The Deconstruction of Hell: A History of the Resignatio ad Infernum Tradition

Clark R. West
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/rel_etd

Part of the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://surface.syr.edu/rel_etd/86

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religion - Dissertations by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
Abstract

This dissertation is an historical examination of a medieval mystical tradition known as the *resignatio ad infernum* (willingness to be damned), which expresses a preference to be damned to hell out of love and solidarity for those the church had deemed lost.

The work has six chapters and a conclusion and is divided into two parts. In the introduction to part one, I frame the discussion of the *resignatio ad infernum* in terms of contemporary trauma theory and Foucault’s late lectures on the concept of *parrhesia*. In the first two chapters, I explore the scriptural antecedents to the tradition (ch. 1), along with post-biblical 'tours of hell' (ch. 2).

In the third and last chapter of Part One, I read Augustine’s doctrine of hell, which becomes the normative one, as deeply embedded in his political battle with the dissident Christians known to us as the Donatists. His hell is seen as an attempt to indemnify both God and the godly self from the trauma/hell of this life.

This sets the stage for the second part of the dissertation, in which the flowering of the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition is seen as a theo-political gesture of resistance to the theodicy of hell developed in the Augustinian context. Part Two begins with an introduction devoted to Foucault's early lectures on governmentality and the medieval practices of what he calls 'counter-conduct'. Chapter four is a detailed look at the flowering of the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition in the 13th century.
beginning with Hadewijch of Brabant. Chapter five looks at two more thirteenth-century mystics, Jacopone da Todi and Marguerite Porete, and analyzes their deployment of the *resignatio* themes as exemplifications of Foucauldian 'counter-conduct'. Chapter five concludes with a brief discussion of the subsequent domestication of the *resignatio* tradition within Catholic and Lutheran thought. Chapter six shows the *resignatio* tradition returning, via Dostoevsky, to the postmodern scene through the work of Levinas, Derrida, and especially Hélène Cixous. Finally, in a concluding chapter, I argue that this tradition, though residing until the twentieth century primarily in a theological register, has much in common with two political theorists influenced by Levinas and Foucault, Judith Butler and William Connolly.
The Deconstruction of Hell:  
A History of the Resignatio ad Infernum Tradition

By

Clark R. West
B.A. (cum laude) Williams College, 1989
M.Phil/ Syracuse University, 2009

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

May 2013
Acknowledgements

I am very thankful for the many wonderful teachers I have had through the years this project has been stirring. My first religion teachers at Williams College were Mark C. Taylor and Binks Little, who taught me to love Derrida, Foucault, and Levinas without fear of anathema. Some years later at the Harvard Divinity School chapel, G. Victor Sogen Hori forgave my many debts and taught me how to sit still and listen. At Syracuse, Jack Caputo took an “old man” in as a graduate student and has been an ideal dissertation director: patient, encouraging, passionate and committed to letting the work bloom where it will. Ed Mooney has been a faithful companion and friend throughout, rekindling my love of writing and lending me parrhesia whenever my spirits were low. William Robert has been an ideal reader and made several suggestions for improvements for which I am deeply grateful. Marcia Robinson not only helped me to see the prophetic dimensions of this work in a new way, but she has also become a dear friend to my wife and children, who now consider her, as do I, a part of our family. Albrecht Diem came in as a reader from the Syracuse History Department and made very helpful suggestions for improving the historical nuance of my thesis along with appreciating the real heart of the project. Here at Cornell, Cary Howie introduced me to Jacopone, helped me considerably with a difficult passage in Marguerite’s *Mirror*, and has become a wonderful dialogue partner. Corey Wronski-Mayersak, now of McDaniel University, encouraged my interest in Marguerite and was a sympathetic ear on a number of occasions. The
students, faculty and members of the Episcopal Church at Cornell endured with good cheer more sermons on hell than anyone deserves.

This project, while finding its home in an academic context, has been inspired by and helped along by a large number of friends and colleagues. The Rev. Dr. Han van den Blink provided me a lifeline through trauma one Monday, for which I am forever grateful. Dr. Ted Papperman taught me what it means to “titrate” trauma and how essential that is for survival. My old Williams friends Evan Davis and Phil Jordan were always with me in spirit, even if we failed too often at getting together in the flesh. Cynthia Bowman’s most generous offer of her guest cottage in the wilds outside of Ithaca made writing the last two chapters far more pleasant than I could have imagined. My parents Judith and Russell West supported me in more ways than anyone could ask or imagine. My wife Sarah and my children Cecilia, Annie, and Amos are quite simply my heaven on earth. Embraced by their love, “I don’t know where it’s likely to go better.”

Finally, I dedicate this work to all clergy abuse survivors and especially to those whose loving witness helped to conceive, challenge, and sustain this project: Anne, Scot, and the people of Trinity Church, Geneva. *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum*...
# Table of Contents

## Part One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Part One</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Versions of the <em>Resignatio ad infernum</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Lens I: Hell and trauma theory</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Lens II: Foucault on <em>parrhesia</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job’s <em>parrhesia</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hell before hell</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter One**  
Biblical Sources of the *resignatio ad infernum*  
- The Contested Ground of hell  
- Moses’ *parrhesia* before God  
- Love and Hell in the *Song of Songs*  
- Paul’s willingness to be damned in *Rom. 9:2-3*  

**Chapter Two**  
The Birth of the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition  
- *4 Ezra*: Theology in Conflict  
- The Apocalypse of Peter  
- The Apocalypse of Paul  
- The Greek Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary  
- Conclusion: A Traumatized Grotesque  

**Chapter Three**  
Augustine, Fugitive from Hell  
- Augustine as theologian of trauma  
- *Permixta Omnia*: the sack of Rome  
- Donatist Controversy and the problem of identity  
- *Ordo Caritatis*, hell, and *Romans 9-11*  
- *Rom. 9:2-3*’s (Dis)appearance in *City of God*  
- Of Flesh and the Abyss 1: Gaudentius  
- Of Flesh and the Abyss 2: Monica  
- Conclusion: What dreams may come
Part Two

Introduction to Part Two

Summary of Part One
Overview of Part Two
Theoretical Lens I: Foucault and Tradition
Theoretical Lens II: Mystical Counter-conduct

Chapter Four
The Flowering of the Tradition Part One

Historical Context: \textit{vita apostolica}
Gervais and the Albigensian Crusade
Béziers
Beguine Counter-Conduct: Hadewijch
Augustine’s Heaven vs. Hadewijch’s Hell

Chapter Five
The Flowering of the Tradition Part Two

Jacopone da Todi
Jacopone’s \textit{Amor esmesurato}
Marguerite Porete
Was Marguerite a Quietist?
The simple soul performs her martyrdom
The domestication of the tradition

Chapter Six
The Postmodern Return of the Resignatio ad infernum

Hell in Levinas and Derrida
Dostoevsky’s \textit{Resignatio ad infernum}
Hélène Cixous: The infernal paradise of Algeria

Conclusion
The \textit{Resignatio ad Infernum} As Resonance-Machine

Bibliography

Vita
Introduction to Part One

The inspiration for this project came from two distinct sources. The first source I will simply call by a name. Sally was a survivor of years of sexual abuse at the hands of a clergy person. I came to know her through my work as a pastor and in the many hours I spoke with Sally or conversed with her by email and letter, I came to understand that hell as I had been taught it in divinity school was a pale abstraction compared to the searing and repeated traumas Sally had known and with which she continued to do battle. Hell, she convinced me, is real. It is a physical, moral, and spiritual landscape she traversed every day in anguished love and tears. Remarkably, given the utter failure of the church to acknowledge the reality of this hell in her heart and in the church, she had remained a deeply committed woman of prayer whose relationship with the God of her understanding was steadfast and deep. While the churches Sally attended liked to say that hell was an outdated concept unworthy of a loving God, Sally responded by insisting that true love does not fear hell but fights with ‘sweet and bitter’ on its terrain, out of love for the betrayed child and the anguished adult who bears that child’s name. To say that a loving God has no need of hell and that the church would be better off casting its imagery aside may thus be the very opposite of a loving gesture. If love is worth its salt, it will be a love that enters hell, argues with God from its midst, and refuses to choose the eschatological image most of us in the western Christian tradition have come to take for granted: hell on
the one side, love on the other, with no place at all for those who insist they live in both.

The second source came from the rather obscure backwaters of the Christian mystical tradition, a tradition taught to me by one of its greatest scholars, Bernard McGinn, while I was privileged to take courses with him at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Early on in my studies with Professor McGinn, I learned that in a true scholar’s hands the footnote could be a world “containing multitudes”. One such world caught my eye immediately, this some years before I met Sally and two or three worlds collided. There was, he noted all too briefly, especially within many of the women mystics of the thirteenth-century, something called the “resignatio ad infernum motif,” a gesture of love that was also a gesture toward hell rather than away from it. Rooted in the erotic charge of Song of Songs, and textually exemplified by Paul’s anguished cry in Romans 9:2-3 that he “could wish to be accursed, cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred in the flesh,” the resignatio ad infernum motif has never had doctrinal status in the church. Neither has it ever gone away, and in my research I discovered that it often rose to the surface in times of deeply traumatic contexts such as Sally’s. When hell is palpably real, and love refuses a siren call to abandon the lost, the resignatio ad infernum motif begins to flower.

I also discovered in my research that there has been more than one way to play the resignatio ad infernum motif throughout history, and that some ways are less helpful and even harmful to those who, like Sally, are not so much trying to get to heaven as
they are trying to keep love alive in hell by means of parrhesiastic prayer to God. What I mean by this last phrase will be apparent in a moment. For now, it might be useful to rehearse briefly some of the other ways of mobilizing the resignatio ad infernum motif if only in order to distinguish them from the parrhesiastic register to which this dissertation will be rather singularly attuned.¹

What is important to note at the outset is that the first three versions below all tend to locate hell in a future world after death rather than in this life. The fourth version, which this work will be tracking, is restricted to speaking of hell in this life rather than speculating on another. As a result, this fourth version makes no claim about what if anything things look like after one dies. Any of the first three versions of the resignatio could presumably be the case, though there are no non-dogmatic grounds upon which one could argue any of them. The fourth version refuses these speculative and dogmatic options, thinking instead that hell on earth is the real hell and that when theology speaks of hell as something in the next life, it is making an unhelpful and even dangerous move to the land of pale abstractions.

When the authors articulating the fourth version do talk about heaven and hell as if they were talking about the next life, my view is that we must read these texts as attempts at “working-through” and/or “acting out” the hell they have known and are

¹ The following typology comes to me from an email exchange discussing the first draft of this project with my dissertation director, John D. Caputo. I have freely adapted his typology to my own purposes.
experiencing even while writing. In this sense, a person may find hell, love, and God all sharing the same psychic space without clear boundary lines or even theoretical consistency between them. Whether or not these three will be compatible with one another in ‘another life’, should there be one, is simply not something this work thinks possible to determine nor worth the risk of discussing when one is focused on trying to keep love alive in the hell of this life by means of parrhesiastic prayer to God.

Four Versions of the Resignatio ad infernum

1. The resignatio ad infernum of absolute obedience.

In this version of the resignatio ad infernum, exemplified by Francis de Sales in the Roman Catholic tradition and Martin Luther in the Protestant, one expresses a ‘willingness to be damned’ if such should be God’s will, out of absolute love and absolute obedience to God. However, the end result of such a willingness is the utter certainty that one will not end up in hell due to one’s utterly pure, and self-annihilating love for all that God wills. In crude paraphrase, which American critics of this orthodox version commonly used against its hyper-Calvinist advocates, you must wish to be damned to be sure that you won’t be damned. A rather neat theological

2 For this terminology applied to trauma survivors and trauma texts, see Dominick LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

3 For example, in the apocalyptic texts discussed in Chapter Three, the divide between heaven and hell is freely crossed out of love. In classic eschatology, such notions are ruled out as logically and theologically impossible. The writers of these texts, we might say, envision and even champion the ‘impossible’ as the grotesque refusal of God, love, paradise and hell to stay put. As Cixous will put it, following Kafka, in this life we can be in heaven and hell at the same time. As for the next one, if there is one, who knows?

4 Both have impeccably orthodox reputations within their respective traditions.

5 Luther’s and Francis’ positions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
parlor trick, some thought. In this version of the resignatio ad infernum, the Augustinian eschatology with heaven as a post-mortem reward and hell as post-mortem punishment is left intact. God’s love is only for the blessed, and his ‘love’ for the damned, if we dare call it that, is the love of punishment. For a survivor of clergy sexual abuse, it should be clear that this version, insisting on absolute obedience even at the cost of truncating love and accepting hell should it be the divine will, is perhaps the worst possible theological vision imaginable. God and hell, we might say, but no love.

2. The resignatio ad infernum of love’s triumph and the emptying out of hell.

In this version, one sides with a God of love over a God of wrath by bringing love into hell and undermining hell from the inside. One might see Meister Eckhart’s famous prayer to God to rid himself of God as fitting this version, where one ‘protests’ the God of wrath in order to break through to a God of pure love in whom hell can have no role. This version of the resignatio ad infernum leads either to universalism simpliciter or to the more sophisticated view, found in von Balthasar for example, of a hell that exists but with (perhaps) no one in it.\(^7\)

---


Though this view is attractive to the extent that it abandons the image of God as ‘cosmic torturer’, it is quite problematic when we put it in conversation with traumatized believers like Sally. For one, this version of the resignatio begins to drift toward hell as something futural rather than present. To one who is in hell, talk about whether there will be hell in the next life will sound like either idle speculation or a not so subtle way (to the survivor at least) of covering over or avoiding her most pressing question: how can hell here and now be understood in relation to both love and a God who, whatever S/he may do in the future, has not ended hell for the sufferer in this life. Universalism is in some sense no less cruel to the survivor of hell than the Augustinian eschatology, insofar as it seems to evacuate this life, including its traumas, of any lasting meaning or value. Love and God, but no acknowledgement of hell.

Because it tends to abstract from this-worldly hell, this version of the resignatio ad infernum is not the one we will be following in this work, though, like the first one, we will have occasion to mention it throughout.

3. The resignatio ad infernum opposed to a loveless God.

Finally, almost the polar opposite of the second version, we may speak of a resignatio ad infernum that denies that God is love, and thus chooses loving solidarity with human sufferers in opposition to this God of arbitrary power, even if this should mean being punished by this very God to hell itself. Here God might look like the Aristotelian God of indifference or perhaps more ominously the God of Schelling or
Jacob Boehme, in whom a dark ground, or hellish *Abgrund* is part of his very nature.\(^8\)

This version of the *resignatio ad infernum* is not without its attractiveness. For one, it clearly allows for the kind of *parrhesiastic* motif we will see in some of the exemplars of the tradition, such as Job, Moses, and even Paul in Romans 9:2-3. Rather than putting all of the blame for evil squarely on human shoulders, as Augustine will do, this view refuses to accept that all human suffering has a human cause, or even that a *meaning* that can be discerned.

The problem with this third version is both its fatalism and its optimism. It is fatalistic in its giving up on a God of love and bitterly consigning the sufferer to an eternity of more and more of the same: unrelieved cosmic loneliness. Like version two, its optimism consists in thinking that a solution to suffering in this life can be had by shifting to the next, one in which the excruciating imbrication of love, hell, and God is wished away by imagining that one will be able to fling oneself into the abyss away from the source of one’s suffering, in this case, God. Love and hell then, but no God.

Obviously for a suffering believer like Sally, none of these three solutions will do to the extent that each sacrifices at least one of the three worlds she inhabits: God, love, and hell. Each of these are, existentially speaking, present realities for her, and I suggested above that rather than seeking to resolve the excruciating tension present in living these three simultaneously, she is *trying to keep love alive in hell by means of*

parrhesiastic prayer to God. This attempt, we might say, is a fourth version of the resignatio ad infernum and it is the one this work will aim to track. As I will argue in the pages that follow, Sally’s effort is not without precedent.
Theoretical Framework: Hell and Trauma Theory

The tradition I will be uncovering is one that is best seen when we look at it through two theoretical lenses: 1.) trauma theory including the grotesque quality of trauma, and 2.) Foucault’s discussions of parrhesia and counter-conduct. Given the widely divergent understandings of trauma and trauma theory, here it will be helpful to spell out in some detail how I will be relating these terms to the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition.

---

9 It is not to my purpose to take sides in the recent heated debates between trauma theorists and those who question its framework altogether, not least because the literature is so vast and complex. Cathy Caruth’s work is often cited as the origin of academic trauma theory. See, among others, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Caruth’s work is heavily indebted to Lacan and psychoanalytic theory in addition to Derridean literary theory. Dominick LaCapra, an historian and a sympathetic critic of Caruth’s reliance on Lacan, represents the major historical approach to trauma theory. See Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). Recently, Ruth Leys has written a scathing critique of Caruth and trauma theory influenced by Caruth’s groundbreaking work. See Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). To my knowledge, Caruth has not herself responded to Leys’ charges. Her colleague Shoshana Felman, in Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), has vigorously rejected Leys’ charges. A more sympathetic, if ultimately unconvinced response to Leys comes from LaCapra in Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004). Much of the debate is focused on the extent to which the competing theories of trauma maintain fidelity to the historical event of trauma, avoiding both the Scylla of narrative closure of an inherently shattering event and the Charybdis of incessant, and ultimately unhealthy acting-out of the trauma attended to by the witness or theorist. My own view is that exposure to trauma of the kind both Caruth and LaCapra so brilliantly seek to understand means that demands for such exactitude are bound to fail and that failure is an inherent part of any trauma theorist’s efforts. This is not to say that all failures are equal. My own sense is that both Caruth and LaCapra are among the finest examplars of theorists who are constantly seeking to self-correct in an effort to allow the reality of trauma to be given voice. Due to this work’s historical focus, I will find myself most often using LaCapra’s work.

10 My employment of the grotesque will be discussed in Chapter Two, and counter-conduct in the Introduction to Part Two.
Trauma, as Shoshana Felman puts it, is “a shock that creates a psychological split or rupture, an emotional injury that leaves lasting damage in the psyche.”\textsuperscript{11} The split or rupture, in addition to being an emotional injury, has temporal effects as well, which is why it is such a troubling matter for historians to deal with. As Dominick LaCapra notes, trauma ruptures time as well as the psyche, making past, present, and future increasingly difficult to keep distinct for the survivor.\textsuperscript{12} Flashbacks, projections, narrative lacunae, and chronic ambiguities are common in trauma and trauma related texts, as the traumatic past lingers and the future haunts the survivor as the (possibly endless) repetition of the past/present. Because the event of trauma so overwhelms the psyche with an ‘extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli,’\textsuperscript{13} the moment of exposure is often described in trauma theory as a non-experience or as a ‘missed’ encounter that is only experienced in fragments and belatedly. “Unspeakable,” “unthinkable,” and “unknowable,” are often used to characterize the event of trauma, lending many trauma texts an apophatic ambience as primary and secondary witnesses struggle to say (and unsay) what it is they did and did not experience.

This prevalent apophatic register has led a number of commentators to note the striking similarities of trauma texts to religious and especially mystical texts as well.

\textsuperscript{11} Felman, \textit{The Juridical Unconscious : Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century}, 171.

\textsuperscript{12} LaCapra, \textit{Representing the Holocaust : History, Theory, Trauma}.

as to the rhetoric of the sublime. Dominick LaCapra has been especially sensitive to
this aspect of trauma, dubbing it the ‘traumatic sublime.’"\textsuperscript{14} LaCapra notes that such
similarities reveal the dangers of an aestheticization and sacralization of trauma, and
to “apocalyptic violent fantasies.” Employment of the traumatic sublime can tend,
however unconsciously, to “idealize melancholia” and function in such ways as to
further trauma’s reach rather than alleviate its worst effects.\textsuperscript{15} LaCapra warns that with
its strong gravitational pull, trauma can be extremely hard to cope with and wrest free
from, at its worst becoming a tyrannical and sacralized object of desire.

Borrowing from Freud, LaCapra organizes his own attempts to avoid
sacralizing trauma around the related psychoanalytic concepts of acting-out and
working-through. In Freud’s treatment of the terms, acting-out is associated with
melancholia and a compulsive and unhealthy form of repeating the trauma that has
never been integrated into experience, while working-through is the hard effort of
mourning that leads to integrating trauma and coming to terms with its concomitant
losses.\textsuperscript{16} When the survivor or witness to trauma finds herself, in however mediated a

\textsuperscript{14} LaCapra’s fullest discussion of trauma and the sublime is found in Dominick LaCapra, \textit{History and its Limits : Human, Animal, Violence} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).
\textsuperscript{15} LaCapra worries about this tendency in a number of post-modern writers, including, but not limited to, Lyotard, Zizek, Agamben, Badiou, and (at times) Derrida. Zizek’s Lacanian tendency to conflate historical trauma and constitutive lack, combined with his fascination with a rhetoric of violence, is especially worrisome here. If trauma just is the real, then the risk is that “one may traumatize others and risk traumatization oneself in order to enact or act out (rather than work through) transhistorical trauma and the ‘death drive,’ compulsively engaging in traumatizing, often violent scenes and even thereby attaining a sublime sense of transcendence.” Ibid., 42. LaCapra’s discusses “apocalyptic violent fantasies” as a dangerous temptation in response to trauma here (38) as well as in his essay, “Resisting Apocalypse and Rethinking History” in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alun Munslove, \textit{Manifestos for History} (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).
form, repeating the trauma(s) of her past, she may be said to be acting-out. According to LaCapra, this may be conscious or unconscious, wanted or unwanted.\textsuperscript{17} For example, when a survivor resists the drive for narrative closure,\textsuperscript{18} either from herself or more often from others, and thus risks further exposure to the wounding aspect of relived traumatic experience, this can be said to be a conscious, even desired form of acting-out with serious personal as well as political consequences.\textsuperscript{19}

Working-through, in LaCapra’s idiom, is the attempt to generate counterforces to melancholia and compulsive repetition, both through psychic “work” on the self and through engagement in social and political practice with others, from mourning (which may have a political valence) to more directly sociopolitical forms of action directed toward institutional change and what might be termed the situational transcendence of unjust or incapacitating structures and contexts. Work here should not be opposed to play, and the carnivalesque has a crucial role both in certain types of mourning and in sociopolitical processes in general that contest unjust institutions and policies. The carnivalesque, along with the comic and the grotesque in general, is also a significant counterpart to the sublime, which helps to question it and bring it down to earth.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} See Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)” (1914) in Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 12:145-56, and “Mourning and Melancholia,” (1917) in Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 14:237-60. LaCapra summarizes Freudian acting-out versus working-through this way: “He saw melancholia as characteristic of an arrested process in which the depressed, self-berating, and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object. Mourning brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life that allows one to begin again.” LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, 65-66.

\textsuperscript{17} This positive view of acting-out obviously puts LaCapra at some distance from Freud.

\textsuperscript{18} Often put in the form of “putting the past behind us and moving on.”

\textsuperscript{19} Anne Cvetkovich mentions the demonstrations of Act-Up in the wake of the AIDS crisis of the 1980’s as an example of this in David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, Loss : The Politics of Mourning (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 434. LaCapra, in his response to Cvetkovich who writes this as a critique of LaCapra, affirms her reading as close to his own.

\textsuperscript{20} LaCapra, History and its Limits : Human, Animal, Violence, 84.
In isolation from one another LaCapra thinks that neither acting-out nor working-through are adequate responses to trauma. When all forms of working-through are shunned due to fear of narrative fetishization, eschatological salvation fantasies, or amnesiac denials of loss, the danger is a sacralizing of trauma in the ritualized form of aestheticized repetition-compulsion.21 Similarly, when all forms of acting-out are rejected as pathological and even narcissistic gestures of masochism and/or “trauma-envy”, then the danger is that

the resulting account of the historical trauma will be that teleological, redemptive fetishizing that denies the trauma's reality: it happened, but it had no lasting effects; Look, we're all better now, even better than before!22

Instead of such one-sided responses to trauma, LaCapra’s trauma theory argues for a nuanced and constantly self-correcting dual approach of acting-out and working-through, mourning and melancholia. In one of his most important re-statements of his oft-misunderstood position, he writes,

21 One of LaCapra’s most compelling and controversial critiques of this kind of sacralizing of trauma comes in his reading of Claude Lanzmann’s film Shoah. He notes the troubling scene where Lanzmann insists that one of his interviewees, Abraham Bomba continue his Holocaust narrative, even when the camera captures Bomba’s intense desire to back away from the trauma he has begun to relive. As LaCapra comments: “In what sense is there a staging of a “fiction of the real” with Bomba simply “playing himself” when the former barber at Treblinka breaks down and cannot go on but, after an excruciating pause, does go on, as Lanzmann, in a pronounced gesture of projective identification, insists “we” must go on? Is not the reliving of a traumatic experience precisely the point at which the aesthetic frame itself breaks down and the distinction between art and life, or the documentary and the aesthetic/fictive, does so as well?” LaCapra, “Traumatropisms: From Trauma via Witnessing to the Sublime” in Ibid. 72. A clip of the scene can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mI_tJS5zs.
22 James Berger, "Trauma and Literary Theory," Contemporary Literature. 38, no. 3 (1997), 569.
Working-through involves coming to terms with extreme events, including the trauma that typically attends them, and critically engaging—but not simply reinforcing—the tendency to act out the past while nonetheless recognizing why acting out may be necessary and even compelling... There may even have to remain open wounds, even if one strives to counteract their tendency to swallow all of existence and incapacitate one as an agent in the present. One of the most difficult aspects of working-through is to undertake it in a manner that is not tantamount to betraying the trust or love that binds one to lost others—that does not imply simply forgetting the dead, distorting what they went through, or being swept away by current preoccupations.\textsuperscript{23}

Crucially, for Lacapra, this dual-approach is deeply political and it involves the full range of collective actions designed to resist being “swallowed” up by the trauma one insists on bearing witness to: “ritual or quasi-ritual forms, notably with respect to (nonsacrificial) ceremonial and carnivalesque activities (including mourning)…”\textsuperscript{24}

Even with such a brief outline of trauma theory, it is easy to see its relevance to a study of hell and especially to the \textit{resignatio ad infernum} tradition. Trauma theorists who have an interest in religious texts have noted how readily the apocalyptic “tours of hell” in the biblical and post-biblical traditions open to readings influence by trauma theory. In addition to Rachel Falconer’s recent work on

\textsuperscript{23} LaCapra, \textit{History in Transit : Experience, Identity, Critical Theory}, 104.

\textsuperscript{24} LaCapra, \textit{History and its Limits : Human, Animal, Violence}, 200. Elsewhere he writes “or one may or less explicitly attempt to subdue violence and acquire some perspective on the past by ‘theatricalizing,’ ritualizing, or transfiguring such traumatizing scenes, at best in a manner that over time may assist in the attempt to counteract uncontrolled and intrusive forms of acting-out or even to overcome certain posttraumatic symptoms.” \textit{History in Transit}, 93.
contemporary tours of hell,\textsuperscript{25} James Berger has linked apocalyptic texts with trauma theory. Following LaCapra’s use of acting-out and working-through, he writes that

Apocalypse and trauma are congruent ideas, for both refer to shatterings of existing structures of identity and language, and both effect their own erasures from memory and must be reconstructed by means of their traces, remains, survivors, and ghosts: their symptoms. Post-apocalyptic representations are \textit{simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them}.\textsuperscript{26}

Unlike LaCapra, who tends to see all apocalyptic texts as prone to the kind of one-sided, acting-out of violent revenge fantasies, Berger hints here that LaCapra’s nuanced theory of both acting-out and working-through trauma may offer the scholar a unique theoretical lens with which to approach texts that have continued to compel readers who come to them looking for ways of dealing with the aftermath in trauma’s wake.\textsuperscript{27}

My own view, which I will be defending throughout this work, is that the \textit{resignatio ad infernum} tradition is best seen as a nuanced integration of the gestures of working through and acting out of trauma described by LaCapra. Hyperbolic acts of


\textsuperscript{26} James Berger, \textit{After the End : Representations of Post-Apocalypse} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19 emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{27} This approach by no means argues that LaCapra’s fears are unfounded. Clearly apocalyptic texts can be mobilized to a terrifying set of conclusions. This is what we will see, for example, in Augustine’s eschatological vision in Chapter Three. In many ways, however, what LaCapra’s theory makes plain is that Augustine’s apocalyptic vision is guilty of the very one-sidedness the theory rejects. Intriguingly, Augustine seems to have combined in a precarious way a one-sidedness of both acting-out and a one-sidedness of working-through. From his heaven, forgetting and redemption-fantasy reigns, whereas a visit to his hell reveals a violent revenge fantasy of one-sided acting out.
mourning, carnivalesque theatricalizations of hell, resistance to redemptive closure by rejecting salvation, and grotesque images of love and hell deeply intertwined are all evidence of the need for both working through and acting out hell/trauma. For the religious believer, such traumas necessarily involve God, and thus the relationship with God is implicated in this dynamic.

In the light of LaCapra’s theory we can clarify that the resignatio tradition is not an attempt to resolve the tension between Sally’s three key terms, God, love, and hell but to deploy that tension productively. The deconstruction of hell articulated by the version of the resignatio ad infernum explored in this dissertation is not the end of hell but its exposure to love. It is not the defense of God by packing up hell and putting it into the dustbin of theological history. It is the exposure of God, by means of parrhesiastic prayer, to the dangerous memory and witness of those who have known hell on earth. In the wake of trauma, God, hell, and love are changed and linked by the combined processes of acting out and working through. And as LaCapra notes, this changing and linking is profoundly political in nature.
Foucault’s Discovery of Parrhesia

The political aspect of the resignatio tradition can be seen more clearly by turning to our second theoretical lens. In the last two years of his life, Michel Foucault devoted his annual public lectures at the Collège de France to the topic of parrhesia.²⁸ Tracing the concept back to its earliest use in Greek philosophy and drama, and examining its transition from a strictly political action to one bound up with the kind of ethical/ascetic practices he had earlier explored in his work on care of the self,²⁹ he concluded the lecture series with an examination of parrhesia in the Cynic tradition and, largely through its influence, into early Christian asceticism.

A number of parrhesiastic features are highlighted by Foucault. Structurally, parrhesia is almost always a word of uncomfortable truth spoken by a subordinate to a superior under conditions in which “the fact of telling the truth, and the fact of having told it, will, may, or must entail costly consequences for those who have told it.”³⁰ The parrhesiastic speaker takes a risk by binding him/herself to the words spoken, as opposed to the distancing of word and speaker possible in rhetorical speech, and thus seeks to turn or persuade the superior to whom they have spoken to re-consider

³⁰ Foucault and Foucault, The Government of Self and Others, 56.
a course of action the speaker considers rash or unwise. The risk of backlash, and
even death, Foucault writes, is what constitutes a speech as *parrhesia*.\(^{31}\) *Parrhesia* started
out in Greek democratic life as an occasional action, where a speaker enters the public
arena to speak a particular word to the polis and its leaders before returning to their
daily life. But, Foucault argues, when a crisis in democratic *parrhesia* occurred due to its
corruption,\(^{32}\) *parrhesiastic* discourse shifted from being an occasional action in the polis
to a permanent set of habits of life in the realm of philosophy and the care of souls.

Socrates becomes an emblematic *parrhesiast* in this new, broader understanding
of *parrhesia*, which Foucault thinks now “tries precisely, stubbornly, and always
starting over again, to bring the question of truth back to the question of its political
conditions and the ethical differentiation which gives access to it.” (68) *Parrhesiastic*
discourse insists on the “irreducibility of truth, power, and *ethos*, and at the same time
the discourse of their necessary relationship” (68) and its own *ethos* is nourished by the
socratic tasks of “investigation, test, care.” (87)

The pinnacle of Socratic *parrhesia*, Foucault thinks, comes at the end of Socrates’
life, with his famous and famously puzzling charge to Crito at the conclusion of the

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{32}\) The crisis occurs, Foucault writes, due to the way in which *parrhesiastic* discourse is distorted by
self-serving demagogues, who, like radio talk show hosts, indeed “say everything” but with no
intention of thereby serving the truth. This distortion only encourages anti-democratic elites,
Foucault writes, into dismissing all forms of *parrhesia* from the city. See lecture from Feb. 8 1984
First Hour in Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (the Government of Self and Others II)* : Lectures at the Collège
De France, 1983-1984. In the remainder of this section, citations from this edition will be indicated by
page number within the text.
Phaedo to “see to it and don’t forget” to sacrifice “a cock to Asclepius.” Following Dumézil, Foucault notes the significance that it is Crito to whom Socrates addresses this charge, Crito who in the dialogue bearing his name proposed an escape plan for Socrates following his death sentence. In that dialogue, Crito batters Socrates with plausible reasons for escape: not to do so would mean leaving behind his family and thus “letting them down”; the likely condemnation of Crito by people who, not knowing the real reason for Socrates’ death, will nevertheless blame Crito for not saving his friend Socrates either out of greed or lack of courage and adequate care for him; and finally the shame and disgrace Socrates’ death will bring to his memory as well as to that of his friends.

Noting the agony into which such considerations thrust him, Socrates nevertheless refuses to back away from his previous teaching that public opinion can never be substituted for truth; so he steadfastly continues on the course which will lead to his death. Socrates is bound to his words, to the truth of them, even should they mean death, because this is the whole point of his parrhesia, the care (epimeleia) he has insisted must be taken to have one’s words match one’s actions.

The sacrifice of a cock to Asclepius acknowledges that in resisting the seductive lure of life at any cost, Socrates, (and to some extent, Crito) has been cured of the

---

33 Asclepius is the Greek god of healing. Foucault begins to discuss these famous last words in the first hour of the 15 Feb 1984 lecture, and then devotes the whole second hour to a discussion of its significance. Foucault notes that this “see to it and don’t forget” translates μη ἀμέλεσθε containing the same root, meles, from which comes the many words for “care”, including Foucault’s favored epimeleia.
disease of false opinion and helped by the gods who in turn have cared for him. In accepting his death as not a hindrance to, but the fulfillment of his *parrhesia*, and even more profoundly, as evidence of the care the gods have had for him in helping him to hold fast to the truth he has been given, Socrates, in Foucault’s view, “bequeaths” this care of the self to others beyond his own death (113).

For Foucault, then, the ascetic rigors of *parrhesia* as a practice of care of the self are perhaps most manifest in how we view death, particularly our own. Socrates’ death sets the bar that all future *parrhesiasts* will need to meet:

I think that Socrates’ death founds philosophy, in the reality of Greek thought and therefore in Western history, as a form of veridiction which is not that of prophecy, or wisdom, or tekhne; a form of veridiction peculiar precisely to philosophical discourse, and the courage of which must be exercised until death as a test of the soul... (113-114)

In the second half of the lecture course of 83-84, Foucault turns to the Cynic tradition, where he notes a further intensification of socratic *parrhesia*, as well as a more confrontational approach to the political sphere than we see in Socrates. Here in the Cynic, Foucault notes, we draw very near to the early Christian tradition of desert asceticism. The Cynic *parrhesiast*, whose mode of life is reduced to the barest essentials so that he can be free of all unnecessary attachments, is a “scout” or even an “angel”, going to the furthest extremes of what it means to be human in order to

---

34 In the ’82-’83 lecture series, Foucault describes Cynic *parrhesia* as more “one of confrontation, and derision, of mockery and the assertion of a necessary exteriority” in comparison to the socratic. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 286. Though he does not, so far as I have found, highlight Diogenes Laertius’ famous description of Diogenes the Cynic as “a Socrates gone mad”, it is hard not to think that this idea of the madness of the Cynics is one of the reasons Foucault is so drawn to them.
“return to tell humanity the truth” about life and death. He then boldly challenges his listeners to leave off the “pointless conventions” and “superfluous opinions” with which this truth of life is often overlaid. (170-171)

In the second hour of his first lecture devoted to Cynic parrhesia, Foucault begins to offer for consideration a certain tradition of Cynic ascesis, one that is, as in the historical Cynicism of Diogenes of Sinope, “handed down, kept up, and carried on much more as an attitude, a way of being, than as a doctrine.” (178) In addition to the desert tradition of early Christianity, Foucault suggests that Cynic parrhesia “was passed on for a very long time” within Christian culture (182), mentioning in particular the mendicant orders and the spiritual Franciscans along with the Waldensians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, all of whom were striving to practice the vita apostolica in response to the widespread corruptions of the medieval church. Moving rapidly through history, Foucault mentions also the anti-ecclesiastical movements in the Reformation as part of a “long history of Christian Cynicism” (183) before turning to the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century, mentioning Bakhtin’s explorations of carnival in Rabelais and His World (187) and suggesting

---

35 The historical and literary connection between the desert tradition of the Holy Fool and the Cynic sage has been persuasively made by Derek Krueger in his treatment of Leontius of Neapolis’ Life of Symeon the Fool. See Derek Krueger and Leontius, Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius’s Life and the Late Antique City (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
Dostoevsky as a particularly significant figure in this tradition Foucault is “wandering” through (185).¹⁶

Towards the end of the lecture series, Foucault returns to his comparison of Cynic and Christian *parrhesia*, becoming even more specific about their commonalities. So he writes,

I think here too—and here things would no doubt be easier, but they should also be studied closely—that Cynicism forms the matrix, the point of departure for a long series of historical figures in Christian asceticism, an asceticism which is at once both a spiritual battle in itself, against one’s own sins and temptations, and also a battle for the whole world. The Christian ascetic is someone who purges the whole world of its demons….an open militantism which is the critique of real life and of men’s behavior, and which, in personal renunciation and destitution, conducts the battle which must lead to the change of the whole world. (286)

Like the ancient Cynics, early Christian asceticism is dedicated to “alter[ing] the value of the currency” of life, “making the theme of the true life grimace.” (227)

---

¹⁶ Is Foucault discovering this tradition of cynicism, or is he inventing it? In a well-known interview, he once said, regarding the historical accuracy of his genealogies, “What I do is a kind of historical fiction. In a sense I know very well that what I say is not true. A historian could say of what I’ve said, ‘That’s not true’…” Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live : (Interviews, 1966-84)* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 301. Here in the lectures he seems to suggest a certain undecidability in his mind when he begins the lecture, writing: “I am going to ask for your indulgence. What I am now going to offer you is no more than a stroll, an excursus, a wander. Imagine that we were able to work as a group or that we wanted to write a book on cynicism as a moral category…” (177). Part of the problem has to do with the nature of Cynic philosophy in Foucault’s view, which is one that is relatively uninterested in passing on particular “doctrines” of its own, preferring to focus on styles of life, or attitudes. Traditions, at least those preferred by scholars, are usually seen as doctrinal inheritances. This privileging, which Foucault contests, is one of the reasons why Cynic philosophy is often dismissed altogether from standard histories of philosophy. For a recent example of this dismissal, see John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom : Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012). On page 61, he refers to Cynic philosophy as “just a way of life”, paraphrasing approvingly Diogenes Laertius’ discussion of contemporary dismissals of Diogenes the Cynic.
Cynicism has “laid down this otherness of an other life, not simply as the choice of a different, happy, and sovereign life, but as the practice of a combatativeness on the horizon of which is an other world (un monde autre).” (287)

In the final lecture of Foucault’s career, he both furthers this comparison between Cynic and Christian parrhesia, and also draw some significant distinctions. There is the “fairly well known and marked out continuity between the practices of ascesis, the forms of endurance, and the modes of exercise in Cynicism, and those in Christianity.” (317) Both emphasize “the idea of a missionary of the truth coming to give men the ascetic example of the true life, recalling them to themselves, putting them back on the right path, and announcing to them another catastasis of the world.” (316) Both assert a certain “bestial” anthropology. (318-19)

As Foucault sees it, this Christian “Cynicism”, seen most clearly in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, and which can go even further than the ancient Cynics in the intensity of its practices, is also marked by a few deeply significant differences from its predecessor. In addition to articulating the goal of “altering the currency,” what Foucault calls living “an other life (un autre vie)”, Christian asceticism also posits an other world, “un monde autre” after this one. In what he calls Christianity’s “master strokes [of] philosophical significance”, (319) Christianity links these two together, so that living an “other life” in this life gives one access to the truth of the other world to come after death. Christian eschatology founds and disciplines Christian parrhesia.
The second major difference between Cynic and Christian *parrhesia* is what Foucault calls the Christian “principle of obedience.”

Obedience to God conceived of as the master (the *despotes*) whose slave, whose servant one is; obedience to His will which has, at the same time, the form of the law; obedience finally to those who represent the *despotes* (the lord and master) and who receive an authority from Him to which one must submit completely. (320)

When he turns to look at some particular biblical instances of *parrhesia*, it becomes clear that he sees this Christian principle of obedience in significant tension with *parrhesia*. Biblical texts reveal a kind of *parrhesia* unknown to the Cynics, that of a “vertical” dimension between the *parrhesiast* and God, whereby God speaks with *parrhesia* to humans, and the soul in turn ascends to God and speaks transparently, without guile, with “openness of heart”.\(^{37}\) This *parrhesiastic* discourse between the soul and God, Foucault claims, leads almost inexorably to a fundamentally different kind of *parrhesia* from that of the Cynic. Quoting the *Book of Job*, though without noting that it is Eliphaz, not Job who is speaking\(^ {38}\), Foucault remarks that here *parrhesia*, tied as it is to devotion to God’s will, becomes less agonistic in nature.

So *parrhesia*, you see, is no longer the courageous and risky truth-telling of someone who speaks boldly to those who are mistaken. It is this impulse, this openness of heart by which heart and soul are lifted up to

---

\(^{37}\) Foucault admits that his knowledge of biblical instances of *parrhesia* is limited to his reading of Stanley Marrow and Heinrich Schlier.

\(^{38}\) See our discussion of this passage in *Job* below. Had Foucault not relied so exclusively on Marrow and Schlier, who apparently do not notice the struggle over the true nature of *parrhesia* going on in the text of *Job*, he would have had an even more intriguing instance of biblical *parrhesia* with which to work.
God, may come to grasp God, to enjoy Him, as it were, and experience the principle of His bliss. (327)

Related to this principle of obedience, Foucault adds, is the principle of “purity of conscience” as a requirement for true parrhesia.40

By the time this newer understanding of parrhesia enters the Christian biblical tradition in the First Epistle of John, Foucault sees its transformation and domestication as nearly complete. Quoting 1 John 5:13-14 he writes:

Parrhesia, therefore, is situated in the following context. On the one hand, the Christian, as such, who believes in the name of the Son of God, knows that he has eternal life. Second, he addressed God to ask for what? Nothing other than what God wills. To that extent, man’s prayer or will is nothing other than the reduplication or return to God of His own will. Principle of obedience. (329-30)

This principle of obedience is then yoked to trust in God’s love and eschatological promise of salvation for those who obey God’s will. Quoting 1 John

39 The French text reads: “La parrhesia n’est donc plus du tout, vous le voyez, le dire-vrai courageux et risqué de celui qui a cette hardiesse à l’égard de ceux qui se trompent. Elle est ce movement, cette ouverture de coeur par lesquels le coeur et l’âme, s’élevant jusqu’à Dieu, peuvent arriver à saisir Dieu, à en profiter en quelque sorte et éprouver le principe de Sa félicité.” Michel Foucault et al., Le Courage De La Vérité : Le Gouvernement De Soi Et Des Autres II : Cours Au Collège De France, 1983-1984 ([Paris]: Seuil : Gallimard, 2009), 298. In the same paragraph, Foucault refers to it as “cette jouissance.”

40 Though Foucault finds this principle, “ek katharou tou suneidotos,” in Philo of Alexandria rather than in a Christian source, it seems clear, as we will see, that by linking this up with the ‘principle of obedience’ found in Christian attempts to delimit parrhesia, that he sees it, as his sources both do, as folded into the early Christian understanding of parrhesia. See Schlier’s entry on parrhesia in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964) Vol 5, p. 881, where Schier draws this connection explicitly.

41 “I have written these things to you, who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life…We have in Him this confidence (parrhesia), that if we ask for anything in accordance with His will, He hears us.”
4:16-17, Foucault concludes, “On the side of men, of Christians, *parrhesia* is therefore this confidence in God’s love, the love that He manifests when He hears the prayers addressed to Him and which He will manifest on the day of Judgment.” (330)

Trust-love-obedience. As Foucault sees it, these three, deeply intercalated, form a unified front in the early Christian version of *parrhesia*. It is a powerful combination, leading all the way to martyrs of the early church, who are the “parrhesiast[s] par excellence.” (332)

Yet this increasing emphasis on obedience and purity of heart is an ambiguous blessing, Foucault thinks. Here we begin to enter the territory which Foucault has explored elsewhere under the rubric of pastoral power.

Foulcault notes at this point that this eschatologically backed “confidence” in God’s promises lends boldness to Christian apostolic preaching such as we find in Paul.

---

42 “God is love; and whoever remains in love remains in God, and God in him. As he is, so we are also in this world; it is in this that love is perfect in us, so that we have confidence (*parrhesia*) on the Day of Judgment.”

43 This qualifier, “of Christians” is crucial, as it is only for Christians, according to the version of “eschatological *parrhesia*” Foucault is tracking here, that such confidence is warranted. As both Schlier and Marrow note, 1 John’s vision of *parrhesia*, confidence on the Day of Judgment, is drawing from the textual tradition that includes Wisdom 5:1 and 4 Ezra 7:98. As we will see in both Chapters Two and Three, these texts present a very different picture of *parrhesia* from the agonized, rebellious version found in the *resignatio* tradition we are following.

within cenobite monasticism and the pastorate, “which entrust the conduct of souls to pastors, priests, or bishops.” (333) Such structures mediate the relationship of the soul to God, so that the transparency or openness of heart which one finds in earlier texts is replaced by a deeply mistrustful attitude toward the self, a mistrust which is exploited by pastoral intermediaries who alone can guide the soul to salvation. Fear of God replaces confidence and “parrhesia now appears as a blameworthy behavior of presumption, familiarity, and arrogant self-confidence” (334-5). More troubling to Foucault is how this mistrust of self and the need for constant vigilance lends itself to a Christian re-deployment of “care of self” which becomes the very opposite of parrhesia, which is now viewed suspiciously as arrogant pride and self-negligence. (336)

This elevation of the principle of obedience and denigration of parrhesia leads Foucault to this bold conclusion:

“Where there is obedience there cannot be parrhesia.” (336) Since the principle of obedience is in Foucault’s view the dominant trait of Christianity in the wake of Augustine, it would seem that this would be the end of the story of Christian parrhesia.

Yet, as is often the case with Foucault, things are not quite so simple. His last words of the lecture series, in what a number of scholars have suggested was his own

46 Foucault provides a number of relevant texts from both the Sayings of the Fathers and from Dorotheos of Gaza’s Discourses and Sayings.
“philosophical testament,” suggests an intriguing bifurcation in Christian history regarding *parrhesia* and a possible way forward in Foucault’s thinking had he lived to continue his work. He writes:

It seems to me...we see the opposition between two major frameworks, two major cores of Christian experience being marked out. I told you that *parrhesia* is not a universally, uniformly, and continually negative notion in these patristic texts. There is a positive and a negative conception of *parrhesia*. The positive conception makes *parrhesia* a confidence in God, a confidence as the element which enables an apostle or a martyr to speak the truth with which he has been entrusted. *Parrhesia* is also the confidence one has in God's love and in how one will be received by Him on the Day of Judgment. Around this conception of *parrhesia* crystallized what could be called the parrhesiastic pole of Christianity, in which the relation to the truth is established in the form of a face-to-face relationship with God and in a human confidence which corresponds to the effusion of divine love. *It seems to me that this parrhesiastic pole was a source of what could be called the great mystical tradition of Christianity.* To whoever has sufficient confidence in God, to whoever has a heart pure enough to open itself to God, God will respond with a movement which will assure that person’s salvation and allow them access to an eternal face-to-face relationship with [Him]. Such is the positive function of *parrhesia*...And it seems to me that the long and difficult persistence of mysticism, of mystical experience in Christianity, is nothing other than the survival of the parrhesiastic pole of confidence in God, which, not without difficulty, has subsisted in the margins against the great enterprise of anti-parrhesiastic suspicion that man is called upon to manifest and practice with regard to himself and others, through obedience to God, and in fear and trembling before this same God. (336-37)

---

47 Frédéric Gros, in his course summary, uses this phrase to describe Foucault’s final lectures, “since Foucault decides to situate the whole of his critical work in this return to Socrates and the very roots of philosophy.” (343)
The positive turn to Christian mysticism should, perhaps, not be so surprising here. Foucault had mentioned it briefly in his lecture from February 29. Nor is this positive evaluation of Christian mysticism a new idea in Foucault’s thought.

In his 1978 essay, “What is Critique?”, Foucault had this to say about the mystical tradition.

If we were to explore this dimension of critique, would we not then find that it is supported by something akin to the historical practice of revolt, the non-acceptance of a real government, on one hand, or, on the other, the individual experience of the refusal of governmentality? What strikes me in particular—but I am perhaps haunted by this because I am working on it a lot right now—is that, if this matrix of critical attitude in the Western world must be sought out in religious attitudes and in connection with the exercise of pastoral power in the Middle Ages, all the same it is surprising that mysticism is seen as an individual experience while institutional and political struggles are viewed as absolutely unified, and in any case, constantly referring to one another. I would say that one of the first great forms of revolt in the West was mysticism. All the bastions of resistance to the authority of the Scriptures, to mediation by the pastor, were developed either in convents or outside convents by the secular population. When one sees that these experiences, these spiritual movements have very often been used as attire, vocabulary, but even more so as ways of being, and ways of supporting the hopes expressed by the struggle that we can define as economic, popular, and in Marxist terms as the struggle between the classes, I think we have here something that is quite fundamental.48

Job’s Parrhesia

It is unfortunate that Foucault missed the most striking aspect of the biblical deployment of parrhesia. While it is true that cenobitic monasticism highlights the principle of obedience, a minor tradition of disobedience before God also exists that,

48 Michel Foucault, The Politics of Truth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 75-76.
when highlighted as it is in the *resignatio* tradition, has profound theo-political implications. A closer look at *parrhesia* in *The Book of Job* reveals what he missed.

In the seventeenth chapter of *The Book of Job*, having listened in agony as his friends try to convince him to accept the justice of God’s punishment, repent, and return with them to the land of the living, Job cries out:

If I must look forward to Sheol as my home, and make my bed in the dark place, Say to the Pit, ‘You are my father,’ to the maggots, ‘Mother,’ ‘Sister’-Where, then, is my hope? Who can see hope for me? Will it descend to Sheol? Shall we go down together to the dust?\(^49\)

Job accuses his friends of adding hell to his hell by refusing to acknowledge that his cry comes from the depths of *sheol* itself, refusing even in part to “go down together” with him to this place of bitterness and tears. Throughout the book, Job repeats that he is already in the “*infernum*”, in an agonizing pit in which the death he has so violently been given now mingles, tormentingly, with what remains of his life. As he puts it in the seventh chapter:

Like a slave who longs for the shadow and like labourers who look for their wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, “When shall I rise?” But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out again. My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and come to their end without hope. ‘Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good. The eye that beholds me will see me no more; while your eyes are upon

\(^{49}\) Job 17: 13-16, JPS translation. The LXX makes it more clear that Job is already in hell, and that whatever comes after this life, it can hardly, in his eyes, be worse. Verse 13 reads: “For if I remain, Hades is my habitation” ἐὰν γὰρ ὑπομείνω ζῆς μου ὁ ὀίκος.
me, I shall be gone. As the cloud fades and vanishes, so those who go
down to Sheol do not come up; they return no more to their houses, nor
do their places know them any more. ‘Therefore I will not restrain my
mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the
bitterness of my soul.’

Looking more like a ghost than a man (“while your eyes are upon me, I shall be
gone”), he insists as do many trauma survivors that when one has been to hell, its
cords clings voraciously to the present (“those who go down to Sheol do not come
up”). The world is made utterly strange, (“nor do their places know them any more”),
and time becomes the measure of one’s unending suffering, alternating between
hurtling speed and intolerable stretches of monotonous nothingness (“so I am allotted
months of emptiness…my days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle”).

Final oblivion would be a reprieve, Job thinks, from this hell on earth, this
death-in-life, but at least for now such oblivion is not his (“nights of misery are
appointed to me”).

Out of this hell, then, whose justice Job adamantly refuses, come his bold and
bitter words of complaint. Above all else, we might say, Job is a man of par-rhesia, who
literally “says everything” to both God and human alike, risking all in order to speak
the truth. Not surprisingly, given his friends’ reluctance to allow Job’s suffering to

---

50 Job 7:2-11 NRSV
51 On these aspects of trauma, see the following studies: Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience : Trauma, Narrative, and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Judith Lewis Herman, Trauma and Recovery (New York, N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1992); Shelly Rambo, Spirit and Trauma : A Theology of Remaining (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).
rend their theological worldview, it is precisely this *parrhesia* of Job’s that is forcefully contested.

In the twenty-second chapter, Job’s friend Eliphaz, having heard one too many words of protestation from Job, insists that there is only one way for Job’s (or anyone else’s) prayers to be heard by God—they must come from a humble, obedient heart, one willing to “accept instruction” from God, no matter how severe. Purity of heart and obedience to God, neither of which are much in evidence in Job’s bitter words, are the conditions of possibility for reaching God’s ears:

> Be close to Him and wholehearted; Good things will come to you thereby. Accept instruction from His Mouth; Lay up His words in your Heart. If you return to Shaddai you will be restored, If you banish iniquity from your tent...[then] When you seek the favor of Shaddai, and *lift up your face to God*, you will pray to Him, and He will listen to you...For he saves the humble.\(^{52}\)

In the translation of this text into Greek of the LXX, Eliphaz’ rebuke even further emphasizes the point: “Then you will *speak frankly (parrhesiastheisi)* before the Lord, looking up to heaven cheerfully, and when you pray to Him, he will listen to you.”\(^{53}\)

True *parrhesia*, Eliphaz insists, cannot come from the agonized, rebellious place of *sheol* in which Job finds himself. Rather, only by complete, trusting obedience to

---

\(^{52}\) Job 22:21-23, 26-27a, 29; JPS translation, italics mine.

\(^{53}\) I follow here the NETS translation of the LXX. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
God can one have one’s prayers answered. Job’s complaint is thus rendered mute by Eliphaz.

Not surprisingly, Job is unconvinced. Though it takes five more chapters of bitter words and bitterly soothing responses, Job finally addresses Eliphaz’ invocation of the proper constraints for parrhesiastic speech before God. In the NETS translation of the LXX it reads:

Far be it from me to declare that you are right, until I die, for I will not relinquish my innocence. But holding fast to righteousness, I will never let it go, for I am not conscious within myself of having done anything amiss…To be sure, what hope does the impious have that he hangs on? When he trusts in the Lord, will he be saved? Will the Lord listen to his petition? Or when distress comes upon him, does he have any confidence (parrhesia) before him? Or as he calls upon him, will he listen to him? Well then, I will declare to you what is in the Lord’s hand; what is with the Almighty, I will not falsify. Look here, all of you know that you are piling nothing upon nothing.⁵⁴ [Job 27:7-12]

“So why talk nonsense?” is the JPS translation of this last phrase from the Hebrew. Here we see a crucial aspect of the parrhesiastic tradition coming from the mouth of Job. One’s words must be in harmony with the actual conditions of one’s life,⁵⁵ or all the words in the world amount to nothing but the vanity of empty gestures, however pious. What this means, Job suggests, is that when one is in the fractured time-scape of sheol, fractured and immoderate words, words burning with eros and angst are nearer to the courage of truth than are pious words whose lack of

⁵⁴ Ibid.
correspondence to the truth will leave them ill-equipped to stand forth when “distress” (LXX: ἄνανκη) comes.

Job’s rebellious words have always sat uneasily within the theological traditions that inherited them. Are they capable of an orthodox reading or must orthodoxy always, however surreptitiously, twist Job’s words back into line with the comforting and pious positions of Eliphaz and friends? In the text itself, God sides with the rebellious Job over the pious friends giving rise to the perhaps unholy thought that when in hell, impiety toward God is more orthodox than holy words of comfort and cozying up to the divine will. Such boundary-breaking thoughts have been difficult to sustain. Even the book of Job concludes with a massive display of divine power and rewards for Job, as if to say that only so much ἀρετή is acceptable/required, following which Job might be expected to return to his happy, holy self, burning the fat in offerings to the one who rewarded him so.

The question that animates this dissertation is this: What would it look like if Job refused the rewards of God just as he refused the counsel of his friends? And refused these rewards while at the same time refusing to call it quits with God? What if Job’s ἀρετή, far from being a mere moment in time, an effusive gesture overcome by divinely paternal kindness, were a permanent aspect of some people’s relationship with God, so that remaining in hell, rather than taking orthodoxy’s penitential way out, was a sign of rebellious love given to God? Would the choice of hell be possible without denying God? Would it be sheer nonsense? Could Job’s rebellious protest
found a tradition, however susceptible to being domesticated and tamed by the theologians of the biblical tradition who so often act as latter-day Eliphaz’s in the name of protecting God from harm? Seeing Job’s *resignatio ad infernum* as a way of contesting the true nature of *parrhesia* raises considerably the theo-political stakes.

*Hell Before Hell*

Finally, it should be quite obvious that when Job speaks of being in *sheol*, he is not thinking of the classic Christian understanding of hell as a place of divine punishment in the next life. Such an idea, as Alan Bernstein and others have carefully shown, is quite late on the scene, arriving only after the death of Jesus and in the midst of the early church’s attempts to come to terms with the failure of more traditional theodicies.⁵⁶ But this is not to say that the Hebrew Scriptures are without a sense of hell. In fact, they are full of such a sense, especially in the Psalms, where *sheol* is quite regularly spoken of as an intimate encounter with death and annihilating suffering that continues to invade one’s waking life in what trauma theorist and theologian Shelly Rambo has called, following Derrida, sur-vival, or death-in-life. Rambo writes,

> Although a person does not experience a literal death, the radical dimensions of the traumatic event are experienced as an end—a death. Surviving is not a state in which one gets beyond death; instead, death remains in the experience of survival and life is reshaped in light of death—not in light of its finality but its persistence.⁵⁷

---

This definition of the traumatized existence between life and death is quite close to what the Psalmists and Job call hell/sheol or the pit, or more poetically, the “cords of death.” The point I hasten to emphasize here is that this understanding of hell, far from being the “metaphorical” one, a weak sister so to speak of the “real hell” of Augustinian eschatology, is actually rather literal; it is, quite simply the only hell any of the writers we will be discussing have ever known. When some, like Jacopone da Todi or even Augustine speak of hell in the next life, this is the metaphor, which will become evident as we shall see when the Bishop of Hippo finds himself forced to articulate the “reality” of hell using dream-language as his vehicle. In this work, such dreams will be taken seriously, but always as attempts to work through hell in this life, and never as metaphysical descriptions of what may be after death. “One world at a time”, as Thoreau famously stated to a friend worried about his future status. This will be our motto throughout.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. Part One will consist of three chapters. In the first chapter, we will explore the biblical origins of the resignatio ad infernum tradition in Moses’ arguments with God, the erotic burning in Song of Songs, and in Paul’s famous “willingness to be damned” in Romans 9:2-3. Chapter Two will examine how the resignatio motif continued in early post-biblical writing, especially among the non-canonical apocalyptic tours of hell and will argue that such tours constitute what we will call a traumatized grotesque. Finally, in Chapter Three we will
focus on Augustine’s decision to reject such a traumatized grotesque in favor of the construction of a hermetically sealed hell in the aftermath of the traumas of the Sack of Rome and the African church’s fierce battle over how to come to terms with imperial power.

Part Two of the dissertation will begin the shift to the thirteenth century when the _resignatio_ motif comes to full bloom and will continue to follow the motif as it winds its way into the postmodern scene via Dostoevsky, Levinas, and Cixous. After an introduction to Part Two rehearsing Foucault’s underappreciated lectures on mystical counter-conduct, Chapter Four will begin with situating the thirteenth-century exemplars of the _resignatio ad infernum_ within the traumatic theo-political landscape of that time. A discussion of The Albigensian Crusade launched by Pope Innocent III against Christians in the south of France will provide one example of how the church deployed a doctrine of hell meant to control and order via regimes of governmentality. The crusade was both a response to and an instigator of various forms of counter-conduct that Foucault saw exemplified in thirteenth century mystical writers, three of whom we will then discuss in Chapters Four (Hadewijch) and Chapter Five (Jacopone da Todi, and Marguerite Porete). Chapter Five will conclude with a brief discussion of the domesticating moves made by the church in subsequent centuries to re-appropriate the volatile energy of the _resignatio_ gestures.

In Chapter Six I will turn to how the _resignatio ad infernum_ re-appears in a new form in post-modernity via Dostoevsky, Levinas, and Cixous. Though it would have
been possible to examine more explicitly theological sources here, I have chosen to focus on thinkers whose tense if not tenuous relationship with theology proper highlights how the resignatio tradition sits uneasily within any one theological tradition. Much as Job, the lovers of the Song of Songs, and the Beguine mystics overflow with their gestures the theological frameworks commonly used to locate them, so too Dostoevsky, Levinas and Cixous elude even the most flexible theological frames. The language of the resignatio, like the hell to which it is witness, is extra-vagant. It wanders, often off the theological reservation, a wandering perhaps better exemplified in writers like Cixous than in the theologians like Balthasar, who, however radical his thought, wants nothing more than to stay on theological terra secura.

Finally, in the Conclusion I will discuss a bit more some of the political import of the resignatio tradition by looking at the resonances it has with two key political theorists of the left, William Connolly and Judith Butler. There I will suggest that the tightly woven fabric of God-love-hell offers a modest but perhaps unique dialogue partner for such non-theistic thinkers who seek alliances across boundaries sometimes thought to be uncrossable in today’s highly fractured and fractious landscape.

---

58 Balthasar and Sergei Bulgakov are the two most obvious twentieth-century theologians who tend toward many of the gestures we see in the earlier resignatio tradition.
Chapter One

Biblical Sources of the Resignatio ad Infernum

The Contested Ground of Hell

Hell is contested terrain, just as the religious gestures with which it is constructed and deconstructed are contested. We are perhaps most familiar with the vision of hell as the proprietary realm of God and his priests,\(^1\) hell as a threatened punishment meted out in the afterlife with the goal of keeping order in this life. This will be the vision most potently realized by Saint Augustine in the 4\(^{th}\) and 5\(^{th}\) centuries in his battles with his brothers in the flesh, the Donatists of North Africa, and further solidified in the 13\(^{th}\) century by St. Thomas Aquinas in the wake of the fierce persecution of the Cathars of Southern France.

In addition to hell as punishment, we are also more and more comfortable speaking of hell as something that takes place here on this earth, hell as world-annihilating trauma.\(^2\) Though this vision of hell as trauma is usually thought of as secondary, even as a metaphoric rendering of the “real” hell of orthodoxy, the account of Gehenna and the historicization of the doctrine of hell by Bernstein and others helps us to see that hell as this-worldly

\(^1\) The gendered language here is intentional, for there is something insistently masculinist about the orthodox view of hell, in which there is little room, as Augustine mockingly noted, for too much motherly “compassion”.

trauma is in fact a root meaning of the term. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, most especially in the Psalms, sheol (LXX: hades; Vulgate: infernum) can designate a world-annihilating trauma in this life, from which one may return and out of which the survivor cries.³

In his history of hell, Alan Bernstein notes that it is the very inability of Deuteronomic justice to make sense of the traumatic suffering of the innocent that leads to the projecting of even more suffering into the afterlife, as the guilty are envisioned being punished eternally in ways quite similar to the actual forms of punishments meted to the innocent in this life.⁴ Hell as trauma thereby leads to yet another vision of hell: hell as theodicy, the classic refutation of which belongs to Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov.⁵ But the vision of a heart drawn to hell via love’s promptings, in unceasing anguish and vehement protest (parrhesia) against a divinely ordered hell-without-

³ A few examples from the Psalms will suffice to make the point: Psalm 30 has “O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.” In Psalm 71 the psalmist sings, “You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths (tehom) of the earth you will bring me up again.” In Psalm 86, it is even more explicit: “For great is your steadfast love towards me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.” Alan Bernstein has written the most thorough scholarly work historicizing hell and showing that the idea of hell as a punishment after death comes relatively late on the scene. Alan E. Bernstein, The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). See also Richard Bauckham, The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998). Unless otherwise noted, biblical citations are from the NRSV.
⁴ Bernstein, The Formation of Hell.
love is a vision of hell less well understood or even recognized. In the tradition of Catholic mystical theology, this vision has been given its own technical term, *resignatio ad infernum*. Given how uneasily such a vision sits with the more orthodox renderings of hell outlined above, it is not surprising that the *resignatio* thematic has often been viewed with outright suspicion, when it has not been deemed heretical as it was during the condemnations of the so-called Free Spirit movements of the 13th and 14th centuries and in the Quietist controversy of the 17th century. In fact, given its radical gesture of solidarity with the damned who are the very enemies of the church and the recipients of its most fervent and fiery condemnations, it would seem that its uneasy survival within ecclesial Christianity can best be explained only by one rather insistent fact: it is biblical.

Beginning in Moses’ parrhesiastic gesture of protest before God’s threatened destruction of the stiff-necked Hebrews, (Exodus 32:32), the notion of a willingness to go to hell in order to bear witness to the fleshy heart of love’s perdurance resonates in the bold gestures of prophetic love found in

---

the Song of Songs and in Paul’s dramatic expression of love in Romans 9:1-3.\(^7\)

Beyond the biblical period, it is in the early apocalyptic texts, especially the *Apocalypse of Peter*\(^8\) that we will see this vision of love in the midst of hell further elaborated. The *resignatio* tradition will not come to flower until the 13\(^{th}\) century when the Beguine mystic Hadewijch can write, stunningly, that “hell is the highest name of love.” In the meantime the biblical and post-biblical apocalyptic tradition will provide the nourishing roots from which the doctrine will flower forth in the 13\(^{th}\) century. To these biblical texts we now turn, seeing in them a number of the key themes of the *resignatio* tradition.

