Dissident Secularism:
Queer Exegesis, Transatlantic Modernism, and the Discipline of Modernity

By
Raji Singh Soni

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the interplay of queer sexuality, theology, and transatlantic modernism in the oeuvres and critical receptions of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Hart Crane (1899-1932), and W.H. Auden (1907-1973). As an interdisciplinary study in literary criticism and of each author’s reception history, this thesis reads the poetry, critical prose, and correspondence of Eliot, Crane, and Auden with focused reference to queer theory and continental philosophies of religion extending from Immanuel Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* and Søren Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship to Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of aesthetics, ethics, and politics in the post-Kantian legacy.

Gauging the “post-secular turn” in cultural criticism, the dissertation develops a critique of “epistemic secularism,” which constitutes a normative framework for scholarship in many branches of the humanities. To examine “the secular limits of discipline” at the junction of queer theory and modernist studies, it examines how literary critics and queer theorists define modernity and conceptualize subjectivity at the secular limits (or limitations) of their fields. Imbrications of theology and queerness in the works of Eliot, Crane, and Auden occasion this study’s response to epistemic secularism and prompt its recalibration of secularism in the ethical terms of “mere reason,” rather than as an episteme rife with antireligious politics.

Research undertaken for this thesis is guided by two foundational questions: 1) Do extant models for the study of queer sexualities presuppose secularism or enforce secularization as a benchmark for the “achievement of modernity”? 2) Are religious foundations conceivable for queer subjects to whom secularism remains a key factor in the emancipatory history of sexual cultures? The dissertation argues that, for better and for worse, secularism has become a blueprint in the metropolitan West for thinking sexual modernity as progressive and achievable.
Notwithstanding such provisos, this study finds that the “proper” subject in queer-modernist studies is in essence neither nonreligious nor antireligious. Rather, reading with and against the grain of secularism’s episteme, it uncovers in the corpuses of Eliot, Crane, and Auden a radical conception of theology as a positively queer endeavour in an era of “liberated” secularist polities.
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Thou shalt not do as the dean pleases,  
Thou shalt not write thy doctor’s thesis  
On education,  
Thou shalt not worship projects nor  
Shalt thou or thine bow down before  
Administration. (182)  
—Auden, “Under Which Lyre,” *Selected Poems*

*De gustibus non est disputandum. Des goûts et des couleurs, on ne discute pas.* In idiomatic English, these phrases shade roughly into the well-worn adage: “politics and religion are subjects not to be discussed at the dinner table.” This epigram is perhaps all the more well advised when the politics or the religion (or tastes and colours) in question are rather queer. In any event, I remain grateful to the many figures—scholarly, friendly, and familial—whose presence at this dissertation’s dinner table enabled me to work through its arguments and toward its *synthesis*.

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Chapter 1

Critical Introduction: Disciplinary Grids under the Aegis of Secularism

I am proposing...that what produces an incongruity within any field, the presence of the Other in it that keeps it from being entirely and complacently itself, is precisely the public, that is, the discipline’s need to legitimate its existence vis-à-vis other disciplines and society at large. The interdisciplinary role of rhetoric, then, would approximate the role some have ascribed to theory: an opening of what appears private in disciplines to public scrutiny and to public accountability. This task could be described as “public-making”: making public or visible, opening to a variety of perspectives and judgments, but also the interdisciplinary fashioning of new publics, new instances of judgment, new collective viewpoints. It is within such a framework, for example, that one might profitably study “praise-and-blame” in the rhetoric of the humanities. (116)

—Bruce Robbins, Secular Vocations

The antihistorical, antimodern subject, therefore, cannot speak as “theory” within the knowledge procedures of the university even when these knowledge procedures acknowledge and “document” its existence. Much like Spivak’s “subaltern” (or the anthropologist’s peasant who can only have a quoted existence in a larger statement that belongs to the anthropologist alone), this subject can only be spoken for and spoken of by the transition narrative, which will always ultimately privilege the modern. (41)

—Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe

Gridding Discipline: The Turn to Ethics and the Return of Religion

To literary critics and theorists attuned to the emergence and development of their fields, “history repeats itself” may be more than a prosaic adage. On the one hand, the phrase holds historiographic valences for literary studies, a discipline whose galvanized “new” schools (new criticism, new historicism, new cultural studies, new aestheticism, new formalism, among others) arose from recalibrations that generations of scholars made to those specters of the critical tradition deemed salvageable or recyclable. On the other hand, when such new schools and the scholarship they yield are understood as forms of intellectual labour produced for a competitive and globalizing institutional marketplace, the adage runs up against a brand of disciplinary faddism that provides, in Michael Kaufmann’s estimation, “continued justification for professional identity by allowing us to ask repeatedly the simple question: What’s the next big
thing?” (“The Religious” 621). In this consumerist vein, critics and theorists pursuing “the next big thing” might consider precisely how the novelty they seek factors into ongoing historiographies of their wider discipline; for, if history repeats itself, then the “novelty” sought by innovators and revisionists may paradoxically limit justifications of professional identity to well-worn disciplinary conventions recast as newfangled.

Alongside a protracted “ethical turn” in theory and criticism that Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca Walkowitz have registered in their wide-ranging essay collection, *The Turn to Ethics*, ¹ scholars across the humanities suggest repeatedly that the next big thing is “the return of religion.”² In both disciplinary and market contexts, the phraseology ascribed to these next big things is telling. Careening, it would seem, through the intricacies of the ascendant Kierkegaardian spheres—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious³—seekers after novelty discuss a shift in theory and criticism from aesthetics and its artful renderings of subjectivity to ethics and its approaches to agency, otherness, and alterity.⁴ This trope of “the

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¹ See also, among others, Baker, *Deconstruction and the Ethical Turn*; Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*; Harpham, *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*; and Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory, edited by Davis and Womack.

² No one has heralded this return more pithily than Stanley Fish. In a characteristically piquant piece for *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Fish writes, “When Jacques Derrida died I was called by a reporter who wanted to know what would succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion” (“One University, Under God”). For a religious studies perspective (specifically, the perspective of a constructive feminist theologian) on Fish’s piece, see Armour, “Theology in Modernity’s Wake,” who asks two disciplinary questions: “what obligation do scholars of religion have to the pursuit of the postmodern? In what sense, if any, do our fields of inquiry exhibit signs of modernity’s decline, if not demise?” (8). “The return of the religious” is a phrase whose uncanny resources preoccupy Derrida throughout his essay, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” Questioning the widespread appeal of this phrase, Hent de Vries cautions wisely against deploying such language naively, for doing so “might very well create the illusion that the term religion refers to a historical presence, to a delimitable body of writings, or to an intellectual or emotional category that at some time or other may have had the potential of somehow or somewhere remaining itself or intact, regardless of its apparent metamorphoses” (Turn 8). With reference to Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge,” de Vries finds that by setting the tone “for everything that it is not,” religion returns (if indeed it must be said to return at all) “as the repressed, even though the suppression was never anything in particular” (9). See also Simmons, *God and the Other: Ethics and Politics After the Theological Turn*. ³ See Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Stages on Life’s Way*, and my discussion of Auden in chapter five.

⁴ Notably, “the political” functions as an alternative for that which is “left” in the turn to ethics. Judith Butler, for instance, sees in this turn a worrisome “escape from politics” (“Ambivalence” 15). See also Critchley, *Ethics—Politics—Subjectivity*. While echoing Butler, John Guillory does not view such escapism as compulsory: the ethical
"turn" intimates that ethical concerns relate perpendicularly to aesthetic pursuits; one might say that aesthetics and ethics meet at sheer (if not always “right”) angles, facilitating sharp but ultimately assured continuity from one direction to the other. Indeed, continuity here is reliable enough to afford grammatical transference: adjectivally, the “act” of turning to ethics becomes quintessentially ethical.

Meanwhile, elsewhere on this interested grid, religion as a subject-object of study in theory and criticism returns of its own accord and thus bears unevenly, if not detractively, on the more tenable geometry of aesthetic and ethical domains. In other words, the distinction between “the ethical turn” and “the return of religion” resides foremost in the play of prepositions: the former vests agency in disciplinary method (turn to) while the latter vests agency in the subject-

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object uncannily under reconsideration (return of). Accordingly, with possible aversions to phraseology typical of serial horror films—*Return of the Living Dead, Return of the Swamp Thing*—secularist intellectuals would retain their purchase in an atheistic death of God counter to any resurgence of religion that may in fact be tethered to their own disciplinary investments.

In engaging religion’s return from the standpoints of aesthetics and/or ethics, theorists and critics do not proceed via the straight and narrow. Religion’s return in fact presupposes that theory and criticism, in their specialized contemporary forms, had hitherto dispelled from their ranks the dregs of theology, originating thereby a steadfastly secular consensus on the meaning, bounds, and legitimacy of religion in and for scholarly practice. Indeed, for Gauri Viswanathan, whose article “Secularism in the Frame of Heterodoxy” features in a recent *PMLA* forum on “the changing profession,” the institutionalized study of literature is so definitively “part of the momentum leading to a secularist worldview that literature appears to have a unique standing among disciplines, in that it chronicles the transition from a religious culture instead of developing methodologies for studying the emergence of secularism” (467). Because literary criticism and its branches of theory generally claim intellectual modernity, autonomy, and agency through the privatization of religion, the line Viswanathan draws between secularization as a narrative of institutional progress (or progressive institutionalization) and secularism as an epistemological project whose contingencies and vicissitudes require scrutiny is often overlooked or conveniently ignored. Bypassing this subject entirely allows theorists and critics to conceptualize both their disciplinary work and their audience and readership as always-already

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6 Tracking religion’s emergence as a secular discipline, Kaufmann discusses the means by which “the private/public division was institutionalized into a division between seminaries and divinity schools, on the one hand, and departments of religion or religious studies in secular universities, on the other” (“The Religious” 613). Kaufmann reads the 1960s as a period of advanced secularization in the liberal arts aided by a cultural shift into liberal Protestantism. This shift disestablished theology in the liberal arts while destabilizing the secular and the religious as discrete rubrics: “Protestant values here being categorized—things like progress, improvement, self-education, discipline, personal responsibility—are themselves neither essentially religious nor secular” (617).
thoroughly secularized and equivalently secularist. At this juncture, upholding the consensus on religion in theory and criticism entails, in Tracy Fessenden’s words, “quarantining it from discussion, or assigning it to this or that bounded historical sphere (Puritanism, sentimentality),” only to reconfirm that “literary studies remains dogged by religion to the degree that it stakes its credibility on a distinction between the two terms, secular and religious, no matter how shifting or arbitrary” they become under scrutiny (“Secular” 633). If the ideological bearings of theorists and critics have not shifted much since the secularized inception of their fields, returning to religion (or fitfully engaging its return) may signal quite alarmingly that history repeating itself is tantamount to the resurrection of a veritable Dark Age.

Given that religion’s return pivots on the vested interests of theorists and critics, the self-reflexive character of the return—e.g. how “returners” qualify key concepts, such as secularism,

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7 The idea that an academic readership or audience is always-already secularized engages Michael Warner’s inquiry into “critical reading” as a “notional derivative from a prior, uncritical reading that it must posit in order to exist” (“Uncritical” 15). “Or is it,” Warner asks, “more like a discipline, seeking to replace the raw and untrained practices of the merely literate with a cultivated and habitual disposition to read by another set of practices?” (15). With reference to literary studies, Viswanathan might answer Warner by delineating “two radically different conceptions of the reader. On the one hand, we must contend with the historical genealogy of English literary study from its religious origins: that is, the construction of readers in English literature as inheritors of a scriptural legacy of original sin. This legacy is so strong as to posit literary study as an instrument of moral elevation, if not redemption. On the other hand, the second conception, which regards readers as encompassing the full range of social diversity, follows from the rise of the nation-state, and it requires the interpellation of readers as members of a community increasingly defined on national rather than religious or ethnic lines. The movement from representation to representational politics adduces a contingent relationship between literary education and its universe of readers who are often overlooked when texts are deemed the sole source of value” (“Subjecting” 180). See Viswanathan, “Milton, Imperialism, and Education,” for an early-modern case study in forms of readership. For a sociological lens on secularism’s cultured readers, see the chapter “Church, state, and modernization: literature as gentlemanly knowledge after 1688” in During, Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory, and Post-Secular Modernity.

8 In the context of wider debates on religion and education within the secular university, linking the return of religion with anxiety over the resurrection of a “Dark Age” does not risk overstatement. Consider a postscript from the Queen’s Journal, published February 27, 2009, whose heading asks, “What’s God got to do with it?” In this piece, Taylor Burns investigates “the place of faith at university” at a time when religion is increasingly “stigmatized by the academic elite” (26). Representing the secularist argument at perhaps its most inquisitional, Burns cites Queen’s philosophy professor Adele Mercier, for whom “religion ought to be stigmatized as any form of irrational thought or belief ought to be stigmatized” (26). For Mercier, “reason” or (to use her phrase) “paradigm rational thinking” assumes, in my view, a repressively clear-cut instrumentalism: “every form of human irrationality we should attempt to eradicate,” Mercier states (26). Perhaps recognizing that such precarious “irrationality” is not utterly abstract—which is to say that it is “cultured” or practiced by religious communities and persons—Mercier states that religious people themselves should not be stigmatized: “We should not discriminate against people but against certain beliefs” (26). Paradigm rational thinking, then, maintains that openly stigmatizing religious beliefs leaves unscathed those for whom such beliefs are tenets of position, identity, family, and community.
whose meanings are often taken for granted; they regard, or refrain from regarding, their own learned forms of adherence to the secularization thesis and its epistemologies—is a vital rubric of critique. For instance, by recognizing that the emergence of secularism in the West occurred by means of (rather than beyond the logistics of or decisively counter to) Christian institutions, Kaufmann foregrounds the extent to which “the religious” and “the secular” are tethered to each other’s divergent prerogatives. Once unmoored from sanctioned narratives of post-Enlightenment progress and considered in historical context, secularization could be seen as the carrying out of certain ideas, beliefs, and practices that were initially located in churches, monasteries, and universities into the world at large. Thus a ‘secular’ priest is not one who, in our contemporary colloquial sense is not ‘religious,’ but rather one who, not cloistered in a particular religious order, is out and about in the world. (Kaufmann “The Religious” 612)

9 Commonly defined as the separation of Church and State, secularism admits of geopolitical and cross-disciplinary polyvalence. For Joan Wallach Scott, for instance, understanding secularism entails transnational inflection: in America, “the separation between church and state was meant to protect religions from unwarranted government intervention…. it was soon extended to keep religiosity as such out of government. In France, separation was intended to secure the allegiance of individuals to the republic and so break the political power of the Catholic Church. There the state claimed the undivided loyalty of citizens to the nation, and that meant relegating to a private sphere the claims of religious communities” (91; emphasis added). Stanley Tambiah delineates Indian secularism with reference to Jawaharlal Nehru’s pre-Partition statement of 1945: “I am convinced that the future government of free India must be secular in the sense that government will not associate itself with any religious faith but will give freedom to all religious functions,” Nehru states; this secularism “does not mean the rejection of the transcendental values of religion or that society should be irreligious; on the contrary, there is acceptance that all religions are meaningful and that they should have a valid place in the life of the nation” (Tambiah 422; emphasis added). These definitions illustrate the plasticity of a term that still remains extraordinarily shorthanded, if not simply presupposed as an untroubled “natural” category through which theorizing occurs, in many sectors of theory and criticism.

