeat the dragon.[7]

But Spenser critics have also offered several objections to reading the well and the balm as symbols of the sacraments. As Rosemund Tuve points out, it is odd that Redcrosse would be baptized as an adult, especially after having undergone his initiation in the House of Holiness in Canto x. Moreover, the standard reading does not explain why Redcrosse is "Besmeard" by the balm if it is meant to represent the eating and drinking of communion (I.xi.50). For these reasons, Tuve concludes that these experiences should be read as conferring a more general grace.[8] An additional source of discontent with the standard reading is that both the well of life and the tree of life are described as having virtues not normally associated with baptism or the Eucharist. The well of life, for example, has the power to heal physical as well as moral afflictions:

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[6] Dodge, "The Well of Life and The Tree of Life," 196.

[7] Carol V. Kaske, "The Dragon's Spark and Sting and the Structure of Red Cross's Dragon-Fight: The Faerie Queene I.XI-XII," *Studies in Philology* 66, no. 4 (1969): 638. For others who espouse this standard reading of the well and balm, see Frederick Morgan Padelford, "The Spiritual Allegory of the *Faerie Queene,* Book One," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 22, no. 1 (1923): 17; and Virgil K. Whitaker, *The Religious Basis of Spenser's Thought* (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), 49-50.

[8] Rosemund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 110-112. See also Pauline M. Parker, *The Allegory of the Faeire Queene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 102 and William Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser: A Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 167, who similarly argue that the well and balm dispense a general grace.

> For vnto life the dead it could restore,
> And guilt of sinfull crimes cleane wash away,
> Those that with sicknesse were infected sore,
> It could recure, and aged long decay
> Renew, as one were borne that very day. (I.xi.30)

In the medieval Catholic Church, baptism cleansed participants of original sin; for reformers, baptism was still associated with the forgiveness of sins, but, historian Euan Cameron writes, it was more a promise of "imputed righteousness and gradual regeneration" than an automatic wiping of the slate.[9] But for both Protestants and Catholics, the well's ability to raise the dead, heal the sick, and rejuvenate the old fall outside the effects typically ascribed to baptism. Likewise, the balm's effects far exceed those associated with communion:

> Life and long health that gracious ointment gaue,
> And deadly wounds could heale, and reare againe
> The sencelesse corse appointed for the graue. (I.xi.48)

For reformers, the Eucharist, in recounting Christ's sacrifice, promises participants salvation and forgiveness.[10] It does not heal wounds or reanimate the dead. Given the well and balm's respective powers, Anthea Hume argues that the former represents

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[9] Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 186.

[10] Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 189-190. See for example Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Three Treatises,* trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 158: "According to its substance, therefore, the mass is nothing but the aforesaid words of Christ: "Take and eat, etc." as if he were saying: "Behold, O sinful and condemned man…I promise you in these words the forgiveness of all your sins and life everlasting. And that you may be absolutely certain of this irrevocable promise of mine, I shall give my body and pour out my blood, confirming this promise by my very death, and leaving you my body and blood as a sign and memorial of this same promise"; and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.1: "We are therefore bidden to take and eat the body which was once for all offered for our salvation, in order that when we see ourselves made partakers in it, we may assuredly conclude that the power of his life-giving death will be efficacious in us."

Christ's doctrine while the latter symbolizes Christ himself. She reasons that while the well has the baptismal power to cleanse, its "healing properties" go beyond baptism; likewise, the tree's power to heal and raise the dead belong to "Christ himself, the destroyer of death."[11] Harold Weatherby, on the other hand, insists that the powers ascribed to the well and balm are evidence that Spenser has in mind an older tradition of baptism, one in which baptism not only remits sins, but renews the baptized so that they are reborn.[12] In keeping with this older tradition, he argues, the tree's balm represents not communion but the "unction with chrism" that followed the baptism in water.[13]

The identification of the well and balm has been further complicated by the similarities between the scene in Canto xi and the well and tree described in Revelation. In the final chapter of Revelation, John describes the New Jerusalem:

> And he shewed me a pure riuer of water of life, cleare as crystal, proceding out of the throne of God, and of the Lambe. And in the middes of the strete of it, and of ether side of the riuer, was the tre of life, which bare twelue maner of frutes, & gaue frute euerie moneth; & the leaues of the tre serued to heale the nations with.[14]

Spenser critics have long recognized the resemblance between the river and tree described here and the well and tree in Canto xi, but because these verses from Revelation have been glossed so variously, the allusion provides no certain answers for those wishing to understand Redcrosse's experiences. [15] Some commentators of

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[11] Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 104-105.
[12] Harold Weatherby, "What Spenser Meant by Holinesse: Baptism in Book One of *The Faerie Queene*," *Studies in Philology* 84, no. 3 (1987): 295-300.
[13] Weatherby, "What Spenser Meant," 288.
[14] Rev. 22:1-2 (Geneva).
[15] Consequently, Spenser critics who read Canto XI in light of Revelation 22.1-2 reach different conclusions. See for example John E. Hankins, "Spenser and the Revelation of

Revelation have read the river as baptism, but others interpret it as eternal life, grace, and the Holy Spirit.[16] Meanwhile, the tree of life from Revelation is often interpreted as the cross or as Christ himself, and the fruit and leaves it bears are interpreted as Scripture.[17] Glosses of Revelation 22.1-2 could, therefore, be used to support many of the readings of the well and balm that have been suggested, but they do not definitively point to any one interpretation.

Scholars have, then, offered compelling objections to the identification of the well and balm with baptism and communion, but those objections do not mean we must reject the episode's connection with the sacraments altogether. On the contrary, I want to suggest here that Spenser gestures towards the sacraments in these scenes, but stops short of making the well and balm indisputable symbols for baptism and the Eucharist. As Dodge observes, the mention of "holy water" and "baptized hands" inevitably brings baptism to mind. But surely, if Spenser meant for the tree of life to stand for the Eucharist, he could have, for example, had Redcrosse eat the tree's fruit to make clear its symbolic meaning.[18] Similarly, while the well and balm's effects could be generously interpreted so as to make them conform to the consequences of baptism and the Eucharist, Spenser could have described those effects so as to more clearly associate the

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St. John," *PMLA* 60, no. 2 (1945): 379-381; Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser,* 166-167; and Hume, *Edmund Spenser,* 104.

[16] William C. Weinrich, ed. *Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 388; and William C. Weinrich, ed. and trans. *Latin Commentaries on Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 192.

[17] Weinrich, *Revelation,* 388-390; and Weinrich, *Latin Commentaries,* 192.

[18] In addition to more clearly making the tree a symbol for the Eucharist, this move would also avoid the present likeness between the balm and chrism, a similarity that casts doubt on the balm's identification with the Eucharist.

well and balm with the sacraments.[19] In a sense, though, it does not matter if we can map the well and balm exactly onto the Protestant sacraments, for regardless, we can say that they are "sacramental." Darryl Gless, while arguing that the well and balm do not symbolize the Protestant sacraments, nonetheless realized that whatever the well and balm are, they function like sacraments. Gless explains that during his battle with the dragon, Redcrosse "requires further aid," and "[w]hat he receives is the kind of renewal and reassurance provided specifically by sacramental ministrations."[20] I wish to join Gless in suggesting that even though Redcrosse does not undergo baptism or receive the Eucharist, we should describe the well and balm as sacramental because grace is conferred upon Redcrosse in these episodes. In calling Redcrosse's experiences "sacramental" and not "sacraments," I mean to emphasize that Redcrosse's immersions in the well and balm resemble baptism and the Eucharist, but I also want to make clear that this alone does not make them "sacraments." The reformers generally agreed that a sacrament was "a promise of God, to which a sign was added."[21] But these were particular promises made with particular signs that were rooted in Scripture. Indeed, the fact that baptism and communion came with "divinely instituted sign[s]" is, for Luther, in part what makes them sacraments. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he writes, "Hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the Church of God – baptism

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[19] See Whitaker, *The Religious Basis,* 49-52, who argues that the physical effects of the well and balm should be read as spiritual cures.

[20] Darryl Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 166.

[21] Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 184. See for example Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 258: "Nevertheless, it has seemed proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them"; and Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.14.1: "[a sacrament] is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us."

and the bread. For only in these two do we find both the divinely instituted sign and the promise of forgiveness of sins."[22] For reformers, the biblical precedent for baptism and the Eucharist, along with Christ's command that they be practiced, distinguishes them from the other five Catholic sacraments that reformers rejected. One cannot, then, call any act in which God confers grace a "sacrament," but in the case of the well and balm, because, as I will argue, they symbolically bestow grace upon Redcrosse, it is appropriate to read them as symbols for, not baptism and the Eucharist in particular, but the sacraments more generally.

Turning back now to *The Faerie Queene,* we find that Redcrosse is physically rejuvenated after he bathes in the well and balm. After lying in the well all night, he emerges

> As Eagle fresh out of the Ocean waue,
> Where he hath lefte his plumes all hory gray,
> And deckt himselfe with fethers youthly gay,
> Like Eyas hauke vp mounts vnto the skies,
> His newly budded pineons to assay,
> And merueiles at him selfe, stil as he flies. (I.xi.34)

The knight is regenerated, and not merely in appearance. Despite his condition before falling into the well: "Faynt, wearie, sore, emboyled, grieued, brent," he is able to wound the dragon the next day, thanks to the well (I.xi.28). The narrator, though unsure how the water strengthened Redcrosse, leaves no doubt that the well is behind the knight's success:

> I wote not, whether the reuenging steele
> Were hardened with that holy water dew,
> Wherein he fell, or sharper edge did feele,
> Or his baptized hands now greater grew;
> Or other secret vertue did ensew;

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[22] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 258.

> Els never could the force of fleshly arme,
> Ne molten mettall in his [the dragon's] blood embrew;
> For till that stownd could neuer wight him harme,
> By subtilty, nor slight, nor might, nor mighty charme. (I.xi.36)

Here, Spenser does not reveal the proximate cause for Redcrosse's success in this passage; it might be the hardened steel, a sharpened edge, or the knight's newly "baptized hands," but in any case, his immersion in the well is the ultimate cause that enables him to wound the dragon. Redcrosse is altered by the tree of life in a similar way. The "pretious" balm "Did heale his woundes, and scorching heat alay," so that Redcrosse awakes refreshed and kills the dragon on the third day with relative ease (I.xi.50).

Reformation Christians would not, of course, expect the sacraments to transform and reinvigorate them so dramatically. Most, however, would expect grace to be conferred in the sacraments. The Catholic Church had taught that sacraments conferred grace reliably; according to the doctrine of *ex opere operato* ("by the work worked"), which was reaffirmed at the Council of Trent in 1547, sacraments bestowed grace on the participant so long as they were administered correctly and the participant put no obstacle in the way.[23] Reformers rejected *ex opere operato*, anxious that the Catholic understanding of the sacraments made them "works," and therefore means by which Christians could win or merit grace from God.[24] Such a conception of the sacraments was

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[23] See Paul F. Palmer, ed., *Sacraments and Worship: Liturgy and Doctrinal Development of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1957), 172-173.

[24] See, for example, Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 189: "witness the fact that they [the sacraments] are said to benefit all men, even the wicked and unbelieving, provided they do not set an obstacle in the way– as if such unbelief were not in itself the most obstinate and hostile of all obstacles to grace. To such an extent have they exerted themselves to turn the sacrament into a command and faith into a work. For if the sacrament confers grace on me because I receive it, then indeed I receive grace by virtue of my work, and not by faith."

incongruous with the reformers' belief that salvation "came as an unmerited free gift direct from God, apprehended through the preaching of the Word."[25] Reformers were, however, reluctant to eradicate the sacraments, because baptism and the Eucharist were rooted in Scripture, which Protestants considered authoritative. Consequently, many in England and on the continent insisted that the sacraments bestowed grace, though they developed explanations as to how sacraments worked that emphasized the participant's faith and the absolute agency of God.[26]

If we return to Spenser, we find that the allegory encourages us to read the physical regeneration Redcrosse experiences as a symbol for the gift of spiritual grace. The strength and healing Redcrosse receives from the well and the balm are essential to his victory, which symbolizes salvation itself. The narrative of Book I follows a familiar trajectory of the life of a Christian sinner: Redcrosse sins by abandoning Una for Duessa, he then despairs when he realizes his sins, and repents in the House of Holiness. The battle against the dragon signifies the final step in this narrative: redemption. His defeat of the dragon marks not only the successful end of his individual quest for holiness, it also, on another level of the allegory, signifies the salvation of all humanity, because it marks the release of Adam and Eve, symbolized by Una's parents, from Satan, symbolized by the dragon. Redcrosse's victory, then, allegorically represents a spiritual victory that Protestants believed could only be achieved with the grace of God. Cameron

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[25] Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 183.

[26] A notable exception here is Ulrich Zwingli, *Account of Faith*, in *On Providence: And Other Essays,* ed. William John Hinke (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1983), 46-47, who believed that the Spirit does not need "a channel or vehicle" to convey grace. The sacraments, then, do not deliver grace but "are given as a public testimony of that grace which is previously present." While Zwingli had his followers, most reformers agreed that grace is bestowed in baptism and the Eucharist.

explains that reformers introduced the people to a new conception of salvation, one that "was *not* a process of little lapses and little rituals to correct those lapses" as it was under the Catholic Church.[27] Instead, saving one's soul was "a question of real sin, of a massive, all-corrupting inability to do right, which only God, by utterly gratuitous, self-sacrificing mercy" could effect.[28] Just as God's grace is indispensable to human salvation, Redcrosse's falls into the well and balm and the regeneration they provide are crucial to his victory. The physical strength and healing Redcrosse receives, then, should be read allegorically as a gift of grace, and the well and balm as symbols of the sacraments.

Redcrosse "vnweeting": Faith and Passivity in the Reception of the Sacraments

In addition to the life-saving aid they provide Redcrosse during his battle for salvation, the well and balm ought to be read as symbols of the sacraments because of *how* the knight comes to experience them: he falls into both by accident. Towards the end of the first day, the dragon unleashes a "flake of fire" upon Redcrosse; "The scorching flame sore swinged all his face / And through his armour all his body seard" (I.xi.26). Redcrosse despairs, wishes for death, and receives a strong blow from the dragon that knocks him backward, into the well that:

> It fortuned (as fayre it then befell,)
> Behynd his backe unweeting, where he stood,
> Of auncient time there was a springing well,
> ……………………………………………
> Into the same the knight back ouerthrowen, fell. (I.xi.29-30)

The knight encounters the tree of life under similar circumstances the next day. The dragon "threw / Huge flames," and Redcrosse, in order to protect himself, retreats and

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[27] Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 139.
[28] Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 139.

then unintentionally falls into the tree's balm (I.xi.44). As he does in the episode with the well, Spenser emphasizes Redcrosse's lack of control:

> It chaunst (eternall God that chaunce did guide)
> As he recoiled backeward, in the mire
> His nigh foreweried feeble feet did slide,
> And downe he fell, with dread of shame sore terrifide. (I.xi.45)

In both instances, the narrator emphasizes that Redcrosse does not encounter these healing pools intentionally. To the contrary, the well is "Behynd his backe unweeting," indicating his absolute ignorance of the well and what he might gain from it, and when he falls into the balm, he does so "with dread of shame" and "terrified." Not only does Redcrosse not seek out the balm, he falls into it against his wishes. Instead, the narrator suggests that divine providence, which guides fortune and chance, brings Redcrosse to the sacramental experiences that will assure his victory over the dragon.

I want to suggest that within Spenser's allegorical depiction of the sacraments in I.xi, this description of Redcrosse, in which he receives the sacraments unknowingly, unintentionally, and passively (not only does he fall into the well and balm, he sleeps in them overnight), represents the Protestant teaching that humans receive the sacraments passively. That is, it makes literal and visible the Protestant belief that sacraments are not works, but gifts from God that humans receive. The reformers, as mentioned above, rejected the Catholic teaching of *ex opere operato,* which located efficacy in the correct administration of the sacrament, arguing that such a doctrine made the sacraments into works whereby humans could win grace from God. Reacting against this Catholic notion of sacramental efficacy, reformers consequently insisted that sacraments were only efficacious by divine agency. Calvin, for example, writes that the sacraments

> properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in. If the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears.[29]

The sacraments, according to Calvin, are only effective when the Spirit, who opens the believer's heart and soul so that the sacraments may be received, is present. Without the Spirit, the sacraments can do nothing. Consequently, Calvin argues that believers are passive recipients of these sacramental gifts: "in receiving the sacraments believers do nothing to deserve praise, and…even in this act (which on their part is merely passive) no work can be ascribed to them."[30] Reformers in England joined Calvin in arguing that sacraments depend upon divine, not human agency, to be effective. Ian Green, in his survey of English Catechisms from 1530-1740, notes that many English catechisms stress that sacramental efficacy rests with God. Green cites the Westminster Larger Catechism (1643) as an example:

> The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.[31]

The Puritan William Perkins also stressed the role of divine agency in the sacraments. Perkins, who believed in double predestination, held that sacraments were effectual only for those elected by God. Some men, he writes, are raised in the Church, receive the sacraments, hear the Word, "yet are not saved, because they have not the promise of the covenant effectually rooted in their hearts"; others receive the sacraments "worthily to

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[29] Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.14.9.
[30] Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.14.26.
[31] Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530-1740* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), 518.

their salvation; because God doth establish his Covenant in their hearts."[32] As historian Brian Spinks puts it, for Perkins the sacraments are "the outworkings of the will of God expressed in election."[33] When Redcrosse receives the sacraments passively, then, the episode portrays in material, visible terms the Protestant teaching that in the sacraments, agency belongs to God alone.

But the circumstances in which Redcrosse falls into the well and balm not only express this belief, they exaggerate it. Redcrosse receives the sacraments not only passively, but unintentionally, unknowingly, and against his own wishes. Such a hyperbolic depiction of human passivity is, of course, not realistic; Christians typically seek the sacraments for themselves and in the case of baptism, for their children, with some understanding of what the sacraments do and represent. But, nevertheless, Spenser's depiction of Redcrosse's sacramental experiences makes visible what would otherwise be invisible: the precise dynamics by which sacraments bestow the grace they promise. When a believer receives the Eucharist, it can be explained but not observed that the sacrament is efficacious due to divine agency, rather than, for example, the priest's actions, the believer's sincerity, or an inherent holiness within the bread itself. Allegory thus exaggerates and makes clear what otherwise would not be visible.

But, as was the case in Spenser's depiction of Error, when one aspect of an idea or concept is prioritized in the allegory, other aspects get pushed aside. In this instance, by exaggerating the passivity with which Redcrosse receives the sacrament, Spenser violates

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[32] William Perkins, "Commentary on 11 Hebrews," in *Works,* 3 vols. (London, 1616-1618), 3:118.
[33] Bryan D. Spinks, *Two Faces of Elizabethan Anglican Theology: Sacraments and Salvation in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker,* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1999), 67.

another principle of Protestant sacramental theology: that sacraments must be received with faith. James Schiavoni and Harold Weatherby, consequently, have argued that Redcrosse's passivity is problematic and cannot be reconciled with Protestant sacramental theology. According to Schiavoni, Redcrosse's lack of consciousness renders him unable to receive "the sacrament through that conscious faith" that was "necessary to make the sacrament beneficial."[34] Weatherby concurs, writing that Redcrosse's passivity makes the well and balm seem "magical."[35] Schiavoni and Weatherby are both right to note the importance of faith in Protestant sacraments. Luther, for example, argues that the sacraments "certainly and effectively impart grace where faith is unmistakably present."[36] Luther insistence on the importance of faith follows from his definition of a sacrament as "promises which have signs attached to them."[37] Sacraments, he argues,

> have attached to them a word of promise which requires faith, and they cannot be fulfilled by any other work. Hence they are signs or sacraments of justification, for they are sacraments of justifying faith and not of works. Their whole efficacy, therefore, consists in faith itself, not in the doing of a work. Whoever believes them, fulfills them, even if he should not do a single work.[38]

For Luther, then, faith in the "word of promise" that is attached to the sacrament is what makes it efficacious; this is also why sacraments cannot be thought of as works. Calvin, too, argued that the sacraments "avail and profit nothing unless received in faith," because a sacrament received without faith, historian Brian Gerrish notes, cannot be

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[34] James Schiavoni, "Predestination and Free Will: The Crux of Canto Ten," *Spenser Studies* 10 (1992): 190.
[35] Harold L. Weatherby, "Holy Things," *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999): 439.
[36] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 189.
[37] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 258.
[38] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 188.

"correctly understood as an appendage to the divine word or promise."[39] In England, reformers generally followed Luther and Calvin in insisting that sacraments must be received worthily. Green notes this consensus, writing that in the catechisms,

> Sacraments were described as 'effectual', faith was said to be nourished, and 'benefits' or 'graces' were said to be conveyed or applied to or received by those who, in the sixteenth century, were usually called the 'faithful' or 'faithful receivers,' but in the seventeenth century were often termed 'believers.'[40]

This emphasis upon worthy reception can also be seen in the works of Thomas Cranmer, who writes that "Almighty God effectually work[s] in them that duly receive his sacraments," and in the 39 Articles of 1563, which state that "in such only as worthily receive the [sacraments] they have a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation."[41]

Returning to Spenser, it is clear why Redcrosse's passivity in Canto xi has been considered problematic. For Protestants, sacraments are signs of God's promises, and it is clear that Redcrosse does not bathe in the well or balm with any consciousness of or faith in God's promises to him. At the same time, however, the language of God guiding Redcrosse to the well and balm, while the knight is unaware and even unwilling, also dramatizes the Protestant position that the Spirit is solely responsible for the efficacy of sacraments. As John King notes, Redcrosse's "unwilling receptivity" serves as an

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[39] Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.14.17; and B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 139.

[40] Green, *Christian's ABC,* 511.

[41] Thomas Cranmer, *The Works of Thomas Cranmer*. 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1844-1846), 1.148; and "The Thirty-Nine Articles, 1563," in *Religion & Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook,* eds. David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 76. For more on Cranmer's view of faith in the sacraments, see Gordon Jeanes, *Signs of God's Promise: Thomas Cranmer's Sacramental Theology and the Book of Common Prayer* (London: T & T Clark, 2008) 165-171; and G. W. Bromiley, *Thomas Cranmer: Theologian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 94-96.

affirmation of the narrator's Protestant assertion elsewhere of "total human depravity and the incapacity of faith to participate actively in salvation."[42] The critical debate over whether Redcrosse's sacramental experiences are sufficiently Protestant, I want to suggest, arises because the allegory, by making visible and literal the Protestant belief that recipients are passive in the sacraments, forecloses the possibility of presenting Redcrosse's faithful reception of the sacraments. That is, the allegory presents Redcrosse receiving the sacraments *so* passively, that he cannot also receive them knowingly. This quality of allegory, its capacity to exaggerate the idea it depicts, serves a pedagogical purpose. In the case of Canto xi, it allows the allegory to reveal a paradox within Reformation sacramental theology: namely, that Christians receive the sacraments passively, but that they must also receive them worthily and with faith. Allegory, by depicting the Protestant assertion of human passivity in the sacraments so literally and concretely, by making it visible and putting it into action, reveals how that teaching is in tension with reformers' insistence upon worthy reception. To be sure, it is not as though these precepts are impossible to reconcile. For Luther and the rest, faith was a consequence of grace. Faith, reformers argued, is not a work or a behavior deserving merit, nor is there anything humans can do to generate it within themselves; it is "a gift, an unearned blessing, an inspiration from God."[43] And, in the case of Calvin in particular, just because sacraments must be received with faith does not mean that it is faith that makes the sacraments efficacious. But allegory, by making literal and visible the Protestant position that humans receive sacraments passively and by presenting that

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[42] John N. King, "Sacramental Parody in *The Faerie Queene,*" *Reformation* 6 (2002): 110.

[43] Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 146.

position in such an extreme way, exposes the paradox that sacraments should be received both passively and with faith.