A. Moses’ *parrhesia* before God

After discovering that the people of Israel had committed idolatry, the book of Exodus tells us that God’s wrath “blazed hot”. Resisting God’s command to let him alone so that he might release his wrath upon the idolatrous people, Moses intercedes, suggesting to God that destroying the people of Israel would only damage God’s reputation among their Egyptian

\(^7\) There is some slippage in terminology here. When we speak of Moses in Exodus 32:32 being willing “to be damned”, we are of course not referring to the doctrine of hell developed much later than the writing of the Torah. However, the parhesisatic gesture, one in which one is even willing to argue with God out of love for one’s brethren, acknowledging and accepting the risk such *parrhesia* involves, is consistent with later articulations of the *resignatio ad infernum* in the medieval Christian tradition. In the medieval period, of course, it is just such an Augustinian construction of hell that is being accepted as a possible fate.

\(^8\) The *Apocalypse of Peter*, though very influential and even considered scriptural in the early church, was, as we shall see, marginalized from the mainstream of Christian thought by Augustine in his treatment of the *misericordes* in Book XXI of the *City of God*. 
rivals whom God had previously defeated. After putting to death three thousand of the offending Israelites himself, presumably as a kind of appeasement, Moses returns to speak with God, this time pleading for the remaining people to be spared the fire of God’s wrath. It is Moses’ remarkable ultimatum to God in 32:31-32 that captures the attention: “So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.’” Though there is scholarly debate over what exactly Moses meant by these words,9 the early tradition points to a number of themes that will carry forward into the resignatio ad infernum tradition. First, there is the quality of parrhesia in Moses’ words.10 As Philo noted in the early first century C.E., Moses “has such courage of speech [parrhesia] that he is bold not only to speak and cry aloud, but actually to make an outcry of reproach...”11 Expressing his clear uneasiness with Moses’ boldness, Philo goes on to make careful distinctions between what he will call the “good confidence” (tharaleotis) of Moses and the “audacity” (thrasuteis) of the “arrogant man” (authadous). (295) What Philo will deny by this careful

---


10 Parrhesia has been translated into English variously. “Boldness of speech”, “freedom of speech”, and “audacity” are all possibilities. Since Foucault’s now famous studies of parrhesia in his late lectures has made the term a familiar one to philosophical audiences, it is customary to leave the term in transliterated form, much like Derrida’s khôra.

parsing, the later tradition will affirm of Moses and of Paul: audacity before God.

Clement of Rome, also in the first century, speaks of Moses’ *parrhesia* and suggests that it is “mighty love” prompting him.\(^\text{12}\) In the third century, Origen, in his commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans, will argue that Moses, like Paul in Romans 9:3, was here “willing to be cut off from salvation” for the sake of his brethren.\(^\text{13}\) That this was a gesture of love on Moses’ part was clear to Basil of Caesarea, who wrote, in his *Asketikon*, “Accordingly Moses, the faithful attendant of God, showed such love for his brothers that he preferred to be blotted out of God’s book in which he had been inscribed, if the people were not forgiven their sin.”\(^\text{14}\)

In the fourth century John Chrysostom wrote of Moses that

so passionately did he love [his brethren], as to say unto God, when they committed that heinous sin, Yet now if You will forgive, forgive their sin; and if not, blot even me also out of the book which You have written. Fain would I perish, says he, with


\(^{14}\) Anna Silvas, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 173. Basil also notes that this gesture of Moses’, shared with Paul, is in the closest proximity to, and in Paul’s case in explicit imitation of, the willingness of Jesus to “to offer himself as an exchange for the salvation of all.” This theme of the *imitatio Christi* and mystical substitution is one that will recur throughout the *resignatio* tradition.
them, rather than without them be saved. Here, verily, is love
even to madness (mania), verily, unbounded love (eros megas). 15

Here in Chrystosom we see the theme of the holy madness of love, a theme
that will return in the medieval period. 16

Given Chrysostom’s notorious anti-Judaism, it is not surprising that he
will contrast Moses and Paul to Paul’s advantage. So Moses, John thought,
wished merely to die with his people, whereas Paul hoped to sacrifice himself in
order to save his people. 17 Nevertheless, Moses’ mad love for his people, even
in the face of their antagonism toward him, was a source of great amazement to
the Archbishop:

How often did they reject both himself and his brother? How
often did they seek to return back to Egypt? And yet after all

15 John Chrysostom, et al., Saint Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (Edinburgh; Grand Rapids, Mich.: T & T
Clark; Eerdmans, 1988), 93.

16 Particularly significant is Chrysostom’s use of the word eros here to describe the self-
sacrificial love of Moses. This of course flies in the face of the by now much critiqued thesis
of Anders Nygren that eros is opposed to agape due to the latter’s self-sacrificial character
and the former’s acquisitive nature. See Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros (London: S.P.C.K.,
1953). As Bernard McGinn has pointed out in his essay, “God as Eros: Metaphysical
Foundations of Christian Mysticism,” eros is a rich trope in the Christian mystical tradition
and can by no means be reduced to the acquisitive love Nygren sees in it. McGinn in John
Meyendorff and Bradley Nassif, New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John
Meyendorff (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1996). In another important essay,
“The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism,” McGinn notes the connection
between the madness of love and the theme of the resignatio ad infernum in the 12th century
mystic Richard of St. Victor. Richard’s writings on love will prepare the soil for the flowering
of the resignatio theematics in the 13th century Beguine mystics. McGinn in Steven T. Katz,

17 Chrysostom draws this conclusion in his paean to Paul, de laudibus sanctii Pauli, translated by
Margaret Mary Mitchell, The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline
Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). The passage comparing
Moses and Paul is found on page 446 of Mitchell’s text.
these things did he burn; yea, was beside himself with love for them, and was ready to suffer for their sakes.\textsuperscript{18}

The agonistic relationship between Moses’ \textit{parrhesiastic} prayer and God’s divine power is noted in an early 5\textsuperscript{th} century letter of Jerome, in which he writes that God’s command to Moses to “let him alone”, far from being an expression of unalterable power on God’s part, is actually a more subtle invitation for Moses to \textit{intervene} and seek to unplug God from his plan of an overheated power display. So, Jerome writes, “On another occasion God said to Moses, ‘Let me alone…that I may consume this people,’ showing by the words “let me alone” that \textit{he can be withheld} from doing what he threatens. The prayers of His servant \textit{bindered His power.”}\textsuperscript{19} As we shall see, it is precisely this resistance to divinely sanctioned power that will mark the distinctiveness of the \textit{resignatio} thematic.

\textsuperscript{18} John Chrysostom, \textit{Homilies on Ephesians}, 83. “Was beside himself in love” is a form of the Greek verb \textit{mainomai}. Again challenging easy assumptions about the theological register of the Greek, Chrysostom’s word for Moses’ “burning” love for his brethren is \textit{exekaieto} from the verb \textit{ekkaiw}. In the New Testament, the verb is only found in Romans 1:27, where it refers to the burning lusts of the idolaters. Paul’s usage is the more common.

B. Wounded Love in the Desert: Love and Hell in *The Song of Songs*

“Love is fierce as death, Passion as mighty as Sheol,”[20] the lover insists in a verse that will become increasingly important as the *resignatio* tradition develops. If, as Rabbi Aqiba has famously said, the Song of Songs as a whole is the “holy of holies”, then this verse on love’s relationship with death and hell may well be thought of as the “ark of witness”, the very heart of the holy of holies and the ur-text of the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition. From it and the surrounding verses of the Song flow a number of themes that we will follow below.

*Eros Transfigured: Divine Love in the Flesh*

Love is fierce as death, as hard as hell.[21] But what is the nature of this love? Here the history of translation and of allegorical readings need to be engaged in order to see what is at stake when the medieval tradition takes up the Song in earnest. Perhaps the most significant interpretive move is made when the Septuagint’s translators choose *agape* exclusively as the word for love

---

[20] Sg of Sgs 8:6, JPS translation. For the Hebrew *sheol*, the LXX has *Hades*. The Vulgate has *inferus*.

[21] I am not making the claim here that the author of the Song has in mind any specific concept of hell. *Sheol* is the Hebrew term used. See Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977). Pope sees *sheol* in the Song as referring here to ‘the netherworld.’ In my reading, it is synonymous with death, which, as Bernstein and Bauckham have both shown convincingly, is for much of the biblical tradition a reality within life, not merely something that occurs when life ends.
(‘ahabā) in the Song. Nervous about the explicitly erotic charge of the song, the translators never use the obvious Greek term eros, choosing instead to use the less common agape. As André Lacocque has noted, this decision will have far-reaching consequences for how the song will be read in the Western Christian tradition. “It played into the hands of those who looked at human love as unworthy and at sexuality as the primal source of sin.”22 Even more significant, he notes, the splitting off of eros from agape leads to a denigration of the flesh. “To the Eros of the Poem was artificially substituted a disembodied Agape. Because of this, the rebellious spirit of the work was tamed to fit a dualistic worldview.”23 Platonic dualism between flesh and spirit, with the latter term always privileged, is continued in the allegorical tradition of both Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, though the struggle to “tame” the eros of the text is clearly evident in their commentaries.24

---

23 Ibid, p.xi. Lacocque has in his sights the kind of reading of agape and eros that will come to fruition in the work of Nygren and is seeking to restore to the Song its erotic, rebellious charge.
24 Origin, in particular, notes the erotic nature of the text, though he repeatedly cautions against a fleshly misreading of these clearly erotic images. See Patricia Cox Miller, ""Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure": Eros and Language in Origen's "Commentary on the Song of Songs"," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 54, no. 2 (Summer, 1986), pp. 241-253, for a deeply sensitive reading of Origen’s erotic mode of reading the Song. For the way Gregory of Nyssa also takes the song in a more Platonic direction, see R. A. Norris, "The Soul Takes Flight: Gregory of Nyssa and the Song of Songs," Anglican Theological Review 80, no. 4 (Fall 1998, 1998), 517-532.
Nevertheless, as Lacocque, Othmar Keel, and a number of other recent readers have noted, the erotic and the fleshly is not easily dislodged from the Song.\textsuperscript{25} The Song is resolutely \textit{this-worldly}, implying as Lacocque notes that even God is to be understood as intimately linked to frail flesh: “…if God’s name is not found, it is because God is to be tasted, smelled, heard, seen, and touched in the song.”\textsuperscript{26} So strong is the identity between earthly love and the divine in the Song that Lacocque argues that under its influence, “God is love” is changed from “a trope to an equation” and it becomes possible to make the bold reversal: Love is God.\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{Love as Paradise}

Because love is so highly praised in the Song, living in its realm is seen as \textit{paradisal}. As Landy, Bloch and Lacocque note, the Song can be read as a bold interpretive re-reading of the loss of paradise in the garden of Eden, with love allowing a return to paradise in the realm of the senses, something exquisitely

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{25} In addition to the above commentators, see Kearney, “The Shulammite's Song: Divine Eros, Ascending and Descending” in Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, \textit{Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{26} Lacocque, \textit{Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs}, p. 31. Keel writes, “Neither the totalitarian alteration of the Song’s theological personality imposed by an allegorical reading nor the moralistic attempt to domesticate and limit its interest to ordinary courtship and marriage has finally been able to obscure the fact that the Song describes love as an elemental power, comparable to death (8:6-7), and having little to do with morality and theology.” Othmar Keel, \textit{The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 31.

\textsuperscript{27} Lacocque, \textit{Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs}, p. 66. And he adds: “Thus the reader is led to the conclusion that wherever there is love between two human beings, there is God.”
\end{footnotesize}
described by the lovers in the Song. As Landy writes, “What the Song does is very simply to substitute the Beloved for the garden of Eden through the metaphor: ‘A locked garden is my sister, my bride.’…In her, Paradise can be re-experienced, through the arts of culture, poetry, perfumery, etc.”

To say that love is paradisal is to say that it is never instrumental, always a matter of *frui* and not *uti* to use Augustine’s famous distinction. If all other things can be means to an end, paradise just *is* “the end”, that beyond which one does not seek to go. To anticipate the medieval tradition, we can say that in this view, love is “without why”, and as such it stubbornly defies all attempts to manipulate it or to make it one’s own. So Roland Murphy in his commentary on the Song will suggest, borrowing from one of the greatest medieval commentators on the Song, Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard writes:

> Love is alone sufficient by itself; it pleases by itself, and for its own sake. It is itself a merit, and itself its own consequence. It seeks neither cause, nor consequences, beyond itself. It is its own fruit, its own object and usefulness. I love because I love; I love, that I may love.

---


30 Bernard, Sermon 83.4 as translated by Roland Murphy in Roland E. Murphy and S. Dean McBride, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles Or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 28. The Latin reads: [*Amor* per se sufficit], *is per se placet, et propter se. Ipse meritum, ipse praemium est sibi. Amor praeter se non requirit causam, non fructum. Fructus ejus, usus ejus. Amo, quia amo; amo, ut amem.*
It is perhaps not immediately evident that the non-instrumental nature of love is of political import. However, recent readings of the Song have insisted that to speak as the Song does of a love that cannot be instrumentalized or manipulated by theo-political forces is to make a bold gesture of resistance to and even defiance of a great deal of the theological tradition. So if the passionate love experienced in the Song is paradisal, it is also “fierce.” One of the great advantages of Lacocque’s non-allegorical reading is that it highlights the bold, prophetic nature of love in the Song. The Song is explicitly engaging and challenging the androcentric and theo-centric worldview of the prophetic tradition according to Lacocque, especially the books of Hosea and Genesis. The woman’s voice in the Song is untamed, not held in check by the religious tradition, but in fact uses its very tropes to critique “male political power.” The woman’s erotic energy is highlighted as a refutation of the idea

31 This subsection borrows its title from Katie G. Cannon and Mud Flower Collective., *God’s Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985).

32 Lacocque writes, “The Canticle sets itself as an anti-Genesis. In hindsight, the poet judges the early human couple as too submissive, too diffident, too quickly convinced of the sadness of sexuality (‘post coitum triste animal est’). ‘Let’s go to the fields, my love’ ---let’s go back to the garden where our ancestors blundered so badly, and let’s start everything from the beginning—‘There, I shall give you my love!’” Lacocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs*, 159.

33 Landry, quoted in Ibid., p. 19. Lacocque notes as an example the comparison the lover makes of his beloved’s neck to the tower of David. “It mobilizes, in the service of erotic description, terms and images that are filled to the brim with traditional contents and that, therefore, previously appeared as definitely unavailable for any use but the religious. To find such terms and images in the most irreligious book of the Bible is so unexpected as to leave
of the “ontological weakness of women”. Lacocque insists on the political and theological importance of this passionate, fierce *eros*, finding in his teacher and colleague Paul Ricoeur confirmation of this insight. Ricoeur writes:

> Eros is not institutional. It is an offense to reduce it to a compact, or to conjugal duty…Eros’s Law—which is not law anymore—is the reciprocity of gift. It is thus infrajuridical, parajuridical, suprajuridical. It belongs to the nature of its demonism to threaten the institution—any institution, including marriage.\(^{34}\)

In rising up to the level of an equal partner to her beloved, the woman of the Song challenges the hierarchical nature of biblical religion. By highlighting her desire, the song insists that the best love is that between equals, not between an active and a passive partner.\(^{35}\) The theological implications of such a view are noted by Michael Fox who writes, “The equality of the lovers and the equality of their love, rather than the Song’s earthly sensuality are what makes their union an inappropriate analogy for the bond between God and

---


\(^{35}\) “What needs further to be emphasized, however, is that in Hosea the woman receives gifts from her illegitimate lovers; in the Song, the woman *gives* gifts to her *singular* lover. In the former case, there is a reflection of the societal custom, according to which the female is supported by the male in charge, father, brother, or lover. In the Song, the woman demonstrates her independence by reversing the order of giving-receiving.” Lacocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs*, 115.
Israel.” Inappropriate, perhaps, but not off-limits for the fierce surge of desire evoked in the Song. Lacocque puts forth what this erotic reciprocity between equals means.

Hence, by a ricochet of sorts, it becomes apparent that the perfect balance between the sexes here and now is grounded in divine-human mutuality, expressed in the famous formula of the Holiness Code. That leaves no room for the suzerain-vassal relationship elsewhere in Israel’s tradition.

We have already noted the theme of the madness of love evoked by the scene of Moses daring to challenge God. Here too in the Song we find the theme of parrhesia, an anti-theodical gesture fired by the passionate love of flesh for flesh. Looking for all the world like demonic hubris, the lover in the Song refuses to be held back by institutional boundaries, religious or otherwise.

---

37 Lacocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs*, 157, referring to Leviticus 26:12. He continues, “The egalitarian conception of the author is grounded, not on humanism or humanitarianism, and only indirectly on an ethical sense of justice. The genders are in perfect mutuality because they are mirroring the I-Thou relationship of God and people.”
39 “Whereas wisdom exhorts its disciples to be deliberate and to keep their balance in all circumstances, the lovers in the Song display their impetuous and passionate feelings, without regard for what society—not to mention sages—consider as propriety and poise.” Lacocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs*, 8. In the 12th century, Bernard of Clairvaux will write of love’s impropriety this way: “The favors I have received are far above what I deserve, but they are less than what I long for. It is desire that drives me on, not reason. Please do not accuse me of presumption if I yield to this impulse of love. My shame indeed rebukes me, but love is stronger than all. I am well aware that he is a king who loves justice; but headlong love does not wait for judgment, is not chastened by advice, not
Like Jacob wrestling with the angel, the lover of the song engages in hand-to-hand “combat” with any, including God, who would prevent her from reaching the object of her love.\textsuperscript{40}

\textit{Love And Hell: Agonized Mimesis}

As we have already seen, for the Song’s lovers, love is not an otherworldly flight from life, nor a romantic paradise of unworldly imaginings. Rather it is an erotic passion that wrestles with fiery intensity with the powers of death and hell that would attempt to reduce love to something other than itself. Its paradise is thus not untouched by hell, but in agonistic relationship with it. It battles with hell within hell’s precincts so to speak.

Andre Lacocque describes this battle succinctly:

\begin{quote}
’Love is strong as death’ is no aphorism; it is defiance. No authority, institution, custom, mores, coercion, dictate, or propriety can successfully oppose love. This is the whole message of the Song of Songs.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

When we look at the weapons with which love wages its battle, what is significant is how closely it begins to resemble the hell with which it is in fierce shackled by shame nor subdued by reason. I ask, I crave, I implore; let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” Bernard, Kilian J. Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds, \textit{On the Song of Songs}. (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1971), Vol. 1 Sermon 9.2.

\textsuperscript{40} Jean-Louis Chretien has written powerfully on this aspect of the tradition. See Jean-Louis Chrétien, \textit{Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), especially Chapter One, “How to Wrestle with the Irresistible.”

\textsuperscript{41} Lacocque, \textit{Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs}, 177.
opposition. Love, like death and hell, is “hard” or “fierce”. If hell has its punishing fire, so the passion of love has “its flames” [Sg. 8:6]. If death is a ravenous force relentless in its grip, so love too has its “zeal” or jealousy that makes the lover helplessly bound to the beloved, even if both are dragged to hell itself. As Othmar Keel puts it, “Like sheol, [love] too never lets go of anyone who has come under its spell.” Keel’s allusion to love’s “spell” calls to mind Origen’s discussion of love’s “philtron” or love-charm which Patricia Miller has written about and compared to Plato’s pharmakon. Is it poison, or is it cure? Life giving or death dealing? At times it seems that it is both, love taking on the very characteristics of death just as iron will begin to resemble the fire in which it burns.

---

42 So Pope writes, “‘fierce. LXX sklers, Vulgate dura. The basic meaning of this root qsy is ‘hard,’ ‘tough,’ ‘severe,’ ‘obdurate,’ and the like, the opposite of rkk, ‘soft,’ ‘weak’; cf. II Sam 3:39. Love and passion are like Death and Hell, strong, fierce, and relentless.” Pope, Song of Songs, 669.

43 Keel, The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary, 275. He continues: “The Hebrew term includes not only ‘passion’ but also the phenomena described in English as ‘zeal’ and ‘jealousy’, But in the form of jealousy, passion comes dangerously close to its great opponent, ‘death’ (cf. Prov. 6:34). That relation is the tragedy of the animosity between these two contenders that strangely tends to push them, with all their mutual hatred, ever closer to one another. The narrative tradition of the OT tells many terrible stories about murderous zeal (cf., e.g., Num. 25:7-8, 13; [Phinehas] 1 Kgs. 19:10 [Elijah after prophets of baal slaughtered]; 2 Kgs. 10:16 [Jehu’s slaughtering of Ahab’s family]). It is often hard to see what could justify the means in these accounts, other than the ends; and it hardly needs to be said how questionable that philosophy is.”

44 Miller notes another of Origen’s intriguing readings of the apples that the lovers in the Song eat eagerly. She writes: “Medicinally, the apple was thought to be an antidote to poison, the sweet fruit that poisons poison (Littlewood: 167, n. 40). It is fitting, then, that in Origen’s text the apple is the fruit of logos. Poison and love-charm at once, the apple is the Bride’s pharmakon. Having tasted the apple and found it sweet, the Bride says: ”Encompass me with apples, because I am wounded by love.”” Miller, “Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure”: Eros and Language in Origen’s ”Commentary on the Song of Songs”, 251. It is equally possible that if
love’s proximity to death to acknowledge, as the Song does, that insofar as love fights in swirling intensity with death, the two begin to be hard to distinguish.

And there is yet another reason why love seems so perilously close to hell in its shape and intensity: the very porosity or vulnerability of the fleshy heart of love.

*The Wound of Love*

In his wilderness battle with the angel, Jacob is wounded and walks thereafter with a limp. So too the lover of the Song speaks of the vulnerability of her love. From whence comes this wound? In the story of Jacob from Exodus, it appears to be of a divine or angelic origin. In the Song, the woman claims to be wounded, to “languish” with love. The lover’s erotic glances are like darts that wound or capture the heart of the beloved (Sg 4:9). Origen in the Song is engaged in a polemical relationship with the Genesis tradition, the apples are eaten by the lovers in a rebellious rejection of that text’s reading of the “fall” into sensuality.

Again the history of translation from Hebrew to Greek to Latin is significant. Pope in his commentary notes that the Hebrew *bly* means to be weak or sick and that the Greek of the LXX, *τετρωμένη* (to be wounded) is not quite precise, though he allows that “one may, of course, be sick as a result of a wound.” The Vulgate, *quia amore langueo* is thus closer to the Hebrew, according to Pope. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 381.

As Pope notes, the Hebrew verb *libbatini* in Sgs 4:9 is ambiguous, and may be given either a privative or a factitive sense. Thus the LXX translates the verb as *εκαρδίωσες*, translated in the NETS as “You heartened us.” Pope notes it could just as well be translated as “disheartened”. For the NETS translation, see Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). The Vulgate, however, has *vulnerasti cor meum*, which Matter translates as ‘you have wounded my heart.’ E. Ann Matter, "The Voice of My Beloved the Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity," University of Pennsylvania Press, xxv. Here, as Pope notes, the Vulgate like the majority of Greek Fathers, reads it as privative. The ambiguity, however, remains, and is nicely captured by Pope's rendering of the phrase as “You ravish my mind…” Pope, *Song of Songs*, 453.

Pope’s discussion of 4:9 is on 478-479. Also intriguing, given the resignatio theme of *mania erotike* is Keel’s translation: “You [drive me crazy], my sister…” Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, 161.
his commentary on the Song made much of this “divine” wound of love, what 
he calls a “saving wound” whereby God opens up, like a surgeon, the calcified 
and recalcitrant heart, tearing it loose from its enslavement to sin. The wound 
(word) of love opens the heart, dilates and stretches it, shoots “fiery darts” into the fleshy heart of its beloved, thus producing a burning fever of restless 
desire.

Beside itself with passion, wounded love is excessive and boundary 
breaking or at least boundary blurring. Recent scholars, not committed to a 
theologically normative and carefully ordered allegorical reading have noted 
how the erotic energy and style of the Song brings a measure of chaos with it.

As Roland Murphy writes, there is a “bewildering shift in persons which creates

---

48 Ibid., 42: “And rightly does he speak of ‘stretching out his words’ in the heart of him to whom God had given largeness of heart, as we said above. For the heart of man is enlarged, when he is able, by taking statements from the Divine Books, to expand by fuller teaching the things that are said briefly and in enigmatic ways.”
49 See Pope’s translation of 8:6: “For love is strong as death, Passion fierce as Hell. Its darts are darts of fire. Its flames…” Pope compares these fiery darts, not surprisingly, to Cupid’s arrows. The connection between the divine arrows and those of Cupid was also made, according to Irving Singer, by the medieval mystics. (180)
50 Ibid., 198: “If there is anyone anywhere who has at some time burned with this faithful love of the Word of God; if there is anyone who has received the sweet wound of Him who is the chosen dart, as the prophet says; if there is anyone who has been pierced with the loveworthy spear of His knowledge, so that he yearns and longs for Him by day and night, can speak of nought but Him, would hear of nought but Him, can think of nothing else, and is disposed no desire nor longing nor yet hope, except for Him alone—if such there be, that soul then says in truth: ‘I have been wounded by charity.’ And she has received her wound from Him of whom Isaias says: And He hath made me as a chosen dart, and in His quiver hath He hidden me.” On p. 42 of his commentary, Origen refers to 2 Cor 6:11 on Paul’s enlarged heart, and Philippians on Paul’s stretching towards what lies ahead—this agonizing stretching of the heart [epktasis] is a Pauline image Gregory of Nyssa will amplify in his commentary on the Song.
difficulty in establishing the identity of the speakers,” and throughout the song the lovers often open their mouths only to have the other’s words come out. This porosity of identity is due in large part both to the binding and wounding quality of passionate love, in which one’s heart is host to the desires of another. Not insignificant, then, will be the choice of Jerome to translate the Hebrew for “passion” in Sgs. 8:6 (qin’āḇ) with aemulatio. Though the word clearly has a negative sense, from which the early English translators drew their choice of “jealousy”, the Latin word, along with the Hebrew it translates, has, as Pope has noted, a much broader sense. The English word emulate captures some of its sense. Most interesting, in this context, is the analysis of aemulatio by Joseph Michael Pucci, who notes the following in his book The Full-Knowing Reader.

[aemulatio] is a concept employed in antiquity to talk about the appropriation of one author’s words by another. The process is not a specific one in which prior words are brought forward into a newer literary work, however. More generally, Žėλωσίς zelosis and

---

51 Murphy and McBride, The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles Or the Song of Songs, 127.
52 It may also be that the lyrical nature of love in the Song increases this porosity. So Tod Linafelt writes, in comparing the Song’s lyric mode to narrative. “Narrative thus promotes an interest in and sympathy for others, while nevertheless honoring their differences from ‘us or from the reader. Lyric, on the other hand, tends to collapse the distance, but only for a moment, allowing the sympathy to become deeper and sometimes stranger as one takes on the voice of the fictive speaker of the poem and makes the speaker’s passions or thoughts one’s own.” “Lyrical Theology: The Song of Songs and the Advantage of Poetry” in Burrus and Keller, Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline, 305.
53 The LXX has Žηλος.
aemulatio attend to the ways in which an author, contending with another, seek to outdo the exemplarism of his model.\textsuperscript{54}

If all of this seems to the good, the Song suggests reasons for caution. Not all wounds are from God, after all, as Origen too noted in his commentary.

We must know, however, that as there are those darts of God which inflict the wound of salvation on the soul, so also there are the fiery darts of the wicked one [Eph 6:16] with which the soul who is not protected by the shield of faith is wounded unto death.\textsuperscript{55}

In the 5\textsuperscript{th} chapter of the Song itself, just before we hear of the “wound” or languishing of love, the woman describes how her desperate attempt to find her lover leads her out into the night, where she is “beaten” and “wounded” by the watchmen presumably indignant at the boldness of this woman willing to leave her home unaccompanied by a male escort. The porosity and boldness of her divinely wounded heart leaves her vulnerable to other wounds, ones that threaten to tear her from her beloved and expose her to death’s worst. Here love and hell touch and even intermingle, in the desert of desire in which familiar discriminatory markers are absent. The price of love’s openness will be exposure to the “wicked one”, just as the desert into which God calls the beloved will be full of demonic spirits and cravings. Even as the fierce heart

\textsuperscript{54} Joseph Michael Pucci, The Full-Knowing Reader: Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 86. Pope gives a number of biblical citations of the Hebrew qin‘āb to argue for its broader semantic range and suggests that passion is therefore a better translation than the RSV’s jealousy.

\textsuperscript{55} Origen., Lawson and Origen., The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies, 199.
will not stop short of entering hell in seeking its beloved, hell will enter the porous heart and mingle its fire with the fires of love.\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{“Who is this who comes up from the desert?” (Songs 8:5)}

The swirl of agonistic wrestling between love and hell makes distinguishing the two a painfully difficult task, as we have seen already. In the Song, this blindness in which love and hell do battle is a desert scene rife with ambivalence. The desert, as Bernard McGinn has shown in an important essay, is a rich and multifaceted trope in mystical theology.\textsuperscript{57} He quotes an earlier study by George Williams to capture the desert’s multivalent quality. Williams notes at least four aspects of the desert for the tradition:

(a) the wilderness as moral waste but a potential paradise; (b) the wilderness as a place of testing or even punishment; (c) the wilderness as the experience or occasion of nuptial (covenantal) bliss; and (d) the wilderness as a place of refuge (protection) or contemplation.\textsuperscript{58}

Modern commentators on the Song confirm this ambivalence. Lacocque will write that the desert “summarizes in the best possible way Thanatos, against which Eros must fight. The desert is here in the company of Death, Sheol,

\textsuperscript{56} In angustia/hell and the wide-open heart in Paul, see 2 Corinthians 6:11-12.
\textsuperscript{58} Williams in Ibid.
many waters, forbidding mountains, lions, and panthers.” At the same time, Othmar Keel notes that the lovers in the song are drawn to the desert as a place of freedom, of love’s respite “from the difficulties it encounters when it tries to find room within society for spontaneity and individuality.” Drawing on the Exodus narrative of flight into the desert from oppression, the Song contributes to a tradition of desert mysticism that will become fully realized in the anchoritic tradition of Antony and the desert monks.

Of central importance to the later mystical tradition, McGinn notes, are the passages from Hosea 2:14 and 11:4, where God draws his beloved Israel into the wilderness: “Therefore, I will now persuade her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her… I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love.” This erotic charge of flight into the desert will motivate the lover in Song 8:5 to look there for a paradisal visit: “Who is this who comes up from the desert flowing with delights and leaning on her beloved?” Coming as it does just before the verse that will bring love and hell into the closest possible proximity (8:6), this interrogative highlights the difficulty of discernment in the arid desert landscape, shorn as it is of familiar markers. Cut off from institutional boundaries and horizons of meaning, love

---

60 Keel, The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary, 32.
61 Cords is the Hebrew chebel, a word often tied to affliction and sheol as in Psalm 18:5 when the Psalmist speaks of being entangled in the “cords of sheol”.
62 This is Matter’s translation of the Vulgate.
finds itself, as Lacocque rightly notes, in the realm of thanatos and “roaring lions”, at the very same time it is drawn there by God’s “bands of love”. Hell is always a possibility in the blinding heat of the desert, yet it may disguise itself as a gift of love. Contrariwise, love is in a certain sense blind to this indiscretion, not allowing the conceptual and even affective confusion between itself and hell to paralyze or deter it from its desert desire. It remains forever on the move; forever it “comes up” as the Song puts it so succinctly.

---

63 The image is from the First Letter of Peter, who writes: “Discipline yourselves (Gk: nepsate); keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.” (1 Peter 5:8-9a NRSV) This was a verse particularly important in the desert tradition of the Philokalia, so much so that the monks became known as the “Neptic Fathers” from the Greek word nepsis, watchfulness, or sobriety. As Athanasius’ Life of St. Antony made clear, attentive discernment of demonic forces was a crucial part of the desert ascetic tradition.

64 Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his passionate challenge to the orthodox Catholic doctrine of hell, questions Dante’s famous invocation of hell as a gift of love: “Or could we really believe Dante when he inscribes above his door to hell: ‘I was created by divine power, supreme wisdom and primal love’, only to have stand by and watch afterward what goes on in his hell?” Hans Urs von Balthasar, Dare we Hope: “That all Men be Saved”? ; with, A Short Discourse on Hell (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 214. Balthasar’s questioning of the Augustinian doctrine of hell has recently led a number of Catholic theologians to challenge his orthodox credentials. See Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, Light in Darkness: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007).
C. Paul’s “Willingness to be Damned” in Rom. 9:2-3

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. [Rom. 9:1-3]

In the twelfth century, William of St. Thierry makes a hermeneutic leap that will prove decisive for the resignatio ad infernum tradition. William, well known among medievalists for his commentaries on the Song of Songs, also wrote a commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. It was in this commentary, as he wrestled with the first three verses of the ninth chapter of Paul’s letter that he reaches for help to the mad wounded lovers of the Song of Songs. To what can he compare this “insane” love of Paul’s, willing as it is to throw away salvation for the sake of his brethren in the flesh, a love that goes

---


66 Ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ λειτουργοῦσιν, κοινωνικοῦσιν μοι τῆς συνειδησεώς μου ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, ὃτι λύπη μοι ἐστὶν μεγάλη καὶ Δολιάλειπτος ὁδύνη τῇ καρδίᾳ μοῦ ἡχόμην γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγώ ἀπό τοῦ Χριστοῦ ύπερ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενέων μου κατά σάρκα

67 A move also made by William’s friend Bernard of Clairvaux, and, as we shall see, by Richard of St. Victor.

from the heavenly “spiritual exultation” at the end of chapter eight, only to
descend to the “abyss” of a miserable “sorrow of heart” at the beginning of
chapter nine.\textsuperscript{69} This “unceasing anguish” rending Paul’s heart,\textsuperscript{70} this “self-
transcending love”\textsuperscript{71} reminds William of nothing so much as the wounded
lovers of the Song of Songs: “It is the languor of a soul that loves but cannot
accomplish what it wishes. So it is the bride in the Canticle says, ‘I languish
with love’.”\textsuperscript{72}

In fact, William’s interpretive leap is not so very great, nor all that
surprising. There is much to link the Song of Songs’ motifs of passionate love
to Paul’s heart-rending prayer;\textsuperscript{73} from the resolute clinging to the flesh of love
and the love of flesh in face of a disembodied theo-logic, to the erotic anguish
of a wounded heart, to the insane flight of love into a desert abyss seemingly
deprived of divine consolations.

What is surprising, however, is how little attention Romans 9:1-3 will
receive in Christian thought outside of its employment in the resignatio tradition.

\textsuperscript{69} “See the great sweetness of this well-disposed mind ascending almost to heaven in spiritual
exultation over his immense joy for the progress of the Gentiles, and then suddenly
descending to the abyss with sorrow of heart for the miserable defection of his own people.”
Ibid.

\textsuperscript{70} William’s Vulgate will read: continuus dolor cordi meo.

\textsuperscript{71} Vg: seipsum excedentis charitatis.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{73} Though there is no direct textual link between Romans 9:1-3 and the Song of Songs, it has
been well established by recent scholarship that Paul had Moses’ parrhesiastic outburst in
Exodus 32 in mind here. See among others, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, \textit{Romans: A New Translation
with Introduction and Commentary} (New York: Doubleday, 1993) and Robert Jewett, Roy David
As we shall see in the third chapter, one reason for its relative neglect has to do with Augustine’s near total avoidance of these verses of Paul’s epistle, an epistle he otherwise mines repeatedly for his mature theological thought. Though, as I shall argue, a large part of that avoidance had to do with his fierce and violent battle with the so-called Donatists, it is also the case that for modern scholars Rom 9:1-3 has all too often been neglected as a mere piece of emotive rhetoric on Paul’s part and not to be taken seriously as an intentional gesture.\textsuperscript{74}

Frequently it is seen as irrelevant as \textit{doctrine} in face of the preceding chapter on the insuperability of divine love and the following two chapters (9-11) devoted to what Joseph Fitzmyer in his commentary on the epistle has called the price of “Israel’s failure.”\textsuperscript{75} What this interpretation of Paul’s \textit{resignatio ad infernum} as mere sympathy-garnering rhetoric\textsuperscript{76} fails to consider is how

\textsuperscript{74} A classic example of this approach comes from the nineteenth-century American Reformed theologian Charles Hodge, whose reading influenced thousands of young clergyman for many years. He writes, “Paul does not say that he did deliberately and actually entertain such a wish. The expression is evidently hypothetical and conditional: ‘I could wish, were the thing allowable, possible, or proper…’ So far from saying he actually desired to be separated from Christ in this way, he implies the opposite: ‘I could wish, \emph{were it not wrong}.’” Charles Hodge, \textit{A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 271, emphasis mine. The length to which Hodge goes to justify this reading shows that in his day, the \textit{resignatio ad infernum} tradition had its share of supporters against which his reading pushed (see footnote 64). Gordon P. Wiles, \textit{Paul’s Intercessory Prayers; the Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St Paul} (Cambridge [Eng.: University Press, 1974) provides a strong refutation of Hodge-style readings.

\textsuperscript{75} Fitzmyer, \textit{Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary}.

\textsuperscript{76} John Chrysostom comes close to resisting this self-aggrandizing reading; for him Paul is perilously close to hell. Yet he backs away from this insight because in his view, Israel’s redemption, though Paul reaches for it in ch. 11, is simply \emph{impossible} for him to imagine. So, Paul’s words exemplify the self-sacrificial nature of his love to his own benefit. For Chrysostom, it accomplishes nothing for the “recalcitrant” Jews.
exactly Chapter Eight’s confident appraisal of love’s relentless triumph in face of all obstacles\(^{77}\) can possibly relate to, much less be reconciled with what follows in chapters nine through eleven, the *locus classicus* for what will become the Christian tradition’s doctrine of double predestination, in which love’s limits (and God’s wrathful hatred toward the reprobate) are rather insistently invoked.\(^{78}\) In other words, when chapters nine through eleven are read as Pauline theodicy *simpliciter*, chapter eight’s triumph of love is rendered pyrrhic and *its* language would more justly be called mere “rhetoric” in the face of the cold-blooded and relentless logic that is to follow. What both Augustine and many modern commentators fail to consider, then, is how Romans 9:1-3, far from being a mere bit of florid, empathic but ultimately doctrinally useless

\(^{77}\) “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels can separate us from the love of God.”

\(^{78}\) A number of recent commentaries on Romans, such as Dunn’s and Jewett’s, soften the tension between chapter 8 and 9-11 by moving in an explicitly universalistic direction, so that the division Paul agonizes over is not fully reckoned with. Chapter 14 of the letter, for example, is read, too optimistically in my view, as a realistic plan for reconciling the “weak” and the “strong” in the Roman church, and Jesus is read by Dunn as exemplifying this reconciliation (following Colossians 2), ignoring how intense the division is in Paul’s churches, and how heart-rending this will remain for Paul. Though Jesus came to “break down the dividing wall” as the letter to the Colossians puts it, the stories in the Book of Acts reveal that the very mention of Jesus’ name only inflamed tensions, rather than reconciled them. The very occasion of Paul’s letter to the Roman church, divided as it was between Jewish and Gentile Christians, refutes any attempt to move past the trauma of division occasioned by the crucifixion. Thus Jewett’s comment that “The prospect of the triumphant gospel transforms the ‘great pain and unceasing pain in my heart’ [of 9:2] to ‘my heart’s good pleasure’ in 10:1,” is unrealistic in its hope that Paul has moved past this anguish. Jewett, Kotansky and Epp, *Romans: A Commentary*, 615. The reference to Psalm 69 in chapter 15 (“I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God”) suggests that Paul’s locus spiritualis, in solidarity with the crucified Christ, remains closer to hell than to any “good pleasure”.
rhetoric, can be seen as the very hinge upon which Paul’s theology turns, expressive as it is of a heart rent in two by the irreconcilable presence at *one and the same time* of love and violent separation, heaven and hell. To argue that these three verses of Paul’s epistle constitute its heart and even perhaps the heart of Paul’s theology as a whole, when for so much of the Christian tradition they are a negligible aside, is admittedly bold. I can only hope to mitigate the reader’s sense of incredulity here with an all too brief rehearsal of the surrounding tissue of texts in which the *resignatio ad infernum* of Paul stubbornly sits.  

**Romans 9:1-3 as Paul’s Cryptic Heart of Steno-kboral Love**

As more than one scholar has noted, Paul’s cry of anguish in Rom 9:2 can come as a surprise following as it does on the heels of what James Dunn calls his “towering confidence” expressed at the end of chapter eight. That this is not an occasional pang Paul feels is emphasized by the precision of his

---

79 That is to say, even if my argument that Romans 9:1-3 is central to Pauline thought is rejected, it is nevertheless true that interpreters have failed to make the case that Paul meant them to be seen as a mere sympathy-garnering affect. If the prayer is *simply* impossible, then surely Paul should not have wished it. That he did, neither allowing the triumphant declaration of love in chapter eight nor the relentless predestinarian logic of chapters 9-11 to render it unnecessary, demands a more thoroughly theological confrontation than has heretofore been employed. This is what the 13th century mystics did, dissatisfied as they were with the Augustinian theodicy and doctrine of hell. In our time von Balthasar is the exception in his willingness to take 9:1-3 with utter seriousness, to the point of it having a major impact on his theology.
language: his anguish [hodune] is “unceasing” [adialeiptos].\textsuperscript{80} And, crucially, it is in his heart [kardia]. The heart, as scholars have long noted\textsuperscript{81}, is a key figure in Pauline anthropology, no more so than in Romans. There are many aspects to Paul’s treatment of the heart in Romans. Paul’s spiritual cardiology tends toward stark alternatives. He sees it as at times foolish, darkened, hard and impenitent, of the flesh, tortured in evil and storing up wrath.\textsuperscript{82} It is, we might say, a heart in hell or at least preparing its fires.\textsuperscript{83} At other times it is the very opposite; it is desiring, believing, circumcised and filled with the Holy Spirit and with love.\textsuperscript{84}

Here in Romans 9:2 Paul’s heart is not easily situated on either side of this bifurcated spiritual topography. In the previous verse, he has told us that he is speaking “in the Holy Spirit” so we might fairly read this verse, as William has done, as an expression of a believing and loving heart, circumcised and full of holy desire. Yet the image we are given, that of a heart in great sorrow and unceasing anguish, seems closer to being a heart in hell. Indeed, “unceasing

\textsuperscript{80} Adialeiptos is a word normally used by Paul to speak of the quality of his prayer. So, in Rom 1:9 he tells the Roman church that his prayer he mentions them “without ceasing” [adialeiptos].

\textsuperscript{81} James D. G. Dunn, \textit{The Theology of Paul the Apostle} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998).

\textsuperscript{82} In the early part of the letter, Paul speaks of the heart as “foolish” and “darkened”, (1:21) “hard” and “impenitent” and “storing up wrath” (2:5).

\textsuperscript{83} Douglas Moo argues that for Paul, the word “stenochoria”, often translated as anguish, is a figure of hell. See his “Paul on Hell” in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, \textit{Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004).

\textsuperscript{84} In Romans, the heart is desiring (10:1); believing (10:9); circumcised (2:29); and filled with the spirit (5:5).
anguish” is a fairly straightforward definition of the classical view of hell. It is a heart whose desire is to be “cut off” from its root, (here the love of Christ), and made anathema. More telling still is that the reason for this hellish desire of Paul’s heart is rooted not in the spirit, but in the very flesh of his heart, specifically his Jewish flesh. So he writes in 9:3: “I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh [kata sarka].” Are we being led to think that it is due to the weakness of Paul’s fleshy heart, that it is not quite hardened enough, that he finds himself on this hellish side of things, unable and unwilling to excise and “cut off” (khorizomai) or release stubborn Israel from his heart?

Though this thought might seem a bit perverse, it suggests that at the very least we are meant to see Paul’s heart as agonizingly porous even in its mercy, such that the wrath that belongs to the foolish and darkened heart has entered his own all too hospitable heart-vessel. It is a heart on fire with love, as if pierced through by the very iron gate that both divides and brings together

---

85 When we read the 4th Book of Ezra, one with so many resonances to this passage in Romans, we will see that such a thought is not considered perverse at all in the tradition, but in fact is commended to Ezra by the Angel Uriel. Ezra, whose own heart is in anguish over the suffering of the Israelite people, is admonished not to try to love sinners more than God. If God can consign these sinners to hell without flinching, surely Ezra’s heart can be a bit stouter, and accept that mercy and compassion finally come to an end. See esp. chapter 7 of Fourth Ezra. This will be Augustine’s position, as we will see.

86 Ch. 9 speaks of “vessels of wrath” and “vessels of mercy”. In the reading advanced here, Paul’s heart in 9:2 is both, simultaneously. Chapter seven of Romans rehearses a similar simultaneity.
heaven and hell, wrath and mercy. A heart in unceasing anguish—out of love—this is what the Latin tradition will brilliantly render as *misericordia*.

When the spirit and the flesh, or mercy and wrath, are contained in the same space without one giving way one to the other, we have, Paul suggests in Rom 7:24, *misery* [*talaiporos*]. Another word he will use is *stenokhoria*. Literally meaning a narrow [*stenos*] space [*khoira*], in the LXX from which Paul’s thought is coming, it has connotations of torture or of an unavoidable disaster. Though it is associated intimately with death, *stenokhoria* is not simply death, but rather, to anticipate Derrida’s conversations with Cixous, it is death *in* life, or life *in* death, a proximity whose existential feel is overwhelming to the flesh and irreducible to the spirit’s attempts at reconciliation. Flight from one or the other, as Paul indicates in his letter to the Philippians, is futile for the two are inextricably bound together in the space [*khoira*] that is the heart. So in chapter eight, when Paul cries out that “nothing can separate [*khoiras*] us from the love of God,” (8:39) not even “tribulation or distress” (*thlipsis/stenokhoria*), this is not, as some commentators have argued, Paul’s articulation of a position beyond death or hell (*stenokhoria*), as if one could, by faith, put an end to the fleshy heart’s anguish. If it were, the outburst of Rom 9:2-3 immediately following would make little sense. Rather, what it suggests is that for Paul, hell and the

---

87 Paul used the word earlier, in 3:16 to speak of the “ruin and misery” due to unrepentant sinners.
88 Phil. 1:21-26
love of God meet in the space (khôra) of the anguished heart, and that love is only love insofar as it seeks not to flee from this anguished site, not to be separated from (khorizomai) the flesh of its flesh. So he will write to his beloved Corinthians, who arrogantly (in his view) seek to separate themselves into a spiritual elite, purified of all sin and far from the flesh of weak sinners:

Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. You are not restricted (stenokhoreisthe) by us, but you are restricted in our own affections in return—I speak as to children—widen your hearts also…open your hearts to us; we have wronged no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together...with all our afflictions, I am overjoyed...for the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities (stenokhoriais); for when I am weak, then I am strong. [2 Cor. 6:11-13, 7:2-4, 12:10]

In contrast to the Corinthian Christians, who are restricting (stenokhoria) their affections for sinners (like Paul) in order to remain strong and avoid contamination with death and calamity (stenokhoria), Paul insists in one of his characteristically brilliant dialectical reversals that he will open his heart wide to the very calamitous, restricted hearts of the Corinthians, and to the sufferings such a relationship with them will inflict upon him.

Rivetted to the site of his weak and fleshy heart, where misery and love interpenetrate, what then could Paul possibly mean by his prayer to be “cut off” from Christ (apo tou Christou) and accursed (anathema)? Many readers have interpreted this as rhetorical hyperbole if not overkill. An “impossible” prayer,
as St. Basil and the later Christian tradition would put it, to wish to be cut off from the source of love out of love. Love divided against itself: dire straits indeed.

It is of course possible to read the imperfect verb of Paul’s prayer as evidence of a conflicted mind, one at war with itself, as flesh and its demands fight against the new-born spirit embedded in Paul’s heart. It is at least that. However, to think it no more than that would be to miss the deeply socio-political dimensions of Paul’s letter. Though the sitz im leben of Paul is still hotly debated, it is generally accepted that the Roman church to which Paul wrote was facing strong tensions if not outright divisions between the Jewish Christians who had returned to Rome in 54 CE following the death of Claudius, and the Gentile Christians who in their absence had taken control of the numerous house churches. The letter takes great pains to address the Roman church in the midst of these tensions and Paul is often read, plausibly, as making every effort to bring reconciliation between these two factions, as well as between Jews and Christians generally. One senses, however, that by the time Paul writes this letter, the divisions have cut too deeply, and Paul’s own use of Scripture (“Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated”) points to the gravity of the

---

89 Claudius had banished all Jews from the city in 49 CE.
situation. With the Gentiles clearly in the ascendancy in the Roman church,\textsuperscript{91} Paul may have sensed that their adherence to Christ apart from the law had become a blunt instrument to wield against the Jewish people. Thus his prayer to be “cut off from Christ” for the sake of his Jewish kinsfolk could be read as his not so subtle rebuke of the Roman Gentile Christians for their strong-arm tactics which used Paul’s own gospel as their weapon!\textsuperscript{92} Read this way, Paul’s emphasis on his unceasing anguish and his willingness to be cut off from (an exclusionary) Christ was his way of reminding the Gentile Christians that the division of the Roman church was a failure to be lamented, not an occasion for seeking advantage, and that rather than side with these “strong” Christians in their battle with the weak, minority Jewish Christian voice, he would defend and uphold the Jewish Christian voice.

There are a number of advantages such a reading has over those that view Paul’s outcry in 9:2-3 as a mere attempt to show he still loves the Jewish people even as his theology seems to lead inexorably toward supersession, or which suggest that this is an anguish that lies safely in Paul’s past (much as Romans 7 is often read as a struggle from his past). In addition to making sense within the socio-political context within which Paul was writing, it fits well with

\textsuperscript{91} In chapters fourteen and fifteen of the letter, Paul will admonish those who are “strong” not to despise those who are “weak”.

\textsuperscript{92} See 1 Corinthians, esp 1: 12-13 where even Christ is used by the Corinthian church as a wedge for creating division.
Paul’s discussion of the strong and the weak in chapters 14-15, where he is at pains to warn the strong from using their (in Paul’s opinion) theological advantage as a weapon of spite against their weaker brethren who continue to adhere to some aspects of the Jewish law in addition to their faith in Christ. Such a reading also requires little reworking of the rest of the letter’s content in order for it to make sense.

Though compelling as a reading of the passage, its very seamlessness with the rest of the letter is what ought to give the reader pause. We have noted how, apart from the resignatio ad infernum tradition we are following, Rom. 9:1-3 has merited little notice. The above reading of Paul’s gesture, wholly assimilable to the logic of the rest of the epistle, renders its language of great sorrow and unceasing anguish distinctly reasonable and cools its ardor considerably. It also risks dulling the seriousness of Paul’s prayer, its radical gesture of solidarity with Israel up to and including being alienated from God. What is missing in this way of reading Paul’s cri de coeur is its parrhesiastic character. When we recall that Paul is in all likelihood alluding to Moses’ bold gesture of Exodus 32, \(^{93}\) it becomes permissible to see this prayer of Paul’s, not first and foremost as a rebuke to the Roman church members to whom Paul is writing, though it is also that, but as an agonized and even rebellious cry to God. Romans 9:3 is

\(^{93}\) See Dunn, Fitzmyer, Jewett and others, especially early Christian readers, who saw such a connection.
first and foremost a fierce prayer to God not to follow through on the explicit threats against Israel which Paul will name in the following chapters drawing as he does from some of the most troubling passages of the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{94} Here Paul is entertaining the possibility of rejecting/cutting himself off from this condemning God, though such a rejection would certainly mean, given the very logic of condemnation rehearsed, his own consignment to the hell to which he sees God sending his kinsfolk in the flesh.

Loving Israel more than God? Loving Israel more than God does? Rebelling against the God of love out of love? Hoping to turn God’s wrathful justice to mercy by challenging the depth of his love with a cry from the heart of this God’s hell?

Though St. Basil and many other theologians in the tradition would insist that such thoughts are impossible both logically and theologically, they are, it must be said, possible readings of Paul’s words, possible readings of the articulation of a heart in which both love and hell reside.\textsuperscript{95} Perhaps, to allude to Richard

\textsuperscript{94} e.g. Romans 9:13 quoting Malachi 1:2: “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.” Of course Paul reads Esau typologically in this passage.

\textsuperscript{95} The reading as we have rehearsed here clearly sticks in the craw of the Christian tradition’s wrestling with Paul’s words. It resists assimilation to attempts at reconciling the obvious tensions in Paul’s letter to the Romans, esp. the dramatic shift from ch. 8 to 9-11. Yet if such a reading resists such assimilation, it does so perhaps with a greater faithfulness to the anguish of the text. Paul’s letter, as numerous biblical scholars have noted, is not systematic theology, nor is its message easily rendered compatible with the widely disparate theological traditions that it has helped spawn. Here G.B. Caird’s dictum is most a propos. “Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin have found in this passage one of the main supports of their doctrine of double predestination; Origen, Chrysostom, and Arminius have used it to confirm their
Kearney and Jack Caputo’s wrestlings with Derrida and with one another, here in Paul’s prayer the impossible and the possible (*peut-être*) meet. As we will see in the next chapter, in the early apocalyptic tradition of 4th Ezra, and the Apocalypses of Peter, Paul, Sedrach and the Virgin Mary, such readings not only became possible, but actual, only to be rather relentlessly rendered illegitimate by the Christian theology of hell inaugurated by Augustine in the midst of his controversy with the Christian dissidents in his African home. To this elaboration of the biblical sources we have just outlined we now turn.

belief that man’s destiny rests on his own free response to God’s grace; and the universalists have seized on it as one of the few Biblical texts which give ground for belief in universal salvation. The irony is that all have been sound in their affirmations, though grievously at fault in their failure to appreciate the strength of the other two positions. For Paul actually contrives…to hold all three beliefs at the same time.” Quoted in Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 542.
Chapter Two

History From Hell: The birth of the resignatio ad infernum tradition

He was at the source, after all; he must have heard of a certain Slaughter of the Innocents. The children of Judea massacred while his parents were taking him to a safe place—why did they die if not because of him? Those blood-spattered soldiers, those infants cut in two filled him with horror. But given the man he was, I am sure he could not forget them. And as for that sadness that can be felt in his every act, wasn’t it the incurable melancholy of a man who heard night after night the voice of Rachel weeping for her children and re-fusing all comfort? The lamentation would rend the night, Rachel would call her children who had been killed for him, and he was still alive!¹

Is it possible to be too compassionate, to be so overwhelmed with the kind of erotic love we have examined in the previous chapter, that one would rather remain in (or go to) hell with and for the damned in a kind of mad paroxysm of responsibility for their tortured cries? Is it possible one too many prayers can be prayed, too many tears wept on behalf of wounded, unconsolable, even raging flesh? Will not justice eventually demand a safe harbor from Paul’s “unceasing anguish”, demand a realm of pure life, a realm far removed from death’s dread sting? In order for paradise to remain unscathed by torment and for joy to be finally secured, must not a great chasm be forever fixed between heaven and hell, a secure border established with impenetrable walls built and maintained?

To all of these questions, St. Augustine of Hippo answered yes, and it is greatly due to his construction of the western Christian doctrine of hell that

such answers remain largely, though not unanimously, our own. So powerful, successful, and seductive is Augustine’s construction of a gated heavenly community free from all strife and fiery torments that it is rarely noted that there was in fact a counter-position to which Augustine was responding, one rooted in the scriptural tradition and further elaborated in the early apocalyptic texts of the first three centuries CE. Before turning to Augustine’s rejection of this tradition, we will examine the most influential of these early apocalyptic texts, *4 Ezra*, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Apocalypse of Paul* and *The Greek Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*. Our purpose in so doing is to describe a theologically rich tradition of thinking about hell which existed well before Augustine. In the conclusion to the chapter, I will summarize this tradition in order to show how it expands upon the themes of the *resignatio ad infernum* outlined in chapter one, as well as to make clear, when discussing Augustine’s construction of hell in chapter three, that there was a significant tradition against which he was moving.

---

2 Though it is thought to have been written later than Augustine, the *Greek Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary* will also be briefly discussed in this chapter, due to its later use by Dostoevsky. The sheer number of these apocalyptic texts prevents a thorough discussion here. Other relevant texts include: *Apocalypse of Sedrach*, *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra*, *Latin Vision of Ezra*, *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. 
4 Ezra: Theology in Conflict

Fourth Ezra is a text written from within the precincts of hell, or to be more precise, within multiple hells. Most likely written shortly after the traumatic destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple in 70 CE, it is ostensibly written in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. In addition to these historical traumas, the text envisions the tortures of the damned in a hell after this life, a vision which the angel Uriel puts before the seer, Ezra, for his consideration and acceptance.

Fourth Ezra was a hugely influential text, spawning a number of translations of it as well as other apocalypses which testify to its ongoing influence.

The twelve chapters which make up 4 Ezra consist of a dialogue between Uriel and Ezra over the meaning and usefulness of these multiple hells.

The book begins significantly with Ezra describing his own hell, his insomnia as he lies awake at night troubled as thoughts of the desolation of Zion burst

---

3 My discussion of 4 Ezra is deeply indebted to Karina Hogan’s work, Karina Martin Hogan, Theologies in Conflict in 4 Ezra: Wisdom, Debate, and Apocalyptic Solution (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), a lucid presentation of the textual and interpretive challenges any reader of the text faces. The text of Fourth Ezra is found in the Christian Apocrypha and Vulgate. Unless otherwise indicated, citations will be from the NRSV translation of the text titled 2 Esdras.

4 Josephus describes the destruction of the city this way in his Jewish War: “Pitiful too was the aspect of the country, sites formerly beautified with trees and parks now reduced to an utter desert and stripped bare of timber; and no stranger who had seen the old Judaea and the entrancingly beautiful suburbs of her capital, and now beheld her present desolation, could have refrained from tears or suppressed a sigh at the greatness of the change. For the war had ruined all the marks of beauty…” Flavius Josephus and H. St J. Thackeray, Josephus. (London; New York: Heinemann ; Putnam, 1926), Vol. III, 379, 381.

unbidden into his heart. Agitated by this wound within his conscience, Ezra begins to speak anxiously to God the many thoughts which perturb him. Reminding God of the covenant he has made with Israel, he accuses God for not taking away Israel’s “evil heart,” but instead punishing them for their evil deeds even as he seemingly excuses their Babylonian tormentors, whose hearts, Ezra insists, are surely no better than Israel’s. The questions of theodicy are immediately raised, and Ezra’s interlocutor, the angel Uriel, takes these questions up in chapter four. His initial response reminds one of God’s response to Job out of the whirlwind, a rather brusque rejection of Ezra’s questioning which Uriel suggests is motivated by arrogance and a lack of knowledge of the divine order. He then challenges Ezra to answer a series of questions, the correct response to any one of which will be rewarded by an answer to the question of why God has allowed the human heart to remain “evil.” This initial dialogue ends inconclusively (for Ezra at least), and in the fifth chapter Ezra again takes up his complaint, with the “thoughts of my heart very grievous to me.” Why, he cries aloud, should the covenanted people of God be tortured by unbelievers? Better, Ezra asks with bitter and parrhesiastic ferocity, that if God wished to punish Israel, he at least do it with his “own hands” (5:30) rather than using so ungodly an instrument as Babylon! This time

6 Ezra quotes the same passage from Malachi that Paul makes so much of in Romans, “You set apart Jacob for yourself, but Esau you rejected.” (4 Ez 3:16)
Uriel answers with a counter-charge that will become commonplace in the apocalyptic tradition: “do you love [Israel] more than his Maker does?” (5:33). Ezra responds to this presumably rhetorical question: “No, my lord, but because of my grief I have spoken; for every hour I suffer agonies of heart, while I strive to understand the way of the Most High and to search out some part of his judgment.” It is a subtle response that both sidesteps the trap Uriel has set (a yes response to the question would expose the “arrogance” Uriel has already accused Ezra of) and at the same time steadfastly insists on putting before God and the angel the torments and unconsolable grief (dolor) of Ezra’s erotic and wounded heart. Ezra refuses to be silenced, and the dialogue continues.

Ezra presses Uriel to show him the telos of God’s creation which has been the cause of such suffering for Ezra and his people Israel, and Uriel responds by describing to Ezra the opening of the heavenly books at the final judgment. It is an apocalyptic vision of another world beyond this one in which “evil shall be blotted out” and “faithfulness shall flourish,” one that seemingly rights the wrongs tormented Israel has suffered; it is what will become a classic gesture of hell as theodicy. Once again Ezra resists this answer and with a

---

7 The Vulgate reads: non, domine, sed dolens locutus sum, torquent enim me renes mei per omnes horam quaerentem adprehendere semitam Altissimi et investigare partem iudicii eius. The Latin verb torqueo will be a favorite of Augustine to describe the twists and turns of the heart coram deo.
turbulent heart and inflamed spirit\(^8\) renews his protest against the suffering of the covenant people whom God has promised to love and for whom his creation has been made.\(^9\) Uriel’s rejoinder and Ezra’s response in chapter seven takes us to the heart of the matter for our *resignatio* tradition. Using the image of heaven as a wide sea, Uriel argues that in order to reach this wide sea one must travel down a river that is a “narrow place” [*angustum*] with fire on one side and deep water on the other. We have seen this word *angustia* before in Fourth Ezra, where it is used to describe the “day of tribulation and anguish” (2:27) and is equated with *gehenna* (2:29). It is the same word used in the Vulgate to translate the Greek *stenokhoria* which we have seen in the previous chapter is one of Paul’s words for hell in *Romans*. This world is hell for Israel. Uriel thus far agrees with Ezra, but argues that traversing this hell faithfully is the very means by which they will attain heaven in the world “to come” (7:15).\(^10\)

\(^8\) The Vulgate reads: *cor meum iterato turbabatur in me et coepi loqui coram Altissimo. inflammabatur enim spiritus mens valde et anima mea anxiabatur.* (6:36-37)

\(^9\) “If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?” (6:59)

\(^10\) As we shall see again in our chapter on the medieval tradition, Uriel thus articulates another version of the *resignatio ad infernum*, an orthodox one in which hell on earth is willingly traversed by those loyal to God, with the promise of a reward in heaven. That the reward consists both of one’s own beatitude and in a vision of the torments of the damned will be one of its most problematic aspects, as Nietzsche noted of Tertullian’s especially resentful version. See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Keith Ansell-Pearson and Carol Diethe, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). The tradition we are following will at times closely resemble this orthodox one even to the point of confusion. Two key aspects demarcating the deconstructive version of the *resignatio* are the element of *parbesiastic* protest against the usefulness of suffering and a resolute refusal to turn to the next life in an attempt to close the wound of love.
Ezra, agreeing that this world is indeed hellish (7:10), nevertheless resists Uriel’s two-worlds solution. Acknowledging the justice of the divine solution, Ezra’s tormented heart is nevertheless inescapably bound to those who suffer, regardless of their lack of righteousness. He pleads therefore for mercy, even in the next world. To this plea, Uriel’s response is unambiguous and deserves to be quoted in full:

After seven days the world that is not yet awake shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish. The earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence; and the chambers shall give up the souls that have been committed to them. The Most High shall be revealed on the seat of judgment, and compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn. Only judgment shall remain, truth shall stand, and faithfulness shall grow strong. Recompense shall follow, and the reward shall be manifested; righteous deeds shall awake, and unrighteous deeds shall not sleep. The pit of torment shall appear, and opposite it shall be the place of rest; and the furnace of hell shall be disclosed, and opposite it the paradise of delight. Then the Most High will say to the nations that have been raised from the dead, “Look now, and understand whom you have denied, whom you have not served, whose commandments you have despised. Look on this side and on that; here are delight and rest, and there are fire and torments.” Thus he will speak to them on the day of judgment— (7:32-38, emphasis mine)

“Compassion (misericordia) will pass away.” This is Uriel’s (and thus God’s) final answer to the problem of suffering and evil in this world—that in the next world the price for eliminating evil will be to cut off all anguished
identification with the suffering of the damned. As we shall see, this will be Augustine’s solution as well, and following him it will be the position of the orthodox doctrine of hell. Heaven and hell, firmly and irrevocably set apart from one another, “this side and that.” As Ezra has already been established by the text as wholly righteous, his question to Uriel regarding this final solution is thus remarkable: “O Lord, show this also to your servant: whether after death, as soon as everyone of us yields up the soul, we shall be kept in rest until those times come when you will renew the creation, or whether we shall be tormented at once?” (7:75, emphasis mine). The permeable heart of Ezra is thus unwilling (or unable?) to be placed on the side of the righteous, but clings erotically to his brethren in the (fallen) flesh, unrighteous though they may be. Out of love, his heart bears the torments of hell with his brethren. When Uriel rebukes him for this solidarity, saying “do not include yourself with those who have shown scorn, or number yourself among those who are tormented,” (7:76) and suggests that the righteous will “rejoice with boldness and shall be confident without confusion,” (7:98) Ezra questions whether “on the day of

---

As Hans Urs von Balthasar has aptly noted, the Augustinian position is problematic not only by imagining a heaven in which compassion is no longer available to the blessed, but also in that such a position tends to lead inexorably to a shrinking of compassion for one’s enemies in this life. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Dare we Hope, 196 in reference to the Calvinist version of double predestination.