10 Timothy Fitzgerald in The Ideology of Religious Studies, to which both Kaufmann and Fessenden have recourse in their pieces, aptly qualifies this phrase: “The secular itself is a sphere of transcendental values, but the invention of religion as the locus of the transcendent serves to disguise this and strengthen the illusion that the secular is simply the real world seen aright in its self-evident factuality” (15). Analysis and critique of secularism as an epistemology has been carried out in discrepant ways by scholars as varied as Talal Asad, José Casanova, William Connolly, Joseph Massad, Ashis Nandy, Vincent Pecora, Joan Wallach Scott, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stanley J. Tambiah, Gauri Viswanathan, and Slavoj Žižek, among others. With the exceptions of Žižek and Spivak, whose reflections on religion and secularity operate within the purview of what literary studies loosely labels “critical theory,” these scholars treat secularism from various “non-literary” sectors: sociology (Casanova), anthropology (Asad), cultural criticism (Massad, Pecora), history of epistemology (Massad, Viswanathan), disciplinary history (Viswanathan), and political studies (Connolly, Nandy, Scott). By drawing from these scholars’ elucidations of secularism’s epistemological quandaries, I seek in part to set a division of literary studies into dialogue with debates on secularism from “non-literary” fields.

11 Pericles Lewis shows that a similar religious pedigree haunts the secular-aesthetic vestments of “modernism,” which “before it was applied to literary or artistic experiments, originally referred in Europe to a liberal movement in the Catholic Church that modeled itself to some extent on nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism. The ‘modernist’ crisis exposed a deep rift between church hierarchy and those priests and theologians who embraced modern science and Biblical criticism” (Religious 41).
Tellingly, this nonsectarian priesthood is roughly continuous with forms of secular, professional identity claimed today across subfields of theory and criticism. Synthesizing Bruce Robbins’s and Robert Scholes’s work on Matthew Arnold’s “replacement theory,” which maintains in late-Victorian fashion “that poetry/literature replaces a religion that had become too dogmatic,” Kaufmann argues that theorists, critics, and teachers of literature still assume “the cultural function,” formerly ascribed to the theological faculty, “of transmitting moral and spiritual values” (“The Religious” 616). If one considers here Viswanathan’s research into how literary study, as devised by Scholes’s “theologians of English” (Kaufmann 616), arose within the imperialist trajectory of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century humanism, then the disciplinary distinction theorists and critics make between religious belief “as something private and personal, creedal and dogmatic” and religion as an abstracted “cultural category” that is subject to “public debate via published research” (Kaufmann 613) comes to represent feasibly the most unquestioned legacy of post-Enlightenment discourse in literary studies.

Left unquestioned or rendered unquestionable, this legacy delimits the means by which theorists and critics are able to perceive, to critique, and to perceive the value in critiquing the epistemology, politics, and determinations of secularism within their fields. If recognized as an epistemological constraint (rather than as something casually to be taken for granted vis-à-vis, for instance, secularist assumptions that the institutions of a given democratic public sphere truly accomplish the privatization of religious beliefs) which sanctions what Ananda Abeysekara

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13 See Viswanathan, Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India. Viswanathan argues that literature’s unique relation to the religious culture it superseded made it an ideal instrument for conveying religiously inspired ethical values in a secular framework, thus making it “an effective and palatable means by which Christian ideas could be imparted in colonial settings without inciting potential rebellion and resistance by colonial subjects practicing different religious faiths” (“Secularism” 466).
terms “secularist complacency”(34), this delimitation might prompt scholars to “explore the practical implications of various elements of those theories that challenge any simple secularization narrative” (Kaufmann 621). Such inquiry affords opportunities for those mindful of fissures that characterize disciplinary historiographies to recognize that, in the genealogy of debates on the secularization thesis, secularity itself has not always held its current, largely unequivocal position as a metonym for teleological, progressive modernity (or, for modernity as bona fide progress).15

Furthermore, by unsettling the reigning thesis, theorists may engage religion in terms of its supple heterodoxies, “the dissonant strains in religious history that secularism has collectively grouped under the rubric of belief” (Viswanathan “Secularism” 476), among which secularism

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14 See Abeysekara, The Politics of Postsecular Religion. Abeysekara parses sections 108 and 343 of Nietzsche’s Gay Science, focusing on the famous pronouncement, “God is Dead.” For Abeysekara, this statement is widely misread as an unequivocal endorsement of “secularist, Enlightenment claims about the divenitized public spaces of rational argument that liberal thinkers ranging from Kant to Rorty and Rawls (in their own varying ways) have considered so essential to our modernity” (35). Abeysekara suggests that Nietzsche’s pronouncement should be read alongside his cognate discussion of “the shadow of God,” which acts as a formidable caution “against a lapse into complacency about the secularism of our political modernity” (35). John Caputo corroborates Abeysekara’s reading when he notes that “some kind of postsecular moment emerges precisely from what Nietzsche calls ‘the death of God’ because it’s the death of any version of monism or reductionism, including secularism” (“Powerless” 133). Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “The End of the End of Metaphysics” and God without Being. In the latter, we read that the “death of God” immediately implies the death of the ‘death of God’” (xxiii).

15 I have in mind the quarrel between Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg as manifest respectively in Meaning in History (1949) and Legitimacy of the Modern Age (1966). For Löwith the modern idea of progress, which underpins contemporary renderings of sociopolitical agency, is a secularization of Christian eschatology. By unveiling secularist historicism as turgid false consciousness, Löwith unsettles modernity’s claims to radical authenticity and self-constitutive originality. As Robert Wallace notes, for Löwith the thinking that elicits modernity “derives its fundamental pattern of interpretation—that of direction toward a future goal or fulfillment—from theology, from the very dogmas that the Enlightenment and its 19th-century ‘historicist’ heirs were concerned, if not to deny, at least to bracket off from their explanatory endeavors” (67). Dissatisfied with Löwith’s reading of secularization as a process of translational continuity across epochs, Blumenberg elaborated a “system of positions” and “reoccupations” (warranting some comparison with Deleuze-Guattarian de-/re-territorialization) according to which, as Elias José Palti explains, “what is inherited from a preceding age is a system of ‘empty positions’ that the new, emerging age must fill with its own materials”; Blumenberg argued that “an independently generated idea of progress was soon removed from its original empirical foundation and ‘overextended’ (a key word in his vocabulary) to fill the place left vacant by the breakdown in the theological pattern” (506). The situation of much contemporary theory (whether critical or uncritical of secularism) may be framed by the remarkable corollaries of this debate.
may, however reluctantly, encounter its own spectral antecedents. If, following this thread of propositions for rethinking the justifications of discipline, secularization is not deemed an absolute, naturalized precondition for theory and criticism; if its role as definitive blueprint for disciplinary training in the humanities assumes the order of a tellingly recalcitrant master narrative; and if one is increasingly skeptical of its valuation as an emancipating substrate of modernity across numerous fields, then the return of religion may not easily be distinguished from an—if not from the—ethical turn.16

**Dissident Secularism, Suspicious Hermeneutics, and the Limits of Reparative Reading**

Anchored more specifically within so circuitous a grid of turns and returns, this critical introduction works in tandem with its subsequent chapter, “Between Theology and Theory: Modern Agencies at the Secular Limits of Discipline,” to examine firstly how modernity is theorized and secondly how agency, a major spoke of “things modern,” is conceptualized and claimed when theorists and critics reach the “secular limits” of their disciplinary fields. As indicated by the subtitle of this dissertation, the two fields in question are queer studies (writ large to encompass both LGBT research and queer theory) and modernist studies, two mutually enlightening, perhaps even symbiotic, quarters of inquiry. Delimiting the latter in subsequent chapters, major works by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Hart Crane (1899-1932) and W.H. Auden (1907-1973) serve as prospects for critiquing epistemic secularism in queer-modernist studies. Poetry, correspondence, and literary and social criticism by these writers occasion my discussion of how various, often underexplored melding points of queer inquiry and theological discourse in

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16 Perusal of Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics” shows us that this identification of the return of religion with the turn to ethics interfaces with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas: “Face to face with the other within a glance and a speech which both maintain distance and interrupt all totalities, this being-together as separation precedes or exceeds society, collectivity, community. Levinas calls it *religion*. It opens ethics. The ethical relation is a religious relation (*Difficile liberté*). Not a religion, but the religion, the religiosity of the religious” (95). “The Other is not the incarnation of God,” writes Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, “but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed”; human relations “give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of” (79).
modernist studies unsettle the doctrinal enshrinement of secularism as a hermeneutic whose attachments to key strands of queer theory and literary criticism are tenacious, if not positively stubborn, in character.

Suturing the grid of ethics, aesthetics, and politics in the humanities, this hermeneutic relies upon the naturalized convictions of secularism to reaffirm the longstanding suspicion of religion it dispenses. These convictions are resilient, lithe, and implicit enough to survive even the most persuasive excursions into what one may call “post-secular cultural criticism.” A key passage from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s deservedly influential essay on “reparative reading” offers a crucial but by no means exclusive case in point. In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” Sedgwick seeks to counteract “the hermeneutics of suspicion” by questioning, among other things, the alleged ubiquity of such easy targets as “the modern liberal subject” and “secular, universalist liberal humanism.” “The modern liberal subject,” writes Sedgwick, seems, or ought to seem, anything but an obvious choice as the unique terminus ad quem of historical narrative. Where are all these supposed modern liberal subjects? I daily encounter graduate students who are dab hands at unveiling the hidden historical violences that underlie a secular, universalist liberal humanism. Yet these students’ sentient years, unlike the formative years of their teachers, have been spent entirely in a xenophobic Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush America where ‘liberal’ is, if anything, a taboo category and where ‘secular humanism’ is routinely treated as a marginal religious sect, while a vast majority of the population claims to engage in direct intercourse with multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God. (140)

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17 Sedgwick cites the usual suspects in her elucidation of this phrase: “[Paul] Ricoeur introduced the category of the hermeneutics of suspicion to describe the position of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their intellectual offspring in a context that also included such alternative disciplinary hermeneutics as the philological and theological ‘hermeneutics of recovery of meaning’” (124). In her essay’s final section, “Paranoia Places Its Faith in Exposure,” Sedgwick characterizes the hermeneutics of suspicion as “strange” for appearing to be “so trusting about the effects of exposure, but Nietzsche (through the genealogy of morals), Marx (through the theory of ideology), and Freud (through the theory of ideals and illusions) already represent, in Ricoeur’s phrase, ‘convergent procedures of demystification’ and therefore a seeming faith, inexplicable in their own terms, in the effects of such a proceeding” (139).
In Michael Warner’s view, “Sedgwick’s reparative reading seems to be defined less by any project of its own than by its recoil from a manically programmatic intensification of the critical” (18). Upon inspection, however, reparative reading does manifest a project of sorts through Sedgwick’s inexorable means for redirecting a certain residuum of suspicion. “Paranoid” and/or “reparative” wariness of Sedgwick’s suspicion of suspicious hermeneutics would accordingly bank on numerous “dab-handed” caveats, queries, and challenges.

In the passage cited, Sedgwick’s case hinges on debunking the normative thrust of criticism that posits “the modern liberal subject” as a given teleological apex of late- and post-Cold War American modernity; logically, Sedgwick appears to be saying, if there is no historical referent or descriptive ground for which “the modern liberal subject” could serve as a catchall or placeholder, then one can hardly maintain that there are any “hidden historical violences that underlie a secular, universalist liberal humanism.” If Sedgwick is right, then the industry of scholarship devoted firstly to limning the presumed ubiquity of this subject and secondly to casting suspicion on its ideological production so as to unmask the violence it (un)wittingly enables would be spurious at best. In short, reparative reading—the suspicion of suspicious hermeneutics—aims to debunk the presumption that there is a subject in need of debunking. Notwithstanding the knot of meta-skepticism intrinsic to reparative reading, what intrigues me most is the force of Sedgwick’s example. To what end does Sedgwick’s debunking of debunking lead with respect to her conjurations of the scarce, if not fictive, “modern liberal subject” and the ubiquitous—indeed, in her usage, quasi-statistical—“majority of the [American] population” that “claims to engage in direct intercourse with multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God”? Why is the latter any more substantive or less fictive than the former?

Ellis Hanson cannily notes that “Sedgwick’s essay on reparative reading would seem to inveigh against a hermeneutics of suspicion, but it cannot help rehearsing it”; as a result, her “essay on the reparative is a remarkably paranoid reading of paranoid reading” (“Eve” 106).
To question whether or not Sedgwick’s claims about “the modern liberal subject” and “secular, universalist liberal humanism” are tenable is necessarily also to query her largely rhetorical or “forceful” means for substantiating her case. Sedgwick’s reasoning on this score bears a degree of resemblance to Stanley Fish’s reasoning in “Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech”: for Fish, multiculturalism, a discourse that is (needless to say) inextricably linked to that of “the modern liberal subject” and “secular, universalist liberal humanism,” “is an incoherent concept that cannot be meaningfully either affirmed or rejected” (388; emphasis added). Sedgwick’s approach to the interrelated rubrics she finds dubious mirrors Fish’s stance on multiculturalism as a concept whose vacuity derives from the shallowness of its descriptive purview: “Indeed in many facets of American life there is no multiculturalism issue despite the fact that it is endlessly debated by pundits who pronounce on the meaning of democracy, the content of universal rights, the nature of community, the primacy of the individual, and so on” (387). Moreover, where Sedgwick posits her rhetorical question as to the whereabouts of “modern liberal subjects” and the “secular, universalist liberal humanism” that produces them, Fish refers to “mind-numbing abstractions” whose roles as “the official currency of academic discussion” “do not point us to what is really at stake in the large social and economic dislocations to which they are an inadequate (and even irrelevant) response” (387).

The crucial difference between Sedgwick on the (non)subjects of liberal secular humanism and Fish on boutique liberal multiculturalism comes to light through the latter’s admission that while multiculturalism is negligible as a philosophical concept, it is nevertheless “a demographic fact” in the U.S. as evidenced by the “many cultural traditions” that “flourish and make claims on those who identify with them” (385). Fish extends this admission by

19 As Stanley Fish writes in Doing What Comes Naturally, “Rhetoric is another word for force” (517).
acknowledging that, “at least in the world of education, multiculturalism is a baseline condition rather than an option one can be either for or against” (387; emphasis added). By contrast, though Sedgwick’s miniature case study for reparative reading begins in what one can only assume is a secular American university, she refrain from acknowledging the indelible roles of liberalism, secularism, and humanism in policies of higher education in the U.S.; in the ethical and political “baseline” of the contemporary humanities and social sciences; in institutions of public life such as popular media and journalism; in the medical and health services sector; and in the bearings of Western statecraft, governance, and international affairs. In other words, Sedgwick does not grapple with the very immanence of liberalism, secularism, and humanism in the conventions of public life and intellectual culture that enable her argument to take the ostensibly subversive (i.e. not-subversive-enough) shape it does. Of course, apropos conditions of subversion’s possibility, one must reckon that such non-grappling undercuts the outwardly post-secular orientation of Sedgwick’s musings in “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” as well as in “Pedagogy of Buddhism.” While disenfranchised as concepts in Sedgwick’s

20 In view of an actually-existing multiculturalism in American society, Fish argues, “saying yes or no to multiculturalism seems to make about as much sense as saying yes or no to history, which will keep rolling along irrespective of the judgment you pass on it” (385).