"for med'cine good": Sacraments and Medicine

Allegory, then, by making visible and dramatizing the belief that sacraments are only efficacious by divine agency, reveals it to be in tension with the teaching that sacraments must be received with faith. But Redcrosse's extreme (if momentary) passivity is not the only way in which Spenser's allegory presents Protestant sacramental theology in a concrete manner, for Spenser also makes literal the reformers' expressions of sacraments' life-giving powers. Indeed, as mentioned above, the well and balm are said to provide both spiritual cleansing *and* physical healing. The well of life not only washes away the "guilt of sinfull crimes," it restores the dead to life, cures the sick, and rejuvenates the old (I.xi.30). In keeping with its powers to provide physical healing, the well is presented as a kind of medicine. It is said to be "Full of great vertues, and for med'cine good," and its effects are dramatic (I.xi.29). Although Redcrosse is wounded and near death before falling into the well, he emerges "new-borne" and ready to fight after bathing in its waters (I.xi.34). The tree balm is similarly depicted as a healing salve that "did from death him saue" (I.xi.48). It is a "gracious ointment" that can heal "deadly wounds" and bring the dead back to life (I.xi.48). These descriptions of the well and balm, which emphasize their medicinal and life-saving powers, reflect the Protestant position that sacraments promise eternal life. Luther, for example, writes that by the Eucharist, Christ promises "the forgiveness of all your sins and life everlasting," while Baptism signifies the death of the sinner and their rebirth into eternal life.[44] Luther, of

[44] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 158, 191.

course, refers to the afterlife, which true believers are promised after their deaths. Spenser's allegory takes this idea and, as he does elsewhere, presents it literally, visibly, concretely. The sacraments' capacity to give everlasting life is thus presented as the power to heal and renew the physical body. Just as the sacraments bestow the divine grace needed for everlasting life, so the well and balm literally heal Redcrosse of his physical ailments, renew his strength, and save him from physical death.

Spenser, then, depicts spiritual health in physical terms, an approach he uses elsewhere in Book I, such as when Redcrosse, in a fit of despair over his sinfulness, considers suicide, the spiritual death wrought by despair thus imagined allegorically as the death of his body. In doing so, Spenser borrows from Protestants' own rhetoric, for David Harley has shown that English divines often used medical metaphors of disease and healing in their religious writings.[45] Spenser's adoption of this rhetoric is particularly evident in Canto x, where Redcrosse's recovery in the House of Holiness, in which his soul is redeemed and his faith is restored, is presented as a process of physical healing. When Caelia, the mistress of the House of Holiness, learns that Redcrosse remains in deep despair despite the efforts of her daughters, Fidelia and Speranza, she summons Patience, a physician who had "great insight / In that disease of grieued conscience / And well could cure the same" (I.x.23). Patience encourages Redcrosse to "tell his grief" and "all that noyd his heauie spright," and then "he gan apply relief / Of salues and med'cines" that help lessen the knight's pain (I.x.24). The physician then sets out to remove Redcrosse's "Inward corruption, and infected sin" which remained as a "festering sore…Close creeping twixt the marrow and the skin" (I.x.25). He applies "corrosiues"

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[45] David Harley, "Medical Metaphors in English Moral Theology, 1560-1660," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 48 (1993): 396-435.

and imposes a regimen of self-mortification to “tame his stubborne malady” (I.x.25). The description of Redcrosse’s treatment repeatedly fuses language of spiritual penance with that of physical cleansing and healing:

> In ashes and sackcloth he did array
> His daintie corse, proud humors to abate,
> And dieted with fasting euery day,
> The swelling of his woundes to mitigate,
> And made him pray both earely and eke late:
> And euer as superfluous flesh did rott
> *Amendment* readie still at hand did wayt,
> To pluck it out with pincers fyrie whott,
> That soone in him was lefte no one corrupted iott.
>
> And bitter *Penaunce* with an yron whip,
> Was wont him once to disple euery day:
> And sharpe *Remorse* his hart did prick and nip,
> That drops of blood thence like a well did play;
> And sad *Repentance* vsed to embay,
> His blamefull body in salt water sore,
> The filthy blottes of sin to wash away
> So in short space they did to health restore
> The man that would not liue, but erst lay at deathes dore. (I.x.26-27)

In these cantos, Redcrosse subjects himself to ascetic and spiritual practices that bring about physical effects. The ashes and sackcloth he wears remove bad humors, fasting heals his wounds, and Repentance washes his sins away from his “blamefull body” with salt water. And, moreover, the positive consequences of this regimen are expressed in fleshy terms: his corrupted flesh is plucked out, and the knight, once near death, regains his health. The spiritual healing offered by repentance and patience are thus allegorized as physical healing administered by a physician. Moreover, Redcrosse’s spiritual treatment clearly includes the Catholic sacrament of penance. Patience asks him to confess his sins, and the doctor’s consequent efforts to “extirpe” the “cause and root of all his ill / Inward corruption and infected sin” provides a surgical, medical depiction of his

sins being removed (I.x.25). Although confession was not recognized as a proper sacrament by the reformers because it was not instituted in Scripture, Luther was, nonetheless, a strong advocate for penance, arguing that confession of sins is "necessary and commanded of God."[46] He writes, "of private confession, I am heartily in favor of it, even though it cannot be proved from the Scriptures. It is useful, even necessary, and I would not have it abolished. Indeed, I rejoice that it exists in the church of Christ, for it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences."[47] Although penance is not a Protestant sacrament, then, it is not so strange for Spenser to present it as an essential aspect of Redcrosse's recovery. It provides, as Luther puts it, a "cure" for Redcrosse's "distressed" mind. Spenser thus leverages the theologians' own figurative language and makes it literal, presenting Redcrosse's spiritual recovery in the House of Holiness and in the well and balm as the recovery of his physical body.

I have argued that in the case of Redcrosse's extreme passivity in Canto xi, allegory's ability to present doctrine literally and visibly allows Spenser to reveal a paradox within the theology. Here, I want to suggest that allegory's capacity to depict invisible ideas visibly and materially serves a different theological purpose. The medicinal depictions of the sacraments present theologians' own figurative language literally, and in doing so, reveal where that figurative language fails. Spenser depicts the sacraments' power to promise everlasting life allegorically as the medicinal power to heal and restore the physical body. But, by exaggerating theologians' own rhetoric so as to present it literally and materially, Spenser's allegory exposes its unsuitability. Presenting the sacraments as medicinal suggests that sacraments provide salvation as assuredly and

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[46] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 212.
[47] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 212.

mechanically as medicine heals the body, a position reformers vehemently opposed. At issue here is the relationship between the sacraments and the grace they bestow, or, to put it more abstractly, the relationship between the sign and the signified. Reformers disagreed as to how the materials of the sacraments related to the effects they promised, but all agreed that the grace conferred in the sacraments was not located in or essential to the sacramental signs. Calvin writes that it is incorrect to think "that a hidden power is joined and fastened to the sacraments by which they of themselves confer the graces of the Holy Spirit upon us."[48] Rather, he argues, "[the sacraments] do not bestow any grace of themselves, but announce and tell us, and (as they are guarantees and tokens) ratify among us, those things given us by divine bounty."[49] In England, Cranmer argues similarly that "although they [the outward sacraments] have no holiness in them, yet they be signs and tokens of the marvellous works and holy effects, which God worketh in us by his omnipotent power."[50] Likewise, Perkins asserts that a sacrament is "not an instrument having the grace of God tyed unto it, or shut up in it: but an instrument to which grace is present by assistance in the right use thereof."[51] These reformers all insist, then, that the outward signs of the sacraments, such as the water of baptism or the bread of communion, do not confer grace, which is an office that belongs to God alone.

If we turn back to the well and balm with this in mind, what we find is surprising. As Weatherby observes, we would expect to find in these scenes "a distinction between the power of signification and the power of operation," some indication that the well and

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[48] Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.14.17.
[49] Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.14.17.
[50] Cranmer, *Works,* 1:11.
[51] William Perkins, "Commentary on Galatians," in *Works,* 3 vols. (London, 1616-1618), 2:260.

balm are signs of grace, rather than efficient causes of it.[52] What we find instead is that the powers conferred by the well and balm appear "joined and fastened" to them. The well is "Full of great vertues, and for med'cine good," and the balm is a "gracious ointment," that gives "Life and long health" (I.xi.29, 48). By describing the well and balm as medicinal, Spenser suggests that the well and balm do not merely signify grace, but are effective causes of it because they contain in themselves the powers necessary to effect the healing they signify. Spenser's depiction of the sacraments as medicinal, then, though it harnesses the figurative language of grace's healing powers, is problematic because it attributes too much to the sacramental instruments themselves.

One should take care, though, not to impose modern views of medicinal efficacy upon the past. Both Harley and Andrew Wear have demonstrated that religion and medicine were much more intertwined rhetorically and conceptually in the early modern period than they are today. For Protestants, and for Calvinists in particular, God's providence was evident in everyday events, illness included, so that when a person became ill it was believed to be the will of God, and, in the same way, when a person was healed by a physician or by medicine, it was believed to be God's doing.[53] As Harley puts it, "Medicine was the means ordained for use in sickness by God who usually acted through second causes."[54] "The physician had to be used," according to one Anglican

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[52] Weatherby, "Holy Things," 438.

[53] Andrew Wear, "Religious beliefs and medicine in early modern England," in *The Task of healing: Medicine, religion and gender in England and the Netherlands, 1450-1800,* ed. Hilary Marland and Margaret Pelling (Rotterdam: Erasmus Publishing, 1996), 147. See also Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[54] David Harley, "Spiritual physic, Providence and English medicine, 1560-1640," in *Medicine and the Reformation,* ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (London: Routledge, 1993), 101.

bishop, "'as Gods *Instrument*, and Physicke, as Gods *meanes*.'"[55] We can see in this language of God's "means" and "instruments" that medicine was conceptually closer to the sacraments than we might at first expect. The sacraments were even compared to medicine by some, though Harley notes that despite the rampant use of metaphors of disease and healing by English divines, it was recognized that the trope did not properly extend to sacraments.[56] Indeed, despite the conceptual overlap between religion and medicine, we should recognize that medicine and sacraments do not correspond perfectly, and although medicine's healing power was ultimately attributed to God, it was still believed that medicine did *something,* such that the religious establishment encouraged people to see trained, educated physicians. Calvin, in addition to denying that sacraments worked miraculously, denied "the continued gift of healing to anyone other than God, and also denied that any physical material or even touch had miraculous powers."[57] Such a claim, Wear argues, legitimized university trained doctors over quack physicians. Calvin's position thus suggests that while illness and healing might ultimately be the work of God, secondary means (such as learned doctors) were recognized as effective. Although, then, both sickness and healing were believed to be the work of divine providence in the early modern period, it was acknowledged that medicine operated according to its healing properties, not because it was miraculous. By contrast, reformers explicitly argued that sacraments were not efficacious in the same way; the sacramental signs of water, bread, and wine, Protestants asserted, did not contain the grace they signified. Allegory, by taking the reformers' figurative expressions of sacraments' life-

[55] Harley, "Spiritual physic," 106.
[56] Harley, "Spiritual physic," 112; and Harley, "Medical Metaphors," 402.
[57] Wear, "Religious Beliefs," 155.

giving powers literally and exaggerating them so as to present sacraments as actual medicine, is thus able to reveal where and how that rhetoric fails.

English Holy Wells and Ruddymane's Failed Baptism in II.ii

I have argued that Spenser's allegorical depiction of the sacraments in I.xi emphasizes both human passivity and the sacraments' healing power in a way that then reveals the contradictions and limitations of these theological principles. I want to turn now to examine how Spenser invokes a local devotional practice, the use of healing holy wells, in his presentation of the well of life. His use of the holy well tradition, I argue, furthers his allegorical depiction of sacraments as medicinal and as divine gifts. But, though it helps him emphasize certain principles of Protestant sacramental theology and present them visibly and concretely, his use of the holy well tradition serves as another instance in which, by emphasizing and exaggerating certain features of the theology, the allegory exposes its tensions and implications.

In his description of the well of life, Spenser compares it to other waters famous for their healing:

> Both *Silo* this, and *Iordan* did excell,
> And th'English *Bath*, and eke the german *Spau*,
> Ne can *Cephise*, nor *Hebrus* match this well. (I.xi.30)

The first waters mentioned, the river Jordan and the pool of Siloam, were used by the prophet Elisha and Christ respectively to heal illnesses.[58] The next two, Bath and Spau, were contemporary spas famous for their healing powers, and the last, Cephise and

[58] 2 Kings 5: 10-14; and John 9:1-12. The river Jordan was also the site of Christ's baptism, see Matthew 3:13 and Mark 1:9.

Hebrus, were classical rivers known for purity and healing, respectively.[59] By comparing the well of life to these six bodies of water, Spenser emphasizes the medicinal, healing properties of his well. But, more importantly, the comparison between the well of life and the waters of Bath and Spau indicates that Spenser means to cast the well at I.xi as a holy well. Incorporating the holy well tradition into his depiction of baptism, I want to suggest, is an important aspect of Spenser's allegorical depiction of the sacraments. By leveraging the attitudes, practices, and history of this local devotional practice, he advances his visible, concrete presentation of Protestant sacramental theology. Indeed, holy wells are an ideal vehicle for further emphasizing the two aspects of the sacraments already explored in this essay. Because holy wells were associated with miraculous healing, his allusion to them continues his presentation of the sacraments as medicinal, and for reasons discussed below, their use furthers the sense that sacraments are divine gifts that do not require human agency to be effective.

Believed to be loci of the sacred, holy wells were used for centuries by both pagans and Christians on the British Isles, who visited them for their healing powers. Despite their reputation for healing, British holy wells are and always have been inseparable from religion. Wells and rivers had been sites of deity worship in the Celtic religion before the Roman conquest, and when the Romans arrived, they adopted some of the Celts' native practices and deities into their own religious rituals involving wells and

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[59] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), I.367-380; and Horace, *Epistles*, in *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.16.

springs.[60] Many characteristics of holy wells in the medieval period and beyond can be found in their early pagan use: wells were associated with a divine figure, believed to possess healing powers, and believers left behind offerings, like coins and pins, at the wells.[61] Later, as part of their project to convert Britain to Christianity, church leaders attempted to stamp out the pagan rituals and worship associated with wells and other sacred places, though some leaders, finding outright eradication unsuccessful, adopted the strategy of converting pagan customs and spaces for Christian use. Churches, for example, were built at the sites of old temples, trees that were sacred in the pagan tradition were planted near Christian churches, pagan wells became associated with Christian saints, and water from holy wells was incorporated into Christian rituals such as baptism and hand washing.[62] By the medieval period, Christian holy wells had become popular pilgrimage destinations for those seeking physical and mental healing.

During the Reformation, these wells came under attack as reformers argued that those who visited them were guilty of treating both nature and the saints as idols.[63] But after a period of initial iconoclasm and suppression, a number of wells were "actively rehabilitated" as healing spas as early as 1570.[64] These wells were recast as medicinal, as physicians insisted that minerals in the water, not the saints, were responsible for reported

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[60] Janet and Colin Bord, *Sacred Waters: Holy Wells and Water Lore in Britain and Ireland* (London: Granada Publishing, 1985), 3-15. See also James Rattue, *The Living Stream: Holy Wells in Historical Context* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1995), 23-31.
[61] Bord, *Sacred Waters,* 4-14.
[62] Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27-29; and Bord, *Sacred Waters*, 19-20.
[63] Walsham, *The Reformation,* 397.
[64] Walsham, *The Reformation*, 398. See also Phyllis Hembry, *The English Spa 1560-1815: A Social History* (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), 4-20.

cures.[65] The recasting was limited, however. Not only did physicians find it difficult to convince people of the wells' medicinal properties and "wean them away from the time-honored rituals they habitually performed during their pilgrimages," even those who believed that the wells worked medicinally ultimately framed them and their healing powers as gifts from God.[66] They were "special instruments bestowed by Him for the sake of human health."[67] Indeed, religion was never completely disassociated from the wells; literature advertising the wells contained scriptural references to healing waters (including Jordan and Siloam), physicians encouraged spa visitors to examine their consciences and repent of any sins, and the wells' cures were sometimes described by priests and physicians as miracles, despite the Protestant position that the age of miracles was over.[68] The well into which Redcrosse falls, then, is not merely a pool of water; it alludes to a local devotional practice that fused religion with physical healing. This identification is strengthened both by the fact that holy wells were used in England for Christian baptism, and by Spenser's pairing of the well with the tree of life, for trees were often found alongside holy wells and were incorporated into the healing rituals pilgrims performed.[69]

Invoking holy wells in his depiction of the well of life not only characterizes the sacraments as medicinal, it also furthers the sense that sacraments are divine gifts rather

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[65] Walsham, *The Reformation,* 408-410.
[66] Walsham, *The Reformation,* 411, 431-455.
[67] Walsham, *The Reformation,* 433.
[68] Walsham, *The Reformation,* 432, 438-9, 443-5.
[69] See Alexandra Walsham, "Sacred Spas? Healing Springs and Religion in Post-Reformation Britain," in *The Impact of the European Reformation: Princes, Clergy and People,* ed. Bridget Heal and Ole Peter Grell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 211, who notes that early Christian missionaries converted some holy wells into baptisteries, and for the role of trees in holy well rituals, see Ronan Foley, "Performing health in place: The holy well as a therapeutic assemblage," *Health & Place* 17, no. 2 (2011): 473.

than human works. In the same way that Redcrosse's extreme passivity made visible the teaching that humans receive the sacraments passively, so the use of a holy well in a baptismal scene exaggerates divine agency and human passivity. When waters are already endued with certain powers, there is no need for consecration, the process by which priests bless the sacramental materials, and hence no real need for an officiant. When Redcrosse receives the sacraments in I.xi, there is no officiant present, either to administer the well and balm or to consecrate them. By incorporating the tradition of holy wells into his sacramental episode, Spenser is thus able to some extent to sidestep concerns amongst Protestants that priests were too much relied upon as intermediaries between the laity and God.[70] Moreover, holy wells were frequently associated with divine providence in early modern England. Protestant rhetoric cast holy wells, not only as gifts from God, but more precisely as evidence of God's approval of the English people and the Protestant church. Walter Baley, for example, in 1587 describes newly discovered medicinal waters in England as one of many benefits that God "hath plentifully bestowed vppon this little soile of England, since the prosperous reigne of our most gratious Souereigne, wherein the Gospell hath sincerely and freely beene preached."[71] Redcrosse is therefore not only guided to the well by divine providence, as argued above, but the well itself, because it is linked to the holy well tradition, is cast as a gift from God. By invoking the holy well tradition in his depiction of Redcrosse's baptism, then, Spenser

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[70] According to Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 147, Protestant reformers insisted that Christ was the sole mediator between humans and God, such that only his sacrifice, which was made long ago, could save souls. Consequently, they criticized the Catholic Mass, which instead of memorializing Christ's sacrifice, attempted to recreate it.
[71] Walter Baley, *A briefe discours of certain bathes or medicinall waters in the Countie of Warwicke neere vnto a village called Newnam Regis* (London, 1587), A2. See also Walsham, *The Reformation*, 433-434.

again makes visible the Protestant position that sacraments are efficacious through divine, not human, action.

But, as I have argued above, when the allegory emphasizes and exaggerates certain aspects of the theology by depicting them concretely, it forecloses the possibility of representing others. When Spenser uses holy wells to depict the sacraments, he reduces the need for human involvement because the water is already infused with its healing virtues. These waters, Spenser's description suggests, heal and rejuvenate all who bathe in the well of life, and this was precisely how holy wells were believed to function. Whether a well's healing powers were instilled by a pagan deity, a saint's intercession, or the earth's minerals, holy wells were, on the whole, believed to administer their effects predictably and reliably according to their virtues. But it follows from this that if a well is not endowed with the *right* powers, the sacrament will not be successful. Spenser presents us with just such an image—and the opportunity to ponder its implications—at the beginning of Book II, when Guyon attempts to baptize the orphaned Ruddymane in a different holy well.[72]

Early in his quest, Guyon discovers Ruddymane, an infant with blood stained hands, whose mother has just killed herself. Guyon tries, unsuccessfully, to wash the babe's hands in a nearby well:

> He washt them oft and oft, yet nought they beene
> For all his washing cleaner. Still he stroue,
> Yet still the litle hands were bloody seene. (II.ii.3)

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[72] See also the enervating well at I.vii, which also invokes the holy well tradition. The well, like the others discussed in this chapter, is endued with specific powers and like the well in II.ii (and many English holy wells), those powers are explained by an etiological myth.

The knight is driven "into great amaz'ment" by the stain's persistence, at which point the Palmer intervenes to explain that the stain will not wash away due to the well's properties (II.ii.3). In an undeniable allusion to holy wells, he informs Guyon that "secret vertues are infusd / In euery fountaine, and in euerie lake" (II.ii.5). Some, he says, were "indewd / By great Dame Nature" with their powers, while others "by guifte of later grace / Or by good prayers, or by other hap / Had vertue pourd into their waters bace" (II.ii.6). The well before Guyon and the Palmer is of the second sort, and its particular powers are explained by the story of its origin. One day, a nymph was hunting in the woods when the lustful Dan Faunus saw her and gave chase. The nymph cries out to Diana, pleading for relief, and

> The goddesse heard, and suddeine where she sate,
> Welling out streames of teares, and quite dismayd
> With stony feare of that rude rustick mate,
> Transformd her to a stone from stedfast virgins state. (II.ii.8)

According to the Palmer, waters now flow from this nymph-turned-stone that possess her "vertues" (II.ii.9). The water is "chaste and pure, as purest snow" and will not let its "waues with any filth by dyde," but has remained "vnstayned" like the nymph herself (II.ii.9). Because the well's water will not allow itself to be dirtied, it will not wash the blood off Ruddymane. This well is linked to the tradition of holy wells, because of its etiological myth, precise powers, and most significantly, because the story of the nymph being pursued by her would-be rapist echoes the legend behind St. Winefride's Well in Wales, one of the most famous wells in sixteenth-century Britain.[73] But despite the

[73] Many holy wells were said to have remarkable origins. Christian wells were often, for example, said to have sprung up at the place where the patron saint died, struck the ground, or simply prayed for water. See Bord, *Sacred Waters,* 96-105. On the issue of the wells' unique powers, Robert Charles Hope writes that the wells "had not all the same

similarities between this well and other holy wells, it departs from the tradition it evokes because, despite its purity, the well fails to cleanse the bloody babe.

The stakes of this failure are heightened when one considers the washing, as many critics have, as a baptism. The strongest evidence for viewing the scene as such are the possible explanations offered by Guyon when he realizes his efforts to wash the stain are futile:

> He wist not whether blott of fowle offence
> Might not be purgd with water nor with bath;
> Or that high God, in lieu of innocence,
> Imprinted had that token of his wrath,
> To shew how sore bloodguiltinesse he hat'th;
> Or that the charme and veneme, which they dronck,
> Their blood with secret filth infected hath,
> Being diffused through the sencelesse tronck,
> That through the great contagion direful deadly stonck. (II.ii.4)

As A. C. Hamilton puts it, these lines, "As exactly as allegorical poetry can," describe the theology of original sin.[74] Alastair Fowler goes further, observing that Spenser here presents readers with two different theories of original sin. In the first, original sin is a "*token*, imprinted when man lost his innocence, to signify God's wrath at sin" after Adam

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virtues attributed to them. Some were blessed and used for baptisms, to others were attributed curative properties, especially for sore or weak eyes, and for leprosy, while others possessed mystical and prophetic powers." *The Legendary Lore of the Holy Wells of England* (1893; repr., Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968), xxi. See also Bord, *Sacred Waters*, 34-40. Finally, Bord, *Sacred Waters*, 8-9, recounts the story of Winefride, who was one day visited by Prince Caradoc. He, overcome with lust, chased her and then beheaded her. At the spot where her head fell, a holy well of miraculous powers appeared.

[74] A. C. Hamilton, "A Theological Reading of the *Faerie Queene,* Book II," *ELH* 25, no. 3 (1958): 158. The identification of the stain as original sin is typically credited to Hamilton. Lilian Winstanley, however, appears to gesture towards Hamilton's conclusion several decades before, writing of the stain: "Spenser probably means this as a piece of Puritan symbolism—to typify the sin of the flesh which is inherent and cannot be removed by any earthly means." Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book II,* ed. Lilian Winstanley (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1922), 243.

and Eve fell.[75] In the second, original sin is described as a hereditary disease that corrupts human nature itself: "Their blood with secret filth infected." It follows that if the stain represents original sin, then Mordant and Amavia become figures for Adam and Eve, Ruddymane becomes a symbol for humankind, which is "innocent" but still bears the inherited mark of original sin (his "guiltie handes"), and Guyon's attempt to wash the babe signifies baptism (II.ii.1, II.ii.3). But, as we have seen, Guyon cannot remove the stain. Fowler, rather than viewing the stain's persistence as evidence of a failed baptism, argues that it points to the limits of the sacrament, which can remove "the guilt of original sin but not the infection itself, concupiscence."[76] He links the stain, and the propensity to sin that it represents, with Book II's theme of temperance, arguing that temperance is required to keep concupiscence in check. "Baptism," Fowler argues, "makes possible and initiates regeneration; temperance puts it into material effect."[77]

And yet, in several ways, the text resists Fowler's suggestion that the washing be viewed as a success. Fowler argues that the persistent stain represents only the infection of original sin, a reading that suggests bloody hands should, for some reason, not symbolize guilt. Fowler's interpretation is also incompatible with the Palmer's assertion that the well will not let her "waues with any filth be dyde," which suggests that the well is unable to provide any sort of cleansing (II.ii.9). Moreover, when Redcrosse falls into

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[75] A. D. S. Fowler, "The Image of Mortality: *The Faerie Queene,* II.i-ii," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1961): 99.
[76] Fowler, "The Image of Mortality," 100. Fowler cites Article IX of the Thirty-nine Articles: "this infection of nature [original sin] doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek *phronēma sarkos,* which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet…concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin" (100).
[77] Fowler, "The Image of Mortality," 101.

the well of life only a few cantos before, there is no indication that the well removes the guilt, but not the infection of original sin. Unlike Ruddymane, Redcrosse is radically transformed by his baptism; he is "new-borne" and apparently so refreshed that the dragon wonders if he is the same knight he nearly killed the day before (I.xi.34). For Redcrosse, then, the sacrament has evident, undeniable effects. This should make us all the more sensitive to the strangeness of the Ruddymane episode, and ask why, given the transformative effects of Redcrosse's baptism, Ruddymane's baptism fails.