Vulgate: *quoniam exultabunt cum fiducia et quoniam confidebunt non confusi et gaudebunt non reverentes*. Fiducia is the Latin word used in many cases to translate the Greek term *parrhesia*. Thus the debate between Ezra and Uriel is in a significant sense over the true nature of *parrhesia*.
judgment the righteous will be able to intercede for the ungodly or to entreat
the Most High for them.” (7:102) When Uriel insists that in the next world “no
[righteous] one shall every pray for another [ungodly]” (7:105), Ezra, in a final
gesture of resistance, points Uriel directly to one of the core biblical texts of the
resignatio tradition, Exodus 32:32:

I answered and said, ‘How then do we find that first Abraham
prayed for the people of Sodom, and Moses for our ancestors
who sinned in the desert…and many others prayed for many? So
if now, when corruption has increased and unrighteousness has
multiplied, the righteous have prayed for the ungodly, why will it
not be so then as well?’ (7:107, 110-111)

Not surprisingly, Uriel insists that this remarkable gesture of love and
mercy on Moses’ part is only for this life, and that in the next such mercy and
grief (tristitia at 7:131) will be impossible. Before this particular dialogue over
hell concludes, Ezra rehearses and thus appeals to God’s on-going mercy
(misericordia) and long-suffering patience (longanimitas) (7:132-140), a rather
subtle and possibly blasphemous challenge to God to be as merciful as he, Ezra
is. The dialogue concludes with Uriel again insisting that Ezra not “compare
[him]self to the unrighteous” and ingeniously suggesting that the very fact that
he does so is what will ultimately pry him apart from the unrighteous damned
for whom his heart aches and from whom he is unwilling to be separated:

But even in this respect you will be praiseworthy before the Most
High, because you have humbled yourself, as is becoming for you,
and have not considered yourself to be among the righteous. You
will receive the greatest glory, for many miseries will affect those
who inhabit the world in the last times, because they have walked in great pride...it is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted...The root of evil is sealed up from you, illness is banished from you, and death is hidden; Hades has fled and corruption has been forgotten; sorrows have passed away, and in the end the treasure of immortality is made manifest. (8:48-54)

The fact that Uriel’s position was taken up and defended by Augustine and the tradition that follows in his steps has led numerous scholars to conclude that the text of *Fourth Ezra* itself takes the side of the angel in this imagined dialogue. However, recent scholarly work on the text by Richard Bauckham and Karina Hogan resists drawing this one-sided conclusion. Bauckham, in his magisterial treatment of the early apocalyptic tours of hell, acknowledges the dangerous theo-political territory texts like *Fourth Ezra* are traversing as they put forward passionate arguments with God about the justice of the divine order. Of Ezra he writes:

> although his protests are always rebuffed, they are by no means always adequately answered. In this way the book keeps open some of the tensions inherent in its subject-matter, and its genre allows the author to give free rein to Ezra’s arguments without exactly endorsing them.\(^\text{13}\)

Drawing in part on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogical truth, Hogan concurs, suggesting that what we see in *Fourth Ezra* are “two conflicting theologies or worldviews [in] conversation with one another without allowing either point of

view to prevail over the other.”

Given as we have seen that the loving and anguished heart is not itself part of an “argument” in need of or responsive to definitive conclusions, but rather a vulnerable, fleshly witness to passionate wrestlings with death’s worst, Bauckham’s and Hogan’s readings should not be surprising. It is true that the text is rather relentless in its theodical conclusions, insistent upon the ultimate cauterizing of the weak and merciful heart.

Augustine and the Augustinian tradition will have much support for their position in texts like Fourth Ezra. Yet Ezra’s relentless, parrhesiastic and tormented voice is not silenced. In the apocalyptic genre that draws its inspiration and resources from it, in particular the Apocalypse of Peter and the apocalyptic texts that follow in its wake, we see Ezra’s voice gain in clarity and boldness, so much so that Augustine will finally see need to make every effort to prevent its cries of mercy from reaching his flock’s vulnerable ears. To these apocalyptic prayers and tears we now turn.

---

15 Because of its place in the Christian Bible (Apocrypha), 4 Ezra has received detailed scholarly attention. By contrast, the apocalyptic texts treated below have received surprisingly little notice, though this is beginning to be corrected. In her book, Jane Baun, *Tales from another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Jane Baun makes the intriguing suggestion that one reason for this gap is due to the favoring of critical editions by scholars. Because the apocalypses treated here often survive in hundreds of manuscripts, each adapted for local use, creating such standard editions for scholarly use is “virtually impossible” to do. The result is that “the lack of an easily accessible, standard edition renders a text virtually invisible.” (3) Baun suggests, ironically, that this invisibility due to the plethora of non-standard versions of apocalyptic texts means that they are “victims of their own success.” We might also add that they are victims of lingering scholarly prejudices in favor of canonicity. The crucial point of Baun’s discussion is that in the case of these non-canonical
The Apocalypse of Peter

Like Fourth Ezra, the Apocalypse of Peter was most likely written during a time of intense suffering and persecution. Bauckham argues persuasively for it having been written by Jewish Christians in the context of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 CE). The text was quite popular from the second through fourth centuries CE, being considered part of Scripture by Clement and other church fathers and being acknowledged in the Muratorian Canon as a canonical text, though not without contestation. Showing influence from Fourth Ezra, and spawning a number of apocalypses in its wake, according to Bauckham the ApPet's influence was quite substantial until the time of Augustine.

The text is itself a dialogue between St. Peter and Jesus during the time of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, and includes the very earliest Christian texts, we have a textual tradition of remarkable “fecundity” even if that tradition is masked or even silenced by orthodox canon-formation abetted by scholarly inattention.


For the details of the text, see Bauckham, The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses, and Dennis D. Buchholz, Your Eyes Will be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987).

Buchholz notes that the text survives in a sixth or seventh century Greek edition discovered in 1886 and in an Ethiopian version discovered in 1908 and first published in 1910. Most scholars consider this Ethiopian version closer to the original Greek text now lost and it is from this version that our English translations are drawn. In addition, a Greek fragment from the third or fourth century known as the Rainer Fragment was discovered in 1924 and is considered by most scholars to be an authentic witness to the original text. See M. R. James, "The Rainer Fragment of the Apocalypse of Peter," The Journal of Theological Studies os-XXXII, no. 127 (1931), 270-279; Buchholz, Your Eyes Will be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter, and Bauckham, The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses for discussions of the Rainer fragment. The fragment contains the most interesting material for our consideration, as we shall see below.
descriptions of hell, ones that influenced Dante and other medieval visions of hell. As in *Fourth Ezra*, the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is parrhesiastic in nature. Jesus has just revealed to Peter the image, drawn from Matthew 25, of the separation of souls into the saved and the damned at the last judgment. Peter responds to Jesus’ revelation of the torments of the damned with an image of shared suffering: “We beheld how the sinners wept in great affliction and sorrow, until all who saw it with their eyes wept, whether righteous or angels, and he himself also.” [ch. 3] Noting Jesus’ tears, Peter’s response is to press Jesus’ evident compassion further. “And I asked him and said, ‘Lord, allow me to speak thy word concerning these sinners: ‘It were better for them that they had not been created.’”

This passage commands our attention for a number of reasons. First, there is the quality of *parrhesia* in Peter’s words. This is evident first of all by Peter’s clever use of Jesus’ own words from the Gospel of Mark to challenge the very image of hell Jesus has presented. As Bauckham has shown, this text from Mark is prevalent in the apocalyptic texts related to *ApPet*. It is a text that originally signals, in both Mark and other early sources, an expression of woe.

---

20 The passage alluded to is Mk. 14:21 and parallels.
21 We recall that Ezra did something quite similar in his argument with Uriel, appealing to the history of God’s own longsuffering compassion as an argument against the cutting off of compassion in the hereafter. It seems to be a crucial aspect of parrhesiastic discourse that it use the very words of one’s interlocutor to open up what appears to be a closed universe of thought.
attributed to the damned, and is “without any kind of pity.” Yet, as Bauckham goes on to note, in ApPet and the tradition that follows in its wake, “it conveys a sense of compassion and tragedy, and sometimes, at least, an element of implied protest: that the very creation of sinners should become regrettable directs a question at God’s purpose and providence.” Will God, by his construction of hell, allow so much of his creative work to be so horrifically aborted? A text that began as a curse in Mark is being wrestled with by the implied author of ApPet in hopes of it giving a blessing. One sees the agonized and erotic love of the resignatio tradition come clearly to the fore here.

More subtly perhaps, Peter’s choice of words to challenge Jesus are revealing of a parrhesiastic spirit in another way. While Peter’s phrase “it were better for them that they had not been created,” is a quotation from the Gospels, Jesus’ words there, as had been noticed as early as in John Chrysostom’s commentary, are quite close in tone to those from the Book of Job. In the third chapter of the book of Job, we find Job, anticipating the upcoming theodical arguments of his friends, refusing all consolations and rationalizations of his suffering. Here, as throughout the book, Job locates...

---

22 Bauckham, The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses, 139.
23 Ibid.
24 John Chrysostom, St. John Chrysostom Commentary on Job (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006). On page 64, Chrysostom also compares this outburst of Job’s to Moses’ parrhesia in Ex. 32.32.
himself in hell/sheol, and denies that there is any way to fit his anguish into an ordered whole. “Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man-child is conceived,’” (3:3)Job cries. As the very exemplar of a parrhesiastic relationship with God, Job’s dialogue with God provides a key intertextual echo for Peter’s engagement with Jesus in ApPet. In this scene, it is as if Peter and Jesus are engaged in an interpretive wrestling over how to read Job’s words, which haunt the scene with their passionate articulation of suffering from the midst of sheol and an insistence that this suffering be witnessed to, rather than explained away.

With a subtle irony that highlights this contestation of readings, the text continues by having Jesus denounce his very own words as they come to him from Peter’s mouth. “And the Saviour answered and said ‘O Peter, why speakest thou thus, ‘that not to have been created were better for them’? Thou resistest God.” Then comes the rebuke we will have come to expect from the

25 Far from leading to a resigned despair, it is possible to read this wild thought of Job’s as part of a sustained affirmation of the integrity of his life, an agonized struggle for life in the midst of the death dealing blows of his friends’ theodicies. To insist that he is in hell is in this reading Job’s way of refusing to escape the very flesh that has been scourged. If there is to be salvation for Job, it is to be here and nowhere else, not in any rationalizing and disembodied flight provided by his friends on behalf of God. For a reading of Job in the same spirit, see Kant’s essay “On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy” in Immanuel Kant, Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni, Religion and Rational Theology (Cambridge; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

26 This phrase, “Thou resistest God” also calls to mind the rebuke found in Romans 9:20 in which the imagined interlocutor is also challenging the extent of divine mercy and Paul’s own contestation of this rebuke in 9:3.
apocalyptic tradition following Fourth Ezra. “You resist God. You would not have more compassion than he for his image.”

Peter is not given an opportunity to respond to this, however. Instead, in the following chapters of the Ethiopic text Jesus describes in great detail the punishments of the damned. Intriguingly, in chapter eight the closed universe of hell is opened in order for the aborted and abandoned children of the damned to come into their presence. They are said, remarkably, to both weep and cry even as they stand in “a place of delight” tormenting their parents with their cries.27

At the conclusion of chapter thirteen, after all the punishments have been described, the righteous are brought to hell in order to witness the torments therein. They then see and hear the damned who cry out: “Have mercy on us, for now we know the judgment of God, which he declared to us beforetime and we did not believe.” This plea for mercy is met with a rebuke from the angel for their lateness in repenting. Finally, in the face of this rebuke the damned acknowledge the justice of their punishment.28

One might think that this would be the end of the story for the damned. However, the text continues with chapter fourteen, which in the Rainer

27 This grotesque image of children who belong properly to the heavenly realm crossing over into hell thus shows how difficult it is for the boundaries of heaven and hell to be held fast. Hell needs heaven, so it seems, and vice versa, in order for sense to be made of the hell of this life.
28 “Righteous is the judgment of God: for we have heard and perceived that his judgment is good, since we are recompensed according to our deeds.”
Fragment reads: “Then will I give to my elect and righteous the baptism and the salvation for which they have besought me, in the field of Akrosja (Acherusia) which is called Aneslasleia (Elysium). They shall adorn with flowers the portion of the righteous, and I shall go...I shall rejoice with them.” Here we have one of the earliest articulations of intercession for the damned, an idea which as Bauckham notes, is likely based on the text of Exodus 32:32 among others. Though here it is a rather truncated picture, in texts indebted to ApPet, this gesture will be considerably expanded.

*The Apocalypse of Paul*  

The first clear attestation of the Latin version of this (now lost) Greek text comes from Augustine’s vehement rejection of it in the early 5th century. Written perhaps as early as the early 3rd century, the text is a fictionalized description of the visions Paul was granted when he was received, according to 2 Corinthians 12, into the third heaven. The author likely knew of the *ApPet* and borrowed from it more than once. Even more than that text, the *ApPl* is

---

responsible for introducing many of the images of hell that would find their
way into the western tradition, not least through their influence upon Dante.\textsuperscript{33}

The text begins with Paul being taken up to the third heaven where he
hears in a series of repetitive passages all of creation lamenting the sins of humanity, and seeking God’s permission to blot out all men. In each case, God responds by saying that though he sees and hears the truth of what creation is saying against humanity, “my patience bears with them until they be converted and repent.” These dialogues are reminiscent of the “groaning” of all creation in Romans 8, as well as of the scene from Exodus 32 explored in chapter one, though in this case, it is God who seems to intercede for humanity rather than Moses, and creation itself that is seen as impatiently looking to “abort” the human family.

The text continues with Paul describing a series of meetings, again in heaven, with angels coming before God and giving him their reports about the good and evil done by humans on earth. In chapter nine, angels who have ministered to the desert saints describe the prayers and “weeping and wailing” of these pilgrims and the angels share how they too “mourn along with them,” thus bringing into heaven the penitential tears of both human and angelic


\textsuperscript{33} Though scholars are divided over the provenance of the text, Kirsti Copeland, in her dissertation on ApPl argues for it originating in an Egyptian monastic setting. Kirsti Barrett Copeland, \textit{Mapping the Apocalypse of Paul: Geography, Genre and History} Thesis (Ph.D.)--Princeton University 2001.
beings. Immediately after this, chapter ten has another troop of weeping angels come to describe in tears the wretched men they have been following, whose prayers are impure and choked by the temptations of the world.

After this rather surprising scene of a tear-filled heaven, one of the angels offers to take Paul on a tour of heaven and hell, to see in more detail the places destined for the righteous and unrighteous. Significantly, he is shown the angels in charge of hell, who are “without mercy, having no pity” and whose job, presumably, is to provide endless tortures and suffering for the damned. Immediately after this vision, Paul sees the angels of heaven, “filled with all meekness and pity.”

Desiring to see the souls of the righteous and the unrighteous as they leave the world, Paul is given a vision of fiery judgment, which prompts the first of what will be many repeated outbursts on Paul’s part of sighs and tears, perhaps encouraged by his having seen so many angelic tears shed in the heavenly realm. As the visions are laid out the theme of compassion is struck, as God says, “In as much as this man did not grieve me, neither will I grieve him; as he had pity, I also will have pity.” Seeing the bitter recompense given

---

34 It is surprising, that is, for one whose only other images of heaven and hell are from the biblical texts. In neither of the classic images of hell in the Christian bible, Lazarus and the Tax Collector from Luke 16 and throughout the Revelation of John, do we find tears in the heavenly realm. Rather, there it is said, God will wipe away all tears (7:17, 21:4) and John is even chastised for weeping in 5:5.

35 In Chapter sixteen, similar words are said, this time not by God but presumably with his approval: “For whoever has shown mercy, to him will mercy be shown, and whoever has not
to one scornful sinner, Paul witnesses the man cry out the words we have come to expect in this genre of apocalyptic: “It were better for me if I had not been born.”

In chapter twenty, Paul is taken through the gates and into Paradise proper, where he meets Enoch, Elijah, and a number of other patriarchs and prophets. Though many of the images are expectedly paradisal, it is noteworthy that even here in this most blessed of places, tears of lamentation are in abundance. Enoch, immediately upon meeting Paul, begins to sigh and weep over the sins of the world. Elijah is so overcome with tears that the text describes him turning his face away from Paul. Absent here is any notion of a firewall between heaven and hell immunizing the saints from the dolorous yearnings of compassion. Added to these tears are the tears of compunction by the saints when they see the “promises and good things which God has prepared for them.” [ch. 22]36

In Chapter thirty-one, Paul is finally taken to hell proper. Here he sees nothing but “darkness and sorrow and sadness” and he lets out the first of

---

36 Ch 24 has Paul at the entrance gate to the city of Christ, with trees doing penance for the proud men who weep as they see others enter the city while they, zealous but proud, are left out. Paul joins in their weeping. It is indicated that after much penance, and after all the others have entered, “all the righteous at [Christ’s] entry may pray for them; and then they will enter with them into the city; yet none of them can have the same confidence (fiduciam) as those who humbled themselves by serving the Lord God all their life.” (Schneemelcher)
many mournful sighs. These prayers and tears echo the weeping of the
damned and Paul is brought up short: “I saw them groaning and weeping and
saying, ‘Have pity on us, O Lord!’, and no one had pity on them.” [ch. 32]
Responding to Paul’s distress that the abyss of hell will not be large enough to
hold all of the sinners if they are kept there eternally, the angel explains that the
abyss has no measure. Paul weeps and sighs at this, and, indicating that this is
the kind of parrhesiastic scene we now expect, the angel answers, without quite
rebuking, “Why do you weep? Are you more merciful than God?”

Paul does not respond to this question, but continues his tour, listening
to the cries for misericordia from the damned and responding with his own
sighing and weeping (ch. 36 and following). The most searing of these
accounts occurs, not incidentally, in the context of abortion and infanticide. (ch.
40) The parents of these children are, as we saw in ApPet, torn to pieces by
animals, perhaps as a kind of lex talionis for the grisly end of aborted fetuses
and unwanted infants, who were often heaped on trash dumps on the outside
of the city. The children describe their horrible ends, and ask God to avenge
them. This he does, and then leads them to “a spacious place of mercy”.

37 See P. Gray, "Abortion, Infanticide, and the Social Rhetoric of the 'Apocalypse of Peter'," Journal of Early Christian Studies 9, no. 3 (2001), 320 where he describes how “unwanted children were frequently abandoned at a local dung hill (κοπριά) or trash heap.” He notes later that exposed children were thus “vulnerable to wild, hungry animals.” As we recall, the biblical name for hell, Gehenna, was originally just such a place in the south of Jerusalem, where child sacrifice was practiced and later became a refuse heap of burning garbage,
Even the horrific crime of infanticide does not prevent Paul from weeping over the sufferings of parents he sees here. Finally, seemingly unable to take any more, he cries out with tears words that echo those he had earlier heard coming from one of the tortured damned: “Woe unto men, woe unto sinners! Why were they born?” This outburst is again met by the angel’s questioning him whether he is “more merciful than the Lord God who is blessed forever.” Paul responds, not with words this time, but with even more vehement weeping, which prompts the angel to take him to yet even greater torments in hell, a place so cut off from God that to the one who lands there, “no remembrance of him shall ever be made in the sight of the Father and his Son and the holy angels.” (ch. 41) This divine forgetting prompts Paul to issue forth his strongest protest, though now, significantly, he goes so far as to identify with the sinners he has seen: “But hearing these things I stretched out my hands and wept, and sighing again I said, ‘It were better for us if we had not been born, all of us who are sinners’” (ch. 42, emphasis mine).


38 As in ApPet, the irony is rich, for abortion is the very sin Paul is toying with here, though now on a cosmic scale, asking whether or not it would have been better, given the sufferings he is seeing, for God to have aborted the human race altogether, rather than subject them to such suffering. That the angel suggests that God will not do so is perhaps the very hint that this hellish scenario, looking like nothing so much as an aborted world, is not God’s final word. As we saw in ApPet, the parrhesiastic duel is often waged by means of using the divine word against itself.
Only now do we reach the denouement of Paul’s *resignatio ad infernum.*

Hearing his com-passionate cry of identification and erotic protest, the damned themselves respond and in turn have their cries break open their hellish enclosure to the powers of heaven:

However when those who were in this very place saw me weeping with the angel, they cried out and themselves wept, saying: O Lord God, have mercy on us! And after that I saw heaven opened and the archangel Michael coming down from heaven, and with him the whole host of angels, and they came to those who were placed in the punishments. And seeing him they cried out again with tears, and said: Have mercy on us, archangel Michael, have mercy on us and on the human race, for because of your prayers the earth continues. We have now seen the judgment and known the Son of God. It was impossible for us to pray for this previously before we came to this place. For we did hear that there was a judgment before we came forth from the world, but tribulations and a worldly-minded life did not allow us to repent.  

What follows is Michael, under the influence of the cries for mercy of both Paul and the damned, agreeing to join Paul with a vehement appeal to God for mercy. “But now weep, and I will weep with you and the angels who are with me with the well-beloved Paul...” (ch. 43) This elicits a chorus of repeated kyrie eleison’s from Paul and the damned, and in chapter forty-four, we see the result: “I looked and saw the heaven move like a tree shaken in the wind.” God, wondering about the commotion, asks the reason for this intercession, and upon hearing from his angels, sends Christ down. Christ at first resists their pleas, reminding them of his own sufferings on the cross.

---

which had little effect, but finally relents “for the sake” of Michael, Paul, and for the children of the damned still on earth. On Easter Sunday each year, he declares, the damned will receive their day of respite from hell. And, once the door to heaven has been opened by Paul’s prayers and tears from hell, the trajectory will be to continually expand mercy’s reach. In what we might plausibly call an imaginative transposition into the afterlife of Paul’s prayer from Romans 9:2-3, Paul’s willingness to identify with the damned and plead their cause has here succeeded.\textsuperscript{40}

*The Greek Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*

The Apocalypse of Paul, as Jane Baun has written, “was one of the most successful Christian Apocrypha…universally acknowledged to have begotten an enormous family of texts, in multiple recensions and numerous languages.”\textsuperscript{41}

One of the most influential of these texts, which will play a significant role in Dostoevsky’s version of the *resignatio ad infernum*, is the Greek Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary, sometimes called the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*.\textsuperscript{42} In her

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} His willingness to side with his “brothers in the flesh” even those who have rejected Christ, is thus not surprisingly affirmed later in the text (ch. 47) by Joseph, who reminds Paul of his own willingness to pray for his brothers at all costs. Moses, who in chapter forty-eight greets Paul in heaven with tears of lamentation over his wayward people, also praises Paul for his efficacious efforts.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Baun, *Tales from another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha*, 78. Appendix A is a translation of a medieval Greek version of the text from which, unless otherwise indicated, our citations will come.
\item \textsuperscript{42} We have already noted that the version of the *Theotokos* explored here is significantly later than Augustine’s time. However, as Baun successfully argues, most of the themes of the text are derived from the *ApPl*, which Augustine clearly knew. In many ways, as Baun notes, the
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
magisterial treatment of this text, Baun argues that the *Sitz im leben* of *Theotokos* is a lay community from an “unofficial, non-elite sphere” residing far from the centers of Byzantine imperial and ecclesiastical power.43 Animated by a “fervent desire to rectify and fortify the moral environment of their own communities,” the writers of the multiple versions of the text were less interested in providing “factual information” about the afterlife, and more on “bear[ing] witness to the realities of this world,” most pressing of which was the injustices inflicted on the poor and the marginal by the imperial and ecclesiastical elites in addition to the traumas inflicted on the powerless in “local networks of kin, village, and parish”.44

The text itself is a re-working of the *ApPl*, in which Mary impatiently demands that the archangel Michael take her directly to hell, bypassing the sphere of heaven altogether.45 There she meets the wailing, miserable damned, who express surprise at her visit. As Baun notes, *Theotokos* is a critical

---

*Theotokos* is more a radicalization and intensification of the themes of *ApPl*, rather than an independent text. Though the Oxford manuscript from which Baun makes her translation dates to the 11th century, the textual tradition goes back much earlier, perhaps, as Bauckham argues, as early as the 4th century. It is not farfetched, then, to imagine that many of its themes would have been present in Augustine’s time.

43 Ibid., 10.

44 Ibid., 1, 31, 1, 2. Baun notes that “the compilers of the medieval apocalypses…were especially exercised by threats to the family; by corruption in the local government office, church, and marketplace; by the personal morals of the clergy, and neglect of pastoral duties by the clergy.” (325) We will see a similar set of concerns in the 13th century by the Beguines, who were part of the continuing attempts at reform of the church and society via the ideal of the *vita apostolica*.

45 Baun notes that whereas in *ApPl* Paul is taken up by God into the heavens, and is thus passive in his tour of hell, Mary is all active, even imperious in her treatment of Michael, demanding him to take her where she wishes to go.
engagement with ApP/, and it here engages in a bit of one-upsmanship on behalf of Mary, with the damned sharing that she alone among the saints has had the audacity and compassion to visit them in hell.\textsuperscript{46} The implication, Baun suggests, is that the author is highlighting the maternal, gendered aspect of Mary’s compassion. “That Mary is a woman, and the members of the Heavenly Establishment are all men, strikes the modern reader immediately.” (272) As in ApP/, we are given numerous examples of Mary’s tears and weeping, and the by now familiar ejaculation upon seeing the torments: “It would be better for man had he not been born!” (ch. 11) Intriguingly, Mary is nowhere rebuked for the sin of thinking she has more compassion than God, a fact which Baun interprets as part of the author’s rather dangerous, even heterodox attempt to raise Mary up to a level higher than the ‘distant’ even fickle Father and Son.\textsuperscript{47}

Finally, upon seeing visions of the punishments of Christians in ch. 24, Mary can hold back no longer. Again going further than even her predecessor Paul had done, Mary not only identifies with the damned, but she expresses her own desire to be punished with them. Though it is not expressly said, the implication seems to be that Mary wishes to be punished \textit{in their place}, for she adds to this request ‘that the Lord God may hearken and have mercy on them.”

\textsuperscript{46} Baun’s translation reads: “Your Blessed Son came upon the earth and did not ask at all about us, nor Abraham the forefather, nor John the Baptist, nor Moses the great prophet, nor the Apostle Paul—and they did not appear to us. How is it, O Panagia Theotokos, the armor of the Christians, the one who intercedes exceedingly for the Christians, how is it that you ask about us?” (392)

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 267.
Michael responds by telling Mary that her request is likely futile, for he admits that he and the other angels, who in ch. 23 had complained bitterly about how much they suffer in their positions as torturers of the damned in hell⁴⁸, have prayed before the Father day and night for “remembrance for the sinners, but the Lord accounts us as nothing.” (ch. 25)

But Mary is not deterred, and her *parrhesia* is now on full display as she commands Michael to bring an army of angels to help her “storm heaven” and come “into the presence of the invisible Father” (ch 26). Upon arrival, she immediately cries out in a remarkable instantiation of the *resignatio ad infernum*:

> “Have mercy, O Master, on the Christian sinners, for I have seen them being punished and I cannot bear their lamentation. May I go forth, and may I myself be punished with the Christian sinners!”

In what Baun rightly calls an “adversarial manner”, Mary has thus challenged God’s compassion, and the ensuing scene shows the Father and Son both resisting Mary’s pleas, justifying their inaction by appealing to the justice of the punishments and repeating the theological principle we have seen in *AπΠ/λ* of granting mercy only for those who in their lives showed mercy.

---

⁴⁸ Upon seeing Michael and Mary, the first light they have seen “for ages” in the dungeon they keep guard over, the angels cry out: “Hail, Kecharitomene Theotokos! Hail, lamp of the inaccessible light! Hail also to you, Archistrategos Michael, the intercessor for the whole creation, for we, seeing the sinners being punished, are greatly grieved.” (397)
Mary brushes aside this theological stance, and instead directs the Father and Son’s attention back to hell: “Behold the punishments” she insists, as if to suggest that theological abstraction is simply not adequate in dealing with the incarnate suffering of the powerless.

Baun here likens Mary to a “majestic, militant mother” (275). When the Father only grudgingly agrees to a single concession, Mary then cries out and calls upon Moses, the prophets and patriarchs, Paul, the Lord’s Day and the Cross itself to join her in her demand for mercy for the damned. Another concession is granted, and then, after the rest of her liturgical gathering flags in their efforts upon being confronted with another heavenly demurrer, (ch. 28) she calls upon all of the saints, angels and archangels to join her cause. Choruses of *kyrie eleison* go up this time, and finally “the Master seeing the entreaty of his saints, having compassion,” sends his Son down to earth and himself comes down from his throne into the presence of the damned. Here, as heaven and hell are brought together into intimate proximity, God finally, if again somewhat reluctantly, grants the damned a respite from their punishments for the days of Pentecost. This grudging relaxing of the torments

---

49 We will see a repeat of this image of the militant, adversarial mother of compassion in the texts of the Beguine mystics in the thirteenth century.
50 Baun brilliantly argues for the importance of the Byzantine Christian liturgical context as the setting for the text, noting the frequent use of liturgical formulae, such as the *kyrie eleison*. If 4th Ezra showed theologies in conflict, one might say that in the *Theotokos*, one has conflict over the moral, ethical, and even political implications of the liturgy.
is met with choruses of praise for the Father’s love, compassion, and long-suffering with sinners.\footnote{The tone of this scene is hard to capture. Is the praise genuine, ironic, or a case of damning with faint praise?}

Mary’s militant use of \textit{parrhesia} in her relentless pursuit of an expansive understanding of misericordia is astonishing. As Baun writes,

This sense of character development, empathy, urgency, and moral crisis are taken to dramatic heights in the \textit{Theotokos} apocalypse in a way unprecedented in the genre. Earlier otherworldly tourists, such as Ezra, Baruch, and Paul, are not unmoved by what they see—intercession features prominently in all the early apocalypses—but they do not set themselves in opposition to the Deity, storming the gates of heaven through their prayer; nor do they offer themselves up for the sinners, in order to force God’s hand toward mercy. (108)

It is a remarkable theological vision, one that acknowledges with terrible seriousness the damage done by the powerful using their power to overwhelm and rapaciously use the weak. Yet at the same time, it suggests that perhaps the greatest sin in such a context is for mercy and compassion to go missing, not only among the privileged elite perpetrating the injustices, but especially among the saints themselves—as evidenced in the text by Mary’s need to continually upbraid the saints, patriarchs, angels and even God himself, for their lack of compassion for those who suffer, whatever the causes.
Resignatio ad Infernum: A Tradition of Traumatized Grotesque

In the context of overwhelming suffering, as trauma theorist Judith Herman has emphasized, what often suffers is a sense of connection to other human beings, to one’s history, and even to oneself. Trauma shatters the world, and the virtues of love, mercy, and compassion are at tremendous risk. Survival of these virtues, survival period, is by no means a given. The texts we have examined in this chapter are, as I have suggested throughout, all attempts to articulate what such virtues might look like in the context of overwhelming trauma, what its authors figure as hell itself.

To experience the erotic pull of mercy and compassion in the midst of such suffering is to find oneself in what Baun calls an “other world,” “struggling to find a language, and a compositional framework, adequate to express complex spiritual and theological realities.” Not surprisingly, the texts of this chapter have quite frequently been described as grotesque, an attribution which is worthy of serious consideration.

---

53 Baun, Tales from another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha, 145.
The traumatic self, as Lyn Marven has argued in her remarkable book on 20th century German women writers, is not surprisingly often figured as grotesque, a self strange to itself. Indeed, classical images of the grotesque are monstrous ones, the fusion of things that should be kept apart. Love and death are intertwined, as are the human and the beastly, heaven and hell, the tragic and the comic. Ever oscillating, never complete or stable, the grotesque is the very con-fusion of seeming opposites. Such monstrosity, of course, seems more at home in the realm of hell than anywhere else, and as Miles and Kayser rightly note, apocalyptic texts are full of such monstrous images.

Yet as Harpham suggests, the grotesque cannot be so neatly cordoned off on any side of a binary opposition, including that of heaven and hell. Ever prone to metamorphosis, protean in nature, the grotesque, though “more comfortable in hell than in heaven, its true home is the space between, in which perfectly formed shapes metamorphose...” The grotesque, Harpham notes, is often “figured as the belly of the whale, the womb of the Mother, or, later, the jaws of hell.” The tearing open of a seemingly closed universe, the grotesque

---

Reflections (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997) on hell as a primary figure of the grotesque in the western tradition.

56 See Harpham, On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature ch. 1 for examples of all of these grotesque images.
57 Ibid., 10.
58 Ibid., 85.
resists being immobilized on either side of the life-death divide though as these birthing images suggest it is most often figured as giving life to what has been long since dead and buried. Such exhumations of hellish realities long buried mean, however, that the life brought to the surface by the grotesque is often quite monstrous to behold.

According to Marven, the grotesque is a way in which traumatized subjects attempt to articulate the experiences they have had, much like what Baun describes the authors of medieval apocalypses doing. Drawing on Dominick LaCapra’s groundbreaking work on trauma-texts, James Berger argues in his work on apocalyptic that we can see these texts as “simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them.” Thus the hybrid nature of the grotesque makes it a most fitting form in which this

---

59 As the image suggests, this is one reason why the grotesque and the apocalyptic are so closely related. Harpham notes that this resistance to closure makes it fall outside Christian orthodoxy and its relentless teleological drive for finality. It’s relentless oscillation, its playing of oppositions, means that “a Christian interpretation of grottesche [is] simply impossible; the material resists it.” (44-45) As we will suggest in the conclusion, this grotesque aspect of the resignatio ad infernum tradition is why it cannot be properly considered a Christian doctrine.

60 James Berger, After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19. LaCapra’s distinction between acting-out and working-through, both of which he finds in many trauma-texts, is of course drawn from Freud. LaCapra thinks that contemporary post-modern discourse has not paid enough attention to the latter aspect of trauma texts. See Dominick LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
trauma-work is done. Revenge fantasies mingle with passionate pleas for compassion for example, without any premature attempt at reconciliation.\textsuperscript{61}

All of these aspects of the traumatized grotesque can be seen in the texts examined in this chapter. We have noted, especially in the \textit{ApPl} and the \textit{Theotokos}, how heaven and hell, initially viewed as utterly distinct realms in a rigidly (and righteously) ordered world, become oddly inter-mixed. Abortive violence, in both a cosmic (divine) and human register, leads to images of the border between human and animal, life and death, being eroded. We find agonized weeping in heaven, choruses of praise in hell; a near-demonic, because ultimately unresponsive, Father-God, and scenes in which mercy and judgment freely intermingle. In hell we are met with the most passionate figures of mercy imaginable in the figures of Mary and Paul, and in \textit{ApPet} innocent children are to be found in hell, grotesquely crying and mourning over their parents’ abandonment of them. It is precisely to this grotesque intermingling of mercy and judgment, heaven and hell, love and unceasing anguish that our authors lead us, forcing us to move beyond rigid oppositions.

At one level, we can see such gestures as exemplifying the point that the trauma-texts we have looked at are a “perverformative” of love in the midst of hell, at once acting-out a traumatic situation and at the same time working-

\textsuperscript{61} On revenge fantasies as grotesque aspects of trauma-work, potentially quite dangerous but often a crucial part of a survivor’s self-acceptance of unwanted feelings, see Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 189.
through its most deleterious effects.\textsuperscript{62} The texts “give us hell”, they refuse, as Mary refuses, to allow hell to remain under cover of darkness, instead insisting on pulling off its veil of forgetfulness. Yet “perversely,” the text argues that this gesture of exposing herself to hell is the very gesture of opening to the re-birth of mercy, as the surprised response of the damned indicates it to be.

At another level, what these texts are attempting is what we might consider the very grotesque, even absurd idea of giving birth to a “\textit{history} from hell,” to what Shoshana Felman calls, in her seminal essay on trauma in the writings of Sartre and Camus, “a witness of incurability and perdition” much like Camus’ strikingly grotesque image of an incurably melancholic Christ with which this chapter began.\textsuperscript{63}

Why would the idea of a history from hell be an absurd one? Felman, in her analysis of the violent shattering of the Camus-Sartre friendship, provides insight here. The fissures of their relationship began to be clear in Camus’ publishing of \textit{The Rebel} in 1951. In that text Camus launched a passionate attack on a certain understanding of Marxist historicism which he associated with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} The term “perverformative” belongs to Derrida, who invokes it to suggest just such scenes at the apocalypses imagine. See Jacques Derrida and Alan Bass, \textit{The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond} (Chicago & London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987). Perhaps especially telling here is Derrida’s justly famous example of the perverformative mentioned by Hent de Vries: “God contradicts himself already.” The quote is highlighted as “perverformative” in Hent de Vries, \textit{Philosophy and the Turn to Religion} (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 28 is from Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 70.
\end{itemize}
Sartre. It is a historical dialectic in which violent actions, including torture and death, are justified by placing all of history into a teleological framework, one in which the end is seen as inevitably happy and the means thus entail terror and the suspension of freedoms when necessary, along with a heroic acceptance of the “burden of guilt” on the part of history’s movers.\(^{64}\) Clearly we are not far from some of the theological justifications for hell which we have seen argued for and against in this chapter.

In *The Rebel*, Camus had in mind the French Communist willingness to turn aside from the increasing evidence of Stalinist work camps. Later, he would consider Sartre’s support for the FLN’s use of terrorism in Algeria as an example of how this viewpoint sided with a notion of historical “progress” in which history’s movement was innocent, and those who got caught in its way, like the pied-noirs of Algeria, were “guilty” of being on the wrong side of history.\(^{65}\) They were thus, in Germaine Breé’s phrase “utterly expendable”

---

\(^{64}\) Albert Camus, *The Rebel; an Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956). Camus begins his most focused critique of Sartre, Part III *Historical Rebellion*, by analyzing how totalitarian revolutions, though motivated by freedom, will in the name of justice, eventually suspend freedom and justify murder and violence as the necessary ‘burden of guilt’ the leaders must carry. In the background, of course, is Dostoevsky’s image of the Grand Inquisitor. In his response to Sartre, he writes, “In order to justify his position he takes toward my book, he would have to demonstrate...that history has a necessary meaning and an end, that the hideous and chaotic face it shows to us is only an illusion; and that, on the contrary, it progresses inexorably, even if with ups and downs, toward that moment of reconciliation that will mark the advent of definitive freedom.” Jean-Paul Sartre et al., *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2004), 122-23.

\(^{65}\) This problematic position “outside” of history for the pied-noirs of Algeria, is most excruciatingly evoked by the Jewish Algerians Derrida and Cixous.
from Sartre’s point of view. Hegel’s “slaughter-bench” of history is a surd, if not outright absurd, and must be covered over and silenced in the onward march of historical reason, much as the damned in hell are covered over in darkness in the *Theotokos* so as to let a purified heaven shine, presumably, all the brighter.

A history from hell is thus absurd from Sartre’s point of view because history just is the very censoring of the hellish cries of the suffering of the innocents from the divine-historical narrative. Sartre writes to Camus, “Like you, I am involved in History, but I don’t see it in your way. I don’t doubt that for those looking at it from Hell, it has this absurd and frightening appearance, because *they no longer have anything in common* with the men who are making it.”

Cut off from history’s makers and making, which is to say from history itself, the damned in history are outside of history, and their cries of innocence are

---


67 For a remarkable reading of Dostoevsky’s sense that this is what Hegel does in his philosophy of history to the suffering people of Siberia, where he himself suffered the hell of exile, see F. Laszlo Foldényi, "Dostoevsky Reads Hegel in Siberia and Bursts into Tears," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 1 (2004), 93-104. “Hegel,” Foldényi writes toward the end of this most remarkable essay, “had no acquaintance with hell.”

68 So, in his re-telling of the hellish history of Christ, the cries of the Holy Innocents, who are killed by Herod in his mad search for the Christ child, are what haunt Jesus, and make impossible the kind of “salvation-history” that the Augustinian tradition so fervently desires.

thus covered over in a darkened forgetfulness on the march to world historical salvation.\textsuperscript{70} History, in Sartre’s mind, is the in-dennification of life, literally, the negation of hell from its precincts, even if this requires, ironically, acts of tremendous, even demonic violence. Such is the image we have seen challenged in our apocalyptic texts, when Ezra, Peter, Paul and Mary each enter hell as compassionate witnesses of what history has fitfully tried to suppress.

Of course, there is an obvious jab in Sartre’s use of the word “absurd” to describe the attempt to write history from hell, for it is precisely this absurd history, Felman argues, that Camus attempts to write in both his fictional and non-fictional works. Reading Camus’ oeuvre as trauma-texts, she suggests that what Camus is rejecting is the very thing Sartre, perhaps unwittingly, is desperate to affirm: a salvation purged of the cries of the damned.\textsuperscript{71} So in her analysis of the above passage from \textit{The Fall}, she writes:

\textsuperscript{70} At this point, one might well invoke the very etymology of our English word, hell. The O.E.D. indicates that it probably shares a common Indo-European base as the verb \textit{hele}, meaning to hide, conceal, or keep secret. Judith Herman, in a chapter of \textit{Trauma and Recovery} titled “A Forgotten History” notes how difficult it is, given the inevitable trauma even the witnesses to trauma face, as well as to the controversies over the nearly unthinkable acts being narrated, for a history of trauma to be written. Because the urge to forget is so intense, and often cuts the victim off from witnesses who could begin the process of piecing together a history, “To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim, joins victim and witness in a common alliance.” Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 9.

Jesus, in Camus' atheological perspective, is himself not a man-God but an archetypal human witness, witness to human suffering and pain in general, witness in particular to history as outrage, as the outrage of the Massacre of the Innocents. The extent of the massacre is such, however, that the witness cannot not be in his turn tainted, implicated in the guilt of its occurrence by his very witnessing of it, by his very knowledge of the massacre -- and of his own survival. And it is because he knows, and because his knowledge must be hushed (denied as knowledge and asserted -- through an active silence -- as non-knowledge), that he in effect must die, and that his voice, his testimony, and his outcry, must be censored. Paradoxically, the allegorical figure of Christ appears in the arena of *The Fall* not as Saviour but as witness to the fact, and as bearer of the knowledge of the fact, that human history precludes any salvation.\(^\text{72}\)

For Camus, the western-Christian idea of a salvation without tears is not possible or even desirable, and a rebellious, parrhesiastic responsibility for the damned is crucial. And if, as Wolfgang Kayser has suggested, the grotesque may be defined as a “play with the absurd,”\(^\text{73}\) then Camus’s history from hell is clearly just such a play. As he writes in his early attempt to articulate his artistic vision of the absurd, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the temptation is to flee this grotesque hell in which “absurdity, hope and death carry on their dialogue.”\(^\text{74}\)

Refusing consolation, like Ezra, Paul and Mary of the *Theotokos*, Camus in *The Rebel* demands that

> The longing for rest and peace must itself be thrust aside; it coincides with the acceptance of iniquity. Those who weep for the

---

\(^{72}\) Shoshana Felman, "Crisis of Witnessing," 223.


happy periods they encounter in history acknowledge what they want: not the alleviation but the silencing of misery. But let us, on the contrary, sing the praises of the times when misery cries aloud and disturbs the sleep of the surfeited rich!...Even though the historical dialectic is false and criminal, the world, after all, can very well realize itself in crime and in pursuit of a false concept. This kind of resignation is, quite simply, rejected here: we must stake everything on the renaissance.75

A history from hell is absurd, for Camus, because it insists that history is full of what history cannot comprehend, what we have seen imagined in our apocalyptic texts: a grotesque admixture of pangs of mercy and a longing for justice, inconsolable mourning and shouts of praise and joy, a love that in its expansiveness opens one to ever greater depths of anguish.76

Though Augustine will, as we shall see, mistake this tradition for a facile grasp at Origenist apocatastasis, universal salvation, and the abolition of hell, it has been the burden of this chapter to argue that the resignatio ad infernum tradition is no such thing. To affirm the inevitability of universal salvation would be to give in to the temptation of a Hegelian-Sartrean happy ending, thus covering over yet again the reality of hell on earth, and even providing justification for stoking its fires if such be needed to move history along its garden path. Camus, like the texts we have examined, resists this move, insisting on the grotesque image of heaven and hell intermixed in one

76 So Camus writes, in The Myth of Sisyphus, “the more one loves, the stronger the absurd grows” (69).
anguished, erotic heart. “The Rebel in effect tries to show that the sacrifices demanded in the past and present by Marxist revolution can only be justified in the context of a happy end to history and that at the same time the Hegelian and Marxist dialectic, whose movement can only be stopped arbitrarily, excludes this end.”

This last point of Camus’, that Sartre has misread Hegel as an eschatological eudaimonist, is crucial. Without wading into the recent debates, prompted by Catherine Malabou’s critique of Derrida’s early readings of Hegel as a metaphysician of closure, Camus’ point seems quite a propos here. As Germaine Brée writes in her book comparing Camus and Sartre,

For Camus, ‘The future in terms of history, when we estimate it, is only a collection of possibilities and, in order to determine an attitude, we must consider each one of these eventualities. The historic future does not vindicate any kind of dogmatism, but it does imply risk.’ Hence the chance of error or defeat…For Camus, in politics and history there were no certain outcomes.

And what about in theology? Though Camus is often thought of as an atheist pure and simple, there are reasons to demur. Not only did he resist this label, much like fellow Algerian, Derrida, but Camus showed an intense interest in engaging the Christian theological tradition deeply and sympathetically.

Especially taken with Meister Eckhart’s articulation of the *resignatio ad infernum*

---

77 Camus in Sartre et al., *Sartre and Camus : A Historic Confrontation*, 123, emphasis mine.
79 Brée, *Camus and Sartre : Crisis and Commitment*, 208-09.
which Camus dubs in *The Rebel* both “a surprising fit of heresy” as well as the “very essence of love.” Camus makes an intriguing suggestion that there may well exist a Christianity which tarries with the absurd. “It is possible to be Christian and absurd. There are examples of Christians who do not believe in a future life.” Though he doesn’t give any examples here, he may well have had Eckhart in mind here, who rejected the kind of eschatological eudaimonism which he suggested scornfully was like loving God the way a farmer loves his cow for its milk. Here in the realm of the absurd, there are “no certain outcomes,” and love must proceed as such, without a transcendental why to back up its risky gestures.

But can one risk love in such a tremulous space with no guarantee of a heavenly reward? Given the vulnerable opening of the self to the other’s desires which eros necessarily entails, one should clearly not underestimate the stakes of such a risk. For one who has been a victim of or even a witness to the kinds of “bodily violation, implosion, explosion” and unwanted penetration

---

81 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*, 112.
82 On the riskiness of love, and hence the Stoic rejection of it, see esp. Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire : Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), where Nussbaum writes of Seneca’s view that love is “a dangerous hole in the self, through which it is almost impossible that the world will not strike a painful and debilitating blow. The passionate life is a life continued gaping openness to violation, a life in which pieces of the self are groping out into the world and pieces of the world are dangerously making their way into the insides of the self; a way of life appropriately described in the imagery of bodily violation, implosion, explosion; of sexual penetration and unwanted pregnancy.” (442) As in many of the texts we have examined, the proximity of thoughts of infanticide and abortion to the realm of vulnerable love is striking.
described by Nussbaum, the risks are even higher. Survivors of trauma, as Herman and others have noted, are often in desperate need of re-establishing stable boundaries in the aftermath of chaotic, disorienting violations: boundaries of self and other, good and evil, guilt and innocence. Yet while such boundary maintenance is crucial in the early stages of recovery, trauma theorists frequently note that this work is not itself without risk. Protecting oneself from a repetition of the traumatic invasion of the self can, without hard work, all too easily lead the survivor into strategies of withdrawal, hyper-vigilant boundary maintenance, and dangerous forms of dissociation. While understandable reactions to traumatic events, the irony is that such strategies, what Herman calls “constrictive symptoms,” have the very effect of repeatedly isolating the survivor from herself and others. Herman writes, “Though dissociation offers a means of mental escape at the moment when no other escape is possible, it may be that this respite from terror is purchased at far too high a price.”

In Herman’s view, what is needed is a communal context in which this hard work of re-establishing relationality and eventually even erotic intimate attachments to others can be achieved. This too is risky, with the hardest part, she suggests, being the work of mourning, which can be likened to a descent back into the hell of trauma. Here the survivor hopes to learn that “what

83 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 239.
sustains the patient through this descent into despair is the smallest evidence of
an ability to form loving connections.”84 The movement is from a “self-
enclosure created through fear toward the other” to an open posture that
“liberates eros from fear for an ekstatic movement toward and not a withdrawal
from the other.”85 Yet, as the prayers and tears of the saints in heaven make
clear, such ecstasy by no means immunizes one from hell; rather, it leads one
straight into grotesque proximity to the very hell one has steadfastly rejected.

This descent into mourning, the re-opening of the vulnerable heart of
love, is indeed a risk without guarantees, a courageous willingness to insist like
Job, Ezra, Paul and Mary, in the face of the most sovereign of authorities, on
the heart’s inextricable boundnessness to frail, yearning flesh. What we are
calling the tradition of the resignatio ad infernum is just such a risky venture along
the margins of life-death, heaven-hell, an im-possible attempt to write history
from hell, the history of hell’s forgetting in the impatience of a restless march
toward a predicted happy end. This tradition may “begin in a gay and carefree
manner—as Raphael wanted to play in his grotesques. But it may also carry the
player away, deprive him of his freedom, and make him afraid of the ghosts
which he so frivolously invoked.”86 But so, absurdly enough, because it brings

84 Ibid., 194.
85 Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Person, Kenosis and Abuse: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and
itself with parrhesiastic ferocity and indominable misericordia into the closest proximity to the cries of the damned, it may also begin in the torments of hell, as Sisyphus did, only to find itself, inexplicably, turned around in rapturous, carvivalesque joy:

“Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable...One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”\(^\text{87}\)

\(^{87}\) Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*, 122-23.
Chapter Three

Augustine, Fugitive From Hell

“Between the immune and that which threatens it or runs counter to it, between Heil and Unheil, the relation is neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction... and if, as I have attempted and am still tempted to do elsewhere, one were to separate as irreconcilable the notion of salut as greeting or salutation to the other from every salut as salvation (in the sense of the safe, the immune, health, and security), if one were to consider the greeting or the salutation of the other, of what comes, as irreducible and heterogeneous to any seeking of salut as salvation, you can guess into what abysses we would be drawn.”

“It came to pass recently, as you yourself have heard, when to the shrill sound of the war-trumpet and the shouts of the Goths, Rome, the mistress of the world, trembled under the weight of a sad fear. Where stood our order of nobility then? Where were the occupiers of the fixed, distinct grades of their hierarchy? Everything was thrown into confusion and disorder by fear, in every home there was lamentation, and terror was spread to all alike. Slave and noble were on the same footing: the same spectre of death stalked before us all. –Pelagius’ letter to Demetrius

Introduction: Augustine as Theologian of Trauma

Like many trauma survivors, Saint Augustine has a hard time wresting his mind from the horrors of hell. Even in the midst of the last book of The City of God, meant to culminate that work with a triumphant portrayal of the

---

3 See Judith Lewis Herman, Trauma and Recovery (New York, N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1992) for the struggle of trauma survivors in this regard. Catherine Oppel, in her essay ""Why, My Soul, are You Sad?"", Augustinian Studies 35, no. 2 (2004), 199-236 also addresses this, albeit indirectly.
"eternal blessedness of the city of God,” visions of hell come creeping back into Augustine’s carefully crafted paradisal scene. Augustine bitterly laments in chapter twenty-two that “This life itself, if it is to be called a life,” is one long litany of sufferings:

- gnawing cares, disturbances, griefs, fears, insane joys, discords, litigation, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, falsehood, flattery, fraud, theft, rapine, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, homicides, parricides…acts of violence, robberies, and other such evils which do not immediately come to mind, but which are never far away from men in this life.

Having opened the door of his heart to such troubling matters, Augustine finds it hard to stop. Even his sleep, that repose (quietis) which is the bishop’s favorite figure for the heavenly state, is invaded with tormenting images.

Finally, even sleep itself, which properly receives the name of rest, is often made unquiet by visions and dreams. Who can describe in words how the wretched soul and the senses are thus disturbed by terrors, great even though false: terrors exhibited and displayed in such a way that we cannot distinguish them from what is real?

After nearly two pages, seemingly exhausted by his contemplation of the overwhelming number of terrors life brings, Augustine concludes: “This is a
state of life so miserable that it is like a hell on earth.”

Perhaps it is not surprising that even here, while struggling to envision what heaven will be like, we find Augustine collapsing into tormented images of “hell on earth.” For like the apocalyptic texts examined in the previous chapter, *The City of God* can be read as a sustained attempt to come to terms with trauma. Of the numerous traumas experienced by the bishop and his flock, two of the most significant were in striking proximity to the launching of his magnum opus and clearly pressed upon the bishop’s mind as he sat down to write. The first was the sack of Rome in August of 410, described so searingly by Augustine’s future nemesis Pelagius in the first epigraph to this chapter. The second was the so-called Donatist controversy culminating with the Council of Carthage in 411. There Augustine finally came face to face with his

---

7 Ibid. The Latin text reads: *ab huius tam miserae quasi quibusdam inferis vitae.*
8 Augustine makes a telling admission in 22/29 about this struggle when he writes of the beatific vision, “And yet, to tell the truth, I do not know what the nature of that occupation, or rather of that rest and repose, will be. After all, I have never seen it with my bodily sight.” (1171) No such admission is made regarding the images he so luridly draws of hell in Book Twenty-one. Perhaps this is because, as we see here, Augustine sees himself as intimately familiar, in “bodily sight” of hell and its torments.
9 One indicator of the severity of the trauma of Rome’s sack comes from the famous Letter 127 of Jerome, where he writes of sobs so violent they choke out his voice. Though O’Donnell admits that the actual destruction caused by Alaric was not as great as earlier historians had suspected, he insists that this should not cause us to view the reactions of Jerome, Augustine, and Pelagius, among others, as exaggerated. “The emotional impact of such an event, as we know today, can run well beyond a cool assessment of the actual damage, aggravated by fears of repetition. ‘I was so distressed,’ wrote Jerome, ‘that it was like the old proverb: ‘I didn’t even know my own name.’” One suspects that in this use of “today” O’Donnell has in mind the overwhelming grief, anger and violent exertions in behalf of law and order that followed in the wake of the attacks on the U.S. in 2001 where, as in Rome of 410, the actual loss of life experienced was not itself enough to account for the traumatized response. See James Joseph O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 228.
fellow African Christians to settle a political and ecclesial battle that had violently raged in North Africa for nearly a century. While CD responds explicitly to the first trauma, it is oddly silent about the Donatist controversy even as it appears to be in numerous places haunted by it.  

Both the silence and the haunting will be a focus of this chapter, as Augustine’s construction of hell and his rejection of the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition is examined. Augustine’s use of Romans 9-11 to construct his doctrine of predestination is well known. In his monograph examining Augustine’s use of these chapters of Paul, Peter Gorday notes the surprising fact that the famously weepy bishop barely pauses to examine the remarkable ejaculation of anguished tears by Paul in 9:2-3. The burden of this chapter will be to argue that this oversight is far from innocent and has much to do with Augustine’s desire for theological and political order in the face of the great traumas of the Late Empire in which he lived. These few verses of Paul’s, though rarely explicitly mentioned by Augustine, haunt his texts, in particular those in which he is addressing his own “brethren in the flesh,” the anti-imperial African Christians known to history as the Donatists. Augustine’s own anguished relationship to his flesh is most pronounced in the endless flood of tears he weeps on behalf of his mother, Monica. In the concluding section of the

---

10 On the conspicuous absence of the ‘Donatists’ from *CD*, see Ibid., 251-52.
chapter, I will return to this scene of anguish and suggest that though Augustine is rightly viewed as a theologian of order, the figure of Monica’s maternal love is one that haunts the bishop’s dreams. In particular, her own resignatio-like gestures trouble his attempt to suture the wounds of the world with his eschatological vision of heaven and hell. Augustine proclaims himself healed of all carnal love for Monica in *The Confessions*, and insists in *CD* that the saints in heaven will also be clothed with spiritual flesh impervious to the anguished call of the damned below. Yet the intensity of Monica’s fleshly love in this life renders uncertain her status in the next one and opens up Augustine’s thought to the troubling possibility that heaven and hell, like Derrida’s *Heil* and *Unheïl*, are not simply exterior to one another at all, but exist in a relationship of troubling proximity. The boundary between them is ever vulnerable to the gestures of abyssal love.

*Permixta Omnia: the sack of Rome*

Begun in the immediate aftermath of the sack of Rome, *CD* continues Augustine’s earlier sermonic efforts to exorcise these “spectre[s] of death” that haunted the Roman Empire in the aftermath of the violation of the eternal city.\(^{12}\) The survivors of the sack were fleeing to North Africa and winding up in the churches of Augustine’s diocese and describing the horrors. As

---

Theodore de Bruyn has shown in his careful analysis of the sermons addressing the sack of Rome, Augustine found himself faced with a congregation who were no longer certain of their Christian identities. From without they faced the threatening charges from their pagan neighbors that it was their worship of the Christian God that was responsible for Rome’s recent trauma. From within they wrestled with the bitter truth that being a Christian in no way immunized them from such suffering.

Christians in Rome and in Augustine’s own churches were finding that, in Pelagius’ apt summary, “everything was thrown into confusion and disordered by fear” (permixta omnia, et timore confusa). If, as Pelagius suggests, “terror was spread to all alike” in the violent seizure of the city, of what use was the Christian faith in the face of such “spectres of death”? As De Bruyn puts it, “the line between pagan and Christian begins to blur; ‘bad Christians’ [Augustine’s phrase] complain as well as pagans. Augustine is facing a community divided in its sense of what the sack portends, with Christians sympathetic to, as well as troubled by, views usually attributed to pagans”\(^\text{13}\).

The hell experienced in Rome intermingled pagan and Christian in a common crucible of suffering. Moreover, the line between God and evil had itself become troubled, causing many to question whether they had been worshipping the right God, one who was a protector from anguish, rather than

\(^{13}\text{Ibid., 412.}\)
a cause of it.\(^\text{14}\)

Disorder was on further display by the angry, “audacious” displays of Job-like parrhesia on the part of some in Augustine’s congregations.\(^\text{15}\) Many refused to accept their plight in humble obeisance to the divine will as interpreted to them by Augustine and the church hierarchy. Instead they “doubt[ed] that God is indeed good to them” and challenged Augustine’s efforts to make their suffering useful for them.\(^\text{16}\) Some concluded that in such hellish times, hierarchies, even ecclesial ones, were of diminished usefulness to addressing their anguish. Here in hell, as Pelagius notes, “slave and noble were on the same footing.”

With the stability of the Roman Empire itself called into question by the recent events in Rome, Pelagius’ *permixta omnia* does not seem much of an exaggeration. As Peter Brown puts it,

> above all, Rome was the symbol of a whole civilization; it was as if an army had been allowed to sack Westminster Abbey or the Louvre…On a deeper level, Rome symbolized the security of a

\(^{14}\) As we shall see, Augustine’s solution was ingenious in arguing that the Christian God was both.

\(^{15}\) Augustine is particularly harsh on his congregants’ questioning of the meaning of their suffering in Sermon 296. There he writes, “when you’re beaten you blaspheme, you grumble, and you say that what the Lord is doing to you ought not to have been done. What you, a bad servant, are doing, that ought to have been done, I suppose? God has only knocked pleasing toys out of the hands of undisciplined children.”

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 408, 416-17. Peter Brown also notes the disconnect between Augustine’s view of the trauma and those who endured it closer at hand, writing, “The refugees who made their appearance in that winter could not afford the complacency of the politicians and later historians, who would minimize the importance of the sack of their city.” Brown, *Augustine of Hippo; a Biography*, 286.
whole civilized way of life…The sack of Rome by the Goths, then, was an ominous reminder of the fact that even the most valuable societies might die. ‘If Rome can perish, wrote Jerome, ‘what can be safe?’\footnote{Ibid., 287.}

*The Donatist Controversy and the Problem of Identity*

For Augustine, the confusion caused by the sack of Rome was hardly his greatest cause for concern. Much closer to home was the ecclesio-political situation that had embroiled North Africa in both real and rhetorical violence for nearly a century, the so-called Donatist problem.\footnote{As Brent Shaw has noted in his magisterial work on Christian North Africa during Augustine’s day, historians have for far too long been guilty in their continual use of the term “Donatist” of taking on board what is a polemical term of Augustine’s. Its usage continues to betray the actual history of events during the time. In a fascinating discussion of this problem, Shaw wrestles with what to call Augustine’s opponents and finally settles on “dissident Christians” as a replacement for either Donatist or his earlier “African Christians”. I will follow Shaw’s practice. Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).} As Peter Brown notes, the two traumas were not unrelated. The fierce battle between Augustine and his fellow African Christians was in many ways over how Christian North Africa should relate to imperial power.\footnote{In addition to Peter Brown and, more recently, Brent Shaw’s work situating Augustine’s thought in its theo-political context, still useful is R. A. Markus, *Saeulum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1970) and W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). See also Michael Gaddis, *There is no Crime for those Who have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Though the initial councils appointed by Constantine at Rome (313) and Arles (314) were at the request of the “Donatists” in the hopes of receiving imperial support, it is fair to say, as Frend, Gaddis, and Shaw have all argued, that in large part the North African church was, in its relation to the empire, a “Resistance movement.” Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography*, 210. Augustine’s siding with the empire was thus, as Shaw has noted, largely out of step with the African Christian tradition of resistance to imperial power.}
their own allegiances from one side to the other of the African Christian battlefield, persecutions and power plays from those on the right side of power predictably ensued. As evidenced by Augustine’s frantic efforts to control his congregation’s response to the sack of Rome in 410, Roman instability reverberated throughout Augustine’s Africa. So, as Brown writes, in the aftermath of the sack,

The authorities in Carthage panicked at this time: to allay discontent they issued a hasty edict of toleration for the Donatists. This action dominated Augustine’s life at the time of the sack of Rome. He was faced with a crisis of authority in his own town. Donatist violence had been renewed, and with it, a revival of religious segregation among the Catholics: his congregation had begun to ostracize Donatist converts.20

Of course to speak of this ecclesial crisis as Augustine’s “Donatist problem” is already to court confusion. One example of such confusion comes from a recent analysis by Charles Mathewes. He describes Augustine’s battle with “Donatism” as a “war on terror” against a group of nativist puritanical Christians who were hellbent on ridding the church of any and all corrupting influences. Most especially, the “Donatists” attacked anyone they felt had betrayed the moral rectitude and purity of the church.21 The “Donatists,” Mathewes writes, were fundamentalist radicals prone to “ransack[ing] churches and monasteries” and even committing suicide dressed up as martyrdom in an

20 Ibid., 288.
effort to both terrorize their opponents and win sympathy to any uncommitted neutrals. Faced with this reign of terror, Augustine felt “compelled” to justify to the imperial governors of Africa the use of force against the Donatist terrorists and their sympathizers. So, Mathewes writes, Augustine “framed his argument to the imperial authorities not first of all as a theological matter of saving souls, but as a civic matter of protecting people, presenting the extremist Donatist radicals, the *circumcelliones*, as threats above all to the *civic* order.”

The Donatists in this reading are guilty of a violent, intransigent form of “cultural ethno-nationalism.” Not surprisingly, Mathewes thinks that Augustine is thus tragically compelled to fight with all his rhetorical, and all of the empire’s actual, force. By stubbornly refusing to submit to the imperial order’s offer of the healing force of unity, Augustine’s “Donatist” opponents are guilty of the same *audacia* and lovelessness of which he accused the traumatized survivors of the sack of Rome.

As Augustine saw it, the height of their sinfulness was the Donatist

---

22 Ibid. Mathewes highlights Augustine’s lament that he is “compelled” by Donatist “mad acts of violence” to his position justifying coercion, seemingly taking it at face value. (48)

23 Ibid., 49. Mathewes does not mention Augustine’s repeated charge against his opponents that they commit the sin of suicide to strike terror into the hearts of their opponents. Given his clear attempt to make the parallel between Augustine and the Donatists with The U.S. war on terror against “fundamentalist Islam,” this oversight is surprising. In his recent article on Donatism Peter Kauffman makes this tempting parallel clear. Peter Iver Kaufman, "Donatism Revisited: Moderates and Militants in Late Antique North Africa," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, no. 1 (2009), 131-142. The analogy of Donatism to modern fundamentalism, while not explicitly made by Mathewes, is nevertheless hard to miss and is in fact fairly common among contemporary scholars. For one example, see the introduction to Judith Chelius Stark, *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 6.
hubris of insisting on the purity of its own clergy and members. Augustine challenged this quest for purity, repeatedly mocking it for its inconsistent application in Donatist ecclesial affairs and upbraiding his opponents for their naivety about the permixture of grace and sin in every human life.

That this was Augustine’s view of his opponents is without doubt. In his eyes they were yet another example of the disorder of his time, and they needed to be coerced into order in this life if possible, condemned in the next if not.

The problem with this reading is that it is almost wholly captive to the Augustinian polemical ordering procedures, what William Connolly has astutely called Augustine’s “heretical imperative.” It is also, as Brent Shaw has argued in his fine-tuned historical analyses of the North African scene, almost wholly wrong. To begin with, the very label of “Donatist” is, as Shaw notes,
historical laziness capitulating to Augustine’s polemic. It stubbornly ignores the fact that his opponents were much closer to the traditions of African Christianity than were the Catholics. In fact, as Robert Markus admits and Shaw reiterates in his analysis of the Carthage Conference of 411, Augustine’s opponents “vigorously rejected” the label of Donatist and simply called themselves Christians in North Africa. Numerous scholars who resist Augustine’s “heretical temptation” have noted, as Augustine himself did much to his own dismay, how similar in belief he and his opponents were. As Markus puts it, “Donatists and Catholics were agreed on most, even all, of the elements of their belief as professed in their creed. The division between them lay at a deeper, more intractable level.”