22 In this essay, Sedgwick suggests that adaptation, the “dominant scholarly topos, and indeed, often the self-description, for Western popularizations of Buddhist thought,” “is not the only model for Western encounters with popularized Buddhist teachings” (156). Although Sedgwick does not explicitly align the terms, adaptation in this usage resembles the notion of secularization as manifest in the Löwith-Blumenberg debate (i.e. secularization as adaptation of eschatology vs. secularization as system of epochal replacement and reoccupation). The proximity of adaptation to secularization comes to the fore when Sedgwick writes that the former posits “an Asian original” of Buddhism that is acclimatized “for the essentially different habits, sensibilities, [and] Weltanschauung of the West” (156). This Weltanschauung is perhaps best characterized as secular. Sedgwick rightly acknowledges the ethical pitfalls of adapting Buddhist thought and pedagogy through Western frameworks, which are “at risk of decontextualizing and misrecognizing” Buddhism’s “cultural difference” through “Orientalizing vices” (168).
account of reparative reading and alienated rather than appropriated by “a xenophobic Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush America,”
23 “the modern liberal subject” and “secular, universalist liberal humanism” nevertheless shine forth as constitutive (if unacknowledged) dimensions of policy-making, scholarly values, public culture, health care, and statecraft.

The subduction of Sedgwick’s argument by its unsung condition of possibility—i.e., by its unchecked investments—stems from reparative reading’s meta-skeptical eschewal of the hermeneutics of suspicion, which in Sedgwick’s estimation “may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge

post-secular orientation of Sedgwick’s analysis emerges when she suggests that, rather than understand Buddhism’s career in the West in terms of “one-directional” adaptation, we resort to “an equally canonical topos such as recognition/realization” (156). This topos allows Sedgwick to generate what one might call a post-secular metaphysics: “The framework of rebirth [in Buddhist thought] casts the single human life in the context of a much longer, very complex learning project. Instead of constituting a single, momentous master-class graded on a pass/fail basis, like Christianity—or even ungraded, like the secular version—the individual lifetime is more like a year of one’s schooling, a year preceded and followed by other school years at the appropriate levels” (177).

23 Sedgwick’s pitting of “marginal” “secular, universalist liberal humanism” against “a xenophobic Regan-Bush-Clinton-Bush America” leaves no room for bio-political analysis of how stunningly amenable the former has become for the latter. Jasbir Puar aptly complicates Sedgwick’s discourse on xenophobic-nation-statist center and secular-liberal-humanist margin by positing that a “stigma of inferiority” has combined with a promissory notion of the liberal state (and by extension the neoliberal market) as an ultimately—i.e. infinitely-deferred—benevolent and inclusionary force that stimulates “affective modes of belonging to the state” and thus keeps multicultural subjects “in the folds of nationalism, while xenophobic and homophobic ideologies and policies fester” (26). “Thus,” writes Puar, “the nation-state maintains its homophobic and xenophobic stances while capitalizing on its untarnished image of inclusion, diversity, and tolerance” (26). In this exigent bio-political sense, Sedgwick’s binary of the xenophobic-nation-statist center and secular-liberal-humanist margin is misleading because it is too meta-sceptically—or too selectively—“unparanoid.” In Puar’s analysis we find a searing answer to Sedgwick’s (unfortunately rhetorical) question, “Why bother exposing the ruses of power in a country where, at any given moment, 40 percent of young black men are enmeshed in the penal system?” (140). Observable aspects of systemic racism and discrimination in the U.S. or elsewhere do not render superfluous one’s reasonable suspicion and steadfast exposure of easily-(re)coded forms of, as well as alibis for, violence. Consider in this vein the George W. Bush administration’s early justifications for military campaigns in Afghanistan, which included several mass-appeal “feminist” renderings of the very secular humanism Sedgwick regards as marginalized. The universalizing, secular-feminist, missionary platform of Laura Bush’s radio address on November 17, 2001 is exemplary:

http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24992. Bush invokes the plight of Afghan civilians under the Taliban to justify deployment of U.S. military forces. Assaying to liberate Muslim women and children via a “democratizing” occupation, these forces would ultimately seek to validate warmongering means by liberationist, Western-feminist ends. Under the rubric of an American military salvation narrative, “the modern liberal subject” remains of course an impossible descriptor for Afghans prior at least to the emancipating, democratizing, and militaristically feminist measures of Western intervention. The “unique terminus ad quem of historical narrative” in this pressing instance may indeed have little to do with the “modern liberal subject” and yet virtually everything to do with the amenability of and political violence (both hidden and apparent) associated with “secular, universalist liberal humanism.” If this argument is admissible, one might wonder how so adaptable a rubric enfolds the myriad subjects of American occupation despite the complications that many of these subjects continue (in resistance and otherwise) to make of such belligerent universality. On this question, see Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation.”
and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller” (124). Precisely because the hermeneutics of suspicion predicates reparative reading, as a discursive groundwork that the reparative gesture would outstrip or transcend, Sedgwick’s important criticisms of the former’s “paranoid trust in exposure” (141) are bound to compromise the latter’s assiduousness unless such meta-skepticism is charged with an interested trust in self-reflexive exposure. In other words, like the (outdated?) practitioner of suspicious hermeneutics, the reparative reader would do well to pose a set of ultimately reflexive questions: Reparation of what, by whom, and perhaps most importantly for whom? What is deemed reparable in the face of so-called paranoid interpretation and what is deemed beyond repair? According to whose interests?

Proponents of reparative reading (as delineated by Sedgwick) are apt to bristle at these procedural interrogatives, particularly for their obvious truck with Fredric Jameson’s imperative, “Always historicize,” whose “sacred status” (shared by the hermeneutics of suspicion) and questionable logic remind Sedgwick “of bumper stickers that instruct people in other cars to ‘Question Authority.’ Excellent advice, perhaps wasted on anyone who does whatever they’re ordered to do by a strip of paper glued to an automobile!” (125). While amusing, this passing deflation of Jameson’s imperative, and by extension of the hermeneutics of suspicion, does not unshackle reparative reading from the question of whose reading it serves. To broach in this way the question of reading’s serviceability draws us back into the suspicious fray of Nietzsche (the genealogy of morals), Marx (the theory of ideology), and Freud (the theory of ideals and illusions) (Sedgwick 139). The gravity of this triumvirate comes to the fore when Sedgwick’s posited opposition between the marginality of “secular, universalist liberal humanism” and the centrality of America’s fervently religious multitude is read at closer range.

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24 “Always historicize? What could have less to do with historicizing than the commanding, atemporal adverb ‘always’?” (Sedgwick 125).
If Marx’s impressive statement, “For Germany, the critique of religion is essentially completed; and the critique of religion is the prerequisite of every critique”\(^{25}\) (131), is in any way representative of Nietzsche’s and Freud’s stances on the phenomenon of religion, then Sedgwick’s approach to the secular-religious binary turns out to be not just one case study among others for reparative reading. Indeed, when approached through the consequential trajectory of Marx’s statement and its gesture of *founding* the hermeneutics of suspicion, Sedgwick’s terse perspective on “secular, universalist liberal humanism” is in a sense the case study for reparative reading. Ironically, however, Sedgwick’s reparative take on the secular-religious binary does not seek to undermine, redress, or repair this hermeneutic foundation; rather, by assigning to “a vast majority of the [American] population [that] claims to engage in direct intercourse with multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God” the status of what I will call an *unwitting second-order suspicion*, Sedgwick tacitly advances Marx’s claim that “the critique of religion is the prerequisite of every critique.”

“Unwitting second-order suspicion,” a phrase I deploy alongside *witting first-order suspicion*, is meant to characterize the position and function reserved for the American evangelical multitude in Sedgwick’s meta-suspicious venture. The “modern liberal subject” and its “taboo” and “marginal” ideology of “secular, universalist liberal humanism” are explicitly debunked in Sedgwick’s analysis. This overt demystification attains the status of a witting first-

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\(^{25}\) As Tyler Roberts points out, this statement, which appears in Marx’s *Contributions to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, “was based in Marx’s belief that religion’s ‘general theory of the world’ masks the mundane, historical origins of all things human with an idealist inversion that permeates human social relations and so infects ‘secular’ theories of the state as well as ‘religion.’ Marx thought that changing the world required first setting this inversion right. Few ideas have had a more powerful impact on the study of religion, and few have been as controversial. Many scholars of religion, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, have resisted Marx’s view that religion is based in a fundamental misconception of human life. In recent years, though—as established paradigms for the study of religion have come under increasing criticism—a variation of Marx’s perspective on religion has regained some prominence. One sign of this change is that the concept of ‘ideology’ has become an integral element in a series of influential efforts to reposition the study of religion as a carefully theorized critical and explanatory discourse” (“Rhetorics” 367).
order suspicion in the itinerary of reparative reading. The witting quality of this premier suspicion arises not only from its explicitness, but also from the ostensibly post-secular leeway that Sedgwick opens up by debunking the “modern liberal subject”; this subject, that is, is vested with the power to transcend its determinacy in “secular, universalist liberal humanism.” By contrast, the religious ideology of the American evangelical multitude—the vast majority’s “claims to engage in direct intercourse with multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God” (140; emphasis added)—is implicitly already debunked. To Sedgwick’s post-secular-liberal-humanist subject, at least, the debunked status of the multitude’s religious ideology goes without saying. The unwitting quality of this secondary suspicion arises not only from its implicitness, but also from the sheer identification it posits between the multitude and its worldview. Unlike the self-transcending (because ultimately fictive) “modern liberal subject,” the multitude does not outstrip its ideological determinacy. Rather, it is its ideology; this would account for the factual or substantive quality of the multitude in Sedgwick’s reading.

In ethical terms, this sheer identification undermines the post-secular drift of Sedgwick’s reparative cultural criticism; for, what could be more characteristic of a secularist hermeneutic than to counterpoise the self-transcending subject of “secular, universalist liberal humanism” and the purely ideological because fervently religious masses? Indeed, when juxtaposed with Troy Dostert’s call for “a post-secular ethics of public life” that would jettison “the presuppositions that political liberalism relies upon for circumscribing religion’s presence in the public realm” and open this realm to further “moral resources for guiding political life—including those of theology” (10), Sedgwick’s opposition between the (non)subject of “secular, universalist liberal humanism” and the monolithic religious multitude is ironically more in keeping with political liberalism than with any post-secular critique thereof. Furthermore, recent work in the sociology
of religion puts into question Sedgwick’s “estimation” of religiosity and politics in (and by necessary extension beyond) America. Referencing Kirk Hadaway’s, Penny Long Marler’s and Mark Chaves’s important article, “What the Polls Don’t Show: A Close Look at US Church Attendance,” José Casanova writes that “Americans exaggerate their religiosity, claiming to go to church and to pray more frequently than they actually do”; as a result, “one should not trust their self-reporting religiosity” (“Secular” 67-8). While Casanova leaves open the question of why this exaggeration persists in American religious culture (his personal hunch is that Americans might “believe that to be modern and to be American, which for most Americans means exactly the same thing, also entails being religious” [68]), such sociological research is nevertheless a cautionary reminder of the stakes involved in the deployment of generalizations.

In particular, the monolith Sedgwick fashions by characterizing “a vast majority of the [American] population” in terms of a radical theistic fundamentalism turns out to be an exaggeration of an exaggeration: a vast majority of the American population just isn’t that religious. What this monolith lacks in descriptive merit, however, it makes up for in argumentative function: the concept of a trenchant religious multitude becomes the “factual” basis upon which “the modern liberal subject” of “secular, universalist liberal humanism” will strive to debunk itself as over-determined and ultimately fictive. Accordingly, whereas the evangelical masses are possessed by unequivocal belief in “multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God,” the transcendent (non)subject of “secular, universalist liberal humanism” equivocates supply on belief as a question and as an answer: meditating on Buddhist concepts of rebirth, Sedgwick admits she “can’t see what sense it would make either to believe or disbelieve such an account. The most and least I can say is that exposure to it… has
rearranged the landscape of consciousness that surrounds, for me, issues of dying. Specifically, the landscape has become a lot more spacious” (“Pedagogy” 178).

If Sedgwick’s monolithic multitude is fissured by sociological evidence that religious Americans in fact encompass a complex, equivocating spectrum of adherences and commitments to the theological tenets of their religious institutions, then the political implications of her argument are also apt to fissure. In Sedgwick’s reading, for instance, the religious multitude metonymically embodies the ideology of rightwing neoliberal Christian neo-conservatism; the multitude, for which liberal is “a taboo category” and which treats secular humanism as “a marginal sect,” predicates “a xenophobic Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush America.” This presumed equivalence between religious multitude and conservative political ideology jettisons a rich tradition of leftist religious thought, culture, and activism in the U.S. and beyond. By foreclosing this trajectory for religion and politics, Sedgwick narrows the post-secular orientation of her thinking. This orientation gives way to what Casanova calls “secularist ideology,” in which “the secular arrogates for itself the mantle of rationality” as it claims “that ‘religion’ is essentially nonrational, particularistic, and intolerant (or illiberal) and, as such, dangerous and a threat to democratic politics once it enters the public sphere” (“Secular” 69). As I illustrate in the chapters ahead, the crossroads of modernist studies, queer studies, and religious studies offer an intellectual space through which to critique this ideology and to rethink political secularism as, in Casanova’s stirring words, “actually compatible with a positive view of religion as a moral good or as an ethical communitarian reservoir of human solidarity and republican virtue” (69).

As Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini note in Love the Sin, “progressive politics in the United States has not always been uniformly ‘against’ religion. Just think of the rich history of progressive movements for African American civil rights that were grounded in the Black Church, the movements for economic justice grounded in the Catholic worker movement in the United States and Catholic base communities in Central America, the long-standing tradition of Jewish progressive politics, and the Quaker movements on behalf of abolition and against war. These social justice movements, their histories and achievements, should make clear that the entry of religion in politics and public life is not in and of itself conservative” (12). See also Shriffin, The Religious Left and Church-State Relations.
Fathoming Fields: Reaching Discipline’s Secular Limits

Historically, relations between queer theory and modernist studies have been immensely productive; their auspicious convergences indeed underscore several milestones of theory and criticism whose influence throughout the branches of English and American studies (modernist and otherwise) is by now indelible. Both singly and in industrious unison, however, queer theory and modernist studies lack engagements with scholarship that treats critically the secularization thesis, secularist epistemologies, and the politics of secularism in a manner whereby religion is not essentialized as an ideologically hallowed illusion or, similarly, as a hazardously resurgent anachronism; for, as questionable measures of modernization and modernity, secularism in its various forms continues to generate significant research in sociology, history, anthropology, political science, and religious studies—but not, curiously, in either modernist studies or in queer theory (let alone their junctures or in literary criticism and theory generally).