We do not have to look far, for the Palmer gives us a reason: the water is so chaste, so pure, that it will not allow itself to be tainted with blood. In this respect, both the well of life and the nymph's well are effective in the sense that they act according to their properties: the healing well of life restores Redcrosse and the chaste well retains its purity. Ruddymane's baptism cannot go forward then, because the waters of the nymph's well do not possess the right virtues for the sacrament. These tragic circumstances, in which the orphaned Ruddymane is denied baptism because the well does not possess the right virtues, I want to suggest, follow from Spenser's efforts to make visible and concrete the role of divine agency in the sacraments. That is, while the allusion to holy wells portrays the sacraments as divine, not human, actions, if that theological principle is pushed to its extremes so that sacraments appear to be solely a matter of divine agency and not one of human merit, then tragedies like Ruddymane's are inevitable. His case is particularly unsettling, moreover, because there is no suggestion in the text that the babe is unworthy of baptism, and given that the evidence for reading his blood-stained hands

as symbols of original sin, he clearly requires the sacrament.[78] But, he simply is not baptized because the well is not capable of baptizing. Just as Redcrosse does nothing on his own to merit the sacrament, so Ruddymane does nothing to prevent it; it is entirely out of human hands.

This sentiment echoes Fradubio's response to Redcrosse's offer for help in Book I, Canto ii. Fradubio explains that he was transformed into a tree by the witch Duessa and will remain that way until he is "bathed in a liuing well" (I.ii.43). Upon learning this, Redcrosse asks the well's location so that he can help Fraudbio return to his proper shape. To this Fradubio replies, "Time and suffised fates to former kynd / Shall vs restore, none else from hence may vs unbynd" (I.ii.43). Here again, Spenser evokes the holy well tradition, but the futility of human agency is made even more clear by Fradubio's assertion that even though the well is the cure, humans cannot do anything to hasten or bring about its restorative effects, a lesson poignantly emphasized a few lines later when we are told that "in vaine *Fradubio* did lament" (I.ii.44). Fradubio's and Ruddymane's states make clear that by evoking the holy well tradition, Spenser is able to emphasize divine agency in the sacraments, but the elimination of meaningful human agency in these scenes comes at a cost.

Comparing the well of life episode with the Ruddymane one, then, both of which stage baptisms in holy wells, reveals yet again how allegory, by giving material form to immaterial ideas, can scrutinize those ideas and expose their implications. In this

[78] It is worth observing that unlike Redcrosse, Ruddymane is an infant, which to some would make him unprepared to receive the sacrament. Infant baptism was, however, widely accepted amongst Protestant reformers, including Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, so there is little reason to think that this alone would bar Ruddymane from baptism. See Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 187-188.

instance, the allusion to holy wells both emphasizes the sacraments' medicinal nature and depicts the sacraments as divine gifts. As was the case with Redcrosse's falls into the well and balm, Spenser's invocation of holy wells makes these qualities of the sacraments visible and exaggerates them; it is, of course, unrealistic that a sacrament would not require an officiant or that baptismal water would be fundamentally unable to baptize. But allegory, by presenting the teaching that humans are passive in the sacraments in visible and material terms, allows readers to examine the implications of that teaching. As Ruddymane's experience shows, if sacraments are purely a matter of divine agency and there is nothing humans can do to merit salvation, then it follows that a recipient's worthiness is irrelevant. It bears repeating that Ruddymane's experience, like Redcrosse's unintentional reception of the sacraments or the depiction of sacraments as medicinal, is not a particularly nuanced depiction of Protestant sacramental theology. Although reformers did, on the whole, believe in predestination and God's absolute sovereignty to damn or save, Ruddymane's experience makes God seem unjust and arbitrary, a characterization reformers would not endorse. But, nevertheless, Spenser's allegorical depiction, though it exaggerates the theology in certain respects, creates the conditions in which readers can scrutinize sacramental theology, ponder its implications, and tease out its paradoxes.

Conclusion

Spenser's allegorical depiction of the well and balm, then, presents Protestant rhetoric and teachings about the sacraments visibly and concretely. In doing so, the allegory pushes the boundaries of the theological ideas being presented and reveals the theology's contradictions, tensions, and implications. Redcrosse's accidental falls into the

well and balm expose the Protestant paradox that humans should receive sacraments both passively and worthily. Meanwhile, the characterization of the sacraments as medicinal, while illustrating the healing and restorative powers of God's grace and borrowing from the reformers' own language, reveals the inappropriateness of such metaphors, which suggest the sacraments contain grace within themselves. Such an understanding of the sacraments would be incompatible with the Protestant belief that sacraments are not works, but gifts freely given by God. Finally, Spenser's use of the holy well tradition both emphasizes that sacraments are divine gifts and extends that idea to its logical conclusions: that humans can do absolutely nothing to merit the sacraments. In each of these instances, the allegory, by providing visible, concrete, and often hyperbolic depictions of theological principles, reveals how easily one theological principle can violate another and how delicately the different actors' agencies must be balanced in sacramental theology.

Allegory, of course, is not typically thought of as mimetically realistic mode, and *The Faerie Queene,* with its witches, dragons, and talking trees is not a realist poem. But, nevertheless, I want to suggest that allegory's capacity to bring abstract ideas "to life," to present them visibly and materially, allows Spenser's poem to draw out theology's contradictions and implications. And, ironically, it is by exaggerating these theological ideas so as to make them more unrealistic, more unbelievable, that Spenser's allegory teaches its readers. Recognizing the capacity of allegory to reveal theology's contradictions and implications has obvious consequences for how we read Book I as a whole. Much of the legend of holiness works by making literal the familiar figurative expressions regarding the difficulties of living a Christian life; Redcrosse's journey to

holiness is imagined as a literal quest, his fight against sin is presented as a battle against a dragon, his relationships with the true and false churches is signified by his courtships with two different women, and so on. The examination of the well and balm in this chapter should make clear that allegory's capacity to transform these abstract ideas into material people and events presents a rich opportunity to examine both the theology underpinning such presentations and the figurative expressions that Spenser's allegory presents literally.

Saying it All at Once: Allegory and Sacrament in *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* Chapter Two

Many years ago, Balachandra Rajan offered a comical and penetrating account of the critical conversation surrounding John Milton's *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634), which was—and remains—divided on the matter of the masque's argument. Rajan observes,

> The confrontation between the Lady and Comus seems to be set in a dark wood of critical disagreement. The most popular view is that the Lady wins largely by refusing to lose and that Comus walks off with the forensic and poetic honors. Other suggestions are that the Lady is right but not the Elder Brother, that both the Lady and Comus are wrong and the epilogue is right, that nobody and nothing is right except the whole poem and even that the whole poem seems to have gone wrong somewhere.[1]

The slippery character of the masque, I wish to argue here, arises in part from the conflicting visions of chastity offered by its characters and events. Although the masque undoubtedly celebrates chastity, what chastity is, how it should be practiced, and what it does remain contested. In this chapter, I suggest that we can find, if not answers to, then at least explanations for the masque's conflicting notions of chastity by examining closely the scene in which Sabrina releases the Lady from the "marble venomed seat" to which she is stuck.[2]

The Lady finds herself glued to a chair and unable to move thanks to Comus, son of Circe and Bacchus, whom she meets after becoming separated from her brothers while traveling "through the perplexed paths of [a] drear wood" to reach their father's estate

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[1] Balachandra Rajan, "*Comus:* The Inglorious Likeness," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1968): 121.

[2] John Milton, *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, in *Complete Shorter Poems,* ed. John Carey, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), 915. Subsequent quotations from *A Masque* will be from this edition and cited parenthetically by line number.

(37). After they meet, Comus promises to lead the Lady to her brothers, but instead lures her to a sumptuous palace where he tempts her to drink from his glass. She steadfastly refuses, but is powerless to leave as he has cast a spell that renders her immobile, stuck to a chair. Her brothers, who have been searching for their sister with the help of an Attendant Spirit, eventually arrive, break Comus' cup, and drive him away, but because they fail to take his wand, they cannot release their sister. After scolding them for their mistake, the Attendant Spirit informs them of "other means" that might save their sister (820). The Spirit tells the brothers of Sabrina, a "gentle nymph," a "virgin pure," and goddess of the river Severn, who can undo Comus' spell "If she be right invoked in warbled song" (823, 825, 853). The Spirit calls the nymph, who arrives and offers her help, declaring it her "office best/ To help ensnared chastity" (907-908). With the following words, she reverses Comus' charm and frees the Lady:

> Brightest Lady look on me,
> Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
> Drops that from my fountain pure,
> I have kept of precious cure,
> Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
> Thrice upon thy rubied lip,
> Next this marble venomed seat
> Smeared with gums of glutinous heat
> I touch with chaste palms moist and cold,
> Now the spell hath lost his hold;
> And I must haste ere morning hour
> To wait in Amphitrite's bower. (909-920)

From here, the masque wraps up quickly. Sabrina leaves, and at the Attendant Spirit's urging, the children depart quickly for their father's residence. The masque concludes with a song and dance in which the children are presented to their parents, and the Attendant Spirit, his task complete, offers a final speech and then returns to heaven.

Sabrina's actions are undeniably ritualistic; she is cast as a priestess when she calls it her "office best" to help those whose chastity is threatened, and the repetitious acts within her performance are strongly suggestive of ritual. Milton critics have long acknowledged the ritual character of her actions, and though there has been some disagreement as to what sort of rite Milton presents here, many have connected her actions to Christian sacrament.[3] The rationale for this identification comes in part from the details of the rite: the number three offers one hint that the ritual could be Christian, and the application of "Drops" from her "fountain pure" ties the rite to baptism, as does the verb "sprinkle," which in the seventeenth century could be used to mean "to baptize."[4] But the most compelling reason for reading the rite as a sacrament is provided by A. S. P. Woodhouse, who reads the masque as an allegory of pilgrimage. The Lady must journey through dark woods filled with danger and temptation before she can reach heaven, "the reward of virtue," which is represented in *A Masque* as the Lady's home.[5] Woodhouse argues that although the Lady is able to resist Comus' temptations on the

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[3] Other interpretations of the rite have been offered, however. Stella Revard, stressing Sabrina's classical identity, has connected this scene to pagan rites of purification that marked a young girl's entry into womanhood. She argues that just as Roman women and girls would undergo rites of purification at the temples of Artemis and Cyrene, so the Lady experiences "a similar rite of purification and passage" at the hands of Sabrina. Stella P. Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair: The Making of the 1645 Poems* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 137.

[4] *OED Online*, s.v. "sprinkle, v.2."

[5] A. S. P. Woodhouse, "*Comus* Once More [1950]," in *A Maske at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's Comus,* ed. John S. Diekhoff (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1968), 74. See also A. S. P. Woodhouse, "The Argument of Milton's *Comus,*" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1941): 46-71. For other allegorical readings of *A Masque* see Sears Jayne, "The Subject of Milton's Ludlow *Mask,*" *PMLA* 74 (1959): 533-543; Kathleen M. Swaim, "Allegorical Poetry in Milton's Ludlow Mask," *Milton Studies* 16 (1982): 167-199; and Victoria Silver, "Thoughts in Misbecoming Plight: Allegory in *Comus,*" in *Critical Essays on John Milton*, ed. Christopher Kendrick (New York: G. K. Hall, 1995).

"natural level" with virtue and reason, she nevertheless finds herself powerless to reverse the spell that keeps her immobilized.[6] As Barbara Lewalski puts it, the Lady "is paralyzed…subject, despite her virtue, to unruly sensuality and unable to attain salvation by her own merits."[7] An "infusion of divine grace" is required, and Sabrina's rite provides it.[8] As we saw in Chapter One, although Protestant reformers insisted that sacraments did not confer grace *ex opere operato,* by virtue of being administered correctly, most believed that grace is bestowed in the sacraments. In providing the "infusion of divine grace" that allows the Lady to reach heaven, then, Sabrina's rite resembles Christian sacrament.

Woodhouse's reading of Sabrina's rite is compelling, but, we still might ask, what is a sacrament doing in a masque about chastity, particularly a masque written by John Milton? Even in his youth, Milton was a puritan and vocal in his criticisms of the religious rites and ceremonies practiced by both the Catholic and Anglican churches.[9]

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[6] Woodhouse, "*Comus* Once More," 75.
[7] Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton's *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing," in *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque,* eds. David Bevington and Peter Holbrook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 314.
[8] Woodhouse, "*Comus* Once More," 76. For other readings that credit Sabrina with administering grace, see Georgia B. Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 53; Debora Shuger, "'The Bliss of Dreams': Theology in Milton's *Maske,*" *Hellas* 7 (1996): 151; Lewalski, "Milton's *Comus*, 309; and Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community From Herbert to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 172.
[9] N. H. Keeble, "Milton and Puritanism," in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 124-140, describes puritans as "distinguishable by their dissatisfaction with the rites and ceremonies of the Elizabethan church and by their desire to continue the process of Protestant reformation, halted in mid-career in England, they believed, in the compromise of an established church which retained government by bishops and a liturgy still modeled on that of Rome. They never, however, belonged to a single sect or constituted a clearly defined group within or without the episcopal Church of England" (124). For more on Milton's critique of ceremony, see Guibbory, *Ceremony*

Between May of 1641 and April of 1642, he published his first pamphlets, five anti-prelatical tracts that attacked the ceremonies of the Church of England and the episcopacy. Achsah Guibbory points out that in these tracts, Milton's concern is with discipline, the outward expressions of faith, rather than with doctrine, reasoning that even if there is "agreement about the doctrines of Protestant faith," improper worship "can contaminate the faith."[10] While his anti-prelatical tracts put him on the side of the Presbyterians who condemned Archbishop Laud, Milton would depart from them in his support for divorce on the grounds of incompatibility and in his tolerance for different Protestant sects.[11] Milton's views were thus highly idiosyncratic, though as N. H. Keeble notes, throughout his writings "there runs an authentically puritan opposition between the hollowness of habitual compliance with external forms and the integrity of inner commitment."[12] In his condemnation of rituals and ceremonies, however, Milton makes an exception for the sacraments. In *Of Reformation,* he writes that faith does not need "the weak, and fallible office of the Senses, to be either the Ushers, or Interpreters, of heavenly Mysteries, save where our Lord himselfe in his Sacraments ordain'd."[13] In the same tract, however, he criticizes the manner in which the sacraments are practiced and he bemoans the attention given to outward rites at the expense of simple faith. It is odd, then, given Milton's puritan sensibilities, that *A Masque* would not only feature a sacrament so prominently but that it would present the rite as obviously efficacious and

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and Community, 147-186; and John Rumrich, "Radical Heterodoxy and Heresy," in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 141-156.
[10] Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community,* 149-150.
[11] Rumrich, "Radical Heterodoxy," 145, 148.
[12] Keeble, "Milton and Puritanism," 129.
[13] John Milton, *Of Reformation*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, vol. 1 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 520.

transformative. Even stranger, Lewalski has argued that the masque presents itself as reformist. "The tempter Comus and his bestial rout," she argues, represent on one level "Cavalier licentiousness, Laudian ritual, the depravities associated with court masques and feasts, and the unruly holiday festivities," which the Lady and her brothers "must learn to resist."[14] Sabrina's sacramental rite is, then, unexpected, but I wish to suggest here that its presence in the masque can be explained by the similarities between Protestant sacrament and the masque's central virtue: chastity. Both sacrament and chastity, I will show, are deeply concerned with the relationship between matter and spirit and both require us to think creatively about what counts as agency. Moreover, Sabrina's rite, because it unfolds within an allegory and can therefore support multiple interpretations at once, is able to provide new ways of thinking about chastity and sacrament by troubling the binary between matter and spirit and presenting multiple agencies working at the same time. That is, allegory, because it can say many things at once—even contradictory things—offers a way to think more deeply and creatively about both sacrament and chastity.

Chastity in *A Masque:* Some Critical Questions

A Masque is, without a doubt, a celebration of chastity, both sexual chastity and temperance more generally. The importance of chastity is underscored early in the masque. In her first speech, the Lady assures herself that virtue will protect her as she travels through the woods alone, and she calls on the theological virtues to keep her safe. But, famously, she replaces charity with chastity: "O welcome pure-eyed Faith, white-

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[14] Barbara K. Lewalski, "How radical was the young Milton?" in *Milton and Heresy,* eds. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 56-57.

handed Hope/ Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings/ And thou unblemished form of Chastity," she says (212-214). Chastity remains central throughout the masque. When they discover that they have lost their sister, the brothers discuss whether her virtue will be enough to protect her as she travels through the woods alone. Meanwhile, at the palace, the Lady and Comus extensively debate whether Nature demands chastity or indulgence from humans. And yet, despite the masque's persistent focus upon chastity, it is sometimes difficult to know what exactly is being celebrated. Throughout the masque, the characters express different, potentially competing, conceptions of what chastity is and what powers it confers upon its adherents.

The two brothers, for example, disagree about whether chastity provides their sister with a defense against harm. The second brother, anxious about his sister's safety, fears that she might be afraid or "within the direful grasp/ Of savage hunger, or of savage heat" (356-357). While his concerns are at first for her general well being, the brother is increasingly worried about the threat of "savage heat," and he reiterates his fear that "some ill-greeting touch" will "attempt" her (405). But the elder brother is more optimistic, arguing that the Lady "is not so defenseless left," for she has the "hidden strength" of chastity (413-414). He continues, articulating for his brother a vision of chastity that provides its disciples with a strong, even martial, defense: "She that has [chastity]" he argues, "is clad in complete steel" and "like a quivered nymph with arrows keen" may travel through dangerous areas without harm (420-421). He then invokes classical myth to "testify the arms of chastity," recounting the legends of Diana with "her dread bow" and Minerva, the "unconquered virgin" who "freezed her foes to congealed

stone" (439-448). The elder brother testifies again and again to the strength and constancy of virtue, which, he argues, can stand firm in any circumstance:

> Virtue could see to do what Virtue would
> By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
> Were in the flat sea sunk. (372-374)

Moreover, virtue's defensive powers are such, he argues, that threatening creatures would not even attempt a lady who is chaste. A lady armed with virginity can travel through dark woods in absolute safety, he insists, because as long as she has chastity, "No savage fierce, bandit, or mountaineer/ Will dare to soil her virgin purity"; "No goblin, or swart faery of the mine/ Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity," he declares (425-436). The elder brother argues further that heaven takes special care to protect chastity, such that "when a soul is found sincerely [chaste]/ A thousand liveried angels lackey her/ Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt" (453-455). The Lady professes a similar opinion early in the masque, insisting that "he, the Supreme Good…Would send a glistering guardian if need were/ To keep my life and honor unassailed" (216-219). The elder brother and Lady thus express absolute confidence that virtue will provide protection in the woods, either because chastity provides women with defensive powers, because vicious and lustful creatures will not dare harm a chaste woman, or because heaven will provide adequate protection to keep the Lady's honor safe.

The sense that *A Masque* celebrates chastity is due in no small part to the lines above in which the elder brother and the Lady extol virtue's powers, and several critics have argued that the elder brother is justified in the extreme faith he places in chastity.[15]

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[15] See, for example, John G. Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition: The Early Poems, "Arcades," & Comus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 93; Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk, "Dark Scandal and The Sun-Clad Power of Chastity:

But it is not so simple, for the events of the masque, rather than supporting the elder brother's claims, undermine both his and his sister's assertions that virtue alone offers sufficient protection. Despite the elder brother's assurances, Comus does indeed "dare to soil [the Lady's] virgin purity," and despite her chastity, the Lady finds herself under Comus' spell, immobilized, and unable to free herself. Likewise, although the elder brother and the Lady are correct that heaven sends an Attendant Spirit for the children's "defense" and "guard" as they travel through the woods, he fails at his task in many ways (42). Despite his "best speed," the Spirit is not fast enough to prevent Comus and the Lady from meeting, and although he leads the brothers to Comus' castle, neither he nor the brothers are able to reverse Comus' spell and free the Lady (572). Sabrina's intervention achieves what the Lady, her brothers, and the Attendant Spirit, on their own, were unable to do. In this, the masque, on the one hand, continues its celebration of chastity given the characterization of Sabrina as an innocent virgin. But on the other, it proves the children wrong in thinking one's virtue will provide sufficient protection from evil.

A second issue that divides the masque is whether it primarily celebrates the moral and spiritual quality of chastity or the physical state of virginity. As Katharine Maus argues, *A Masque* seems divided on whether (and how) virginity is related to chastity: the masque "represents the body as both separable and inseparable from the soul, dispensable and indispensable for the practice of virtue."[16] While the elder brother

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The Historical Milieu of Milton's *Comus*," *SEL* 15, no. 1 (1975): 146; and William Kerrigan, "The Politically Correct *Comus:* A Reply to John Leonard," *Milton Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1993): 152.

[16] Katharine Eisaman Maus, "A Womb of his Own: Male Renaissance Poets in the Female Body," in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts,*

and his sister both imagine chastity as providing a strong defense against harm, the Lady, after being immobilized by Comus, defiantly declares, "Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind/ With all thy charms, although this corporal rind/ Thou has immanacled" (662-664). The Lady here asserts a distinction between her body and her mind that gestures towards the difference between virginity and chastity; Comus controls her body and could take her virginity by force, but he cannot reach her mind and therefore cannot make her unchaste. For Leah Marcus, this sentiment is the crux of the masque: the "central issue in *Comus*," she writes, "is not virginity, but chastity, a virtue which does not automatically perish along with the loss of virginity, even in cases of rape."[17]

And yet, the distinction between chastity and virginity is often blurred in the masque. In her conversation with Comus, the Lady speaks at one moment of the "sun-clad power of chastity" and in the next of the "sage/ And serious doctrine of virginity," suggesting that the two are not entirely distinct in her mind (781-786). Moreover, it must be admitted that although the masque claims to celebrate the Lady's chastity and virtue—her spiritual fortitude in the face of Comus' temptations—the masque derives much of its drama and suspense by suggesting that the Lady is physically in danger. Indeed, the two brothers primarily discuss the outward physical threats the Lady faces: the "savage heat," the "ill-greeting touch," the "savage fierce, bandit or mountaineer" who might "spoil her virgin purity." The elder brother in particular, as we have seen, insists upon the defensive power of chastity, such that he appears incapable of comprehending that virtue might not protect his sister from rape. When he learns that she has fallen into Comus' trap, he

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Images, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 282.

[17] Leah Sinanoglou Marcus, "The Milieu of Milton's *Comus*: Judicial Reform at Ludlow and the Problem of Sexual Assault," *Criticism* 25, no. 4 (1983): 318.

confidently declares: "Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt/ Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled" (588-589). These lines might at first blush seem to make the same division between the impenetrable mind and the vulnerable body that the Lady discerns, but this is too generous a reading. Rather, the brother here again asserts the inviolability of virtue: it can be threatened ("assailed" or "surprised by unjust force"), he admits, but it cannot be defeated ("hurt" or "enthralled"). The overconfidence the elder brother places in chastity is at times insidious.[18] He claims that no one will attempt to harm a woman possessing "*true* virginity" (436, my emphasis) and that chastity will guard a woman walking through the most dangerous of environments "Be it not done in pride, or in presumption" (430). In this, the elder brother suggests that if an unsavory character attempts to rape a woman, then she must not have been "sincerely" chaste in the first place; she must, to use the modern phrase, have "wanted it" (453). The elder brother, then, although he praises his sister for her chastity and virtue, appears unable to separate her chastity from her virginity. Because she is chaste, he cannot imagine that she might be raped.