Catholics and African Christians lived and worked side by side, and Augustine even counted some in his own family. As Maureen Tilley notes, for many years between 311 and 411, “both parties lived and prayed side by side in the same towns with one church for each group. Double lines of bishops succeeded one another with only occasional

---

27 Markus, Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine, 286.
28 Letter Fifty-two is written by Augustine to his relative Severinus, a dissident Christian whom Augustine appeals to as one of his “brothers according to the flesh.” The Latin, qui secundum carnem fratres sumus, is strikingly close to Rom. 9:3, which in the Vulgate is qui sunt cognati mei secundum carnem.
quarrels.” Careful scholarship has debunked the image of Donatists as violent fundamentalists. Shaw shows instead that African Christian violence, while real, was more than matched by imperial force, which received strong encouragement from Catholic leaders in many cases.

So too the image of Augustine’s African opponents as self-righteous puritans denying their own sinfulness has been vastly overdrawn. As detailed analyses of the minutes of the Carthage Conference reveal, it was not purity in general that the dissident Christians insisted upon or claimed for themselves. They were more than willing to admit that they were not morally pure and that sin existed within their own churches. The key issue being addressed by the dissident Christians was whether the church would side with the powerful or the persecuted. When they spoke of the need for an “immaculate” church, they were drawing on biblical images, mostly from the prophets, expressing their hope and nurturing their struggle to ensure that the community would no

30 Again, Shaw has done the best work here, especially “Who Were the Circumcellions?” chapter eleven in Merrills, Vandals, Romans and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa.
32 “quae persecutionem patitur, non quae facit” was the way the dissident leader Habetdeum succinctly put it. See Serge Lancel, Actes De La Conference De Carthage En 411 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1972), Chapter 258.
longer be violated by rapacious imperial forces.\textsuperscript{33} Purity thus meant maintaining one’s integrity in the face of overwhelming force. It meant not capitulating, or taking the point of view of one’s oppressor in hopes of “dealing” with an aggressive power. In this sense, the Donatist emphasis on purity is analogous in part to Augustine’s own famous use of the image of purity when he discusses rape victims in the first book of CD.\textsuperscript{34} Purity is when one does not consent to the violent impositions of another or interpret one’s vulnerability before vastly superior force as indicative of one’s moral failings.\textsuperscript{35}

What this closer historical scrutiny of Augustine’s battle with his fellow African Christians thus reveals is a further, even more intractable aspect of the “\textit{permixta Omnia}” with which the bishop struggled. For at its heart, the so-called Donatist problem is the problem of identity. More specifically, it is the problem of identity’s permeability and vulnerability in the face of traumatic evil.

\textsuperscript{33} See, for example, the quotations from Isaiah 52 that begin Habetdeum’s lengthy defense in \textit{Ibid}. The context there is of God reassuring the people of Israel of their integrity even in the wake of their traumatic defeat at the hands of their enemies.

\textsuperscript{34} Augustine, and Dyson, \textit{The City of God Against the Pagans} Book I.15-19. For an astute reading of the deeply problematic nature of Augustine’s view, see Mary Pellauer’s essay “Augustine on Rape: One Chapter in the Theological Tradition” in Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, \textit{Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook} (New York: Continuum, 1995).

\textsuperscript{35} Unlike Augustine, the African dissident Christians counseled resistance, even to the point of martyrdom, rather than subscribe to Augustine’s view that one could preserve the mind’s purity while the body was being violated. Bodily resistance, in the form of martyrdom, was a crucial aspect of the African Christian tradition prior to Augustine. At the same time, as we shall see, Augustine’s opponents, like Gaudentius, were often more realistic about the weakness of the flesh and its vulnerability in the face of evil. As Gaddis and others have noted, Augustine is largely responsible for a spiritualizing move in regards to martyrdom, a “forgetfulness of the flesh” that we will explore later in the chapter.
This should not be surprising when one remembers that the historic origins of the split between Catholic and disident Christians are found in the wave of violent persecution that swept over North Africa during the Diocletian persecutions in the first part of the fourth century. As African Christians struggled to come to terms with their own personal and collective inability to resist overwhelming force, including torture and death at the hands of imperial forces, the same sets of questions arose that will re-occur in Augustine’s writing nearly a century later. In the midst of such “hell on earth”, how stable and effective are identity markers such as Christian and pagan, Catholic and Donatist? Martha Nussbaum has noted in her reading of the Stoics that a permeable self is a self capable of being inhabited by another, any other, including the otherness of evil, the fires of passion, rage, and death.\(^36\) For some, such vulnerability is too high a price to pay and every effort is made to shore up an immaculate self in what William Connolly calls the “heretical imperative.” Connolly describes the process this way:

> To expel difference is to organize identity; and to keep the expelled difference alive as an object of condemnation is to forestall its re-constitution inside. ‘There must be heresies’ for Augustinianism to be. And for the idea of a fixed, true identity to be as well.\(^37\)

---


Connolly shows how in Augustine this problem of a vulnerable self, itself so closely related to the problem of evil, is met with a two-part gesture. The first part involves immunizing God from all responsibility for evil. It is a “series of attempts to protect the purity and certainty of hegemonic identity by defining as independent sites of evil (or one of its many surrogates) those differences that pose the greatest threat to the integrity and certainty of that identity.”⁴⁸ Because this first gesture makes the self vulnerable for the full weight of evil’s existence, it is followed by a second gesture, one in which “doubts about self-identity are posed and resolved by the constitution of an other against which that identity may define itself.”⁴⁹ Finally, Connolly notes how in Augustine this is done by a massive ordering procedure in which a strong sense of an intrinsic moral order is combined with a vision of faith as strict obedience to the orders of a hegemonic God. In his “Letter to Augustine” Connolly concludes by locating Augustine’s doctrine of hell at the pinnacle of this set of ordering procedures. Hell is designed to exorcise the “spectre of death” that has haunted the bishop and his congregations.

You mount a series of attacks on the life of alter-identities to consolidate the identity built around this fear of death and the hope of escaping it. You deploy damnation to organize life; you organize life to transcend death; you organize death as afterlife to regulate identity and difference in life.⁴⁰

---

⁴⁹ Ibid. ix-x.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 138, my emphasis.
Augustine’s Response to Trauma: Ordo Caritatis, Hell and Romans 9-11

A. De ordine and the Order of Traumatic Disorder

To see how Augustine “deploy[s] damnation to organize life” it is crucial to examine his justly famous doctrine of the ordo caritatis, the proper ordering of love. The doctrine is at the very heart of Augustine’s mature theology, yet even the bishop’s earliest writings show evidence of his strong desire for order.

From as early as his Cassiciacum dialogue De Ordine, Augustine was troubled with the intrusion of evil and disorder into life. How, he wondered, could it be reconciled both with God’s love and his omnipotence as reflected in a well-calibrated cosmic order? Battling against his previous Manichaean view of evil as a principle independent of God, he has his student Licentius say that even evil things are comprised within the order God loves above all else.41

When Augustine’s other young charge Trygetius protests that this would seem to lead to the impious and even blasphemous notion that God loves evil, Licentius clarifies his statement:

God does not love evils, and for no other reason than that it does not belong to order that God should love evils. And He greatly loves order, precisely because by it He loves not evils… Now this itself is the order of evils: that they be not loved by God…And thus evils, which God does not love, are not apart from order, and nevertheless He does love order itself. This very thing He loves: to love good things, and not to love evil things—and this is

a thing of magnificent order and of divine arrangement.\textsuperscript{42}

Anticipating Dante’s inscription over the gates of hell, we can paraphrase Augustine’s solution to evil and the hell it evokes as follows: For Augustine, God has carved out a space in the divine order for things he “loves…not to love” or even loves to hate. God’s essence as love is thus preserved at the same time as evil is kept from becoming an independent ontological principle outside of the divine order. To the question why it wouldn’t be better for God to have ordered things so that there not be evil at all, Augustine invokes an ingenious, aesthetic solution. “And because this orderly arrangement maintains the harmony of the universe by this very contrast [between good and evil], it comes about that evil things must need be. In this way the beauty of all things is in a manner configured, as it were, from antitheses, that is, from opposites: this is pleasing to us even in discourse.”\textsuperscript{43} As we shall see, this “aesthetic theodicy” will remain a constant throughout Augustine’s life, developing into its fullest realization in CD with his infamous beatific vision of hell known as the “abominable fancy.” What is crucial to note at this point is how deeply intertwined Augustine’s vision of love is to that of order.

It comes as no surprise to see Augustine develop his classic analysis of

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. 256.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
the need for a proper ordering of love in the midst of his various traumas. As Gerald Schlabach has noted, the *ordo caritatis* doctrine arose in large part out of Augustine’s desire to stanch the wound of love’s losses. Love of weak and vulnerable flesh, what Augustine will call *cupiditas*, is a weight which if clung to will drag one down to deeper and deeper abysses of endless anguish and tears of mourning. Ordered love is an ascending love, one that flees the chaotic, permeable and impermanent in favor of flight to “a place of imperturbable quiet”, to the “ever-stable” and safe eternal realm with God above. This ordered love is one in which higher things are loved more highly, lower things are loved with lowered expectations, and the lowest things are loved with a “perfect hatred”. Of such ordered love, he writes in a sermon, “nothing is more lovely”.

In insisting on the need for such ordering of love, Augustine, in line with the Stoics, is admitting that love for him includes both *dilectio* and *cupiditas*. It is a bit on the wild side, needing to be wrested free from its objects when they are hurtling headlong on a downward ontological path. So he will write in a sermon on Mt. 10:37,

> There are, you see, things that are wrongly loved in the world, and

---


45 See *The Confessions* 4.11.16, in which Augustine warns that such fleshly love with “drag you with them in their own collapse.” The Latin reads: *et non te deponent quo descendunt*.

46 See the classic definition of the hierarchy of loves in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.23.

47 This last phrase is from Sermon 37.23. The Latin reads: *nihil pulchrius hoc ordine.*
when they are wrongly loved in the world, they make their lovers vile. Unlawful love is a serious pollution of the soul, and a heavy weight holding down the soul that is longing to fly. Just as a right and holy love whirls the mind up to the heights, so a wrong and vile love plunges it down to the depths.\(^{48}\)

The allusion here to damnation is re-enforced later in the sermon after Augustine has used his favorite verse from the *Song of Songs*, a book he otherwise studiously avoids mining for its erotically charged language.\(^{49}\)

His bride cries out to you, ‘Set charity in order toward me’ (Sg 2:4). Love in the right order, so that you yourself may be rightly ordered. Allot things their own proper weights and importance. Love your father and mother, but you have something you should love more than father and mother. If you love them more, you will be condemned….\(^{50}\)

Finally, Augustine provides dialogue from an imagined lover’s quarrel to deliver the coup de grâce to all unruly, fleshly love. Significantly, as in his reading of the Book of Job, such disorder comes from the lips of a woman:

Someone has a wife, someone has children. They cry out, “Love us.” Answer them, “I do love you.” Say to your wife, “If I didn't love you, I wouldn't have married you.” Say to your children, “If I didn't love you, I wouldn't have begotten you, I wouldn't have brought you up. But what is it you want? Do you want to call back one who is on his way to Christ as a martyr, not meaning to run away from you, and do you grudge one whom you love his prize? Give him back his own coin; he loves you, see to it you

\(^{48}\) Sermon 65A.1.


\(^{50}\) Sermon 65A.8. The Latin reads: *clamat tibi sponsa eius: `ordinate in me caritatem`*. *ama ordinate, ut sis ordinatus. sua rebus et pondera et momenta distribue. ama patrem et matrem, sed habes quod plus ames quam patrem et matrem. si illos plus amaueris, damnaberis, et si illos non amaueris, damnaberis.*
love him. Why should he show love and you show hatred? Look: he denies Christ, and he is condemned. Just look what you have done... Why aren't you dreading the one you love being condemned by the higher judge? The judge on earth relentlessly passes sentence of death. Yes, this one relentlessly passes a death sentence; afterward that one passes a sentence beyond death. So what do you think you are doing, inflicting evil on the one you love? From what, precisely, are you calling back the one you love? You are making sure he gets gehenna, and doesn't get his prize. And you call that loving.  

This excruciating scene is an example of what Augustine will describe in a late sermon on the ordo amoris as “two loves wrestling with each other in every trial and temptation: love of the world and love of God.... This is the combat we are challenged to, this the struggle with the flesh, this the struggle with the devil, this the struggle with the world.”  

For Augustine, there must be a winner and a loser in the deadly serious game of love.  

---

51 Ibid., Para 9. Earlier in the sermon, Augustine rehearse a similar scenario, the outcome of which is the very nub of the problem that the resignatio tradition addresses. “Let us answer our fathers and mothers, when they say to us, with every right, ‘Love us;’ let us answer, ‘I do love you, in Christ; I don't love you instead of Christ. Be with me in him; I won't be with you without him.’ ‘But we,’ they say, ‘don't want Christ.’ ‘But I want Christ more than you. Am I to attend to my father and lose my creator?’ Paul, of course, gestures in exactly the opposite direction when he says, ‘I could wish to be accursed, cut off from Christ.’ We might paraphrase him as saying ‘I won’t be with Christ without you.’”  

52 Sermon 344.1. Again we see how quickly woman, flesh, the devil and the world are ordered to one another in Augustine’s mind.  

53 It is striking how violent Augustine’s images of love’s triumph often are. In one instance, he uses the image of the victorious cock gazing down upon his vanquished, bloody foe as the image of the pulchritude of harmonic order. “Finally, the very law of the victor: the proud crowing, the almost perfectly orbed arrangement of the members, as if in haughtiness of supremacy. But the sign of the vanquished: hackles plucked from the neck, in carriage and in cry all bedraggled—and for that very reason, somehow or other, beautiful and in harmony with nature’s laws.” Augustine and Schopp, Writings of Saint Augustine Vol. 1 the Happy Life, 263. Or, as he will suggest in his greatest “anti-Donatist” treatise, the Homilies on the First Epistle of John, using another bird analogy, love is a hard taskmaster, like a dove tearing apart “with beak and wings” a rival threatening its home (7.11). A careful analysis of these
elsewhere, the image of love’s victory is beautifully illumined by the fire into which the loser has been cast: “The martyrs caught fire from the flame of this pious and holy love, and indeed burned up the straw of the flesh with the steadily burning oak logs of the mind; while they themselves came through whole and entire to the one who had set them alight.”

*Ordo Caritatis and Romans 9-11 in The City of God*

Augustine’s view of the ordo caritatis has only intensified by the time we reach *CD*. Augustine will again quote Song of Songs 2:4 and now suggests that the ordo caritatis is the very definition of virtue itself. He continues to champion his aesthetic theodicy, in which “the beauty of the universe is enhanced even by sinners,” and “even the nature of eternal fire is without doubt worthy of praise, even though it will be the punishment of the ungodly when they are damned. For what is more beautiful than a flaming, blazing, shining fire?”

Though *De Ordine* shows Augustine able to articulate it without scriptural backing, by the time of *CD*, the entire architectonic of Augustine’s aesthetic theodicy is shot through with references to these verses from Romans 9-11.

---

54 Sermon 344.1.
55 “Hence, it seems to me that a brief and true definition of virtue is ‘rightly ordered love’.” Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, 680.
56 Ibid. The citations are from XI.18 and XII.4 respectively.
The harmony of God’s love and hatred is drawn from Paul’s discussion of God’s love for Jacob and hatred of Esau (Rom. 9:13), mercy’s circumscription is justified by Paul’s allusions to God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart and claim that “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.” (Rom 9:15, 17-18). To any parrhesiastic attempt to argue the point with either God or Augustine, he responds by quoting Rom. 9:19-20, accusing of audacia any who think this is an excuse on God’s part for an unwillingness to “render a reason” for the constricting of his mercy. In at least one sermon dealing with the well-known image from Rom. 11 of the ingrafting of Gentiles and the “breaking off” of the “natural branches,” the people of Israel, Augustine quietly inserts Matt. 8:12 in place of Paul’s more radical conclusion of Rom. 11:32. The bishop thereby suggests that damnation is all but assured for those outside the Christian faith.

Again and again Augustine returns to Romans 9-11, suppressing its disorderly elements and finding in it the basis both for his aesthetic theodicy of ordo caritatis and for his theological shaping of history into the sharp and fateful

57 He uses the phrase render a reason (reddendae rationis) in The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity Ch. 99. Much later Heidegger will invoke this phrase in his reading of Leibniz, Eckhart and Angelus Silesius’ well-known verse, “the rose is without why”. Martin Heidegger, The Principle of Reason (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
58 “But the children of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
59 “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.”
60 Expositions of the Psalms 134.7.
dualism of the city of God at war with the city of man.\textsuperscript{61} Christian identity is established and, as Connolly rightly suggests, all “alter-identities” born of love and mutual anguish are “thrown into the outer darkness” (Mt. 8:12).

Things culminate in Augustine’s infamous vision of the “abominable fancy”, the idea that the saints in heaven will have their joy further enhanced by their ability to see the damned below suffering in their endless torments.\textsuperscript{62} Such a vision of misery is necessary, Augustine explains in the final chapter of CD, for otherwise, “how could they, as the Psalmist says, for ever sing the mercies [misericordias] of God?”

\textit{Romans 9:2-3’s (Dis)Appearance in the City of God}

This final image of the saints singing endlessly the liturgical misericordias domini brings us into both the closest possible proximity to and the furthest possible distance from the resignatio ad infernum tradition we saw in the post-biblical apocalypses. In those texts the parrhesiastic insistence of the saints for just such misericordia from God brought about periodic release from the torments of hell.

Obviously, Augustine means nothing of the sort. His heavenly liturgy is celebratory rather than anguished, his saints’ misericordias destined only for

\textsuperscript{61} On more than one occasion, it becomes clear that the city of man is no neutral secular space for Augustine. Rather, in his mind it is thought of within this Pauline framework and is a figure of Esau, sin, and the devil.
\textsuperscript{62} Augustine, \textit{The City of God Against the Pagans}, Book XX.23, 30.
themselves as they look joyfully upon the very same miseries from which they have been gratuitously freed.\textsuperscript{63}

How do we account for such a dramatic difference in these respective visions of saintly response to the torments of the damned? Why is love’s misericordia so drastically curtailed in Augustine’s thought? One might surmise that this is in part due to the fact that Augustine, like the Stoics, rejects mercy as too unruly for the project of an integrated self-identity, and thus limits it to a rather non-miserable articulation of misericordia.\textsuperscript{64} There is something more than a bit “stoic” about the saints’ response to the damned in Augustine’s heaven.

Yet Augustine is well-known for his critique of the Stoics on just this point. In Book XIV.9 Augustine argues, explicitly against the Stoics, that there is such a thing as righteous (recta) perturbations of the mind, ones “which come from love of the good and from holy charity.” Augustine draws particular attention to those affections the saints are afflicted with “on account of those whose deliverance they desire and whose perdition they fear, and whose loss or

\textsuperscript{63} It is not that Augustine’s heaven is without parrhesia altogether. Rather, he has dramatically re-interpreted it in this context, based in large part on his use of Wisdom 5:1, a scene imagining the day of judgment as one in which “the righteous will stand with great constancy over against those who oppressed them.” In the LXX, the word translated here as constancy is, in fact, parrhesia. Augustine turns to this verse and its surrounding ones repeatedly in his attempts to console his suffering charges that though in this life they “groan amid our tribulations,” in the next the wicked will be “groaning within themselves in anguish of spirit” while the saints will be rejoicing with “parrhesia” over their fate. See Exposition of the Psalms 29.2.8. In Augustine’s view, like his predecessor Tertullian, then, parrhesia is perilously close to the spirit of ressentiment excoriated by Nietzsche.

\textsuperscript{64} See Augustine, The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1966), chapter 27.53 where Augustine argues for just such a misericordia in which the miseria has been removed.
salvation affects them with grief or with joy.” Not surprisingly, Paul is Augustine’s great example of this righteous grief. It is here, in one of his tellingly few uses of it, that he highlights Rom. 9:2 and the “great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for the Israelites.”

Yet Augustine is clearly nervous about this Pauline prayer, and feels the need to put it in its proper order. Tellingly, Augustine leaps past Paul’s first, more anguished naming of his opponents as “my kinsmen in the flesh” in favor of the more abstract and distancing “Israelites.” This elision weakens Paul’s identification with his opponents and shores up Augustine’s desire for a distinctively Christian identity in the midst of overwhelming anguish.

Augustine further limits the dis-ordering possibilities of Paul’s volatile prayer by studiously avoiding 9:3. Given his heretical imperative and desire to stabilize the Christian identity in the face of hell, this avoidance makes perfect sense. Finally, Augustine delimits the Pauline gesture of anguished solidarity with his own flesh by suggesting that these perturbations are penultimate and indications of our “weakness” (*infirmitas*). They must be “well-regulated” (*rectas*).

---

65 Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, 598. The Latin reads: *magnam tristitiam et continuum dolorem cordis de Israelitis habentem*, which is close to the Vulgate. Augustine also refers to Rom. 9:2 in Book XX.17 in a similar context.

66 The Vulgate reads: *pro fratribus meis qui sunt cognati mei secundum carnem qui sunt Israhelitae*. Is this an oversight of ordering, or a mere lapse of memory on Augustine’s part? In Augustine’s mind, such a question may not be relevant, as lapses of memory are a crucial part of keeping heaven ordered to happiness and away from anguished identification with the damned in hell. So the saints in heaven will be “oblivious” (*oblita*) of sufferings, and have a mere “intellectual remembrance” of past ills (*ad scientiam rationalem*).
before they pass away entirely in the life to come. Such mercy can never be allowed to win in a battle with love of God. So, in an almost perfect, if unacknowledged denial of Rom. 9:3, Augustine writes, in CD XXI.26:

But whosoever prefers, I do not say his wife, with whom he lives for carnal pleasure, but any of those relatives who afford no delight of such a kind, and whom it is right to love—whosoever prefers these to Christ, and loves them after a human and carnal fashion, has not Christ as a foundation, and will therefore not be saved by fire, nor indeed at all.

Thus we see that for Augustine the Pauline gesture of Romans 9:2-3 is ruled out of the heavenly realm for the sake of keeping the ordo in his ordo caritatis.\(^{67}\) Not surprisingly then, Augustine will explicitly dismiss the Apocalypse of Peter, mocking its advocates by calling them “perversely compassionate.” He warns that allowing misericordia such free reign will result in total chaos, in having mercy for the devil himself.\(^ {68}\)

Of course Augustine is well aware that his opponents here are not without Scriptural warrant. In addition to Romans 9:2-3, there is the final, stunning conclusion to Paul’s wrestlings over love and its losses, “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. O the depth of

---

\(^{67}\) Augustine seems to be aware that this relentless emphasis on keeping love “orderly” leads to a rather unrecognizable view of love in heaven. Whereas in XIV.7 he has shown how closely related love and anguish are, in XIV.9 he anxiously tries to defend the idea that there can be love without loss or fear of loss, writing: “It may, indeed, reasonably be maintained that the perfect blessedness we hope for shall be free from all sting of fear or sadness; but who that is not quite lost to truth would say that neither love nor joy shall be experienced there?”

\(^{68}\) Ibid. Book XXI.24.
the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom. 11:31-32) This verse clearly spelled trouble to the bishop’s blessed rage for order. Not only did it seem to extend the reach of divine mercy well beyond the boundaries of the chosen few. More troublingly, in its expression of the divine inscrutability it called into question any attempt to map onto reality a theological system of any kind, even one drawn from the scriptures themselves. Augustine meets this threat by quickly circumscribing the reach of 11:32 and its extravagant mercy. “He has mercy, then, on all the vessels of mercy. And what means ‘all?’ Both those of the Gentiles and those of the Jews whom He predestinated, called, justified, glorified: none of these will be condemned by Him; but we cannot say none of all men whatever.”69 (XXI.24) This divine circumscription of mercy authorizes an analogous constriction in the saints’ misericordia, so that, in a famous passage from CD, Augustine admits that there are some for whom we should not even pray. “But if the church knew with certainty who those people are who, though still abiding in this life, are nonetheless predestined to go to the devil into the eternal fire, she would no more pray for them than she does for him.”

Of Flesh and the Abyss: Romans 9:2-3’s Haunting of Augustine

With this withdrawal of the heart’s prayer from the realm of the damned

69 Ibid. XXI.24.
Augustine has strayed exceedingly far from Paul’s traumatic prayer, “I could wish to be accursed.” The nodal points of that prayer, as discussed in Chapter One, are (1) its parbesiastic boldness, to the point of being labelled near insaniasia by some early church fathers; (2) the porous heart of flesh that Paul shares with his Jewish brethren; (3) Paul’s willingness to descend to the abyssal land of the accursed (“anathema”); and (4) the inordinately excessive anguish out of which Paul’s prayer is made (“great sorrow…and unceasing anguish”). Not surprisingly, given the traumatic context in which Augustine lived, moved and prayed, these nodal points show up in his own thought-world, even as suppressed elements.

In order to see how these nodal points haunt the Augustinian imagination, I will look at two crucial traumatic scenes in the bishop’s story. The first is his confrontation with his African brother in the flesh, the dissident bishop Gaudentius. The second scene is the bishop’s tortured relationship with his mother Monica that culminates in his agonized prayer for her in the immediate aftermath of her death at Ostia.

Gaudentius: Augustine’s African Brother in the Flesh Cries Out

What, then, remained for him but to mourn his lost son and for his majesty to be consoled by the peace that had been gained for the kingdom? (Letter 185)

Augustine’s ordo caritatis had a dove’s fierce beak and talons, and for his

---

70 Letter 185.8.32.
71 “This is why charity is shown by the dove that came upon the Lord. That form of a dove, in which form the Holy Spirit came, whereby charity was poured out upon us: why was this?
African brethren who refused to accept his political theology and its backing by the imperial order, the consequences were dire. Repeatedly in his correspondence with and writing about his dissident African brethren, he positioned them in terms of Romans 9-11: they were like Esau wrangling with their (Catholic) brother Jacob in the womb of the church; they risked being the natural branches “cut off from Christ” and thrown into the fires of hell; they were guilty of *audacia* in their resistance to the theo-political order.\(^\text{72}\) As Peter Brown puts it in his important essay on religious coercion in Augustine, “The whole weight of his doctrine of predestination is turned, with horrible emphasis, on the broken remnants of a great church,” and then adds ominously, “the Donatist bishop of Timgad had threatened to burn himself with his flock in his basilica.”\(^\text{73}\)

Roman imperial officials were understandably hesitant to use massive and brutal force to try to bring order to the North African religious landscape. In the first wave of imperial persecution of the noncompliant African churches, (317-321), an entire worshipping congregation had been slaughtered inside its

---


own basilica in Carthage.\textsuperscript{74} Such actions served their terrifying purpose and similar ones were repeated throughout the fourth-century in spasmodic attempts by Rome to quell dissent. Memories of these traumas remained burned into the collective memories of African Christians, haunting them with the knowledge that such brutality could come at any time, with the flimsiest of reasons. The pre-ordained outcome of the Carthage Conference of 411 outlawed noncompliant churches and legalized “compelling them to come in” to the imperial Catholic Church. An ominous threat hung over the heads of all who, unlike Augustine, resisted the imperial theological order.\textsuperscript{75}

In 418 the Roman governor Dulcitius wrote to Gaudentius, dissident bishop of Timgad, and warned him against resisting imperial demands to relinquish his church to the Catholics. “Know that you will be handed over to the death you deserve,” Dulcitius threatened. Reading these words Gaudentius had every reason to tremble.

Instead, his response was stunningly bold. He and his congregants locked themselves inside their church and refused to budge. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
In this church, in which the name of God and his Christ, as you yourself have recognized, have always been worshipped in the truth by a large congregation, we will either remain in life, as long as that pleases God, or else, as it becomes the family of God, within the walls of this camp of the Lord, we will put an end to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{74} Tilley, \textit{Donatist Martyr Stories : The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa}, xvi.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Compelle eos intrare}, “Compel them to come in,” from the Gospel of Luke, because Augustine’s favored text used to justify the Roman Catholic policy of coercion.
our life, yet on this condition: if one should do us violence, in that case the act will be realized. No one is so insane that he would run to death without being driven to it.\footnote{Gaudentius’ response is only available in snippets quoted by Augustine in his work Contra Gaudentium quoted here from 1.6.7. \textit{in hac autem ecclesia}, inquit, \textit{in qua dei nomen et Christi eius, ut etiam ipse Dixisti, in veritate semper est frequentatum, nos aut uiui, quamdiu deo placuerit, permaneumus aut, ut dignum est dei familia, intra dominica castra uiae exitum terminumus, sub ea scilicet condicione, quia, si nis fuerit operata, tune id poterit euenire. nemo enim tam demens est, ut nullo impellente festinet ad mortem.} The translation here is from Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, \textit{A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Jews and Christians in the Ancient World} (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 170.}

Though Augustine in his \textit{Contra Gaudentium} would interpret this as a threat of suicide, an act for which he had no tolerance, modern scholars have resisted drawing this conclusion. The line between martyrdom and suicide is a thin one, and as Droge and Tabor insist, “Gaudentius’s position was far more subtle and complex than Augustine cared to admit.”\footnote{Ibid.} For Gaudentius distinguished, just as Augustine did, between the “insanity” of suicide and the courageous act of martyrdom, and it was the latter that he was here defending.

And, as Brent Shaw puts it,

There is no sign that the Christians inside the basilica with him were actually going to set fire to the church. More probably, they expected that firebrands would be used by their attackers—as had happened in other attacks on basilicas in Africa—and they were willing to die a death of virtual self-immolation in the process.\footnote{Shaw B.D., \textit{State Intervention and Holy Violence: Timgad/Paleostrovsk/Waco}, 875-876.}

Dulcitius, now worried that he had a significant problem on his hands, wrote to Augustine to ask his advice regarding Gaudentius’ intractability. What he received from the bishop is what Peter Brown will call “noticeably the most
heartless of Augustine’s writings in defense of the suppression of the
Donatists.” Having in previous letters positioned his opponents in terms of
his reading of Romans 9-11, Augustine now draws the troubling conclusion:

But since by his deeply hidden but still just providence God has
predestined some of them to the direst punishments, it is
undoubtedly better that some of them perish in their own fires
rather than that all of them burn in the everlasting fires of hell as a
punishment for their sacriligious schism.  

It is out of loving misericordia, Augustine assures Dulcitius, that he should
use his imperial power to force Gaudentius and his church to submit. That this
will mean the assured death and damnation of the most recalcitrant, Augustine
counsels Dulcitius to accept. Anticipating Dulcitius’ reluctance to be
responsible for the perdition of an incalculable number of people, Augustine
offers him compensatory consolation.

For the Church mourns these people when they perish, just as
holy David mourned his rebellious son, for preserving whose
safety he had issued commands out of anxious love. For he
grieved over him as even his tear-filled voice bore witness, when
his son deserved to be slain as a punishment for his wicked
impiety. Nonetheless, when the proud and wicked son departed
for the place he deserved, the people of God, who were divided
by his revolt, acknowledged their king, and the achievement of
unity consoled the father’s grief over the loss of his son.  

Augustine’s logic of hell is deeply ramified. Hell is seen here as 1)Pre-
destined by God; 2)Chosen by the willful insania of Gaudentius and his

---

79 Brown, Augustine of Hippo; a Biography, 335 note 10.
80 Letter 204.2.
81 Ibid.
congregation in resisting ecclesially-sanctioned imperial power; 82

3) Implemented by Dulcitius’ “mercifully” unwavering and lovingly fierce hand; and 4) Redeemed by means of a unifying and thus consoling sorrow felt by hell’s survivors. 83 Consistent with his readings of Romans 9-11 in CD, Augustine carefully skirts around the threatening gestures of Paul’s resignatio ad infernum in 9:2-3. Anguish, far from being unceasing, is “consoled” by the promise of a peaceful unity. 84 A “willingness to be damned”, something Paul’s prayer gestures dangerously toward, is here labelled insania, a “wretched impulse of… madness.” 85

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there is Augustine’s vastly different treatment of the flesh in relation to his African brethren. In Rom. 9:2-

82 Augustine will repeatedly refer to the insania, furor, and dementia in his ecclesial opponents. See Letters 185 and 204 for numerous examples.
83 It is, to say the least, an odd reading that Augustine gives to David’s sorrow from 2 Samuel 19. There, David’s warrior Joab warns him that his sorrow over Absalom threatens to breed resentment among his soldiers who wonder whether such mourning over the loss of his rebellious son means that in David’s eyes his commanders and officers mean nothing to him. Here it appears that it is a careful political calculation that puts a stop to David’s sorrow, rather than any consolation due to the unity gained by it.
84 One might think here of the Derridean distinction between impossible mourning and profitable loss.
85 Letter 204.1 Latin: miserabili instinctu furoris. Though it is far from clear that Gaudentius and his fellow anti-imperial Christians thought of their defiance as expressing a “willingness to be damned,” Augustine’s imperviousness to their position made it difficult for him to see it otherwise. Perhaps he was influenced by Gaudentius and his fellow churchmen’s appeal to the resistance of the Maccabees. The African Church, as Tilley, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, and Gaddis have noted, was deeply influenced by the martyrdoms of the Maccabees as they too resisted imperial power. In 2 Maccabees 6:23, Eleazar famously submits to his tortures rather than betray his faith, telling his torturers to send him to hell (Vg: respondit cito dicens praemitti se velle in infernum) At the council of Carthage, Augustine had heard his opponents repeatedly compare themselves to Eleazar. See Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 58.
3 Paul writes, in Augustine’s Latin,

\[ tristitia est nibi magna et continuus dolor cordi meo optabam enim ipse ego anathema esse a Christo pro fratribus meis qui sunt cognati mei secundum carnem. \]

Paul emphasizes here that it is in his heart of flesh that he is afflicted with an agonized, even rebellious love. By contrast, Augustine consistently subordinates the flesh to the spirit in his attacks on his African sisters and brothers.\(^86\)

Reading the battle between himself and his Christian opponents through Paul’s midrash on Ishmael and Isaac (Gal. 4:22-31), he suggests that any persecution his opponents have suffered is merely of the “flesh.” It is not to be compared with the spiritual persecution he and the Catholics (Isaac) have experienced at the hands of their rebellious brothers (Ishmael).\(^87\) As Joslyn-Siemiatkoski notes, this is a typical move on Augustine’s part, domesticating the African martyrriological tradition and substituting a spiritual reading more suitable to an imperially-backed church less likely to know real persecution.

In privileging the spirit over the flesh, Augustine makes an interpretive move contested by Gaudentius. While both will appeal to the well-known

\(^{86}\) In an early letter (52.1) to a dissident Christian relative, Severinus, Augustine makes a remarkable, if unconscious, appeal to Romans 9:3 when he writes, “I thought, after all, not without reason that the idea entered your mind to recall our blood relationship, only because you perhaps see—just as I know the considerable weight of your wisdom—how we should feel sorrow [dolendum] that we, who are brothers according to the flesh [qui secundum carnem fratres sumus], do not live in the body of Christ in one society.” The Latin here is a near exact quote from the Vulgate translation of Rom. 9:3.

\(^{87}\) Tractate 11 in Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John.
Matthean trope, “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,” (Mt. 26:41),
Augustine’s reading enables and even encourages the spirit to run roughshod
over the flesh’s vulnerability. He counsels spiritual flight heavenward and/or
“discipline” of the flesh with beatings and persecutions of various kinds.
Gaudentius refuses this reading. Rather, as Tabor and Droge note, “the
‘weakness of the flesh’ indicates, according to Gaudentius, that there is a
certain limit of suffering beyond which the body cannot endure.”
Ironically, Gaudentius’ admission does not lead to the avoidance of a conflict with
Dulcitius, a conflict almost certain to lead to intense suffering in the flesh. This
was Augustine’s advice.

Rather, Gaudentius’ solution to the weakness of the flesh is to identify it
fully with Christ’s own flesh and to insist in abiding in it up to the very end.
Only when the spirit refuses flight and remains riveted to the flesh in solidarity
with Christ’s cry from the cross can the import of the incarnation be
understood. Hell in the flesh may well be unavoidable, Gaudentius reasons.
Better to descend with Christ than to betray him.

Augustine chooses another way, a royal road. Using his theology of hell
to cauterize his heart from any traumatic confusion between himself and

---

88 Droge and Tabor, A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Jews and Christians in the Ancient World, 171.
89 Our ability to reconstruct Gaudentius’ thought is admittedly limited. For a hint that a battle over how to understand the import of Christ’s flesh is at stake, see Homilies on the First Epistle of John.
Gaudentius, Augustine shores up his own Christian identity while simultaneously consigning Gaudentius to the flames both in this life (via Dulcitius) and the next (via God). Love is thus set apart from hell and order is restored.

B. Monica’s Descent to the Abyss

Nowhere is the risk of Romans 9:2-3 more threatening than it is in the figure of Augustine’s beloved mother, Monica. As we have seen, Augustine is deeply ambivalent about the intersection of love with the flesh, with how enfleshed love so often spills over the sides and becomes inordinate. In the *Confessions* the figure of this inordinate and fleshly love is, of course, the bishop’s mother Monica. Monica’s love for Augustine, expressing itself in a seemingly endless supply of prayers and tears, seems to the bishop to be both the model of Christian love and, at the same time, dangerously excessive. So in the moving scene from Book Five when Augustine is seeking to flee his mother’s vehement love by heading across the sea to Rome, he describes her relentless efforts to keep him at her side and addresses his thanks to God for releasing him from this passionate and fleshly mother-love:

So the wind blew for us and filled our sails, and the shore dropped away from our sight as she stood there at morning light mad with grief, filling your ears with complaints and groans. You took no heed, for you were snatching me away, using my lusts to put an end to them and chastising her too-carnal desire with the
scourge of sorrow.\textsuperscript{90}

We can hear echoes of Paul’s \textit{insania amoris} in Augustine’s description of Monica’s grief at the loss of her son. Augustine makes it clear that in her eyes, and even in his own, this was no ordinary departure of a son from a smothering mother, but a \textit{katabasis} of ultimate significance. As Book Six begins the bishop describes his flight to Rome in a series of oceanic images. On the literal level, his departure from Monica and her love is a journey across the Mediterranean Sea. But as always, Augustine does not want us to miss the spiritual significance of this sea voyage. “Yet I was walking a dark and slippery path, searching for you outside myself and failing to find the God of my own heart. I had sunk to the depth of the sea, I lost all faith and despaired of ever finding the truth.”\textsuperscript{91} As Maria Boulding has noted in her translation, Augustine’s image of having sunk “to the depth of the sea” is an allusion to Psalm 67 of the Vulgate and perhaps to the Book of Jonah as well.\textsuperscript{92} The latter allusion seems especially likely given that Augustine will shortly describe his mother’s own ocean voyage in terms unmistakably reminiscent of Jonah’s. Both scriptural allusions, but especially the latter, make it clear that this descent is a hellish one. In Jonah 2:3, Jonah is said to be crying out “\textit{de ventre inferni}”,

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 135.
from the oceany “abyssus” of despair.93 The bishop’s fleshly love (cupiditas) is causing him to flee both his mother and his God, dragging him downward into the infernum. Monica’s response to this abysmal journey of her son is, Augustine tells us, to follow him into the very same perilous sea out of “steadfast fidelity” for her son. Like the Virgin Mary in the Apocalypse of the Theotokos, it seems there is no depth to which Monica will not plunge out of love for her beloved son.94

The dangerous implications of this boundless misericordia are hinted at briefly in Book 6.2 when Augustine tells us that upon arrival in Rome, Monica attempted to continue her African practice of making offerings of bread and wine to the tombs of the martyrs. It was a practice especially popular among dissident Christians.95 As James O’Donnell has noted in his recent biography, this action of Monica’s indicates the continuation on her part of the dissident (“Donatist”) practices of her childhood. Brent Shaw has suggested that

---


94 One also thinks here of the bishop’s quip in his late work, On the Care of the Dead that “If the souls of the dead were taking part in the affairs of the living, and they themselves were speaking to us when we see them in our dreams (that I may be silent about others), my devout mother would be with me every night, for she followed me on land and sea that she might be with me. Far be it that she should have become for the sake of a happier life cruel to this extent, that, when anything grieves my heart, she would not console her grieving son whom she loved so fondly! She never wished to see me sorrowful.” In Augustine, Writings of Saint Augustine, Vol 15, 373.

Augustine is clearly anxious to distance his mother from any “Donatist” taint.⁹⁶ O'Donnell argues that Augustine is haunted by “Monnica the Donatist,” which explains why she receives such prominent treatment in *The Confessions* as the bishop ingeniously hides his anxieties in plain sight. “When Augustine shows us Monnica and her religion, we see nothing of a Donatist past and no direct censure...[the] whisper of criticism is counterbalanced and erased in most readers’ memories by all the other displays of her virtue and piety.”⁹⁷

It is this whisper of criticism coming from Ambrose’s rebuke of Monica’s graveyard visits to which we must pay attention if we are to understand Augustine’s own inordinate grief in response to his mother’s death in Italy. For Monica’s gesture of visiting the martyr’s tombs with bread and wine is, as both O’Donnell and Shaw have shown, a clear indication of her “Donatist” past and again raises the spectre of the excessively carnal interpretation of martyrdom proclaimed by Augustine’s African brethren over and against his own spiritualizing tendencies. The African church was known for its practices of the *refrigerium*, in which the living and the dead maintained intimate communion with one another, even interceding on one another’s behalf as the martyr Perpetua did in praying her brother Dinocrates “out of

---

hell.” It was a tradition Monica knew well and clearly appreciated. Is Monica’s gesture here an indication that, unlike her son, she is more closely bound to her dissident brethren than he is? Is she less willing to follow the orderly ascent of caritas that he has recommended, especially if there is a chance that such carnal expressions of love may prove to do some good in bringing her “dead” son out of the hell to which he is hurtling?

Is Monica’s all too carnal miser-cordia threatening to lead her to the very hell from which she vehemently seeks to free her son?

The bishop assures us that we need not fear such an outcome, that Monica in this case responds immediately to Ambrose’s rebuke with humble obedience. Indeed, as O’Donnell notes, these hints of worry are overwhelmed by Augustine’s descriptions of Monica’s Marian-like “displays of…virtue and piety.” Yet the worries remain, no doubt partly due to Augustine’s insistence

98 The popularity of the story of Perpetua is indicated, in part, by the three sermons Augustine preached on it, 280-282. Jeffrey Trumbower suggests that the author of the Passion of Perpetua was influenced by the ApPet and notes the similarities between the intercession for Dinocrates and the Rainer Fragment. He further argues that Augustine is thus moving against African tradition, writing that “Augustine is striving mightily to overturn centuries of Mediterranean beliefs and practices in which the realms of the living and the dead were intimately related, replacing them with authorized prayers and masses for the baptized dead with light sins only.” Jeffrey A. Trumbower, Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 84. Monica’s appreciation of Perpetua is indicated by the fact that she gave the name to her daughter, about whom little is known other than her name.

99 Offerings at martyr’s tombs were often an attempt at gaining support from the dead for the living. In this case, the proximity of Augustine’s telling of the story of Monica’s graveyard visits to her deep anxiety over his eternal fate may well indicate such a motivation on Monica’s part.
that the heart is a dark abyss in which secrets are hid, even from ourselves. In the immediate aftermath of Monica’s death, we see Augustine troubled by the way in which his own grief seems inexorably bound to the flesh of his mother, so that he is unable to avoid the very repetition of carnal weeping he had rebuked her for in Book Five. In this intermingling of tears, the bishop’s very identity is overwhelmed by a grief whose source lay hidden in his heart’s recesses. “What was it, then, that gave me such sharp [graviter] inward pain?...My soul was wounded; it was as though my life was rent apart, for there had been but one life, woven out of mine and hers.”

Again appealing to images of watery chaos, Augustine describes how this bond of the flesh pulls him, in spite of himself, into the depths:

I chided myself with weakness for feeling as I did, and dammed up the flood of grief, so that for a little space it receded from me; but then a fresh wave swept over me...and I was distressed by this double sadness.

Sensing that this seemingly bottomless abyss of tears is in danger of unmaning his grasp for orderly ascent (9.29), the bishop tries to pull himself up from his grief. He tells himself that there is no good reason for him to think that Monica is anywhere other than with God in heaven due to her “virtues and her sincere faith.” Such reasoning, however, does little to stop the

---

100 On the heart as an abyss and the abyss as hiding hell, see *Expositions of the Psalms* 41.13-14.
102 Ibid., 9.31.
downward plunge of his heart, and so “secretly weighed down by sorrow…in my mental turmoil I begged you as best I could to heal my hurt.”\textsuperscript{103}

Receiving no immediate reply to his plea, Augustine finally gives in to the pressure of his grief and goes to sleep. While laying on his bed that night, most likely in a dream, his heart (\textit{recordatus}) is invaded by the words of a Saturday Vespers hymn. The hymn, written by his beloved bishop Ambrose, is itself a prayer asking for a night’s sleep free from nightmares. In the morning after this dream Augustine awakes and finds that much of the “bitter sorrow” of his heart had left him (\textit{maeroris amaritudo…theorom meum}).

Structuring the account of his grief by means of the Pauline distinction between “worldly grief” and “godly grief”,\textsuperscript{104} Augustine indicates that somehow during this dream-sleep he has now successfully passed from the former to the latter. Assured now that his tears will not lead him into an endless abyss of grief, he allows them to “flow as plentifully as they would, and strewed them as a bed beneath my heart.”\textsuperscript{105} At this point, Augustine speaks of weeping tears “of a

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. 9.32.
\textsuperscript{104} Augustine’s fear of grief’s role in dragging one to hell can be found in his \textit{Literal Interpretation of Genesis} Book XII.64 in an allusion to Jacob’s lament that his grief over his son’s loss will lead to his death. Augustine writes “Then there is what Jacob says to his sons: \textit{You will bring down my old age with sorrow to the netherworld} (Gn 44:29); what he really seems to have been afraid of is that he would be so overwhelmed with excessive grief that he would go to the hell of sinners and not to the resting place of the blessed.”
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. 9.33. The Latin reads: \textit{et dimisi lacrimas, quas continebam, ut effluent quantum uellent, substernens eas cordi meo}. It is a decidedly odd image of tears becoming a bed or pillow (one of these two words is provided by most translators), a kind of cushion preventing the heart’s free-fall. This odd image is perhaps taken by Augustine from Psalm 6. There, intriguingly, it
very different kind” than those that had threatened to pull him under. These are tears no longer of the flesh, he assures us, whose “wound” he has miraculously (and mysteriously) been cured of as if overnight. Hell’s dark attraction now safely overcome, the bishop feels free to offer up his weepy purgational prayer on behalf of Monica. Even though Monica, like all of humanity, is deserving of the punishments of hell, he now stands firmly upon the mercies of God. He indicates that her tears for him, which he now doubles on her behalf, provide solid ground for their mutual salvific security. Any hints that Augustine might share in his mother’s all too fleshly and Pauline insania amoris are here put to rest. Or so it would seem.

Conclusion: What Dreams May Come?

Yet this appeal by Augustine to what we might call a “sonnium ex machina” is also a question of how to put a stop to an endless grief that threatens to drag the Psalmist down to Sheol itself. So in his rewriting of this Psalm’s striking image of a pillow soaked to overflowing with grief, Augustine makes a sharp contrast: his tears form a pillow, a break-wall so to speak to the downward stream upon which the Psalmist’s heart full of “worldly grief” flows.

106 “But now that my heart is healed of that wound, in which I was perhaps guilty of some carnal affection, I pour out to you tears of a very different kind for this servant of yours, O our God; they come gushing forth from a mind struck by the perils besetting every soul that dies in Adam.” Ibid., 9.13.34.

107 He references here Mt. 5:22, “But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool’, you will be liable to the hell of fire.”

108 This subsection takes its title, of course, from Hamlet’s famous speech in which he, like Augustine, thinks of hell as a kind of endless nightmare from which we do not awake: “To die, to sleep, No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to: ‘tis a consummation Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep; To sleep, per chance to dream – ay, there’s the rub: For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause – there’s the respect That makes calamity of so long life.” In William Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt, The Norton Shakespeare (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), Act Three Scene I.
is disquieting to say the least. Ambrose’s hymn, contrary to Augustine’s experience of it here, highlights how easily the heart is invaded by unbidden dream-thoughts in the dead of night. Augustine’s own famous worrying over his wet dreams in The Confessions is only the most well-known of his examples of the dangers dreams pose for the human heart whose secret reservoirs of sin the bishop compares to crypt-like abysses. As Augustine discusses at length in various places, dreams are dangerous because they are in fact the means by which the normal theo-spiritual order is disrupted. They are, moreover, notoriously difficult to interpret. Dreams can be visits from angels, but also from demons. Nightmares, the bishop famously argued, are one of the strongest evidences we have of the reality of hell, which can visit the soul and

109 The hymn, Deus Creator Omnium, being written for the Vespers liturgy, has numerous allusions to the disturbing power of evil to enter into the dreams of the monk and cause traumatic disturbances and spiritual confusion. The last verse may suffice to make the point: “From cheats of sense, Lord, keep me free; and let my heart’s depth dream of thee; let not my envious foe draw near, to break my rest with any fear.” The Latin reads: exuta sensu lubrico; te cordis alta somnient; ne hostis invidi dolo; pavor quietos suscitet.

110 See The Literal Interpretation of Genesis Book XII.

111 In addition to the discussion of demonic intervention in dreams in The Literal Interpretation of Genesis, see Demonic Divination and Letter Nine to Nebridius. Though not exactly a dream, the story of the Witch at Endor, found in 1 Samuel 15, is one of the most troubling, because biblical, visions of the “chasm” between this life and the next, heaven and hell, being crossed. Augustine was deeply troubled by this story in the Scriptures, and unlike many patristic interpreters, refused to deny its status as genuine. See, among other discussions, Patricia Cox Miller’s essay “Origen and the Witch of Endor: Toward an Iconoclastic Typology” in Patricia Cox Miller, The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity : Essays in Imagination and Religion (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001) and K. A. D. Smelik, ”The Witch of Endor: I Samuel 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis Till 800 A.D." Vigiliae Christianae 33, no. 2 (1979), 160-179.
flesh of the sleeper without warning. It was by means of a dream that
Perpetua was able to pray her brother Dinocrates out of hell, an act that
Augustine as a good African Christian can’t deny, though it deeply troubles his
theological schematics. In dreams, as Augustine discusses in On the Care of the
Dead, the boundary between the living and the dead is also crossed, perhaps
especially by the tremendous power believed to be granted to the martyrs in
Augustine’s North African context. To appeal to a dream in an attempt to
stabilize the Christian self is thus a deeply problematic gesture on the bishop’s
part, and can fruitfully be read through the Derridean point made in the
epigraph to this chapter. There Derrida writes,

> Between the immune and that which threatens it or runs counter to it, between Heil and Unheil, the relation is neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction… and if, as I have attempted and am still tempted to do elsewhere, one were to separate as irreconcilable the notion of salut as greeting or salutation to the other from every salut as salvation (in the sense

112 Literal Interpretation of Genesis Book XII and Letter 159 to Evodius.
113 It was fervently believed that the martyrs were in a special class by themselves, where the normal order and rules of theology did not always apply. So Tertullian believed that whereas everyone else who died ended up in the bosom of Abraham awaiting their ultimate fate, the martyrs ascended directly to heaven upon their deaths. See Tertullian’s On the Soul Ch. 55 in Tertullian, Tertullian: Apologetical Works, and Minucius Felix: Octavius; (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950). The power of the future martyr Perpetua to pray her brother Dinocrates out of hell is drawn, according to traditional readings of it, from her anticipated martyrdom and suffering. And in a remarkable meditation on the second beatitude, “Blessed are they who mourn,” Augustine suggests that due to his overwhelming compassion for those still suffering on earth, the martyr Cyprian, even in heaven will join Christ in having “a certain sadness, for our Lord Jesus Christ still intercedes for us, and all the martyrs in his company intercede for us too. Their intercession will not cease until this groaning of ours has passed away.” See Exposition of the Psalms 85.24. This is a striking admission on Augustine’s part that there can be tristitia in the heavenly realm, and he makes no attempt to reconcile this with the final solution he puts forward in CD.
of the safe, the immune, health, and security), if one were to consider the greeting or the salutation of the other, of what comes, as irreducible and heterogeneous to any seeking of salut as salvation, you can guess into what abysses we would be drawn.

On the one hand, it is belaboring the obvious to say that Augustine’s is a theology of salvation par excellence in which the eschatological vision of heaven is immunized and rendered safe by means of exteriorizing “that which threatens it.” This is what the abominable fancy means, in nuce. But as Derrida himself notes in his attentive reading of his African forebear, there is more than one Augustine. Though trying mightily to protect the integrity of his vision of the Christian self from the traumas that ravaged it, Augustine was relentlessly honest about what Derrida calls the “salutations of the other.” These can come to one in the dead of night, in the dreams, visions, and nightmares that may dis-order our desire for quiescence. For Augustine, as for Derrida, these salutations, gesturing out across the abysses of the human heart, are no more avoidable than are the scarifications that come from a mother’s anguished, inordinate love. “Nam et si descendero in infernum, ades,” Derrida writes in his meditation on his fellow African, here quoting Augustine quoting the Psalms. Even in hell one does not escape love’s reach. This means that

---

115 Ibid. 94. He is quoting Augustine, Confessions I.2.2 who is citing Psalm 139:8. Derrida astutely senses that for Augustine, this reach of love into hell is something shared by both Augustine’s mother and his God. And there is at times, to borrow Tom Carlson’s phrase, a profound indiscretion between the two.
heaven, the place of love *par excellence*, is neither exterior to hell, nor immune to its salutations. It is drawn, out of love, into the very abyss. For heaven to be heaven, it must open itself to hell. It is a thought we can imagine haunting the bishop at the very end.
PART TWO

Introduction to Part Two

Summary of Part One

Before turning to the 13th century, it may be helpful to review the trajectory followed to this point. In Chapter One, a number of biblical texts crucial to the development of the resignatio tradition were examined. In Moses’ bold challenge to God in Exodus 32:32 and in Paul’s repetition of this challenge in Romans 9:1-3, we saw the first signs of a posture of love and parrhesiastic challenge to divine power that the early Christian tradition saw as a kind of insaniam amoris in its willingness to risk salvation out of solidarity for those threatened with divine condemnation. In the Song of Songs, a number of thematic elements were explored: a.) In the Song we see an erotic, embodied love willing to challenge the theological and institutional orders in which it moved. b.) the non-instrumental quality of this love (it is “without why”) figured as paradisal c.) the wound of love, articulating the inextricable vulnerability of love to suffering as well as the porosity of love and the way in which the lover’s identity is permeated with difference to the point of possible confusion with that of the beloved. d.) The way in which this porosity, combined with the fierce and agonistic relationship of love and hell (sheol) creates a certain indiscretion between the two (e.g. Sg. 8:6: “love is strong as death, as hard as hell”). e.) This indiscretion, a kind of constitutive blindness in
which familiar, ordering structures are absent, is figured as a desert. In the *Song*, this desert space has both tremendous potential as a site of liberation, as well as significant threat (e.g. the way in which death can disguise itself as a figure of love).

In Chapter Two, we explored how these biblical themes were further mobilized in the post-biblical tradition and began to coalesce into a distinct tradition of thinking about love and hell. In *4 Ezra*, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Apocalypse of Paul*, and finally in *The Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, parrhesiastic love and hell were brought into the closest of proximities by means of what Martha Himmelfarb has called “tours of hell”. All four of these texts present an unfinished theological world, in which a Bakhtinian dialogical space was created for competing theological positions regarding hell and its relation to divine love and mercy. In *4 Ezra*, we saw two competing versions of the *resignatio ad infernum* thematic; one of which emphasized obedience to God’s will even if this should mean hell in this life, the other refusing this economy of salvation in favor of a more parrhesiastic protest against any theodical resolution to the suffering of the wretched here on earth. As we saw in the *Book of Job*, so too in *4 Ezra* we see a debate staged over the true nature of parrhesia, with God’s advocate Uriel suggesting that true boldness will come when, after the Last


\[2\] The reward will come in the next one, the angel Uriel tells a dubious Ezra.
Judgment, the saints will “rejoice with boldness and shall be confident without confusion,” as they see their obedience to God vindicated and their opponents tormented in gehenna.\(^3\) This agonistic relationship over scripture and its interpretation is further highlighted in the apocalyptic texts where, for example, we see Peter using Jesus’ own words from the Gospel to argue against the theodicy of hell being presented (\textit{ApPet}) and the Virgin Mary mobilizing the patriarchs and apostles themselves in her assault upon God’s rendering of the damned to the angels in hell.

In these later texts, we also highlighted, using the theoretical work of Bakhtin, Harpham, and Czachesz among others, the grotesque features of these scenes, in which love and hell, joy and anguish, saint and sinner freely intermingle, challenging the orderly picture of heaven and hell as discrete, mutually exclusive and inviolable spheres. Such grotesque violations of theological order as we find in these apocalyptic texts also bear striking resemblances to what trauma theorists such as Herman, LaCapra, and Marven have noted in other contexts, prompting one scholar of apocalyptic literature, James Berger, to argue that we can see these texts as “simultaneously symptoms

\(^3\) 4 Ezra, 7:98. This verse bears a striking resemblance to a similar scene described in the \textit{Book of Wisdom}, where it is said that after the judgment, “Then the righteous man will stand with great \textit{confidence} in the presence of those who have afflicted him.” (Wisdom 5:1). The LXX word for “confidence” is \textit{parrhesia}. In his commentary on 4 Ezra, Michael Stone draws the parallel between these two texts. Michael E. Stone and Frank Moore Cross, \textit{Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 242.
of historical traumas and attempts to work through them.” The virtue of reading the resignatio tradition as such a “traumatized grotesque” is that it captures both the witnessing to or “acting out” of hell which is seen so vividly in texts such as the Apocalypse of Peter and the “working through” of trauma’s worst through the bold, parrhesiastic refusal of love to accept such trauma as inevitable or ultimate.

Finally, in Chapter Three we saw how Augustine, the chief architect of the orthodox Christian doctrine of hell, chose another path rather than follow the resignatio way through the traumatic encounters of his life that he called “hell on earth.” As William Connolly put it, Augustine chose to attempt to immunize himself and the Christian tradition he represented from a love that would engage such hell, instead “deploy[ing] damnation to organize life…to transcend death.”

In order to do this, Augustine crafted a rigidly hierarchical, carefully circumscribed theology of love, the ordo caritatis which he would bequeath to the medieval Christian tradition. In his ferocious exclusion of the dissident African Christians he called Donatists, Augustine again and again

---

4 James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19. LaCapra’s distinction between acting-out and working-through, both of which he finds in many trauma-texts, is of course drawn from Freud. LaCapra thinks that contemporary post-modern discourse has not paid enough attention to the latter aspect of trauma texts.

insisted that love required such persecution in the name of order, and the political consequences of his theological justification of religious violence was another of his most troubling legacies to the medieval Christian theo-political order.

Even such a strenuous effort at exclusion, however, was haunted by that ever-present figure of excessive, inordinate love in Augustine’s thought, his mother Monica. Into the midst of the bishop’s *ordo caritatis* came unruly dreams of a more disturbing nature, supporting Derrida’s insistence that the relationship between *Heil* and *Unheil*, salvation and damnation, is “neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction.” Heaven it seems, is not as secure as Augustine would wish, and the abyss, it turns out, can be a most hospitable place indeed.

---

6 See especially his use of the touchstone of love to distinguish his own position from that of the “Donatists” and justify their persecution in his *Homilies on First John*. It is telling, to say the least, that these homilies, so often appealed to by Augustinians as the pinnacle of the bishop’s thinking on love, were crafted in the midst of a violent exclusion of his African Christian brethren. For example, one of Augustine’s most famous phrases found in Homily 7, “love and do what you will,” was, in that context, a justification for religiously-inspired violence, so long as the intention behind such violence was “loving.” See Giles Constable, "Love and do what You Will": The Medieval History of an Augustinian Precept (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1999) for how this idea of Augustine’s was gradually turned by the tradition into something the bishop would have likely abhorred, what William James dubbed as “Saint Augustine’s antinomian saying…with passports beyond the bounds of conventional morality.” James quoted in Constable, p. 4.

Overview of Part Two

In turning now to the thirteenth century, our attention will shift to the interplay between contemporary continental philosophy of religion, and the medieval sources in which the resignatio ad infernum thematics are most fully developed. In particular, the work of Foucault, Levinas, Derrida and Cixous will be brought into dialogue with 1.) the medieval resignatio tradition as it is seen in three exemplary figures: Hadewijch of Brabant, Jacopone da Todi, and Marguerite Porete; 2.) Fyodor Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov, which, as we will see, represents a unique redeployment of the resignatio tradition coming from the eastern orthodox tradition.

The reason for this interplay is to begin to make the argument that when we see the deployment of such tropes as “religion without religion”, radical hospitality, writing as a descent into hell, parrhesia as a form of “political spirituality”, we are witnessing an explicit, if not always recognized, filiation at work.

A reader of an earlier draft of this dissertation noted how there seems to be some slippage between my discussion of the resignatio ad infernum in the early

---

chapters and the analyses which follow in Part Two. Specifically, in Part One what made the tradition recognizable as such was the textual presence of the key scriptures discussed in Chapter One. The apocalyptic texts of Chapter Two were embedded in this scriptural milieu even as they were nonetheless contesting it. Augustine was explicitly rejecting this apocalyptic reading of the textual tradition in favor of his own reading of Job, the Song of Songs, and the relevant Pauline texts. The point, however, is that even in the case of Augustine, there is a common textual tradition to which he and his opponents, the “misericordes,” are appealing.

In Part Two, however, this scriptural ligature is often lacking, thus making it harder to see how my discussion of the resignatio ad infernum in these latter chapters is, as my reader puts it, a tradition rather than a trope or series of loosely related tropes. For example, these key scriptural texts are rarely if ever explicitly referenced in Jacopone, Marguerite, Hadewijch, Dostoevsky, or Cixous. If Romans 9:2-3, so crucial a part of what I am calling the tradition of the resignatio ad infernum in Part One is not explicitly engaged by the thinkers discussed in Part Two, or only marginally and implicitly echoed therein, in what sense can I speak of a continuing tradition of thought here?

12 My reader writes, “I found myself asking: is resignatio ad infernum a tradition that this dissertation tracks, or is resignatio ad infernum a trope that touches on many other key tropes that this dissertation wants to talk about? In chapters 1-3, I found myself thinking the former, especially given the way that Romans 9 and interpretations of it (and of Job and Exodus 32) reiteratively link together the various materials very effectively. But in chapters 6 and especially 5, I found myself thinking the latter more and more.”
Foucault and tradition

My initial response has been to acknowledge the force of this critique and to seek wherever possible to point out any textual citations where they can be found in order to more closely tie the two parts of this work together. One challenge in doing this is the fact that, as Bernard McGinn has noted, the medieval mystics, in particular the women writers, were not allowed to teach Scripture and thus were forced to be much more allusive in their textual explication.¹³ For example, in his role as canon theologian Richard of St. Victor in his classic articulation of the resignatio ad infernum explicitly quotes both Exodus 32 and Romans 9:2-3. Hadewijch, Marguerite Porete, and Jacopone rarely if ever do. But this is not surprising, given the relative paucity of explicit quotation from Scripture in their poetic, vernacular idiom. In these cases we must rely on intertextual echoes rather than explicit citations in order to show how in these mystical writers, the resignatio tradition is being textually mediated.

This response, however, does not address what it means to speak of a common tradition when we shift from the medieval mystics to the modern and post-modern thought of Dostoevsky, Levinas, and Cixous, who to a much lesser extent can be said to share a textual tradition. In Levinas’ and Cixous’

¹³See, for example, Flowering, 203.
case, we certainly are not permitted to think of a common theological or doctrinal tradition.\(^{14}\)

To begin to address this problem, some pressure must be put on the word “tradition” itself. If by tradition we are limited to thinking exclusively of one textually mediated and stabilized by institutional identity, one in which tradition is the shared task of commenting on a particular canon of writings in order to shore up institutional identity, then no, the \textit{resignatio ad infernum} is not a tradition.\(^{15}\) But, as Foucault has argued in his discussion of the Cynics, the notion that traditions are textually and/or institutionally mediated \textit{exclusively}

\(^{14}\) Perhaps it is easier to show doctrinal/textual connections between Dostoevsky and the earlier \textit{resignatio} tradition. It is not only that there is here a shared biblical and theological tradition which Dostoevsky, as a Christian, clearly mined. There is also the explicit use, in Dostoevsky, of Isaac the Syrian, who addresses Romans 9:2-3 and interprets it to his own ends in his discussion of love and hell. Nothing quite like this can be found in Levinas or Cixous.

\(^{15}\) Of course Foucault could be deeply suspicious of the language of “tradition” and of the ethico-political effects to which it could lend its weight. So, in \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge} he writes, “Take the notion of tradition: it is intended to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar); it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same; it allows a reduction of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without discontinuity the endless search for the origin; tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals. Then there is the notion of influence, which provides a support – of too magical a kind to be very amenable to analysis – for the facts of transmission and communication; which refers to an apparently causal process (but with neither rigorous delimitation nor theoretical definition) the phenomena of resemblance or repetition; which links, at a distance and through time – as if through the mediation of a medium of propagation – such defined unities as individuals, œuvres, notions, or theories.” Michel Foucault, \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge} (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 21. For Foucault, none of these are effects to be desired, obviously! What I am suggesting is that in his late work on the Cynics, he seeks to construct a different idea of tradition, one much closer to the kind of “history” he writes in \textit{The History of Madness}. It is history full of breaks, fissures, discontinuities and dispersions of identity. In the same way that we can speak, counter-intuitively, of a history of hell, here we can speak of a tradition \textit{from} hell.
unnecessarily limiting. In many ways, as he notes, the Cynics critiqued
vigorously the value of both doctrinal and institutional mediations of tradition.
In so doing, ironically, Cynicism has often been neglected as itself a tradition. So,
Foucault writes,

> There is no doubt that Cynicism is apt to appear as a somewhat
> trivial and not just marginal figure in ancient philosophy. There
> are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, of course,
> there is the very strong discredit, which we will come back to,
> which weighed on Cynicism in Antiquity, or anyway the
> standpoint which meant that established, institutional, and
> recognized philosophy always had an ambiguous attitude towards
> Cynicism, trying to distinguish between a set of practices which
> were despised, condemned, and severely criticized, and then, on
> the other hand, something which was like the core of Cynicism,
> and which was worth saving. This attitude towards Cynicism was
> frequent in Antiquity and was no doubt a strong influence on its
> later discredit.  