27 Acknowledging that the very brief list I provide here is far from exhaustive, I have in mind two seminal works which have elicited complex traditions of queer reading in/of/ across modernism and modernity. The first is Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet, which finds such proto-modernist and modernist figures as Herman Melville, Henry James, and Oscar Wilde deployable for theoretical discussions of closeting and queerness. The second is Butler’s Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,” wherein the chapters “Dangerous Crossing”: Willa Cather’s Masculine Names” and “Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen’s Psychoanalytic Challenge” make rigorous use of modernist literary works to develop theories of identity and its myriad subversions. Responses to the distinctive legacies of Butler and Sedgwick shine through, among innumerable other works, Queering the Renaissance, ed. Goldberg; Lamos’s Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Prost; Vincent’s Queer Lyrics: Difficulty and Closure in American Poetry, which features analyses of works by Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, Jack Spicer, Walt Whitman, and John Ashbery; Laity’s and Gish’s edited collection, Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T.S. Eliot; Davidson’s Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics, which ranges broadly in discussion from Walt Whitman to Sylvia Plath to Charles Olson; Doan’s and Garrity’s edited collection, Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture; and, very recently, Queering the Non/Human, eds. Giffney and Hird; Munt’s Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame; and Snediker’s Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions, wherein poems by Hart Crane, Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Jack Spicer find attentive aesthetic readings.

28 On this point, Kaufmann writes: “Thinking of religion as a distinctive category with its own unique truth claims only essentializes it once more, and portraying this renewed interest in religion as a return only further extends a simplified, almost nostalgic story of secularization” (“The Religious” 621). For a dovetailing view of secularization as a simplified “mega-thesis” incapable of engaging religion in existential terms, see McIntire, “Transcending Dichotomies in History and Religion.”
Highlighting the modernist context of this discrepancy, Viswanathan maintains that literary studies has not “witnessed a corresponding breadth of scholarship” on secularism because of “literature’s self-definition as a secular vehicle for ideas whose possible religious origins were subsequently effaced as religious sensibility became absorbed into aesthetic form and imagery, especially in modernist writing” (“Secularism” 466). Social theorist Susan Harding corroborates Viswanathan’s point by arguing that this kind of setback results from ways in which disciplines across the humanities have established secularist boundaries for legitimate research, especially in discourses of representation and in dominant practices of reading. Harding writes that most “tools of cultural criticism are better suited for some ‘others’ and not other ‘others’—specifically, for cultural ‘others’ constituted by discourses of race/sex/class/ethnicity/colonialism but not religion” (375). As a specialized “tool” of cultural criticism, queer theory like modernist studies harbors its own blinkered approaches to secularity and to religion both as a cultural construct and, in relation to religiositv in its myriad frequencies and registers, as a thriving, complex otherness; indeed, insofar as religion and religiosiy partake in imbrications of race, sex, class, ethnicity, (post)colonialism, (trans)nationalism, queerness, and secularism, queer theory’s aversions to and disengagements from religion risk totalizing queerness as secular, eliding thereby the (by turns) dissenting, intersectional, overlapping, collaborative, syncretic, and/or assemblage-based aggregates within its own purview of difference.  

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29 For work that assesses and redeployes LGBT criticism and queer theory according to their imbrications in this spectrum of sociopolitical interests, see among others: special issue of Social Text on “Queer Transexions of Race, Class, and Gender,” edited by Harper, McClintock, Muñoz, and Rosen; special issue of Social Text on “Lesbians, Gays, and the Struggle for Workplace Rights,” edited by McCreery and Krupat; Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics; special issue of Modern Fiction Studies on “Queer Fictions of Race,” edited by Somerville; Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism, edited by Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé; Ferguson, Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique; Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature, edited by Holden and Ruppel; Queer Theory and the Jewish Question, edited by Boyarin, Itzkovitz, and Pellegrini; Arondekar, “Border/Line Sex: Queer Postcolonialities, or How Race Matters Outside the United States”; special issue of Social Text on “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now,” edited by
For Mark D. Jordan, such “overdetermined” neglect on the part of mainly Anglo-American queer theorists derives from “lingering disdain for religious topics in English-speaking, secular universities—from the suspicion that any familiar piety is a sort of dullness and theology a fancy name for irrational assertion”; reframing as it does “the antireligious models that have governed so many strategies of queer activism from the late 1960s on,” this attitude is also residual (“Trouble” 563). Dovetailing politically with Jordan (while disheartening, one might surmise, to proponents of Sedgwick’s reparative reading) is Jasbir K. Puar, who argues in Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times that the “queer liberal imaginary” functions both within and beyond “contemporary discourses of terrorism and counterterrorism” as an ideology—indeed, as a “regulatory apparatus” for normative queerness whose roots lay in a bio-political “ascendency of whiteness”\(^\text{30}\) (25)—that is “resolutely secular, unforgiving in its understanding of (irrational, illogical, senseless) religion, faith, or spirituality” (13). For Puar,

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Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz; Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology, edited by Johnson and Henderson; Gopinath, Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures; Puar, Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times; and Massad, Desiring Arabs. For work that imbricates queerness and religiosity against the secularist grain and in various disciplinary registers, see: Puar, Terrorist Assemblages; White, Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America; Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion, edited by Schlossberg and Sanchez; Althus-Ried, Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics and The Queer God; Sullivan-Bloom, “Balancing Acts: Drag Queens, Gender, and Faith”; Wilcox, “Outlaws or In-Laws? Queer Theory, LGBT Studies, and Religious Studies”; Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body, edited by Loughlin; Jones, “The Challenge of Christianity for Gay and Lesbian Criticism—and Vice Versa”; Rodriguez, “At the Intersection of Church and Gay: A Review of the Psychological Research on Gay and Lesbian Christians”; and Whosoever: An Online Magazine for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Christians @ http://whosoever.org/mission.shtml. This cross-section of research illustrates that when examining the frames of agency from one identity (im)position to another, one may reconsider selfhood through any or all of its intersectional “lenses”; notwithstanding degrees of privilege corresponding to strategies of negotiation between differences within selves and across societal contexts, one lens (e.g. queerness in any of its particularities) need not cancel out, displace, or override another. As lenses such (im)positions may be as collaborative, if not syncretic, as they are dissenting; indeed, they may end up collaborating in syncretic fashion through vigorous dissent.

\(^{30}\) “The ascendency of whiteness,” Puar writes, “is ensconced in (neo)liberal ideologies of difference—market, cultural, and convergences of both—that correspond to ‘fitness-within-capitalism’ and ultimately promise ‘incorporation into the American Dream’” (26). Bound to multiculturalism “as defined and deployed by whiteness” and thus not “delimited to white subjects,” the ascendency of whiteness underpinning queer liberalism is not a “conservative, racist formation bent on extermination, but rather an insidious liberal one proffering an innocuous inclusion into life” (31). On wider linkages between neo-liberalism, literary culture, and secularism, see the chapter “Completing secularism: the mundane in the neoliberal era” in During’s Exit Capitalism. For elaboration of arguments subtending Puar’s work on unchecked privilege in liberal queer studies, see Halberstam’s excellent article, “Shame and White Gay Masculinity.”
this conception of queer religiosity as a “subjugated and repressed sexuality void of agency” applies most adamantly, within the hegemonic purview of the United States, to queer Arabs and Muslims; nevertheless, as Puar notes, congruent classifications of religious LGBT people are only “debatably avoidable to an extent for queers from other traditions such as Judeo-Christian” (13). By conceptualizing religiosity as the “downfall of any rational politics,” the queer liberal imaginary in Puar’s analysis operates through secularity (either presupposed or enforced) to demand a “particular transgression of norms, religious norms that are understood to otherwise bind that subject to an especially egregious interdictory religious frame” (13).

Puar’s criticism of the homonormativity that underwrites queer secularism’s notion of “rational politics” reinforces a central endeavor of this dissertation. As a work of theoretical criticism attuned to the auspices of queer-theological inquiry for literature and culture, Dissident Secularism aims to challenge secularist homonormativity by honing a queer politics whose appeals to rationality are self-critical, amenable, and democratic enough to disquiet the hegemonic, exclusionary interests suturing most appeals to reason in the singular. More

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31 For an incisive take on the political ramifications of this homo-normative viewpoint, see Puar’s chapters on “The Sexuality of Terrorism” (37-79) and “Abu Ghraib and U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism” (79-114).
32 This call for a self-critical, inter-/cross-/multi-disciplinary approach to queer politics (and by extension to the interpretative work—whether poststructuralist or historicist—of queering) rooted in a broader praxis of amenable, progressive democratization carries (at least) three debts. The first is to Stefan Mattessich, who argues with reference to Drucilla Cornell, Judith Butler, Alain Badiou, and Jacques Rancière, that parsing one’s complicity in “the symbolic violence consummated in and as the ‘moral’ community” entails a shift in theoretical vocabulary “from right to desire, from the freedom to decide on one’s life and being to the motive for self-critical dissent from a violence in which we are always already implicated” (308). Uncovering in all four theorists “a flexible rationality that hinges on the possibility of misapprehension in the openness to time and change,” Mattessich argues that a “genuinely self-critical theory” analyzes the lack of openness that theory as genre exhibits in relation to its ineluctable process of othering—in relation to, that is, its own “deceptions, its euphemisms, its empty speech,” and its “determination in the principles and institutions of liberal democratic society” (317). My second debt is to Chantal Mouffe, who maintains that “instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics requires that we bring them to the fore, to make the moment of decision visible so that decisions and their effects can enter the terrain of contestation” (93) upon which “the institutions, the practices, and the discourses that recreate and reproduce democratic forms of individuality” can undergo processes of multiplication (91). My third debt is to Jacques Derrida, for whom the radical amenability of democracy ensures that it “remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even
expressly on this score of democratic theory (that is, on the ethical venture of theorizing subjectivity and political agency with respect to richly dynamic, incalculable constituencies), *Dissident Secularism* takes up in queer-modernist context Gauri Viswanathan’s challenge for cultural theory to vouchsafe religious belief “as a form of knowledge” (*Outside* 253) within the variegated scope of participatory democracy—as, in Vincent Pecora’s words, “a complex but nevertheless truth-based form of political dissent, not merely as an ideological effect of power” (“Theatre” 526). By engaging Viswanathan’s challenge in the frame of queer modernist studies, *Dissident Secularism* constitutes one response among others to what Elizabeth Castelli calls “the discomfort of the current political moment”: “an anxious recognition that religion itself keeps moving—religion not at the limits but beyond the limits—and that religion has emerged in some way as itself a form of critical theory” (133). Through the refreshing instigations of Viswanathan and Castelli, *Dissident Secularism* critically re-envisions the stakes and terrain of queer modernist studies “when religion is understood not only as the object of theorization but also as the embodiment of the practice of critique itself” (Castelli 133).

Optimally, in a spirit evocative of William Connolly’s “ethos of engagement,” divesting singularized reason from secularist homonormativity will prompt privileged queer subjects, for

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33 “The pressing problem,” Viswanathan writes, “is how modern secularism can accommodate and absorb the reality of religion and the power of religious conviction experienced by believers, while at the same time protect the rights of those who believe differently” (*Outside* 173). As Pecora observes, “religious belief for Viswanathan has an intellectual substance in modernity” that warrants a difficult expansion of “what constitutes the legitimate parameters of secular political debate” (“Theatre” 526).

34 See “An Ethos of Engagement” in Connolly, *Why I Am Not a SECularist* (137-161). Developing a counterpoint to Bertrand Russell’s *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1957), Connolly suggests alternatives to the hypocritical (because patently self-exonerating) “secular demand to leave controversial religious and metaphysical judgments at home so as to hone a single public practice of reason or justice” (36): rerouting the ethical praxes of the care of the self in Foucault and Nietzsche, Connolly finds that “self-artistry is not a ‘subjectivist’ practice… if that means simply expressing what you already are or, more dramatically, treating what you purport to be as the universal standard to which everyone else must conform. Such artistry, rather, involves the selective desanctification of elements in your own identity” (146). By imagining in this vein of desanctification the “contributions to a public ethos of engagement” that atheist secularists might make, Connolly writes that “a political movement that translates the
whom the queer liberal imaginary seems most advantageous, to theorize (if not also cultivate) a critical praxis that would not preempt, deflect, or ignore aggregations of class, ethnicity, gender, (post)colonialism, nation or trans-nation, and religiosity within the full (indeed, positively infinite) gamut of “queer.” In a deconstructive vein, and with respect to the contingent binary of the secular and the religious, such subjects might recognize their attachments to the secular (or, vis-à-vis Abeysekara, their secularist complacency) as the basis for a normative experience of queerness in a given environ and yet refrain from making secularity an absolute, enforceable ground for queer subjectivity and agency (the universalizing singularity of which is groundless even while imperializing). This ethically critical move, I argue, invites secularist theorists to unsettle and thus interminably question the (post)modern nonreligious frameworks through which they understand subjects, agents, and the project of queer critique as a whole.

Far from nurturing indecisive relativism, acknowledgement of a usually-uncritical adherence to the secular as a structure of power and vigilance against subscribing to secularly hegemonic models of queerness may prompt recurrent critiques of ideology and universality on the part of those for whom queerness is normatively secular. As a corollary, secularist queer theory might begin to conceptualize LGBTQ personhoods that are capacious enough for passionate (rather than repressive, oppressive, or stubbornly/passionately primitive) attachments to, among others, forms of Islam, Sikhism, Judaism, Buddhism, and (even) Christianity, as well as non-European and non-Euro-American traditions of animism, shamanism, (poly)theism, and deism. Perhaps more outlandishly, theorists may vouchsafe such persons as queerly agential by virtue of their religiosities; for, if deep imbrications are conceivable for the divergent rubrics of assigned marks of atheism into cultivation of nontheistic gratitude for the ambiguity of being opens up some possibilities,” including “actively endorsing a nontheistic, asecular source of ethical inspiration. Connecting nontheistic gratitude for existence to selective currents in other traditions without reducing it entirely to any theism or secularism currently in circulation” (159).
the secular and the religious, then imbricated depths should also extend, against the recalcitrance of secularism as empowering meta-narrative, to queerness and religiosity.