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[18] His comments, which pave the way for victim-blaming, are particularly disturbing given the context in which *A Masque* was performed. As Barbara Breasted and Leah Marcus have documented, the Egerton family was tied to two sexual scandals around the time the masque was performed at Ludlow. In the first, a relative of the Egerton family, the Earl of Castlehaven, had been executed for sexual crimes that included encouraging his male servant to rape his wife and step-daughter, and in the second, the Earl of Bridgewater oversaw the investigation into the rape of Margery Evans, a young serving girl who claimed she was robbed and raped near the Welsh border. One particularly disturbing consequence of the assaults is that the victims were punished. The Earl's wife and step-daughter faced charges (of which they were later pardoned), and Margery Evans was thrown in jail after accusing her assailants. Barbara Breasted, "*Comus* and the Castlehaven Scandal," *Milton Studies* 3 (1971): 217; and Marcus, "The Milieu of Milton's *Comus*," 298.

The question of whether the masque is primarily interested in chastity or virginity is further complicated by the figure of Sabrina. Milton encourages his readers to see the nymph and the Lady as kindred spirits. Sabrina's virginity is, like the Lady's, repeatedly emphasized, and the Attendant Spirit thinks to call on Sabrina because he believes she would "be swift / To aid a virgin, *such as was herself* / In hard-besetting need" (854-856, my emphasis). Despite their similarities, Sabrina's backstory indicates that she holds a different attitude toward the body than the one the Lady professes. The Attendant Spirit tells how Sabrina, once mortal, died:

> The guiltless damsel flying the mad pursuit
> Of her enraged stepdame Guendolen,
> Commended her fair innocence to the flood
> That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course. (828-831)

The Attendant Spirit claims to have heard of Sabrina's fate from the shepherd Meliboeus, a figure often identified as Edmund Spenser, who recounts Sabrina's story in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*. Sabrina's tale can also be found in both Geoffrey of Monmouth and in Milton's own *History of Britain*.[19] In these other accounts, Sabrina does not kill herself, but is thrown into the river by the raging Guendolen. Milton presents Sabrina's death as a choice, then, and her choice to die rather than fall into Guendolen's power reveals an attitude about bodily control and integrity that opposes the Lady's. While the Lady takes the position that harm to the body is not harm to the spirit, Sabrina elects to

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[19] For other accounts of Sabrina's death, see Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed., (New York: Longman, 2006), II.x.17-19; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain,* ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007), II.25; and John Milton, *History of Britain*, ed. French Fogle, vol. 5 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 18.

kill herself rather than lose control of her body. Sabrina is the Lady's savior, but her presence undermines the distinction the Lady professes between mind and body.

A Masque, then, although it inarguably praises chastity, raises questions about the power and strength of chastity, as well as the relationship between chastity and virginity. While Milton's masque engages and explores these questions, they no doubt spring at least in part from the peculiarities of chastity itself. In many ways, *A Masque* reflects an interest in temptation and its necessity for virtue that can be seen throughout Milton's oeuvre, from *Areopagitica* (1644) to *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671). Indeed, in his writings, Milton repeatedly makes the case that one must be tempted and choose rightly in order to be praised; in *Areopagitica*, he writes that "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian."[20] For Milton, true virtue consists in being enticed, in seeing the "baits and seeming pleasures" of sin and still refusing. But the celebration of chastity complicates this model; if the Lady is to prove herself virtuous, she must, on some level, desire to drink from Comus' cup. But if virtue requires the Lady to be tempted, chastity, which requires adherents not only to act a certain way, but to think a certain way as well, is arguably incompatible with temptation. Once one desires, one is no longer chaste. While Eve can consider eating the apple and in the midst of her temptation be "yet sinless," it is unclear how much the Lady can desire (or if she can at all) before she is no longer chaste.[21]

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[20] John Milton, *Areopagitica*, ed. Ernest Sirluck, vol. 2 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 514-515.
[21] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* ed. Alastair Fowler (New York: Longman, 1998), IX.659.

The masque can, consequently, seem uncertain at times about the degree to which the Lady is actually at risk of forcibly losing her virginity. While it is feared by the younger brother and the Lady, Comus himself desires, not to force her, but to persuade her to give in to pleasure. Whether or not the Lady is actually in danger of rape, the threat of force is pervasive in the masque and reveals a second way in which chastity is different from other virtues: one practicing chastity must guard not only against one's own desires, but against the sinful desires of others. This, in turn, calls for rethinking the role of the body in the practice of virtue. Elsewhere, Milton suggests that the body is indeed implicated in the virtuous life. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve are approvingly said to eat so that they "sufficed/ Not burdened nature," while afterwards, Michael warns Adam to "observe/ The rule of not too much" in what he eats and drinks, "seeking from thence/ Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight."[22] Milton also, in *Apology Against a Pamphlet,* argues in favor of a masculine chastity precisely because man (not woman) was made in God's image: "if unchastity in a woman whom Saint *Paul* termes the glory of man, be such a scandall and dishonour, then certainly in a man who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable."[23] Many vices, then, particularly those practiced by Comus and his companions—gluttony, intemperance, licentiousness—suggest that pollution of the soul follows from pollution of the body. But the threat of forcible sexual assault, in which the body is polluted against one's will, complicates the notion that what happens to the body is related to the state of one's soul.

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[22] Milton, *Paradise Lost,* V.451-452, XI.530-533.
[23] John Milton, *An Apology Against a Pamphlet*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, vol. 1 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 892.

Chastity is also unique amongst virtues because its social and theological connotations had very recently been altered by the Protestant Reformation in a way that makes the masque's exuberant praise of virginity difficult to parse. Following the Reformation, celibacy was no longer required of priests and the monasteries and nunneries were dissolved in England; consequently, Lawrence Stone observes, the "medieval Catholic ideal of chastity, as a legal obligation for priests, monks and nuns and as an ideal for all members of the community to aspire to, was replaced by the ideal of conjugal affection."[24] As married chastity replaced celibacy as an ideal, John Rogers notes, lifelong celibacy "was devalued and dismissed as sinful popery."[25] "Maidenly virginity" he continues, "maintained its status as a moral ideal, but it was strictly a temporary state, the condition of bodily integrity that best qualified an individual, usually female, for her proper entry into legitimate marriage."[26] Given this, it is difficult to imagine a masque commissioned for the Egerton family starring fifteen year-old Alice that would celebrate a virtue other than chastity. Female virtue in the Renaissance primarily meant sexual virtue, and for a young, unmarried girl like Alice, chastity would imply virginity. But, precisely because the masque presents the Lady's trial as a triumph of virtue over "sensual folly, and intemperance" more generally, the idiosyncrasies of chastity are made evident, which in turn raises questions regarding the limits of virtue

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[24] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), 135. See also William Haller and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1942): 235-272; and Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250-1550): An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 381-396.
[25] John Rogers, "The Enclosure of Virginity: The Poetics of Sexual Abstinence in the English Revolution," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England,* eds. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 233.
[26] Rogers, "The Enclosure of Virginity," 233.

and the relationship between body and spirit (974). I turn now to Sabrina's rite in the hopes that, by understanding her rite in detail, we can better understand the masque's conflicting attitudes toward chastity. But first, I wish to pause here to make a case for why sacramental theology might be a particularly generative way for thinking through the thorny questions regarding chastity that the masque poses.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Protestant reformers sought to maintain the position that sacraments are gifts freely given by God and unmerited by humans, but this meant they had to guard constantly against the (reasonable) impression that humans played a role in making the sacraments effective, either by participating in them or by having faith in them. According to the reformers, humans are passive receivers in the sacraments, despite the fact that the sacraments are rituals that involve human performance and participation. Similarly, chastity is a virtue that requires us to think creatively about what counts as agency. Agency, the "ability or capacity to act or exert power," sits somewhat uneasily with chastity, a virtue that is observed, not by performing certain actions as, for example, the virtues of courage and faith are, but by *avoiding* certain behaviors and thoughts.[27] Simply put, chastity is not about what you should do; it is about what you should not do. The odd relationship between chastity and agency is stressed throughout the masque when the word "virtue" stands in for "chastity." "Virtue" comes from the French word "virtu," meaning "power," a sense that the elder brother seems to take literally. As we have seen, he envisions an active and militant chastity, one that makes women strong, untouchable nymphs like Minerva or Diana. For the elder brother, chastity *does* something: it protects and defends. But as we have seen, the

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[27] *OED Online*, s.v. "agency, n.".

masque, in several ways, questions the sufficiency of chastity. The Lady's predicament in which, as Woodhouse and Lewalski point out, she is immobilized despite her virtue, raises questions about the limits of chastity's power. It cannot, it turns out, alter the will and intentions of lustful foes. Numerous Church Fathers acknowledged this reality, and there is consequently a long history in Christianity of distinguishing spiritual chastity from physical virginity and asserting the superiority of the former over the latter.[28] Isidore, Ambrose, and most notably Augustine all argue that the body cannot be corrupted unless the mind is willing, and so rape victims should not be considered unchaste.[29] In his *City of God,* Augustine writes that "no one, however magnanimous and shamefast, has it always in his power to decide what shall be done with his flesh, having power only to decide what he will in his mind accept or refuse."[30] Augustine here shifts agency away from control of the body—which can never be guaranteed—and instead places "power" in the realm of intention. If agency is the "ability or capacity to act or

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[28] See Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3-7.

[29] Corrine Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 89-91. Saunders goes on to note that despite the early church's insistence upon the distinction between mind and body, the difficulty of assessing the will and intention of the raped woman meant that these theoretical distinctions were not always neatly applied: "The issue of rape focuses the difficulty of discerning the truth of human will and motivation, for this truth is crucial in any assessment of the raped woman's virtue. On a theoretical level the purity of the unwilling victim of rape was absolutely held to endure; in reality it was difficult to distinguish cases where pleasure had been experienced or consent willingly given from those where spiritual resistance had been absolute. This difficulty was compounded by the belief that the experience of physical pleasure was hard to avoid, particularly for women, because of the physical and instinctive construction of desire" (97).

[30] Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans,* trans. George E. McCracken, 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), I.79.

exert power," then chastity asks us to think about agency elastically: either as the capacity *not* to act, or, if the body is forced, in the power of the will to accept or refuse.

In addition to their shared interest in agency, chastity and sacramental theology are also deeply concerned with the relationship between the material and the spiritual realms. As Chapter One demonstrated, reformers insisted that material things like water and bread are not capable of causing spiritual benefits, though these outward, material elements are obviously indispensable to practicing the sacraments. Reformation sacramental theology thus posits an unintuitive relationship between the material and spiritual realms. Christians are to believe that when they perform a certain ritual act, grace is bestowed, but they must also believe that the outward action they perform does not cause or confer that grace. Reformers, we shall see below, attempted to explain this puzzling relationship between the outward signs and their promises in various ways. Chastity, as we have seen, is similarly fraught with questions about the relationship between matter and spirit. Maus aptly points out that the question of whether virginity is, as Augustine argued, separable from chastity depends upon the relationship between body and soul. "If the universe of *Comus* is dualist," she writes, "then the Lady's intuition of the safety of her mind within her body…is correct. If it is not, she is not."[31] Along with the issue of whether body and soul are indeed separable—a question especially pertinent for a materialist poet like Milton—*A Masque* demonstrates how quickly discussions of chastity can transform into discussions of virginity, and vice versa. Despite then, the patristic insistence upon distinguishing between chastity and virginity, the two are hard to keep apart precisely because the categories of body and spirit are

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[31] Maus, "A Womb of his Own," 281.

difficult to separate. Let us turn now to Sabrina's sacramental rite, which, through its use of allegory, offers new ways to think about agency and the relationship between matter and spirit.

Sabrina's Rite: Literal or Figurative?

Sabrina's sacramental rite consists of two parts. First, the nymph sprinkles "Drops" from her "fountain pure," on the Lady's breast, finger, and lip, then she places her "chaste palms moist and cold" on the "marble venomed seat/ Smeared with gums of glutinous heat" (911-917). Comus' spell "[loses] his hold" and the Lady is freed (918). I am particularly concerned here with the second part of the rite, which appears to work, at least on one level, according to a mundane, familiar physical principle: that placing something cold onto something hot will have a cooling effect. That is, if we put aside for the moment whatever figurative meaning Sabrina's touch represents, on the literal, physical level, her rite is effective because her cold hands cool the heat of the gums. Similarly, it makes sense at the literal level that Sabrina's "moist" palms would cause the gums to lose their "hold." Critics have long contested the identity and source of the gums, but one reading that has been offered is that they are tree gums.[32] This identification is supported by Milton's other uses of "gums"; he uses the word three times in *Paradise*

[32] Beth Bradburn, "Bodily Metaphor and Moral Agency in *A Masque*: A Cognitive Approach," *Milton Studies* 43 (2004): 30; and Michael Gillum, "Yet Once More, 'Gumms of Glutenous Heat,'" *Milton Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2010): 48, identify the gummy substance that glues the Lady to her chair as tree gums or resin. Stanley Archer, "'Glutinous Heat': A Note on *Comus*, l.917," *Milton Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1973): 99; and Shuger, "The Bliss of Dreams," 140, identify the gums as bird lime, and John Leonard, "Saying 'No' to Freud: Milton's *A Mask* and Sexual Assault," *Milton Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1991): 130, likens them to horse glue.

Lost, always in connection with plants and trees.[33] Moreover, many critics have suggested that the gums come from the Lady, whom Comus associates with a tree when he threatens to wave his wand and turn her into a "statue" or make her "Root-bound" like Daphne (660-661).[34] Milton's word choice is important here, because unlike resin, which also oozes from trees and shrubs, gums are water-soluble.[35] There emerges, then, another physical reason for why Sabrina's rite is effective: her "moist" hands meet a substance that dissolves in water. Once the gums dissolve, the Lady is freed. Sabrina's ritual therefore appears to work on the literal level by physically altering the "gums of glutinous heat" in two ways: by countering their heat with Sabrina's cool, chaste palms and by dissolving the gums in water.

While we can read Sabrina's actions as literally altering the gums so as to free the Lady, we can also explore the rite's details in light of their figurative meanings. The heat of the gums and the coldness of Sabrina's hands, of course, play on the metaphorical

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[33] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* IV.248, IV.630, and XI.327. See also Milton's use of "gummy," in *Paradise Lost,* X.1076.

[34] The sense that the gums are sexual in nature has been widespread. Some read the gums as Comus' semen, arguing, after all, that it is his spell and his phallic "rod" that traps the Lady to the marble chair. See for example John T. Shawcross, "Two Comments," *Milton Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1973): 98. But many have suggested that the gums originate with the Lady herself and serve as evidence that she is responding to Comus' offer. For some, this is not a huge problem. Shuger, "The Bliss of Dreams," 148-152, links the gums to the same sort of unconscious bodily function as nocturnal emissions, which, though not sinful because the will does not consent, are still evidence of humanity's concupiscence. Similarly, James W. Broaddus, "'Gums of Glutinous Heat,' in Milton's *Mask* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," *Milton Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2003): 210, reads the gums as evidence of the Lady's sexual maturity, which is necessary for her trial to be truly tempting; she cannot prove her chastity if she is not really tempted, he argues. But others have read the gums as a sign of "some spiritual deficiency" in the Lady. John Carey, *Milton,* (London: Arco, 1970), 46.

[35] *OED Online*, s.v. "gum, n." The *OED* entry for "gum, n.2, 1a" makes this distinction: "a viscid secretion issuing from certain trees and shrubs, which hardens in drying but is usually soluble in cold or hot water, in this respect differing from resin."

associations of chastity with coldness and lust with heat. In cooling the gums with her hands, then, Sabrina is figuratively cooling the lust (perhaps of Comus, perhaps of the Lady) that is signified by the gums. Similarly, while I have above read Sabrina's "moist" hands literally, we should remember that she is the goddess of the river Severn and that the river's Latin name is Sabrina. That the "gums of glutinous heat" are water-soluble could refer to the fact that only Sabrina can dissolve the gums. Lastly, we should keep in mind Woodhouse's interpretation of Sabrina's rite: in the larger allegory of *A Masque,* Sabrina's intervention offers an infusion of divine grace without which the Lady could not return home, thus demonstrating humanity's dependence upon God for salvation.

The nature of allegory is such that these meanings can exist simultaneously; we do not need to decide whether the sacrament functions literally *or* figuratively because the answer must be that these meanings operate at the same time.[36] Moreover, we should not ignore the rite's literal level and focus solely on its figurative meanings. Indeed, Angus Fletcher, Edward Honig and Rosemund Tuve have all asserted the importance of the literal story in allegory. As Fletcher puts it, the "whole point" of allegory is that it does not need to be read "exegetically."[37] The literal level makes sense on its own and is

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[36] Shawcross' 1973 description of the scene captures the way in which various levels of meaning converge in the rite: "The chasteness of the palms is needed to counteract the sinfulness; the moistness, to make the gum soluble; and the cold, to nullify the heat. The palms, of course, indicate the laying on of hands, that is, the giving of the Holy Spirit." Shawcross, "Two Comments," 98.

[37] Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 7. Similarly, Edward Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 5, writes that in a "good allegory…the narrative, the story itself, means everything." Rosemund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 50-51, remarks that "maintaining the literal sense [of a story] is understood as an element in the figure of allegory," when discussing Britomart, who, she says, "does not cease to be the faithful human lover in quest of a particular person" though her quest does represent

only made richer by allegorical interpretation. We cannot, then, ignore or read our way out of the mundane, mechanical character of Sabrina's rite, though we might be tempted, given that its details are difficult to reconcile with Protestant sacramental theology. As I will argue below, the reformers were adamant that the sacramental signs (washing in baptism or eating in communion) did not create or cause the sacrament's spiritual benefits. The sacrament of baptism, for example, does not use water to wash off a material thing called "sin" that stains the skin. Sabrina's rite, however, when read literally, appears to function mechanically. It *does* seem as though her outward action causes the rite's effect: the touch of her hands alters the gums by applying moisture and coldness, and as a result, the gum loosens and the Lady is released. Sabrina's rite thus threatens first, to make sacraments too physical by suggesting that they operate according to the laws of physics and nature. And if this were true, then Protestant theology would face a second threat: that sacraments are not freely given gifts, but works wherein humans could, by applying the laws of nature, win grace.

The question I am exploring here, though similar, differs from one explored in the previous chapter. There, Spenser's depiction of the well and balm as medicinal conflicted with reformers' descriptions of how the elements of sacraments—the bread and water—related to the grace they promised. Here, the question is of the significance of Sabrina's act as a whole and whether her rite operates literally or metaphorically, materially or spiritually. Put another way, to what extent is the outward action performed in the

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something larger than herself. Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 5, defines allegory differently, arguing that "allegory must be, unlike a parable or a fable, incoherent on the narrative level, forcing us to unify the work by imposing meaning on it." See also Gordon Teskey, "Allegory," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* ed. Roland Greene, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

sacrament related to what the sacrament is believed to effect? Does the water of baptism literally wash away sins, or does washing only metaphorically represent the spiritual cleansing undergone? When one eats the host in Communion, does he literally eat Christ's body or is the "eating" only metaphorical? If Spenser's characterization of the sacraments as medicine in Chapter One was about nouns—the material elements of bread, wine, and water and their relationship to grace—the present chapter is about verbs—the outward actions of washing and eating and their significance.

As we saw in Chapter One, Protestant reformers were united in their conviction that sacraments do not contain grace or confer it reliably by virtue of being performed as the Catholic Church taught. The reformers also believed that while the sacraments should be observed in accordance with Christ's instructions, they were not necessary for salvation. They thus faced the challenging task of explaining the relationship between the outward actions and the promises they signified in a way that did not make the latter an effect of the former, and they consequently developed various theories as to how the sacramental signs related to the effects they promise. Brian Gerrish has identified three main positions amongst reformers:

> symbolic memorialism, symbolic parallelism, and symbolic instrumentalism. In all three the shared component is the notion that a sign or symbol "points to" something else. They differ in that the reality pointed to is variously thought of as a happening in the past, a happening that occurs simultaneously in the present, or a present happening that is actually brought about through the signs.[38]

Symbolic memorialism is the position ascribed to Ulrich Zwingli, who considered the sacraments "a public testimony of that grace which is previously present" but held that no

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[38] B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 167.

grace was conferred in the act of the sacrament.[39] Symbolic parallelism and symbolic instrumentalism are similar in that both consider grace to be conferred in the sacramental act, but symbolic instrumentalism imagines the sacraments as serving an "instrumental" function in conferring grace, while symbolic parallelism does not. The definitions provided by Gerrish neatly categorize the reformers and their stances on sacramental efficacy and causality, but for our investigation of Milton's masque, the writings of the reformers themselves are much more helpful in teasing out the significance they ascribed to the outward signs. When we turn to these writings, we find that although the reformers insisted that the outward sacraments did not cause or create the sacrament's spiritual effects, they are nevertheless anxious about the outward signs. The reformers care a great deal that the signs appropriately reflect the promises they signify, and at times, they appear to betray a yearning that the signs could be efficacious in themselves—that through the material, we might reach the divine.

In his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), for example, Martin Luther insists that it is "not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone," but rather "faith in that word of promise to which baptism is added" as a sign.[40] Similarly, he argues that the bread and wine of communion are "memorial sign[s]" of Christ's promise of salvation, and that faith, not bread and wine, is the primary element of the sacrament.[41] The "whole power of the mass consists in the words of Christ," he writes, "in which he testifies that forgiveness of sins is bestowed on all those who believe that his body is given and his

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[39] Ulrich Zwingli, *Account of Faith*, in *On Providence: And Other Essays,* ed. William John Hinke (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1983), 47.
[40] Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Three Treatises,* trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 188.
[41] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 162.

blood poured out for them."[42] Indeed, Luther writes in his Small Catechism (1529) that the words "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" are the "essential thing in the sacrament" when they are accompanied by eating and drinking.[43] And yet, despite his insistence that faith and not the outward signs is the essential element of the sacraments, Luther is nonetheless concerned with explaining the outward signs and making a case for their appropriateness. When writing on baptism, for example, he explains the promise of the sacrament by referring to its outward sign. According to Luther, baptism does not promise the mere cleansing of sins, but also death and resurrection or "full and complete justification."[44] This promise is reflected, he argues, in the outward sign: "When the minister immerses the child in the water it signifies death, and when he draws it forth again it signifies life."[45] And, though he admits it is not "necessary," Luther writes that he would prefer the participant "completely immersed in the water, as the word says and as the mystery indicates" so as "to give to a thing so perfect and complete a sign that is also complete and perfect."[46] Luther, then, while firmly denying that the outward washing provides the "full and complete justification," is eager to establish the suitability of the outward sign. Milton would make a similar argument some years after *A Masque* was performed, in his theological treatise, *De doctrina Christiana*, where he argues for baptism by immersion rather than sprinkling on the grounds that the former but not the latter depicts actual washing: "when you wash

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[42] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 161.
[43] Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings,* ed. Timothy F. Lull, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 328.
[44] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 190.
[45] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 190.
[46] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 191.

your hands," he observes, "you do not just sprinkle them, you put them right in the water."[47]

Luther's commitment to the outward signs is also reflected in his views on the theological question of "real presence." Luther steadfastly asserted that Christ's real, corporal body was present in the bread and wine consumed in the Eucharist. In doing so, he rejected the claims of other reformers, most notably Zwingli, that Christ's words in Matthew, "This is my body," were figurative rather than literal. Luther insisted upon the real, corporal presence of Christ in the Eucharist in part because any other reading, to him, would be a distortion of Scripture in order to pacify human reason and human understandings of corporality.[48] But, his writings also suggest that he maintained his position so stridently because he believed that the sign of the sacrament, the "pledge of God's promise" was not the bread itself, but "a single new substance formed out of the union of the bread and the body," because at the Last Supper, Christ did not offer mere bread to his disciples, but "his body *with* the bread."[49] Thus, Luther describes the sacrament as Christ giving his body to assure us of his promise of salvation. He writes that in offering the bread and wine, it is as though Christ said: "that you may be absolutely certain of this irrevocable promise of mine, I shall give my body and pour out

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[47] John Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. Maurice Kelley, trans. John Carey, vol. 6 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 550. The dating of *De doctrina* has been disputed, but it is believed that Milton began working on the treatise in the late 1640s and stopped writing, leaving the manuscript unfinished, at the time of the Restoration in 1660. See Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, "*De Doctrina Christiana:* An England That Might Have Been," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, eds. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 425-426.
[48] Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 102-103.
[49] Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude,* 165.

my blood, confirming this promise by my very death, and leaving you my body and blood as a sign and memorial of this same promise."[50] Though he denies that consuming the bread and wine confer benefits on their own, Luther is here again concerned that the signs—and our understanding of them—accurately reflect the promise God makes in the Eucharist.

Zwingli, the Zurich reformer who famously denied that grace was conferred in the sacraments, perhaps surprisingly, shared Luther's interest in the outward signs. Zwingli rejected the notion that what happened outwardly in the sacrament also happened inwardly, and instead held that the sacraments commemorate Christ's sacrifice and provide outward assurances to others that one is a follower of Christ.[51] In his *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525)*,* Zwingli defines sacraments as "signs or ceremonials…by which a man proves to the Church that he either aims to be, or is, a soldier of Christ, and which inform the whole Church rather than yourself for your faith."[52] Consequently, he viewed the Eucharist as a "commemoration of Christ's death, not a remitting of sins."[53] Despite the commemorative and confessional functions Zwingli attributes to the sacraments, he, like Luther, was mindful of the significance of the particular signs, washing and eating, that God instituted. In his *An Exposition of the*

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[50] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 158.
[51] W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to his Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 80.
[52] Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion,* ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1981), 184.
[53] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 228.