Furthering their erasure as a tradition is the relative lack of a textual archive,
due in part to their ascetic tendencies as well as to suppression of the textual
evidence they did leave.  

The other reason is that some ancient philosophies have handed
down to Western thought extremely strong and well specified
doctrinal cores, as in the cases of Plato and Aristotle—and to
some extent Stoicism, although this is already much less clear.
This is clearly not the case with Cynicism for the good reason that
we have very few Cynic texts, a fairly large number of which did
exist however, [but] also because the theoretical framework of
Cynicism, even in Antiquity, seems to have been extremely

---

16 The Courage of Truth, 177-178.
17 We can say the same regarding the textual evidence of the resignatio ad infernum in medieval
Europe, as the examples of St. Francis and Marguerite Porete demonstrate.
rudimentary. Cynic doctrine has therefore disappeared, as it were. But doesn’t this mean that Cynicism, rather like Stoicism, Epicureanism, and especially Skepticism…was basically handed down, kept up, and carried on much more as an attitude, a way of being, than as a doctrine. We could therefore conceive of the history of Cynicism, not, once again, as a doctrine, but much more as an attitude and way of being, with, of course, its own justificatory and explanatory discourse. So it seems to me that we could study the history of Cynicism through the centuries, from Antiquity to our own time, from this point of view.\(^{18}\)

Foucault shows what he means by then arguing for a common Cynic tradition linking the Ancient Cynics, medieval Franciscan mendicants, and modern writers such as Dostoevsky. This is clearly not a tradition whose mediation is primarily textual and/or doctrinal. Foucault thus suggests that there can be a tradition of *gestures*, of lived responses to contextually similar life-situations such as trauma.\(^{19}\) What I am suggesting is that we have just such a tradition in the *resignatio ad infernum* I am tracking. Shared textual analysis and doctrinal exegesis are far less important than a congruent existential response to trauma, what each of the writers discussed in this work referred to as hell.

Thus, where explicit textual echoes are absent, I have relied on the presence in these writers of the *commonality of theme, gestures, and “ways of being”*

---

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 178, emphasis mine.

\(^{19}\) When we recall Judith Herman’s crucial point that one of the distinguishing effects of trauma and its witness is the urge to disbelieve, dissociate from, and otherwise forget the trauma and the one who bears witness to it, it becomes even more clear how different a tradition or history from hell will be from one less traumatic in nature. Lacunae, fissures, lapses and discontinuities will be less an indication of a fragmented tradition than they are of the history of fragmentation the tradition is articulating.
discussed in Part One, especially in Chapter One. When, for example, we see in a given author in close proximity- 1.) *parrhesia* directed toward God; 2.) Love articulated as a kind of madness; 3.) A willingness to abide in hell out of love rather than a fear of its punishing qualities; 4.) Love and hell in the closest proximity, to the point of possible confusion; 5.) The flesh privileged over the spirit as the site of love; 6.) Love articulated as paradisal even in the midst of great anguish; 7.) Love as non-instrumental in nature and thus resistant to oppressive forms of governmentality—then, whether or not there are any textual continuities, we can speak of these texts as belonging to the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition.

When we draw out the resonances created by this interplay and begin to see a certain tradition of thinking about love in the midst of hell, such resonances bear strong resemblance to what Deleuze and Guattari have described as a “minor literature.”

One of the key markers of a minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is that “everything in them is political.” This is so even when the overt themes seem not to have to do with the political realm. They write:

---

20 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). They identify three key markers of minor literature as: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation.” (18)

21 Ibid. 17.
Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it.\textsuperscript{22}

By reading the \textit{resignatio ad infernum} in both its medieval and postmodern guises as a minor literature occupying the “cramped space” of hell on earth, I read it as inherently political. In the conclusion to Part Two, I will make this political aspect explicit, by drawing on the work of William Connolly and Judith Butler. Connolly’s efforts at creating a politically progressive “resonance-machine” which he often characterizes in terms of a Foucauldian “ethico-political spirituality” is, I will argue, deeply congruent with the \textit{resignatio} tradition we have been tracking. Butler’s more recent writing on a politics of mourning, inspired in large part by her re-reading of Levinas, can also be considered as a kind of ethico-political spirituality which develops a number of the \textit{resignatio} themes. Neither Connolly (a non-theist) nor Butler (Jewish) is Christian, obviously. Though developing on Christian soil, the version of the \textit{resignatio ad infernum} which we will have traced in this work is by no means self-evidently Christian, any more than hell is. It will thus seem most appropriate to conclude with the words of two authors, who, according to the Augustinian doctrine to which neither of them subscribe, would find themselves in the very same hell into which Porete, Hadewijch, and Jacopone were, out of love, willing to go.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
Foucault and Mystical Counter-Conduct

As we saw in the introduction to Part One, Foucault, by tying mysticism to the resistance to governmentality, suggests intriguingly that politics is at the heart of certain forms of Christian mysticism. He elaborates on this idea at length in his Collège de France lectures of that 1977-78 on governmentality, and it is to these lectures that we now turn in order to provide the framework in which we will look at the resignatio ad infernum tradition in the thirteenth century.

Foucault defines governmentality as an ensemble of doctrines, techniques, institutions, and apparatuses used to shape the conduct of a population, control its political economy, and articulate the nature of and provide for the protection of the “salvation” or security of the population so governed. Foucault traces the origins of this particular form of power to the Christian pastoral tradition, in which the ruler is positioned as a beneficent

---

23 In the “Course Context” of Security, Territory, Population, Michel Sennelart quotes from an unpublished manuscript of Foucault’s where he writes, “Politics is no more or less than that which is born with resistance to governmentality, the first uprising, the first confrontation.” Foucault et al., Security, Territory, Population : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-78, 390. For the remainder of this section and for the following one, citations from this edition will be within the text by page number.

24 There is considerable range to the notion of “salvation” (salut) in Foucault’s analysis. It may include, as it will for medieval pastoral power, the idea of heaven after death. At its most basic, however, it means the subsistence and safety promised to a population by the ruler.
overseer of each and every member of the population (*omnes et singulatim*) and provides the techniques by which the population may secure its salvation. Distinct from the power structures of sovereignty or discipline, though it incorporates aspects of both, pastoral power as a form of governmentality requires the active participation of the population. They are “conducted” in their conduct as they conduct themselves.\(^{25}\) What Foucault thinks is absolutely unique in the formation of the medieval pastorate is its utter comprehensiveness over life, its conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men, an art of monitoring them and urging them on step by step, an art with the function of taking charge of men collectively and individually throughout their life and at every moment of their existence. (165)

Pastoral power achieves this aim by means of three fundamental elements: 1.) through focusing on, and guiding individuals along the path of salvation as it defines it; 2.) through obedience to the law, “it must make sure that they really submit to the order, command, or will of God” (167); 3.) teaching and defending the truth “since in Christianity, as in all scriptural religions, earning one’s salvation and submission to the law are, of course, conditional upon acceptance, belief, and profession of a particular truth.”\(^{26}\)

\(^{25}\) The richness of Foucault’s concept of conduct is highlighted in the lecture of March 1, 1978 (193).

\(^{26}\) These three elements of pastoral power are introduced and discussed in the lecture of Feb 22, 1978, 167-185.
Foucault reiterates, as we have seen him do in his *parrhesia* lectures, that at the heart of this three-fold emphasis is the absolute necessity for obedience to the pastor, so much so, that it will go so far as to create absurd “tests of good obedience” in the cenobite tradition of monasticism (176). As a mode of “care of self,” Christian pastoral power is utterly distinct from its Greco-Roman counter-part. Rather than ascetic techniques designed as instruments of self-mastery, “it establishes a kind of exhaustive, total, and permanent relationship of individual obedience.” It is “a mode of individualization by subjection (*assujettissement*)” (183-184).27

In what Arnold Davidson has called “one of the richest and most brilliant moments” in the series, Foucault turns, in his March 1 1978 lecture to what he calls the “crisis” of the pastorate in the thirteenth century.28 Distinguishing between internal and external “blockages” to the church’s exercise of pastoral power,29 Foucault considers the imposition of the mandatory practice of confession at the IV Lateran Council (1215) as a critical moment in this crisis. Noting that this was itself a response to the dangers of

---

27 Foucault’s larger claim, which cannot be discussed at this point, is that this process of individualization begun in the period of the medieval Christian pastorate is inherited by the modern Western subject as well. With it, the “fascism of obedience” it helps create will continue to be a problem in late modern political formations.


29 Among the external blockages he names the Cathar heresy. As we will see in our discussion of the Beguines, a closer historical look might have caused Foucault to reconsider calling this “external”.
the “intoxication of religious behavior” throughout the church’s history, (195)³⁰ Foucault indicates that in the wake of this overwhelming imposition of pastoral power, there developed “specific movements of resistance and insubordination” to the principles of obedience and surveillance encoded in such actions (194). Struggling for the proper word to describe these resistance movements, he finally settles on that of “counter-conduct” in order to emphasize, as Davidson notes, both the ethical and political aspects of these movements.³¹

Crucial for our purposes, Foucault mentions specifically the counter-conduct of Marguerite Porete as well as that of the Nonnenmystik (197) which included Hadewijch,³² before meandering ahead to a twentieth-century exemplar of such resistance to another form of pastoral power: Solzhenitsyn. Paraphrasing these voices of resistance to the “fascism of obedience” echoing

³⁰ This, of course, parallels his analysis in The Courage of Truth lectures, where he suggests that the early church developed its principles of obedience in response to the similarly dangerous aspects of unfettered parrhesia. The church was also responding, in IV Lateran, to the rise in movements devoted to the vita apostolica such as the Beguines, whose rapid proliferation in the 12th and early 13th centuries was threatening the church’s ability to incorporate these movements into its pastoral structures. Among the most intriguing examples of this religious “intoxication”, Foucault mentions a movement that reversed Paul’s classic formulation in Romans 9, and prefers “loving Esau and hating Jacob.” Sadly, Foucault does not mention the source of this idea, though he does indicate it comes from a Gnostic source.

³¹ Foucault toys with a number of terms before settling on that of counter-conduct: resistance, refusal, revolt, revolt of conduct, disobedience, insubordination, and even dissidence. As Davidson notes, he finally focuses on counter-conduct because it “underlines the productivity of counterconduct which goes beyond the purely negative act of disobedience.” Ibid., 27.

³² Burchall, in his notes on the lecture, mentions the book Écrits mystiques des Béguines, which includes a number of Hadewijch’s poems, as one of Foucault’s possible sources. Hadewijch, Écrits Mystiques Des Béguines (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1994).
across history, Foucault writes: “We do not want this salvation, we do not wish
to be saved by these people and by these means” (201).

To what in particular were these 13th century movements responding?
Foucault sees three crucial elements in the medieval consolidation of pastoral
power: 1.) the “dimorphism” or binary structure of pastoral power, in which
clergy and laity are strongly distinguished and hierarchized, so that the clergy
have “not only economic and civil privileges, but also spiritual privileges, who
are broadly speaking closer than others to paradise, heaven, and salvation”
(203). 2.) An increased emphasis on the priest’s sacramental power, the power
to “have direct effectiveness in the salvation of the sheep through his action,
his words” (203). 3.) The introduction into the pastorate of a formerly secular,
“judicial model” centered on the practice of confession made mandatory at IV
Lateran, and in the development of the belief in purgatory and its associated
practices, “a system of modulated, provisional punishment in which justice, the
pastorate in short, has a role” (203). 33

Having indicated the lineaments of this consolidated pastoral power,
Foucault now returns to the movements of counter-conduct and goes on to
consider in some detail five forms this counter-conduct takes. He emphasizes
that all five of these forms are not external to the Christian pastorate, but in

33 As we will see, all three of these elements will play a strong role in the rise of the vita
apostolica and its resistance to these elements and their corrupting influences on the church.
agonistic relationship to it. As these forms will be crucial in our analysis of the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition in the thirteenth century, we will examine them in some detail.

**Forms of Counter-conduct**

1. *Asceticism*

   In a rather remarkable reversal of expectations, Foucault insists that in its pastoral form, Christianity is not in fact an ascetic religion. What the organization of monasteries in the third and fourth centuries accomplished, Foucault argues, is the domestication of the excessive, ascetic practices of the Egyptian and Syrian anchorite monks. The increasing emphasis on the monks’ need for absolute obedience to the abbot “clearly show[s] that what was at stake was limiting anything that could be boundless in asceticism, or at any rate everything incompatible with the organization of power” (205).

   Obedience limits this excessive, *inordinate* ascetic exercise of “self on self”, in which the gaze of a superior is beside the point. So as a form of counter-conduct, the asceticism of medieval counter-conduct renews this challenging, excessive practice. Crucial to this ascesis is the relationship the ascetic develops to his/her own suffering. By means of ever increasing challenges to one’s ability to suffer, the ascetic develops a form of *apatheia*,

---

34 We recall that this will also be his argument about the domestication of the cynic *parrhesia* of the desert ascetics in *The Courage of Truth*. 
Foucault argues, in which suffering no longer is able to provoke a passionate response. This creates a kind of *spiritual indifference*, which makes it less compliant to forms of pastoral power. Asceticism, however, is not an *absence* of the principle of obedience, Foucault writes, but a “sort of exasperated and reversed obedience that has become egoistic self-mastery”. As an internal agonized counter-conduct to the “completely exorbitant” obedience demanded by pastoral power, asceticism adds “another exaggerated and exorbitant element,” by adding its own “prescriptions and challenges” excessive to that of pastoral power (207-208).

2. Communities

If asceticism is a form by which the individual denies pastoral power ultimate efficacy, communities are, Foucault suggests, the collective way of doing so. Based on the “refusal of the pastor’s authority and its theological or ecclesiological justifications,” (208) such counter-communities challenge the sacramental power and increased privileges granted to clergy during the Middle Ages. Issues of power surrounding sacramentalism-- the Eucharist, baptism, and the requirement for priestly confession-- are all challenged, and the hierarchical dimorphism between clergy and laity is rejected.

Again, obedience is not rejected outright by these communities. Rather, Foucault describes a rather wide range of obediential structures, a number of
which seem to suggest, if not a parodic relationship to pastoral obedience, at least a certain ironizing of it. Foucault notes the “carnival” aspect of some communities “hierarchical reversals” of authority. As Foucault notes wryly, here “The first really will be the last, but the last will be the first.” (212)

In addition to the later pre-Reformation movements, Foucault mentions the Cathar heretics as one such community. As we will see, Beguines such as Hadewijch and Marguerite Porete, and to a certain extent, the spiritual Franciscan movement of Jacopone da Todi will share similar features.

3. Mysticism

Anticipating what he will say about the unique form of early Christian parrhesia before it is domesticated by the pastorate, Foucault notes that what takes place in medieval Christian mysticism is a “different game of visibility” in which the soul is offered, not to the pastor for examination, but to itself “in God”. The mystic “escapes examination…escapes the structure of teaching and the passing on of truth from someone who knows it to someone to whom it is taught.” (212) It “short-circuits” the ordering propensities of both pastoral and teaching hierarchies, insisting instead on “an immediate communication… between God and the soul, of appeal and response, of the declaration of God’s love and the soul, and of the soul’s love of God” (213). In the mystic’s focus on silence, the demand of pastoral power to “say everything” is resisted.
4. The Problem of Scripture

“In the movements of counter-conduct that develop throughout the Middle Ages, it is precisely the return to the texts, to Scripture, that is used against and to short-circuit, as it were, the pastorate” (213). Scripture, Foucault suggests, needs no “pastoral relay”, and the reading of it is a “spiritual act” which transcends structures of pastoral obedience. Though he is likely thinking about the Reformation emphasis on *sola scriptura*, we will clearly see, in the agonized struggle over how to read such excessive texts as the *Song of Songs* and Rom. 9:1-3, forms of scriptural counter-conduct were clearly evident in the thirteenth century as well.

5. Eschatological Beliefs

By focusing on the end times, or even suggesting that they would soon come and usher in a spiritual age in which the current ecclesial order would be obsolete as Joachim of Fiore and some of his followers in the spiritual Franciscan movement suggested, eschatology was, Foucault believed, a belief structure within which potential for counter-conduct simmered, as it made the reigning governmental order seem less solid and necessary.\(^35\) Obviously,

\(^35\) As we will see, Jacopone, a follower in the footsteps of Joachim in the community of Spiritual Franciscans, was himself given to similar apocalyptic thought. See George Terhune
questioning the Augustinian eschatological vision of heaven and hell, as the
resignatio tradition did, will have equally radical potential.

Foucault concludes his lecture on medieval counter-conduct to pastoral
power with an important caution. Just as these five forms of counter-conduct
are not external to the church’s obedience-structures, but in agonized
relationship to them, so too the doctrines, instruments and institutions of
pastoral power were not themselves unaffected by the challenges these forms
presented. These “border-elements”, Foucault insists, “have been continually
re-utilized, re-implanted, and taken up again in one or another direction, and
these elements, such as mysticism, eschatology, [or] the search for community,
for example, have been continually taken up by the Church itself” (215). As we
will see in the following chapter, Foucault’s caution is well-heeded when
examining the resignatio ad infernum tradition of the thirteenth-century. Even
within the mind of a single thinker, counter-conduct and obedience-structures
may sit in uneasy proximity.

Chapter Four

The Flowering of the Resignatio ad Infernum Part One

Resignatio Context: Vita Apostolica, Lateran IV, and the Albigensian Crusade

Before turning to our three exemplars of mystical counter-conduct in the 13th century, it will be helpful to situate the flowering of the resignatio thematic in its theo-political context, particularly as hell is mobilized by both the Roman church and its strongest critics. Most crucial was the continuing radicalization of the twelfth century reform efforts known as the vita apostolica movements. Inspired by the eleventh century efforts of Pope Gregory to combat, among others, the corruptions of simony and lay investiture, new monastic movements such as the Cistercians (founded in 1098), and canonical communities like the one at St. Victor (1108) were formed with the goal of both re-invigorating and better ordering religious life through a new focus on the power of holy, well-ordered love.1 Efforts at reform also included the laity, a crucial aspect of which was the crusade, first begun in 1096 by Pope Urban and serving, McGinn suggests, as “a potent form of lay piety that fused

---

1 So we see the twelfth century turn to the Song of Songs as a source for monastic theological reflection, most notably in Bernard of Clairvaux and his close friend, William of St. Thierry. This focus on the passionate qualities of love is continued and brought to radical conclusions in the works of the Victorines, most especially Richard of St. Victor, whose short work, De quattuor gradibus violentiae caritatis is one of the earliest works to combine the Song of Songs and Rom. 9:1-3 as exemplifying the insaniam amoris which will become a common trope in the thirteenth century. Richard will inspire both Hadewijch and Jacopone among others.
penitential pilgrimage and holy war in the service of the new conception of papal monarchy.”

Once begun, however, especially when combined with the volatile leaven of Bernardine invocations of vehement, “measureless” love, these reform movements soon had a way of turning against the very clerical movements that had inspired them. Though as McGinn notes, the twelfth century monastic movements inspired by Bernard, William of St. Thierry, and the Victorines were deeply committed to the *ordo caritatis*, other voices were not so sure. In the twelfth century, the passionate love evoked by Heloise and Abelard presented a deep challenge to the Bernardine *ordo caritatis* and was viewed as both a theological and political threat to papal-centered reform.

The *vita apostolica* movements tended to reject as “half-way measures” a number of ecclesial-centered reforms. As Foucault noted, these communities and individuals, by insisting on a return to poverty and itinerant preaching and challenging the sacerdotal authority of the clergy, became a significant “counter-movement” to the church, one which threatened the *ordo* of the theological-political realm. It may well be that, as Talal Asad argues, “instability, following from the ideological commitment to preaching and poverty, was precisely what

---

3 Ibid., 154-155.
the *vita apostolica* demanded,” so much so that by the time of Lateran IV, Pope Innocent III realized that something had to be done to re-assert order into ecclesial reform.

As McGinn notes, in addition to creating the mechanisms of the Inquisition to deal with recalcitrant reform movements and introducing mandatory confession, Lateran IV was particularly focused on the need to limit the reforming impulses of the various *vita apostolica* movements. In forbidding the formation of any new religious orders, knowing that established ones were not inclined to receive under their care any more of the new communities cropping up rather prolifically, Lateran IV evinced “a clear sign of the growing tension in the thirteenth century between hierarchical attempts to limit and control the variety of ways to live the religious life, on the one hand, and the power of the appeal found in the *vita apostolica* on the other.”

The *vita apostolica* and heresy were now brought perilously close together in the papal imagination, and just a few years prior to Lateran IV, the continued presence in the south of France of *vita apostolica* movements resistant to papal power led Pope Innocent III to launch, spearheaded by the Cistercian

---

monks, the Albigensian Crusade against the Christians of southern France.\(^8\)

Increasingly focused on the corrupt sexual practices of the clergy, as well as on the rapacious economic motives of the papal legates sent to the south of France, these *vita apostolica* movements proved to be a threat too troubling to the church’s image to ignore.

In this tense situation of ever more radical attempts at reform clashing with increasingly harsh countermeasures by the church, the contested theopolitics of hell were readily invoked. Two examples can suffice to show how hell becomes one of the most salient sites on which these movements and Foucauldian counter-movements were held.

The first comes from an incident at Reims in 1180 described by the Cistercian abbot Ralph of Coggeshall, who heard it directly from the main participant, Gervais of Tilbury.\(^9\) Gervais, a legate for the archbishop of Reims, accosted a young woman while he was riding with the archbishop and some of

\(^8\) See, among others, Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Just as Brent Shaw has resisted the (Augustinian) rendering of anti-imperial dissidents as “Donatists”, so Pegg has insisted that the label of Cathars to the Christians of southern France during this period is historically false and theologically misleading.

his men. When Gervais insisted that the young woman allow him to have
sexual relations with her, she resisted, saying that if Gervais were to rape her “I
should most assuredly fall under eternal damnation without hope of recall.”
Gervais responded immediately to this protestation by accusing the girl of the
heresy of the Publicans, a heresy of which with the \textit{vita apostolica} movements in
the south of France were often accused.\footnote{In medieval heresiology, the Paulicians and the Publicans were considered synonymous. The Cathar or Albigensian heresy was also often labeled as the “Publican” heresy. See \textit{Ibid.}, 42.}

What leads Gervais so quickly to associate this woman’s response with
heresy, when the desire to maintain her virginity is, in itself and within
orthodox terms, unimpeachable? Cynically, we might think it a mere ruse
designed by Gervais to pressure the girl further. But the story continues and
suggests that there is more at stake. For when the archbishop finally arrives at
the scene, he is told of the nature of Gervais’ trouble with the girl and he
immediately begins to continue the interrogation by imprisoning her and taking
her back to Reims for a full-scale inquisition complete with a retinue of his
clergy as questioners. If Gervais was merely “having sport” at the young girl’s
expense, such efforts on the archbishop’s part would be unlikely. However,
when we focus on the nature of her protest, that the envisioned rape would
amount to damnation, and the fact that she then refuses to admit her “error”

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 252. That it is an issue of rape, rather than an attempt at wooing the girl is delicately masked by Ralph’s account of Gervais’ own description of the event.}
under questioning, something else emerges. Clearly the desire for virginity
cannot be the error for which the archbishop condemns her of the Albigensian
heresy. As scholars of the Albigensian movements have noted, however, the
thought that the only hell which exists is in this life, and not the next, was
indeed a teaching held by some of Rome’s opponents. By insisting that the
rape would itself be quite enough “damnation” in this life for her, and by
refusing to be swayed by the archbishop’s not-so-veiled threats that a further
hell awaited her in the next life should she not relent to his (and the church’s)
will, the young girl raised the stakes of contesting the theo-politics of hell. This
anonymous parrhesiast thus exemplifies the kind of Foucauldian counter-
movement we see repeatedly in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Such fiery resistance to the church’s authority was common in the south
of France during the early thirteenth century and no doubt such boldness and

---

12 Raymond A Powell’s “The Problem of Cathar Apocalypticism,” *Koinonia* XIV (2004), pp. 101-117 at 107 where he writes, “Indeed, for many Cathars, if earth played any role at all in the work of the good god, it was as the realm of punishment, be it temporal or eternal. Simply put, earth was hell. One Cathar text describes “this world” as “the last lake, the farthest earth, and the deepest hell,” while another asserts that “hell and eternal punishment are in this world only and nowhere else.” Costen also mentions the Cathar position that hell is in this life, rejecting the idea of punishment after death. M. D. Costen, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1997). Richard Bernstein also notes the Cathar position that hell as punishment after death was redundant in Richard E. Bernstein, “Theology Between Heresy and Folklore: William of Auvergne on Punishment After Death” *Studies in Medieval & Renaissance History*, 5 (1982), 5-44.

13 Needless to say, the girl, steadfast to the end, was burned. But even Ralph cannot avoid an expression of consternated admiration for her as he concludes, “she was burned. She caused a great deal of astonishment to many, for she emitted no sigh, not a tear, no groan, but endured all the agony of the conflagration steadfastly and eagerly, like a martyr of Christ.” Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 253.
lack of fear of the church’s theo-politics of hell was one reason for Pope
Innocent III’s decision to launch the Albigensian Crusade in 1209, led by
Bernard’s successor at Clairvaux, the monk Arnaud Amalric. Our second
incident occurred at the outset of this bloody crusade, in the town of Béziers,
France on July 22, 1209, the Feast Day of Mary Magdalene.

Innocent III’s charge to Arnaud Amalric was clear: heresy was to be
stamped out in the Languedoc by whatever means necessary. Upon arriving on
July 21 at the outskirts of Béziers, a leading stronghold of resistance to Roman
power, the Cistercian monk quickly met with the bishop of the city, Rainaut,
and sent him back inside with orders to convince the Catholic citizens of the
city to choose one of two options in order to save themselves. They were either
to turn over the heretics whose names the bishop had in his possession, or to
leave the city altogether if unwilling to hand over their fellow citizens, many of
whom were friends and relatives.

Rainaut complied, and the response to his pleas came back, according to
one eyewitness account, without hesitation:

When the Bishop had delivered this message from our side to the
citizens, they refused to listen to it. Instead they set themselves up
against God and the Church, made a covenant with death and chose to
die as heretics rather than live as Christians.14

14 The account is from Peter of les Vaux-de-Cernay’s Historia Albigensis. Petrus, The History of
the Albigensian Crusade (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 1998), at 50, emphasis mine. Peter
was a Cistercian monk who joined the crusade and provides history’s most important
eyewitness account. The Latin reads: Quod verbum cum sepelit nos episcopus ex parte nostrorum
The phrase “made a covenant with death” is crucial, as it is a quote from Isaiah 28:15 which the eyewitness Peter of les-Vaux-de-Cernay has abbreviated and conflated. The full passage in the Vulgate reads,

For you have said, we have entered into a league with death, and we have made a covenant with hell. When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come upon us: for we have placed our hope in lies, and by falsehood we are protected.\(^{15}\)

There can be little doubt that Peter meant for his readers to recall the full passage and understand the ominous implication—that the Catholics who refused to save themselves by either betrayal or flight had chosen to be in hell with the heretics, rather than safe within the bosom of the church. The \textit{resignatio} thematic is clearly to the fore in this clash between the church with its power to give and withhold hell, and its Christian critics who refused, out of love and solidarity with their brothers and sisters in the flesh, to march to its ordering impulses. These martyrs \textit{against the church}, Rainaut spewed, were clearly “fools…and madmen.”\(^ {16}\)

\(^{15}\) dixistis enim percussimus \textit{foedus} cum morte et cum inferno fecimus pactum flagellum inundans cum transierit non veniet super nos quia posnimus mendacium spem nostram et mendacio protecti sumus.

\(^{16}\) This phrase comes from William of Tudela’s \textit{The Song of the Cathar Wars}. Guillaume, and Janet Shirley, \textit{The Song of the Cathar Wars: A History of the Albigensian Crusade} (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2000), 20.
In the case of Béziers, there only remained for the church to complete the task of bringing hell upon those who refused its salvation. Shortly after Rainaut gave Arnaud Amalric the bad news, a band of young ruffians who were part of the crusading army breached the walls and began to set the fires indiscriminately. Arnaud Amalric may or may not have said, “Kill them all, God knows his own” in response to a question how to tell the difference between Catholic and heretic, but that was the result. Out of spite that the crusading lords were not inclined to give to these ruffians their just spoils, they set the entire city ablaze, and every man, woman and child was ultimately killed, between fifteen and twenty thousand. As Jonathan Sumption described it, “They invaded the churches and slaughtered the terrified citizens who had gathered there for safety. Priests, women and children were cut down indiscriminately, as they clung to reliquaries and crucifixes.” The church of Mary Magdalene was burned to the ground with catholic and “heretic” alike inside praying, “a splendid example of divine justice and Providence,” according to Peter, for the “shameless dogs” of Béziers.

Though the slaughter of Béziers had not gone exactly as planned, Arnaud Amalric exulted, just as the monk Peter had done, that it was an act of

17 This famous response was recorded sometime later by Caesarius of Heisterbach. The saying is cited in Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom*, 77.
18 For the numbers killed, see Ibid., 77-78.
“Divine vengeance.” The bringing of hell on earth to Béziers made its theological point, and the crusaders were able to continue their march through the south of France which much less resistance. In the north, news of the unprecedented violence of the first crusade against Christian peoples also sent a clear message, especially to those of the burgeoning vita apostolica movements who were without papal or monastic protection: to have any association with the Albigensians at all was to risk having hell itself brought down on one’s head. And unfortunately for the Beguine mystics, as Herbert Grundmann notes in his magisterial treatment of this women’s movement of the thirteenth century, “even the name ‘beguine’ arose around 1200 as a rebuke which was supposed to mark them as heretics.” For Hadewijch, the Dutch Beguine mystic to whom we now turn, the risk of being consigned to hell was one she not only was willing to take. She boldly suggested that to take it was in fact the royal way of love.

21 See Appendix A of William, W. A. Sibly and M. D. Sibly, The Chronicle of William of Puylaurens: The Albigensian Crusade and its Aftermath (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 2003) which is a translation of the letter the two papal legates, Milo and Arnaud Amalric, sent to Innocent III describing the slaughter at Béziers and subsequent actions of the crusading army.

22 Grundmann, Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women’s Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism, 242. Though the etymology of Beguine is still shrouded in mystery, a number of scholars, Grundmann among them, indicates that it is related to Albigensis. More recently, scholars like Simons have questioned this link. In any case, it is fair to say, with Grundmann, that in the early decades of the thirteenth century, to be called a Beguine was to be under a cloud of suspicion. See James de Vitry’s acknowledgement of this in Walter Simons, Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, 121.
The Beguine Counter-movement: Hadewijch

Hadewijch

When the Dutch Beguine Hadewijch writes in a couplet, sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century, that “hell should be the highest name of love,” it is easy to underestimate the intensity and the range of her provocation. It is a culminating gesture in the Dutch mystic’s thought which simmers with theological, existential and political implications simultaneously. Before turning to the key elements in Hadewijch’s resignatio counter-conduct, a brief look at the theo-politics of hell against which she was moving so boldly is in order.

We can take the writings of William of Auvergne, theologian and bishop of Paris from 1228-1249, as exemplary in this regard. As Richard Bernstein has carefully shown, William was a skilled preacher of hell, a fierce critic of the “Cathar” heresy, and mindful of the great theo-political use of hell. “Hell is not an evil, rather it is very good and ought to be highly valued,” he wrote in a treatise that had in mind, in large part, the Albigensian eschatological view that

---

23 In Hadewijch, *The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 356. All citations of Hadewijch, unless otherwise noted, will be from this edition and will be indicated by page number within the text. Unfortunately, we have almost no historical information about Hadewijch. From a list of names in one of her letters, scholars have estimated that she wrote sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century. See Hadewijch, and Marieke J. E. H. T. van Baest, *Poetry of Hadewijch* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), 33.
this life is hell and that another one after death was overkill.\textsuperscript{24} William
innovated theologically in order to further threaten the lax with hell: in line
with Lateran IV, he argued that failure to participate in priestly confession was
hell-worthy,\textsuperscript{25} and that hell began right at death, not after the general
resurrection, as was a common understanding before William’s time. Hell is a
social good, William insisted, its threats of punishment restoring order in this
life, its reality assuring order in the next.\textsuperscript{26} William justifies hell in the next life
by pointing to its presence in this one as a necessary theo-political instrument:

Every castle has a dungeon, every city has a jail, thus the church,
which is the city of God, should have a “place…set aside for
exercising divine justice…and this is the place which the three
common laws understand to be hell.”\textsuperscript{27}

William’s scholastic treatment of hell was reinforced, as Bernstein shows,
by the preaching manuals of his day, meant to provide examples with which to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{26} The explicitly political function of William’s teaching on hell is brought out in Bernstein’s article. Alan E. Bernstein, "Esoteric Theology: William of Auvergne on the Fires of Hell and Purgatory," \textit{Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies} 57, no. 3 (1982), There Bernstein writes, “William of Auvergne interpreted the fire of purgatory and hell in two different ways, depending on the intellectual preparation of his audience. He wanted the uneducated to take the fire literally; otherwise its deterrent force would be diminished. For his students, future theologians, however, it is a symbol acting at a number of different levels.” (530)
\item \textsuperscript{27} Bernstein quoting William in Kristeller et al., \textit{Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller}, 21.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
instill fear and submissiveness in the laity and to drive them to confession.\textsuperscript{28} Hell in the orthodox view was thus unambiguously negative, something to be avoided, yet meditation on its threats was of great usefulness as was its reality for restoring the theo-political order.

It was this highly ramified view of hell as deterrent/punishment which Hadewijch dramatically called into question by suggesting that hell, rather than something to be feared or avoided, was the highest way by which the soul attains love, what she in her Dutch idiom called \textit{minne}.

Clearly the Dutch Beguine has dramatically re-interpreted hell in this remarkable form of counter-conduct. Hadewijch’s writings are vast and complex, yet we can begin to sketch the outlines of her innovative theology of \textit{minne}-hell under the following five concepts, each of which is crucial to her \textit{resignatio} counter-conduct: 1) \textit{fierheid}; [pride] 2) \textit{ontrouwe} [unfaith]; 3) \textit{minne} [love/God]; 4) \textit{dynamic eschatology}; and 5) Hell as the \textit{community} of love.

\textbf{1. Fierheid}

Hadewijch was nothing if not bold. Turning centuries of theological thinking on its head, she insisted that pride \textit{[fierheid]}, rather than a sin to be

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. Bernstein describes the manuals, containing numerous \textit{exempla} regarding hell. Manuals were collected by James de Vitry, a leader of the Crusades and author of Beguine hagiographies, Caesarius of Heisterbach, and Stephen of Bourbon. Intriguingly Bernstein notes that in at least one of these collections, \textit{exempla} from the \textit{Vision of St. Paul} are used.
avoided was in short supply and greatly to be praised as a virtue for one trying
to attain to God. In her fourth letter, written to her Beguine community, she
argues that theological reason is too quick to submit, out of fear of “the terrors
of God’s threats.”

Reason well knows that God must be feared, and that God is
great and man is small. But if reason fears God’s greatness
because of its littleness, and fails to stand up to his greatness, and
begins to doubt that it can ever become God’s dearest child, and
thinks that such a great Being is out of its reach—the result is that
many people fail to stand up to the great Being. Reason errs in this and in
many things (54).²⁹

Hadewijch writes that this overly submissive humility loves the
possibility of union with God/minne out of a servile fear of hell. Yet, as she
writes in Letter 22, hell is the very way of Christ, who “delivered up his
substance to death.” (98) Union with Christ thus requires that one overcome
this fear with a greater willfulness, what she calls fierheid, in order to respond to
God’s troubling call.

Moreover he constantly invites men to unity in the fruition of
himself; and they are all stirred and set in commotion by the force
of his fearful invitation. The spirit of some of them is frightened
by his just warning, and they go astray. But others, the proud
souls, he awakens, and they stand up with a violent new will and
raise themselves toward his nonelevation… (95)

²⁹ Emphasis mine. Later in the same letter she re-iterates: “God’s threats or all sorts of
torment that we fear cause reason to err, if we are often more influenced by fear than love in
what we do or omit.”
In Foucault’s analysis of asceticism, we saw how the will is a locus of a complicated form of counter-conduct. At times the ascetic adopts a severe strategy of willing absolute obedience to the point of annihilation of the will, while at others, the ascetic’s will rises imperiously to the fore. Crucial to understanding Hadewijch’s invocation of a “violent new will” is to see it in this Foucauldian register, as a kind of dialectics of the will in which the annihilation of the will is exemplified by this proud, violent new will. As Marieke van Baest puts it,

> When the development of the Christian tradition concerning desirable human qualities of character is considered, many people do not think it obvious to interpret fierheid: fierceness (literally: proper pride) as a virtue. But Hadewijch founds her high-spirited attitude in life on fierceness because she assents to being created in God’s image and towards God’s likeness.30

In Hadewijch’s understanding of mystical encounters with God/minne, only one with fierheid was capable of receiving and hence following the dark and royal road of God. As Paul Mommaers has noted, this was a brilliant (and controversial) deployment of the classic scholastic principle, *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* with Hadewijch insisting that a fearful approach to God would lead merely to the reception of a fearful, and thus not loving, God.31

---

31 Anything that is received is received to the measure of that which receives it. Paul Mommaers and Elisabeth M. Dutton, *Hadewijch: Writer, Beguine, Love Mystic* (Louvain; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), 75. As John Milhaven puts it, “Hadewijch has to exercise her
This pride, it would seem, is without limit and so it seeks even to influence God and to make the mystic’s will God’s will. A true mutuality between God and human lover is envisioned here, which, as John Milhaven notes, is a view utterly distinct from even the boldest of twelfth-century medieval mystical speculations. However, as we saw in the early apocalyptic tours of hell, it is not without precedent in the tradition.  

At times Hadewijch implies that by her power of free will she gains yet more such power, a direct share in God’s universally ruling will: “And then the Angel said to me: ‘O Powerful and strong one, you have conquered the powerful and strong God, from the origin of his Being...’”

2. Ontrouwe

Such fierceness leads to an agonized relationship with God. Not surprisingly, as van Baest notes, the figures of Job and Jacob wrestling with the angel were among Hadewijch’s favorites and she turned to them often. Again, however, she deployed these biblical figures differently from the Augustinian tradition, exemplifying Foucault’s fourth form of counter-conduct, Scripture.

---

free will if she is to will all that God is, for to so will she must will to increase that desire in her, the desire that is both divine Love and agony.” John Giles Milhaven, Hadewijch and Her Sisters: Other Ways of Loving and Knowing (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 50.

32Ibid., pp. 23-26 where Milhaven compares Bernard and Hadewijch, arguing that Bernard, while using the boldly mutualistic language of the Song of Songs with great fluidity, ultimately never questions the “complete independence and absolute immutability of God.” Hadewijch, he argues, questions and even rejects this classical theologeme in favor of a true mutuality of the divine and human lover.

33Ibid., 50, quoting Hadewijch’s Vision One, 264.
Hadewijch highlights, rather than softens, as Augustine and the later tradition will do, the mistrustful tones in these biblical scenes. In the Augustinian version of Job, the consolations Job receives at the end of the book dampens his fierce ardor. By contrast, in Hadewijch all consolations are rejected and God’s love and justice are demanded. As Mommaers has noted, this refusal of divine consolations has a parallel in the Beguines’ social status and their criticism of the reigning theo-political order. As they returned, controversially, to the earlier communal practice of begging, the Beguines, Mommaers writes,

formed, therefore, an economic-social as well as a moral problem. On the one hand there were just too many common and religious beggars; and a city or an area could not support that. On the other hand the ecclesiastical authorities had absolutely no control over religious who went around begging, and that is particularly risky when they are women. 

Unafraid of hell, and detached from either material or spiritual consolations, Hadewijch and her sisters were thus not only a problem for the ecclesiastical champions of economic and spiritual order, they also presented a problem for God, whose promises they were not inclined to accept at face value. Untrouwe or “unfaith” was one of the Dutch Beguine’s most innovative and fertile concepts, as McGinn explains.

“Unfaith may be described as the soul’s hard-won response to the torture and suffering that minne inflicts on her in the game of love…this mysterious state occurs when the soul’s frustrated

---

desire passes beyond humility and knowledge to a consciousness in which she ceases to believe in the faithfulness of minne. This indifference to, even hatred of, love’s consolations allows her to engage in a far deeper struggle with love on love’s own ground. Abandoning minne for the sake of minne compels minne to surrender herself to the soul.  

Ontrouwe, as Hadewijch describes it, is closely related to fierbeid, and it furthers her critique of the submissiveness of scholastic reason, which is always content to stop with faith, even when, as in the book of Job, there are good reasons to question the divine promises. So, she writes,

The work of the highest fidelity [trouwen] of reason is the clearest and most euphonious voice of Love. But the noise of the highest unfaith [ontrouwen] is the most delightful voice of Love; in this she can no longer keep herself at a distance and depart.

Crucially, Hadewijch’s ontrouwe moves beyond similar treatments of agonized wrestlings with God. In Guerriec of Igny, the twelfth century monk, for example, such wrestling was taken up in earnest, though ultimately it was seen as a kind of “dissembling” in which both sides played a role: God that of an indifferent, even antagonistic opponent, the human that of a mistrustful, passionate lover. In Guerriec, as Milhaven notes, everyone involved knows that

---

this “wrestling” is a mere game, and that the God behind the mask is as faithful as ever.\(^{37}\)

In contrast, Milhaven insists that Hadewijch’s wrestling is no mere game, but is rather a real attempt to conquer God, to bring about “a real change in God’s love for her,” \(^{38}\) and cannot rest from its labors even by such means as Guerri’s theory of God’s “dissembling mercy.” A classic example of the mystical gesture which Foucault has indicated consists in twisting free of the examining eyes of pastoral power (e.g. Job’s friends), Hadewijch’s unfaith is a bold attempt to achieve greater intimacy with God, even if hell is the means of so doing. It is also an exception to the “principle of obedience” which Foucault has suggested domesticates \textit{parrhesia}. Not confidence in God, but untrouwe, is what renders Hadewijch’s \textit{parrhesia} restless and without limit.

Desires of love, moreover, cannot/By all these explanations be quieted./ Desire strives in all things for more than it possesses:/ Love does not allow it to have any rest...Desire...undergoes pressure from noble unfaith,/Which is stronger and higher than fidelity \textit{[trouwen]}; Fidelity, which one can record by reason,/ And express with the mind,/ Often lets desire be satisfied--/ What unfaith can never put up with; / Fidelity must often be absent/ So that unfaith can conquer;/ Noble unfaith cannot rest/ So long as it does not conquer to the hilt; / It wishes to conquer all that Love is...\(^{39}\)

\(^{37}\)Ibid., pp. 53-56.
\(^{38}\)Ibid., 55.
\(^{39}\)Ibid, 60, quoting the tenth Poem in Couplets.
3. *Minne*

At the heart of Hadewijch’s thought is love (*minne*). As numerous scholars have noted, in Hadewijch *minne* has a remarkable semantic range. It can refer to the love of a human, to God’s love or even to God, as well as to the relationship between God and human lover. Quite intentionally, Hadewijch often runs these semantic possibilities together, and her theological point is that what ultimately unites God and human, even to the point of indistinction, is the dynamic power of *minne*. It is *minne*, ultimately, which funds both the fierheid and ontrouwe in Hadewijch’s thought, and *minne* which leads the Beguine to hell in the quest to conquer *minne*, to “abandon *minne* for the sake of *minne*.”

It is quite impossible in this context to do justice to the richness of Hadewijch’s range of thought regarding *minne*. In terms of the *resignatio* thematic we have been exploring, perhaps *minne*’s most important quality is another of Hadewijch’s favorite, related terms, *orewoet*. A technical term in Dutch

---

40 McGinn, in an important comparison, suggests that for the Beguine mystics, *minne* often functions as *esse* does for the scholastic theologians, though for the Beguines, its function is more “phenomenological than metaphysical.” McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*, 171. Barbara Newman notes, “To the perennial frustration of critics, this potent figure resists the straitjacket of consistency, even in the writings of a single author. She appears in various contexts as a double for the mystic herself, her ‘transcendent I’; as a double for Christ, the Beloved; and as ultimate being, the Absolute, in which Lover and Beloved are one.” Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to womanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 153.
mysticism, whose literal meaning is “primaeval rage”, it was translated into the Latin as *vesania amoris*, or the madness of love.\(^4^1\)

What is it that turns *minne* into *orewoet* in Hadewijch’s view? Above all else, it is its utter lack of concern for proper order and hierarchical distinctions. As McGinn points out, even in the mystical ecstasies of Bernard, William of St. Thierry, and Richard of St. Victor, all of whom wrote about the *insula amoris* as they meditated upon the Song of Songs, love is never out of order.\(^4^2\) Following the mystical trajectory of Pseudo-Dionysius, these twelfth-century mystics do insist that God’s love includes the ecstatic movement of *eros*. However, as Milhaven notes, though God’s love does indeed go outside itself, seeming to break rank and proper order, this is somewhat illusory, as Pseudo-Dionysius cautions that this is only true insofar as God at one and the same time ‘yet stays within Himself’.\(^4^3\) Indeed, it would be hard to imagine either Bernard or William of St. Thierry, both eager defenders of the Crusades as well as papal

---


authority, advocating anything like the mad, “perfect love” which Hadewijch suggests ends up being persecuted by the church.⁴⁴

_Minne_, according to Hadewijch, is “without why”. So she writes, in the Tenth Poem in Couplets,

When one wants many particular things, / And prefers to be in delight. / This is a failure in loftiness of life. / Not for feeling’s sake must we learn to serve, / But only to love with love in Love. / If anyone did not fear hell, and did not serve for the hope of heaven, / And if for hell’s sake and for heaven’s sake / He were equally glad and equally daring, / And if he loved without rest, / And desired without above measure, / And above reason and above thought / That were great profit in love. (335-336)

As Paul Mommaers writes, Hadewijch rejects the “commerce of love” in which one anticipates rewards for loving, even one as seemingly innocent as the experience of love itself. Give in to this commercializing of _minne_, Mommaers writes, paraphrasing Hadewijch, and

a person’s attention is no longer focused on the Other but on his or her own experiencing…which led Hadewijch to formulate the warning… ‘Live exclusively for holy Love out of pure love, not because of the satisfaction you might find by communing with his love in your devout exercises.’⁴⁵

Spiritual indifference to suffering and/or reward, noted by Foucault as a key aspect of the counter-conduct of medieval asceticism, has its greatest exemplar

---

⁴⁴ She daringly mentions a Beguine woman burned at the stake by Robert le Bougre “because of her true love.” Quoted in McGinn, The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350), 221.

⁴⁵ Mommaers and Dutton, Hadewijch: Writer, Beguine, Love Mystic, 104.
in the Flemish mystic who may well have, if indirectly, influenced Meister Eckhart’s later theories of *abegescheidenheit* (detachment) and *Gelassenheit* (relaseasement).  

4. Dynamic Eschatology

Such stormy love, not surprisingly, tends to upset traditional hierarchies. Hadewijch is unique among the Beguines for the way she plays with the courtly love paradigm, often positioning herself as knight pursuing her God, who is figured as Lady Love.  

---

46 Given that Hadewijch wrote in Middle Dutch, a language Eckhart would not have read, scholars are reluctant to ascribe direct influence. Yet there is general agreement that, as the Catholic scholar Louis Bouyer puts it, “All these paradoxes are actually not his creation. He holds them because of the contemplative spiritual milieu in which he worked. And there can no longer be any doubt about their source, more precisely, their first author. It was a woman, an exceptional contemplative, from one century prior to the theology that we would consider Eckhartian. This was Hadewijch of Antwerp, whose thought was relayed to Eckhart (thus “activating” him as a mystical writer, so to speak) by a scarcely less inspired disciple, who, for want of her real identity, has been called Hadewijch II.” Louis Bouyer, *Women Mystics : Hadewijch of Antwerp, Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Edith Stein* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 19. More recently, see Paul Dietrich has noted that earlier than Eckhart, Hadewijch employed the phrase “sonder waeromme” (“without why”) and suggests that Eckhart’s famous Predigt 52 on spiritual poverty has ‘striking parallels’ to Hadewijch’s thought. This leads him to tentatively suggest, following Alois Hass, that she “may have exercised a considerable influence on Eckhart’s notion of abgescheidenheit.” Paul A. Dietrich in Paul A. Dietrich in Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics : Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete* (New York: Continuum, 1994b), 43.  

twelfth century love mystics and articulates a true mutuality in which even God is vulnerable to the parries of fiery \textit{minne}.

More pointedly, Hadewijch sees \textit{orewoet/minne} upsetting that most anxiously guarded of all hierarchies, that of heaven and hell. If hell is the highest name of love for the Flemish mystic, this is because love is, to return to a theme of the second chapter, rather grotesque in nature, refusing to stay put on either side of the eschatological line. As Mary Suydam has noted,

Hadewijch’s descriptions of heaven emphasize features commonly associated with medieval ideas about hell, namely, the yawning abyss, eternal flames, and utter darkness. In fact, one of Hadewijch’s poems in couplets declares that “Hell is the highest name of Love.”

Not only does Hadewijch’s heaven have some strikingly hellish images, but, Suydam notices, “there are no bridges, ladders, gates, or other boundaries demarcating the heavens (or their inhabitants) from each other or from purgatory or hell.”

Heaven is not static and immutable, freezing the saints into sterile perfection unmoved by the cries of the damned below. Rather, her heaven is deeply active, a traumatized grotesque, an impure world of desire


\footnote{Ibid.}
and abysses, in which “whirls the hidden storms of a powerful, restless divinity”. ⁵⁰

Because minne is what it is, and is ever-present in heaven, heaven is home to “disgrace, madness, engulfment” ⁵¹ and all the other aspects of orewoet which we have seen. Even ontrouwe, unfaith, finds a home in heaven!

It appeared to them that they were alone in loving and that Love did not help them. Unfaith made them so deep that they wholly engulfed Love and went up to her with the sweet and the bitter…These now came forth adorned like Love…I know the number of these persons, which is very small, and I know all those who belong to it, the ones in heaven and the ones on earth. ⁵²

Foucault’s carnivalistic reversals are clearly in evidence in the Flemish mystic’s visions of heaven. Suydam sums up Hadewijch’s dynamic eschatology this way: “The demands of loving [in Hadewijch] requires the strength to live in an undifferentiated world which is not wholly accessible to the rational mind.” ⁵³

Her eschatology was, as Foucault suggests, both a theological and political challenge to the church of her day, one which rejected “metaphysical speculation” ⁵⁴ about heaven and hell in the next life in favor of an existential realization of the porous, grotesque life of love in the midst of heaven, love in

---

⁵⁰ Ibid.
⁵¹ Ibid., 130.
⁵³ Ibid., 132.
⁵⁴ Bouyer, Women Mystics: Hadewijch of Antwerp, Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Edith Stein, 52.
the midst of hell. Hadewijch’s heaven, full of the stormy anguish of erotic desire, could not so easily be deployed by the church as an enticing reward for obedience, nor could hell be viewed as a simple punishment given minne’s inextricable connection to it.

5. Hadewijch’s Community of Those Who Have Hell in Common

As Bernard McGinn has aptly noted, Hadewijch’s writing is always intending a community, in particular the community of Beguine sisters with whom she lived, worked and prayed. As women who did not come under the protection of a recognized monastic order, their communities were vulnerable to the predations and whims of forces beyond their power to control. We have already noted Hadewijch’s tribute to “a beguine killed by Master Robert because of her true love.” This is one of the few pieces of historical information we have regarding Hadewijch, that she was in regular contact with Beguine women who were under increasing suspicion of heresy. Hadewijch’s theology of love conquering God through hell led her to associate without fear with such suspect women, and in her writing she indicates why.

55 So Suydam concludes her remarkable essay, “Rather, Hadewijch’s visions were meaningful to those medieval seekers, male and female, who believed that the goal of godly living was not to get to heaven as a place of glory in some future time, nor to enact heaven on earth, but to be heavenly—that is, to live in the state of dynamism characteristic of God and heaven.” (133)
Love has put in chains our heart and powers / And all our mind and will; / And the man in us must undergo / As many sufferings as this life holds: / With the miserable, he must suffer need; / With the slain, death; / With beggars, he suffers bodily torment; / And with lovers, pain of soul. / He who wishes to stand at Love’s service for Love’s sake / Must undergo pressure from many sides. (336)

Noting this deeply communal aspect of her love, McGinn highlights her use of the resignatio theme in Romans 9:2-3.

The beguine’s works, especially her letters, are full of discussions of the necessity of serving others in love and humility. In L 2 she adopts the Pauline language (see Rom. 9:3) of being willing to ‘be deprived of the Beloved’ if this would be of assistance to the salvation of others (the resignatio ad infernum motif).”

Swirling erotically from heaven to hell and back again, Hadewijch and her community eluded the rigidly hierarchical order of the thirteenth century. Their poverty made them independent and suspect, and the boldness of Hadewijch’s theological insights, written in the non-scholastic language of Middle Dutch, made their community deeply troublesome to the ordering impulses of the day. Mommaers concludes:

“Here we see, in the area of literary culture, something happening similar to the waves the beguines would also make at other levels of the social structure. They formed an ‘intermediate state’. They fell between the scaffolding of the medieval order. Where could one situate a woman such as Hadewijch, who burst through the established organization by writing such things in medieval Dutch? She signaled danger.”

---

Though we do not know whether Hadewijch’s life ended similarly to the Beguine martyr to whom she pays tribute, Mommaers thinks so, writing that “we have reason to assume that indeed people probably ‘grilled’ a lady of her stature.”

Vision Eleven: Augustine’s Heaven vs. Hadewijch’s Hell

Nowhere is Hadewijch’s articulation of the resignatio ad infernum more explicit than in her eleventh vision. In it she is caught up into an abyss where she sees and has a mystical union with St. Augustine. Because so many of the resignatio gestures we have been exploring are found in this remarkable vision, we will conclude our discussion of Hadewijch with a closer look at this exemplary text.57

“One Christmas night, when I was lying in bed in a very depressed frame of mind, I was suddenly taken up in the spirit.” (117) Already at the outset, Hadewijch has provided us with a rather grotesque setting for her vision. Christmas, the night of the birth of Christ, is meant to be one of the most joyous of all nights for a Christian. Instead, the Beguine languishes on her bed with what might be called a debilitating case of the blues. This is only the first

57 Unless otherwise indicated, I will be citing Sheila Hughes’ translation found in Emilie Zum Brunn, Georgette Epiney-Burgard, eds., Women Mystics in Medieval Europe (New York: Paragon House, 1989), pp. 117-121. Hereafter citations will be within the text by the pagination of this edition. The Middle Dutch edition I refer to is Hadewych, De visionen, trans. Jozef van Mierlo (Leuven: S.V. de Vlaamsche Boekenhalle, 1924).
of many indications that she means to complicate the Augustinian-Thomist understanding of the beatific vision of God. The Christmas setting is also significant, as we will see, for being the very moment in which the two natures, divine and human, are first brought into union. While Christians are used to seeing this union in rather bucolic, even sentimental ways, Hadewijch will continue to challenge this with her theological grotesqueries.

So, when Hadewijch is “taken up in the spirit,” she finds herself in a disturbing realm that can only with serious qualifications be called “heaven.”

“There I saw a very deep whirlpool, wide and extremely dark. And in this vast abyss all things were included, packed together and compressed.” The image is striking on a number of levels. As McGinn has noted, the use of abyss language to describe either God or the heavenly realm was studiously avoided by Augustine, for whom, as we saw in Chapter Three, the image conjured up hell.\(^{58}\) For Hadewijch, however, to speak of the divine realm as an abyss is to challenge the notion that the divine-human encounter is circumscribed or static in any way. It is a world of endless \textit{movement}, as implied by the Dutch word used here, \textit{wiel}.\(^{59}\)

At the very same time, however, Hadewijch tells us that everything in this abyss is “packed together and compressed.” Here is a classic image of hell


\(^{59}\) Our English word wheel is a cognate.
as an oppressive stenochoria. Hadewijch does nothing to resolve the felt contradiction between the vastness and the compression of this grotesque space. She merely acknowledges the inadequacy of her terms and moves on. The reader, however, cannot help but sense that for Hadewijch, traditional boundaries between heaven and hell are already being challenged.

To suggest that the cosmos itself is less than (or more than!) orderly is to indicate that traditionally ordered hierarchies, such as that of divine-human, will be open to question as well. Significant, then, is Hadewijch’s very next image. “I saw the Lamb take possession of our Loved one,” she writes, an image that alludes to a scene in the Apocalypse of John:

Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. (NRSV)

In his notes on the Dutch text, van Mierlo is clearly a bit puzzled by Hadewijch’s version of this biblical scene. The first problem is her use of the verb besetten, translated here as “take possession.” Such a gesture threatens to upend the hierarchical staging of the biblical scene, in which the Lamb is on the

---

60 She adds a classic apophatic punctuation to her description: “I cannot put into words what is indescribable.”
61 Van Mierlo tells us it is from Rev. 5:7. Columba Hart, in her English translation, has 5:6. As we will see, part of the difficulty is that Hadewijch has transformed the scene quite significantly. My citation above includes both verses.
62 In modern Dutch, bezitten. The German verb besitzen is a cognate. Though it can also mean simply to “hold,” a less problematic image, both Hart and Hughes translate it as “take possession.”
receiving end and the one on the throne is clearly in “possession” of the scroll representing the Godhead’s gnosis. There is the added problem that, as Hart notes in her introduction, Hadewijch employs the word *lief*, here translated as *Loved One*, “either for Christ or for the soul.”

If we reject for the moment the idea that the one sitting on the throne is the soul, then we have the odd image of the lamb (Christ) taking possession of the Beloved, who is also Christ.

Van Mierlo ignores this problem and instead tries to resolve matters by appealing to unidentified artistic renderings of this scene, in which the Lamb, representing Christ, is shown with his paws on the lap of the one seated on the throne, who van Mierlo tells us stands for the Godhead. He thinks that Hadewijch must have something like this in mind, with the Lamb representing Christ’s *humanity* (*Menscheid*) being “united” to the Godhead.

This interpretation has the advantage of highlighting Hadewijch’s rather brilliant and bold move of putting into close contiguity the uniting of the divine-human natures (the Christmas context) with that of the Godhead and the Son (Revelation 5:6-7). It does so, however, at the price of ignoring the more problematic aspects of Hadewijch’s text.

---

64 *De visionen*, 110.
65 Ibid. So he glosses Hadewijch’s use of *besetten* with the less troublesome language of uniting (*vereenigen*).
66 That is, van Mierlo simply ignores that nowhere as far as I know does Hadewijch use *lief* to refer to the Godhead. When referring to the latter in Vision Eleven, for example, she simply uses the Middle Dutch word, *godheit* (*De Visionen*, 118).
Yet what if we take seriously the beguine’s language here, which is rarely imprecise? What might it mean to say that the Lamb (\textit{lam}) takes possession of the Beloved (\textit{lief}) if we hold to Hart’s view that the latter refers to either Christ or the soul? My own view is that we must look more closely at the biblical scene, rather than to the artistic renderings to which van Mierlo appeals. For what is notable about the artistic tradition is how often it covers over the \textit{trauma} that the biblical writer envisions being brought into the heavenly realm.

To cite the text a second time, this time adding the relevant Greek term:

Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered (\textit{sphazoo}), having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne.\textsuperscript{67}

English readers, so used to the King James Bible’s rendering of the word as “slain” have had the traumatic violence of this scene repeatedly occluded from their eyes/ears. This occlusion is repeated in many of the classic artistic renderings of the passage.\textsuperscript{68} Yet if we look at it without these softening lenses, the harshness of the scene is palpable. Here trauma, figured as a slaughtered

---

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Sphazoo} in the New Testament is use for quite violent and traumatic scenes. It describes Cain’s murder of Abel in 1 John 3:12. In \textit{Revelation}, in addition to describing Jesus’ death on the cross, it is used of the murdering of the saints and prophets in addition to the apocalyptic violence of the end times.

\textsuperscript{68} For example, see the most famous rendering, Van Eyck’s “Adoration of the Mystic Lamb in the Ghent Altarpiece. There is hardly any indication of a slaughter as the lamb stands erect, regal, and all too heavenly a creature to match the biblical description of it “standing as if it had been slaughtered.”
lamb, is brought into the heavenly realm—we might even say, with Hadewijch, that it “takes possession” of love itself (lief). Here what Hadewijch finds significant is how the rupture of God’s birth in the soul and through the body of Mary at Christmas is something that not only affects humanity but reverberates, and “takes hold” (besetten) of the fullness of God in Christ (lief). From the moment of the birth of Christ on that first Christmas Eve to his violent death on the cross, a double wound has occurred, rending both heaven and earth with shrieks of pain.

At this point in the vision, the trauma is merely hinted at with the image of a languishing Hadewijch contemplating a (slaughtered) lamb. The dominant image in the vision at this point is the Augustinian one which the beguine calls the “festivities” (feeste) going on in the divine realm, including King David playing the harp. This is followed by a description of a “Child being born in the secret part of loving souls” (118). The image is one familiar to readers of Eckhart as that of the birth of Christ in the contemplative’s soul, and it continues the Christmas day imagery. As in Eckhart, this birth of Christ in the soul is contemporaneous with what McGinn calls the mystical “union of indistinction.” Here, the soul and the abyss of divine love are merged so that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to know who is who in the ensuing

---

69 Of course, even this image is capable of ambiguity. For assiduous readers of Scripture, David is as well known for his “psalms of lament” as he is for his celebratory psalms.

exchange. Crucially, Hadewijch describes this realm as one in which souls are “hidden from their own eyes in the deep abyss of which I speak, and lacking nothing, except to be lost (dolen) forever in this abyss.” Classical Christian mysticism tends to think of union as re-orienting the soul, a process in which the soul, having become lost in false distinctions and dissipation, is “found” in a hierarchically ordered union with the divine ground. By contrast Hadewijch here speaks of a further stage of union beyond the classical vision, one in which the soul wanders or meanders in what Eckhart will think of as the “desert” of indistinction.71 Here, the multivalence of some of her key terms, as we saw already in lief, is of theological import.72 This wandering or meandering outside of the distinct, highly ordered architectonic of the Augustinian eschatology thus marks a key intervention Hadewijch is making, as her next scene makes explicit.

Then I saw a bird arriving, the one called phoenix. It swallowed up a gray eagle that was young and an old eagle with young yellow feathers. These eagles were ceaselessly flying about in the depths of the abyss...As regards the eagles who were swallowed up, one was St. Augustine and the other was myself (118).

The image of a phoenix is striking here. A traditional Christian image of the resurrection, it includes within it the image of hell and its fires, which the phoenix, like the Christ is figures, somehow survives. Hadewijch’s only other

71 While both Hart and Hughes translate Hadewijch’s Dutch word as “lost”, this risks courting confusion, especially as they both choose the same English word later in the text to translate another Dutch word, uerloren. While this latter word, like its German cognate, verloren, often has the connotation of damnation in theological settings, the former can refer to wandering or even meandering off the beaten track.
72 Or, as we have already discussed, in the equally important term, minne.
use of the term signals that hell is very much in her mind in using this figure. In Couplet Sixteen, “The Seven Names of Love,” she writes:

By the fire, she burns them in the Unity,
Just as in the fire of the salamander
The phoenix burns to ashes and metamorphoses itself (357).

By linking together the salamander and the phoenix, Hadewijch here recalls Augustine’s classic defense of the eternal torment by hell-fire that the damned will undergo. Just as the salamander can sit in fire and not be burned up, so Augustine thinks that the damned can burn eternally without the fire ever annihilating their tormented flesh. Now, Hadewijch suggests that both she and Augustine are swallowed up by just such a hell-bearing creature, giving the distinct impression that both she and the bishop have themselves become united in a cosmic abyss in which heaven and hell are no longer clearly distinct.

The thought that Hadewijch is daring to critique the most revered theologian in all of Christian theology is one that some readers of her text have had a hard time accepting. What immediately follows this image of the phoenix swallowing the two mystics, however, leaves little doubt that

73 Augustine refers to this dubious example from nature in his defense of hell in Book XXI of The City of God. Augustine, and R. W. Dyson, The City of God Against the Pagans (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1048.
74 For example, van Mierlo nervously deals with this passage and the one immediately following by insisting that her invocation of Augustine shows that she is an ardent admirer and follower of the bishop. See De visionen, 113. While this is no doubt true as far as it goes, it is simply willed ignorance to think that she is also not engaged in a rather fierce critique of Augustinian eschatology.
Hadewijch has in mind a “metamorphosis,” via hell, of the Augustinian doctrines of God, love, and heaven.

The eaglet with gray feathers, old and young at the same time, was myself, commencing and growing in Love. The old eagle with the young yellow feathers was St. Augustine, old and perfect in the Love of our Beloved. The “oldness” in me came from the perfect nature of by eternal being, although I was young as regards my created nature. The young feathers of the old eagle were the new splendor he received from my great love for him and my desire to be united to him in the single Love of the Trinity, where he himself burns so totally with an unextinguishable love. And this youthful color of the old eagle’s feathers also stands for the eternal youth of Love which continuously grows in Heaven and on earth. The phoenix that swallowed up the two eagles is the Unity of the Holy Trinity where both of us were lost (uerloren).