Clearly, as ongoing revisionist work in both queer and modernist studies illustrates, eliciting and legitimating the critique of secularism as an epistemological, ideological, and political project remains a fraught task. Perhaps for reasons that Kaufmann and Viswanathan specify in their discussions of the Arnoldian triumph of literary-secular aesthetics over dogmatic religion, this difficulty seems significantly apparent in modernist studies. In their wide-ranging *PMLA* review of “The New Modernist Studies,” for instance, Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz qualify recent “interrogations of the politics, historical validity, and aesthetic value of exclusive focus on the literatures of Europe and North America” as fertile grounds for revisionism in modernist studies (737). Significantly, of the three modules for revisionism that Mao and Walkowitz delineate—“the transnational turn” (738), “media in the age of mass persuasion” (742), and “politics as itself” (745)—only in “the transnational turn” does one find an example of scholarship, particularly the work of Susan Stanford Friedman, in which the ethos

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35 Substantial exceptions are still relatively marginal in the field, insofar as there seems as yet to be no expansive, self-critical drive to examine secularism (as opposed to secularized “religion”) in modernist studies. One such exception, which builds on a critical template established by Wood in *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief*, is Singh’s *Literary Secularism: Religion and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Singh examines secularization as a theme and as a represented social process in fiction that ranges from late-Victorian to postcolonial contexts and across geographical regions. Through this significant trans-historical and transnational approach, Singh studies works by writers as varied as George Eliot, Rabindranath Tagore, James Joyce, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Philip Roth, and Orhan Pamuk. While certain of our subjects, rubrics, and imperatives are convergent, Singh’s theoretical and generic grounds differ markedly from those I develop. Other notable exceptions include Brett, *Faith and Doubt: Religion and Secularization in Literature from Wordsworth to Larkin*, a book that is in some measure a fresh variation on the approach and theme of Woodhouse’s *The Poet and His Faith: Religion and Poetry from Spenser to Eliot and Auden*; Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modern Novel* and his precursor articles, “Churchgoing in the Modern Novel” and “Christopher Newman’s Haircloth Shirt: Worldly Asceticism, Conversion, and *Auto-Machia in The American*”; and Seidel, “Beyond the Religious and the Secular in the History of the Novel.” Also of note is McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison*.

36 Noting the streamlining effect of their threefold scheme for “The New Modernist Studies,” Mao and Walkowitz point out that research into other modernist topics such as “literary form, intraliterary influence, narratology, affect, gender, sexuality, racial dynamics, psychoanalysis, science, and more continue to propel important scholarly endeavours, and we might reasonably have chosen other directions to dwell on here…developments considered here are by no means equal in scale or in recognition by modernist scholars” (738).
of secularity appears at the very least worth further investigation. Notably, secularism’s dubiousness as a narrative facet of modernity appears within Friedman’s “Definitional Excursions” into “The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism”:

Within this context, modernity signifies a specific set of historical conditions developing in the West, including the industrial revolution, conquest of and expansion economically and politically into other continents, the transition to urban culture, the rise of the nation state, and growing power of the bourgeoisie. Consistent with this periodization, philosophers often regard the theories of reason in Locke, Kant, and Hegel as the embodiment of a distinctly modern secularism and humanism.37 (500)

Friedman does not unravel this nexus to illustrate precisely how the Enlightenment theories of reason that gird Western secularism continue to influence (re)constitutions of modernist studies. Nevertheless, by instantiating secularism as an outcrop of modernity’s colonial trajectory, Friedman affords a subtext for her discussion of “postcolonial modernities” implicitly assigned derivative status in mainstream modernist studies. This status, Friedman remarks, yields a “misleading binary that sets up the West as modern and the Rest as traditional, struggling to reject its traditionalism in favor of becoming modern, which by a subtle metonymic slide is the equivalent of becoming Western” (“Periodizing” 434).

Identifying through this critique the asymmetries of modernity and modernism as often-linked headings, Friedman strives to unsettle the Euro-centricity that haunts modernism’s designation “as a loose affiliation of aesthetic movements that unfolded in the first half of the twentieth century” (427). Because the temporal bounds of this definition privilege “Anglo-American modernism, that is, modernism in English produced in Britain and the United States and by expatriates living abroad” (427) and because modernism’s aesthetic movements are tied to the meta-narrative of secularization, it is crucial to develop Friedman’s observation that secularism is that which sutures Enlightenment conceptions of reason as modern. The corollary

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37 For a more expansive reading along the lines of Friedman’s definitional excursion, see Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History, specifically his chapter on “Modernity” (113-149).
here points up a structure of cultural power: When deemed “unreasonable” by secularists both in “the West” and across “the Rest,” the subjectivities and agencies of religious selves and groups cannot be recognized or represented as such either in the “modern” sphere of socio-politics or in accordingly “modern” aesthetic movements and theories. For Dissident Secularism, whose focal Anglo-American and British authors engage both Western and non-Western theologies, the postcolonial referents eliciting Friedman’s critique of the privilege that modernist studies affords Enlightenment geopolitics behooves scholars to question their theoretical investments in secularism as it pertains to zones traditionally “licensed” and “unlicensed” for modernity.

Perhaps in part because of its linkages to the underlying political historicisms of cultural studies, women’s studies, and social theory, LGBT research seems presently more attuned to and prepared for the critique of secularism than contemporary queer theory, whose longstanding ties to psychoanalysis and to certain secularly vested strands of post-structuralism continue to model its approach to the subject of religion. Classic rifts between LGBT studies and queer theory on

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38 Logically pertinent to queer secularism’s effacement, if not preclusion, of subjectivities and agencies specific to queer religiosity, this argument is indebted to Talal Asad. In Formations of the Secular, Asad argues that the secular “ideology of political representation in liberal democracies” disables representations of certain minority groups, such as Muslims throughout the EU: it is difficult, Asad writes, “if not impossible to represent Muslims as Muslims” (173). To suture this argument, Asad examines “the secular Enlightenment theory that the political community consists of an abstract collection of equal citizens”; this theory “was propounded as a criticism of the religious inequality characterizing the absolutist state” and had as its corollary the emergence of civil minority rights designed to protect living narratives of group identity that run against the corporate narrative of the majority body politic (174). While such provisions are meant to guarantee agency for ways in which minorities affirm their integrity, the case in theory and practice is otherwise: through the Enlightenment lineage of secular public spheres, agency resides normatively in conceptions of the political community’s abstract individual to the exclusion of collectivist narratives that gird religious or cultural minorities. The former identifies the latter as an aberration to be remedied. This is apparent in contemporary France (and will be in Quebec as well, if recent “Secular Charter” legislation tabled by the Parti Québécois is not defeated), where current laïcité statecraft bans the Sikh turban and the Muslim hijab, for example, in public schools (175). I see strong continuities between Asad’s focus on liberal secularist conceptions of agency as the tenet of the political community’s abstract individual and my focus on narrowed frames of agency that the normative liberal imaginary makes available for the abstract individual of secularist queer theory. In both cases, if minority subject-agents are rendered “legible” in/for (though not usually via) secularist reason, this occurs against the critical grain and generally at very high premiums.

39 On the lush rapport between psychoanalysis, LGBT politics, and queer theory, see Floyd, “Rethinking Reification: Marcuse, Psychoanalysis, and Gay Liberation.” As Mark C. Taylor notes, secularist paradigms from classical psychoanalysis and its coevals continue to “inform the ways in which many analysts understand the nature and function of religion...Nietzsche, Durkheim, and Freud formulated their theories of religion at the exact moment that
the subject of secularity and religion (among others) naturally elicit forms of disciplinary dissent. For Steven Seidman, such dissent has much to do with how each field engages (or refrains from engaging) the task of institutional analysis, by which he means the study of complex linkages between queerness and broader sociopolitical realities such as colonialism, nationalism, globalization, class struggle, racism, and antiracism (134). Remarking on the trajectory of both fields according to how each has responded to increasing demands for institutional analysis, Seidman generally assigns lower scores to queer theory than to LGBT studies. With reference to the foundational work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for instance, he argues that queer theory writ large tends to erect “an autonomous cultural logic, prolifically generating categories and fields of knowledge” without venturing to query its own politics of interest—a query integral to any project of cultural critique (134).

Referencing *Epistemology of the Closet* as illustrative of foundational queer theory’s relinquishment of institutional analysis, Seidman argues that Sedgwick’s project “remains at the level of the critique of knowledge and the de-centering of cultural meanings, an intervention

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artistic modernism was bursting upon the historical scene. While not immediately evident, their theoretical reflections share many of the presuppositions of modern art and literature. Perhaps the most significant assumption they hold in common is the belief in what modernists describe as ‘the primitive.’ Modernism presupposes primitivism; indeed, they are two sides of the same coin. Like the sacred, whose substitute it becomes, the primitive is highly charged and consequently overdetermined” (53). To extend Taylor’s observation into the saturated field of psychoanalytic queer theory, a word from the editors of the 2005 “Queer Studies Now” issue of *Social Text* proves informative: Noting how queer liberalism’s “mechanisms of normalization have endeavored to organize not only gay and lesbian politics but also the internal workings of the field itself,” David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz rightly caution theorists that “if interdisciplinary sites such as queer studies isolate sexuality within one epistemic terrain (such as psychoanalysis), or attempt to arrogate the study of sexuality to themselves alone,” such sites will undo the very interdisciplinarity through which fresh insights spring (4). More generally, in the context of religion in psychoanalysis, exceptions to Taylor’s account are noteworthy. See: Winquist, “Lacan and Theology”; DiCenso, *The Other Freud: Religion, Culture, and Psychoanalysis*; Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*; Reinhard, “Toward a Political Theology of the Neighbor”; and Reinhard and Lupton, “The Subject of Religion: Lacan and the Ten Commandments,” who argue that for Lacan “religious discourse supposes us—supports and underwrites our very structures of being, subjectivity, and social interaction. That is, the secular subject is produced by the religious discourses that precede and continue to speak through it; the challenge for the contemporary critic is not to silence or debunk those discourses, but rather to bring the modern subject to assume responsibility for their enunciation” (71).

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40 For overviews of this schism, see *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*, edited by Duggan and Hunter and, more recently, Loovas, Elia, and Yep, “Shifting Ground(s): Surveying the Contested Terrain of LGBT Studies and Queer Theory.”
which by her own account has been going on for a century. This uncoupling of cultural from social analysis is a departure from at least the original intention of [Jacques] Derrida, who insisted on linking discursive meanings to their institutional settings” (134). By evacuating social analysis en route to an autonomous cultural logic that dissembles its institutional politics of interest, queer theory (“at least its deconstructive currents”) endorses “a social vision whose ultimate value lies in promoting individuality and tolerance of difference” (135). A signal consequence of this highly normative social vision is that queer theorists may, in (neo)liberal fashion, “affirm the surfacing of new subject voices” (queerly religious voices, for instance), but remain critical of their “political grounding in the name of a more insistent politics of difference” (135).

Underscoring the same quandary of hegemonic interest in Bodies That Matter, Judith Butler (in whose queer-theoretical work Seidman finds a more laudable “constructive politics” [137]) qualifies “queer” as a perpetual site of “collective contestation”: queer, she writes, “will not fully describe those it purports to represent” and consequently it must “be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it” (230). Auxiliary to her recent work on contracts between academic freedom and disciplinary autonomy in the university, Butler’s early efforts to preserve the grounds of auto-deconstruction for queerness impart a strong epistemic basis for dissent, under whose labile banners of abrasive contest we may find, to paraphrase W.C. Harris, a queerness that always merits queering (179).

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41 In Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology, Kwok Pui-lan draws similar conclusions with respect to trends in American poststructuralism: “European postmodernist and poststructuralist theories emerged out intense debates and creative dialogue with Marxism as both an intellectual theory and socialist strategy. This context is nonexistent in the United States, and the kind of postmodernist and poststructuralist theories circulated in the American academy are not known for their social critique. The attention to language, desire, and bodies in poststructuralism risks the danger of being easily appropriated into a highly individualistic, eroticized consumer culture of American late capitalism” (135).

42 See “Critique, Dissent, and Disciplinarity.” Butler discusses academic freedom with reference to how Kant and Foucault theorize the autonomy of disciplines. Each titular term accues significance not only for rationales of
As scholarship outlined in footnotes 27 and 29 indicates, the relative attunement and preparedness in LGBT studies for the critique of secularism seems to pivot on a “transnational turn” similar to the one Mao and Walkowitz discuss in “The New Modernist Studies.” For instance, in their introduction to a 2005 special issue of Social Text, David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz pose the question, “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” Throughout their critical modules of “Queer Epistemology,” “Queer Diasporas,” and “Queer Liberalism,” Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz reanimate the safeguard Butler places on the will or proclivity to universalize through theorizations of “queerness”; building on the imperative Butler casts by affirming “the contingency of the term [queer],” Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz urge that queerness remain “open to a continuing critique of its exclusionary operations” and argue that maintaining a “‘subjectless’ critique” across queer studies would disallow “any positing of a proper subject of or object for the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent” (3). Queer studies requires this subjectless critique because, at our “historical juncture, it is crucial to insist yet again on the capacity of queer studies to mobilize a broad social critique of race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, as well as sexuality” (4). Especially among seemingly innocuous, unassuming, or liberating varieties of poststructuralism, this “subjectless” agenda should not undermine itself with recourse to secularism (qua “the secular”) as a clear-cut autonomy, but also for how disciplines stand in productive tension via respective interests. Following Kant, for whom “assertions of state power over academic inquiry” elicited vigilance, Butler reads critique as predicted on two questions: “by what right? And through what means” does authority establish its legitimacy? (782). Questioning the basis of disciplinary legitimacy in relation to the university, the state, and the public sphere mirrors political dissent in its dispute with “existing conventions and norms”; both disciplinary and political dissent function via guarantees of protection by the very state or institution subject to critique (786). Minus this guarantee, dissent emerges “as a direct result—as a response to—there being no such protection” (786). Relations between dissenters and institutions are thus paradoxical: both are mutually constitutive while their interests engender friction. On dissent between LGBT studies and queer theory, consider Butler’s sense that, despite the dissident’s reliance upon institutional guarantees for critique, the critique that dissidence itself enables is not “predictable on the basis of established norms” (786). This means that tracking dissent between the methodologies and politics of LGBT studies and queer theory may not amount to describing how these sectors parted ways according to, say, essentialist or constructivist agendas. For queers—individuals or communities, nationals or transnationals, expatriates or refugees—being caught between these fields may generate forms of dissent unlikely to resemble a tidy ledger of debits and credits.
Indeed, while such epistemic clear-cutting may appear discursively naturalized or expedient for queer secularists in general, queer theorists may gain much by parsing the implications of the liberationist formula, which Janet Jakobsen renders as “Sex + Freedom = Regulation,” that all-too-legibly underwrites their intellectual labour.

Secularism Elsewhere, Religion Otherwise: Outsourcing an Ethics of Reading

If one reframes here Viswanathan’s observation that both literary studies and the theories (queer and otherwise) to which it normally subscribes chronicle “the transition from a religious culture instead of developing methodologies for studying the emergence of secularism” (“Secularism” 467), it becomes apparent that a certain degree of outsourcing is necessary for generating both the critical momentum and the theoretical vocabulary proper to a critique of secularism at the juncture of modernist studies and queer theory (among other crossroads). Given the extent to which postcolonial theory and attending historicist criticism have advanced the

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43 My usage of this term aligns with Michel Foucault’s definition in Power/Knowledge: “I would define the episteme retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won’t say a scientific theory, but a field of scientficity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific” (197). Drawing on Foucault’s concept of the episteme, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak elicits my resistance to an epistemic absolutism founded on the secular: “Privatization of the transcendental works for a handful. Our world shows us that secularism is not an episteme. It is a faith in reason in itself and for itself, protected by abstract external structures—the flimsiest possible arrangement to reflect the human condition” (“Terror” 106). I explain this elicitation in the next section of the introduction.