Faith, he declares it a "virtue" of the sacraments that there is an "analogy between the signs and the things signified."[54] He identifies a twofold analogy in the Eucharist:

> The first is to Christ. For as the bread supports and sustains human life, and wine makes glad the heart of man, so Christ alone sustain[s] and supports and rejoices the soul when it has no other hope…The second analogy is to ourselves. For as bread is made up of many grains and wine of many grapes, so by a common trust in Christ which proceeds from the one Spirit the body of the Church is constituted and built up out of many members a single body.[55]

The sacramental signs, though they are not efficacious in themselves, are not insignificant for Zwingli. Milton too, though he denies that Christ's body is present in the bread in *De doctrina*, nonetheless asserts the significance of the outward signs by interpreting them analogously:

> That living bread which, Christ says, is his flesh, and the true drink which, he says, is his blood, can only be the doctrine which teaches us that Christ was made man in order to pour out his blood for us. The man who accepts this doctrine with true faith will live for ever. This is as certain as that actual eating and drinking sustain this mortal life of ours for a little while.[56]

Meditating on the analogous relationship between the sign and signified, for both Zwingli and Milton, thus yields insights into the believer's relationship with Christ.

Zwingli also uses the language of the outward sign (eating) to describe inward and invisible actions. Though he denies that believers eat Christ's corporal body in the Eucharist, he admits that they can eat "sacramentally":

> when you come to the Lord's supper to feed spiritually upon Christ, and when you thank the Lord for his great favor, for the redemption whereby you are delivered from despair, and for the pledge whereby you are assured of eternal salvation, when you join with your brethren in partaking

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[54] Ulrich Zwingli, *An Exposition of the Faith*, in *Zwingli and Bullinger,* ed. and trans. Rev. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 263.
[55] Zwingli, *An Exposition*, 263.
[56] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, 553-554.

> of the bread and wine which are the tokens of the body of Christ, then in the true sense of the word you eat him sacramentally. You do inwardly that which you represent outwardly, your soul being strengthened by the faith which you attest in the tokens.[57]

For Zwingli, sacraments strengthen faith not because they bestow it, but because by participating, believers affirm and testify to their faith. He also, while denying that inward benefits accompany the outward actions, demanded that the participant be honest in her outward oath. It was crucial to him that the outward sign accurately reflect the inward and invisible. He therefore condemns those who participate in the outward sacrament without participating inwardly (i.e. eating sacramentally): "For if we join with the Church in the Lord's Supper as though we held this faith, but falsely," he asks, "are we not guilty of the body and blood of the Lord? Not as eaten naturally and corporally, but because we have falsely testified to the church that we have partaken spiritually when there has been no spiritual partaking."[58] Because sacraments outwardly attest one's commitment to Christ for Zwingli, it is important to him that the outward sign truthfully professes the inward, invisible, spiritual reality. Sign and signified are thus related, not because the outward sign effects what it signifies, but because the sacrament attests to an inward truth. Thus for Zwingli, Stephens writes, a "sacrament does not make present what it signifies, but it shows and attests that what it signifies is there."[59]

Though John Calvin agreed with Luther and Zwingli that sacraments are not efficacious by virtue of being performed, he stakes out a more ambitious role for the outward signs than either of his peers. Unlike Zwingli, who viewed the sacraments as memorials, and Luther, who located efficacy in faith in God's promise, not the outward

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[57] Zwingli, *An Exposition*, 259.
[58] Zwingli, *An Exposition*, 260.
[59] Stephens, *Zwingli,* 81.

sign, Calvin insists in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) that God "accomplishes within what the minister represents and attests by outward action."[60] Writing on baptism, for example, Calvin asserts that God performs the spiritual benefits of baptism "for our soul within as truly and surely as we see our body outwardly cleansed, submerged, and surrounded with water."[61] In this, Calvin imagines a much closer relationship between the outward sign and the inward, spiritual effects of the sacrament than his fellow reformers do. Calvin, like Zwingli, characterizes the relationship between sign and signified as one of analogy. He asserts that "analogy or similitude is the surest rule of the sacraments: that we should see spiritual things in physical, as if set before our very eyes."[62] Indeed, he writes that the analogy leads us to realizations about the spiritual consequences of the sacraments, and like Zwingli, his explanation of the sacraments' spiritual effects borrow the language of the outward sign. Of the Eucharist, he writes,

> when bread is given as a symbol of Christ's body, we must at once grasp this comparison: as bread nourishes, sustains, and keeps the life of our body, so Christ's body is the only food to invigorate and enliven our soul. When we see wine set forth as a symbol of blood, we must reflect on the benefits which wine imparts to the body, and so realize that the same are spiritually imparted to us by Christ's blood.[63]

But Calvin departs from his peers by insisting that the analogy of the Eucharist, that Christ's body nourishes us, is not merely spiritual or figurative. Though he denied that Christ's fleshly, corporal body was present in the Eucharist as Luther argued, Calvin

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[60] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.14.17.
[61] Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.15.14.
[62] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.15.14.
[63] Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.3.

insisted upon what he calls the "true partaking" of Christ's body and blood.[64] "I am not satisfied with those persons," he writes, "who, recognizing that we have some communion with Christ… make us partakers of the Spirit only, omitting mention of flesh and blood."[65] For Calvin, we truly partake of Christ's body and blood as a result of the incarnation, God's choice to take on human form. Calvin argues that God, who is the "spring and source of life," came down from heaven, and "by coming down he poured that power [of life] upon the flesh…in order that from it participation in life might flow unto us."[66] From this it follows, he argues, "that his flesh is truly food and his blood truly drink, and by these foods believers are nourished unto eternal life."[67] The Eucharist, according to Calvin, does not cause Christ's body to be food, but it represents and attests that Christ's "flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink."[68]

For Calvin, then, it is not a figure of speech to say that we are nourished and given life by Christ's flesh and blood; it is literally true that by taking on flesh, Christ extends life to us. Calvin's understanding of the analogy between sign and signified in the Eucharist, then, is closer to equivalence than correspondence. For Zwingli, the outward signs illustrate, through a sort of symmetry, a fact about Christ or the church. Just as wine makes man happy, for example, so the soul rejoices in Christ. For Calvin, the analogy between sign and signified seems to disappear because the two terms being compared are not different enough to create a real parallel. As Calvin states repeatedly, Christ's body and blood *is* our food and drink, and he often speaks of the effects of "true

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[64] Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.5. See also Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 176.
[65] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.7.
[66] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.8.
[67] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.8.
[68] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.4.

partaking," of participating in Christ's body and blood, in physical terms. "Christ pours his life into us, as if it penetrated into our bones and marrow," he writes, and "By true partaking of him, his life passes into us and is made ours."[69] It is worth mentioning again that Calvin insisted that "true partaking" is not only spiritual, but physical as well, and so he often speaks of Christ's body as being located in the believer's flesh. He writes, for example, of the "special comfort for the godly" that as a result of Christ's participation in the flesh, they "find life in their own flesh."[70] Similarly, when speaking of how it is possible that we truly partake of Christ's flesh, Calvin's response stresses that Christ is physically, not just metaphorically, present in us. "Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such a great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses," he argues.[71] Calvin, then, though he shared Zwingli's opinion that sacraments serve as analogies, speaks of the Eucharist as though its sign and signified are not so much parallel phenomena, as they are merely different versions of the same thing: life-giving nourishment.

The sense that sign and signified collapse for Calvin is bolstered by another claim he makes that distinguishes him from his peers. He argues that the outward signs of the sacraments are neither empty nor ineffectual: God "does not feed our eyes with a mere appearance only, but leads us to the present reality and effectively performs what it

[69] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.10, 4.17.5.
[70] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.8.
[71] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.10.

symbolizes."[72] Calvin insists that though grace is not contained within the signs, the signs exhibit the reality they signify. Writing on the Eucharist, he admits

> that the breaking of bread is a symbol; it is not the thing itself. But, having admitted this, we shall nevertheless duly infer that by the showing of the symbol the thing itself is also shown. For unless a man means to call God a deceiver, he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by him.[73]

Because God would not trick us, Calvin reasons, the signs must present the reality they symbolize, and this thinking, again, makes separating the sign from the signified a difficult task. Calvin, then, shares his peers' concern and interest with the outward signs, though in many ways he goes further than either Luther or Zwingli in joining the sign and its promise.

Although the reformers insisted upon a separation between the outward actions of the sacraments and the inward, spiritual effects, they, along with Milton, repeatedly betray a strong interest in explaining the meaning and proper practice of the outward signs. For them, these signs are not arbitrary; they are related closely to the promises to which they are attached. Thus for both Luther and Zwingli, albeit in different ways, it is important that the outward sign be practiced in a way that accurately reflects the meaning of the sacrament. We also find Zwingli and Calvin using the language of the outward sign, of cleansing and nourishment, to explain the sacraments' inward effects. These ways of thinking, I want to suggest, subtly undermine the reformers' declarations that the outward signs can be separated from and deemed irrelevant to the sacrament's spiritual benefits. For while these reformers officially take the position (in varying degrees) that the outward signs are merely symbolic and ineffectual in themselves, their language

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[72] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.15.14.
[73] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.10.

forges connections between the sign and the promise as if, for example, baptism truly effected the death and resurrection it so perfectly and completely signifies. This is particularly true of Calvin, who not only argued that the outward signs are not "empty" symbols, but who also, in his description of "true partaking," posits an extremely close relationship between the outward eating and the spiritual nourishment Christ provides. The Eucharist is not so much an analogy of a spiritual reality as it is a dramatization of the way Christ's body physically nourishes the flesh. Consequently, the language of the sign (eating the Eucharist) and of the signified (Christ's life-giving body penetrating our flesh) frequently overlap.

This is not to argue that the reformers secretly believed that the sacraments worked physically and materially. What their writings suggest, though, is that the strict categories used to discuss sacraments—outward versus inward, material versus spiritual, literal versus metaphorical—are less distinct than is commonly acknowledged. Turning back now to *A Masque,* I wish to make two observations. The first is that the literal, mechanical reading of Sabrina's rite is not so unusual or at odds with Reformation theology as it first appeared. The reformers' writings reveal that while their official stance was that sacraments are only efficacious through the will of God and through faith, they often speak of the sacraments as if the outward signs are related to the spiritual benefits they promise. This inconsistency on their part speaks to the difficult of thinking in purely spiritual terms, especially about a rite that includes physical actions. The second is that allegory, because it allows us to read Sabrina's rite both literally and figuratively, is a particularly well-suited mode for representing sacrament. As noted above, we can read Sabrina's rite on different levels simultaneously; it works both in a very physical and

literal way by altering the gums with coolness and moisture *and* in a figurative way by countering lust with chastity. Allegory's capacity to double-speak allows Milton to capture both the undeniable, physical aspects of sacrament as well as its symbolic and spiritual nature. And allegory, because it can present multiple levels of meaning at once, can trouble the distinction between matter and spirit that sacramental theology depends upon but which, as the reformers' writings attest, is difficult to maintain.

Allegorical Officiants

As we saw above, reformers rejected the notion that the sacramental signs, washing and eating, could effectively bestow grace. Such a position would make sacraments too physical and would suggest that they operated materially rather than spiritually. It would also challenge the Reformation teaching that humans receive the sacraments passively, for if sacraments were to confer spiritual benefits as a consequence of their outward actions, then human officiants, in performing those actions, would be capable of bestowing grace. And this is the other danger of Sabrina's mechanical rite: it appears as though Sabrina, not God working through her, frees the Lady.

Here again, though, Milton's use of allegory allows him to think subtly about agency in the sacraments. Sabrina, as we have seen, has multiple identities in the masque. On one level, she is a mimetically real character, just like the Lady and her brothers. But Sabrina also serves to personify several abstract concepts. She represents chastity, which counters Comus' lust, the Severn river, which bears her name, and within the allegory proposed by Woodhouse, she represents divine grace. In some ways, these personifications, which elevate Sabrina over ordinary human characters, alleviate concerns about her officiating such a literal, mechanical rite. If Sabrina is in some way

divine or transcendent herself, then her capacity to free the Lady would be less problematic than if she were an ordinary human character.

But, as was the case in evaluating the literal and figurative aspects of her rite, we cannot abandon her concrete identity in favor of her abstract ones; Sabrina is both a mimetically real character *and* a personification of abstract principles. In his study of allegory, Fletcher has observed that allegorical characters typically have both human and divine characteristics, and he suggests that we think of allegorical characters as though they have undergone daemonic possession and are "possessed" by the abstract principle they represent. For Fletcher, this places the allegorical character between man and God on a hierarchical scale; the allegorical figure will "act part way between the human and divine spheres, touching on both."[74] I wish to argue here, not that Sabrina's identities place her *between* humans and God, as though a single identity and hierarchical rank can be derived from her various identifications. Rather, I suggest that we read these different identities of Sabrina simultaneously. She is *both* a concrete and particular character *and* the abstract, transcendent concepts she represents. This view of allegorical character also counters that of Gordon Teskey, who sees allegory as a process of violent "capture" of the literal to create meaning. Allegory's "primary work," he writes, "is to force meaning on beings who are reduced for that purpose to substance."[75] Teskey considers allegory violent because in it, the literal, concrete identity of characters are subdued in order to create a more transcendent meaning. To the contrary, I want to insist here that we can and should maintain both Sabrina's literal identity and her abstract ones.

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[74] Fletcher, *Allegory*, 68.
[75] Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*, 25.

When we do, Sabrina's multiple identities affect how we understand her role as officiant. In her identity as a mimetically real person, she fills the role of priestess and therefore represents human agency in the sacrament, but because she is also a personification of abstract concepts, she is transcendent, even divine, and therefore she simultaneously represents divine agency. This convergence of human and divine agency that we see in Sabrina's character is another way in which allegory is able to say multiple things at once and thereby avoid the zero-sum game, so often suggested by the reformers' writings, wherein any agency attributed to humans in the sacrament would detract from God's power. As we saw in the previous chapter, the reformers insisted that sacraments are not works through which humans can earn grace. Rather, the grace conferred in the sacraments is given freely by God. But, if we turn to the reformers' writings on the sacraments, we find there that even if they ultimately credit God alone for salvation, there is a place for human agency in the sacraments—or at least something that looks like it.

Luther, for example, instructs his readers as to how they should receive the Eucharist: "nothing is more important for those who go to hear mass than to ponder these words [Christ's promise of forgiveness] diligently and in full faith. Unless they do this, all else that they do is in vain."[76] Although Luther elsewhere insists that the faith with which the mass-goer hears Christ's words comes from God, his words here suggest that human choice and effort *do* matter in one's salvation.[77] Although following Luther's instructions does not guarantee or earn salvation, his words nonetheless acknowledge a role for humans within the sacrament. Similarly, when writing on the relationship

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[76] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 161-162.

[77] On faith as a consequence of grace, see Luther, *Babylonian Captivity,* 184; and Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 146.

between the officiant and God, Luther seems to combine the actions of man and God in much the same way that Milton fuses human and divine agency in the figure of Sabrina. Of baptism, he writes,

> we can clearly see the difference in baptism between man who administers the sacrament and God who is its author. For man baptizes, and yet does not baptize. He baptizes in that he performs the work of immersing the person to be baptized; he does not baptize, because in so doing he acts not on his own authority but in God's stead. Hence we ought to receive baptism at human hands just as if Christ himself, indeed, God himself, were baptizing us with his own hands…Therefore beware of making any distinction in baptism by ascribing the outward part to man and the inward part to God. Ascribe both to God alone, and look upon the person administering it as simply the vicarious instrument of God, by which the Lord sitting in heaven thrusts you under the water with his own hands, and promises you forgiveness of your sins, speaking to you upon earth with a human voice by the mouth of his minister.[78]

In this rich passage, Luther describes the cooperation between God and the minister. To be sure, Luther credits God, not the minister, with the spiritual benefits of the sacrament; it is God and not the minister who promises forgiveness in the sacrament. And yet, humans are not entirely passive in Luther's description. The minister "performs the work" and acts "as the instrument in God's hands." Moreover, the passage is particularly noteworthy for the ways in which Luther paradoxically collapses notions of action and inaction. The minister "baptizes, and yet does not baptize"; he performs the work, but only as a representative of God. In the final sentence, human and divine agency are merged when Luther asks his reader to consider the minister performing the rite as an instrument of God, such that it is the Lord "with his own hands" who immerses in water and who promises salvation "with a human voice by the mouth of the minster." There is no doubt here that Luther ascribes ultimate agency to God, and yet, it would be incorrect

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[78] Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 184.

to conclude that humans are entirely passive in the sacraments. Absolute notions of human agency and human passivity fail here, and what we find instead is that human and divine agency work together in the sacrament.

Calvin similarly merges human and divine agency in his description of the relationship between the outward performance and God's inward action. "We must also note this," he writes in the *Institutes,* "that God accomplishes within what the minister represents and attests by outward action, lest what God claims for himself alone should be turned over to a mortal man."[79] Calvin here, as Luther does, makes God the prime agent in the sacrament, while the minister merely "represents and attests by outward action" what "God accomplishes." But the dynamic between the outward and inward actions that Calvin describes creates the impression that even if the sacrament is only efficacious through God, the minister and God work together, at the same moment. Calvin also, like Luther, merges divine and human agency when he argues that "a sacrament must not be judged by the hand of the one by whom it is administered, but as if it were from the very hand of God, from whom it doubtless has come."[80] Like Luther, Calvin encourages his reader to see the action of the minister as the action of God, as though the sacrament was performed by God's own hand. Although Luther and Calvin, then, are adamant that sacraments are not human works in which humans win or confer grace, their descriptions of the relationship between the minister's outward performance and God's inward action reveal a place for human agency in the sacraments. To be sure, this is not an agency that can merit or confer salvation on its own, but the minister and the actions he performs are nevertheless an essential aspect of the sacraments God

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[79] Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.17.
[80] Calvin, Institutes, 4.15.16.

instituted. And, moreover, the passages in Luther and Calvin not only create room for human agency, but they imagine a combination of human and divine agency, such that the two work together in concert. What the minister does outwardly, God does inwardly, they argue, and consequently, we should view the minister's action as though it were performed by God himself.

The reformers' accounts of the dynamic between the minister and God in the sacrament challenge not only absolute assertions of human passivity in the sacraments, but also the notion that agency can be located in a single actor. What the reformers depict is a confluence of human and divine agency, where divine agency (which is of course primary) works in and through human agency. The figure of Sabrina, who, due to her allegorical nature, is both human and divine, effectively captures the fusion of human and divine agency the reformers describe. Her identity as a concrete, real character speaks to the role of humans in sacraments, while her metaphorical identifications with grace and chastity represent divine agency. And, because allegory allows Sabrina to possess multiple identities at the same time, she can enact, not just these two types of agencies, but the complex interplay between them in the sacraments.

Conclusion

Allegory, as its etymological definition of "other speaking" suggests, necessarily entails the coexistence of multiple meanings. As Jon Whitman observes, all fiction "tries to express a truth by departing from it in some way," but allegory takes this to the extreme.[81] It "seems to refer to something in the fiction, but actually refers to something

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[81] Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of An Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1.

else in fact. Allegory turns its head in one direction, but turns its eyes in another."[82] There always exists, then, at the bare minimum, two levels of meaning in allegory: the literal and the figurative. I have argued for reading these different levels at the same time in *A Masque*, rather than ignoring or moving past the literal level in favor of a figurative reading. We must read this way, in part, because, as Fletcher puts it, the masque does not require us to read "exegetically." A literal reading of the Lady's ordeal, Sabrina's rite, and her identity makes coherent sense. And, when we do read Sabrina's rite and her identity at both the literal and figurative levels simultaneously, we are given a fuller, more nuanced picture of both the relationship between the spiritual and material and the relationship between human and divine agency in the sacrament. Interpreting Sabrina's rite as both mechanical and metaphorical reflects the real combination of the material and the spiritual in the sacraments. Although the reformers conceived of the sacraments as working inwardly and spiritually, their interest in outward action—how a rite is performed and what it signifies—underscores the materiality of the sacraments. Similarly, by seeing Sabrina as both a real, concrete character and as a personification of abstract principles, we can see in her role as officiant the relationship between divine and human agency in the sacrament. In both cases, what the reformers confidently assert about the sacraments—that they work inwardly and are divine gifts and not human works—is shown to be, not false, but incomplete. Yes, the sacraments operate spiritually and yes, grace is not conferred as a result of human agency, but this does not make matter and human agency irrelevant. In Milton's hands, allegory is able to put forth a more

[82] Whitman, *Allegory*, 2.

nuanced and more accurate picture of the sacraments, precisely because it can say several things at once.

I wish to end by turning back to where we began: with chastity. I have suggested that the masque presents its audience with unclear signals as to what chastity does and what it is. Does chastity provide those who possess it with militant strength, as the elder brother suggests, or is chastity ultimately limited in the protection it provides? And does the masque primarily celebrate chastity as a quality of the mind or as virginity, a bodily state? I wish to suggest here that Sabrina's allegorical rite, which so effectively troubles the binary of matter versus spirit and captures the coincidence of different agencies, can speak to the conflicts surrounding chastity in the masque. Moreover, her rite should be evaluated closely for its capacity to resolve the masque's conundrums precisely because of its location in the narrative. Sabrina's intervention effectively concludes both the masque and its debates regarding chastity. Though chastity is the chief issue of discussion for the majority of the masque, it is hardly mentioned again after Sabrina's rite. Its place within the narrative of the masque therefore suggests that if answers are to be found to the questions the masque poses, they are to be found in Sabrina's performance. And if her rite demonstrates anything, it is that the relationships between matter and spirit and agency and passivity are neither stable nor clear cut. Matter and spirit, we learn from Sabrina's rite, are difficult to separately entirely, even at the conceptual level, and agency, we see, is not a case of all-or-nothing. Humans, like Luther's minister, can be active and passive at the same time, and the agencies of different actors can work simultaneously.

If we look at the masque's questions through this lens, we find, on the issue of chastity's power, that the brother's confident claims of chastity's power are insufficient. Chastity does provide the Lady with power, but it is circumscribed; it is not physical like that of Minerva, nor does it grant the Lady magical powers that repel potential foes. Rather, the Lady's power, evident in her unwavering resistance to Comus' charms, is in her stoic refusal, through which she exerts agency even as she is acted upon. This paradox, by which the Lady acts through seeming inaction, is most evident in the climax of her debate with Comus, when she withdraws, refusing to engage him any longer, reasoning that he has "nor ear, nor soul to apprehend" the "serious doctrine of virginity" (783-786). In her final words to Comus, the Lady professes the kind of overwhelming power the elder brother imagines, but it is a power she refrains from employing. Instead, she acts by withdrawing, by being silent. She tells Comus,

> Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced;
> Yet should I try, the uncontrolled worth
> Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
> To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
> That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,
> And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
> Till all thy magic structures reared so high,
> Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head. (791-798)

It should be noted here, though, that although the Lady threatens Comus with possible physical harm, the agency she professes is slightly different than that of "dread Minerva's bow." The Lady's power, like that of Orpheus, emerges from the force of her language, not her brute strength. But despite the different versions of agency the Lady exhibits, the limits of her agency are inescapable. Regardless of her virtue, her resistance, and her language, her body is controlled by another. Her vulnerable body is subject to the will of Comus and is ultimately dependent upon the aid of others for its release. Chastity thus

provides the Lady with power, but it is not absolute; she is both a subject and an object, powerful and powerless, on her journey through the woods.

The Lady's agency is limited in part, we have seen, because it confronts Comus' agency. But, as the masque's allegory suggests, it is also limited due to her fallen nature, which is why she requires Sabrina's help to secure her salvation. The Attendant Spirit, in his closing speech, gestures towards the limitations of human virtue and offers a vision of cooperation between human and divine agency like that seen in Luther's and Calvin's ministers. "Love Virtue," he warns, for

> She can teach ye how to climb
> Higher than the sphery chime;
> Or if Virtue feeble were,
> Heaven itself would stoop to her. (1018-1022)

The Attendant Spirit here describes a confluence of human and divine agency in the practice of virtue: humans actively strive to be virtuous, he notes, but might still require help from above.[83] The merging of human and divine agency he describes thus reflects the combination of divine and human agency at work in Sabrina's rite. As in the case of the sacraments, then, the idea that agency is located in a single actor—that one is entirely free and empowered to live virtuously on one's own—is shown to be misguided. The Lady possesses agency, but it coexists alongside, working with or against, the agencies of Comus, Sabrina, and heaven.