Both Augustine and Hadewijch go through a metamorphosis in their fiery union into the Love of the Trinity. Augustine’s love of God is not in doubt, as he already “burns so totally with an unextinguishable love.” Yet, like the souls who “lacked nothing, except to be lost forever in this abyss,” Augustine’s love had grown old, if not cold. It was, she suggests, too static, too satisfied, and needed something else in order to grow. This something he receives from Hadewijch when she claims that old Augustine receives “new splendor” and an infusion of her “desire.” In union with her, the bishop’s love is re-ignited, so that now it “continuously grows in Heaven and on earth.”

Though, significantly, Hadewijch is the proximate cause of the bishop’s metamorphosis, while her own, the “old feathers” come from the “perfect nature of her eternal being,” and not from the bishop. Again the suggestion is that the bishop has more to gain from her than she does from him!
if we take the penultimate word of this brief tableau, *uiterloren*, with full theological seriousness, it would seem that in the phoenix’ abyssal union of the bishop with the fierce beguine he is finally, irretrievably lost and given the taste of love’s hell which is Hadewijch’s most insistent gift and vision. “The phoenix that swallowed up the two eagles is the Unity of the Holy Trinity,” where all of Augustine’s carefully drawn boundaries between God and human, heaven and hell, pride and humility, are overwhelmed and the “dikes quickly burst” (120). Augustine, theologian of trauma and rightfully concerned with the need for boundaries and distinctions, would undoubtedly look at Hadewijch’s vision of this abyss and find it a nightmare.

It seems that Hadewijch realized this as well. In Letter Twenty-Two, she acknowledges that there are a number of different ways in which “God pours forth his Unity” (96). One of these ways is the “way of hell” we have been discussing throughout this section (99). Another is the way of those who “live on earth as if in heaven” (97). There is also a way of purgatory (98-99). There seems no doubt but that Hadewijch herself tends toward the way of hell in her own spiritual itinerary. Yet it is clear in the letter that she in no way means to insist that all follow her way. She concludes her discussion of the ways to God:

> Since we enter within God by *all these ways*—through himself, through heaven, through hell, and through purgatory—God is uncircumscribed, although he is within all (99, my emphasis).

---

76 Page numbers for this letter refer to the Hart translation.
A dialectic of distinction and indistinction is here at work. It is precisely God’s nature as indistinct, loving abyss of love—“uncircumscribed” in this passage—that allows Hadewijch to honor and uphold each of these distinct ways of being in union with God.

This insight is relevant to the next section of the Vision in which Hadewijch “returned” from her vision and reflects upon what she has seen. Quite remarkable for vision literature, she engages in a rigorous questioning of the vision’s veracity and considers to what extent it revealed more of her own desire, to have Augustine dragged or “swallowed” into the way of hell she prefers, than it did the divine will. So she writes,

I was not happy about what my Beloved had allowed, in spite of my consent and my inclination. I was overwhelmed by the thought that this union with St. Augustine had made me perfectly happy, whereas before I had known union with God alone, far from saints and men. And I understood that, neither in heaven nor when taken up in the spirit, can one enjoy one’s own will, unless it is in accordance with the will of Love. After pondering on this matter, I asked my beloved God to deliver me from this imperfection. For I wished to remain in fruition only within His deepest abyss. And I also understood that, since my childhood, God had attracted me to Himself, far from all others whom He gathers to Himself in different manners (119, emphasis mine).

Unhappy with her happiness in the vision, it would seem that what Hadewijch is troubled by is that in her union with Augustine, even though it is on her terms, she has abandoned her solitary way of hell. For the vision is one in
which Hadewijch receives reassuring consolation, *via her union with the great Augustine*, that her way of hell is indeed a higher way to God. Paradoxically, by wanting the great bishop to share her damnation (*uerloren*), she is no longer seeking God alone, but her own re-assurance that she is not utterly lost. The way of hell, as we will soon see, is a lonely road, full of rebukes and rejections, and so the vision, implying that she might receive Augustine’s favor, is more of a willful fantasy than it is an “accordance with the will of Love.”

Not surprisingly, given the Augustinian context in which she writes, the issue for Hadewijch is freedom (*vribeit*). Augustine famously rejected the notion that freedom is reducible to doing whatever one wants. Rather, freedom must be tied to an end in accordance with God, so that his famous pear-tree incident in the *Confessions*, far from being an instance of his “freedom” to do what he wants, is instead indicative of his “slavery” to sin. Here Hadewijch agrees with him, but extends the Augustinian understanding to include the freedom to go to hell out of love.

I do not claim to be more privileged than St. Augustine but, having known the truth of Being, I did not want to be consoled or have my suffering alleviated by him, a human creature; neither did I want to rely on the security given me in this union with St. Augustine, for I am a free human creature and partially pure and I can, through my will, freely desire and will as high as I wish and seize and receive from God all that He is, without encountering contradiction or refusal on His part, and this is what no saint can do (119).
Consolation (*recreatie*) and security (*sékerheit*), two of the great Bishop’s favorite words for describing his heaven, are hereby rejected by Hadewijch as limitations on the freedom which lies at the essence of her divinely created human nature. In a scene that anticipates by a good six hundred years or so the Grand Inquisitor’s offer of security and leisure at the price of human freedom, Hadewijch rejects the offer which she sees coming from Augustine and from accepting union with him in heaven.\(^7\)

Augustine’s saints, she argues, are free, but only within the rather sharply drawn limits of the Augustinian privileging of security and satisfaction. “In fact, in the other world, the will of the saints is perfectly accomplished and they cannot wish for more than they possess” (119). Like the Augustine she imagined prior to his being singed by her eternal, youthful desire, the saints in his heaven are sated by heaven’s endless “feasts” (*feeste*). By contrast, Hadewijch keeps herself hungry. “As for me, I have rejected many wonderful experiences and states because I wanted to belong to Love alone…” And, so it would seem, she rejects the “wonderful experience” of the vision itself, in which her “way of hell” receives the Augustinian imprimatur via their mutual union within the fiery Godhead. The abyss of God is “vast” (*vaste*). It can include both

\(^7\) What is crucial is that here she wants to hold together what Augustine says is impossible: God, hell and love. She calls it a unity, but it is a unity that allows for no repose. The issue is that she sees true liberty as impossible in Augustine’s vision of heaven which will not allow the saints to “move” out of heaven in concerned for the damned.
Augustine’s heaven and Hadewijch’s hell. But for Hadewijch, this will be experienced as an isolating constriction (*bedwongen*).

Calling this endless desire “pure love” (*purre minnen*), she is eager to insist on its felt difference from the Augustinian view of heavenly love. “But I have never experienced Love as repose (*rasten*), so much have I been overwhelmed by the weight and disfavor of love” (120). This is in direct contradiction to the Augustinian view of heavenly love as the ultimate rest (*quietis*). And not only is love metamorphosed when it is “swallowed” in the abyss. So too is God, who is identified with this abyssal desire.

For I was a human creature and the Deity is so terrible and implacable, devouring and consuming without mercy. The soul, contained in a narrow riverbed, when flooded, soon overflows and her dikes quickly burst, and thus the Divinity rapidly engulfs her (the soul) within Itself.⁷⁸

The Beguine admits that she has at times envied the repose of Augustine and the saints. But she quickly adds that it was something she could not share, so closely did she identify with the sufferings of the damned. She puts herself in the Augustinian scene of the saints above rejoicing while the damned are in agony below:

What inquietude for me was their quietude which brought me forty pains for one single pleasure! To know that they were smiled

---

⁷⁸ Hart, seeking to soften the harshness of Hadewijch’s vision, silently substitutes the word “Love” for “Deity.” Yet there is no doubting the beguine’s charge. God is “soe onghenadeleec.” The German word, *gnadenlos*, is a cognate.
upon while I wept; that they were jubilant while I was groaning; that in every land they were honored by God and God was honored because of them, while I was derided (120).

At this point one might expect that envy would turn to resentment or even hatred, as the beguine contemplated the image of Augustine and the saints safely ensconced in heaven above. Hadewijch, however, rejects this opportunity, stressing that as one with intimate knowledge of the sufferings of hell, she does not want this for others. “But what each one had in Love, that I loved for God, so that He might strengthen this love and help it reach perfection: such was my desire.” Hadewijch’s resignatio, we might say, is a singularity, something that can only be taken on oneself, and never desired for another.

Indeed, as she turns next to the image of the damned, she expresses her fervent desire for the relief of their suffering. Here, not surprisingly, she appeals directly to Moses and to Romans 9:2-3 to express her desire.

[It] made me suffer so terribly when I considered that He had left these souls as strangers to Him, deprived of all the good that He Himself is in Love. At times I was so crushed by these thoughts that I felt as Moses did on account of his love for his sister. My wish was that he should withdraw love from me and give it to others; I would have liked to be hated by God, if this could have been the price of His loving them. Sometimes, as this bargain was not possible, I would willingly have turned away from His Love and loved them in spite of His anger.79 Seeing that these

---

79 Van Mierlo references Romans 9:3 at this point in the text. See De visionen, 120. The reference to Moses and his sister is a bit puzzling, as van Mierlo admits. He suggests that Hadewijch is likely thinking of the scene in Numbers 12 where Miriam is punished by God with leprosy after she and her brother Aaron challenge Moses’ leadership. It seems to me
unfortunate souls could not know the secret and ardent love that
dwells in His holy nature, I would gladly have loved them, had I
been able to do so (121).

Here our interpretation of Hadewijch must proceed with great care. It can
easily be assumed, as numerous interpreters of Romans 9:2-3 and the resignatio
tradition have done, that this desire Hadewijch shares with Paul is
straightforwardly impossible (“as this bargain was not possible”) and that her
desires must be read as unrealizable wish fantasies. Both English translations of
Hadewijch seem to allow for this way of reading her. \(^80\) It is simply not possible,
so this reading goes, for God to “love” Hadewijch while simultaneously “hating”
her for the sake of her lost sisters and brothers.

Yet, in direct contradiction to this way of reading the beguine is what
immediately follows.

Ah, charitable compassion towards persons has wounded me
more than all else, except Love Herself. And what is this Love? It
is a divine power that must come before everything else, as it has

---

\(^80\) In his *Romans* commentary, Jewett notes how many interpreters silently substitute the
subjunctive for Paul’s imperfect verb, *euchomen*. This is a mistake, he thinks, writing that
“Paul avoids the subjunctive formulation with ‘an’ (‘if’) because this would render the wish
itself unreal and thus awaken the suspicion that Paul in fact had never wished such a thing.
To translate this as ‘I would pray that I myself be accursed…’ implies that the prayer was
‘unattainable or impermissible’ and therefore unlikely to have actually been made by Paul, in
which case the preceding threefold assertion of his truthfulness is reduced to claiming good
intentions.” Jewett, 560.

Regarding the English translations, here I must admit my scholarly limitations regarding
Middle Dutch. My reading does not depend upon this, instead relying on the context, as I
show above.
done in my case; for the power of Love spares nobody, in hatred or in love (121).

What may be impossible for Hadewijch, she suggests, is not impossible for Hadewijch-in-God, thus furthering the dialectical reach of the abyssal nature of God’s love-in-the-midst-of-hell. That this love is grotesque, combining what the Augustinian *ordo caritatis* holds forever apart, Hadewijch insists upon in the following two concluding paradoxes in her vision:

I have lived in sufferings, outside Love, in the love of God and of those who belong to Him. For I have not received from Him what is mine: *God still withholds what I nevertheless possess* and will remain mine (121 emphasis mine).

And there is the further paradox that to *turn against God*, in a fierce, parrhesiastic protest of the hell which love entails, may very well be the most intimate way of uniting with the divine nature:

To turn against Him would have been, for a human nature, both beautiful and free indeed: I could desire whatever I wished to. But to refrain from doing so made me participate in a closer and more beautiful way in the divine nature.\(^8\)

Her “unity” with God in the abyss of love will always be, to use two of her favorite words, *stormy* (*orewoet*) and fierce (*fierheid*). It will also be, to return to

---

\(^8\) Here my reading of this passage goes against the grain, admittedly. My view is that what Hadewijch “refrains” from is not to “turn against Him” but to “desire whatever I wished to.” This parallels her earlier rejection of her “happiness” found in her desire to have her own way of hell united with the Augustinian way. Just as she rejected her desire for “consolation” in that way, so too here she refrains from this kind of unity with God, preferring a deeper unity found, paradoxically, in turning “against Him.” Thus she is quite close to her exemplar, Job.
the Christmas scene, one in which the fullness of the human condition,
including the marks of hell and death on the flesh, is loved without limit in the
divine-human encounter. So she concludes her most remarkable vision of the
resignatio ad infernum:

I never felt Love, unless as a renewed death, until the time of my
recreatie came and God allowed me to know the perfect fierheit of
Love, and how we must love the Humanity in order to reach the Divinity
and to recognize them in one single Nature. This is the noblest
life that can be lived in the Kingdom of God. This rich peace God
bestowed on me, when it was the propitious time.\footnote{Hughes, translation modified. I have kept recreatie rather than use Hughes’ “consolation” in order to highlight the image of growth and metamorphosis. I have also kept Hadewijch’s favored word fierheit. Unfortunately, in my view, Hughes chooses “nobleness” as a translation for fierheit. A few lines later, she uses the same English word to translate werdechste (German cognate: würdig). A bit better is Hart, who translates fierheit as pride.}
Chapter Five

*The Flowering of the Resignatio ad infernum tradition Pt. II:*

*Jacopone da Todi and Marguerite Porete*

*Jacopone da Todi*

We do not need to speculate about the fate of our second figure, the Italian Spiritual Franciscan and holy fool (*bizoccone*) Jacopone da Todi (1230-1306).¹ Born into lower nobility, as a young man Jacopone entered into a prosperous career as a lawyer in his native Umbrian town of Todi. Well-married, Jacopone was on his way to a prosperous career in an economic and political landscape full of groaning inequality and massive corruption.² His life plans, however, were brutally interrupted one night when his wife Vanna, dancing at a lavish party she and Jacopo were attending, was killed in a freak accident. His trauma at this wrenching loss was compounded by his discovery that his wife had for some time been engaged in secret ascetic practices without his knowledge, causing him to believe that he had been leading her against her will into a life of dissolution.

---


² See Peck for a detailed description of the economic disparity of Jacopone’s Italy, and for the prominent role church leaders played in the exploitation of the poor.
With much of his family thinking he had lost his mind, Jacopone left behind everything and began to embark on a life of itinerant poverty and holy foolishness as a Franciscan tertiary, wandering the roads of Umbria for the next ten years. The stories of his wild and provocative actions during these years are perfect instantiations of Foucault’s view that we see the continuation of a Cynic tradition in the medieval mystics.\(^3\) Jacopone focused on the fleetingness of life, and on the need to confront one’s own death in order to live life without illusions. During these years wandering and begging, the abject poverty in which most of his neighbors lived and struggled was unavoidable, and Jacopone gradually became a fierce critic of the church’s siding with power.

After ten years of wandering outside of any established order, Jacopone finally joined the Franciscans as a monk in 1278. The order into which he entered was by then caught up in a bitter feud over economic and political matters. Their founder, St. Francis, was committed to spiritual poverty and did not provide any means for the order’s economic survival. By Jacopone’s day,

---

\(^3\) Peck details a number of these Cynic gestures and actions that Jacopone’s earlier biographer Evelyn Underhill thought too indelicate to relay to her readers! One such story is worth relating, as it reinforces Foucault’s reading of the Cynic tradition’s emphasis on death and animality. Peck quotes from a medieval collection of stories of the Italian Franciscans: “Thus one day there was a festa in the city of Todi, where was gathered a great part of the people. This blessed man in a fervor of spirit and on fire with disdain for the world, took off all his clothes, then taking a packsaddle put it on his back, set a bit in his mouth, and went about on all fours just as though he were an ass. And saddled this way he went among those who were at the festa. Through this action by divine grace he spread such terror that all were moved with compunction of heart, considering how Ser Jacopone, so famous a procurator of the city of Todi, had taken on such lowliness. And all the people at that festa were confused and drawn from vanity in bitterness and sorrow of heart.” (52)
much had changed and the Franciscans were heavily invested in papal power
and the perks that went with it. A reform movement known to us as the
Spiritual Franciscans fought fiercely for a return to the ideals of Francis. The
Spiritual Franciscans challenged the corruption in the order, especially among
the papal legates and professors of theology in the great universities of Paris
and Bologna. Against these reformers stood the Conventual Franciscans who
argued that the economic and political power they had gained since Francis’
time, especially in the papal appointments they now frequently received, was a
good not to be relinquished.

Given his experience of having lost everything that mattered to him in
one brief moment, Jacopone sided with the Spiritual Franciscans out of a
theological and political instinct quite similar to what we have seen in
Hadewijch.

When his fellow Umbrian Benedetto Gaetani was elevated to the papacy
as Boniface VIII, Jacopone, along with two other of his Franciscan brothers,
entered into open rebellion by signing the Longhezza Manifesto which denied the
legitimacy of Benedetto’s papacy. Boniface, generally considered one of the
most corrupt of all the medieval popes,\(^4\) was incensed, and after summary
excommunications for Jacopo and his brothers, quickly attacked the Umbrian
city of Palestrina where the three rebels were holed up. In a scene reminiscent

\(^4\) He earned a place in Dante’s eighth circle of hell, for example, as a simonist.
of Béziers, Boniface’s men, after a year and a half of slowly starving the city’s inhabitants, finally breached the walls and destroyed the entire city. Jacopone was captured and thrown into a dank underground prison cell in the Franciscan monastery of San Fortunato at Todi, where he remained in solitary confinement for the next five years.

It was in this dank prison cell that Jacopone wrote a series of ninety-three poems, known as Lauds, which Bernard McGinn calls “among the treasures of prison literature.” In Laud Fifty-Five, the holy fool describes his surroundings:

My hood taken away, a life term before me, chained like a lion.

My prison, underground, opens on a latrine
Whose odor is not quite the fragrance of musk.
No one is allowed to speak to me, except for one attendant,
And he has to report every word I utter.

I am fettered like a falcon,
And my chains clank as I move about—
The attendant outside my lodgings

---

5 McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*, 125. It might be asked, as scholars over the years have often done, why Jacopone’s writings are not better known. Some, as Peck notes, perhaps influenced by the stories of the poet’s Cynic-like behavior, dismiss Jacopone as an inferior, crude poet, especially as compared to Dante. Peck argues convincingly that this is mere prejudice. More likely, it is due to Jacopone’s obscure dialect of Umbrian, which few scholars have mastered. That and his deeply ambiguous place in Franciscan history (because of his attack on the Pope) combine to leave the monk relatively free of scrutiny. There are exceptions. In addition to Peck’s work, there is the remarkable recent book by the medievalist Cary Howie, which includes a chapter dedicated to Jacopone. See Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).
Can hear me practicing my new dance steps.⁶

Jacopone’s disarming wit, a Socratic characteristic to which we will return, should not distract us from the utterly abject nature of his new home.

The prison cell, adjacent to an open latrine, was not high enough for him even to sit up, so the “dance steps” Jacopone refers to are his agonizing attempts to move even a modest amount in his cell. It is, with its stenochorial cruelty and proximity to the stench of death, hell on earth, a fact which Jacopone highlights in Laud 57 writing,

The members of my Order weep for me  
As I stand on the brink of Hell. (179)

Yet, as biographer George Peck notes, Jacopone’s long ascetical training, first as a bizoccone and now as a Spiritual Franciscan, has in some sense led him to just this place, much as Socrates was led to his hemlock and to his refusal, in spite of Crito’s pleas, to budge. He was in no way naïve about what his signature to the Longhezza Manifesto would mean for him, and his poems in his prison suggest no regret at this decision. This is not to say that Jacopone could ignore the sufferings he endured, as if in a grand gesture of dissociation from his surroundings. The poems are filled with joy, but this joy is grotesquely

---

⁶ Jacopone, Serge Hughes, and Elizabeth Hughes. The Lauds. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 174. All citations will be taken from this edition unless otherwise indicated with page references given in the text.
mingled with abject suffering, with no attempt to privilege or deny one or the other. As he will put it in Laud 38, in this hell

> Love and hatred, that is to say,  
> Are locked in unending struggle  
> In the selfsame heart. (135)

Jacopone’s hatred, expressed in the *parrhesiastic* fury with which he continues to condemn Boniface’s greed and exploitation, continues even in prison, undiminished by his outward circumstances. In Laud Fifty Eight he spits:

> Pope Boniface, you’ve had a good deal of fun in this world;  
> You’ll not be very lighthearted, I suspect, as you leave it…  
> You were always intent on accumulating riches  
> But now you find licit gains are not enough;  
> You’ve taken to stealing like a vicious highwayman. (180)

Jacopone’s *parrhesia* is remarkable and consistent throughout, and he calls upon the apocalyptic themes of the Joachimite tradition within the Franciscan order to criticize the political economy of the church.\(^7\) In Laud Fifty, he writes, in images drawn from the Book of Revelation and elsewhere,

> The moon is the Church in Christ, dressed in mourning;  
> Guided by other popes and cardinals it once illumined the night,  
> Now that radiance is blotted black. The whole clergy  
> Has spurred it to a mad gallop along the path to destruction.

---

\(^7\) Foucault, as was noted above, highlighted the apocalyptic thought of the Franciscan Joachim of Fiore as a powerful form of counter-conduct in relativizing the ordering impulses of governmentality. Peck notes in passing that this Joachimite tradition influenced Jacopone considerably.
Lord God, who shall be saved?

The stars that have fallen out of heaven
Are the religious orders, fallen on evil days.
The flood waters have risen,
Submerged the mountains and plains;
Help us, O Lord, or we drown! (166)

Yet what is so remarkable, as McGinn, Peck and other scholars have noted, is how even at his most vehement, Jacopone never gives in to either self-pity or unremitting bitterness. There is a remarkable openness of spirit in the Franciscan, so that he can write, in Laud Thirteen,

A raging, sulphurous fire,
Smothers the soul
In which it takes lodging

Come, people, come,
And marvel at what you see:
Yesterday the soul was hell,
Today it is paradise! (91)

Amor esmesurato

What sustained the Umbrian monk during these five unimaginably long years, with hell in his heart and with so little human conduct and with no hope for release from his chains?

It would be too simple, and only partly accurate, to say that in Jacopone’s terms, it was the love of Christ which sustained him. Amor and amor Iesù are indeed among the friar’s favorite words, and in some lauds they have an
almost incantatory quality. Yet it is clear when reading the Franciscan’s brutally honest lauds that this love is itself a mixed blessing, equally open to traumatic loss as it is to unrestrained joy. So, in Laud Seventy Five he stages an imaginary argument with someone who seems to take the *amor Iesù* far too optimistically, and rebukes Jacopone for his desire to flee from its clutches.

‘The cross is my joy, Brother,  
Do not call it torment;  
Perhaps you have not become one with it,  
Not embraced it as your spouse.’

[[Jacopone]:  
The cross warms you but sets me on fire;  
For you it is joy, for me searing pain. How can I stay  
In this blazing furnace? Not to have experienced it  
Is not to know the heat of the flame. (227)

The dialogue reminds one of Job’s dialogue with his friends, and Jacopone joins with Job in arguing that love and hell are, for him, in agonizing proximity.

As he writes in the beginning of what is perhaps his most famous, Laud Ninety,

Why do you wound me, cruel charity.  
Bind me and tie me tight?  
My heart all trembling, in fragments,  
Encircled by flames,  
Like wax melts into death.  
I ask for respite. None is granted.

---

8 See especially Laud 90, where Jacopone punctuates each line of the conclusion of the laud with this word, *amor.*
My heart, cast into a blazing furnace,  
Lives and dies in that fire. (257)

Love of God is a kind of spiritual sickness, Jacopone thinks, leading to a holy madness whose lineaments he draws on the wall of his heart during his years of captivity. As in the Song of Songs, which is a potent intertext here for Jacopone, the heart is mad because though the lover knows that hell is quite often the terrain in which it will lead one, the lover loves nevertheless, almost in spite of himself.

I would give it all away for Love.  
And yet Love still plays with me,  
Makes me act as if out of my senses,  
Destroys me and draws me I know not where—  
But since I sold myself I have no power to resist. (258)

The richness of Jacopone’s theology of love, which thus moves beyond either optimism or simple joy, is perhaps best captured by focusing on his concept of “measureless love” (amor esmerurato) which McGinn notes was among the most unique and provocative ideas in the Franciscan’s idiom. The term occurs in a number of Jacopone’s lauds. Laud Eighty Four, in which he compares the scholastic theology of the schools of Paris and Bologna unfavorably to the measureless love of the holy fool, is representative.

The man who enrolls in this school  
Will discover a new discipline;

---

Only those who have experienced this madness
Have an inkling of what it is.

He who joins in this dance finds love beyond measure—[amor
d'esmesuranza]…

Those who seek shame and humiliation
Will soon come to their heart’s desire,
And have no further need of the University of Bologna
With its doctrines and philosophies. (241-242)

In speaking of love without measure, Jacopone is boldly challenging that
most sacred of Augustinian ideas for the medieval church, that of the ordo
caritatis. As McGinn has indicated, the ordo caritatis was of increasing importance
beginning in the twelfth century, and it finds a prominent place in the writings
of Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, and the Victorines. With
Richard of St. Victor, however, the notion is stretched to its limits. In a work
that would be deeply influential for Hadewijch and most likely for Jacopone as
well, The Four Degrees of Violent Charity, Richard concludes his discussion of the
vehemence of love by speaking of a love so vehement and heedless of proper
order that it could lead a man even to wish to be damned.10 Referring to the
resignatio ad infernum of Paul in Rom. 9:2-3 as well as to Moses in Exodus 32,
Richard writes:

10 Numerous scholars have drawn the connection between Richard and Jacopone. See V.
Louise Katainen, "Jacopone Da Todi, Poet and Mystic: A Review of the History of the
Criticism," Mystics Quarterly 22, no. 2 (June, 1996), pp. 46-57. At 49, 51; Also Peck, The Fool of
God, Jacopone Da Todi, Ch. 6.
And such a man then desires to be made anathema from Christ for his brother’s sake. What shall we say then? In this degree of love the soul of man might seem to be mad, in that it will not suffer his zeal to be kept within bounds or measure.\textsuperscript{11}

Such measureless love, Richard writes, transgresses traditional theological boundaries, such as that between humility and pride. Again referring to Paul in Rom. 9:2-3 and Exodus 32, he says:

Consider to what boldness of presumption the perfection of charity can raise up the mind of man: behold how it induces him to presume beyond the power of a man! That which he hopes of God, what he does for God and in God and effects with God, is more than merely human. How utterly wondrous and amazing! The more he hopes from God the more he abases himself for God. The more he rises up in boldness, the more he descends in humility.\textsuperscript{12}

Whether or not Jacopone knew this daring work of Richard’s, the thought is remarkably similar. If anything, Jacopone is even more bold than Richard, who was, according to McGinn, still trying to maintain the \textit{ordo caritatis} even as he stretched it here to the limits.

\textsuperscript{11} “The Four Degrees of Passionate Charity” in Richard of St. Victor, \textit{Selected Writings on Contemplation} (London: Faber and Faber, 1957). The Latin text reads: \textit{Denique cupit anathema fieri a Christo pro fratribus suis, qui ejusmodi est. Quid ergo dicemus? nonne hic amoris gradus videtur animum hominis quasi in amentiam vertere, dum non sinit eum in sua aemulatione modum, mensuramve tenere?}

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 232. The Latin text reads: \textit{ecce quonodc facit hominem ultra hominem praeumere. Sic enim totum plus est quam humanum, quod de Domino praemunit, quod pro Domino agit, quod in Domino agit, quod in Domino vivit. Totum mirum, totum stupendum. Quantum praemunit de Domino, tantum se dejicit pro Domino. Quantum ascendit per praeumptionem, tantum descendit per humiliacionem.}
In Laud Ninety, Jacopone challenges the Augustinian position directly in a staged dialogue between himself and Christ. Having spoken of the agonizing madness of love that has pierced his heart, Jacopone concludes his lyrical expression of his *amor esmesurato*:

‘My heart is no longer mine;  
I cannot see what I should do…

Love without limits immobilized my mind;  
The Love that embraces me leaves me mute,  
No longer conscious of willing or doing.

‘Once I spoke, now I am mute;  
I could see once, now I am blind.  
Oh, the depths of the abyss in which,  
Though silent, I speak; fleeing, I am bound;

Descending, I rise; holding, I am held;  
Outside, I am within; I pursue and am pursued.  
Love without limits, why do You drive me mad  
And destroy me in this blazing furnace?’ (261)

Here we see, in addition to the theme of the wound of love from the *Song*, the notion of the blindness of the spiritual desert, in which one cannot clearly demarcate traditional hierarchical distinctions.

At this point, Christ responds, rebuking Jacopone for mixing up all kinds of orders, logical ones as well as the *ordo caritatis*.

‘O you who love Me, put order into your love,  
For without order there is no virtue!  
Now that you love Me with fierce desire  
(for it is virtue that renews the soul)
You need charity, well-ordered love.
A tree is judged by its fruits.
My creation is patterned in number and measure,
Each thing according to its purpose.

‘Order maintains and sustains
Each particular function;
And this, by its very nature,
Is even more true of charity.
Why, then, has the burning intensity of love
Made you almost lose your senses?
Because you have passed the limits of order,
Because your fervor knows no restraint.’ (261)

The rebuke, though put in the mouth of Jesus, is straight out of
Augustine, and with its tying together of order and virtue, seems to leave
Jacopone with no choice but to relent to this most venerable of orthodox
theologemes.

Yet, in what Cary Howie calls a remarkable case of “mystical back-talk,”
Jacopone turns the tables on Christ, suggesting that if it is anyone’s fault that
his love is so disorderly, it is Christ’s!

Christ, You have pierced my heart,
And now You speak of orderly love.
How can I experience love of that sort
Once united with you?
Just as a red-hot iron
Or forms touched by burning colors of dawn
Lose their original contours.
So does the soul immersed in You, O Love…
You, not I, are responsible for what I do.
If I displease You, then,
You are displeasing Yourself, Love.
I know well, O Highest Wisdom,
That if I am mad, it is Your doing--… (261-262)

Unrelenting in his *parrhesiastic* display, Jacopone makes the link between madness, measureless love, and hell, insisting that this linkage is rooted in Christ’s own journey to the cross.

If it was temperance You wanted,
Why did You lead me to this fiery furnace?
In giving Yourself, the Infinite,
You canceled all measure in me. To contemplate You
As a babe was as much as my heart could bear;
How can it ever endure Your love in its fullness?
If there is fault in my immoderate love it is Yours,
Not mine: it was You who led the way, Love.

You did not defend Yourself against that Love
That made You come down from heaven to earth. (262)

Measureless love, as it is conceived by Jacopone, leads one to the “depths of the abyss” where love, madness, and hell swirl in dynamic intensity, as we saw they did in Hadewijch. As Howie writes,

the measureless thus marks the place at which virtue and vice are difficult to tell apart, where conversion and perversion, as in the life of Marie l'Egyptienne, meet at the barest point of turning. Here, however, it is less a question of the in-between space of an almost imperceptible turn than of spatial extremity: the seat of the *Deus absconditus* in the very belly of hell.”

---

Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature*, 82. Howie thus highlights an aspect of the *resignatio* tradition that stands against Foucault’s portrayal of Christian *parrhesia*. By the dismissal of virtue in Jacopone (and in Marguerite, as we will see), the authorizing power of purity for *parrhesia* is also delimited. Jacopone’s *parrhesia*, as we can see, is anything but pure.
Noteworthy is the fact that in this abyss of measureless love, Christ and the soul are themselves mingled indiscriminately. Jacopone will boldly suggest that he cannot tell at times whether the words he is speaking are his own or Christ’s, and the “mystical back-talk” is in fact authorized by this very indiscretion. (“If I displease You, then, You are displeasing Yourself.”) Because he is bound to Christ by the chains of love, he is free to speak (and act) freely.

Purity of thought is thus not at issue and the nature of virtue in relation to love is being dramatically reconceived. Jacopone alludes above to the Augustinian definition of virtue as “the order of love” from Book Fifteen of the City of God and is clearly dissatisfied with this view.

His re-conception is placed dramatically to the fore in Laud 60, which McGinn notes has strong theological similarities to both Meister Eckhart and Marguerite Porete. A poem on the nature of true spiritual poverty as the root of detached freedom, he insists that the heart must be free of creatures, a vast emptiness in which “In the great heart of Poverty God has room to dwell.” (184) Such poverty, Jacopone believes, must rid itself of all honors, including the “reputation for sanctity”. It must “cast aside the fear of Hell, the hope of Heaven”, (185) indifferent to these merely external crutches.

Though spiritual poverty may be thought of as the highest virtue, Jacopone goes further, insisting that even virtue itself must be let go of or it
can become a trap. Though hope for heaven is, in the realm of virtue, undoubtedly the goal, for one living in the land of spiritual poverty, things could not be more different:

Higher than all, the third Heaven in its infinity  
Lies beyond the reach of the imagination.  
It has stripped you of every good and every virtue,  
And what you have lost has been replaced with true treasure.

This heaven is founded on *nichil*,  
Where purified love lives in Truth.  
You see that things are not as they seemed to you,  
So high a state has been reached.

The proud win Heaven and the humble are damned;  
Between aspiration and realization yawns a great gap,  
And the man who thinks he has succeeded  
Is often the loser. (186)

Here, as in Hadewijch, a crucial distinction must be made. Jacopone is clearly resisting a *juridical* model of hell as a system of rewards and punishments in the next life, designed by the church for its own theo-political ends. Such a system, according to the Franciscan, makes a mockery of love and its vehement, extra-ordinary leaps across the boundaries of the Augustinian *ordo caritatis*. The juridical model, Jacopone insists, contains a *fantasy* heaven and a

---

14 This sort of language, not surprisingly, is what has led a number of scholars to link Jacopone to Marguerite Porete and to the so-called heresy of the free spirit. Quietism is the boogeyman feared here, though it is clear from Jacopone’s strong desire for the sacraments that he is not guilty of that particular charge.
fantasy hell (“you see things are not as they seemed to you…the proud win
Heaven and the humble are damned”).

Yet, like the Dutch Beguine, Jacopone continues to use the language of heaven and hell and it is essential to his thought. The language is much more adequately thought of as spiritual and existential, rather than metaphysical or juridical. Pope Boniface put Jacopone in hell on earth with the promise that this was a foretaste of eternal damnation, punishment without love.

Rotting in his cramped underground cell as the fetid perfume of the latrine wafted in along with the sounds of the monks of San Fortunato praying for heaven, Jacopone discerned that the Pope’s promise was a lie, and that even in this hell, love remained among the lost. With the writing of these lauds, Jacopone, a loser to the last, might have smiled at his annihilating success.

*Marguerite Porete*

It would be a mistake to think that writers as unique and uniquely gifted as Hadewijch and Jacopone stood isolated above their historical context. The beguines were a significant and rather diverse group of women, as were their

---

15 Again, Jacopone is quite close to Eckhart’s insight that loving God for the reward of heaven, of fearing him because of hell, is like loving a cow for its milk. It is delusive love.

16 It is true that in a number of Lauds, Jacopone does speak of hell as a just punishment for the sinner after his death. It is possible these Lauds are early, and represent a less mature position, or that the Franciscan monk was not completely consistent in his usage of hell language. Like the grotesque readings of the Apocalypses in chapter two, my argument does not rest on logical or theological purity in the sources. Acting out and working-through go on simultaneously, as Lacapra has noted.
male counterparts, spread throughout Europe during the thirteenth century. Their influence is difficult to track in some part because they often were at the margins of and even eluded the more visible institutional settings of the regular monastic orders. Catherine Bynum has argued that such elusiveness has at times led to frustration at pinning the movement down, or even dismissal of their importance and impact given their lack of institutional solidity.

The beguines, the only movement created by women for women before the modern period, were a puzzle to contemporary male chroniclers, who sought (as modern historians have continued to do) a specific founder for the movement and a specific legal status or rule or form of life characteristic of it. But what characterized the beguines . . . was exactly lack of leaders, rules, detailed prescriptions for the routine of the day or for self-regulation, lack of any overarching governmental structures.  

Bynum argues against the view that this lack of visible order in the beguines is a sign of their rejection by the established ecclesiastical orders of the day. Instead, she considers the possibility that the beguine women were not so much interested in institutional structures and the power that accompany them, but were, rather, “simply women in the world…being religious…simply continued their ordinary lives (whose ultimate status they usually did not control), just as the economic activity of ‘holy women”—weaving, embroidery, care of the sick and small children—continued women’s ordinary work.”

18 Ibid., 47.
Bynum’s interpretation of the beguine lack of interest in joining the established ecclesial order makes much sense of figures like Hadewijch and as we will see shortly, Marguerite Porete. Their indifference to church order, however, was a problem as far as the church was concerned as it seemed to indicate a refusal of ecclesial power’s attempts to structure women’s lives. As a result of this concern, early on in the beguine movement orthodox churchmen such as the crusading canon theologian James de Vitry and his compatriot Thomas Cantimpré made great efforts to bring these women into the fold. They incorporated as much of the beguine spirit as they could in the beguine hagiographies they wrote and furthered the orthodox cause by figuring these women as full-throated enthusiasts for the crusading church.

As Dyan Elliott has brilliantly argued, the “orthodox” beguine hagiographies of Marie d’Oignies and Lutgard of Aywieres sketched by James and Thomas were incredibly effective examples for the laity of the power orthodoxy could give women. In both hagiographies, the women were shown deploying their bodily sufferings and anguished prayers to lead even former popes out of purgatory (never hell). Even as the church created martyrs in the south of France through its crusading violence, James and Thomas, in full support of these efforts, put forth ever more macabre physical sufferings of

their beguine saints as what we might call, following Foucault, “counter
counter-conduct” to the resistance movements. As Elliott puts it,

[James] actually attempts to advance his holy women as types of
martyrs whose self-imposed sufferings would be sufficiently
compelling to eclipse the drama of heretical burnings altogether.  

Elliott argues that by presenting these women as “living relics” whose
suffering authorized their power over even their own confessors, James and
Thomas used their hagiographies to further authorize the penitential system
and pastoral power of the church, as it was clear that these women fully
accepted the regime of obedience which gave them their own power.  
James presented the sufferings of these orthodox beguines as deeply useful and even
redemptive, thus reconciling the church to the suffering of the world, a
significant part of which came at its own hands. Marie and Lutgard were thus
presented as living theodicies. Elliott notes that the hagiographies of Marie
and Lutgard were “deeply anti-heretical” documents and deeply invested in the
church’s construction of hell as a crucial aspect of pastoral power.

---

20 Ibid., 63.
21 I will not attempt to wade into the turbulent waters of interpreting to what extent we can
recover the “historical” Marie d’Oignies and Lutgard of Aywieres. One can certainly read
these texts with a more liberatory spirit than Elliott does. Her reading, however, seems to
make the most sense given the ideological commitments of their chroniclers, James and
Thomas.
22 Elliott writes, “Women’s embodied spirituality celebrated the new meaning and scope
available to physical suffering and would, in turn, assist in reconciling Christendom at large
to a world where suffering was not just inevitable but desirable. They did this by offering
themselves as object lessons for the different registers, meanings, and uses of suffering” (78).
Heretical contentions against the reality of divine judgment were extensions of their denial to human institutions—ecclesiastical and secular—of the right to pass judgment, particularly one resulting in the death sentence. Orthodoxy, in turn, insisted on the legitimacy of the various machines of justice.23

Elliott insists that we make careful distinctions between these orthodox beguine “martyrs” whose suffering authorized the church’s pastoral power, from that of the actual martyrs of the church’s power, such as the Albigensians and the beguines, like Hadewijch’s beloved sister, who were martyred by the church. The crucial differences, we could say, lies in two places: 1.) the parrhesiastic protests of Hadewijch, Jacopone and Porete, versus the sacrificial obedience and acquiescence to the usefulness of suffering of James’ and Thomas’ beguines. 2.) the rejection of a juridical model of hell in the former, and its acceptance and the latter, who find their power enhanced by legitimizing the orthodox machinery of judgment.

Discussing two stories in Thomas in which purgatorial suffering in this life is willingly accepted by its sufferers, Elliott concludes:

Nevertheless, any possible indebtedness to the theme of martyrdom still turns upon a central reversal that is essential to an understanding of the potential political ramifications of the episode… Thomas, wisely, leaves the dismemberment and torture to the criminal’s imaginative genius and his loyal relative’s execution. Even so, the implication remains that—unlike the martyrs of yore, who died bravely but defiantly at the hands of their persecutors, of whom they were righteously contemptuous (an attitude not

23 Ibid., 81.
unlike that of contemporary Cathars toward their executioners)—the new-style martyr is one who cheerfully submits to pain at the hand of a stern but ultimately benign tribunal.  

In the book she refused to renounce, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, Marguerite Porete, unlike the “orthodox” beguines, left no doubt about the nature of her protest against the church’s system of pastoral power. In Chapter Six Marguerite announces, with all the provocation she can muster, “Virtues, I take my leave of you forever.” Given the importance of the virtues in the church’s penitential system, it is no surprise she soon caught the church’s attention.

The details of Marguerite’s life and death are fairly well known. A highly educated women raised near Valenciennes, France, she wrote her first version of *The Mirror* some time before 1305. Her provocative work caught the attention of the Italian canon lawyer and bishop of Cambrai, Guido of

---

24 Ibid., 83, emphasis mine.
25 Marguerite Porete and Ellen L. Babinsky, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 84. Hereafter, unless otherwise indicated, citations will be from this edition with the page number in the body of the text.
Collemezzo, who ordered the book burned and Marguerite to cease and desist with such writing.²⁷

It did not take Marguerite long to disobey this stern ecclesiastical warning. She had it copied and distributed it to a bishop, a number of learned Paris-trained theologians, as well as to “many other simple people” and received some positive responses to her writing.²⁸ Her reasons for these bold, some would say reckless actions, are not entirely clear, though I will offer a reading of them below.

Regardless, sometime between 1306 and 1308, her work ran afoul of the Dominican inquisitor William of Paris, and in 1308 Marguerite was thrown in prison for having violated Guido’s previous order. She was held there for nearly a year and a half while William deliberated how to proceed with her case.

²⁷ Field summarizes, “Guido condemned and burned Marguerite’s book as “heretical” and containing “errors.” His threat was that if Marguerite showed herself to be persistent in flouting ecclesiastical authority he would take the separate step of condemning her in her person as a contumacious heretic, which would likely result in her death at the hands of the secular authorities.” (45)
²⁸ The most prominent of her readers was Godfrey of Fontaines, professor of theology at the University of Paris, who, according to Marguerite, “blamed it not, no more than did the others. But he said this, that he did not counsel that many should see it, because they might leave their own workings and follow this calling, to which they would never come; and so they might deceive themselves, for it is made by a spirit so strong and perceptive that there are but few such, or none. And therefore the soul never comes to divine usages until she has this usage, for all other human usages are beneath these usages. This is divine usage and none other but this.” In the Inquisition documents, William of Paris notes that she had shared the book with pluribus aliis personis simplicibus. Both translations in Ibid., at 52, and 156 respectively.
Commanded to appear before the inquisition to defend herself, Marguerite steadfastly refused to even take the oath, and thus held her counsel in silence.\(^{29}\)

And so in the spring of 1310 she was put on trial in absentia before a court of theologians and canon lawyers who judged her to be “contumacious, rebellious, and deserving to be condemned as a heretic.”\(^{30}\) Her work was condemned by the twenty-one theologians gathered, and her re-publishing of it following Guido’s decree allowed them to declare her a relapsed heretic. On June 1, 1310, at the Place de Grève in Paris, she was burned at the stake.

According to eyewitness accounts, Marguerite went to her death with great courage and equanimity, “by which the hearts of many were piously and tearfully turned to compassion, as revealed by the eyes of the witnesses who beheld this scene.”\(^{31}\)

There are obviously many reasons for which William and the Paris theologians were eager to condemn Marguerite to the flames.\(^{32}\) None of them is

---

\(^{29}\) Though all attempts to understand the reasons for her silence are speculative, I am unconvinced by Fields’ view that she was stalling for time and holding out hope to the very end that the church would finally “get” what she was saying. Not only does this ignore the political context in which she was living, it portrays Porete as both naïve politically and far more optimistic about the denizens of “Reason”, whom she mocks repeatedly throughout her book.


\(^{31}\) Cited in Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart*, 234.

\(^{32}\) Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, provides the most thorough examination of these reasons, including the desire of King Philip and his close advisors, who included Marguerite’s inquisitors, to rehabilitate their image as “defenders of the faith” in the wake of the brutal torture and summary execution of fifty four Knights Templar on May 12, 1310.
so crucial, writes David Kangas in a groundbreaking essay into the theo-
political nature of the French Beguine’s work, than her decision to “take her
leave of the virtues.” We have seen above that Jacopone, too, saw the virtues
as a threat to genuine spiritual poverty and so too rejected their ultimacy. What
Marguerite adds to this, Kangas writes, is an explicit challenge to the virtues as
the linchpin to the governmentality/pastoral power of the church of her day,
what he calls aptly the “theological-political imperium” (301).

To see why the virtues are so crucial to Marguerite’s critique, Kangas
rehearses Aquinas’ theory of their role in a life oriented toward beatitude or
heaven. In William of Auvergne, we saw pastoral power mobilizing fear of hell
to induce the confessional practices Foucault highlights in his reading. In
Thomas’ account of beatitude and its relation to the virtues, we see how heaven
is also mobilized.

Chapter Eight of Marguerite’s work begins to rehearse an imagined
response from the angelic doctor to Marguerite’s leavetaking of the virtues.
The voice of (scholastic) Reason, one of several personifications Marguerite

---

33 The following analysis of Marguerite is gratefully and heavily indebted to this essay of
Kangas’ with which I am in entire agreement. What I have contributed to his lucid
discussion is simply to highlight the resignatio thematic simmering in her protest of the
“theological-political imperium”. See David Kangas, "Dangerous Joy: Marguerite Porete's
essay will be within the body of the chapter.
employs for the various theological positions she is either advocating or
critiquing, protests. “…the Virtues who offer the manner of living well to every
good soul, and without these Virtues none can be saved nor come to perfection
of life…Is she not out of her mind, the Soul who speaks thus?” (85)

In the seventh chapter, *Love* has responded to the leavetaking of the
virtues with the admission that the *Soul* “takes account of neither shame nor
honor, of neither poverty nor wealth, of neither anxiety nor ease, of neither
love nor hate, of neither hell nor of paradise.” (84-85) In Chapter Thirteen,
*Reason* again protests. Though *Soul’s* words sound profound, *Reason* confesses to
not understanding such things.

For my intellect and my judgment and all my counsel is the best
that I know how to counsel: that one desire contempt, poverty,
and all manner of tribulations, and masses and sermons, and fasts
and prayers, that one have fear of all kinds of love, whatever they
might be, for the perils which can be there, and that one desire
above all paradise, and that one have fear of hell…This is the best,
says Reason, that I know how to say and counsel all those who
live in my obedience. (95)

Here, as Kangas notes, *Reason* is articulating the Thomist position that 1.)
all actions in this life, to be possible, let alone meaningful, must be oriented
toward an end, and for the Christian this end is beatitude (what *Reason* here
calls paradise) and 2.) That the virtues (which include right desires and actions,
outlined above) are the *necessary means* by which one orients one’s life to this end.
The virtue system, including the sacramental actions of the church, in other
words, *requires* heaven as its end point, and so founds an entire system, the theo-political order.\(^3^4\) In a perfectly coherent, circular system, the virtues mediate the salvation without which the virtues would have no meaningful direction. And, as Kangas rightly notes, it is exactly this system, *in toto*, which Marguerite rejects, in favor of a life of joy, lived without any ultimate end point, lived “without why.”\(^3^5\)

Yet just here, Kangas astutely notes, there is an ambiguity in the virtue system of Aquinas and the scholastics. For in most cases, the end toward which the virtues are aimed is achievable in this life. Beatitude or heaven, however, was thought to be a different case, its fullness (the beatific vision) being reserved for the next life. Human effort was in no way capable of climbing, unaided, to heaven.

The virtues were attuned to beatitude in part, but there was nevertheless an “essential gap between the happiness achievable through the virtues—which depend upon human effort—and that ultimate happiness” (305). Into this gap,

\(^{34}\) Kangas: “Theologians undertook the work of securing the ultimate justification and mooring of ethical practices and legal statutes within certain transcendental structures—for example, natural law, scripture, and/or divine revelation. The political arm, for its part, was responsible for codifying and enforcing legitimated practices. The institution(s) of the Inquisition, multifaceted as it was, constitutes in fact the exemplary representation of this collaboration. After theologians condemned a work as heretical, the church itself did not perform the execution; rather, the heretic was, in the technical jargon employed, “relinquished” to the secular authority for punishment” (301).

\(^{35}\) Scholars have speculated that Eckhart had read *The Mirror* during his time staying with William of Paris at the Dominican convent of that city. See among others, Justine L. Trombley, "The Master and the Mirror: The Influence of Marguerite Porete on Meister Eckhart" *Magistra* 16, no. 1 (Summer 2010, 2010), 60-102.
Kangas notes, Aquinas inserts the theological virtues, whose origin comes not from human effort, which is not adequate to the task, but from God who *infuses* them into the subject. Though they, like the natural virtues, attune the person to his/her proper end, beatitude, they are “essentially different insofar as they must be ‘infused in us by God alone.’” (305) In a phrase which Kangas notes Porete will “subversively” repeat, the theological virtues are “in us, without us” (*in nobis sine nobis*).

This solution, Kangas insists, creates more ambiguity than it removes. For if God is capable of infusing the virtues required for beatitude, then it seems the natural virtues and the “good works” produced by them are, strictly speaking, unnecessary. God could, Kangas argues, and Aquinas knows this, simply infuse beatitude directly, with no prior conditions. The virtue system could be broken by God’s gratuitous action!

Of course Aquinas does not want to head in this direction, and so he must say that though there is no “ontological necessity” for the mediating virtue system, it is, nevertheless, *somehow* necessary. Kangas focuses on this somehow:

One has to pay close attention to Aquinas’s resolution of this dilemma. *Opera bona* are urged as necessary, not in a strictly ontological register, but in some other kind of register. Aquinas says: “Cum autem beatitudo excedat omnem naturam creatam, nulla pura creatura convenienter beatitudinem consequitur absque motu operationis” (Since beatitude exceeds all created nature, no mere creature can fittingly arrive at beatitude without some
motion of activity; Ia2ae, 5, 7). The word that bears the whole weight of the solution to the dilemma is *convenienter*, “fittingly.” Attaining beatitude without many motions and much effort is, ontologically speaking, entirely possible—but it just wouldn’t seem right. It would violate some sense of propriety and *good order*. Hence the concluding judgment: the human being “reaches [beatitude] through many motions of activity, which are called his merits” (Ia2ae, 5, 7). (306 emphasis mine)

This fittingness, Kangas argues, requires Aquinas to employ, while nevertheless masking, his reliance on a “social consensus” that is at once theological and political.

Certain notions about justice and labor are in play, notions that have an institutional counterpart in the offices of the church, in the sacramental system, in customary social practices, as well as within the statutes of monastic orders. The *opera bona* Aquinas regards as the fitting condition for beatitude, one might point out, do not float in a vacuum: inevitably, they become aligned with recognized social practices—usages—wherein they are stamped with a kind of objectivity or quasi-transcendence (306).

It is exactly this social consensus masked with a quasi-transcendental theological justification which Marguerite rejects when she speaks of taking her leave of the virtues. It is not, as her opponents thought, that she rejected virtue as such and was thus guilty of advocating licentiousness, the so-called “heresy of the free spirit.” In Chapter Eight she rejects this reading, saying that what she rejects is the virtues *as means*, merits in an theo-political economy which she finds cruel and conducive to, in her words, “great distress…grave torments” (84). She rejects the virtues insofar as they have become, in Augustinian terms, “*usus*” practices, or a “socially inscribed, publically recognized, determinate set
of normative practices” (308) In Foucault’s terms, her refusal of the virtues as usus means that she resists the governmentality of these practices, the way they enslave, rather than liberate the ones who participate in them.

By rejecting the virtue system, Kangas argues, Marguerite rejects the “metaphysics of lack” which underlies them. What she advocates in their place is not a metaphysics of plenitude, which is what her inquisitors accused her of, but rather a theology of “love without why”. The metaphysic of lack, which the virtue system exploits, keeps one forever indebted to a system of practices which promise what they can never deliver, that is, beatitude, and threatens ultimate lack, hell, for those who will not comply with the church’s political economy.

Marguerite rejects this and with it the church’s power to order and stabilize one’s identity, instead favoring love (L’Amour). Love, as Kangas notes, is “beyond being”, it is the “originative event” which gives all being, which is to say it is not masterable within a virtue system, but undoes its strict economic logic by giving without why.36 Whereas Aquinas’ beatitude lies beyond this life as a metaphysical foundation for the virtue system that is driven by lack, Porete’s loving joy is both immanent and unmasterable, “in her without her”

---

36 Kangas doesn’t say this, but it would be fair to say that in this way, Porete’s L’amour thus takes the option Aquinas rejects of thinking of the utter gratuity of God’s love outside any virtue system.
(in elle sans elle) as Marguerite puts it. Her theology of “love without why” is not, it must be said, a reversal of the metaphysics of lack, nor is it an appeal to an experience of love or joy of a private individual, no matter how blessed with a positive spirit. Rather it is, as her words about neither desiring heaven nor fearing hell suggests, a gesture of spiritual indifference. As Kangas puts it,

> Far from claiming the paradisal condition of beatitude here and now, Porete proclaims her indifference to beatitude—an indifference that reflects her refusal to interpret human life in terms of an ultimate end-goal. The highest conception of human life for Porete is one that sees it “without any why” or ultimate what-for. Porete ascribes no reality either to the end-goal or to the lack that the end-goal is supposed to supplement. She refuses the lack and the supplement. As we shall see further below, to lack nothing is not to exist in a condition of pure plenitude. It is rather to accept lack itself with no conditions (312).

“To accept lack itself with no conditions.” This is perhaps one of the finest transpositions of the resignatio ad infernum theme as we might find. It is, in Marguerite’s terms, to have an annihilated will, which is not the lack of a will, but a will no longer invested in an economy of lack and its anxieties.

37 Kangas: “As I showed, Aquinas organizes his entire account of human reality, including his justification of the virtues, around beatitude as the ultimate what-for of existence. Beatitude constitutes the ultimate foundation of the virtue system precisely insofar as it transcends human life in toto; it signifies a fullness that human life essentially lacks. Beatitude, precisely as a metaphysical foundation, indeed functions foundationally only by being the fullness of what human life is said to lack” (311)

38 As Kangas rightly notes, there is, even today, a heavy political investment in a metaphysics of lack. As he writes, “There is a very strong theological-political investiture, however, in lack: not only in the reality of the lack, but in the reality of what is lacking. When one considers how the supposed human lack of some ultimate term (e.g., beatitude) legitimates and founds an entire soteriological and even political economy, the radical implications of Porete’s assertion that she lacks nothing leap out: to proclaim the unreality of lack would be to disinvest from the entire virtue system (312).
Whether or not King Philip or his theological advisors had read with any care this damning critique of the theo-political structure under which they operated is uncertain.\textsuperscript{39} History has preserved only three extracts from the \textit{Mirror} that were translated by William into Latin and condemned by his gathering of twenty-one theologians. Significantly, one of these extracts states that “the annihilated soul…is no longer in servitude” to the virtues. A second states that “such a soul does not care about the consolations of God or his gifts.”\textsuperscript{40} It would seem that William and his men got the gist of Marguerite’s daring argument.

\textit{Was Marguerite a Quietist?}

Kangas argues impressively throughout his essay in an attempt to rehabilitate Marguerite Porete, not only as a philosophical and theological genius, but as a thinker with deep theo-political investments. I have indicated above my agreement with much of his argument, and have re-contextualized it into the \textit{resignatio} themes this dissertation has been tracking. Others, even sympathetic readers of her book, have not been so convinced. She has been called “masochistic,” “stubborn, willful…arrogan[t],” and “open…to the

\textsuperscript{39} Field notes that King Philip was out of the country during the bulk of the trial. William of Paris does not indicate how much of the \textit{Mirror} he had read and he gave the trial theologians only the briefest of excerpts at which to look.

\textsuperscript{40} Translated by Field in, \textit{The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor}, 128.
charge of quietism.” The latter charge is more significant, perhaps, than the first two, coming as it does from one of the beguine’s more sympathetic and careful readers, Amy Hollywood. Hollywood, both in her earlier book *The Soul as Virgin Wife* and again in her *Sensible Ecstasy*, has held up Porete as a brilliant writer, who in sharp contrast to many of the hagiographical texts of beguine women, rejects the need for women to endure excruciating tests of physical suffering as indicative of their piety. Yet it is clear that she too is troubled by some of Porete’s more extreme formulations of the annihilation of the will in spiritual, if not physical suffering. In particular, Hollywood points out in a number of places her concern with the justly famous “trials of love” chapter in the *Mirror* (ch. 131). There, Marguerite imagines a series of increasingly agonizing “tests” in which God demands her absolute obedience, including among others a willingness to be damned, to have God love another more than her, and for her to love another more than God (211-215).

In an early essay, Hollywood notes how these trials are the means by which Porete pries herself free from her clinging will and reaches the

---


43 Though perhaps here Hollywood is a bit crude in making such a sharp distinction between the two.
annihilated state, what she will call the “land of freeness” (215) or the living
“without why”. The problem, as Hollywood sees it, is that in the very effort to
rid herself of her will, Porete is in danger of annihilating not just her will, but
her love, without which any motivation for action in the world becomes
threatened. This is the charge of quietism:

Yet Porete’s account of the absolute freedom of the soul gives her
difficulties when it comes to describing the way in which she
continues to work in the world in and as divine Love. (*This, despite
the fact that Porete, herself apparently a solitary beguine, clearly pursued an
active ministry of writing and teaching, for which she was ultimately
condemned and killed.*) This occurs, I think, because for Porete the
sacrifice of will and desire stands in opposition to, rather than in
continuity with, the highest name of the divine, which is Love. 44

Barbara Newman shares similar concerns. While rejecting as overly
psychologistic those readers who call Porete’s position masochistic, she
nevertheless shares some of these readers’ worries. In her book, *From Virile
Woman to WomanChrist*, Newman writes that whereas “Hadewijch and
Mechthild would agree on the immaturity of a soul that wished to remain
permanently in the delights of union…Marguerite takes a different course. If
the Soul is called to the truly free and noble life, she must not return from her

emphasis mine. Why this parenthesis, one might ask. Though it is indeed dangerous to read
a text in light of its author’s biography, so too is minimizing it. My own argument is that in
Marguerite’s case, there is indeed a tight fit between her articulation of the “free soul” in the
*Mirror* and her “active ministry of writing and teaching,” up to and including her death at the
hands of “Holy Church the Little.”
ecstatic union.”

She goes on to rehearse Richard of St. Victor’s *Four Degrees of Violent Charity* which, as we have seen, includes the *resignatio ad infernum* as the highest stage of love. In Richard, she notes, this stage has the lover “leaves her glorious union for her neighbor’s sake and sinks below herself in works of compassion” (160). She suggests that Marguerite fails in this regard to reach Richard’s *resignatio*. “Marguerite’s abjection, is, in an ontological sense, absolute” and “there is no need for the bodily torments or public displays of humiliation” we have in other mystics (164). Newman thinks that Marguerite retreats to “a Zenlike tranquility that the orthodox mystics, from Richard of St. Victor to Hadewijch to Ruusbroec, would judge to be dangerous self-delusion.” (164)

Though she doesn’t say so explicitly, Newman hints that Marguerite may be guilty of what she describes, paraphrasing Denis de Rougement’s assessment of *Tristan*, as “the lovers’ mystic yearnings for the infinite as well as the antisocial, death-seeking character of their love” (160).

---

45 Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 152. Hereafter, citations from this text will be indicated within the text by page number.

46 As with Hollywood, Newman seems most troubled by the “trials of love” in ch. 131 of *Mirror*. So it is immediately after rehearsing these “savage *demandes d’amour*” (163) that she declares that Marguerite’s abjection is “absolute.”

47 Like Hollywood, Newman has to parenthesize the rather stark evidence that Marguerite was far from inactive in the public realm. Her willingness to be martyred at the hands of the church was a “bodily torment” and “public display” the likes of which few, including Hadewijch or Ruusbroec, were willing to endure.
In these readings of Marguerite as proto-quietist, her “willingness to be damned” is, if not a self-destructive and suicidal masochism, at the very least so preoccupied with God that it leaves little room for action in the world. So Hollywood, in direct contradiction to Kangas, reads her “without why” as quietistic: “Because the simple soul is fully united with God and cannot know any lack, she cannot be troubled by the need of her neighbors and thus seems unable to work actively in the world.” Transposed into Paul’s language in Romans 9:3, it would seem that for Hollywood as for Newman, Marguerite, while more than willing to be accursed and cut off from Christ, does not do this “for the sake of” her brethren in the flesh or for anyone else. She does it, ironically, only in order to further her remove from the world in a paroxysm of violent, mystical union.

These charge, if true, would do considerable damage to my effort here, with Kangas’ help, to portray Marguerite as an exemplar of the resignatio ad infernum tradition, in which love, God, and hell are held together such a way as to have significant ethical and political charge. So at this point it is necessary to probe more deeply into Marguerite’s text, beginning with the so-called “trials of love” which have given so many readers much pause. Before we do so,

---

48 Soul as Virgin Wife, 117.
49 To take one more example, the eminent historian Peter Dronke, whose essay on Marguerite was one of the first to take her seriously on her own terms, writes this of the trials of love: “It is only after extravagant unconditional surrender to each of his cruelties
however, it is crucial to explore the precise theo-political context in which she wrote these and what her motivations were for so doing.

_Suicidal, rash, Naïve: False choices and another way_

Most scholars agree that Marguerite’s infamous “trials of love” passage, along with all of Chapters 123-139 in the _Mirror_, was written after her initial condemnation, which occurred some time between 1296 and 1305.\(^{50}\) Disagreement quickly follows regarding the reasons why. Interpreting her decision to send the new edition, whose earlier iteration had been strictly forbidden publication by Bishop Guido, to John, Bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne, not a likely supporter, Edmund Colledge et. al call it “rash or ill-advised.”\(^{51}\) In a recent work, Zan Kocher wonders aloud with a question that seems barely below the surface of many readings of Marguerite’s actions: “Was she playing out a death wish in a medieval version of ‘suicide by police officer’?”\(^{52}\) Or was she, as Hollywood suggests, merely so pre-occupied with her efforts to annihilate her own will and sink into a mystical union with God that she simply

---

\(^{50}\) Sean Field rehearses this consensus view in Field, _The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor_, 276.


\(^{52}\) Suzanne Kocher, _Allegories of Love in Marguerite Porete’s Mirror of Simple Souls_ (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 43. Though he does not answer his own question, Kocher does share on the next page his view that Porete’s decision to republish her book following Guido’s initial condemnation, created an “unnecessary” conflict with the new bishop, Philip of Marigny.
was not concerned with the political “effects” of her actions, including her own death?

Most recently, Sean Field, in a deeply learned and historically rich reading, has offered another view, one that will undoubtedly shift the field of Porete scholarship substantially. Because my own reading is significantly at odds with it and much depends on the context in which we read these latter chapters, a closer look at his argument is in order.

Field suggests that even after Guido’s condemnation sometime before 1306, Marguerite was still optimistic, hoping for, in his words, “some kind of new hearing on her ideas.”\footnote{Field, \textit{The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor}, 62.} This optimism, he thinks, was fueled by Godfrey of Fontaines’ qualified affirmation of her work, which he argues was solicited by Marguerite following the initial condemnation.\footnote{Field admits that the timing of the so-called “approvals” of Marguerite’s work, including Godfrey’s, is not clear. In fact, the only information we have regarding these approvals comes from the Middle English and the Latin versions of her text, making their provenance and authorship uncertain. Field thinks they come from Marguerite’s hand and that she solicited them after the initial condemnation. Other scholars think that Godfrey and the other theologians would scarcely have been willing to offer even qualified approval of a text they knew had been condemned by a bishop of the church, in this case Guido. Field, on the other hand, makes a strong argument that Godfrey in particular was a strong critic of ecclesiastical condemnations by a single bishop who did not consult more widely with the theological community. On record in this regard, Field thinks that Godfrey would not have hesitated to challenge Guido’s ruling as an overreach by a single bishop. Field rehearses these arguments at length in “The Master and Marguerite: Godfrey of Fontaines’ praise of The Mirror of Simple Souls,” \textit{Journal of Medieval History} 35.2 (2009), 136-149.} Though puzzled by her decision to send her condemned book to Bishop John, well known as an
authoritarian royalist, he nevertheless re-asserts his thesis regarding her optimism:

Rather than simply being naïve, or ‘rash’ and ‘ill-advised’ as she has been described, she may have had an entirely rational reason to believe that her case was not hopeless, given the support she had received from Godfrey and her argument that it ‘proved’ the book’s worth.\textsuperscript{55}

But this view of the matter stretched credulity to the breaking point.

And though Field believes that his view is an improvement upon Colledge et. al, it is only apparently so. For in order to argue for Marguerite’s “optimism”\textsuperscript{56} he not only has to silently re-assert her naïveté about Bishop John’s likely response to her book.\textsuperscript{57} He also has to imagine that Marguerite was blissfully unaware of the violent and authoritarian tactics of King Philip IV and his court, in which trumped up charges, torture, and summary executions were all employed as the King furthered, with increasing intensity, his efforts to impose upon his realm his image as a “defender of orthodoxy” and as God’s holy and virtuous regent.\textsuperscript{58} Naïve, and/or remarkably arrogant in thinking her persuasive powers

\textsuperscript{55} Field, “The Master and Marguerite,” 148. The view cited is that of Colledge, as we have noted above.