44 See Jakobsen, “Sex + Freedom = Regulation: Why?” Jakobsen posits that, “In the traditional view, religious repression is the root of sexual regulation and hence freedom from religion is the answer to the problem. This traditional view plays into the larger Enlightenment narrative in which freedom from religion brings about human liberation. In contrast to this view, however, I argue that our problem is as much secular freedom as it is religious regulation…. It is not that religious regulation and secular freedom are the same, but they are mutually constitutive. I make this argument because modern freedom, even the Enlightenment freedom that is first and foremost supposed to be liberated from religion, has its own religious roots. Those roots can be found in the Protestant Reformation, and they inform the specifically Christian secularism that marks U.S. culture and politics…. Queer resistance has all too rarely embodied the possibility of connections across multiple identities that the shift from gay to queer hoped to produce. And resistance has proven to be a term too thin to organize diverse and wide-ranging politics…. Accepting religious repression as the answer to the question “why sex?” and failing to engage our implication in freedom sets up a number of pragmatic problems. The traditional view of religious repression underwrites a form of gay politics that appears necessarily secularizing, an appearance that has been extensively exploited by the political Right, whether by Jerry Falwell when lumping gays and secularists together in the blame for the September 11 attacks or by Bill O’Reilly claiming that the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision on gay marriage is another victory for the secularists” (286-87).
analysis of secularism, recourse to these fields is virtually imperative for conceptualizing the latitude of existing scholarly debate as well as for devising interpretive rubrics through which *Dissident Secularism* will solicit and advance its readings in subsequent chapters.

More specifically, in pursuit of apposite critical methods and theoretical bearings, I turn from the relatively slender resources of Anglo-American modernist studies and queer theory to historiographic analyses of secularism, religion, and modernity by researchers in subaltern studies. A branch of historicist inquiry whose theoretical contours interface with postcolonial theory, comparative literature, and deconstruction, subaltern historiography develops extraordinarily nuanced accounts of the sociopolitical, ethical, and literary-aesthetic challenges that religion poses for secular intellectuals in enlightened (post)modernity. I maintain that thinkers in this field tend to posit, contemplate, and interpret the representational politics and ethical viabilities of “religious modernity” in ways averse to the predominantly aesthetic (rather than formally ethical or political) determinants of modernist studies and queer theory. Hazarding charges from purists (to whom a literary specialization might afford wholesale alibis for skirting matters arbitrarily deemed extrinsic to the constitution of criticism) that this interim departure from the “proper” folds of modernist studies and queer theory is extraneous or detractive, I nevertheless draw from methodologies in subaltern studies to reinvigorate the question of disciplinary ethics in recalcitrant secularism—the question, that is, of “the calculation of the subject” whose species of gravity, indeed whose Archimedean point, is a professed sovereignty (by virtue) of nonreligious discipline.

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45 See Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject.” “The subject is also a principle of calculability,” he notes, within the sphere of “the political,” within “the question of legal rights,” and also “in morality” (272). To this list I would add, more specifically, the calculation of the subject in secular intellectual discipline, wherein there surely is, to borrow Derrida’s terms, “a certain closing off—the saturating or suturing—of identity to self, and a structure still too narrowly fit to self-identification, that today gives the concept of subject its dogmatic effect” (273).
Notwithstanding trenchant criticisms of its avowedly subversive approach to (post)colonial history, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* exemplifies a strand in subaltern studies that ventures to question secularist historiography and thereby address the worldviews of South Asian populations for which secularism, despite its permutation in the aftermaths of constitutional independence and partition, is not an episteme. “Criticism in the historical mode,” Chakrabarty writes, “even when it does not institute a human subject at the centre of history, seeks to dispel and demystify gods and spirits as so many ploys of secular relationships of power” (87); “the moment we think of the world as disenchanted we set limits to the ways the past can be narrated. As a practicing historian, one has to take these limits seriously” (89). Specifically with reference to Gyanendra Pandey’s history of textile labour in colonial Uttar Pradesh, Chakrabarty seeks an appropriate praxis for avoiding the epistemic secularization of historiography. For disciplinary reasons, developing a praxis of this sort seems an essential task, particularly because labour is seldom a completely secular activity in India; it often entails, through rituals big and small, the invocation of divine or superhuman presence. Secular histories are usually

46 See Ismail, “(Not) At Home in (Hindu) India: Shahid Amin, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and the Critique of History.” Ismail discusses Chakrabarty’s scrupulous evasion of the Muslim question in South Asian political historiography and the impact of this evasion (whose prefatory alibi is a casually essentialist Hindu “mindset”) on his project of critical-historicist intervention. For alternative recent critiques of *Provincializing Europe*, see Varadarajan, “The Unsettling Legacy of Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*,” an essay which addresses startling affinities between Bloom’s agonistic revisionism and Chakrabarty’s politics of translation; and Li, “Necroidealism, or the Subaltern’s Sacrificial Death,” which treats Chakrabarty’s conception of the subaltern at the limits of hegemonic thinking and the effects of its virtual non-existence on various interfaces of theory.

47 For analyses consonant with this facet of Chakrabarty’s argument, see: Nandy, “A Report on the Present State of Health of the Gods and Goddesses in South Asia”; Sanjay Seth, “Reason or Reasoning? Clio or Siva?”; Vanita Seth, “Difference with a Difference: Wild Men, Gods, and Other Protagonists”; and Mohanty, “Alternative Modernities and Medieval Indian Literature: The Oriya *Lakshmi Purana* as Radical Pedagogy.” Sanjay Seth’s article is particularly noteworthy: “That which was previously *historicized* as the premodern, the survival, the fragment of a past continuing into the present (and at times this included whole societies), now also participates in the rituals and practices of the modern—statehood and nationhood, citizenship, and so on. That ‘denial of coevalness’ which anthropology and historicism presumed and authorized is now, or should be, deeply problematic” (87); as Seth acknowledges, rectifying this epistemic impasse is inherently difficult, if not impossible, “because history writing is constituted by a rejection of the agency of gods; it can register the fact of belief in them, it can attempt to make sense of this belief, but it cannot include the gods. It is true that this is also the case for European history, before that point when God was stripped of historical agency” (90).
produced by ignoring the signs of these presences. Such histories represent a meeting of two systems of thought, one in which the world is ultimately, that is, in the final analysis, disenchanted, and the other in which humans are not the only meaningful agents. For the purpose of writing history, the first system, the secular one, translates the second into itself. It is this translation — its methods and problems — that interests me here as part of a broader effort to situate the question of subaltern history within a postcolonial critique of modernity and of history itself. (72)

Like Viswanathan’s endeavour to consider religious belief systems as “legitimate modes of cultural self-empowerment and political intervention” (Mishra and Hodge 392), Chakrabarty’s aim to pursue and, in a deconstructive register of im-possibility, to recover the “antihistorical, antimodern” subject via non-secularized historiography leads me to ponder if a congruent move is viable, if not also ethically warranted, for religious subject-agents at the nexus of modernist studies and queer theory. In seeking out such congruency, I follow the lead of Purushottama Bilimoria, who illustrates with reference to the comparative philosophy of religion that drawing on theoretical auxiliaries of subaltern studies generates readings that are otherwise foreclosed when disciplines operate in rigid, self-reflexively secular terms.49

48 In “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” Spivak treats the historiographic “encounter” with such sign-systems by querying the relation between subaltern historiographers’ work on “discursive displacements” (270) (by which “the inauguration of politicization for the colonized” figures, in the manner of sign-system insurgency, as “the agency of change”), and their sense that “the bourgeoisie’s ‘interested’ refusal to recognize the importance of, and to ally themselves with, a politicized peasantry accounted for the failure of the discursive displacement that operated the peasants’ politicization” (273). This approach to the nation-state’s fractured self-representation elicits “a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and ‘situate’ the effect of the subject as subaltern” (281). For Dissident Secularism, Spivak’s critique of historiographic efforts to “access” subaltern consciousness broaches the question of how theologically-invested groups and selves across time, space, and culture may not be rendered intelligible within frameworks bent on minimizing, secluding, depoliticizing, or eroding channels of resistance to antireligious secularist authority.

49 See Bilimoria, “What is the ‘Subaltern’ of the Comparative Philosophy of Religion?” Bilimoria’s recourse to subaltern studies facilitates criticism of Kenneth Maddock’s secularist work on Aboriginal Australian religion: Maddock notes “that because Aborigines were ‘passive recipients of unmotivated gifts’ that come through the powers of the All-Father/All-Mother in accordance with laws set down in the Dreamtime, they were morally denying ‘the creativity which is truly theirs.’ Thus, he adjudges this as ‘false consciousness,’ in contrast to the ‘true consciousness’ that hermetically recognizes that ‘individuals are vehicles of their society’s traditions.’ This ‘false consciousness’ or unfounded beliefs of the Aboriginal people ‘abstracts imaginatively’ what is ‘actually human creativity’ as being ‘powers standing over and against men’” (354). For related analyses, see Bilimoria, “A Subaltern/Postcolonial Critique of the Comparative Philosophy of Religion”; Surin, “On Not Being Sure about the ‘Post’ in ‘Postcolonial’: Afterthoughts on Postcolonial Religious Studies”; and Gregory, “The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion.”
Of course, by cross-referencing LGBT or otherwise queer religiosities with subaltern religiosities I am decisively not implying that all religious queers are de facto subalterns; the absolute crudity of such an equation would co-opt even further a notion whose apparent serviceability has only exacerbated legitimate crosscurrents of suspicion. Adhering rather to Spivak’s view of the subaltern as a “position without identity,” which one can neither claim for oneself nor mediate into transparency via positivist accounts of disenfranchised groups living beyond the empowering circuits of hegemony, I posit a striking congruence between the effects of epistemic secularism on disciplines that ultimately (at times unwittingly) work to translate worldviews and world-viewers into (the interests of) high theory. In this theoretic frame of translation, mediation, and representation, subalternity undergoes a subtle but consequential shift from the (im-possibly) mimetic to the (nimbly) abstract, a shift which hinges for Gyan Prakash on an architectonic sense of power relations within a given discursive regime:

We should understand subalternity as an abstraction used to identify the intractability that surfaces inside the dominant system—it signifies that which the dominant discourse cannot appropriate completely, an otherness that resists containment. But precisely because dominance fails to appropriate the radical incommensurability of the subaltern, it registers only the recalcitrant presence of subalternity…. its externality to dominant systems of knowledge and power surfaces inside the system of dominance, but only as an intimation, as a trace of that which eludes the dominant discourse. (“Impossibility” 288)

As a non-incorporable alterity that delimits and thus haunts authority’s interior (e.g., the undifferentiated, self-constituting, transcendental “Subject” of Enlightenment philosophy, queer

50 In “Moving Devi,” Spivak notes that “many younger scholars now refer to metropolitan migrant writers as ‘subaltern.’ Yet Gandhi and Nehru were not ‘subalterns’ for the Subaltern Studies collective. (It goes without saying that the historians themselves did not claim subalternity.) The term ‘subaltern’ has lost its power to indicate people from the very bottom layer of society, excluded even from the logic of the class structure.” (121). See also Spivak’s “Position without Identity”: “There is much talk these days of the emergence of subaltern counter-collectivity. I think that is bogus. If you nominate collectivities that are questioning the power of the United States or the power of the West or whatever as immediately a subaltern counter-collectivity, I don’t think you really know what it is like where this conflict can mean nothing. There are many millions of people in the world to whom this conflict means nothing, except in the lives they are obliged to lead. The search for subalternity has become like the search for the primitive” (438-39).

theory, Western feminism, etc.), subalternity in Prakash’s terms echoes Derrida’s sense of the force with which a philosophical text runs into a membrane that indicates exteriority and “cracks its meaning,” eliciting thereby “the intransigence that prevents it from calculating its margin” (“Tympan” xxiii-xxv). With its subtext of a final frontier that defies annexation, Prakash’s conception of subalternity recalls Spivak’s deconstructive approach to “the social text of imperialism”: “The narrow epistemic violence of imperialism gives us an imperfect allegory of the general violence that is the possibility of an episteme” (“Subaltern” 287). Exemplifying precisely how “the critique of imperialism is deconstruction as such” (“Subaltern” 311 n.49), epistemic violence indicates the extent to which subalternity abjectly sutures the authoritative Subject of (post)modernity. Indeed, as Adriana Johnson notes, subalternity—the abjectly insurgent nonsubject of hegemony—“forces us to think about what has remained outside that province we call modernity” (22). Accordingly, if epistemic secularism and its disciplinary

52 For corroboration, see Derrida’s “Tympan” in *Margins of Philosophy*: “In the familiarity of the languages called (instituted as) natural by philosophy, the languages elementary to it, this discourse has always insisted upon assuring itself mastery over the limit (*peras, limes, Grenze*). It has reconceived, conceived, posited, declined the limit according to all possible modes; and therefore by the same token, in order better to dispose of the limit, has transgressed it. *Its own limit* had not to remain foreign to it. Therefore it has appropriated the concept for itself; it has believed that it controls the margin of its volume and that it thinks its other” (x); “What is the specific resistance of philosophical discourse to deconstruction? It is the infinite mastery that the agency of Being (and of the) proper seems to assure it; this mastery permits it to interiorize every limit as being and as being its own proper” (xix).

53 On this phrase, see Johnson, “Everydayness and Subalternity”: “The subaltern I am referring to is not simply the dispossessed, the downtrodden, the rebellious. It is not simply the people, the bodies out there, but the way they are represented as unrepresentable (as escaping)….To understand subalternity thus is to side with the argument that it is a discursive effect…. In saying this I am relying on Althusser’s formulation of the subject as fundamentally subjected through ideology, a formulation which makes visible the articulations between the grounds upon which the modern (human) subject is constructed and those upon which modern political systems are built or at least imagined. When I claim the subaltern is the nonsubject, therefore, what I mean is that this is how they are represented…This line of thought on subalternity addresses therefore the problem of limits—the limits of representation and the limits of knowledge. Not just any limits, however, but limits that are specifically a consequence of problems of dominance and power…. To the extent that the subaltern surfaces within a discourse, it is that which the discourse excommunicates; to the extent that such a manifestation is only a discursive trace of a more radical outside, the subaltern escapes” (30-31). For consonant readings of subalternity’s permutation in theory since Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935), see O’Hanlon and Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World”; Prakash, “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride? A Reply to O’Hanlon and Washbrook”; Levinson, “Feeling, the Subaltern, and the Organic Intellectual”; Surin, “The Sovereign Individual, ‘Subalternity,’ and Becoming-Other”; and Chari, “Son of Bush or Son of God: Politics and the Religious Subaltern in the United States, from Elsewhere.”
narratives of secularization are barometers for modernity’s province, then subalternity in the present context may very well be a wholly disquieting matter of faith.

Conceptualizing epistemic secularism as a form of discursive imperialism underscores modernity’s disciplinary centrifuge—or, more precisely, its translational proficiencies. As Chakrabarty suggests with reference to historiography, secularization translates religion’s epistemic presence in history by substituting secular accounts of agency for theological discourses that jar with institutional frameworks of sanctioned knowledge, without modernization-quas-translation, religious subjects remain virtually unintelligible for their ideologically backward or outmoded epistemic difference, an incommensurability that excoriates non-secular claims to agency. As preeminent cultural translator, secularization subalternizes religiosity through a disciplinary calculus that envisions the public sphere as a neutrally rational (because nonreligious) entity, access to which is granted upon suspension of religious belief for the sake of a singularized, theoretically universal public reason.