Similarly, Sabrina's rite provides us with more subtle ways of thinking about the relationship between chastity, body, and soul. Rather than viewing chastity in purely spiritual or bodily terms, Sabrina's rite forges a path for us to think of chastity as a virtue

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[83] Earlier in the masque we are given a hint of such human-divine cooperation when the elder brother describes the Lady's chastity as a "hidden strength/ Which if heaven gave it, may be termed her own" (417-418).

involving both body and spirit. In certain respects, the masque makes a strong case for severing chastity from virginity and thus locating chastity only in the mind. The Lady's predicament, in which her body is "immancled" without her consent and despite her unwavering dedication to virtue, is reason for arguing, as many have, that one can be chaste in spirit even if one's virginity is taken by force. But on the other hand, the masque does not permit a clean severing of body and spirit such that the body becomes wholly irrelevant to the practice of virtue. On the contrary, at various points *A Masque* suggests the importance of the body in living virtuously. The threat posed by Comus' potion, for example, is one of bodily transformation. In those who drink, "their human countenance/ The express resemblance of the gods" is changed into that of an animal, "All other parts remaining as they were" (68-72). This change, though it only applies to the body, is followed by vicious behavior. Those who are altered believe themselves "more comely than before" and "all their friends, and native home forget/ To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty" (75-77). Comus' potion then, though it only works outwardly, leads to immoral behavior that, crucially, follows when one's face is no longer "The express resemblance of the gods" (69). Elsewhere, the elder brother describes the corrupting impact of lustful acts on the spirit, thus similarly asserting a place for the body in the practice of virtue. He warns his younger brother of bodily sin's corrupting effects on the soul:

> when lust
> By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
> But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
> Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
> The soul grows clotted by contagion,
> Embodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose
> The divine property of her first being. (462-468)

In these lines, the elder brother suggests that outward acts, what is done with the body, can defile the spirit and, like Comus' potion, cause one to lose one's human form and with it, one's divinity. The masque does, then, insist upon the importance of the body, particularly given its resemblance to God, in the practice of virtue. There is, however, no basis for thinking that the Lady would lose her chastity if she were sexually assaulted. Ultimately, then, what is required when thinking through the relationship between chastity, body, and soul, is restraint and nuance. No absolute declarations about the relationship between body and soul will do when it comes to chastity, because the truth is that chastity both is and is not related to the body.

The characters and events of *A Masque* present conflicting ideas about what chastity is and how it functions, but rather than presenting clear and precise answers to these questions, the masque refuses to define chastity absolutely. Instead, through the example of Sabrina's allegorical rite, it encourages its audience to think in deep and subtle ways about chastity. Her rite illustrates the insufficiency of certain claims of Protestant sacramental theology, namely that sacraments work spiritually and are received by humans passively. What is needed, for both sacramental theology and chastity, then, is nuanced thinking that acknowledges and engages with the contradictory and paradoxical nature of both sacraments and chastity. Allegory, we have seen, is an ideal way not only to enact such complex ideas, but to prompt this sort of deep thinking, because it requires readers to hold multiple, potentially competing, interpretations in mind at the same time.

Fit Reading, Figurative Language, and Fallen Agency in *Paradise Lost* X-XI
Chapter Three

The opening lines of *Paradise Lost* announce its intention to "justify the ways of God to men," to explain how it was possible that a good and just God created an Adam and Eve who fell.[1] And while much of the epic is concerned with Adam and Eve's creation and their fall, the poem also looks forward to the possibilities for and mechanisms of their redemption. In both the question of how Adam and Eve fell and in the process by which they obtain salvation after their transgression, Milton seeks to balance human and divine agency, to honor God's omnipotence and goodness while also reserving—indeed, insisting upon—a place for human action and freedom. *Paradise Lost*, then, more explicitly than *The Faerie Queene* or *A Masque,* engages explicitly with the concerns that have animated this project: what is the appropriate relationship between divine and human agency in salvation? And how does the poet represent the agencies of multiple actors working together? As in Chapters One and Two, the stakes are high: if humans are deprived of agency, then God appears a capricious tyrant, but if they are given too much agency in their own salvation, God appears less than omnipotent, dependent upon the actions of humans. In this chapter, I examine Adam and Eve's postlapsarian confession in Books X and XI, an event that Milton presents as the product of both human and divine agency.

As we saw in Chapter One, Protestant reformers did not consider the Catholic sacrament of penance to be a true sacrament, though they did encourage believers to confess their sins, and in Reformation England, general confession was included in

[1] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* ed. Alastair Fowler (New York: Longman, 1998), I.26. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by book and line number.

several prayer book services. In his theological treatise, *De doctrina Christiana*, Milton joins this consensus, writing that penance cannot rightly be called a sacrament because it was not "divinely instituted" and therefore contains "no sign appointed by God to seal the covenant of grace."[2] He goes on to say, however, that he has "no objection" if penance is called a sacrament, "if the word is used loosely" to refer to "sacred things" more generally.[3] Like other Protestants, Milton viewed the sacraments as "visible sign[s]" that God "instituted for the sake of us believers" by which "we testify our faith and obedience to God with sincerity and gratitude."[4] He departs from Calvin and Luther, however, in insisting that the sacraments are not efficacious. Instead, he takes a position closer to that of Zwingli, writing that the sacraments "cannot impart salvation or grace of themselves" and are not necessary for salvation, but are "merely seals or symbols of salvation and grace for believers."[5] Given its subject, then, this chapter takes a slightly more expansive view of sacramentality than previous chapters, considering Adam and Eve's confession in Books X and XI not as a sacrament *per se*, but nevertheless as a moment in which the

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[2] John Milton, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. Maurice Kelley, trans. John Carey, vol. 6 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 560. Milton is widely believed to have authored *De doctrina,* though some scholars, most notably William B. Hunter in his *Visitation Unimplor'd: Milton and the Authorship of De doctrina Christiana* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), have questioned his authorship. See also Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). As noted above in Chapter Two, n.47, the dating of *De doctrina* is uncertain, but many believe it was written while Milton was composing *Paradise Lost* and that it reflects his mature beliefs. I therefore rely on the treatise much more heavily in this chapter than in the previous one. On the relationship between *Paradise Lost* and *De doctrina,* see Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss Upon Paradise Lost* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962).

[3] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 561.

[4] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 542.

[5] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 556.

complex relationship between human and divine agency in salvation is enacted poetically.

In this respect too *Paradise Lost* is unique; more than any other work examined in this project, the epic is anxious about its ability to express theological truths through poetry. The poem is, of course, bold and ambitious, pursuing “Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme,” and when the narrator names the Holy Spirit as his muse, he claims for his poem the status of divinely inspired Scripture (I.16). Yet, despite these expressions of self-confidence, the narrator often voices doubts about his ability to succeed—about the limits of his own fallen agency. In the invocation to Book I, he asks the Holy Spirit for help: “what in me is dark/ Illumine,” he writes, “what is low raise and support” (I.22-23). The darkness and lowness that the narrator acknowledges within himself points to an anxiety that runs throughout the poem: how can a fallen person explain the unfallen world? How can a fallen person speak of God or his justice at all? The narrator must, consequently, ask for divine help to shore up what is “dark” and “low” about him if he is to succeed, thus imagining a cooperation between human and divine agency in his poetic process that mirrors the cooperation he depicts, as I shall argue below, in Adam and Eve’s confession.

Elsewhere, the narrator expresses a different sort of doubt about his poetic project, one rooted not so much in his fallen nature, as in the limitations of his creaturely existence. *Paradise Lost* attempts to depict God and heaven, a task that the narrator acknowledges is both difficult and dangerous. In the invocation to Book III, the narrator addresses “holy light,” asking again for assistance so that he “may see and tell/ Of things

invisible to mortal sight" (III.1, 54-55). In particular, he expresses uncertainty about whether he may speak of celestial light "unblamed":

> Hail holy light, offspring of heaven first-born,
> Or of the eternal co-eternal beam
> May I express thee unblamed? since God is light,
> And never but in unapproached light
> Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
> Bright effluence of bright essence increate. (III.1-6)

The light to which the narrator refers here is both physical light, as suggested later in the invocation when Milton alludes to his literal blindness, and the Son, "the eternal co-eternal beam" through which the invisible God is expressed.[6] In these lines, the narrator discloses his anxieties about his right to speak of light, but it is not, as in Book I, that he is concerned about his ability to present a persuasive argument on God's behalf. Rather, it is light's proximity to God that concerns him, its eternal nature, and its dazzling brightness and unapproachability, that make the poet concerned about his ability to describe it "unblamed." The greatness of the poet's task—and his awareness of his inability to describe God, heaven, hell, and Eden adequately—creates a sense of unease that runs throughout the epic but is crystallized in the narrator's invocations. The responsibility does not lie solely on the narrator's shoulders, however; the epic calls upon the reader to read rightly, to navigate literal and figurative meanings. In this chapter, I explore two moments in which humans must read figurative language correctly if they

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[6] The description of light here as "Bright effluence of bright essence increate" closely echoes the description of the Son given later in Book III. He is

> of all creation first,
> Begotten Son, divine similitude,
> In whose conspicuous countenance, without cloud
> Made visible, the almighty Father shines,
> Whom else no creature can behold; on thee
> Impressed the effulgence of his glory abides,
> Transfused on thee his ample Spirit rests. (III.383-389)

are to understand the limits of their own agency in salvation. First, I examine how metaphor enables Milton to set forth the epic's Arminian view of salvation in Book XI. While these views are articulated clearly in Book III (as well as in his theological treatise), Books X and XI show these doctrines in action, and I argue that metaphor plays a critical role in this episode, allowing Milton to prove God just in Adam and Eve's redemption. Second, I examine the relationship between Eve's confession before Adam and their joint confession before God, arguing that Adam fails to understand that his knowledge of God has been accommodated to his level of comprehension.

Milton's Arminianism and Christian Heroism

While neither *The Faerie Queene* nor *A Masque* contains an explicit articulation of how divine and human agency operate together in salvation, *Paradise Lost* does. In Book III, as Satan travels from hell to earth, the Father discloses what he foreknows: Satan will successfully tempt Adam and Eve to fall. But the Father also reveals that unlike Satan and the rebels, who were "Self-tempted, self-depraved" (III.130), humans will be shown grace and mercy:

> Man shall not quite be lost, but saved who will,
> Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
> Freely vouchsafed. (III.173-175)

In these lines, the Father asserts that salvation will be achieved entirely through his grace "Freely vouchsafed," but he also carves out a place for human agency in salvation: humans will be saved "who will." Many scholars have described these lines, as well as the views Milton expresses in his theological treatise, *De doctrina Christiana,* as

Arminian.[7] Arminianism, named after the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius, seeks a middle path between Calvinism, which maintains that humans are utterly unable to cooperate in their salvation, and Pelagianism, which holds that humans can achieve salvation on their own, without the aid of divine grace.[8] According to Calvin, salvation is entirely a matter of divine agency; grace is only offered to those God predestines for salvation, election does not depend upon one's merit, and God's grace is irresistible (i.e., humans cannot reject it). As Stephen Fallon observes, the Calvinist position, the one most widely accepted by reformed churches, emphasizes "God's freedom and omnipotence" because a "human being can do nothing to limit God's freedom to choose who is to be saved."[9] Pelagianism, named for the British heretic Pelagius, takes the opposite position: humans can achieve salvation entirely on their own, without divine assistance.[10] Arminius seeks a compromise between these two positions. On the one hand, Fallon notes, Arminius was concerned that Calvin's doctrine of unconditional predestination meant that "God withholds the grace necessary to choose the good," which in turn destroys

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[7] For further discussion of Milton and Arminianism, see Maurice Kelley, "The Theological Dogma of *Paradise Lost,* III.173-202," *PMLA* 52, no. 1 (1937): 75-79; Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 58-91; Stephen M. Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism and the Authorship of *De doctrina Christiana*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41, no. 2 (1999): 103-127; Thomas N. Corns, *Regaining Paradise Lost* (New York: Longman, 1994), 78-86; and Benjamin Myers, "Prevenient Grace and Conversion in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2006): 20-36. While scholars generally agree that Milton's views are best described as Arminian, Debora Shuger, "Milton Uber Alles: The School of Divinity in *Paradise Lost* 3.183-202," *Studies in Philology* 107, no. 3 (2010): 401-415, has recently suggested they more closely follow those of English divine John Overall.

[8] For more on Arminius, see Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1971).

[9] Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism," 105-106.

[10] For more on Pelagius and the Pelagian heresy, see John Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study* (New York: AMS Press, 1978) and Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: Seabury Press, 1968).

humans' free will and "makes God the author of sin."[11] But on the other, he agreed with Calvin, against the Pelagians, on the depravity of the will, the notion that after the Fall, humans "can do no good without the aid of grace."[12] Consequently, Arminius argues that "sufficient, resistible grace is given to all and that salvation depends on a free choice to believe or not with the aid of that grace."[13] As Fallon notes, while the Calvinist position stressed divine omnipotence, the Arminian position is concerned with divine justice: "although the merit of salvation rests with Christ, no one can partake of that merit (or forfeit the opportunity) without the chance to choose."[14]

It is this Arminian position that is articulated in Book III. The Son clearly states, contra Calvin, that sufficient grace is offered to all and, contra Pelagius, that humans cannot attain salvation without it:

> man shall find grace;
> And shall Grace not find means, that finds her way,
> The speediest of thy winged messengers
> To visit all thy creatures, and to all
> Comes unprevented, unimplored, unsought,
> Happy for man, so coming; he her aid
> Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost. (III.227-233)

Salvation can only occur by divine grace, and, the Father asserts, the grace offered to all is sufficient for salvation:

> for I will clear their senses dark,
> *What may suffice*, and soften stony hearts
> To pray, repent, and bring obedience due. (III.188-190, my emphasis)

But God's grace is resistible; humans choose to accept it and be saved or to reject it and be damned. The Father says he

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[11] Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism," 107.
[12] Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism," 109.
[13] Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism," 110.
[14] Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism," 106.

> will place within them as a guide
> My umpire conscience, whom if they will hear,
> Light after light well used they shall attain,
> And to the end persisting, safe arrive.
> This my long sufferance and my day of grace
> They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
> But hard be hardened, blind be blinded more,
> That they may stumble on, and deeper fall;
> And none but such from mercy I exclude. (III.194-202)

These lines reflect what Milton argues in *De doctrina,* where he writes that God "excludes no man from the way of penitence and eternal salvation, unless that man has continued to reject and despise the offer of grace, and of grace sufficient for salvation, until it is too late."[15] The Arminian and Miltonic positions thus posit a cooperation between divine and human agency in salvation, unlike the either/or of Calvinism and Pelaganism. God offers his saving grace to everyone, and while salvation is only possible by God's grace, humans can choose to accept or reject that grace. As Maurice Kelley puts it, "the possibility of election results from the grace of God, but the enjoyment of this possibility requires the volition of man."[16]

That Milton's soteriology reserves a role for human choice should come as no surprise, as many of his works celebrate humans' free will, presenting it as both evidence of God's justice and as a prerequisite for virtue. In both *A Masque* and *Paradise Regained,* protagonists prove their virtue by encountering temptation, and Milton's devotion to choice appears even in his prose, particularly in his argument against censorship in *Areopagitica*. There, he articulates the view, expressed throughout this poetry, that humans must have the opportunity to choose in order to be called virtuous: "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and

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[15] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 194.
[16] Kelley, *This Great Argument,* 15.

yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian."[17] The Father makes the same argument in *Paradise Lost,* reasoning that if creatures were not made free,

> what proof could they have given sincere
> Of true allegiance, constant faith or love?
> Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
> Not what they would, what praise could they receive?
> What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
> When will and reason (reason also is choice)
> Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
> Made passive both, had served necessity,
> Not me. (III.103-111)

Without freedom, the Father argues, his creatures would only serve him by "necessity" and therefore could earn no praise from their virtuous obedience. Giving humans the freedom to choose right or wrong, the ability to stand or fall, the Father argues, also makes him blameless for their fall. Man "had of me/ All he could have," the Father insists: "I made him just and right/ Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (III.97-99). And indeed, as Dennis Danielson observes, the poem's Arminian theology frees God from the responsibility for the damned after the Fall. Because sufficient grace is offered to all, humans' wills are "truly decisive," and so "God is not made the author of sin."[18]

But the relationship between human and divine agency that Milton describes in his epic and in his treatise is complicated by his assertions that divine agency makes human choice possible. That is, while humans are free to accept or reject God's grace, they are only able to choose because grace has already restored some (but not all) freedom to them. Thus the Father explains,

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[17] John Milton, *Areopagitica*, ed. Ernest Sirluck, vol. 2 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982), 514-515.
[18] Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, 86.

> once more I will renew
> His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthralled
> By sin to foul exorbitant desires;
> Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand
> On even ground against his mortal foe,
> By me upheld, that he may know how frail
> His fallen condition is, and to me owe
> All his deliverance, and to none but me. (III.175-182)

After the Fall, humans' powers were "forfeit and enthralled/ By sin," and the only way they can "stand/ On even ground against [their] mortal foe" is if they are "Upheld" by God. This description accords with what Milton writes in *De doctrina Christiana*. There, he describes the two processes of vocation and election: God "invites fallen men to a knowledge of the way to placate and worship his Godhead and, out of gratuitous kindness, invites believers to salvation so that those who do not believe are deprived of all excuse."[19] All are subject to the first step, the vocation or "call," which offers them the "knowledge" of how to "placate and worship" God. Milton goes on to describe the effects of the vocation: "the mind and will of the natural man are partially renewed and are divinely moved towards knowledge of God, and undergo a change for the better, at any rate for the time being."[20] All, then, are given the freedom to choose through divine grace, and in the second step, election, God "invites believers to salvation."[21]

This dynamic can be observed in the Father's description of how his grace will lead fallen humans to "prayer, repentance, and obedience due":

> Some I have chosen of peculiar grace
> Elect above the rest; so is my will:
> The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warned

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[19] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 453-454.
[20] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 457.
[21] For further discussion of the distinction between the call and election in *De doctrina,* see Jason A. Kerr and John K. Hale, "The Origins and Development of Milton's Theology in *De doctrina Christiana,* 1.17-18," *Milton Studies* 54 (2013): 202-204.

> Their sinful state, and to appease betimes
> The incensed deity, while offered grace
> Invites; for I will clear their senses dark,
> What may suffice, and soften stony hearts
> To pray, repent, and bring obedience due. (III.183-190)[22]

Humans do not avoid sin all on their own, then, but do so in response to the grace that "Invites" them: it clears their "senses dark," softens their "stony hearts," and makes their repentance and obedience possible. This, of course, grants an even greater role for divine agency in salvation, as even humans' ability to accept saving grace comes from God. And yet, this does not make the human will irrelevant; when "prayer, repentance, and obedience" are "endeavored with *sincere intent*," the Father promises, his "ear shall not be slow," his "eye not shut" (III.191-193, my emphasis).

The relationship between human and divine agency that Milton's Arminianism posits, one in which humans play a small but definitive role in their own salvation, has implications for the epic's vision of heroism. The genre of epic poetry in which Milton writes had traditionally (which is to say, in the epics of Homer and Virgil), focused on a specific type of heroism, one of bravery and physical prowess exhibited on the battlefield. *Paradise Lost,* however, seeks to outdo its epic predecessors by celebrating a higher form of heroism, as the narrator announces in the invocation to Book IX, where he asserts that his argument is "Not less but more heroic than the wrath/ Of stern Achilles" or the "rage/ Of Turnus for Lavinia disespoused" (IX.14-17). Instead, the narrator seeks

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[22] Many critics have argued that the mention of the super-elect, those "Elect above the rest," serves as a moment of Calvinist intrusion in an otherwise Arminian poem. See Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), who attributes the lines to Milton's own self-construction: his "incompatible desires to be both among a special super-elect, marked out by a kind of birthright, and among those who are elect by virtue of their free choices" (187-188).

to celebrate "the better fortitude/ Of patience and heroic martyrdom" (IX.31-32). Consequently, it is Satan, not Christ or Adam, who is modeled after Aeneas when he gives a rousing speech to his comrades after landing in hell despite being inwardly "racked with deep despair," and it is Satan whose shield, like that of Achilles, is compared to the moon (I.126, 287).[23] While Satan is, at least in Books I and II, cast in the mold of the traditional epic hero, the poem defines real heroism not in the fighting skill of Achilles or the cunning of Odysseus, but instead in obedience to God, and ironically, it is through *standing* that characters prove heroic.

Throughout the poem, the word "stand" is used figuratively to refer to one's obedience to God, as when the Father argues that he made man "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall," or when Satan admits that other angels "Fell not, but stand unshaken, from within/ Or from without, to all temptations armed" (III.99, IV.64-65). Creatures act rightly when they choose to "stand," and consequently right action is achieved through a sort of inaction: to *not* fall, to *not* disobey. Thus, when Abdiel rebukes Satan in Book V, accusing him of ingratitude and disobedience, his heroic feat is described by the narrator in terms of constancy: he is "unmoved/ Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified," refusing to "swerve from truth, or change his constant mind" (V.898-902). Likewise, in *Paradise Regained,* Jesus achieves his victory over Satan by standing, both literally and figuratively. In his final temptation of Jesus, Satan places him atop the highest spire of the Temple in Jerusalem and asks him to prove he is the Son of God by casting himself down. "There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright/ Will ask thee skill," Satan

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[23] See Virgil, *The Aeneid,* trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1990), I.270-286, and Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), XIX.410.

taunts,[24]

> To whom thus Jesus: Also it is written,
> Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood.
> But Satan smitten with amazement fell.[25]

This version of heroism is not reserved for angels and the Son of God, but applies to fallen humans as well. In Book XII, through his conversation with Michael, Adam comes to grasp this paradoxical vision of heroism. He learns that it is not physical fighting that makes one heroic, but that instead obedient, faithful acts that might appear "small" or "weak" constitute real victory: "Henceforth," he tells Michael,

> I learn that to obey is best,
> And love with fear the only God, to walk
> As in his presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on him sole depend,
> Merciful over all his works, with good
> Still overcoming evil, and by small
> Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
> Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
> By simply meek; that suffering for truth's sake
> Is fortitude to highest victory. (XII.561-570)

Milton's Arminianism, then, and the relationship between human and divine agency it imagines, is refracted throughout the epic, particularly in its treatment of heroism. The poem asks readers to adjust their preconceived notions of heroism and of agency, to find actions admirable that do not seem so at first glance. It often does so, I want to argue here, through the use of figurative language, which readers must interpret correctly if they are to grasp the epic's paradoxical, counterintuitive brand of heroism. Indeed, throughout *Paradise Lost,* readers are asked to interpret language of power and action figuratively rather than literally. This is true both in the case of the Son's heroic "battle"

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[24] John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, in *Complete Shorter Poems,* ed. John Carey, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), IV.551-552.
[25] Milton, *Paradise Regained,* IV.560-562.

against Satan and in descriptions of creaturely obedience, particularly after the Fall. If any good the fallen Adam and Eve do is only through God's grace—if, like the narrator, they are continually raised and supported by the divine—then figurative language emerges as an important tool in representing human agency and preserving its limits, particularly in salvation.

Prayers that Move: Metaphor in Book XI

While Book III describes the dynamics of salvation, Books X and XI, which depict Adam and Eve's journey to repentance and their confession, put it into action. In what follows, I aim to explain how Milton uses metaphor to enact the theological principles he sets out in Book III and in his treatise. Metaphor is crucial to conveying his theology, I argue, precisely because Milton refuses to take an either/or position on the question of human and divine agency in salvation. Just as in Chapter Two, where allegory allowed Milton to demonstrate *both* divine and human agency and the material and spiritual aspects in Sabrina's rite, so metaphor enables Milton to show human and divine agency working together in Adam and Eve's repentance.

At the end of Book X, after Adam and Eve reconcile and agree not to blame one another for the Fall but instead to "strive/ In offices of love," they decide to beg for God's mercy (X.959-960). The book concludes with their confession; Adam and Eve return to the place where the Son judged them at the beginning of Book X, they fall "prostrate," and

> both confessed
> Humbly their faults, and pardon begged, with tears
> Watering the ground, and with their sighs the air
> Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite. (X.1099-1103)

Book XI then opens to reveal the role that divine grace played in enabling their repentance:

> Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
> Praying, for from the mercy-seat above
> Prevenient grace descending had removed
> The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh
> Regenerate grow instead, that sighs now breathed
> Unutterable, which the spirit of prayer
> Inspired. (XI.1-7)

These lines closely echo what the Father promised in Book III and what Milton describes in *De doctrina*. Adam and Eve's repentance is made possible by "Prevenient grace," the grace offered to all that the Son describes as "unprevented, unimplored, unsought" (III.231). As suggested by the word "for" in line 2, this grace enables their confession, by removing "The stony from their hearts" and promoting their regeneration, just as the Father promised in Book III to "clear their senses dark…and soften stony hearts/ To pray, repent, and bring obedience due" (III.188-190). With their freedom to choose partially restored by this grace, Adam and Eve decide to confess humbly and sincerely.