\textsuperscript{56} He calls it her “rational optimism” in The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor, 163.

\textsuperscript{57} Bishop John, as Field himself argues, was well known as a royalist sympathizer. It is hard to imagine that Marguerite would not have known this about a man she was to send her book, at the risk of her life. As Field notes, her other choices, especially Godfrey, were brilliantly thought through.

\textsuperscript{58} I am referring, of course, to the infamous trial and execution of the fifty-four Knights Templar in the spring of 1310. William of Paris and Philip of Marigny, who was the second bishop of Cambrai and who had Marguerite arrested in 1308 and sent to William in Paris for
would be enough to overcome the “inquisitorial terror” which infected nearly all the players involved.\textsuperscript{59}

More troublingly, Field’s interpretation requires that he ignore Marguerite’s own words.\textsuperscript{60} In arguing for her “optimism” he bypasses her

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{59} The phrase “inquisitorial terror” is applied to King Philip’s reign by historian Charles-Victor Langois and is cited by Brown in Ibid. Indeed, a large part of Field’s impressive historical analysis is his compelling, and somewhat sympathetic portrayal of Marguerite’s Inquisitor, William of Paris. The sympathy comes from the sense, accurate in my view, of the overwhelming fear in which he moved and thus the precarious line he had to tow in relation to both King Philip and Pope Celestine.

\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, in making his argument, Field shows that he has read every historical document there is, with the exception of the very book, Marguerite’s \textit{Mirror}, that has caused all the trouble in the first place! In the introduction to his text, he does give a very cursory glance at her words, but only to downplay their radical nature. He lumps the \textit{Mirror} together with other works of the time (she had “plenty of company”) suggesting that “the brand of love-drenched vernacular theology that these women favored may have been provocative, but it was not necessarily heretical” (7). “In form,” he writes, “the Mirror is a mix of meditation, poetry, and instruction, oscillating in mood from exaltation to despair, scolding to mockery, and humility to haughtiness. It can, at first reading, seem chaotic in the way it drops themes, picks them up much later, contradicts itself, and generally proceeds along anything but a straight line.” This rather perfunctory “reading”, of course, allows him to bypass the text throughout the rest of his analysis. By ignoring her own pointed critiques of the theopolitical regime in which she lived, he makes his argument that Marguerite was more an “innocent” victim of these political and historical forces beyond her control (and beyond her ken, it would seem). So, as he concludes in his introduction: “Running throughout, however, is my primary argument that Guiard of Cressonessart and Marguerite Porete were caught up in a highly contingent series of events, where their own choices combined with
insistent critique of what she calls “Holy Church the Little”, the virtue-system to which it clings out of fear, its spiritual blindness, and scholastic theology’s inability to understand the true nature of divine love. Moreover, he misses her quite politically charged framing of the book with a re-telling of the story of Alexander the Great and Queen Candace of Meröe in which Queen Candace one-ups the king’s deceptive ways by painting a true portrait of his nature so as to stop him in his tracks. It is, in other words, hard to imagine a less optimistic

the specific political situation and limited legal options of their inquisitor to drive them toward perpetual incarceration and the stake. The constraining factor in these individual choices was the political context at Paris by 1310. Guiard and Marguerite were processed by Philip IV’s political machine, where all stories and all fights were ultimately about royal power.” This is no doubt true, as far as it goes. What I would insist, however, is that these two forces, Marguerite’s "choices" and King Philip’s "machine" are not unrelated to one another. One is tempted here to recall Reinhold Niebuhr’s excoriation of liberal academic thinking in regard to power politics. With just a little more refined persuasive power and scholarly nuance, Niebuhr mockingly imagines the liberal scholar to think, surely the tyrant will see the error of his ways! See Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Scribner’s, 1932). So Field seems to think Marguerite saw her situation.

She jabs, for instance, at Reason by repeatedly calling it “one-eyed,” in one case associating this with people “who are called kings” (132). Grace Jantzen has intriguingly argued that this is a direct reference to King Philip and his court. See Jantzen, “Disrupting the Sacred: Religion and Gender in the City” in Bodies, Lives, Voices: Gender in Theology, ed. Ann L. Gilroy et. al (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 72-92.

In the medieval version of that text with which most of Marguerite’s readers would have been quite familiar, Alexander is only barely restrained from killing the queen on the spot for her exposing of his true self. Marguerite’s brilliant deployment of the legend of Alexander and Candace is quite complex and worthy of a much larger treatment than it has heretofore received. Relevant to the discussion is the way in which King Philip IV and the political advisors of his day would have read Alexandre de Paris’ Roman de Alexandre as fodder for their own attempts to portray the king as a near-divine and wholly virtuous figure of great largesse and nobility. Also relevant is as the way in which the story of Candace and Alexander, in the original Greek version of Pseudo-Callisthenes, troubles this royalist reading with the figure of a fiercely independent and even antagonistic Candace. See Donald Maddox, Sara Sturm Maddox, eds. The Medieval French Alexander (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) for the deeply political stakes of the medieval versions of the legend. Also relevant to the discussion would be John Baldwin’s magisterial analysis of the Capetian Dynasty and the way in which Philip Augustus and his followers employed the legend of his
view than hers of the ability of the Love she champions to persuade the
denizens of Reason and the virtue-system of King Philip and his theological
advisors.63

Moreover, things are even more problematic for his argument when
Field turns his attention to Chapters 123-139 of the Mirror, written, so he has argued, after the first condemnation in order to refine and qualify her argument in the hopes of persuading the crown theologians and bishops to accept it.

With these additions, Marguerite attempted to show an imagined audience of dubious churchmen that she understood the kind of straightforward relation to the saints and the Scriptures that they might like to see in a devout woman, and she came as close as she ever did to arguing that her knowledge came at least in part through conversation with God. Thus she made more clear her credentials as both a textual scholar and a mystic.64

namesake, Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great’s father, in his own rise to power. See
Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), at 364 and following.

63 One question my reading must face, then, is why she would share her book with Godfrey, scholastic theology’s magister par excellence. Was it to “persuade” him to accept her position, as Field thinks? My own view, which admittedly is as speculative as Field’s, is that it was not so much to persuade as to share with a sympathetic ear. Field does a superb job in his essay on Marguerite and Godfrey of showing the more radical tendencies of his thought, particularly surrounding ecclesial power politics. Here he was at some remove from what she calls Holy Church the little.

64 Field, The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor, 48. He does refer to a dissenting view of her biblical “considerations” by Rina Lahav. Her essay, which I have been unable to read, describes her readings as “provocative.” See Rina Lahav, “Marguerite Porete and the Predicament of Her Preaching in Fourteenth-Century France,” in Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900, ed. Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen M. Magion (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 38–50.
This sounds reasonable enough. The problem, Field notes, is that she just won’t stay so reasonable.

To cap off this concluding section, however, Marguerite returned to some of her more audacious statements, as though she could not resist restating them after providing a new grounding in textual exegesis and spiritual experience. Dialogue returns briefly for chapter 133, with Marguerite reformulating some of her riskiest ideas. “Divine Love,” for instance, here addresses the “Soul,” saying: “I have found many who have perished in the affection of the spirit, through works of virtue, in the desire of a good will; but I have found few who were nobly forlorn, and I have found fewer still who are free without fail . . . such as this book asks for; that is, who have one single will which fine amour causes them to have. For fine amour causes one to have one love and one will, and so my will has become a non-will.” The offhand equation of “works of virtue” with those who “have perished” (or “are lost”) was exactly the sort of passage that would ultimately be held against Marguerite.  

Let us be clear of the picture Field is painting. It is an image of Marguerite, with her very life at stake, impetuously adding such self-condemnatory thoughts because she simply can’t help herself. It is hardly an improvement on Colledge.

---

65 Ibid., emphasis mine. He goes on to add: “Particularly in the very last chapter, Marguerite slips into much darker tones, complaining of how “wily” nature is, lamenting, “I have experienced this to my great misfortune.” Overall these last seventeen chapters are a confident culmination of the work; perhaps, however, at the very last, they offer a glimpse of Marguerite’s fears that her tribulations were not over” (49). With this last statement, as will soon be clear, I agree.

66 Here I must admit to sharing Grace Jantzen’s incredulity over the ways in which Marguerite is treated in much scholarly literature. It may be implicit sexism, or it may be an inability to identify with and/or imagine sympathetically the martyriological gesture. In either case, it hardly does justice to the steady brilliance of her thought.
The question that must then be asked is this: If not for the royal court and its theologians, to whom was she writing these additional chapters to her text, including the infamous trials of love? And, if not to persuade these denizens of reason of her orthodoxy, for what purpose?

The Simple Soul Performs her Martyrdom

Taking the second question first: the obvious answer is what so many commentators struggle to accept: her purpose was martyrdom. It is not, however, Kocher’s version of this, “suicide by police officer.” Marguerite states quite early on in the *Mirror* that the simple soul “neither desires nor despises…martyrdom” (94). I believe we have no reason to doubt her word here. Instead, it is easy imagine that Marguerite, in the wake of the fierce condemnation of her earlier edition of the book, which included being forced to witness the book itself be burned before her eyes, saw a way open before her. Not of her choosing, perhaps, but nevertheless unavoidable if she was not to betray the very Love with whose boldness and lack of fear she had so clearly aligned her will in the now burned book. The vision Bishop Guido insisted upon giving her, of course, was also meant to be a foretaste and a premonition of what would be in store for her own body should she disobey. Though it is unclear how many heretics were burned in Paris during Marguerite’s lifetime,

---

67 Ibid., 44.
she undoubtedly knew that it was the likely outcome of ecclesial disobedience. Several hundred had been consigned to the flames by the Dominican Robert le Bougre in the north of France in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, and there were re-lapsed Jews who, prior to being expelled under King Philip’s orders, had been burned. The import of having her book burned, then, was not lost on Marguerite.

Her actions alone, in republishing the *Mirror*, along with her free admission of this when brought before the royalist church’s fiercest defenders are enough to indicate that Marguerite expected to die a martyr. The church under King Philip, William of Paris, and Philip of Marigny was not a theology classroom where bold new ideas were considered even-handedly, debated openly, and judged according to their merits. If, before her arrest in 1308 she or anyone else had thought that it was, which is most unlikely, then the traumatizing rounding up, torture, and execution of the fifty-four Knights Templar beginning in October of 1307 made such a thought impossible for all but the most credulous to sustain. The quite qualified approval she received from Godfrey could hardly have changed the harsh reality of what Philip intended for the Church and those who challenged it under his rule. Holy

---

68 “Relapsed” Jews who those who had previously been baptized, often under duress, but had subsequently renounced their Christian faith. Field describes these executions and William of Paris’ prominent role in ibid., 82-83.
Church the little was by this time, as James Givens suggests in his analysis of King Philip’s reign, part of a holy terror.\textsuperscript{69}

Marguerite now saw that adherence to Lady Love was leading her into the very same hell that the Templars, Jews, and unnamed others had been cast into by King Philip and William of Paris’ inquisition. It is difficult to fathom the impact this fact must have had upon her understanding of God, love, and the hell that awaited her. Difficult to come to grips with the visceral impact this traumatic new way forward must have had upon her body and soul.\textsuperscript{70}

It is difficult but not impossible. Marguerite’s purpose in composing and publishing the new chapters to the \textit{Mirror} in the wake of her first condemnation was martyrdom. But by this I mean something more than the martyrdom she was undoubtedly expecting to receive at the hands of the church by her decision to follow the way Lady Love had opened up for her in the first iteration of the text. Specifically, I am suggesting that the best way to see these new chapters of the \textit{Mirror} is as the \textit{very performance of that martyrdom}.\textsuperscript{71} It


\textsuperscript{70} One thinks, for example, of the life-changing impact his mock-execution had on Doestoevsky. When a writer of such rare sensitivity and descriptive power as Dostoevsky, Cixous, or Marguerite has descended to such traumatic depths and been able to write from within or even only on the edge of such an abyss, we have a unique witness of hell.

\textsuperscript{71} A number of scholars of Marguerite have noted the performative quality of these latter chapters. In addition to Hollywood, see Nicholas Watson, “‘Yf Wommen Be Double Naturally’: Remaking ‘Woman’ in Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love”, \textit{Exemplaria} 8, No. 1 (1996): 1-34.
is often noted that Marguerite, in the wake of her arrest, refused to speak another word right up until the moment of her death in the flames at the Place de Grève. My suggestion here is that this is because she had, in these seventeen chapters, already done what Hélène Cixous has worried cannot be done: taken her pen into hell and not only not dropped her notebook, but left us a witness of her journey, a textual witness (martyrdom) of what was to come.\textsuperscript{72}

I am not suggesting that Marguerite had a “mystical vision” of what would befall her in the next two years following her arrest, or at least not if what one means by that phrase is a supernatural premonition of the exact events that would take place.\textsuperscript{73} Rather, what I mean is that in the days and hours following that first burning of \textit{The Mirror}, Marguerite was forced to come to terms with what this new way meant for her relationship with God, Love, and the sadness of souls lost in such hell. These final chapters are, then, her best articulation of what she sees (\textit{regars}) of God and love and/in hell.\textsuperscript{74}

Marguerite’s way was a severe and lonely one. Earlier in the Mirror, she says that the soul goes through various stages on its way to the “land of

\textsuperscript{72} See Hélène Cixous, \textit{The Book of Promethea} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). The image of dropping her notebook is on page 96.
\textsuperscript{73} Again, I do think she had a quite realistic sense of how, roughly, things were going to turn out for her in the end.
\textsuperscript{74} We have no knowledge of when she completed these chapters. I am following the general consensus that they were written sometime after the first condemnation and burning of her book in Valenciennes, which could have occurred no later than 1305. I assume as well that they must have been written before her arrest by Philip of Marigny and transfer to Paris in 1308. There is thus a significant amount of time for her to have wrestled with what was on the horizon.
freeness.” Now, in the wake of her condemnation, she begins chapter 123 this way: “I wish to speak about some considerations for the sad ones (les marriz)” (202). She makes it clear that she herself knows this sad state intimately herself. Related both to suffering (souffrance) and grief (greté), sadness is, in addition to being an affective state, the experiential knowledge that one is lost, “off the path” as she says here in Chapter 123. In sadness, there is a sharp disconnect between what one experiences and what one has believed. (134) At times she will call it a state of “wretchedness,” when one’s realization of lostness provides a kind of oscillation between intense agitation and utter numbness, as in the biblical image she invokes of the “dead burying the dead” (130). She sums up this eviscerating oscillation perfectly when she writes “I knew not how to restrain myself or how to endure” (210).

I would suggest that Marguerite’s sadness is in this way quite close to the experience described in trauma theory. Judith Herman notes that the shattering of belief systems, the sharp oscillations between lethargy and hyper-activity, and the feelings of deep self-loathing and wretchedness, here described by Marguerite, distinguish the traumatized person from someone with a normal load of grief which typically has a predictable progression back into a more or

---

75 Indeed, we might say that one prominent register of being sad is having lost the ability to suffer. So, in an earlier chapter, she encourages the soul not to give in to this deadness, which it could be tempting to view as blessed relieve from one’s agitated state. “I would say to those who are sad that the one who guards the peace and satisfies perfectly the will of the ardor of desire piercing the work of his spirit…such a one will attain, as the rightful heir, worthy proximity to this being of which we speak.”
less integrated mode of existence. Given the experience of having been called before the Inquisition, having been forced to watch her book burn, and now having the immanent threat of torture and death so close at hand with each day that passed, I think it only prudent to assume that Marguerite was writing from within just such a traumatized place.

It is in order to find the way through this sadness that Marguerite, launches a series of “considerations” (regards) designed to help herself and other sad ones learn to “suffer” one’s suffering and so “find the path” (202). Crucially, these considerations begin with the struggles of others who have also tread this difficult path: Meditations on the Apostles, Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary begin Marguerite’s journey through the torments.

In considering the Apostles, Marguerite homes in on the verse from the Gospel of John in which Jesus declares to his uncomprehending disciples that “it is necessary that I go away” (202). The reason for this declaration, she is given to see, is because the disciples “loved Him too tenderly (tendrement) according to human nature.” She then notes how the apostles are grieved at the thought of being “cut off from Christ” (Rom 9:3). Yet she sees this grief in this instance as a gift, for it points to the natural limits of their love, its acquisitive nature. She ends the consideration by suggesting that the grief the disciples

---

76 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery.*
experience in this wound of separation weans the Apostles from a distorted view of love, and thus opens them up to further gifts which they will need to “suffer” (*souffrir*) divine love as they enter more deeply into its pure wellspring.

This theme of the necessary wound of love continues in Marguerite’s second consideration, Mary Magdelene. Here she highlights that Jesus was Mary’s guest (*hoste*), “often in the hospitality (*l’ostel*) of Mary.” Mary’s hospitality is itself a wound, the beguine notes, done “for nothingness.” It is a wound that receives a wound, as Marguerite notes:

> And our savior Jesus Christ returned often completely barefoot, suffering in His blessed body, and He was completely thirsty and exhausted, refused by everyone, for He found no one who would give Him something to eat or drink—all this the Magdalene knew. (203)

As Jesus marches single-mindedly on his own “way of hell”, Mary’s hospitality is itself transformed as she comes to know more intimately the nature of this divine, suffering love. Her education is complete, Marguerite suggests, when she refuses comfort (*confort*) from the angels who guard Jesus’ tomb. If, as the tradition has it, Jesus descended to hell on that first Holy Saturday, so would Magdalene’s heart. In the fiery heat of the Sun’s love (*soleil*), any remaining tenderness is burned away, and what is left is a love that is agonizingly
hospitable to suffering. It is, as the Song of Songs puts it, a love “hard as hell.”

Ever the astute psychologist, Marguerite continues her consideration of Mary Magdalene using the metaphor of the body as soil needing to be tended. Just as the soil exposed to intense heat and dryness can become so hard that it is unable to receive seed, so the soul and body of one who suffers as Mary has can become cracked and hardened. Spiritual numbness and sterility is the danger here, and Marguerite insists that Mary combatted it by “cultivating the earth of her Lord which He had left to her” (203). Making it clear that this is not a dis-embodied effort, she clarifies a moment later: “The earth which Mary worked was her body.”

Lest we allow such a pastoral image lure us away from the site of hers and her lovers’ suffering, she invokes the tradition of Mary Magdalene’s thirty-year sojourn in the wilderness as the improbable site of this tilling: “Such

---

77 Song of Songs 8:6. Vg: *dura sicit inferus* Though Marguerite does not quote this verse of the Song, as far as I know, I am suggesting that it is ever present in the background of her meditations.
78 The intertext here is that of Jesus’ parable of sower and the seed in Matthew 13.
79 This is an intriguing metaphor and worthy of more consideration than I can give it here. At one level, this alludes to his dead body, which is all he has left her to mourn and to tend. Another intriguing possibility is to think of the garden in which Jesus’ body was laid, and which was where Magdalene encountered him. The site of their trauma and their love, it is in need of her constant tending in order for it to bear fruit.
80 Here too, I am suggesting that Hollywood has been too extreme in her reading of Marguerite as anti-ascetic. This tilling metaphor is crucial to Marguerite’s spiritual itinerary, and as is clear here, it involves the disciplined willingness to suffer the body. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in her willingness to expose her body to the grinding hell of King Philip’s Inquisition.
working He accomplished in Mary in the desert” (205). Love blooming in the harsh sands of the desert, as we have seen, is a key trope in the biblical resignatio tradition, especially in the Song of Songs, and here Marguerite mines it brilliantly. As the apostles help her to understand how love can survive being apart from its source, so Mary Magdelene teaches Marguerite how to avoid sterility and hardness of heart in the wake of the traumatic split.

Next Marguerite turns, not surprisingly, to the Virgin Mary, perhaps the greatest exemplar of the depths to which sorrow over God’s loss may lead one. She focuses her attention on an image of Mary at the foot of the cross, where she ponders the grieving mother “in the presence of the death of her child” (207). What strikes Marguerite, above all, is that in the midst of such searing injustice, neither vengeance nor hatred overcome her anguished love or desire for pardon. The same image of the Virgin Mary that we found in the apocalyptic tradition is now put before us: one for whom the response to

---

81 Babinsky, in a footnote, reminds the reader that the image of mystical union in the desert of indistinction is a favored metaphor in the mystical tradition stemming from Hadewijch, Marguerite, and Eckhart, among others.

82 She continues this theme of love-in-the-desert with her brief consideration of John the Baptist, of whom she notes: “One cannot find that Saint John left the desert to go see Jesus Christ in human nature” (206).

83 Here I would simply note, that like many mystics, Marguerite seems to underplay the dangers of excessive openness, and her emphasis on radical hospitality is in danger of being one-sided. I have in mind here Richard Kearney’s worries about Derridean notions of hospitality. However, it is perhaps especially difficult for a reader in the early twenty-first century United States to appreciate just how few resources one had to protect one’s borders, both personal and political. In some ways, I think the mystics might be more realistic about monsters than we are, who, after all, never announce their coming in such a way that we can refuse their arrival.
violent suffering is to “unencumber” (descombrer) herself from what has happened to her. It is just such freedom from the chains of the affections that the Beguine seeks in these considerations. How did the Virgin Mary accomplish this? Marguerite is short on analysis here. Perhaps it is enough that she did. The only hint she gives us is in pointing to her next “consideration”, that of the suffering Christ, the contemplation of which seems to stop all thoughts of vengeance in their tracks. “And this consideration made me depart from myself, so that it might make me live by divine pleasure” (207).

Marguerite follows this with a brief discussion of the immensity of Christ’s anguish. She writes that

if all the sufferings, and deaths, and other torments, whatever they might have been, or are, or will be, from the time of Adam up until the time of the Antichrist, and if all the sufferings above said were gathered as one, truly this still would not be but one point of suffering compared to the suffering which Jesus had (207-208).

At first glance this sounds like a classic theological trope used both to magnify the debt owed to Christ by virtue of his unparalleled suffering and to minimize the reality of our own. Yet in Marguerite’s hands, the trope takes on a rather

---

84 In Chapter 24, Marguerite suggests that it is just such traumatic events as the Virgin Mary experiences that tend to “encumber” the one who undergoes them. Victims, as is well known, are often more likely to feel “stained” by the trauma they have undergone, as in survivor guilt. So Marguerite writes of souls like Mary’s: “Such Souls are alone in all things, and common in all things, for they do not encumber their being on account of something which might happen to them. For as completely as the sun has light from God and shines on all things without taking any impurity into it, so also such Souls have their being from God and in God, without taking impurity into themselves on account of things which they might see or hear outside themselves.” (107)
different sense. She concludes this paean to Christ’s sufferings by noting that
the reason for the immensity of Jesus’ suffering was “the delicate tenderness of
His purity” (208).  

We saw above that for Marguerite, “tenderness” (tendre) is not
necessarily a virtue. It can, left without further testing, lead to inordinate self-
love or even deception. Yet this is not the only sense she has for the word.
She uses it, or a variant of it, only a few times in the Mirror, yet each use carries
significant weight. In relationship to the disciples, she suggests that their
tenderness is a sign of their all too “human nature” (202). Yet it would not be
quite right to say that she uses it pejoratively here, as quickly adds that even in
this tenderness “they still possessed the sweet grace of God.” Next, in her
consideration of Mary Magdalene’s deep anguish at the tomb, she cries out:

“Ah God, Mary! Who were you, when you sought and loved humanly through
the affection of the tender grasp of your own spirit?” The opening ejaculative
prayer followed by the evocative “Who were you?” is thus a remarkable insight
on Marguerite’s part on the way in which their shared suffering has caused the

85 Guarnieri’s French text has pour la delicateté ou déleté de la tendreur de la purté de luy.
86 For example, in chapter 133, she notes that “those who are sad possess affection of spirit”
and this affection is mediated by the “tenderness” of the sad soul’s love. This can create
confusion, where such affections, which are indeed powerful in their oscillating intensity, can
be mistaken for holy love. By these untested intensities, sad souls often “are deceived” (216).
Here we might think of LaCapra’s worry about the traumatic sublime.
87 I have modified Babinsky’s translation, which is on page 203. Marguerite’s opening
ejaculation, is “Hay, Dieux, Marie!” Babinsky inexplicably leaves out God. Colledge, however,
is more faithful here, so I have followed his translation.
divine and the human natures to mingle inextricably. Here tenderness is the very permeability of suffering allowing for the rich communion between Mary and God. It is thus crucial to the very process of the will’s overcoming of its fear of loss, and in no way despised or denigrated by Marguerite.

And so too in the passage we have before us, it is the very tendreur of Jesus’s pure human nature that is valorized. In this way, Marguerite turns the classic trope on its head, suggesting that to be tender, a weak, vulnerable human being, is the very way into God’s divine loved.

What follows are another three chapters contemplating this divine-human nature of Christ, (Ch 127), the “great poverty” of his suffering (Ch 128), and a rather obscure consideration of the unity of will between the Seraphim and the divine will (Ch 129).

Having travelled so far into the sufferings of wounded love, bereft of consolation and full of fire, in Chapter 130, Marguerite describes herself as bewildered and even beside herself. “I knew not how to restrain myself or how to endure” (210). When she tries to consider God from the midst of such hell, she is unable. Though she can recite the standard divine attributes of power, wisdom, and goodness, they do not register for her: “I do not know whence

---

88 The seraphim are fiery angelic beings who, in the Book of Isaiah, guard the divine throne while singing the Trisagion. Aquinas notes, following Pseudo-Dionysius, that they are said to contain “an excess of heat.” Perhaps, in this way they exemplify for Porete what she will call the fire of love so perfectly united with the divine will that it can “feel no fire.”
you are...I do not know what you are...I do not know who you are.” So too when she looks at herself. Though she can register at some level the abject nature of her condition, she does not experience such abjection as properly her own:

Similarly I said of myself: “Lord I know not whence I am, for I know nothing of my excessive weakness. Lord, I know not what I am, for I know nothing of my excessive ignorance. Lord, I know not who I am, for I know nothing of my excessive wretchedness.”

She tries to reassure herself of the things she once thought she knew—but such reassurances have the feel of one so traumatized that they are reduced to repeating things once believed in but whose meanings now shift and slip away in the blinding sand:

Lord, you are One Goodness...And I am One Wretchedness..Lord you are all power, all wisdom, all goodness...Lord you are one sole God in three persons, Father Son, and Holy Spirit. And I am one sole enemy, in three miseries, that is, weakness, ignorance, wretchedness (211).

Such catechetical reassurances, however, are of no avail. Here Marguerite has moved beyond her earlier guideposts into a forlorn night in which she is utterly lost and abject. Her agonized frustration is evident:

And if I could comprehend one of these two natures, I would comprehend them both...[but] as I understand nothing of my wretchedness, compared to what it is in itself, so I understand nothing of your goodness... (211)
Cut off from God, cut off from herself, she understands so little of what is happening to her that to call such anguish “truth” is a dry crumb indeed:

“And yet truly, Lord, this is so little that one could better say that it is nothing compared to what remains than to say that it is something compared to what remains.” And what remains is simply this: her own sense of wretchedness as she has followed, to the best of her ability, the counsels of a God to whose goodness and love she nevertheless still clings.

And now Marguerite reaches the crucial stage in her journey, the so-called “tests of love” that make up chapter 131 in her new text. Frustrated that her earlier considerations have taken her only so far and left her more deeply troubled than ever, she announces at the outset of the chapter that she sought a new strategy to “calm (apaiser) myself about Him” (211). The solution she comes to, not surprising to us at this point, is to stage a performance in which she says she has “placed myself in meditation by the pondering of a comparison with the consent of my will without turning back.” What follows is a series of staged tests in each of which she acts out the possibility of accepting God’s will for her no matter what the cost to her own person.90

---

90 Guarnieri’s French text has “et me mis en meditacion par comprendement de comparaison en consentement de voulenté sans revance” (376). I admit to being puzzled by the exact meaning of Porete’s words here. To what exactly is she “comparing” these ever more extreme examples of consent to the divine will?  
90 It is of course possible to be skeptical of these tests, seeing in them nothing more than a woman with a masochistic streak and a fertile imagination subject herself to ever more
The chapter can be divided into two parts. The first part consists of, by my count, eleven “tests”, each beginning with the following formula or variation upon it: “And so I said (to Him).”\(^{91}\) Though many commentators have highlighted that all of the tests are ones Marguerite tells us she “authored” rather than heard from a divine source, few have noticed that in this first part of the chapter, Marguerite in fact does all of the talking. Even more importantly, it is saying that she does, with dis or dis je insistently punctuating each test. It is, to be sure, a rather odd way to express an attempt to annihilate one’s will.

These initial tests show Marguerite imagining herself accepting each and every “torment” (tourmens) God could will for her, up to and including her own damnation.\(^{92}\)

Finally, in the last “test” of this first part of the chapter, she raises the stakes to what we might think the boldest possible level in a scene that looks

---

\(^{91}\) In the French: dis a lui que or dis je que. In the French text there are only ten tests in this first part. In Babinsky there are eleven due to her addition of one found in the Latin text. The eleven tests begin in Babinsky on page 211 and continue until the shift toward the bottom of 213 beginning with “And afterward.”

\(^{92}\) In the light of her own situation vis-à-vis King Philip’s Inquisition, this test of her will was in no way an idle speculation. It must be remembered that in Marguerite’s context, distinguishing between the church’s condemnation and God’s damnation was not easily done. One was not, obviously, in today’s ecumenical context in which one could simply find another church in which to seek God’s safe embrace. Marguerite herself, according to the trail documents, agreed that her inquisitor William was “duly appointed.” Field, The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor, 90.
strikingly like that of our previously discussed Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{93}

It is worth quoting in full:

\begin{quote}
And then I said that if I knew that the sweet humanity of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary and the whole court of heaven could not bear that I have such eternal torments and that I not receive the being from which I had departed; and then should God perceive in them this pity and this desire, and should He then say to me, ‘If you desire, I will return to you that from which you departed on account of my will, and I will remove you from such torments because my friends in my court desire it, for if it were not their will, I would not return it to you, and you would be in eternal torments; but because of their love I return such a gift to you, if you wish to take it.’ If it were thus, I would refuse forever and remain in the torments rather than take the gift, since I would not have it by His will alone, but instead I would receive it through the prayers of the humanity of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary and the saints. For I could not tolerate it if I did not have the gift from the pure love which He has for me of Himself, from His pure goodness, from His will alone, as a lover has for his beloved (213).
\end{quote}

The passage is fascinating on a number of levels. Marguerite’s use of the phrase “sweet humanity” (doulce humanité) to describe the inability of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the other saints to “bear” (souffrir) her damnation, recalls the earlier discussion of the “tenderness” of the Apostles’ and Jesus’ “human nature.” Here, it would seem, such tenderness has made it all the way up to the heaven, suggesting that it is much a part of the divine nature as it is human.

\textsuperscript{93} I have no direct evidence that Marguerite would have had access to these Apocalypses, though it seems likely that such texts would have been circulating in France at the time.
Nevertheless, Marguerite here imagines not giving in to heaven’s tender pleas, refusing from her hard place in hell all such offers of misericordia. “I would refuse forever” (sans fin) she defiantly cries, thus acting out rather stunningly a scenario in which she rejects ad infinitum the loving gestures of Christ and the hosts of heaven.

How do we interpret this remarkable counter-movement to the resignatio gestures of our earlier apocalyptic texts? My own view here is that we should see Marguerite’s move here as the final in a series of increasingly extreme and futile attempts to will herself into accepting the condemnation and (possible) tortures that she sees on her horizon. Thus the willfulness of the telling insistence of her own voice (the dis je) in these first eleven tests, and the particularly defiant refusal on her part to accept even Christ’s merciful offer of love. It is as if she thinks that the only way to “calm” herself is to force herself to accept a God who would demand her ultimate rejection.

I think that the marked shift in the second half of the chapter indicates that this strategy fails, and that she needs further meditations to find her way forward. For immediately after this paroxysm of defiant acceptance of her damnation, Marguerite’s favored word returns, a word that has been conspicuously absent throughout the entire first part of the chapter: amour.

And afterward, I considered in my pondering, as if He Himself were asking me, how I would fare (contendroie) if I knew that He
could be better pleased that *I should love (j'amasse) another better than Him*. At this my sense failed me, and I knew not how to answer, nor what to will, nor what to deny; but I responded that I would ponder it (213, emphasis mine).94

Gone is the strident voice of Marguerite’s earlier *dis je*. Gone, for the moment, is the language of torment. Gone is the confident will that *knows* that the only answer to (God’s) rejection is more rejection (her own). Quietly, sweetly, we might even say, God breathes into Marguerite’s imagination a new word of love. And the word repeats in the final two tests, which ask Marguerite to ponder what it would mean for God to love another better than her and then for another to love her better than God loves her.

It is, to be sure, a new word, and not the same old love that Marguerite has known all along. Nor is it Marguerite’s own word, her *dis je*. Rather here God speaks a new, hitherto unimagined possibility for love to survive even in the midst of a hellish separation from God. And this is what is singularly surprising about it. When we recall that both Newman and Hollywood worried that Porete’s annihilation of the will left no room for the other because of an all-consuming union with God, here is a love able to be “unencumbered” from God. Though she does not cite Romans 9:3, we should not miss its

---

94 Godefroy has the following definition for the verb *contendre*: “*combattre, lutter, etre en lute, en contestation.*” In Vol. 2 of Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue francaise et de tous ses dialects du IXème au XVème siecle* (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1881-1902), 262. We will return to this idea that part of “fairing” well with love in the midst of hell requires ceaseless battle.
resonance. God presents to Marguerite the possibility of a love no longer locking her in a suffocating death grip. So, she writes, “For as long as I was at ease and loved myself along “with” him, there was nothing I could do for myself, nor could I have calm in myself. I was held in bondage, and I could not move” (214). Now that she has been given the offer by God to love God “without” God by loving, and being loved by another, she can finally twist free.

This freedom, Marguerite makes clear, is not without significant pain. The heart, she insists, is free only in anguish, it can receive this wound of love only by battling (contendre) the strong desire to be “with” God. To be released from this “withness” into the “land of freedom” (le Pays de Franchise) means giving up the desire to have, and to be perceived by others as having, “a good will” (215). Without the royal cloak of virtues to cover her, “such a soul is naked” yet “she does not fear, in such nudity, that the serpent will bite her” (216). Bite it will, for it does not perceive the virtues “completely enclosed within such a soul” (217).

The Virtue-System of Holy Church the little will not, Marguerite knows, stand idly by. For it feeds on the sad souls’ fear of being “without” God’s love,

---

95 When Paul writes that he could wish to be “cut off” from God so that he might love more fully his “brethren in the flesh,” he is quite close to answering yes, he could indeed “contend” quite well should God give him over to the love of another.  
96 We are obviously quite close to Eckhart’s prayer to God to be rid of God. When we shift such a prayer to Marguerite’s register, it is clearly a prayer for love’s survival, rather than its destruction.
and insists that only those frozen in its clutches are “with” it.\textsuperscript{97} And so she concludes with this truth, known to her even before William of Paris has heard her name: “My will is martyred, and my love is martyred: You have guided these to martyrdom” (214).

“For the sake of my brethren in the flesh, the Forlorn”

A martyr is, as the Greek word from which it comes indicates, a witness. As I conclude this reading of Marguerite’s testament, I want to return one more time to the question I asked above: For whom did Marguerite write this remarkable text of Love’s trial by fire? Lest there be any doubt, she names her audience at the very outset of chapter 123. I write, she says, “for the sad ones” (\textit{pour lez marriz}).\textsuperscript{98} And who are these “sad ones?” Marguerite doesn’t name them (other than herself), but it is not hard to guess. On the day of her death, June 1, 1310, she was joined in the fire by a “relapsed Jew” for whom the historical record has no name. Having publically renounced his baptism he, like Marguerite, like the fifty four Knights Templar, like countless others, had found themselves outside the King’s virtue system. As the two of them burned, crowds gathered to see what their bodies might reveal, what truths their faces

\textsuperscript{97} “Holy Church singularly praises Fear of God…still Fear of God would destroy the being of freeness if she could penetrate such a being. But perfect freeness possesses no why” (217).

\textsuperscript{98} Colledge, et. al translates \textit{marriz} as the forlorn.
might betray. History does not tell us how the nameless Jewish man met his fate other than by demeaning stereotype. Marguerite, eyewitnesses say, met the fire calmly, “both noble and devout.”99 Many of those who gathered to witness the event, we are told, had tears in their eyes as their hearts beheld the excruciating misery of the burning, melting flesh. The reflections in Marguerite’s *Mirror* were for them.

The Domestication of the *Resignatio Ad Infernum*

The burning of Marguerite Porete did not quench the fire of love sparked by the thirteenth-century exemplars of mystical counter-conduct studied in the previous chapters. Soon after her death, Marguerite’s work was re-published under various pseudonyms to avoid any taint of heresy and it soon found its way into no fewer than four languages, making it according to McGinn, “among the more widely disseminated of the vernacular mystical texts of the Middle Ages.”100 Meister Eckhart was likely influenced by Porete’s writing, which he could have seen while staying in Paris at the house of the Beguine’s inquisitor, William of Paris.101 Significantly, however, the radical and

101 Ibid. Numerous scholars have noted the similarities between Porete and Eckhart. In addition to McGinn, see Trombley, 60-102. The Flemish theologian Jan van Ruusbroec was heavily influenced by Hadewijch’s mysticism, even as he wrote diatribes against the Beguines to avoid falling under any suspicion himself. See Jessica A. Boon, *”Trinitarian Love Mysticism: Ruusbroec, Hadewijch, and the Gendered Experience of the Divine,” Church*
even heterodox edges of the Beguine *resignatio* were dulled by the Dominican Meister in a gesture that would lead to a version of the teaching more palatable to anxious orthodox eyes. It is Eckhart’s teaching, followed by the Rhineland school of mysticism so indebted to him that was carried forward in the orthodox tradition long after the Beguine women’s movement has been stamped out under the accusation of the “free spirit” heresy.\(^\text{102}\)

Eckhart repeated the Beguine theme of vehement love willing to risk hell for the sake of the beloved. The following passage from Eckhart’s *Predigt 13* is representative:

> If I loved a person as myself, then whatever happened to him, good or bad, life or death, I would be as ready for it to happen to me as to him: This would be true friendship. In regard to this St. Paul says, ‘I would be willing to be eternally separated from God for my friend’s sake *and for God*’ (cf. Rm. 9:3). To be separated from God for an instant is to be separated from God for eternity; to be separated from God is the pain of hell. What then did St. Paul mean in saying that he would be willing to be separated from God? The masters pose the question whether St. Paul was on the way to perfection or whether he was in the state of full perfection. I claim that he was in the state of full perfection.\(^\text{103}\)

---

\(^\text{102}\) *History* 72, no. 3 (2003). We noted above the distinct possibility, argued by Louis Bouyer that Eckhart had been influenced by Hadewijch at second-hand.


Eckhart goes on to explain that Paul’s love is perfect insofar as it seeks no reward of its own, nothing from God, not even the rewards of love. Yet here we see the Dominican hedge his radical notion of *Gelassenheit* with a significant qualifier, as his perfect love is only willing to “forsake God for God’s sake” [*das er Gott um Gottes willen lasse*]. This “for God’s sake” is not found in Romans 9:3 of the Vulgate from which he has just quoted, and so it would seem that both in his quotation of Paul and in his own gloss he has supplemented Paul with a rather protective and recuperative gesture. Paul, according to Eckhart, leaves God, but only so as to re-join him at a higher level, thus exemplifying the *exitus-reditus* Neo-Platonic pattern so deeply ingrained in the Dominican’s thought. So, he continues, “it is a oneness and a pure union…and such a man experiences no suffering.” [*es ist ein Eines und eine lautere Einung…und in diesen Menschen fällt kein Leiden*]  

Gone from this version of the *resignatio ad infernum* is the stormy refusal of quiet reconciliation that we saw in Hadewijch, Jacopone and in Porete. Gone is the emphasis on *suffering* God out of a parrhesiastic insistence on love’s

---


*Ironically enough, even these qualifiers did little to protect Eckhart from suspicious inquisitors. The above passage was on the censors list of ideas “evil sounding and rash” from the pen of the Dominican mystic. See Eckhart, et al., *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher,* 271.*
vehement desire to bear witness without stint to the anguish of suffering flesh.

As Donald Duclow puts it in an essay comparing Hadewijch and Eckhart,

Yet his path...differs sharply from hers. Whereas Hadewijch consistently presses desire to and beyond its limits, Eckhart here counsels a restraint or pulling back from desire. From the devouring hunger of the Ecclesiasticus lecture, he turns to a release or detachment that opens to receive God's self-giving. This detachment is one of Eckhart's major themes and cannot be developed here, except to note two points. First, in Eckhart's dialectical fashion, detachment is the opposite to the devouring hunger of unending desire and therefore its predictable foil; infinite desire and no desire, but nothing in between, carry one into the Godhead. Second, although Eckhart's detachment may resemble Hadewijch's surrender to Love, it makes the whole mystical enterprise sound much easier than she found it to be.105

Indeed, for Eckhart, Paul’s gesture, far from making him vulnerable to hell’s worst, is instead a salvific gesture *par excellence*. As Denys Turner notes,

“In Eckhart’s scheme detachment is the achievement of a kind of invulnerability, a security in the soul’s ever-present ground where the dramas of sin, weakness and suffering can have no place.”106 A willingness to be damned is now a sign, not of agonized protest of God’s will out of love for human flesh, as it is in Paul and in the thirteenth century, but an index of one’s pure obedience to the divine will.

---

We see this orthodox version of the resignatio in both Luther and Francis de Sales in the sixteenth century. Luther’s commentary on Romans puts it succinctly in his gloss on 9:3.

“Now all who truly love God and revere him as a father and friend, not from natural capacity but only through the Holy Spirit, will think these words very beautiful and they will take them as evidence of a truly perfect example: for they submit freely to the will of God whatever it may be, even for hell and eternal death, if God should will it, in order that his will may be fully done; they seek absolutely nothing for themselves. And yet, inasmuch as they themselves so purely conform to the will of God, they cannot possibly remain in hell. [sic est impossibile, ut in inferno maneant.] For one who surrenders his own self completely to the will of God cannot possibly be forever outside God. For he wills what God wills. Therefore he pleases God. And when he pleases God, he is loved by him and by this love he is saved.”107

For Luther, then, seeking to avoid hell was damnable while being willing to be sent there insured that one never would be. Whereas Paul never mentions the will of God as motivating his prayer, and as we saw in Chapter One can plausibly be read to be saying that he is willing to resist it should it mean the damnation of his “brothers in the flesh,” Luther has turned his words into the very apotheosis of the annihilation of the human will. Unlike Porete’s ironic gestures of will-lessness in The Mirror, Luther could hardly be more serious.

This domestication of Paul’s radical gesture is repeated by Francis de Sales early in the seventeenth century. In the well-known Book Nine on holy indifference in the *Treatise on the Love of God*, de Sales writes,

Resignation prefers God's will before all things, yet it loves many other things besides the will of God. Indifference goes beyond resignation: for it loves nothing except for the love of God's will... To conclude, God's will is the sovereign object of the indifferent soul; wheresoever she sees it she runs after the odour of its perfumes, directing her course ever thither where it most appears, without considering anything else. She is conducted by the Divine will, as by a beloved chain; which way soever it goes, she follows it: she would prize hell more with God's will than heaven without it; nay she would even prefer hell before heaven if she perceived only a little more of God's good-pleasure in that than in this, so that if by supposition of an impossible thing she should know that her damnation would be more agreeable to God than her salvation, she would quit her salvation and run to her damnation.\(^{108}\)

In the Fifth Chapter of the same book, Francis mentions Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac as an exemplary case of holy indifference, both on the father’s and the son’s part, further diminishing the parrhesiastic aspect of the tradition we have been following.

[Then we should have at the same instant to unite our will to God's in imitation of the great Abraham, and, like him, if we had such a command, we should have to undertake the execution of the eternal decree even in the slaying of our children: Oh admirable union of this patriarch's will to the will of God, when, believing that it was the Divine pleasure that he should sacrifice his child, he willed and undertook it so courageously! Admireable that of the child, who so meekly submitted himself to his father's

---

sword, to have God's good-pleasure performed at the price of his own death!\(^{109}\)

When Francis does turn to Paul's words in Romans 9:2-3, he, like Luther, seeks to truncate their measureless grief and love.

But, at last, after we have wept over the obstinate, and performed towards them the good offices of charity in trying to reclaim them from perdition, we must imitate our Saviour and the Apostles; that is, we must divert our spirit from thence and place it upon other objects and employments which are more to the advancement of God's glory. To you it behoved us first (said the Apostles to the Jews) to speak the word of God: but because you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the Gentiles. The kingdom of God (said our Saviour) shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof. For we cannot spend too long time in bewailing some, without losing time fit and necessary for procuring the salvation of others. The Apostle indeed says that the loss of the Jews is a continual sorrow to him, but this is said in the same sense that we say we praise God always; for we mean no other thing thereby than that we praise him very frequently, and on every occasion; and in the same manner the glorious St. Paul felt a continual grief in his heart on account of the reprobation of the Jews, in the sense that on every occasion he bemoaned their misfortune.\(^{110}\)

Not surprisingly, Francis's resignatio, unlike his thirteenth century predecessors, never fell afoul of the church he so obediently served. It was only in the late seventeenth century, with the condemnation of the Spaniard Molinos followed shortly by the more rebellious champions of the resignatio,

\(^{109}\) In this atmosphere of absolute obedience regardless of the human cost, it comes as no surprise to see Francis singing the praises of the crusaders for their obedience to their bloody tasks. Book IX, Ch. 5.

\(^{110}\) Ibid. Book IX Ch. 8.
Francois Fenelon and Madame Guyon, in the eighteenth, that the church again cast its eye suspiciously on the *resignatio* tradition of holy indifference. In the later case, Bishop Bossuet tried valiantly to distinguish what was in his view the wholly orthodox teachings of de Sales from that of the impertinent Mme. Guyon and her patron Bishop Fénelon. Contemporary scholars are less optimistic that he succeeds on *theological* grounds.\textsuperscript{111} In a fascinating recent article devoted to the topic, G. R. Evans suggests, in a reading similar to this one, that the issue of obedience of the will, or lack thereof, might be a shibboleth of sorts in sorting out why some mystics can speak of a willingness to be damned with impunity, while others cannot. She writes:

Perhaps the most important clue to the scale of the adverse reaction is the fact that the Quietists and their like were surprisingly noisy in defense of their teaching and their practices. “Every slight . . . had to be dramatized and exclaimed over; they resigned themselves to their loss not . . . with a pious shrug of the shoulders, but in a roaring ecstasy of self-abandonment.” In a way, this was a reflection of the deeper truth that it was not all simply about cultivating “indifference.” It was also about establishing what matters and what does not (*adiaphora*), what authority is allowed to interfere in and what is legitimately private. These questions are as topical as ever in an age where state intrusion into the lives of private citizens and the surveillance of activities and the compilation of databases are growing threats to the quiet enjoyment of the inner world of the mind and soul. Other

people’s indifference is not a matter of indifference to authoritarian power structures.\textsuperscript{112}

Though their teachings can, according to McGinn, be given non-heretical readings, the condemnations of Molinos, Fénelon and Guyon reassured an anxious church that de Sales (and Bernard, whom Fénelon also took for inspiration) was no heretic, and that hell was best avoided by an expression of a willingness to be damned, should that be God’s will. Needless to say, the corollary, that one must will there to be a hell after this life to which some are damned, necessarily followed. The resignatio tradition of the thirteenth-century mystics, in which such theodicies were vehemently resisted, was thus, for a century or more, largely left behind.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., at p. 38.

\textsuperscript{113} The orthodox version of the resignatio, begun with Eckhart and furthered by de Sales, could be said to reach its pinnacle with Jean Pierre de Caussade’s work, \textit{Abandonment to Divine Providence}. Like de Sales, he refers to Abraham’s “generous readiness” to sacrifice Isaac, and counsels his readers to stay in the hells they find themselves in “as quietly as you can.” Jean Pierre de Caussade, \textit{Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence}. (London: Burns & Oates, 1959), Book IV Letter One. At this point, the noisy parrhesia we saw in the apocalyptic tradition and in the thirteenth century mystical counter-conduct has obviously been abandoned in favor of quietly suffering as a sign of loyalty to God and his church.
Chapter Six

The Postmodern Return of the Resignatio ad Infernum

The Resignatio Returns: Hell in the Levinasian Tradition

It has been the argument throughout this dissertation that the orthodox version of hell, a punishment received in the afterlife for disobedience to God in this one, is late on the scene. It is only one possible response to what the psalmist in the Hebrew Scriptures thinks of as hell/sheol: a traumatic experience of this life haunted by death and implacable suffering.¹ In the twentieth century, according to Rachel Falconer, this existential understanding of hell has returned with a vengeance.² In her remarkable study of twentieth century literary tours of hell, Falconer discusses how the “sheer pressure of twentieth-century history has convinced many that Hells actually exist, and survivors do return.”³ Drawing a sharp distinction between earlier katabatic narratives, where the heroes descended to hell in order to “subjugate the dark realm” and return with the prize of self-knowledge, Falconer notes that one of

¹ Though I have not addressed the scenes in the New Testament where Jesus appears to be invoking the former understanding, it is at least arguable that a more existential, rather than metaphysical reading can be given to these passages. For hints at how one could go in this direction, one example see Adela Yarbro Collins and Harold W. Attridge, Mark: A Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).
² Falconer mistakenly refers to this existential hell as “metaphorical” hell. As Bernstein has shown convincingly, it would be more accurate to say that this is closer to the literal meaning of hell, as we see it in the psalmist, and that the projection of hell to another world is the metaphor.
the unique aspects of twentieth-century hell narratives is that hell is not so much a place one enters for a time only to return whole and hale, but is the very context in which one lives and moves. The thought of conquering or “harrowing” hell is now considered hubristic; instead hell is grappled with, survivors seek to “acquire the ability to live with the double-vision [of life-amidst-death]” and to “articulate their resistance to this apparently inescapable infernal condition.”

If, as Falconer writes, hell is the “modern condition,” responses to it can vary significantly. The older, katabatic narratives of heroic descent continue to appeal with their promise of self-construction under adverse conditions. This response is what she drolly refers to as the “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” theory of hell. Yet, especially in the wake of the major horrors of the twentieth-century, a second approach to hell has to some extent supplanted this optimistic one. If the katabatic narrative can be said to make hell meaningful, this second approach refuses this understanding, in place of what Falconer calls a “traumatized” hell.

Drawing on Lyotard’s famous essay “The Jewish Oedipus,” Falconer suggests that this traumatized hell makes its way into much postmodern thought through the influence of Emmanuel Levinas who rejects what he considers the triumphalist, Christian, and katabatic “odyssey of knowledge.”

---

Ibid., 5.
Lyotard paraphrases him, the katabatic self has a “desire simply to be tempted, to have been tempted, and to have emerged intact from the ‘ordeal’.”³ Lyotard quoted in Ibid., 35. Lyotard is commenting on a passage in Levinas’ Talmudic lecture “The Temptation of Temptation”, found in Emmanuel Lévinas, Nine Talmudic Readings (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 33.

Levinas writes that this “useful suffering” tries to “brush past evil, know it without succumbing to it, experience it without experiencing it, try it without living it, take risks in security.”⁶

In contrast to this is Levinas’ concept of the “there is” (il y a). Levinas describes this as a “mute, absolutely indeterminate menace” which haunts being. Falconer likens it to a traumatized hell leading to a dispossession of the self. If one returns from this hell it is as “a stranger to oneself.”⁷

She notes that Levinas’ “there is” is deeply imbued with his experience of the survival of the labor camps of the Nazis. Falconer points to his use of Shakespeare’s tragedies in his essay on the “there is” to note that for Levinas, even should one survive

⁴ Ibid. The phrase “useful suffering” is, of course, an allusion to another of Levinas’s crucial essays rejecting theodicies, “Useless Suffering,” found in Emmanuel Lévinas, Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
⁷ Ibid. This following passage from Levinas’ essay on the “there is” is representative. His allusion to Sartre make the hellish implication unmistakable: “in the there is which returns in the heart of every negation, in the there is that has ’no exits’. It is, if we may say so, the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation….A corpse is horrible; it already bears itself its own phantom, it presages its return. The haunting spectre, the phantom, constitutes the very element of horror.” Emmanuel Lévinas, Existence and Existents (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), 61.
hell, one is forever haunted by its ghosts, including the ghost of who one once was.⁸

Falconer rightly worries that in some postmodern renderings of this traumatized hell, there is an almost romantic fascination with this abject sphere of the “there is.” Trauma, as we saw in LaCapra’s theory, is in danger of becomes valorized, as having near divine status.⁹ She critiques Lyotard for this temptation, for writing “in praise of a “dispossession without return”.¹⁰ No one writes of hell, she insists, without “a degree of distance from the experience,” even if that distance is the distressingly close call of the beloved’s nocturnal whisper.

Rather than follow Lyotard’s reading of Levinas, Falconer prefers Derrida’s invocation of a “hauntology” in his reading of *Hamlet* in *The Spectres of* 

---

⁸ Levinas writes, “Specters, ghosts, sorceresses are not only a tribute Shakespeare pays to his time or vestiges of the original material he wrote with; they allow him to move constantly toward this limit between being and nothingness where being insinuates itself even in nothingness, like bubbles of the earth (‘The Earth hath bubbles’). Hamlet recoils before the ‘not to be’ because he has a foreboding of the return to being (‘to die, to sleep, perchance to Dream’).” (62) It is significant that this speech in Hamlet resonates with the Augustinian suggestion that hell is like a nightmare from which one does not wake up. This is Hamlet’s fear as well, and Levinas hints that it is a reality invading one’s waking and sleeping moments.

⁹ Could this be part of what Levinas means when he writes, in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, of a “possible confusion” between the “there is” and divine transcendence? See Emmanuel Lévinas and Bettina Bergo, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 69. Hell has its allure, as readers have known since at least the time of Dante, yet in Levinas it seems more likely that the confusion comes from the fact that the ghosts who haunt one in the dark night of the “there is” call with an infinite demand. They exemplify the divine transcendence of the face in their incessant and haunting call to remember.

Marx. Falconer reads Derrida’s text as itself a kind of “descent” narrative. The descent is twofold. First, Derrida’s analysis descends below the ruses of capitalism to what (or who) is being denied life and voice in its (always) gated community. Secondly, it descends below the value of life at all costs to witness to the truth of the dead. Derrida writes:

It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born.\(^\text{11}\)

Here Derrida links up Levinasian hell with his notion of radical hospitality, suggesting that if such a thing exists, it is more likely to be in hell than in heaven.

to welcome, we were saying then, but even while apprehending, with anxiety and the desire to exclude the stranger, to invite the stranger without accepting him or her, domestic hospitality that welcomes without welcoming the stranger, but a stranger who is already found within (das heimliche-Unheimliche), more intimate with one than one is oneself, the absolute proximity of a stranger whose power is singular and anonymous (es spukt), an unnamable and neutral power, that is, undecidable, neither active nor passive, an an-identity that, without doing anything, invisibly occupies places belonging finally neither to us nor it.\(^\text{12}\)


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 172.
For Derrida, to refuse the welcome of hell, to stop one’s ears and heart to the Unheimliche call of the ghosts who are not quite there, is to risk an even greater hell, that of abandoning the cries of the damned, leaving them vanished without a trace.

That the without-ground of this impossible can nevertheless take place is on the contrary the ruin or the absolute ashes, the threat that must be thought, and, why not, exorcised yet again… One must constantly remember that the impossible (‘to let the dead bury their dead’) is, alas, always possible. One must constantly remember that this absolute evil (which is, is it not, absolute life, fully present life, the one that does not know death and does not want to hear about it) can take place. One must constantly remember that it is even on the basis of the terrible possibility of this impossible that justice is desirable: through but also beyond right and law. (175)

Falconer writes, “The choice laid out in Spectres of Marx seems to be between returning from Hell to live in and for the present alone or surviving diachronically, feeling the ‘non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present’. In other words, like the charge given to the scholar Horatio to speak with the hellish ghost come to haunt Hamlet and the realm, Derrida pleads for a love just enough to allow hell to speak in the heart:

If he loves justice at least, the “scholar” of the future, the “Intellectual” of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let

---

them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet. They give us to rethink the “there” as soon as we open our mouths…”

Falconer herself never mentions the resignatio ad infernum tradition in her book. Indeed, it is not likely that she is familiar with it. Nevertheless, when we read both Levinas and Derrida as Falconer suggests we do, it becomes clear how close they are to the resignatio tradition. Though neither of them ever reference Romans 9:1-3 as far as I know, one of their leading interpreters, John D. Caputo, does. In an essay articulating his own understanding of a religious view inspired by Levinasian-Derridean notions of the impossible, hospitality, hauntology, and the gift, he writes:

The acid test of the lovers of the impossible is, as is entirely in order, I think, the impossible itself. I refer to what is called in classical theology resignatio ad infernum (“resignation to hell”), the notion, itself based on another word from Paul (Rom 9:1-3), that if the love of God required it, if the service of the slumdogs required it, the people of the impossible (known in religion as “saints”) would prefer per impossibile, as we say so tellingly, to be consigned to hell, that is, to be forever separated from the love of God rather than to go to heaven while letting the slumdogs bury the slumdogs.15

14 Ibid., 176.
That both Levinas and Derrida turn to literature to speak of life in hell is no accident. When they occur at all, recent philosophical treatments of the subject are too often hampered by the analytical tradition’s tendency toward Christian apologies for hell’s rationality.\textsuperscript{16} Christian theologians rarely speak of hell anymore, and when they do, it is often to soften the traditional teaching or else argue that hell is a self-imposed and this-worldly phenomenon of despairing isolation.\textsuperscript{17}

On the other hand, literature has the distinct advantage of being a non-technical, vernacular language. We saw its suppleness in the three mystics discussed in the previous chapters. Given the grotesque nature of the \textit{resignatio} thematic of love and God in the midst of hell, literary expressions are thus especially apt. Not surprisingly, Falconer points to perhaps the most important writer of hell for the postmodern tradition after Shakespeare, Fyodor Dostoevsky. Levinas is deeply marked by Dostoevsky’s thought, returning again and again to \textit{The Brothers Karamazov} for inspiration and clarification of his

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17} Hans urs von Balthasar is, of course, the exception for the depth of his treatment of the topic. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Dare we Hope : "That all Men be Saved"? ; with, A Short Discourse on Hell} (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). Rob Bell, in a popularizing genre, argues that the traditional hell is cruel and unnecessary, and that hell, if it exists, is self-imposed suffering. Rob Bell, \textit{Love Wins : A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived} (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011). Hell as self-imposed, rather than divine punishment was popularized earlier in the twentieth-century by C. S. Lewis in numerous of his works.
\end{flushright}
notions of responsibility, hospitality, and substitution, summed up in his favorite phrase from the novel, “Each of us is guilty before everyone and for everything, and I more than all the others.”

The phrase is a troubling one, and often misunderstood. Because of its deep influence on the Levinasian way of thinking about the resignatio, it is crucial that we explore it further. Before we do, it is important to note that Levinas indicated in a late interview that it was Dostoevsky’s treatment of love which captured his attention most as a young philosopher. For Levinas, as for Dostoevsky and the resignatio tradition we are following, love and hell are intimately linked.

---

Dostoevsky’s Resignatio ad Infernum

In the western theological tradition, the resignatio ad infernum became associated with heresy in the thirteenth and again in the eighteenth-century, and so has not been readily recognized as a tradition. In the Eastern Orthodox world of Dostoevsky this was not the case. There the doctrine of Christ’s descent into

---

19 The Brothers Karamazov tells the story of four Russian brothers, Dmitri, Alyosha, Pavel, and Ivan, whose father, Fyodor, is murdered under circumstances that lead the four brothers to wrestle with their complicity and/or guilt. All four brothers, as well as their mothers, suffered intensely at the hands of their negligent father, Fyodor, and the novel is throughout an exploration of the meaning or lack of meaning of the suffering of innocent children. In many ways, this is the hell that each character carries around with them, one that was shared by their author, Dostoevsky.

The brothers live near a Russian Orthodox monastery, whose staretz, Zosima, is worshipped by the young novice, Alyosha. Zosima’s own “back story” is told in Book VI of the novel, where we learn that the monk’s life is marked indelibly by the premature death of his brother, Markel, who is the originator of the phrase so well known by Levinas’ readers, “each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all.” Alyosha’s transcriptions of Zosima’s sermons, especially one given on hell and hell-fire, frame the novel as an exploration of the human heart as caught between hell and paradise, and each character in the novel struggles to come to terms with this grotesque spiritual cardiography. Zosima’s thought thus allows Dostoevsky and the reader to “theologize” much of the narrative, though never in such a way as to control the meaning of the events that take place.

The novel concludes with a trial of Dmitri for murder, and with the aftermath of his guilty verdict. Of course the trial is also symbolic, in that each character is tried throughout the novel with coming to terms with the reality of a hell that none of them have chosen but with which each must wrestle. In the end, Dmitri chooses to accept his sentence to live “underground” in the mines of Siberia rather than seeking, as Alyosha counsels, to escape to America. Ivan, increasingly overwhelmed by visions of the devil which he takes to be real, is shown going gradually insane. Pavel (Smerdyakov), the unacknowledged brother who was directly responsible for Fyodor’s murder, takes his own life. Alyosha is shown basking in the glow of the adoration of a group of children whom he has befriended and who are struggling with how to come to terms with the death of their young companion, Ilyusha. Though some commentators have read the novel as representing the triumph of Alyosha’s faith over the skepticism of Ivan/Smerdyakov and the hedonism of Dmitri, recent scholarship, as I will discuss below, has strongly resisted this conclusion, especially in light of the fact that it is now incontrovertible that Dostoevsky saw The Brothers Karamazov as the first part of a much longer work.
hell always played a more prominent role, and the apocalyptic vision of Mary boldly arguing for relief for the damned continued to be very popular well into the middle ages and beyond. Hilarion Alfeyev has noted that in the western theological tradition a juridical model of hell has predominated, whereas in the Eastern tradition this was never the case. Instead, under the influence of Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, Isaac the Syrian, and the Pseudo-Macarian homilies among others, the descent into hell was less about punishment than it was “an event significant not only for all people, but also for the entire cosmos, for all created life.” In crucial places in *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky invokes this Orthodox tradition of thinking about hell, making the novel perhaps the single most influential carrier of the resignatio tradition. It is through the book’s influence, especially on Camus, Levinas, and Cixous that it once again enters the western tradition.

It is not immediately self-evident that Levinas’ favored “talisman” from *The Brothers Karamazov* has anything to do with hell. When the phrase is first

---

20 See especially Hilarion, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009) and Sergeĭ Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Edinburgh: W.B. Eerdmans; T&T Clark, 2002). Alfeyev quotes from the Macarian homily, which gives a strongly existential reading of hell: “When you hear that the Lord in the old days delivered souls from hell and prison and that He descended into hell and performed a glorious deed, do not think that all these events are far from your soul… So the Lord comes into the souls that seek Him, into the depth of the heart’s hell, and there commands death, saying: “Release the imprisoned souls which have sought Me and which you hold by force.” Alfeyev is quoting from Pseudo-Macarius, George A. Maloney and Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies; and, the Great Letter* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 95.

21 Hilarion, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective*, 100.
uttered in Book VI,\textsuperscript{22} it is on the lips of the monk Zosima’s young and dying brother Markel. The boy, in a transcendent state of bliss, has just exclaimed that “life is paradise and we are all in paradise.”\textsuperscript{23} Marvelling at the love his family’s servants have shown him throughout his young life, Markel exclaims that “If God were to have mercy on me and let me live, I would begin serving you, for we must all serve each other” (289). This prompts his mother to protest that his words are too extreme, a sign of illness if not delirium. This response merely increases the boy’s ardor. “And I shall also tell you, dear mother, that each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all” (289). Such extravagant thoughts only increase in their passionate intensity as the day of his death nears, prompting the family doctor to opine in an aside to Markel’s mother, “He’s not long for this world, your son… from sickness he is falling into madness.”

At the very end of his life, he even seeks forgiveness from the birds that flutter by his deathbed window, prompting an incredulous response from his family and one last proclamation of his beatific state:

None of us could understand it then, but he was weeping with joy: “Yes,” he said, “there was so much of God’s glory around

\textsuperscript{22}That is, the first time within the time-frame of the novel. The first use of it in the novel comes in a sermon by Zosima in Book IV, but we are not yet privy to the fact that it is a phrase his brother uttered many years earlier as he lay dying.

\textsuperscript{23}Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, \textit{The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts with Epilogue} (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 288. All citations will be from this translation and edition and will be noted parenthetically by page number.
me: birds, trees, meadows, sky, and I alone lived in shame, I alone dishonored everything, and did not notice the beauty and glory of it at all.” “You take too many sins upon yourself,” mother used to weep. “Dear mother, my joy, I am weeping from gladness, not from grief; I want to be guilty before them, only I cannot explain it to you, for I do not even know how to love them. Let me be sinful before everyone, but so that everyone will forgive me, and that is paradise. Am I not in paradise now?” (289-290)

If read on its own, this passage could be interpreted in numerous ways: as a fit of sentimentality at the end of life; as a fitting and even triumphantly Christian end to a life cut short; as a burst of insania amoris; or as a theological belief of the author put into the mouth of a character whose final words we are meant to read sympathetically and to take with utter seriousness.