To unsettle this calculus and question its template for engaging a public sphere that ultimately enfolds and seeks representation within the academic institution, we might reframe questions Asha Varadharajan poses when reading Spivak’s “Imperialism and Sexual Difference”: “Why is the text of imperialism any more readable than that of the subaltern?… And why does the subaltern continue to recede while the narrative of imperialism overwhelms

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54 How do secularist historiography’s translational substitutions, as Chakrabarty explains them, relate to the Löwith-Blumenberg debate glanced in footnote 15? Given Chakrabarty’s, and by extension Prakash’s, sense of subalternity’s deconstructive absent-presence in discursive hegemonies, the translational work of secularist historiography aligns more with Blumenberg’s thesis that secularization involves a process of strategic reoccupations (whereby shifts in intellectual history determine how to “fill” vacancies in waning theological regimes) than with Löwith’s teleology of continuous epochal palimpsests.

55 See Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” for a nuanced discussion of John Rawls, Robert Audi, Paul Weithmann, and Nicholas Wolterstorff on the demand in many constitutional democracies that religiously-informed arguments be translated into secular discourses in order to uphold a singularized public reason. Habermas’ sense that religiously-informed arguments are existentially vital (and thus incapable of undergoing full privatization) for major constituencies of democratic nation-states occasions his recent endorsable view that epistemic translation in the name of public reason should be a two-way (i)deal, incumbent on both secularists and non-secularists.
the vision?” (Exotic 96). Outsourcing such queries on behalf of queer modernist religiosity foregrounds secularism’s naturalization as self-evident ontology. By naturalizing its episteme, secularism quietly dissembles its ideological production and thus leaves unchecked the circuitry of power, desire, and interest that conditions its theorizations. In her famous analysis of “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze,” Spivak develops a paradigmatic reading of how ideological production is dissimulated in French poststructuralist theory. Perhaps to the chagrin of critics pursuing the itinerary of Sedgwick’s reparative reading, the adaptability of Spivak’s analysis to the critique of secularism pivots on tracing the intellectual’s role in suturing an episteme without scrupulously interrogating the will for and aptitude of representation:

The participants in this conversation emphasize the most important contributions of French poststructuralist theory: first, that the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive—a persistent critique is needed; and second, that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society’s Other. Yet the two systematically ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history. (“Subaltern” 272)

Systematic neglect of “subject formations that micrologically and often erratically operate the interests that congeal the macrologies” (279) and of the theorists’ contingent position in intellectual history effect a subterfuge that fills the place of ideology “with a continuistic ‘unconscious’ or a parasubjective ‘culture’” similar to the explanatory fixtures of bourgeois sociology (274). Against these ponderous backdrops, both theorists elucidate interest and desire in merely schematic terms: “We never desire against our interests,” Foucault says, “because interest always follows and finds itself where desire has placed it” (qtd. in “Subaltern” 274). This formulation balloons agency into an “undifferentiated desire” whose universalizing effects are too-easily construed as transparent marks of power: “In the name of desire,” Spivak writes,

56 See Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice (205-217).
Foucault and Deleuze “reintroduce the undivided subject into the discourse of power” (274); rather than conceptualize “the desiring subject as Other” (273), they arrive at “the Subject of desire and power as an irreducible methodological presupposition” (279). Both theorists’ strong disinclination “to consider the relations between desire, power, and subjectivity renders them incapable of articulating a theory of interests. In this context, their indifference to ideology (a theory of which is necessary for an understanding of interests) is striking but consistent” (273). “As common to much poststructuralist as to structuralist theory,” this lacuna unwittingly imperils the standing of both philosophers as “prophets of heterogeneity and the Other” (272).

Spivak’s intervention in these unguarded clauses of French poststructuralist dialogue imparts a logistic foundation for *Dissident Secularism*. In crudely approximate terms: By instantiating a nexus of “power/desire/interest,” epistemic secularism and its disciplinary (queer, modernist) registers warrant “a persistent critique” to destabilize the “coherent narrative” of enlightened (post)modernity—a narrative that is especially “counterproductive” in its abjurations of religion as agency for ethical-political subjects and collectives. Progressive elements in contemporary religion may very well represent a final frontier of solidarity for nonreligious queers to whom the Left, broadly conceived and despite its perennial state of embattlement and disarray, remains even faintly viable.57 Moreover, secularist theory writ large as a presupposition for academic research and teaching “must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society’s Other”—in this context, a religiously-inflected subject-agent (unvanquished by

57 See Butler, “Merely Cultural,” for a reading of the role that factions have played in the formation of disciplines and in the disunity of the Left in American academic and activist life. Focusing on the borders separating “race studies from sexuality studies from gender studies,” Butler discerns imbrications that “expose the ultimate limits to any such autonomy”: “the politics of sexuality within African American studies; the politics of race within queer studies, within the study of class, within feminism; the question of misogyny within any of the above; the question of homophobia within feminism—to name a few. This may seem to be precisely the tedium of identitarian struggles that a new, more inclusive Left hopes to transcend. And yet, for a politics of ‘inclusion’ to mean something other than the redomestication and resubordination of such differences, it will have to develop a sense of alliance in the course of a new form of conflictual encounter” (269). Needless to say, addressing religion in this nexus of differences that the Left confronts in its galvanizing moments is for me imperative.
instrumentalist post-Enlightenment reason) whose status as anachronism illustrates precisely how “the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self’s shadow” (280). Interrogating neither the contingency of their position in intellectual history nor the question of ideology as it informs the backwardness they ascribe to religion, to theology, and to religious others, secularist intellectuals forgo theorizing “the desiring subject as Other”; consequently, they embody “that radiating point, animating an effectively heliocentric discourse,” which “fills the empty place of the agent with the historical sun of theory, the Subject of [post-Enlightenment, universal-humanist, Christian-secularist] Europe” (274).

**Dissident Secularism: Ensuing Trajectories**

By navigating the disciplinary grids and epistemic vestments charted in the preceding pages, this critical introduction has laid the groundwork for dissident interfaces between queer religiosity, literary modernism, and secular modernity in subsequent conceptual and author-focused chapters. To extend, distill, and formalize arguments set forth thus far, chapter two, “Between Theology and Theory: Modern Agencies at the Secular Limits of Discipline,” advances and thinks through “theo-critique” as a praxis that traverses the interests and terrains of theology and theory in order to read T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, and W.H. Auden against the queer-secularist grain. As its subtitle indicates, chapter two also sets into argumentative relief “the secular limits of discipline,” a critical phrase upon which the development of Dissident

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58 Hyphenating “Christian” and “secularist” is crucial for Gil Anidjar, in whose estimation secularism is “Christianity, secularized”; “Like that unmarked race, which, in the related discourse of racism, became invisible or white, Christianity invented the distinction between religious and secular and thus made religion. It made religion the problem—rather than itself. And it made it into an object of criticism that needed to be no less than transcended… secularism is a name Christianity gave itself when it invented religion, when it named its other or others as religions. And the question now remaining is whether there was a specific religion that was particularly targeted with this name” (“Secularism” 62). Anidjar answers this question with reference to Orientalism, arguing that Said’s book “must be read as a critique of Christianity, secularized or not. This should not be surprising. Orientalism is secularism, and secularism is Christianity” (62). See also Anidjar, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Christianity” and Asad, “Response to Gil Anidjar.” For a brief but suggestive reading of “secularism as laundered Christianity” undertaken “to produce ethics,” see Afsaneh Najmabadi’s interview with Spivak (124-27).
Secularism hinges. Central to my conception of this rubric and its deployment are the deconstructive measures that Derrida and Spivak adopt when reading Immanuel Kant’s founding notion of the universal secular intellectual within the nexus of cognitive faculties—namely, pure reason, practical reason, and judgment. To this end, I reconsider a question—“Is Critique Secular?”—which ostensibly polarized Saba Mahmood and Stathis Gourgouris in the Fall 2008 exchange forum of Public Culture. After positing that Mahmood and Gourgouris are mutually invested in challenging and overcoming the intransigence of epistemic secularism, I canvass Spivak’s deconstruction of Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* and argue that her reading constitutes a vital exercise in democratic criticism that sets into relief an important convergence between Mahmood and Gourgouris as interlocutors. While delineating imbrications among *Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Judgment*, and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, I synthesize Derrida’s work on Kantian aesthetics and Spivak’s recalibration of the Kantian intellectual to unsettle the recalcitrance of epistemic secularism in academic debate and public culture. By orienting Derrida’s and Spivak’s deconstructions of Kant to the quandary of epistemic secularism in queer-modernist studies, I foreground the challenges that “universal secular intellectuals” face when reading for agency between the aisles of theology and theory.

To remark further on the limits and horizons of theological discourse and secularist discipline in (post)modernity, I critically juxtapose two books that represent divergent approaches to the nexus of queerness, literature, and religiosity. The first, Marcella Althaus-Reid’s *The Queer God*, develops the subject of queer theology through syncretic discussions of scripture, fiction, and critical theory. Althaus-Reid’s work is avowedly revisionist; with mixed but nevertheless provocative results, she aims to subvert and to renegotiate the secular limits of each field she treats, and thereby to wrest the theological from its hetero-normative orientation in
institutions of patriarchy. The second, Michael Snediker’s *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*, advances an aesthetic regimen to counteract the “pessimism” that regulates much queer criticism and psychoanalytic thought. *Queer Optimism*, I argue, universalizes the figure of the individual (or, the individual as figure) whose agency evacuates, pathologizes, and ultimately secularizes religious psychologies that imbricate culture and queerness differently. In foreclosing religious faith as agency for the personhood of robust queers, *Queer Optimism* hones a formalist epistemology whose aestheticization of ethics totalizes religious otherness as both a pathogenic anachronism and an ideological violence whose vacuity is far beyond queering. Notwithstanding their mutual adjective and certain convergences in their poststructuralist itineraries, *The Queer God* and *Queer Optimism* exemplify theocratically negotiable differences between theology and theory.

Chapter three, “T.S. Eliot, Kantian Ideal Embodiment, and the Queer Resources of Political Theology,” is predicated on Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Corpus*, a deconstructive work on embodiment (from the organic to the body politic; from the body of laws to the Eucharist) which underscores the theoretical usefulness of figuring a literary oeuvre in corporeal terms. Conceiving of Eliot’s oeuvre as an assemblage of conversions in authorial persona and poetic technique, I seek to redress shortcomings in critical approaches to works he wrote after his “turn” to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, an event whose singularity among the largely secularist terrains of British and American modernism anticipates Eliot’s naturalization as a British citizen. Following Carol Christ, many critics maintain that Eliot’s post-1927 “devotional” works preclude matters of sexuality, gender, and embodiment that are evident in the drafts, fragments, and short poems that comprise *Inventions of the March Hare* (1909-1917) and that extend from *Prufrock and
Other Observations (1917) to “The Hollow Men” (1925). Conversely, I claim that a bisection of the corpus at 1927 to designate an irrevocable shift in authorial attention misreads Eliot’s career.

Waves of Eliot scholarship have valorized some quarters of his corpus while obfuscating others. How, I ask, has Eliot’s corpus been remembered and dismembered by genealogies of critical inquiry that (often tacitly) fashions itself as secularist and—by metonymic induction—left-leaning and progressive? How do genealogies of criticism, with their backdrops of interest, negotiate the stakes of Eliot’s corpus? I maintain that the lion’s share of queer-theoretical work on Eliot’s oeuvre has been produced by either explicitly or implicitly abjuring his conservative social criticism and by extension his essays on religious themes and figures. Such abjuration is pervasive enough for one to surmise that eliding consideration of Eliot’s post-conversional writings on religion, theology, culture, and politics is a condition of possibility for queering Eliot. Underwriting a “secular limit of discipline” beyond which there is ostensibly neither grounds nor use for queer exegesis, queering here is tantamount to a selective “dismemberment” or “disfiguration” of Eliot’s corpus. To trespass this limit theo-critically and thus unsettle modernist queer theory’s faith in epistemic secularism, I venture to tap the unforeseen “queer resources” of Eliot’s political theology and religious intellectualism as manifest in “Thoughts After Lambeth,” After Strange Gods, The Idea of a Christian Society, Notes Toward the Definition of Culture, “Catholicism and International Order,” and “Religion and Literature.”

My aim to chart a leftist, democratic, queer-theological pathway through—and to find therewith a leftist, democratic, queer-theological usage for—Eliot’s conservative social and religious thought is admittedly as forbidding as it is exigent. It is forbidding because Eliot’s socio-religious thought often seems far too unyielding in its royalist conservatism, in its hierarchic (even hieratic) vision of culture, and in its theocratic tendencies. Indeed, one might
reasonably ask: precisely how are Eliot’s social criticism and religious essays in any way amenable to a leftist, democratic mode of queer criticism—whether theoretical or theological in its drift? This question is rendered somewhat less forbidding when one considers the exigency of the critical task itself: as Simon During notes in one of his posts to the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) blog, “The Immanent Frame,” recent theories of religion are often informed by an unchecked “structural link between European conservative political theology and post-colonial anti-secularism”59 (“Mundane against”). If, as I suggest, critiquing epistemic secularism is irreducible to taking an anti-secularist stance, then any structural link between Eliot’s brand of European conservative political theology and my critique of secularist approaches to Eliot’s corpus must nevertheless be scrupulously checked and balanced, so as not to risk what During rightly labels “bad faith”: in order for secularism to be thought of “as the progressive social/intellectual distantiation from supernaturalisms,” one must remember that the “research university has long been at the heart of European, and thence global, secularism. The implications of this alignment press on us not least because it means that academic anti-secularist arguments risk bad faith” (During “Mundane against”).

My reading of Eliot’s corpus inflects this risk, for I am not espousing an anti-secularist argument; rather, my critique of epistemic secularism entails that I canvass Eliot’s critiques of this subject and its “next of kin”—liberalism, individualism, and democracy—in order to limn the means and ends of his arguments against the means and ends of my own. To argue in good (or better) faith, that is, I work through a trenchant double bind for which the reading practices of deconstruction serve as signposts: to critique epistemic secularism as it bears on Eliot scholarship and on queer-modernist studies more generally, I must traffic in Eliot’s conservative

59 “For example,” writes During, “it would not be hard to deploy Carl Schmitt’s postwar affirmation of the anti-liberal, anti-democratic partisan for a sympathetic account of contemporary jihadism” (“Mundane against”).
political theology and therewith utilize the ethical, political, and theological cross-purposes that emerge precisely where our positions seem most to align.