Adam and Eve's prayers are then received by the Son in heaven, who presents them to the Father. As in Book III, Milton presents Father and Son as separate characters, a choice I read as a reflection of Milton's anti-Trinitarian views, rather than as a theological liberty taken for dramatic purposes.[26] The Son plays the role of intercessor,

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[26] Milton here, and in their conversation in Book III, presents the Father and Son as different characters, though both Catholic and Protestant churches hold that they are, along with the Holy Spirit, separate persons in the same triune God. C. A. Patrides, insisting that the poem is Trinitarian, argues that the separation between Father and Son is presented to suit Milton's dramatic purposes. See C. A. Patrides, "The Godhead in *Paradise Lost*: Dogma or Drama?," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64, no. 1 (1965): 31, and C. A. Patrides, "Milton and the Arian Controversy. Or, Some Reflexions on Contextual Settings and the Experience of Deuteroscopy," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, no. 4 (1976): 250. Others, most notably Maurice

asking that the Father show mercy, though his request for humanity's salvation restates the scheme decided upon in Book III. He repeats his offer to atone for and perfect humans' failings; all man's works, he asks,

> on me
> Good or not good engraft, my merit those
> Shall perfect, and for these my death shall pay. (XI.34-36)

He then asks that Adam and Eve not die immediately, but be given the opportunity to make peace with God, and he looks forward to a time, when, through his sacrifice, all of the redeemed will "dwell in joy and bliss" (XI.43). Although the Son's requests are presented as acts of advocacy and "supplication," the Father's reply suggests that they have not influenced him, because he had already decreed humans would be saved (XI.31). He offers the simple reply, "All thy request for man, accepted Son/ Obtain, all thy request was my decree" (XI.46-47). The Father's response is fitting, both because the Son's request repeats the plan for salvation proclaimed in Book III, and because, as the Father states previously and as Milton argues in *De doctrina,* God foreknows who will sin and who will obey. The Father, for example, foreknew the rebel angels would fall,

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Kelley and John Rumrich, have argued that the apparent separation between Father and Son reflects the Arian, or anti-Trinitarian, sentiments expressed in Chapter V of *De doctrina*, where Milton argues that the Son is not God because he did not exist from eternity, the Father was under no necessity to beget him, and because, according to Milton, Father and Son do not share one essence because it is "impossible for any entity to share its essence with anything else" (225). See Maurice Kelley, "Milton's Arianism Again Considered," *The Harvard Theological Review* 54, no. 3 (1961): 195-205; John P. Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism: Why it Matters," in *Milton and Heresy,* eds. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75-92; and Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986). I am more persuaded by this latter camp, and find, in particular, the fact that the Son does not share the Father's divine attributes as evidence that the poem is Arian. The Father, but not the Son, is omnipresent (VII.587-590); the Son grows in power and glory after he offers to redeem humankind and is therefore not immutable (III.305-21); and the Son is not omnipotent by nature but is given these powers by the Father (VI.677-718, VII.165-6).

though he insists they did so through their own free will:

> they themselves decreed
> Their own revolt, not I; if I foreknew,
> Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
> Which had no less proved certain unforeknown. (III.116-119)

Similarly, in his treatise, Milton argues that while "nothing happens because God has foreseen it," God "has foreseen each event because each is the result of particular causes which, by his decree, work quite freely and with which he is thoroughly familiar."[27] The Father's response, in which he agrees to the Son's requests by claiming human salvation was his plan all along, thus reflects his foreknowledge that Adam and Eve, through their own free will, would choose to repent.

Adam and Eve's confession, then, closely follows the program of salvation outlined in Book III and in *De doctrina*. And yet, one might—given the described effects of prevenient grace and the declaration that the Father had already decreed their salvation—feel as though Adam and Eve are granted too little agency in their own redemption. Thomas Greene, for one, has complained that the emphasis upon grace in the episode undermines the sense that Adam acts heroically. "It is a little anticlimactic for the reader," he writes,

> after following tremulously the fallen couple's gropings toward redemption in Book Ten, to hear from the Father's lips that he has decreed it—that all of this tenderly human scene, this triumph of conjugal affection and tentative moral searching, occurred only by divine fiat.[28]

Even Danielson, in a book that defends Milton's theodicy, acknowledges that the mention of prevenient grace in Book XI "might look like a reductive explanation of the human

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[27] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 164.
[28] Thomas Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 407.

drama we have just witnessed."[29] Indeed, Book X presents Adam and Eve's reconciliation and their confession as the hard-won fruits of an exclusively human struggle; to learn at the beginning of Book XI that God enabled the regeneration of Book X would seem to lessen Adam and Eve's actions. The language of prevenient grace removing "The stony from their hearts" for example, while of course echoing the Father's words from Book III, also recalls the moment when Adam relents towards Eve: upon hearing her pleas for forgiveness, "soon his heart relented" and "his anger all he lost" (X.940, 945). In the narrative of Adam and Eve's reconciliation, the moment in which Adam softens is pivotal; that their hearts were previously softened by God would seem to diminish the power of Eve's persuasion and Adam's pity while foregrounding the role of divine agency. Moreover, not only do we learn that Adam and Eve's repentance was made possible by divine grace, but the narrator states that their sighs, which, along with their profuse tears, were a sign of their true contrition, were inspired by the "spirit of prayer." While the phrase does not contradict the poem's Arminian position, the suggestion that Adam and Eve's sighs are helped along by divine agency inevitably raises questions about the intentionality and sincerity of their repentance.[30] When we receive an apology from a friend who has wronged us, we expect the apology—if it is to mean anything—to be self-generated and deliberate, not done through coercion, for the sake of convenience, or on a whim. Any doubts concerning the genuineness of Adam and Eve's repentance are only increased by the Father's assessment that they must leave Eden because their newfound contrition will be short lived and cannot be self-sustained. "He

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[29] Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, 87.

[30] Fowler points to Romans 8:26 as Biblical precedent for Milton's phrase (598), and, as discussed above, Milton in his poem and treatise follows Arminius in arguing that humans can only do good through God's grace.

sorrows now, repents, and prays contrite," the Father observes, but "His heart I know, how variable and vain/ Self-left" (XI.90-93). Finally, that the Father appears so uninfluenced by Adam and Eve's prayers, while not inconsistent with the poem's theology, furthers the sense that human agency does not count for much. He has already decreed their salvation, and so their confession seems nothing more than a *pro forma* exercise.

To be sure, it is entirely fitting that Books X and XI show God, not Adam and Eve, with more agency in salvation. The mechanism of salvation that the Father describes in Book III is initiated by God's grace, given freely to all, and is only possible through this grace (and, of course, the Son's sacrifice). The only role given to humans is to accept or reject, to repent or to harden themselves further. Adam and Eve exercise this freedom in Book X, when they choose to confess their faults. George Muldrow has compared Adam's response to his sin with that of Satan, who in Book IV resolves to continue in disobedience. In his soliloquy, Satan admits that he sinned and entertains the idea of repentance, that he might, "By act of grace," obtain his "former state" (IV.94). He rejects this idea, however, knowing that it would require his "submission," which "Disdain forbids" him (IV.81-82). He acknowledges that even if he could submit, his ambition would return: "how soon/ Would height recall high thoughts, how soon unsay/ What feigned submission swore" (IV.94-96). This would then lead, he thinks, "to a worse relapse/ And heavier fall" (IV.100-101). He therefore decides, Muldrow writes, to dedicate "himself to a mission of evil and to eternal misery."[31] Like Satan, Adam also despairs and blames God after his fall before ultimately acknowledging his sin. But

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[31] George M. Muldrow, "The Beginning of Adam's Repentance," *Philological Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1967): 205.

Adam chooses not to harden himself, and instead finds hope that he will be saved. When Eve suggests they commit suicide or practice celibacy in order to spare their offspring from death, Adam rejects the idea, reasoning that it cuts them

> off from hope, and savors only
> Rancor and pride, impatience and despite,
> Reluctance against God and his just yoke
> Laid on our necks. (X.1043-1046)

While Satan refuses to repent and vows to continue in sin because he sees his situation as hopeless, Adam (and Eve, at his urging) freely choose to turn towards God and towards hope.

The process of salvation depicted in Books X and XI, then, is consistent with that expressed in Book III and in *De doctrina,* and many critics have, while acknowledging the substantial—and even disconcerting—role given to divine agency in the episode, justified it by pointing to Milton's Arminianism. Danielson, for example, argues that

> It makes no sense to see [God's prevenient] grace as the exclusive explanation for Adam and Eve's sighs and prayers when it clearly does not produce any such "fruits" in those who reject God's offer. God's grace explains how man's repentance is possible…but does not finally account for the fact that it actually takes place.[32]

But, while the poetry can be read to agree with Milton's Arminian position, I do not want to ignore the uneasiness one might feel about Adam and Eve's relative lack of agency in their own salvation. Milton's poem is an effort to "justify the ways of God to men," and so it matters that Milton present readers with an argument that is persuasive, not just on an abstract, intellectual level, but on an emotional one as well (I.26). For Milton to be

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[32] Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, 88. For other Arminian readings of XI.1-7, see Myers, "Prevenient Grace and Conversion," 29, and Deni Kasa, "Arminian Theology, Machiavellian Republicanism, and Cooperative Virtue in Milton's *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2016): 272.

successful, readers must not simply understand how God *could* he just, but *feel* that Milton's God is just in fact. I would like, then, to turn attention away from whether the episode can be reconciled with the Arminian theology of *Paradise Lost* (it can), and instead toward the poetic strategies Milton employs in order to ameliorate the sense that Adam and Eve are not meaningful agents in their own salvation. Danielson himself acknowledges that if the Arminian view of human virtue

> were to be presented in a piece of literature, the difficulty might be that the reader, failing to understand the respective functions of grace and free will, would suspect some essential inconsistency between being led to believe that certain actions are humanly virtuous and praiseworthy and being told that in fact they result from divine agency.[33]

This potential disjuncture, between what a theological doctrine looks like when it is outlined discursively as opposed to when it is enacted mimetically has been an animating principle behind this project as a whole. And, as in previous chapters, I wish to argue that in *Paradise Lost,* figurative language is one strategy the poet can use to balance divine and human agency. Jason Kerr and John Hale observe, writing on *De doctrina,* that while "the majority of Protestants, following Luther, considered the question of human and divine agency in sanctification to be a strictly either/or proposition, Milton is trying, against these odds, to argue for both/and."[34] Metaphor, I argue, helps Milton enact this "both/and" in his poetry.

Metaphors, along with similes, are essential tools used by the poet to draw comparisons, to depict and explain one thing in terms of another. But in *Paradise Lost,* comparison is difficult because the world the poem describes is so *unlike* the fallen world of the reader. Metaphors and similes, consequently, become places in the poem where

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[33] Danielson, *Milton's Good God,* 87.
[34] Kerr and Hale, "The Origins and Development," 201.

both the uniqueness and the difficulty of Milton's poetic project are registered. One way Milton's metaphors reflect the peculiarity of his subject is through a collapse of the metaphor's two terms, its "tenor" and "vehicle," labels offered by I. A. Richards to designate the thing spoken about in a metaphor and the thing from which terms are borrowed, respectively.[35] The poem's opening lines, for example, use words for both their literal and figurative meanings:

> Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world…
> Sing heavenly Muse. (I.1-6)

The word "fruit" refers both to the apple consumed by Adam and Eve and to the consequences of their actions, while "mortal taste" points both to the human act of tasting and to the fatal consequence of that act. Similarly, in Book III, the Father's observation to the Son that "rage/ Transports our Adversary" captures both Satan's emotional transformation and his physical travel towards earth (III.80-81). Anne Davidson Ferry has argued that through such metaphors, Milton's language resembles "the language of Scripture, in which concrete and abstract meanings are true and indivisible."[36] In doing so, she argues, the poem seeks to "recapture for us the unity which was shattered by the Fall of Adam" and present a world in which "words perfectly identify things."[37]

Elsewhere, metaphors and similes are marked not by the collapse of tenor and vehicle but by an unbridgeable gap between them. The narrator will gesture toward a

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[35] I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 97.
[36] Anne Davidson Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice: The Narrator in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 94. See also Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 57-66.
[37] Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice,* 113, 115.

similarity, but then undermine it, thus creating the sense that the tenor is simply indescribable. In Book I, for example, the narrator describes Satan's spear:

> His spear, to equal which the tallest pine
> Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast
> Of some great admiral, were but a wand. (I.292-294)

In these lines, the narrator at first seems to give a clear sense of just how large Satan's spear is: it is equal in size to the "tallest pine" fashioned into a ship's mast. But the reader's understanding of the spear's size is undermined when the narrator reveals that the ship's mast is in fact "but a wand" compared to Satan's spear. Comparisons like this one thus reveal how slippery and uncertain the reader's understanding of the poem's world is; as Stanley Fish puts it, such similes suggest "a reality beyond this one by forcing us to feel, dramatically, its unavailability."[38]

Milton often uses negative similes to achieve a similar effect: the reader is not given a definitive description of the tenor, creating the sense that it is simply beyond comparison or description. Eden, for example, is presented as so surpassing all other famous gardens that it is said *not* to be like them:

> Not that fair field
> Of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flowers
> Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis
> Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
> To seek her through the world; nor that sweet grove
> Of Daphne by Orontes, and the inspired
> Castalian spring, might with this Paradise
> Of Eden strive. (IV.268-275)

Negative similes such as this one tantalize the reader, giving her a sense of the unfallen world but denying her a full description of it. They also, Isabel MacCaffrey has argued,

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[38] Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 27.

reflect the "archetypal nature" of Milton's subject, its status as preceding and surpassing all to which it is compared.[39] MacCaffrey writes that in such similes, "a broken image is reconstituted by fitting together the fragments that fallen man has been able to collect in his myths, and at the same time the status of the image as the original of and superior to all the fragments is established."[40]

The negative comparison of Eden to famous pagan gardens is also, like many of Milton's similes and metaphors, proleptic. It anticipates both later events in the poem (here, Proserpine's rape by Dis foreshadows Eve's fall) and the postlapsarian world itself, in which false pagan myths will arise unchecked. Indeed, the narrator often crafts comparisons using figures from classical myth, the Bible, and even contemporary life, and in doing so ties the fallen and unfallen worlds together and reminds the reader that the Fall will occur. When Satan, after his tumultuous journey through chaos, arrives in Eden, for example, he is described as a thief in a world that is already fallen:

> As when a prowling wolf,
> Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,
> Watching where shepherds pen their flocks at eve
> In hurdled cotes amid the field secure,
> Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the fold:
> Or as a thief bent to unhoard the cash
> Of some rich burgher, whose substantial doors,
> Cross-barred and bolted fast, fear no assault,
> In at the window climbs, or o'er the tiles;
> So clomb this first grand thief into God's fold. (IV.183-192)

Even before the Fall, this simile reminds readers of what will follow from Satan's actions. Satan is the "first grand thief," and by his deeds will give rise to the "prowling wolf," the "rich burgher," and the greedy robber. The metaphorical description of Adam

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[39] Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as "Myth"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 122.
[40] MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as "Myth,"* 122-123.

and Eve's prayers that I explore below, then, appears in a poem in which figurative language is fraught, for at every turn, it reminds the reader of what has been lost through the Fall by marking the distance between the world of the poem and the world of the reader.

Sandwiched between the revelation that God's prevenient grace softened Adam and Eve's hearts and the Father's response, the narrator describes the metaphorical journey of their prayers to heaven. These lines (XI.6-30) as a whole, but particularly in the narrator's description of the prayers, serve to reassert the place of human agency in a scene that otherwise emphasizes divine agency. After the revelation that Adam and Eve had been affected by prevenient grace, our attention is turned back to the pair, who are described as "suitors," offering a petition, one not "important less" than when Deucalion and Pyrrha "to restore/ The race of mankind drowned, before the shrine/ Of Themis stood devout" (XI.9-14). The intrusion of the Deucalion and Pyrrha myth, in which a couple, like Adam and Eve, seeks to restore humankind serves as a reminder of the role Adam and Eve will play in the larger Christian narrative of redemption. Adam and Eve are petitioners, bringing a case for mercy that affects not only them individually, but the whole of humankind. The comparison to Deucalion and Pyrrha, furthermore, underscores the role of human agency in salvation; in the myth, the couple performs an arduous, physical task to restore the human race, just as Adam and Eve will use their bodies, first in supplication and then in reproduction.

The narrator then offers a metaphorical description of the prayers' journey to heaven, one that, as I will show below, helps Milton persuade readers of God's justice.

Their prayers are said to have "winged for heaven with speedier flight/ Than loudest oratory" (XI.7-8). The narrator goes on to describe their journey:

> To heaven their prayers
> Flew up, nor missed the way, by envious winds
> Blown vagabond or frustrate: in they passed
> Dimensionless through heavenly doors. (XI.14-17)

While these lines do not fit the simple formula sometimes given to illustrate how metaphors work, "A is B" (as in, for example, "Achilles is a lion"), they clearly satisfy the common definition of metaphor: to speak of one thing in terms of another. In the lines above, Adam and Eve's prayers are the tenor, while the vehicle is the flight of a bird (or in any case a flying, winged animal). Metaphors, Wallace Martin points out, shift words from their usual context (above, prayers are described using the language of flight), and in response, readers "tend to seek relevant features of the word and the situation that will reveal the intended meaning."[41]

In this case, the metaphor makes the point that Adam and Eve's prayers make their way upwards to God. But the metaphor, I want to argue, inevitably "carries over," as its etymology suggests, other qualities of the vehicle onto the tenor. As Max Black puts it, the metaphor applies "to the principal subject a system of 'associated implications' characteristic of the subsidiary subject."[42] In this case, Adam and Eve's prayers are given not only the power of flight, but with that ability, the prayers are endued with both materiality and agency, in so far as they are able to direct themselves through space. The description of the prayers' smooth journey to heaven, not "by envious

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[41] Wallace Martin, "Metaphor," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 863.
[42] Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 44.

winds/ Blown vagabond or frustrate," serves as a reversal of Satan's haphazard journey through chaos in Book II and suggests that the prayers have a material nature because it imagines their travel through time and space (XI.15-16). Similarly, the report that the prayers "winged…with speedier flight/ Than loudest oratory" suggests that they travel according to a physical law wherein words propelled with great volume and force travel faster, and Adam and Eve's prayers outspeed even the loudest speech (XI.7-8). The metaphor not only implies that the prayers travel through time and space, but the verb "winged" suggests that they also move according to their own volition. The presentation of the prayers as material and agential, moving quickly upward from earth to heaven, I wish to argue, serves to assert the place of human agency in their redemption. In a scene that otherwise stresses divine agency, the metaphorical description of the prayers' journey suggests that Adam and Eve's words *do* something: their confession produces something real and physical capable of traveling all the way to heaven.

The sense that Adam and Eve's prayers play a crucial role in their salvation continues in heaven, where the Son presents them to the Father in a ritualistic manner.[43]

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[43] Critics have disagreed as to whether the depiction of heavenly ritual in Book XI is Catholic or not. Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, *Poetry & Dogma: The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth Century English Poetry* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954), 224 identifies it as Catholic, while J. B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject: An Essay on Paradise Lost* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 157 and William G. Madsen, *From Shadowy Types to Truth: Studies in Milton's Symbolism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 106 argue that the censer and altar come from Jewish practice. In either case, the mention of the incense, altar, and censer point toward human ritual, and thus further the emphasis upon human agency in these lines. The elaborate ritual in Book XI is a departure from the simple prayers "Which God likes best" offered by Adam and Eve before the Fall (IV.738), though perhaps, as Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 205 suggests, Milton means to reject ritual worship on earth and indicate that only the Son can perform such rituals properly. See also Michael's warnings against

The Son, describing himself as a "priest," offers the prayers in a "golden censer, mixed/ With incense" near a "golden altar," and he presents them as the impressive—even wondrous—product of God's creative powers and his grace:

> See Father, what first fruits on earth are sprung
> From thy implanted grace in man…
> Fruits of more pleasing savor from thy seed
> Sown with contrition in his heart, than those
> Which his own hand manuring all the trees
> Of Paradise could have produced, ere fallen
> From innocence. (XI.18-30)

Their prayers, he argues, are more pleasing than any fruit they could have cultivated in Eden before the Fall because they were produced by Adam and Eve's genuine contrition, which was made possible through God's "implanted grace." The Son thus presents the prayers as arguments for granting mercy to Adam and Eve, as evidentiary proof of their merit. Here in heaven, the prayers continue to be presented as though they are material: the Son requests that the Father "See" the "first fruits" of his grace, and the prayers are "clad/ With incense" by the Son (XI.22, 17-18). The Son's argument, along with the material nature ascribed to the prayers, thus suggests that Adam and Eve's prayers are an essential and effectual aspect of their redemption.

I have suggested that the description of the prayers' winged flight upward to heaven grants more power and efficacy to Adam and Eve's actions, but it is equally important in this case that metaphor allows the poet to indicate that the prayers do not literally travel to heaven. If they did, this would grant far too much power to the words and actions of the couple and therefore to ritual itself. It is important, then, for the reader to recognize the prayers' journey as figurative and not literal, and as Donald Davidson

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ceremony in Book XII, where he criticizes those who "deem in outward rites and specious forms/ Religion satisfied" (XII.534-535).

argues, the reader only knows to take a sentence metaphorically when she recognizes it is literally false. "Absurdity or contradiction," he writes, "in a metaphorical sentence guarantees we won't believe it and invites us, under proper circumstances, to take the sentence metaphorically."[44] In the lines above, I wish to argue, it is the word "Dimensionless" that marks the sentence as false and signals that the prayers' journey should be understood figuratively. In the monist materialist world of *Paradise Lost,* the idea that speech (either as sound or as exhaled breath) has a material nature and moves through space cannot be dismissed out of hand.[45] Fallon argues that by the time Milton wrote *Paradise Lost,* he was a monist materialist, one who rejected the duality of matter and spirit and instead believed that they were "two modes of the same substance: spirit is rarefied matter, and matter is dense spirit."[46] These views are most explicitly articulated in his poem in Book V, when Raphael explains to Adam that all things are created from "one first matter…Indued with various forms, various degrees/ Of substance" (V.472-4). Some, he notes, are more "spirituous" and "pure," and he describes a process of ontological refinement by which matter will from "body up to spirit work" (V.475, 478). He offers a simile to describe this chain of being, which includes even the odors of flowers:

So from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More airy, last the bright consummate flower

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[44] Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 40.
[45] On Milton's monism, see Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). More recently N. K. Sugimura, in "*Matter of Glorious Trial": Spiritual and Material Substance in Paradise Lost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), has challenged the critical consensus surrounding Milton's monism.
[46] Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 80.

Spirits odorous breathes. (V.479-482)

Raphael, admittedly, provides this simile for the purposes of educating Adam, but his inclusion of the "odorous" breath of the flower in the chain of being suggests that Adam and Eve's prayers could be material as well.

But the word "Dimensionless" creates a contradiction and indicates that the prayers' journey must be metaphorical, because while prayers could have a material nature in the world of *Paradise Lost*, they could not both be material *and* be without dimension (that is, without extension: without length, breadth, or depth).[47] Such unbounded material does exist in chaos, which is described as a "dark/ Illimitable ocean without bound/ Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height/ And time and place are lost" (II.891-894). But God gives form to this matter in creation, and so we do not expect to find formless matter in Eden or in heaven. In Book II, the description of the dimensionless matter not only gives a sense of the region's disorder, it also suggests the unfathomable size of chaos. But in Book XI, the effect is the opposite; after following the prayers' journey upwards, to learn that they are dimensionless just as they enter heaven's gates gives the sense that they have evaporated, vanished into thin air. We learn that they are in fact immaterial, and so they did not literally or physically travel to heaven. Milton's metaphorical description of the prayers, then, works to suggest that Adam and Eve's confession does indeed make a difference in their salvation, but the word "Dimensionless," which indicates that the lines should not be taken literally, ensures that their actions are not ascribed with too much power either.

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[47] See also Thomas N. Corns, *Milton's Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), who likewise notes that the word "Dimensionless" "emphasizes with a peculiar precision the immateriality of prayer" even as the prayers are elsewhere described as though they are substantial (100).