Interpreters of Dostoevsky, especially those from the western theological tradition, are often tempted to read the book in this way. When they do, Markel’s piety is accepted at face value as is his vision of paradise-on-earth. To borrow Falconer’s terms, such readings tend to move in a katabatic direction where hell is a journey through which one passes in order to come out unscathed and triumphant. Usually such readings take Alyosha, the would-be monk and youngest Karamazov brother, as the katabatic hero and double for Zosima’s pious brother Markel.24 The end of the novel, where Alyosha is celebrated by his young companions for seeing light and joy in the midst of the

24 Zosima notes the strong resemblance between his brother’s and Alyosha’s faces right before telling the story of his brother’s tragic death (285).
funeral of the young boy Ilyusha, is seen as his triumphant resurrection. Harriet Murav’s reading is here typical when she compares the novel as a whole to an Orthodox narrative icon,

in which the stories of the brothers and the structure of the novel mirror each other. The icon consists of three parts: katabasis, or descent into hell; trial; and resurrection or ascent….In the novel, as we will see, hell takes up the largest space. The possibility of ascent is suggested only at the novel’s end by the holy-foolish Alesha.  

Yet there are compelling reasons to resist this katabatic reading of the text, not least of which is the fact that Dostoevsky explicitly warns us against it. Early in the novel, we see a phrase reminiscent of Levinas’ critique of the Christian katabatic desire to “brush past evil…without succumbing to it.” Alyosha’s father says mockingly to his pious son, “you’re like an angel, nothing touches you” (25). This is followed by numerous hints that Alyosha is using the monastery and his religious faith to escape hell, rather than engage it. Like Ivan’s Grand Inquisitor, Alyosha is repeatedly tempted by a religion which makes things easier rather than harder. Toward the end of the novel he encourages his brother Mitya, convicted of the murder of his father Fyodor, to flee to America rather than enter the hell to which Mitya has indicated he is

---

In the final scene of the novel, the one which Murav thinks points to Alyosha’s triumph, Alyosha whips his young companions up into praising his own name (“Hurrah for Karamazov!”) even as the dead boy Ilyusha’s parents are wracked with mad, inconsolable grief over their son’s death. As Ksana Blank has written in her clear-eyed analysis of Alyosha’s failings,

Alyosha’s speech contrasts with the dramatic events of the final chapters. Captain Snegiryov and his wife weep, crushed by their child’s death. Dmitry is sentenced to twenty years of hard labor in Siberia; Ivan succumbs to brain fever. Alyosha only quickly refers to his brothers, ‘one of whom is going into exile, and the other is lying near death’ (774). Not to mention that his father has been recently murdered…Obviously the funeral is ‘the time to mourn,’ and in this sense Alyosha’s speech at the stone, full of joy and excitement, is out of place.

Here we begin to see how the phrase, “we are all guilty…and I most of all,” cannot so easily be read as validating either Markel’s or Alyosha’s faith.

Both seem strikingly innocent rather than guilty.

Part of Dostoevsky’s brilliance, as Mikhail Bakhtin has famously noted, was that he would take such touchstone phrases or ideas and run “tests of truth”

---

26 Mitya declares his willingness to go “underground,” significantly, by quoting Markel’s phrase: “And there are many of them, there are hundreds, and we’re all guilty for them! Why did I have a dream about a ‘wee one’ at such a moment? ‘Why is the wee one poor?’ It was a prophecy to me at that moment! It’s for the ‘wee one’ that I will go. Because everyone is guilty for everyone else. For all the ‘wee ones,’ because there are little children and big children. All people are ‘wee ones.’ And I’ll go for all of them, because there must be someone who will go for all of them.” (591)

on them by putting them into the mouths and/or hearts of many of his characters, saint and sinner alike, to see what they reveal. Nowhere is this more true than in the phrase at issue in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In Markel, as we have seen, the phrase is uttered in the midst of a religious reverie hinting at the interconnectedness of all being. Without denying the truth of this aspect of the phrase, when it occurs in the mouth of Dmitri at the end of the novel, it takes on more hellish tones as he indicates his desire to go “underground.” Dmitri chooses his exile to hell on earth out of love for the innocent suffering of children, the “wee ones” as he calls them.\(^\text{28}\) (591) When Zosima quotes his brother in his sermons to his monks at the monastery, the phrase takes on a more searing religious intensity:

> There is only one salvation for you: take yourself up, and make yourself responsible for all the sins of men. For indeed it is so, my friend, and the moment you make yourself sincerely responsible for everything and everyone, you will see at once that it is really so, that it is you who are guilty on behalf of all and for all. (320)

As theologian and Dostoevsky scholar Rowan Williams has noted, in Zosima’s religious context the phrase does not mean, as it might seem, “an

---

\(^{28}\) Who are these “wee ones” for whom Dmitri is willing to be sent underground? Literally, he is referring to the suffering, starving children he has seen in a dream: “No, no,” Mitya still seems not to understand, “tell me: why are these burnt-out mothers standing here, why are the people poor, why is the wee one poor, why is the steppe bare, why don’t they embrace and kiss, why don’t they sing joyful songs, why are they blackened with such black misery, why don’t they feed the wee one?” (507) But, given the suffering he and his brothers endured at the hands of their father’s cruelty, especially the bastard son Smerdyakov, who is the actual murderer, it seems also likely that Dmitri is willing to go to hell out of solidarity with, and on behalf of them as well.
invitation to the other to take one’s place, a passive acceptance of annihilating injustice.” Instead,

responsibility is the free acceptance of the call to give voice to the other, while leaving them time and space to be other; it is the love of the other in his or her wholeness, that is, including the fact of their relatedness to more than myself; it is the acceptance of the labor of decentring the self and dissolving its fantasies of purely individual autonomy, and it is to be open to a potentially unlimited range of relation, to human and nonhuman others.29

Williams’ apt description of Dostoevskian responsibility, so close in spirit to Derrida’s hospitality in *Spectres of Marx*, opens on to the question that will preoccupy Ivan and Alyosha in Book V of the novel. Does the truth claim of Alyosha’s hero Zosima, that “each of us is undoubtedly guilty on behalf of all and for all on earth,” extend even beyond earth, beyond paradise and even into the precincts of hell?

Dostoevsky stages this “test of truth” in five crucial scenes in Book V: 1) the suffering of children; 2) The orthodox version of Hell as limiting responsibility; 3) The Orthodox counter-tradition of the Theotokos Among the Torments and Isaac the Syrian’s love in the midst of hell; 4) Hell in Ivan’s heart and Alyosha’s capacity to receive it; 5) Rebellion as a willingness to be guilty/damned out of love. We’ll take them each in turn.

1.) *The suffering of children*

---

Dostoevsky was pre-occupied with the suffering of children. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, they are everywhere. All three (legitimate) sons of Fyodor Karamazov suffer intensely from his cruel neglect. The fourth son, Pavel Smerdyakov, is never claimed by Fyodor, and is brought up under the harshest conditions by the servant Grigory. A key secondary story surrounds the sufferings of Ilyusha, a boy who witnesses his father being humiliated on the street and, taking that humiliation on himself, in some sense literally dies from his grief.

In the initial scene of visitors coming to the monastery for a blessing from the staretz Zosima, we hear the anguished cries of a mother for the loss of her son. This scene will be crucial for understanding Ivan’s contrasting presentation of stories of child suffering in Book V. The women approaching Zosima are identified by the narrator as “shriekers,” a quasi-religious category of women, as Liza Knapp indicates, whose

hysteria is the bodily expression of the anguish these mothers feel in response to giving birth to children—to bringing them from the safety of their wombs and out into a world where mothers and children suffer into a world where God allows this suffering to happen.31

---

31 Knapp in Jackson, *A New Word on the Brothers Karamazov*, 39.
The narrator of the scene describes the anguish of these women with considered care.

There is among the people a silent, long-suffering grief; it withdraws into itself and is silent. But there is also a grief that is strained; a moment comes when it breaks through with tears, and from that moment on it pours itself out in lamentations. Especially with women. But it is no easier to bear than the silent grief. Lamentations ease the heart only by straining and exacerbating it more and more. Such grief does not even want consolation; it is nourished by the sense of its unquenchableness. (48).

Upon hearing the wrenching story of one of these bereaving women, Zosima chooses to tell a consoling story:

“Listen, mother,” said the elder. “Once, long ago, a great saint saw a mother in church, weeping just as you are over her child, her only child, whom the Lord had also called to him. ‘Do you not know,’ the saint said to her, ‘how bold these infants are before the throne of God? No one is bolder in the Kingdom of Heaven: Lord, you granted us life, they say to God, and just as we beheld it, you took it back from us. And they beg and plead so boldly that the Lord immediately puts them in the ranks of the angels. And therefore,’ said the saint, ‘you, too, woman, rejoice and do not weep. Your infant, too, now abides with the Lord’ (49).”

In sharp contrast to this story are the ones Ivan tells his brother in Chapter Four of Book Five. There Ivan tells one after another horrifying tale of suffering children as a direct challenge to Alyosha’s as yet untested faith.

---

32 It is a remarkable story, a paraphrase of The Tale of the Blessed Father Daniel about Andronicus and His Wife, which is part of the Russian Orthodox Prologue. We see signs of the *parrheia* for which the *resignatio* tradition is known, yet in this context it is told by Zosima to dampen such displays from the women before him.
Stories that Dostoevsky drew from contemporary newspaper reports, they call to mind the biblical account of children being passed through the fires at the valley of Gehenna itself while their parents looked on.\textsuperscript{33} It was precisely the effect, no doubt, that Ivan was after. At one level, Ivan’s presentation of these multiple stories is designed to test Alyosha, whether his new-found faith can stomach the hell on earth that is so prevalent in their lives and their world.

When Ivan admits to “torturing” Alyosha with his stories and offers to stop, Alyosha murmurs, perhaps half-heartedly, “Never mind. I want to suffer too.” (242) Yet one story later, he blurts out: “Why are you testing me?...Will you finally tell me?” (243)

Part of the answer to Alyosha’s question, Ivan suggests, has to do with whether or not Alyosha’s new faith, influenced as it is by Zosima, is willing to give ear and voice to the “shriekers” of the world. Or is it tempted to cover over their cries with stories like the one we saw Zosima tell the grieving woman at his gate? Liza Knapp has brilliantly suggested that part of what Ivan does here is to fulfill his responsibility, in Rowan Williams’ words, to “give voice to the other.” In this case, one of the most significant others in their life is Ivan and Alyosha’s own mother, Sofia Ivanovna, who was, Knapp reminds us,

\textsuperscript{33} The suffering of children was at the origin of the biblical notion of hell. Gehenna, it will be recalled, was an actual place on the outskirts of Jerusalem where children were sacrificed to the God Moloch. The altar on which they were slaughtered was called Topheth in the Hebrew of the book of Jeremiah. Some rabbinical commentators argued that the etymology of the word came from the drumbeats the priests used to drown out the cries of the children. See Marvin H. Pope, \textit{Job} (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 129.
herself a “shrieker.” So, Knapp writes, “In his own way, Ivan carries on a protest in the name of his mother and the other grieving mothers in the novel.”34 Ivan’s test, staged as one of unconsolable maternal voices and crying children versus the re-assuring tones of comforting, paternal faith, is his way of asking his brother whether his faith is willing to go as far as the descent to gehenna, hell on earth.

2.) The orthodox version of hell as answer

Of course Ivan knows that the Christian tradition has an answer to the implacable cries of suffering flesh. Innocent suffering is *economic*, Ivan notes, a good investment for a future harmony to be enjoyed in the next life with the added benefit of seeing one’s tormentors suffering eternal torment in hell. It is a solution Ivan roundly rejects.

It’s quite incomprehensible why they should have to suffer, and why they should buy harmony with their suffering. Why do they get thrown on the pile, to manure someone’s future harmony with themselves? I understand solidarity in sin among men; solidarity in retribution I also understand; but what solidarity in sin do little children have? (244)

Ivan indicates the insoluble double-bind of the traditional doctrine of hell. On the one hand, it offers forth a vision of harmony in the next life to make up for the desiccating strains of this one. Yet to do so it must envision an eternal hell burning within eyeshot of an eternal heaven:

34 Knapp in Ibid., 45.
Not worth it, because her tears remained unredeemed. They must be redeemed, otherwise there can be no harmony. But how, how will you redeem them? Is it possible? Can they be redeemed by being avenged? But what do I care if they are avenged, what do I care if the tormentors are in hell, what can hell set right here, if these ones have already been tormented? And where is the harmony, if there is hell? (245)

Of course, the way around this dilemma is to argue that in heaven, hell and its inhabitants are utterly forgotten so that harmony is unscathed, a solution we saw Augustine, at least, unwilling to take. Ivan knows, however, that to take this tack would be to fail the test of “guilty for everyone and for all” by the willful forgetting of the damned. Ivan thus insists that the traditional teachings on hell utterly fail.

3.) The Mother of God Visits the Torments

Ivan reveals the failure of the traditional doctrine of hell another way in the following chapter, “The Grand Inquisitor.” There he shares with his brother an alternative tradition of hell, the popular apocalyptic story of the Theotokos among the Torments, which we examined in Chapter Three. His summary of the story is rather striking:

The Mother of God Visits the Torments, with scenes of a boldness not inferior to Dante’s. The Mother of God visits hell and the Archangel Michael guides her through ‘the torments.’ She sees sinners and their sufferings. Among them, by the way, there is a most amusing class of sinners in a burning lake: some of them sink so far down into the lake that they can no longer come up again, and ‘these God forgets’— an expression of extraordinary depth and force. And so the Mother of God, shocked and weeping, falls before the throne of God and asks pardon for
everyone in hell, everyone she has seen there, without distinction. Her conversation with God is immensely interesting. She pleads, she won’t go away, and when God points out to her the nail-pierced hands and feet of her Son and asks: ‘How can I forgive his tormentors?’ she bids all the saints, all the martyrs, all the angels and archangels to fall down together with her and plead for the pardon of all without discrimination. In the end she extorts from God a cessation of torments every year, from Holy Friday to Pentecost, and the sinners in hell at once thank the Lord and cry out to him: ‘Just art thou, O Lord, who hast judged so.’ (247).

The story Ivan tells boldly challenges the conventional version of hell, pointedly hinting that measured by Markel’s maxim, God himself fails to meet the test (he “forgets” the damned altogether). Robin Miller notes that the image of God “forgetting” calls to mind Smerdyakov, the one brother whose very relation to the other brothers is one they repress or even “forget”. In this sense, the story serves as a “test of truth” of whether any of the brothers has taken responsibility for their brother’s abandonment, suffering, and guilt which leads to his suicide.

The image of Mary storming heaven out of love for the damned and this hint that Smerdyakov has been culpably “forgotten” by the brothers calls to mind another series of texts which haunts the novel. Isaac the Syrian, whose writing Dostoevsky knew and cherished, had as one of his preoccupations the

---

35 The eminent Dostoevsky scholar, Robin Feuer Miller, has written a very careful analysis of this text and the possible Slavonic sources from which Dostoevsky likely adapted Ivan’s version in Predrag Cicovacki and Maria Granik, *Dostoevsky’s Brothers Karamazov: Art, Creativity, and Spirituality* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010). She notes there that among other changes, Dostoevsky surprisingly expands the range of Mary’s recipients of mercy to include the Jews, something neither of the medieval Slavonic texts he would have had access to were willing to do.
relationship of God, love, and hell. Early in the novel we learn that Smerdyakov’s surrogate father and tormentor Grigory had taken to reading from a copy of Isaac’s sermons, and in Ivan’s last conversation with Smerdyakov, he has a copy which he places on top of the “blood money” he offers to Ivan. In Zosima’s discourse on hell, he silently references the seventh-century monk in his definition of hell: I ask myself: “What is hell?” And I answer thus: “The suffering of being no longer able to love.” (322)

It is not a direct quote from Isaac, however, and a comparison with Isaac’s actual writing is helpful. We have already noted that Isaac’s influence upon the Eastern Orthodox tradition of hell is hugely significant. Two passages are particularly significant. The first is the likely source of Zosima’s definition of hell:

I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love. Nay, what is so bitter and vehement as the torment of love? I mean that those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment from this than from any fear of punishment. For the sorrow caused in the heart by sin against love is more poignant than any torment. It would be improper for a man to think that sinners in Gehenna are deprived of the love of God. Love is the offspring of knowledge of the truth which, as is commonly confessed, is given to all. The power of love works in two ways: it torments sinners, even as happens here when a friend suffers from a friend; but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. Thus I say that this is the torment
of Gehenna: bitter regret. But love inebriates the souls of the son of Heaven by its delectability.  

The difference between Isaac and Zosima is striking. Whereas Zosima calls hell the suffering that comes from being unable to love, for Isaac it is love itself which causes the suffering. Specifically, suffering comes from the love of God. Hell is anguished, insatiable, unconsolled love, Isaac seems to be saying, putting him in the same spiritual terrain as we saw in Hadewijch.

This crucial distinction between Zosima and his source leads us to the other key idea of Isaac’s which is hovering in Dostoevsky’s text.

And what is a merciful heart? It is the heart burning for the sake of all creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and by the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. By the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and by his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God.  

Zosima glosses his brother’s maxim in a sermon by saying that

Only then will our hearts be moved to a love that is infinite, universal, and that knows no satiety. Then each of us will be able

---

to gain the whole world by love and wash away the world’s sins with his tears … Let each of you keep close company with his heart, let each of you confess to himself untiringly. (164)

Here he is very close to the spiritual thought-world of Isaac as well as to that of the merciful and insatiable tears of the Virgin Mary in Ivan’s tale. Ivan tells this tale with its daunting demands upon love right before he tells Alyosha of the Grand Inquisitor, who lights the fires of hell for those who won’t acquiesce to his tempting offer to “escape” from freedom’s demands. Ivan thus articulates a *resignatio ad infernum* whose measureless love becomes the test of true responsibility before all.

4.) *Hell in the Hearts of Ivan and Alyosha*

Early in the novel, Dmitri makes one of his many profound, if yet unearned, insights. “Here the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart.” (108) It would take us too far afield to explore the richness with which Dostoevsky explores the spiritual terrain of the heart in his novel. For the purposes of exploring his articulation of the *resignatio*, it is perhaps enough to note that he is quite close to the fourth-century Syrian monk known to us as Pseudo-Macarius. We have already noted his influence on the Eastern Orthodox tradition of hell as an existential reality of the heart and we see this notion echoed here in Dmitri’s words. In Ivan’s testing of his brother Alyosha regarding the truth of Markel’s maxim, both brothers sense that the stories have more to do with their own hearts’ capacity for love and for suffering than
anything else. After Ivan has finished telling his story of the Grand Inquisitor, Alyosha expresses his fear that the man of such a vision might prove unable to love enough to bear life.

And the sticky little leaves, and the precious graves, and the blue sky, and the woman you love! How will you live, what will you love them with?” Alyosha exclaimed ruefully. “Is it possible, with such hell in your heart and in your head? No, you’re precisely going in order to join them … and if not, you’ll kill yourself, you won’t endure it!” (263)

At this point Alyosha is unable to see how hell and love can co-exist in one heart, and seeing only the former in his brother Ivan, thinks resignation the only possibility.

For his part, Ivan also wonders if his brother’s own heart is hospitable enough to let in the bitter venom that comes from the shrieks of the unconsoled. He responds to his brother’s words with more bitterness and a plea for a more risky and radical hospitality:

I thought, brother, that when I left here I’d have you, at least, in all the world,” Ivan suddenly spoke with unexpected feeling, “but now I see that in your heart, too, there is no room for me, my dear hermit. The formula, ‘everything is permitted,’ I will not renounce, and what then? Will you renounce me for that? Will you?” (263 emphasis mine).38

---

38 The phrase, “everything is permitted” is, like Markel’s maxim, subject to Dostoevsky’s polyphonic truth testing. It echoes the phrase in St. Paul’s epistles, where it is a rhetorical device used to dismiss the idea that grace leads to anti-nomianism. Yet, in this context, it can suggest that radical hospitality means accepting, as Derrida insists, that setting up criteria before the fact for what is “permitted” entry and what is not, is to risk the greatest inhospitality. In Alyosha’s case, his inability to permit hell into his own heart means forgetting his brother Ivan as he will soon forget his brother Dmitri, whom he has been sent by Zosima to protect.
5.) Rebellion

At numerous points throughout their conversation, Ivan declares himself guilty. Most significantly, he is guilty of refusing to accept suffering as a part of the divine plan, guilty of anti-theodicy. By placing himself squarely in the wrong before God, Ivan means to give voice to the anguished shriekers of the world, to those who are damned and refuse a consolation that would seek to cover over the truth of their suffering. “I hasten to return my ticket” to heaven, Ivan declares. “That is rebellion,” Alyosha said softly, dropping his eyes. (245)

Though Ivan protests his brother’s charge somewhat playfully, it has rarely been in doubt among interpreters of the novel that Ivan is the figure of great rebellion, and is thus guilty before God. In many readings, particularly those with a theological inflection, this is enough to rule Ivan out as a possible source of truth in the novel. Sometimes he is declared to be utterly without love. In this reading he is often paired with his double, Smerdyakov, who, if

---

39 One of the most ruthless example of this sort of reading, one that compares Ivan to a terrorist, is John P. Moran, The Solution of the Fist: Dostoevsky and the Roots of Modern Terrorism (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).
remembered at all, is usually put into the outer darkness of the Dostoevskian universe.\textsuperscript{40}

But to read Doestovesky’s novel in this way seems, as Olga Meerson points out, is perhaps to fail the test of Markel’s maxim. Referring to the tendency to condemn Smerdyakov as a figure of pure evil deserving hell, she writes,

Why should Dostoevsky raise the concern for everyone’s responsibility for their neighbor’s iniquity—and then reveal as the murderer the one person whom nobody considers his or her neighbor, let alone a biological brother?\textsuperscript{41}

The answer to this question, Meerson suggests, is that Smerdyakov is also a test of Markel’s maxim. In this case, however, it is a test for the reader. Can even a rebel, a devil, a murderer, (a terrorist?) and the hell they bring be our responsibility?\textsuperscript{42}

To give voice to the rebel, to think \textit{with} the rebel, to learn, in Derrida’s words “how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself,” this is one of Dostoevsky’s crowning achievements, and it is at the heart of his

\textsuperscript{40}See Blank, \textit{Dostoevsky’s Dialectics and the Problem of Sin} and Olga Meerson and Horst-Jürgen Gerigk, \textit{Dostoevsky's Taboos} (Dresden: Dresden University Press, 1998) for a rehearsal of these readings as well as impassioned critiques of this way of reading Smerdyakov.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., p. 200.

\textsuperscript{42}Zosima has indicated in his sermons that he thinks this is the case. However, Meerson suggests that even the great staretz seems to lapse at enacting this truth in the case of Smerdyakov.
version of the resignatio ad infernum. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes, there is a profoundly Job-like quality to Dostoevsky’s polyphonic vision in which we see “free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him or even of rebelling against him.”

As his beloved Algerian home began its rebellious march toward independence from France, Camus wrote his own version of the rebel’s cry as a loving gesture:

Then we understand that rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love. Those who find no rest in God or in history are condemned to live for those who, like themselves, cannot live: in fact, for the humiliated. The most pure form of the movement of rebellion is thus crowned with the heart-rending cry of Karamazov: if all are not saved, what good is the salvation of one only? Thus Catholic prisoners, in the prison cells of Spain, refuse communion today because the priests of the regime have made it obligatory in certain prisons. These lonely witnesses to the crucifixion of innocence also refuse salvation if it must be paid for by injustice and oppression. This insane generosity is the generosity of rebellion, which unhesitatingly gives the strength of its love and without a moment’s delay refuses injustice. Its merit lies in making no calculations, distributing everything it possesses to life and to living men. It is thus that it is prodigal in its gifts to me to come. Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present.

---

44 Albert Camus, *The Rebel; an Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 304. Here, of course, one has to distinguish between the rebellion of Ivan and that of Smerdyakov. While the former has the kind of nobility Camus is here championing, the later’s is, while no less in need of being heard and even borne in responsible dialogue, has collapsed under the sheer weight of despair over ever being recognized.
Perhaps not surprisingly it is another Algerian, Hélène Cixous, herself a survivor of the multiple hells of that nation’s history, who weaves together most powerfully, among others, the traditions of The Song of Songs, the Book of Job, Dostoevsky, and the hospitality of her friend Derrida whose “infernal paradise” of Algeria she shared. As a literary rather than a strictly philosophical writer, she continues the vernacular tradition of the thirteenth-century, and her “tours of hell” are to a great extent richer and deeper than anything we see in either Derrida or Levinas. To her version of the resignatio ad infernum we now turn.

_Hélène Cixous and the Infernal Paradise of Algeria_

It is probably safe to say that no writer in the French language of the last forty years has written more about hell than Hélène Cixous. The theme makes its appearance in nearly all of her works, from her doctoral dissertation on James Joyce which included a section title “From Hell to Hell” to her numerous meditations on the nature of writing, as well as in her works of

---

experimental fiction. So too hell appears in her writings for the theater\textsuperscript{47} and numerous interviews.\textsuperscript{48} As Amy Hollywood has noted,

Cixous’s writing evinces a continual struggle to express the political, ethical and religious value of attention to the instant without trivializing historical injustice and catastrophe. Moreover, the instant and ‘what exists’ are themselves often moments of loss, suffering and abjection. Cixous’s writing constantly moves between pleasure and pain, beauty and horror, ‘Paradise’ and ‘Hell’, with the role of writing and memory constantly shifting.\textsuperscript{49}

As Hollywood’s comment suggests, for Cixous hell is never an abstraction or a metaphysical postulate about another world, but is embedded in the “instances” of this life to which she pays agonizing attention. This existential understanding of hell is what, among other things, drew her to the topic of James Joyce for her dissertation. For Joyce’s hero in \emph{The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man} Stephen Dedelus himself turns from the unreal, if utterly terrifying hell of the preachers of his Catholic upbringing, to the hell of real life in what Cixous describes as a mixture of innocence and abject suffering.

Crucially, the language of Catholic hell is transfigured into a poetic language in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Hélène Cixous, \emph{The Book of Promethea: Le Livre De Promethea} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991a); Hélène Cixous, \emph{Manna : For the Mandelstams for the Mandelas} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994a); Hélène Cixous, \emph{L’Ange Au Secret} (Paris: Des femmes, 1991b); Hélène Cixous, \emph{The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).
\item \textsuperscript{48} A representative collection of interviews is published as Hélène Cixous and Susan Sellers, \emph{White Ink : Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
\item \textsuperscript{49} Hollywood in Morny Joy, Kathleen O’Grady and Judith L. Poxon, \emph{Religion in French Feminist Thought : Critical Perspectives} (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 152.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
which Stephen can articulate the new, earthly hell to which he has fallen. As Cixous puts it,

For the artist believing in the evocative power of words, the sermons were more than a skillful piece of oratory designed to bring the sinner to his knees. They had an effect on the world outside and on the cave within, touching Stephen on the raw in his imagination, in his spoken language, and in the relationship between his reason and his words. They have affected his actual vision of the world.\(^\text{50}\)

The description of the profound interaction of the artist’s inner and outer experience (the “world outside” and the “cave within”) with the theopoetics of hell could just as easily describe Cixous’ own awakening as an artist as it does Joyce’s Stephen. Like Stephen, Cixous found herself, as a young girl in pre-independence Algeria, struggling to find a language. She sought one rich enough, on fire enough to help her articulate the excruciating sense of loss she experienced as her father’s sudden and tragic death coincided with the first signs of rebellious struggle of the Algerian Muslims to free themselves of the damning grip of French colonialism. It was a struggle with which she longed to join, but was unable to because of her status as a Jewish outsider and as a “French” woman, a double, even triple layer of hells.\(^\text{51}\)

\(^{50}\) Cixous, *The Exile of James Joyce*, 328.

\(^{51}\) For an account of her longing to be part of the Algerian rebellion, see Hélène Cixous and Eric Prenowitz, "Letter to Zohra Drif," *College Literature* 30, no. 1 (2003), 82-90.
Books became Cixous’ “sermons,” allowing her to enter into a “paradise” of recognition in the midst of her multiple hells. As she writes in *The Newly Born Women* describing her childhood flight into books,

And that is where I go. I take books; I leave the real, colonial space; I go away. Often I go read in a tree. Far from the ground and the shit. I don’t go and read just to read, to forget—No! Not to shut myself up in some imaginary paradise. I am searching: somewhere there must be people like me in their rebellion and in their hope. Because I don’t despair: if I myself shout in disgust, if I can’t be alive without being angry, there must be others like me, I don’t know who, but when I am big, I’ll find them and I’ll join them…

*From hell to hell,* Cixous here moved from the political and personal hell in which she was living to the equally real hell of literary space in which writers struggled with and rebelled against the hell that had invaded the “cave within”.

And naturally I focused on all the texts in which there is struggle. Warlike texts; rebellious texts… I knew, I have always known, what I hated… The ceaseless work of death—the constant of evil. But that couldn’t last. Death had to be destroyed. I saw that reality, history, was a series of struggles, without which we would have long ago been dead.

And so Cixous as a child made her choice which was not really a choice (“death had to be destroyed”); she would be a rebel, join this company of writers like Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Lispector and Camus all of whom she

---

53 Ibid., 72.
sees as having chosen to write “history from hell” and to struggle for life and
love in its midst. Her mature works all mine this infernal terrain. They are
densely allusive, at times thick with almost impenetrable thorns of crowning
beauty, and resistant to easy summary. They also can seduce the reader into
sympathetic singing, an attribute both charming and dangerous for one trying
to adequately schematize her work. For now, here are four key themes in
Cixous’ resignatio: 1.) Tortuous Love; 2.) Writing as a descent to hell; 3.) The Politics of
Hell and 4.) Infernal paradise.

1.) Tortuous Love

Love means loss. For Cixous, this was the truth burned into her flesh at
the death of her father. Using the language of the Song of Songs, she writes in her
first book, “It is said that love is as strong as death. But death is as strong as
love and I am inside.”54 Inside is a richly evocative word for Cixous, summing
up the sense of forced enclosure, inner isolation, yet also the protective cocoon
of familial space. Love is all of these things for the young Cixous, and she
returns repeatedly to its power to contain multitudes of emotion and thought.
Love never forgets loss, however, and so it is always, as she puts it in one of
her most important and sustained meditations on hell, “tortuous love.”55 “My
mother…could not fathom…that we were sick with love,” she quotes from The

---

55Hélène Cixous and Chris Miller, "We Who are Free, are we Free?" Critical Inquiry 19, no. 2
(1993), 201-219 at 203. Hereafter cited within the text as AWF and page number.
Song in another work, after describing how her mother as a midwife brought babies into the Algerian world. It was a world that she and her brother as French-Jews were not allowed to enter.\(^{56}\)

In literature Hélène found an entry to life, and to the recognition of loss. It was love at first sight. “And naturally I focused on all the texts in which there is struggle. Warlike texts; rebellious texts…I loved and I loved love. I never went back on love.”\(^{57}\)

Tortuous love is rebellious love, love that, like Dostoevsky’s shriekers, screams in protest at its losses. It “doesn’t accept the causing of suffering.”\(^{58}\) Tortuous lovers are “fragmentary, harrowed, in perpetual deconstruction: suddenly they let out the Scream…the scream at the horror of life…they explode into notes…” (AWF 216) Love is tortuous because it is weak love, always loving the other, as Augustine puts it, “too late.”\(^{59}\)

Where there’s love there’s hatred and fear. What makes all that so hellish is every human being’s terror of the fact that in her or his soul, in the soul of the other, are wild animals, knives, arrows, etc.\(^{60}\)

---


\(^{58}\) Cixous and Jenson, "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays, 24.

\(^{59}\) Cixous speaks of her weak love, too late to save the one who needed it, in her tribute to her childhood dog. “Stigmata, or Job the Dog” in Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

\(^{60}\) Cixous and Sellers, *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics*, 5.
All this is to say, echoing Hadewijch, that love, insofar as it is an openness to an other whose vulnerability exacerbates one’s own, is hell.

When love arrived, suffering followed close behind. Sadly, despite herself, she made the cat suffer. Despite herself, the cat made her suffer. She had opened the hell of love.  

2.) Writing as a Descent to Hell

But if space without bounds hadn’t been given to me then, I wouldn’t have written what I can hear. Because I write for, I write from, I start writing from: Love. I write out of love. Writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love. The Gesture.

If, as Cixous insists, writing is a “gesture of love” this means that it is, necessarily a gesture toward hell. Not to cover over hell, or economize it, or to forget it with purple prose.

Not to fill in the abyss, but to love yourself right to the bottom of your abysses. To know, not to avoid. Not to surmount; to explore, dive down, visit.

This gesture is crucial for Cixous because forgetting is so easy and so deadly for love. Because love opens onto paradise, it can tempt one to forget that love has its hell, is in the midst of hell and tends to overlook it.

And it is thus that in paradise one runs into danger, because paradise is a balcony onto the hells of the world. In paradise one risks something which is discreetly called ‘forgetting.’ There again writing is entirely called for. One must not forget. Writing is in the

---

62 Cixous and Jenson, "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays, 41-42.
63 Ibid.
end only an *anti-oubli*. It is in one’s interest to write in order to both feel the passing of, and not forget that there is, hell.\(^{64}\)

So, out of love, for the sake of love, in resistance to love’s temptations, the writer of love must descend. This is to protect the dead, to “give them voice” as Derrida says, and to “remember all those who have fought” for love in the past. Because love is porous, open to loss in its very nature, the writer of love is dispossessed. At times she is possessed by the ghosts of love’s victims who refuse to allow their betrayal, either in the past or the future, to give one rest. When one descends to the “bottom of the heart,” these crucified voices come to writing.

I was suddenly invaded by a whole people, very specific persons whom I didn’t know in the least and who became my relatives for eternity. I ascertained then that this is exactly what happens to the actor. The true actor is someone whose ego is reserved and humble enough for the other to be able to invade and occupy him; he makes room for the other in an unheard of manner.\(^{65}\)

In discussing a play she wrote about the horrors of Cambodia, Cixous acknowledges that this kind of writing is deeply risky. One can betray and mishear the voices of the damned and do them violence yet again. We all fear exclusion, she writes, and it is possible to exclude the voice of the other even when trying to give them voice. But, she insists, love can only exist when it risks losing both itself and its other. Silence is its own hell, and it is one she

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 13.
thinks most often fails to do justice to love. “If I can’t write, I am dead.”

(AWF 215)

3.) The Politics of Hell

Somewhat mischievously, Cixous writes that hell is marvelously hospitable. Any time a victim tries to use their suffering as a political weapon against others, to give their voice a unique, unquestioning authority by an appeal to the “hell” they’ve been through, Cixous thinks they have betrayed the love of hell and the hell of love.

On the other hand, there is no privileged hell. We are all allowed to go to hell. We are allowed to enjoy the sublime sufferings of hell. We all have a permit for hell—and that is our blessing. ‘Our soul is our aptitude for suffering,’ as Tsvetayeva said. This is our common lot.

The poet of hell, by throwing open hell’s gates so gratuitously, (Joyce’s “Here comes everybody!”) is a threat to this politics of exclusion, and thus performs the kind of counter-conduct we saw Foucault analyze earlier. Cixous insists that the poet of hell is deeply political, though not in the same way as the politics of the state, which functions by means of this very manipulation of exclusion and

66 In an interview, Cixous expressed her suspicions of silence: “This is the question I am always asking myself. My choice has been made, after all I have decided to try to speak about what takes our breath away. Because more than anything else, I am suspicious of silence. There is such a thing as a respectful silence, there can be a silence that sings, but I’m suspicious of human silence. In general, it is a silence that represses.” Quoted in Cixous, Manna: For the Mandelstams for the Mandela, page 1 of the introduction.

67 Ibid., 117.
our fears of it. We saw in The Brothers Karamazov how the test of hospitality was about whether and how much Alyosha would let Ivan’s hell into his heart. Cixous insists that this test is precisely what the poet of hell must face, seeking not so much to articulate their own suffering as to give room and voice to the suffering of the other.

In times of injustice, the "subject" of pain is not me, but you. Your pain makes my own more bitter and more generous. Your pain restores my pain to me. For my pain, when it is too great, exceeds, escapes me, grows alien to me, I can only undergo it dully, far inside me, where I am a stranger within me. It is only in your pain that I can suffer and weep, I need you to suffer my suffering. (AWF 206)

Cixous claims that the loving gesture of letting the hell of the other into one’s heart creates something that otherwise will not exist, a tradition and a history. Perhaps even a liturgy from within the precincts of hell.

For years, I wondered whether poetry would hold up in the concentration camps, if the tongue would not shrivel, if the magic weapon would not dissolve into dust. Till the day when I met women resistance fighters who gave me the answer: in periods of spiritual penury, human beings need books, need you, need to address you, need an extra voice… (AWF 209)  

Such bold witnessing from the inside “surreptitiously organize[s] a chain through time,” (AWF 205) with which to resist the politics of the lie. “And so, in times of strangeness, by sharing unhappiness, by being strangers together, people and poet reconstitute an internal homeland” (AWF 207).

---

68 She calls her favored writers from hell “inventors of a furious liturgy” (AWF 206).
This suggests that a politics from hell is also a politics of love, to borrow Michael Hardt’s term. Cixous is furious in defense of the evocation of the language of love in the political realm.

On pain of death, you shall not speak of love in politics, as we have known since Gandhi. It is better that you should resolve conflicts with violence than with nonviolence. Anyone who, like Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, wants to change a political regime by means of love, is hated and feared more than those who use the acceptable violent means. (AWF 213)

Nor is this politics of love sentimental in the least. Rather, it exposes the sentimentality of the state with its nationalist rhetoric of brotherhood and democracy and national unity, its “smile of the lamb.” (AWF 210) Hell speaks “murder to the state,” war on its manipulation of language and the media to cover over its exclusionary policies and practices. “A state will never accept a poet, and a poet will never accept a state. We are even. Between the state and the citizens of language there is war.” (AWF 204)

---

4.) *Infernal Paradise*

Perhaps her most provocative claim of all, one which risks utter absurdity, is that there is paradise, even “pastry in hell.” Again, with this provocative phrase Cixous means nothing sentimental. We saw this theme of paradise in the midst of hell in the *Song of Songs*, and in Cixous it functions similarly as a kind of rigorous attentiveness to the moment. She evokes a whyless gratitude as when we see music drawn even from a stone, or a comedy written in a concentration camp. (AWF 206, 208)

It is crucial that we not misunderstand Cixous here. It is not, as we saw her insist, an “imaginary paradise” she is after, not a flight into irresponsibility or political quiescence as we accept cakes and die of them. Rather, it is a sense that even the politics of exclusion, the state’s massive organization of life through the deployment of hell cannot deprive one of the whylessness of love. Its manipulation of our fear of being excluded and cast into its hells, of being rendered unrecognizable to its identity regimes and schemata is, Cixous thinks, well-matched by the poet of hell’s insistence that even then one can experience the “infernal taste of paradise.”

What does this phrase mean? It is obviously a grotesque image worthy of Dostoevsky or Hadewijch. Cixous describes it with a story of her going to the prison camps of the refugees of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge. It is worth quoting in full.
I once had the strange and unexpected good fortune to stay in the
Khmer camps, refugee and resistance camps, which at that time
were camps of the innocent and the forgotten. I went, I
remember, without joy. I was afraid. And there, with my whole
being I tasted the infernal taste of paradise. I was in heaven and in
hell with the Khmers. At one and the same time on both sides. At
dawn, the great gates opened and, with the aid workers, I entered
the captivity of the Khmers. I entered the endless hell of that
people. And in the dust, the poverty, the separation, among so
many ills, there were everywhere the traces of paradise. From
within the despair hope burgeoned. From poverty, generosity.
From barbarousness, courtesy. People killed each other and
pardoned each other. At the close of day, the great gates opened
to let people out and help ensure that no one did go out. A
separation was made between (the word) free and (the word)
imprison, between those who had rights and those who had none.
Injustice and law reigned. We, as we left, went with our heads
bowed, thrown out of hell. The gates would close. Through the
bars we would look at each other in a pall of red dust. All of us
regretted. On both sides. We were on both sides. We lost and we
kept. We looked at each other through the bars, smiling. We, on
the one side, were losing the hell full of horror and grace, which
gave us the infernal taste of paradise. And we felt with a sacred
horror that there were resources hidden in the suffering on the
other side. On both sides of the gate, good and evil were
exchanged with extreme intensity. We linked hands with what had
been lost. Of course, there was rape, pillage, and murder; there
was also tenderness, consideration, attention that our society no
longer knows. At the frontier, in front of or behind the gate, we
didn't know who knew most about freedom. We looked at each
other and were naked in the red dust, and we were not ashamed,
we had compassion each for the other, those too innocent, these
not innocent enough, and brought together by the gates, we saw
each other as we were and a forgiveness greater than any of us
united us. To know good and evil, to know the worth of courage,
the value of dignity, we must be on both sides. And we must not
forget that joy, joy that is freedom, is worth the pain it costs. Yes,
we need both sides, and to know the one through the other. And
to learn to find / discover the one in the other. For prison and its
bars are quick to grow up in the freedom that gives itself no
thought. Only the thought of prison gives all its splendor to the
thought of liberty. They, who lacked it, they gave us the freedom that we didn't know how to have . . . they gave us the desire and the duty to be free. We who are free, do we know how to be free, do we think about being free, of being free, are we helping to expand the realm of freedom on this earth, are we responsible? Do we need a camp, a prison, a war, to free us from our indifference to ourselves and from our fear of others? So that we do not forget our good fortune? (AWF 218-219)

Paradise here is nothing less than the full truth, unvarnished (“too innocent, not innocent enough”) and without guile. Cixous’ resignatio ad infernum is “the singing of human beings against hell, in spite of hell, through hell,”71 a subversive singing that is also a losing and a blessing (AWF 203, 209, 214). It is a “surreptitiously organized chain through time,” a chain of love allowing us to glimpse a community and a tradition that otherwise is not there but forgotten. “I write to save what would otherwise be disappearing.”72 And what is it that might disappear? Stigmata.

I want stigmata. I do not want the stigmata to disappear. I am attached to my engravings, to the stings of my flesh and my mental parchment. I do not fear that trauma and stigma will form an alliance: the literature in me wants to maintain and reanimate traces. Traumatism as an opening to the future of the wound is the promise of the text.73

The resignatio ad infernum is a promise that the gates of hell will always be open. On both sides.

---

71 Cixous, Manna : For the Mandelstams for the Mandelas, xiv.
73 Cixous, Stigmata : Escaping Texts, xiv.
Conclusion: The Resignatio ad Infernum As Resonance-Machine:
An Ethico-Political Spirituality

The poet Charles Péguy famously once said that ‘Everything begins in mysticism [la mystique] and ends in politics [la politique].’ Like Paul, Péguy’s life and love was caught between religions, his own Catholicism, the Jewish faith of Blanche Raphael to whom he ‘lost his heart’ in an unconsummated love affair, and the atheism of his wife Charlotte Baudouin. It was his deep love and respect for Charlotte that prevented Peguy from having their children baptized or from himself taking the Catholic sacraments. As his biographer Alexander Dru puts it, by ‘refus[ing] to dissociate himself in any way from his wife, who could not agree to a religious ceremony…He remained, in consequence, technically outside the Church.’ A vigorous supporter of Dreyfus during the scandal that rocked France and the world in the late 1800’s and a close friend of Dreyfus’ Jewish champion the atheist Bernard Lazare whom Péguy famously described as ‘that atheist dripping with the word of God,’ he broke off relations with the eminent Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain when

---

1 Both phrases, “resonance-machine” and “ethico-political spirituality,” are borrowed from William Connolly.
3 Ibid., 414.
Maritain attempted to convert his wife to Catholicism. Levinas scholar and translator Annette Aronowicz in her book on Péguy writes that, almost unique among French Catholic thinkers of his day, “Péguy allows the Jewish difference to remain.”

Not surprisingly, given his intense desire to honor, rather than elide or overcome religious difference, Péguy from an early age had a strong aversion to the Catholic doctrine of hell, what von Balthasar calls ‘the central problem…of all his life.” From a very young age, the sensitive young Péguy found it impossible to reconcile three things: 1.) the hellish conditions of the working class and poor in France, a situation that very early on prompted his strongly held socialist beliefs; 2.) the Church’s suggestion that merely by being outside the church, the vast majority of French men and women were doomed to suffer eternal damnation; 3.) that the very same Church, while seemingly so interested in preventing the eternal damnation of souls, showed a mere half-hearted, at best, interest in alleviating hell on earth among the poor with whom Péguy lived and worked. Hell was above all political, Péguy recognized, and in rejection of the politics of the Catholic Church, he rejected its doctrine of hell.

---

6 Ibid.,10. She also notes that this was the common view of a number of prominent Jewish intellectuals. “The great Jewish historian Gershom Scholem, in his essay on German-Jewish relations, pointed out that unlike German writers, who at most rose to praising a Jew because of his universal human qualities, Péguy in “Notre jeunesse” praised the Jew in his difference as a Jew.” (10)

However, Péguy did not turn as one might expect to a simple
universalism, for he thought this too had disastrous political consequences,
seeming to evacuate the hell of this life from any ultimate meaning.
Universalism led to quietism, so Péguy struggled to find a third way, one in
which hell was recognized as a contested political sphere in this life and over
which he was not willing to let the church’s position hold sway. As von
Balthasar puts it, in his dramatic poem dedicated to Joan of Arc,

Péguy’s central problem is thus laid out before us, the question
that illuminates the shape of all his life and work: the problem of
the eternal loss of a part of humanity—damnation, Hell. Joan ‘est
mon seul atout (temporal) dans ce terrible jeu’, and so he can say: ‘la
damnation est mon seul problème’. Thus he ties together inseparably
both themes, Joan and Hell, from the first of his works onwards.
Joan, with her holy obstinacy, must and will force the door that
Church tradition since Augustine has closed in what for her and
for Péguy seems an incomprehensible resignation. Joan and Péguy
do not understand how charité can understand itself in any other
way than as solidarité. This was why the young Péguy rapidly
determined to abandon the Church to devote himself to the
Socialist (Communist) Party. 8

However, this was not the end of Péguy’s story as it relates to the
Church nor to Christianity. In the midst of his battle with Bernard-Lazare on
behalf of Dreyfus, he saw in the Jewish atheist a passion, a boldness, what he
will ultimately call a ‘mysticism’ which astounds him, unlike anything he has

8 Ibid., 407. We should note that Cixous too expresses her great sympathy for Joan of Arc, in
spite of her Christianity, writing, in The Newly Born Woman, “I can never lay down my arms.
Of course, Joan of Arc is someone; but for me, a Jew and suspicious of anything related to
the Church and its ideological rule, she is totally uninhabitable. But otherwise I am with
her—for her energy, her unique confidence, the stark simplicity of her action, her clear-cut
relationship with men—and for her trial and her stake.” (77)
seen in his own Catholic Church. Seeing the price Bernard-Lazare paid for his
defense of his Jewish brother Dreyfus and the astounding courage with which
he did so, Péguy finds in him ‘la mystique.’ As Aronowicz puts it, in Péguy’s
eyes,

[Bernard-Lazare] himself had been betrayed by the people he had
helped most. Yet this betrayal, although leading to the defeat of
his vision of justice, was nonetheless incapable of stemming the
flow of his goodness. His responsibility for others and to others
remained untouched. He could not be made to swerve, remaining
loyal to his mystique, presented here not as a set of principles but as
a way of acting toward others, as a goodness.  

Nor is it a merely abstract admiration for Bernard-Lazare’s courage that
draws Péguy’s attention. Aronowicz notes that it is the carnal voice of God which
he hears in Bernard-Lazare’s unswerving fight for his brother in the flesh. Hell
is about flesh, wounded, suffering flesh, Péguy thinks, and only a religion which
is fleshly and this-worldly is capable of entering its precincts and doing battle.

So, Péguy writes,

I still see him in his bed, that atheist dripping with the word of
God. Even in death, the whole weight of his people bore down
on his shoulders. He could not be told that he was not
responsible for them. I have never seen a man burdened in such a
way, so burdened with a task, with an eternal responsibility. As we
are, as we feel responsible for our children, for our own children
in our own family, just as much, exactly as much, exactly thus did
he feel responsible for his people.

9 Aronowicz, Jews and Christians on Time and Eternity: Charles Péguy’s Portrait of Bernard-Lazare,
26, emphasis mine.
10 Quoted in Ibid., 36.
It is the very carnal dimension of life, including its ineradicable religious
differences, which makes life hellish yet at the same time allows one to enter
out of solidarity into what Péguy will call, inspired by Bernard-Lazare, “*cet enfer
commun.*”\(^{11}\) Reading the following passage from Péguy, describing Bernard-
Lazare,

…a heart that beat to all the echoes of the world, a man who
would leap on a newspaper and who in its four, six, eight, in its
twelve pages with a single look like lightning seize upon a
sentence, and in that sentence there was the word *Jew*…a heart
that bled in all the ghettos of the world…a perpetual tremor, a
perpetual vibration…

Aronowicz notes striking similarities between Péguy’s reading of Bernard-
Lazare and Levinas’ concepts of hospitality, the hostage, and responsibility, and
concludes, “It is as if, in this passage, Bernard-Lazare acts like a man possessed.
Would this not be the very image of what Levinas meant when he spoke of the
Good as that which violently seizes a person?”\(^{12}\) So deeply moved by this
“mystical” attentiveness to the everyday, ordinary sufferings of the flesh of this
Jewish atheist, Péguy wrote, explaining his willingness to be condemned by his
church and much of the virulently anti-Semitic French society at the time, “I

\(^{11}\) From his essay “*Notre Jeunesse*” in Charles Péguy and Robert Burac, *Œuvres En Prose
Complètes* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1986), 136. There is a translation of portions of this essay,
including the above quote in Aronowicz, *Jews and Christians on Time and Eternity : Charles
Péguy’s Portrait of Bernard-Lazare*, 140.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 86.
side with the Jews, because with the Jews, I can be a Catholic in the way that I want; with Catholics, I couldn’t.”

Under Bernard-Lazare’s influence, Péguy began to develop what would become the richest articulation of the *resignatio ad infernum* in the first half of the twentieth-century. Rather than seeking, under the encouragement of his church’s preaching, to *flee* hell, he enters “that common hell.” From this common hell, and not one restricted to the Jew, or the heretic, or the atheist, his mysticism arises. So in his great passion-poem, *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*, young Joan challenges the church and God’s teachings about hell and insists that she would rather be damned in solidarity with the damned than in heaven without them.

If then to save from the flame eternal
The bodies of the dead that are damned and go mad with suffering,
I must long abandon my body to human suffering,
Lord, keep my body for human suffering;
And if to save from eternal Absence
The souls of the damned going mad because of Absence,
I must long abandon my body to human suffering.
Let it remain alive in human suffering.  

---

13 Quoted in Ibid., 104.
When her companion, the nun Gervaise, accuses her, as Alyosha accused Ivan, of rebellion, she responds by suggesting that Gervaise is too quick to be reconciled to suffering and concludes her argument with an apocalyptic vision:

And when we see that Christendom itself, that all of Christendom gradually and deliberately sinks, sings regularly into perdition.\textsuperscript{15}

Is this a prophetic denunciation of the church, or a prayer that it might renounce its obsession with security in both this life and the one to come? Perhaps both. Joan goes forward in her attack on the church and the kingdom, and is, as history tells us, soon consigned, with the theologians’ eager consent, to the flames.

What is clear is that in Péguy’s vision of the resignatio ad infernum, we have a remarkable political theology, one in which, as Balthasar puts it, “praying alone, in place of acting, is cowardice.”\textsuperscript{16} Or as Aronowicz writes, for Péguy “the word of God is not a statement. It is a deed.”\textsuperscript{17} What Péguy’s example also reveals is that the resignatio ad infernum we have tracked, though growing up in Christian soil, is by its very nature resistant to an exclusive religious orientation at the same time it rejects any protective gesture of abstraction from the carnality of the religious orientation. This is why Bernard-Lazare’s Jewishness is crucial to Péguy, why he violently rejects Maritain’s desire to convert his wife,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 215.
\textsuperscript{16} Balthasar, Fessio and Riches, \textit{The Glory of the Lord a Theological Aesthetics}, 441.
\textsuperscript{17} Aronowicz, \textit{Jews and Christians on Time and Eternity: Charles Péguy’s Portrait of Bernard-Lazare}, 98.
and why he can write that it is “with the Jews [that] I can be a Catholic in the way that I want” rather than saying that with the Jews he recognized that which transcended religious particularity. The flesh of religion and the suffering such flesh both enabled and resisted mattered intensely to Péguy, which is why he was unwilling to leave Catholicism for an abstract universalism.

Péguy’s example helps make clear that the resignatio ad infernum is what the political theorist William Connolly, following Foucault, has called an “ethico-political spirituality” which he describes as

An ethical sensibility, anchored in an ontological problematic, rendered through genealogies of the possible, cultivated through tactics applied by the self to itself, embodied as care for an enlarged diversity of life in which plural constituencies coexist in more creative ways than sustained by a communitarian idea of harmony or a liberal idea of tolerance, politicized through a series of critical engagements with established social apparati of good/evil, normal/abnormal, guilt/innocence, rationality/irrationality, autonomy/dependence, security/insecurity.¹⁸

To this description we might add: paradise/hell. If the classic notion of hell is closer to the communitarian ideal, which, as Romand Coles suggests, so often leads to “gated politics” in order to keep out those who challenge the community’s norms and virtue-practices,¹⁹ universalism can tend to an anemic or “liberal idea of tolerance” in which the cries of the damned never quite

---

reach the ears of the benighted. Connolly’s own ethico-political spiritual practice as a non-theist is admirable, as when he challenges the Augustinian version of hell with the stories of Job and Foucault’s Alex/ina in *The Augustinian Imperative*. There he notes how the “established social apparatus” of heaven/hell in the Augustinian tradition makes no room for either Job or Alex/ina’s experience, thus rendering them guilty, in the bishop’s view, of making their own hell. His focus, inspired again by Nietzsche, on the impact of traumatic experience upon the “visceral register” which can then be manipulated into politically disastrous resentment, is a crucial intervention for one seeking to understand the “politics of hell” and its dangers. So too is his attentiveness to what political theorist Jenny Edkins calls trauma-time: the way in which historical traumas like 9/11 are mobilized by state apparatuses, shaped into historical narratives, and ritualized in ways that lead to authoritarian structures being given greater legitimacy and latitude to construct ever tighter binaries of control. Here too the *resignatio ad infernum* tradition could

---

20 A particularly good discussion of the “visceral register” can be found in William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), especially in chapter one, “Pluralism and Evil” an analysis in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. See also William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), which has a fascinating discussion of recent scientific research on the role of the amygdala in traumatization, and of the need for various experimental “micro-political” practices designed to slow or even re-direct the brain’s fight-flight response in the political realm. Here the various spiritual practices in the *resignatio* tradition might be brought into useful dialogue with Connolly.

profitably be brought into conversation with Connolly’s work, perhaps creating a kind of progressive “resonance-machine” between secular and religious progressives who see the “common hell” into which the Evangelical-Capitalist machine is so willing to see so many thrown and “forgotten.”

Another ally of the resignatio ad infernum tradition is the philosopher Judith Butler, especially in her more recent work inspired by a creative synthesis of Foucault and Levinas, arguing for the need to contest the hegemonic claims of various forms of political theology and hinting at another, progressive option. Increasingly sensitive to conservative political efforts to protect the population, via various modes of governmentality, from any and all suffering, while at the same time inflicting it so disproportionately on those most vulnerable, she writes that seeking this kind of invulnerability risks making its citizens the kind of beings who, by definition, could not be in love, blind and blinded, vulnerable to devastation, subject to enthralment. If we were to respond to injury by claiming we had a “right” not to be so treated, we would be treating the other’s love as an

---

22 In *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Connolly writes of this “forgetting”: “The politics of becoming, when it achieves a modicum of success, repositions selected modes of suffering so that they move from an obscure subsistence or marked identity below the register of justice to a visible, unmarked place on it. In a modern world of justice as fairness between persons, this means that modes of being consciously or unconsciously shuffled below normal personhood become modified and translated into the dense operational rubric of personhood itself through the politics of becoming. A mode of suffering is thereby moved from below the reach of justice to a place within its purview; and now the language of injury, discrimination, injustice, and oppression can apply more cleanly to it. It is after a movement crosses this critical threshold that a mode of suffering fits into the practice of justice.” (63)
entitlement rather than a gift. Being a gift, it carries the insuperable quality of gratuitousness. It is, in Adorno’s language, a gift given from freedom.\textsuperscript{23}

Here we are clearly in the vicinity of some of the favored themes of the \textit{resignatio} tradition of accepting the vulnerability of love and the need to practice certain exercises of risk-taking in its name. Like Connolly on Job and Alex/ina, Butler’s meditations on Antigone show how the state is prone to readily construct a hell of exclusion from its laws and how figures like Antigone willingly enter this hell in the name of justice above the law, or what Thoreau called a “higher law.”\textsuperscript{24} In lieu of what would need to be a much longer discussion of this remarkable work, let the following passage serve as a provocative transposition into fine-tuned philosophical idiom of the scene of the “shadowy realm” of the damned and their “melancholy” cries in \textit{The Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary}.

How are we to understand this realm, what Hannah Arendt described as the “shadowy realm,” which haunts the public sphere, which is precluded from the public constitution of the human, but which is human in an apparently catachrestic sense of that term? Indeed, how are we to grasp this dilemma of language that emerges when “human” takes on that doubled sense, the normative one based on radical exclusion and the one that emerges in the sphere of the excluded, not negated, not dead, perhaps slowly dying, yes, surely dying from a lack of recognition,


\textsuperscript{24} Judith Butler, \textit{Antigone's Claim : Kinship between Life and Death} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
dying, indeed, from the premature circumscription of the norms by which recognition as human can be conferred, a recognition without which the human cannot come into being but must remain on the far side of being, as what does not quite qualify as that which is and can be? Is this not a melancholy of the public sphere?

In her recent analysis of the role of the frame and framing in media presentations of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the imprisonments in Guantanamo, Butler has provided a highly sophisticated theoretical lens with which to think about the theo-political frame of heaven and hell as two discrete realms with no passage between, as well as to what changes when we enter the resignatio tradition of the post-biblical apocalypses where such frames are re-described, repeated in a different context, or altogether exploded.

Finally, Butler’s emphasis on the political significance of mourning provides the resignatio tradition numerous intertextual possibilities for a progressive political resonance-machine in which mourning becomes a critical mode of counter-conduct resisting the Evangelical-capitalist machine’s empty promise of happiness at any cost.

---

25 Ibid., 81.
26 Judith Butler, Frames of War: When is Life Grievable? (London; New York: Verso, 2009). One passage that would be richly suggestive in this light is the following: “Yet, precisely because each body finds itself potentially threatened by others who are, by definition, precarious as well, forms of domination follow. This standard Hegelian point takes on specific meanings under contemporary conditions of war: the shared condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives, cast as “destructible” and "ungrievable." Such populations are "lose-able," or can be forfeited, precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited.” (31)
Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence? Is there something to be gained in the political domain by maintaining grief as part of the framework within which we think our international ties? If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? Could the experience of a dislocation of first-world safety not condition the insight into the radically inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally? To foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way. To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief—“Who have I become?” or, indeed, “What is left of me?” “What is it in the Other that I have lost?”—posits the “I” in the mode of unknowingness.27

27 Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (London; New York: Verso, 2003), 30. In an important interview with political theorist Thomas Dumm, she responds to possible objections to this view: “I’m aware as well that many people are ‘affronted’ by the demands of grief, since grief undoes agency in some consequential ways. For instance, one seeks to ‘act’ in the face of loss, but the loss is itself a form of impingement, a confrontation with a deprivation or a violence that is precisely against one’s will or indifferent to one’s will. So grief limits the will, and this ‘affront’ sometimes leads people to insist upon immediate forms of activism, not only to take revenge, but to reassert the mastery or agency of the ‘I’. So I guess I am somewhat opposed to the idea that one should cease grieving and organize. In the same way, I was opposed to Bush’s time-limit on grieving (ten days, I believe), after which he ‘resolved’ on war. Maybe what needs to be ‘tarried with’ is that experience of being impinged upon in ways one never chose, and to think through what this means about how profoundly affected by others’ lives we are. This could, in turn, lead to a different conception of intersubjectivity and even, I believe, a consideration of global interdependency. One would have to ‘stay with’ the thought of unwanted impingement in order to get these social and political conclusions. Otherwise, we end up reasserting the ego and its mastery, and the hyper-agency (perhaps manic) of liberal individualism and masculine nationalism wins the day.” J. Butler and T. Dumm, “Giving Away, Giving Over: A Conversation with Judith Butler,” Massachusetts Review 49, no. 1/2 (2008), 95-105, at 99.
It has been the burden of this project to answer affirmatively to Butler’s question, “is there anything to be gained” by such tarrying with grief. What is gained, all of the thinkers we have tarried with might say, is just this: the surprising recognition that, after all, love remains even in the hell of disconsolate grief, even in the ghostly memories of the ashen faces of the damned.

And what, finally, about God? To my knowledge Butler has made no serious interventions in the sphere of theology. Connolly’s work on Augustinian theology is a crucial aspect of his work, though it is almost wholly critical. More recently, he has read with appreciation both Caputo and Catherine Keller, acknowledging in their thought valuable allies for a progressive resonance-machine to counter the Evangelical-capitalist one. He notes that Keller’s theology of becoming turns sharply from the Augustinian model, and argues for a God vulnerable to the “unruly world” and the “chaos and depth” of creation.\(^{28}\) In *Face of the Deep*, Keller, wanting to retrieve the Genesis imagery of the *tehom* from what she views as a misogynistic rejection of

---

it by the Augustinian tradition, reads this “chaos and depth” in a positive light and aligns it with the feminine.  

More recently, however, Keller’s view seems to have shifted somewhat in response to her reading of another feminist theologian, Shelly Rambo. Rambo’s book *Spirit and Trauma* is to date the most sustained reading of the Christian theological tradition of hell in light of recent trauma theory. She retains the view Keller resists in *Face of the Deep* of the abyss as an image of hell, but unlike Augustine she insists that it is only in *abiding* in and with the abyss, rather than fleeing it, that love and God may be found in the wake of annihilating trauma. Sensing that this more troubled chaotic space may be closer to what she (Keller) was trying to articulate in her earlier work, she writes in her preface to Rambo’s book the following:

> Perhaps my own reflection on creation at the edge of chaos, with its potential to destabilize colonized orders of gender, sex, and sovereignty, had led me to the edge of her own problematic… Rambo is mapping—with exquisite care—not a harrowing but a healing pathway through trauma. On this forking, multidimensional way, the Spirit is not (as in Moltmann, for example) simply identified with life—at least not the life that is opposed to death. Between Good Friday and Easter, between death and life, between the exhale and the inhale, between the future and the past, this middle Spirit vibrates, delicately. And, dramatically, it reopens the vining interconnections of the Johannine site of love. In the subtle power of this love’s “remaining,” it “is not only tied to death, it is marked by an

---

29 For a similar critique of the way the Christian tradition has tended to align the abyss with the feminine and with the nihilistic, see Grace Jantzen, "Eros and the Abyss: Reading Medieval Mystics in Postmodernity," *Literature and Theology* 17, no. 3 (2003), 244-264.
unknowing.” In both trauma and theology, a language capable of minding its effects falters. This spirit, vibrating still upon the face of the deep, witnesses to our most tormenting depths of loss, violence, and despair. “Love is a new commandment, and it calls witnesses into the abyss.”

My own view is that the resignatio ad infernum motif that I have traced in these chapters is just this responding to the call of love into, rather than away from, the abyss. Rambo’s theological risk is in suggesting that it may only be here, in hell itself, that God may be found in an age in which a triumphalist Christianity, along with other forms of self-protective fundamentalisms, align themselves so readily with the secular promises of salvation in the governmentalties of today’s nationalist regimes. A strange hospitality, this hell that opens to all the vulnerable world, which is to say, to everybody. A strange God, whose own insecurity enables love’s fragile hope to remain alive in the battle that remains.

---

30 Catherine Keller’s preface to Shelly Rambo, Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), x, emphasis mine. The italicized quotation comes from 137 of Rambo’s text.
Bibliography


———. "Trauma and Literary Theory." *Contemporary Literature.* 38, no. 3 (1997): 569-582.


———. "We Who are Free, are we Free?" *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 2 (1993): 201-219.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher and Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari</td>
<td>Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature</td>
<td>Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


VITA

AUTHOR: Clark R. West

PLACE OF BIRTH: Rochester, N.Y.

DATE OF BIRTH: January 9, 1967

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:
- Williams College, Williamstown, MA
- University of Chicago Divinity School, Chicago, IL
- Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

DEGREES AWARDED
- Bachelor of Arts in Religion, (cum laude) 1989, Williams College
- Master of Divinity, 1997, University of Chicago Divinity School
- Master of Philosophy, 2009, Syracuse University

AWARDS AND HONORS
- Arthur B. Graves religion department essay prize, 1989
- John Gray Rhind Award for academic excellence, 1997
- Syracuse University Fellowship, 2005
- *Theta Chi Beta* Religion Honor Society, 2008

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

“Dostoevsky on Affliction” given in Professor Edward F. Mooney’s Syracuse University graduate seminar on Affliction and Redemption, Spring 2009.

“Strange Fruit: John Brown and the Politics of Paradise Lost and Hell Regained in Henry David Thoreau’s Late Work”, presented at a panel on Thoreau and Religion at the Eastern Regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Spring 2009.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Teaching Fellow, Syracuse University, Spring 2009
Teaching Assistant, Syracuse University, 2007-2008
Instructor, Bexley Hall Seminary, Rochester, NY, 2005