Metaphor, then, allows a sort of lie; through it, Milton is able to *suggest* a greater role for human agency in redemption while never *asserting* that this is indeed the case. As Davidson argues, most metaphors, unlike similes, are false:

> The most obvious semantic difference between simile and metaphor is that all similes are true and most metaphors are false. The earth is like a floor, the Assyrian did come down like a wolf on the fold, because everything is like everything. But turn these sentences into metaphors, and you turn them false; the earth is like a floor, but it is not a floor; Tolstoy, grown up, was like an infant, but he wasn't one.[48]

But Ferry and, more recently, Stephen Hequembourg have argued that metaphors are actually often true in *Paradise Lost* because the poet frequently uses words for both their metaphorical and their literal meanings. For Ferry, this collapse of vehicle and tenor is a symptom of an unfallen world in which "words perfectly identify things."[49] For Hequembourg, it is an outgrowth of the poem's material monism; the reader of *Paradise Lost,* he argues, is repeatedly asked "to resist the temptation to read metaphorically what Milton is insisting can be understood as literally and physically true."[50] While Ferry and Hequembourg are convincing, the pattern they describe makes the contradictory description of the prayers' journey all the more salient and, I would argue, effective. The reader of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* would likely read the epithet "winged words" figuratively without much thought; an audience member would probably do the same when, in *Hamlet,* Claudius says after trying to pray, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go."[51] But in *Paradise Lost,*

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[48] Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," 39.
[49] Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice,* 115.
[50] Stephen Hequembourg, "Monism and Metaphor in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 52 (2011): 141.
[51] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1989), 3.3.97-98.

given both its monist materialism and its tendency to collapse the vehicle and tenor of its metaphors, the reader must entertain, for a few lines at least, the possibility that the prayers literally and physically travel to heaven. This creates an even stronger sense that Adam and Eve's actions are consequential and efficacious, until we learn that the prayers are "Dimensionless," or without form, and so their journey must be read figuratively.

This, of course, has consequences for how the reader understands human and divine agency working in Adam and Eve's salvation. The metaphor indicates that Adam and Eve's prayers do not actually exist as physical objects that travel to and enter heaven, but it nevertheless claims a sort of power for them. This is important for Milton's theodicy; the episode, from its mention of prevenient grace to the revelation that the Father had already decreed Adam and Eve's salvation, emphasizes God's role in salvation. Metaphor in Book XI thus allows Milton to suggest a greater place for human agency, without explicitly declaring that Adam and Eve's actions cause them to be saved.

Adam, Accommodation, and the Dangers of Analogy

Metaphor thus allows Milton to give the sense that humans play a greater, more powerful role in their salvation than what the poem's Arminian view allows. But it is not as though Milton intends to fool us; readers are called to interpret "Dimensionless" correctly and to understand the limits of what Adam and Eve can do to redeem themselves. In all poetry, readers must be able to read figurative language properly, but given the unique subject and ambitions of *Paradise Lost,* the stakes of reading rightly are raised. This is particularly the case in the reader's interpretation of God and heaven, as interpreting the poem too literally can lead one to anthropomorphize God. In some senses, this is an inevitable consequence of any encounter between human and divine. As

Roger White argues, “If we are to use language at all to talk about anything whatsoever, we have no alternative but to use language in a way that is intelligible to us as human beings,” and so the “language we use to talk of God must therefore be a language that relates to our experience.”[52] Readers of Milton have observed, however, that Milton carefully crafts his God and heaven in such a way to avoid overly anthropomorphizing God. Fish, for example, has argued that the Father’s presentation is “determinedly non-affective,” and that “the harshness, the sense of irritation, the querulousness” that so many readers have found in him is a product of their own defensiveness.[53] Ferry, too, notes that the Father speaks in declarative statements, and Milton carefully avoids the “conventional figures of poetry or rhetoric [that] would have seemed blasphemously inappropriate to God.”[54] Moreover, by eschewing the long, elaborate similes found in hell, Milton marks heaven as “the incomparable realm of uncreated light.”[55] But C. A. Patrides, like White, has argued that some degree of anthropomorphism in Milton’s poem is simply unavoidable, as it is “very much part of the fabric of the Christian faith,” a religion that claims man was made in God’s image.[56] Indeed, despite Milton’s careful depiction of the Father, anthropomorphic elements slip in; the Father, invisible, eternal, and omnipresent as he is, “sits,” “bent down his eye,” and is positioned in space such that the Son is “on his right” (III.57, 58, 62). If such anthropomorphizing is inevitable, then we as readers must know how to interpret such descriptions properly.

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[52] Roger M. White, *Talking About God: The Concept of Analogy and the Problem of Religious Language* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 2.
[53] Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 62, 86.
[54] Ferry, *Milton’s Epic Voice*, 69.
[55] Ferry, *Milton’s Epic Voice*, 70.
[56] C. A. Patrides, “*Paradise Lost* and the Theory of Accommodation,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 5, no. 1 (1963): 62.

Milton writes about the necessity of figurative language in our conversations about God and our obligations to read such language correctly in *De doctrina*. There, he articulates the principle of accommodation, the idea that in Scripture, God has accommodated himself to human understanding.[57] God, he writes, "is far beyond man's imagination, let alone his understanding," and so it is "safest" for us to form our image of God from how he has allowed himself to be depicted in Scripture.[58] While acknowledging that in Scripture, God is "described or outlined not as he really is but in such a way as will make him conceivable to us," Milton concludes that we should not shy away from such descriptions.[59] If "God attributes to himself again and again a human shape and form," he asks, "why should we be afraid of assigning to him something he assigns to himself, provided we believe that what is imperfect and weak in us is, when ascribed to God, utterly perfect and beautiful?"[60] When speaking of God, then, figurative language is a necessity, because human minds simply cannot comprehend him. But, again, it is necessary that we recognize figurative language as such and make allowances when language borrowed from the human experience is used to describe God.

The theory of accommodation hovers over all of *Paradise Lost,* but is most evident in Raphael's discussions with Adam, in which the angel admits that some of what he tells him has been accommodated to his understanding. When Adam requests to hear

[57] For more on Milton and the theory of accommodation, see Patrides, "*Paradise Lost* and the Theory of Accommodation"; James Holly Hanford, *A Milton Handbook* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 226-228; and Leland Ryken, *The Apocalyptic Vision in Paradise Lost* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 7-24.
[58] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 133.
[59] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 133.
[60] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 136.

more about Satan's rebellion and the war in heaven, Raphael assents, but acknowledges the difficulty of explaining what happened in a way that is comprehensible to Adam:

> High matter thou enjoinst me, O prime of men,
> Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate
> To human sense the invisible exploits
> Of warring spirits; how without remorse
> The ruin of so many glorious once
> And perfect while they stood; how last unfold
> The secrets of another world, perhaps
> Not lawful to reveal? Yet for thy good
> This is dispensed, and what surmounts the reach
> Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
> By likening spiritual to corporal forms,
> As may express them best, though what if earth
> Be but the shadow of heav'n, and things therein
> Each to other like, more than on earth is thought? (V.563-576)

Raphael here goes beyond the epic trope of admitting the difficulty of telling his story. His specific concern is that the events that occurred in heaven, the "secrets of another world," will not be comprehensible to "human sense," or perhaps, even "lawful to reveal." He therefore warns Adam that the story he will tell will be changed in certain ways.[61] But the degree to which his story is accommodated is uncertain; Raphael's question regarding the relationship between heaven and earth is left unanswered. As a result, the account of Satan's rebellion provided by Raphael is haunted by the sense that what he describes might be understood literally but could also be understood figuratively. What does it mean that the Son was "begot" on "this day"? That the warring angels heaved mountains and fired cannons at one another? To be a good reader, Adam cannot interpret Raphael too literally, and the same goes for the reader of *Paradise Lost*. I wish now to turn back to Adam and Eve's reconciliation and their confession before God to

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[61] Raphael makes similar statements to Adam elsewhere in his description of the war in heaven and creation. See VI.297-301, VII.112-114, and VII.177-179.

explore an instance of misreading: Adam's failure to recognize that God will not be swayed by his prayers in the same way Adam was swayed by Eve.

I have been concerned, throughout this project, with the ways in which poets use metaphor and allegory in order to enact the Reformation doctrine that the sacraments are divine gifts, rather than human works. These tropes allow poets to hedge and equivocate, which is useful when showing paradoxical doctrines in action, but they also prove effective in depicting sacraments, which are themselves metaphorical. Here, however, I turn to an instance in which a character misunderstands the figurative nature of sacraments. In his treatise, Milton acknowledges that sacraments make use of tropes or figures of speech, by which he means "a thing which in any way illustrates or signifies another thing [that] is mentioned not so much for what it really is as for what it illustrates or signifies."[62] In acknowledging the sacraments' metaphorical nature, Milton echoes the assertions of Calvin and others, who argued that the washing in baptism and the eating in the Eucharist should be understood as representing acts of spiritual washing and spiritual eating. Milton warns in his treatise against confusing the sign and signified, the literal and figurative meanings. "Failure to recognize this figure of speech in the sacraments," he writes, "where the relationship between the symbol and the thing symbolized is very close, has been a widespread source of error."[63]

In Books X and XI, Adam makes an error akin to misunderstanding the relationship between the sign and the signified: he effectively anthropomorphizes God, imagining that reconciliation between humans and God (i.e., penance) is the same as reconciliation between humans. This, in turn, leads him to overestimate his own agency

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[62] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 555.
[63] Milton, *De doctrina Christiana,* 555.

in salvation; if Eve can persuade him to show mercy, he reasons, so too can he persuade God to relent. In what follows, I analyze Adam's misunderstanding of the relationship between human reconciliation and penance, a relationship that I argue is more properly understood as analogous than metaphorical. Though sometimes used as synonyms, Janet Martin Soskice argues that these terms can be distinguished by the fact that metaphors employ figurative meanings while analogies do not. She argues that unlike metaphors, we regard analogies "as a legitimate extension of a word's domain of application," and so analogies involve "stretched usages, not figurative ones."[64] Washing in baptism and eating in the Eucharist are metaphorical because these outward acts are said to symbolize a figurative and spiritual "washing" of sins and "partaking" of Christ's body. The rite of penance, on the other hand, works by analogy: in the rite, we ask God for forgiveness for our sins, just as we might ask another human for forgiveness. This does not entail a figurative sense of "asking for forgiveness" but rather a stretched one, because, as Milton shows, asking for forgiveness from another human is not the same as asking God.

Analogy has long been an important tool for theologians who are anxious about how to speak about God without anthropomorphizing him. They have sought to remedy this problem by acknowledging that when we speak of God, we do so neither "univocally" nor "equivocally" but analogically. This theory of analogy, attributed to Aquinas,

> states that some terms which religious people apply to God are not to be taken precisely in their ordinary sense, nor yet in a totally different sense, but in a special and related sense; and that the relationship of this special sense to the ordinary sense can be appreciated by means of a certain 'proportion' or 'ratio'… The things people say about God, on this view,

[64] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 65-66.

> are not to be taken literally (*univoce* in a single sense), neither are they fatally ambiguous (*equivoce* used in a double sense)—for then their ordinary sense would provide no clue to their religious meaning, and taking them literally would make complete nonsense of what they really meant: rather they are to be taken analogically.[65]

Humphrey Palmer gives the example of God's love. God does not love in the same way that humans do, but he does not love in an entirely different way either. And so, the theologian must "consider ordinary human love and then think of the difference between God and man, and make appropriate allowances."[66] Similarly, reconciliation between God and humans is not wholly unlike reconciliation between humans, but in Books X and XI, Adam fails to "make appropriate allowances," to acknowledge that they are not exactly the same.

Over the course of Books X and XI, we see Adam thinking analogically, hoping to replicate Eve's success by confessing before God using the same words and gestures that she used. Adam is himself so transformed by Eve's words—from vengeful and cruel to sympathetic and loving—that he imagines he can effect a similar transformation upon God. Before Eve approaches Adam, he is in despair over what he has done, lamenting,

> O conscience, into what abyss of fears
> And horrors hast thou driven me; out of which
> I find no way, from deep to deeper plunged! (X.842-844)

Adam's expression of despair echoes the words of Satan who, after his fall, mourned that "in the lowest deep a lower deep/ Still threatening to devour me opens wide" (IV.76-77).

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[65] Humphrey Palmer, *Analogy: A Study of Qualification and Argument in Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 15. He goes on to explain: "Univocity in theology—calling God *strong* or *sensible* and meaning just exactly that—would lead to anthropomorphism, to making God in the image of Mr Jones. And anthropomorphism is anathema. But equivocation—calling God *good* or *great* but not really meaning anything like that—is also unacceptable, for it makes complete nonsense of theology" (36).
[66] Palmer, *Analogy*, 16.

It is in this state that Eve approaches with "Soft words," but Adam "with stern regard…repel[s]" her, saying "Out of my sight, thou serpent" (X.865-867). Adam continues with a cruel, misogynistic attack, casting Eve as deceptive, vain, "a show/ Rather than solid virtue" (X.883-884). He questions God's wisdom to create woman, asserts that without her he would not have fallen, and predicts that future men will likewise be harmed "through female snares" (X.897). But Eve, "Not so repulsed" (X.910), persists, and after she asks for Adam's forgiveness, despite the rancor he had shown her less than 50 lines before,

> his heart relented
> Towards her, his life so late and sole delight…
> As one disarmed, his anger all he lost. (X.940-945)

It is this radical transformation that Adam experiences, I want to suggest, that makes him hopeful that God will show them mercy. In doing so, he is thinking analogically. As Roger Hazelton remarks, analogy "is an effort of the logical, rational mind to demonstrate that matters alike in some respects may be deemed alike in other respects about which knowledge is limited to one of them."[67] In *Paradise Lost,* Eve has disobeyed Adam and both Adam and Eve have disobeyed God; in both cases, the offenders seek to restore their relationship with the party they have wronged. If Eve's approach was successful with him, why would it not also be effective before God?

But Adam does not express such optimism right away. After he and Eve have made peace, he doubts that their sentence will be lessened or commuted, asserting the conditional that "*If* prayers/ Could alter high decrees," he would offer to take all the sentence upon himself, an inversion of Eve's earlier offer to do so on his behalf (X.952-

[67] Roger Hazelton, "Theological Analogy and Metaphor," *Semeia* 13 (1978): 160.

953, my emphasis). But, as Adam recalls and reconsiders their sentence—in a crucial moment of figurative reading to which I will later return—he finds hope in the future, when their "seed shall bruise/ The serpent's head," and he realizes that he and Eve will not die immediately (X.1031-1032). With this knowledge, Adam hopes that they can persuade God to lessen their burden, in no small part because he himself was softened as a result of Eve's confession. He recalls how God showed them kindness when he delivered their sentences:

> Remember with what mild
> And gracious temper he both heard and judged
> Without wrath or reviling. (X.1046-1048)[68]

Adam continues, recounting how God clothed them after the Fall, his care "unbesought provided," and how he pitied them even "while he judged" (X.1058-1059). "How much more," then, he reasons, "if we pray him, will his ear/ Be open, and his heart to pity incline" (X.1060-1061). He repeats this expression of optimism just before they confess, and again, he places his hopes in the fact that God has already shown them kindness:

> Undoubtedly he will relent and turn
> From his displeasure; in whose look serene,
> When angry most he seemed and most severe,
> What else but favor, grace, and mercy shone? (X.1093-1096)

Adam hopes then, to "incline" God's "heart to pity," just as his own heart "relented" when he beheld Eve's distress.[69]

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[68] It is the Son who visits Eden in Book X, but I use "God" here, as Adam does not distinguish between Father and Son. From his conversation with Raphael, he knows of the Son's existence, but he shows no knowledge that the Son is the visible expression of the Father. See also his description of his encounter with God in Book VIII, 250-451.
[69] See Kester Svendsen, "Adam's Soliloquy in Book X of *Paradise Lost,*" *College English* 10, no. 7 (1949), who notes that "Only after [Adam] has listened to Eve's prayers does he realize that God will listen to his" (366).

And while at the end of Book X, Adam seeks not a release from their sentence, but further aid and advice as they face the “inclement seasons,” he is more sanguine in Book XI (X.1063). When they have finished their confession, Adam is optimistic about the power of prayer to ascend to heaven and “incline” God’s will, and he claims that their confession has influenced God, telling Eve:

> Methought I saw him placable and mild,
> Bending his ear; persuasion in me grew
> That I was heard with favour. (XI.151-153)

Adam goes on, believing they will receive, not only instructions as to how to confront extremes of weather, but relief from their sentence; he confidently asserts that “the bitterness of death/ Is past, and we shall live” (XI.157-158). Adam, then, is hopeful—too hopeful, in fact—that his prayers and contrition will move God to alter their sentence, because he has experienced his own transformation in response to Eve’s complaint.

This analogical thinking shapes his approach to the confession itself, which he models upon Eve’s confession.[70] At the end of Book X, Adam, reasoning that God might offer them relief and comfort, proposes they confess and beg for mercy:

> What better can we do, than to the place
> Repairing where he judged us, prostrate fall
> Before him reverent, and there confess
> Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
> Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air
> Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
> Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek. (X.1086-1092)

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[70] Critics have acknowledged the way in which Eve’s confession serves as a template for their joint confession before God. Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community*, 218, for example, writes that Eve’s submission “provides a model for their falling ‘prostrate’ before God in prayer and asking forgiveness,” while Joseph H. Summers, *The Muse’s Method: An Introduction to Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 176 calls their reconciliation the “prologue and type” of their reconciliation with God.

In this description of their confession, Adam suggests that they replicate the persuasive confession Eve has performed before him. Only 150 lines before, Eve "Fell humble" before Adam, attested to the "love sincere, and reverence" in her heart towards him, confessed her sins, asked for pardon, and acknowledged that she had sinned "against God and thee" (X.912, 915, 931). Adam's suggestion that they return to the place where the Son judged them repeats Eve's earlier offer to return "to the place of judgment" to ask that Adam's punishment be placed on her (X.932). Further, Eve confessed "with tears that ceased not flowing," just as Adam suggests they do before God, and she asked for pardon with a humility and contriteness that Adam seeks to emulate (X.910). She refers to herself as Adam's "suppliant" and the narrator describes her in a "lowly plight" and "submissive in distress" (X.917, 937, 942).

Adam's analogical thinking thus gives him hope and leads him to believe that he can, through his own actions, influence God. Georgia Christopher has accused Eve of manipulation in this episode, but it is clear that Adam's motivations to confess are not solely his sincere regret and contrition, but his hope for leniency as well.[71] Indeed, Eve's confession appears spontaneous and genuinely felt; we never see her strategizing before speaking to Adam. But, before they confess, the reader sees Adam hoping that God will show them pity and anticipating the particular comforts and advice they will receive. The calculated nature of his confession is furthered when the narrator recounts their actions

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[71] See Georgia B. Christopher, "The Verbal Gate to Paradise: Adam's 'Literary Experience' in Book X of *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 90, no. 1 (1975): 69-77, in which she argues that Eve's "loving gesture of reconciliation" is in fact "far more self-serving than selfless" (69), as well as Georgia B. Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), in which she writes that Eve's offer to take the full sentence upon herself is an "unconsidered and almost instinctive gesture of self-preservation" that is "brilliantly, if unconsciously, manipulative" (165-6).

using almost exactly the same language that Adam used when he suggested they confess. Adam had suggested they go

> to the place
> Repairing where he judged us, prostrate fall
> Before him reverent, and there confess
> Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
> Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air
> Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
> Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek. (X.1086-1092)

A few lines later, the narrator describes the couple confessing in the precise manner that Adam had proposed:

> they forthwith to the place
> Repairing where he judged them prostrate fell
> Before him reverent, and both confessed
> Humbly their faults, and pardon begged, with tears
> Watering the ground, and with their sighs the air
> Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
> Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek. (X.1098-1104)

Alastair Fowler has argued that this near repetition shows that "the actions truly reflect the words."[72] But I would argue that the double description serves as yet another reminder that Adam's confession is planned and performed in the hopes of achieving a specific effect. Thinking analogically, Adam believes he has persuasive power, that he can wield influence upon God. This is particularly evident after their confession, when Adam fancies himself an effective suppliant, one who swayed God through his physical performance: "I sought," he tells Eve, "By prayer the offended Deity to appease/ Kneeled and before him humbled all my heart" (XI.148-150).

But while Adam seeks to replicate Eve's confession and its results, the two confessions are notably different in the effects they actually produce. While Eve's causes

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[72] Milton, *Paradise Lost,* X.1098-1104n.

Adam to relent from his anger, Adam and Eve's confession, as discussed above, does little to move God. Indeed, while Adam viewed the kindness God showed in their judgment as a sign that his heart could easily be moved "to pity," he does not have the sort of emotional response that Adam predicts (X.1061). Instead, the Father responds to Adam and Eve's prayers with the language of decrees and laws: "all thy request was my decree," he tells the Son, before announcing that the "law" he "gave to nature" forbids Adam and Eve from remaining in Paradise (XI.47-49). The Father's cool response, which is marked by no emotional change, no softening or relenting, but by the same serenity Adam witnessed when they were judged, is not what Adam expected nor what he experienced himself. Indeed, the poem suggests that Adam was swayed not by high-minded notions of forgiveness and mercy, but by his love for Eve and by what led to his fall in the first place: an overvaluing of her beauty. After hearing her pleas,

> soon his heart relented
> Towards her, his life so late and sole delight,
> Now at his feet submissive in distress,
> Creature so fair his reconcilement seeking…
> As one disarmed, his anger all he lost. (X.940-945)

Adam is moved, the narrator suggests, not only by the truth in Eve's words, but also by the show of distress and humiliation in a "Creature so fair" who had been his "sole delight." The description of Adam "disarmed" furthers the sense that he does not respond to her confession with the cool rationality of the Father, but instead is swayed and moved to pity because of his love for Eve. In contrast, the Father appears immovable. Penance is thus revealed to be unlike reconciliation between humans for one important reason: God does not respond emotionally as Adam does. In this divergence of responses, it becomes clear that Adam did not make the "appropriate allowances" that are required when one

speaks of God using language derived from human experience. Instead, Adam anthropomorphized God, believing that he would be emotionally moved just as Adam was moved by Eve.

Conclusion

In *Paradise Lost*, the ability to interpret figurative language is a necessity for both Adam and the reader if they are to obey God and understand the limits of their agency. The reader must be alert to the fact that the prayers' journey in Book XI is not literally true in order to understand the role of human agency in redemption; likewise, Adam must understand the analogical relationship between human and divine so that he does not overestimate his own ability to sway God. Interpreting figurative language, the epic suggests, is thus an essential part of being a good Christian. Indeed, Christopher has argued persuasively that the moment in which Adam interprets their sentence figuratively in Book X is "a dramatization of the Reformers' understanding of Adam as the first Christian who is rehabilitated by a heartfelt grasp" of God's promise in Genesis that Adam's seed would crush the serpent's head.[73] At the beginning of Book X, the Son arrives in Eden to deliver God's sentence upon Adam and Eve. He sentences Eve to pain in childbirth and to subservience to her husband, Adam to labor in order to sustain himself, and both to death. The Son also sentences the serpent:

> Because thou hast done this, thou art accursed
> Above all cattle, each beast in the field;
> Upon thy belly grovelling thou shalt go,
> And dust shalt eat all the days of thy life.
> Between thee and the woman I will put
> Enmity, and between thine and her seed;
> Her seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his heel. (X.175-181)

[73] Christopher, "The Verbal Gate," 72.

In Book X, Adam struggles to interpret his sentence, wondering if death is meant literally or figuratively, whether it is death of the body, the soul, or both. He regains hope when, in his conversation with Eve, he reconsiders the Son's sentence and understands it figuratively:

> let us seek
> Some safer resolution, which methinks
> I have in view, calling to mind with heed
> Part of our sentence, that thy seed shall bruise
> The serpent's head; piteous amends, unless
> Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand foe
> Satan, who in the serpent hath contrived
> Against us this deceit: to crush his head
> Would be revenge indeed. (X.1028-1036)

Adam's figurative reading is contrasted with Satan's literal reading of the sentence. In hell, he boasts to his comrades,

> I am to bruise his heel;
> His seed, when is not set, shall bruise my head:
> A world who would not purchase with a bruise,
> Or much more grevious pain? (X.498-501)

The need to read rightly, however, is ongoing. It is after Adam has grasped the meaning of God's promise that he fancies himself able to sway God, and later, in Book XII, his understanding of the Son's sentence is adjusted once again. When Michael reveals that the Son will defeat Satan, Adam eagerly asks for details, imagining a literal battle between them: "say where and when/ Their fight, what stroke shall bruise the victor's heel," he says (XII.384-385). Michael chides him, warning that he should not imagine "their fight/ As of a duel, or the local wounds/ Of head or heel" (XII.386-388). Instead, he explains that the Son will win victory over Satan "by fulfilling that which [Adam] didst want/ Obedience to the law of God" (XII.396-397). *Paradise Lost* at its close thus again stresses the importance of reading figuratively, a skill that is required if humans are

to understand the limitations of their own agency and if they are to grasp the higher form of heroism that the poem celebrates.

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