Tethered to and by this double bind, I concentrate on Eliot’s political theology and his critique of secularism in order to map imbrications among Eliot’s social criticism and Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Judgment and Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone. More specifically, I delineate a model of radically-immanent sensibility—or, to use the rubrics of leading-edge Kantian scholarship, transcendental or ideal embodiment—that ultimately lead Kant and Eliot to fissure the relation between ethics and politics in their respective philosophies of religion. By approaching this radically-immanent sensibility through the provocative lens of queerness, I aim to unsettle Eliot’s religious thought from within and render it useful for my own queer-theological purposes. Through the spokes of this religious compass and its cavernous fissures between ethics and politics, I read with and against the grain of Eliot’s political theology to uncover its surprising, because furtively deconstructive, resources for queering. This paradoxical double bind of trafficking in as a means to deviating from Eliot’s conservative religiosity points up the difference between my critique of epistemic secularism in queer-modernist studies and the post-secular, post-liberal, post-humanist simulations of reparative reading: I argue that, rather than ascribe to a political theology such as Eliot’s the status of an already-debunked second-order suspicion, a careful post-secular ethics must engage the text of political theology on its own terms in order to unravel its circuit of deconstructive use/value.

In chapter three, “‘A Prevalent Piety’: Queering Religion in the Poetry and Correspondence of Hart Crane,” I focus on Crane’s poetics with the goal of salvaging religion for queerness without recourse to epistemic secularism. For all its gravity in Crane’s poetry and prevalence in his correspondence, the subject of religion has gradually fallen out of critical focus
roughly since the publication in 1990 of Thomas Yingling’s seminal study, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text*, in which Crane’s “homotextuality” transcends the repressive religious culture of his time. After critiquing Yingling’s argument that Crane emancipates Dionysus from Christ in “Lachrymae Christi” as a means for secular queerness to override hetero-normative religion, I reconsider the aesthetic optimism that informs “The Circumstance,” a brief lyric Crane drafted in 1932 during his turbulent residence in Mexico as a Guggenheim Fellow. Refocusing on Snediker’s *Queer Optimism*, I discuss how a secular aesthetics of personhood necessarily misconstrues “The Circumstance.” The secularist hermeneutic that organizes *Queer Optimism*, I argue, cannot account for the intricacies of Aztec iconography, theology, history, and culture in Crane’s poem. To unsettle the claim that queer agency in literary and cultural theory is restricted to the epistemology of secularism, I argue that understanding Crane’s aesthetics in theoretical and theological contexts involves fashioning a critique that pays rather than secularizes its debts to the queer resources of religion. Ultimately, in my pursuit of Crane’s supple engagements with Dionysus, Christ, and Aztec theology, I aspire to synthesize the idioms of sexuality and religion that inform the heterodox tenets of his own queer theology, through which he boldly reconsiders the sacred spaces of American modernism.

At its outset, chapter five, “‘Where flesh and mind / Are delivered from mistrust:’ Christ, Caliban, and the Queerness of Incarnation in W.H. Auden’s *For the Time Being*,” shows how the secularist hermeneutic that partitions Eliot’s corpus at his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927 similarly bifurcates Auden’s oeuvre, which is usually zoned at his conversion to Anglicanism in 1940. Privileging Auden’s forays into secular-leftist politics in the 1930s, many critics concentrate on his pre-conversion writings at the expense of engaging post-conversion works that not only hone an aesthetics of individual and communal faith, but that also complicate
Auden’s approach to queerness and religion. Between 1941 and 1944, Auden wrote “For the Time Being,” an oratorio on the Christian nativity, and “The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare’s _The Tempest_,” whose post-performance dramatic monologues from each of Shakespeare’s characters culminate in an allegory Caliban fashions from the Pauline dualism of letter and spirit. As Arthur Kirsch shows in his critical edition of “The Sea and the Mirror,” both works register the impact of Chester Kallman’s sexual infidelities, which intensified Auden’s sense that religious faith and secular queerness are painfully irreconcilable. I expand Kirsch’s discussion by exploring whether, for post-conversion Auden, queer subjectivity banks on or fashions a mode of religious agency. Focusing on the dialectical relation between Auden’s texts, I suggest that he affords deep religious foundations for queer subjectivity by juxtaposing the theological mystery of Christ’s Incarnation in “For the Time Being” with the queerly erotic subtexts of Caliban’s bodily orations in “The Sea and the Mirror.”

Auden’s publication in 1944 of both works in a single, intricately dialogical volume elicits this heterodox collocation of Caliban and Christ. Specifically, by aiming in “The Sea and the Mirror” to devise a Christian aesthetics for a secular age, Auden rewrites an allegory that Robert Browning established in “Caliban upon Setebos, Or Natural Theology in the Island” (1864). Browning’s Caliban subordinates revealed religion to natural theology by allegorizing tensions in Victorian culture between Christianity and Darwinism, respectively. In “The Sea and the Mirror,” Auden rereads _The Tempest_ as an _Ars Poetica_ in which doctrines of “flesh and mind” extending from Paul to Kierkegaard destabilize secularity as a precondition for modern aesthetics. I argue that Auden’s sense of a border between doctrine and its significance in secular activities elucidates his implicitly theological reading of _The Tempest_. Accordingly, I conceptualize Auden’s border as a permeable margin separating Caliban’s queerly eroticized but
nonetheless “drab” mortality in “The Sea and the Mirror” from the paradox of Christ’s divine embodiment in “For the Time Being.” Gauging Auden’s preoccupations with existential Protestant theology throughout the 1940s, I liken the relationship of Caliban and Christ to the typology of Kierkegaard’s ethically-interlocking “aesthetic” and “religious” spheres, respectively. For Auden, I argue, the furtive interdependence of aesthetic and religious systems illustrates the import of theological doctrine for secular life and of secular revisionism for religious conviction. Reading “The Sea and the Mirror” alongside “For the Time Being,” then, facilitates a measure of syncretism, if not heterodox collusion, between Caliban’s queer carnality and Christ’s miraculous Incarnation.

My conclusion, “‘Religion can hardly revive, because it cannot decay’: In Queer Theology / Queer Theory We Trust,” revisits the groundwork laid in chapter three in order to develop its double bind. Arguing that the fissures scaled and double binds tightened in chapter three predicate the theo-critical endeavours undertaken in chapters four and five, I reframe the thread of queer deconstruction that sutures my author-focused chapters: *Dissident Secularism*, I maintain, ultimately rewires the dialectics of immanence and transcendence as a queerly deconstructive double bind. Doubly binding religious immanence to secular transcendence, I argue, cautions strongly against tipping the hermeneutic scale in favor of immanence over transcendence; or, mutatis mutandis, of transcendence over immanence. This strong caution solicits constant deconstructive negotiation—and thus *not* consensus—between the dialectical aisles of ethics and politics. I maintain that this double-bound reading has guided my queer exegeses of Eliot, Crane, and Auden by keeping queer theory and queer theology in productive, interminable, and interpenetrating tension; rather than in static and unserviceable opposition. By doubly binding religious immanence and secular transcendence, that is, *Dissident Secularism*
deconstructs the religious-antireligious binary of epistemic secularism, which continues to steer the postmodern course of much—especially queer—literary theory and cultural criticism.
Chapter 2

Between Theology and Theory: Modern Agencies at the Secular Limits of Discipline

Thus I cannot even assume God, freedom and immortality for the sake of the necessary practical use of my reason unless I simultaneously deprive speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights; because in order to attain such insights, speculative reason would have to help itself to principles that in fact reach only to objects of possible experience, and which, if they were to be applied to what cannot be an object of experience, then they would always actually transform it into an appearance, and thus declare all practical extension of pure reason to be impossible. Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith. (B xxx)


Estimating the worth of others does not celebrate a communal standard but prompts a task of persuasion. (119)

—John Brenkman, “Extreme Criticism”

Is Critique Secular? Framing Theo-Critique between Theology and Theory

In the Exchange forum of Public Culture’s Fall 2008 issue, Saba Mahmood and Stathis Gourgouris misconstrue each other’s arguments thoroughly enough to spark a quarrel over how not to answer a provocative question, “Is Critique Secular?,” which occasioned the 2007 Townsend Center for the Humanities Symposium at UC Berkeley.¹ Vexing as it is, this question subsequently elicited a forum debate in The Immanent Frame, a research blog on secularism, religion, and the public sphere sponsored by the U.S. Social Science Research Council (SSRC) under the editorship of Jonathan VanAntwerpen.² While exempt from the trappings of a rhetorical question that would solicit an answer in (most plausibly) the affirmative,³ the query “Is

¹ The second issue of The Townsend Papers in the Humanities, titled “Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech,” represents the dynamic character of this symposium. This issue features papers by and respondent commentaries from Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood.

² See http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/category/is-critique-secular/. Along with pieces from Mahmood and Gourgouris that appear in Public Culture, the forum discussion features posts from Simon During, Justin Neuman, Robert Bellah, Colin Jager, Charles Taylor, Gil Anidjar, Talal Asad, and Christopher Nealon.

³ As Mahmood notes, “it must be clear that we were not looking for a yes or no answer to our question, ‘Is Critique Secular?’ To do so would be to foreclose thought and to fail to engage a rich set of questions, answers to which remain unclear not because of intellectual confusion or incomplete evidence but because these questions require a comparative dialogue across the putative divide between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ traditions of critique and practice” (“Secular?” 448).
Critique Secular?" foregrounds nevertheless the extent to which scholarship in the humanities and social sciences is thought to flourish strictly within the purview of a nonreligious, if not patently antireligious, intellectualism. In this context, asking whether critique essentially is secular, or for that matter if the secular is for critique one qualification among others, necessitates a discussion of whether and to what degree a religious (or more generally non-secularist) intellectualism engages with, departs from, or adeptly complicates modes of argumentation regulated by and enshrined in the secular academy.

In Mahmood’s estimation, forgoing such a discussion would simply license critical reason to abjure “its ethical and substantive commitments for its procedural merits,” thus rendering it “incapable of recognizing itself as a peculiar (and parochial?) cultural form” (Secular?” 451-52). Furthermore, Mahmood maintains, critical theory’s normative suspicion and categorical rejection of “religion’s metaphysical and epistemological commitments” should elicit a set of queries whose bearings extend evenly to nonreligious, antireligious, and religious intellectuals:

Do distinct traditions of critique require a particular epistemology and ontological presuppositions of the subject? How might we rethink the dominant conception of time—as empty, homogeneous, and unbounded, one so germane to our conception of history—in light of other ways of relating to and experiencing time that also suffuse modern life? How do these other ways of inhabiting time complicate the rigid opposition between secular and sacred time so common to everyday practices of modern life? A final set of questions revolves around various disciplines of subjectivity through which a particular subject of critique is secured. What are some of the practices of self-cultivation—including practices of reading, contemplation, engagement, and sociality—internal to secular conceptions of critique? What is the morphology of these practices, and how do

4 “The full force of this ideal of critical reason,” Mahmood writes, “comes to the fore when it is juxtaposed against religious critique, imagined to be saturated with ethical and moral prejudices, and therefore not critique at all. What such a notion of critical reason remains blind to is its own disciplinary formation, its moral and structural unconsciousness. For critique, so understood, if it were to recognize this, would by its own definition have to relinquish its claims on truth and reason. But perhaps the time has come when this circularity of reason can turn the tables on itself and start by acknowledging its normative commitments and ethical presuppositions, as well as the analytic risks entailed in its rhetorical and theoretical gestures. This would certainly constitute a starting point for a dialogue with what critical reason declares to be its ultimate enemy, namely, religion and religious criticism” (“Secular?” 452).
these sit with (or differ from) other practices of ethical self-cultivation that might uphold contrastive notions of critique and criticism? (“Secular?” 447-48)

Mahmood’s queries establish an unsparing trajectory both for the analysis of secularity in sociopolitical life and for scrutiny of its value as, for resolute secularists at least, the very condition of possibility for critique. Ranging in theme from the contingencies of subjection and modernity’s spatiotemporal contours to morphologies of ethical self-cultivation, Mahmood’s interrogatives have as their common denominator the aim of critiquing secularity within and on behalf of the secular; she aspires, that is, to critical detachment from epistemic secularism while recognizing the extent to which the secular (as scaffolding ethos of many a public and private sphere) is virtually indelible for the production, regulation, and dissemination of knowledge (or, to opt for a much looser term, information) in Western media and academic contexts.⁵

Accordingly, Mahmood contends that “as secular rationality has come to define law, statecraft, knowledge production, and economic relations in the modern world, it has also simultaneously transformed the conceptions, ideals, practices, and institutions of religious life”⁶ (“Secular?” 448).

⁵ Mahmood’s sense of the double-bind that characterizes the hegemony of the secular functions as an implicit nod to the latticework of complicity and transgression within a given discursive regime. Mapping double-binds of all descriptions is of course a premier task for deconstruction: “The challenge of deconstruction,” writes Spivak, “is not to excuse, but to suspend accusation to examine with painstaking care if the protocols of the text contain a moment that can produce something that will generate a new and useful reading….The deconstructive figure is one of complicity as well as (and therefore fully neither/nor) deicide-parricide” (Critique 98).
⁶ Mahmood develops this point by inferring that “To rethink the religious is also to rethink the secular and its truth claims, its promise of internal and external goods” (449). Extending this discussion in “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” Mahmood addresses how the liberal-secular-democratic state “manages” religious difference; “the political solution offered by the doctrine of secularism resides not so much in the separation of state and religion or in the granting of religious freedoms, but in the kind of subjectivity that a secular culture authorizes, the practices it redeems as truly (versus superficially) spiritual, and the particular relationship to history that it prescribes. These aspects of secular culture, now often noted under the rubric of secularity, are propagated through not only the agency of the state but also a variety of social groups and actors who might even challenge the state’s sovereign claim to define the exception. The political solution that secularism proffers, I am suggesting, lies not so much in tolerating difference and diversity but in remaking certain kinds of religious subjectivities (even if this requires the use of violence) so as to render them compliant with liberal political rule. Critics who want to make secularism’s claim to tolerance more robust must deal with this normative impetus internal to secularism, an impetus that reorganizes subjectivities in accord with a modality of political rule that is itself retrospectively called ‘a religiously neutral political ethic’” (328).
In view of this infrastructural leverage afforded to secularity by the paradigmatic liberal democratic state, Mahmood freely admits that the feel-good part of the secular story cannot be belittled. It should in fact be studied in all seriousness so that we might apprehend the visceral force that secular discourses and practices command today. While it is common to ascribe passion to religion, it would behoove us to pay attention to the thick texture of affinities, prejudices, and attachments that tie us (cosmopolitan intellectuals and critics) to what is loosely described as a secular worldview. (‘‘Secular?’’ 451)

Given Mahmood’s nuanced sense of the sociopolitical, institutional, and cultural imbrications to which secularity and religiosity are prone (a sense which is arguably as conspicuous in her influential book, Politics of Piety, as it is in her recent article, ‘‘Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation’’), Stathis Gourgouris’s contention that Mahmood avows a fashionably trenchant politics of anti-secularism seems somewhat misleading, even while his barbed appraisal yields an array of consequential perspectives on the ethico-political tasks of what he, following Edward Said (1-30), calls secular criticism. 7 Referencing ‘‘The Mundane against the Secular,’’ 8 in which Simon During discusses ‘‘strange encounters’’ that stem from ‘‘the structural link between European conservative political theology and postcolonial anti-secularism’’ (qtd. in Gourgouris ‘‘Detranscendentalizing’’ 440), Gourgouris contends that ‘‘Mahmood’s position stands at the forefront of an alarming conservative trend that takes the critical edge out of postcolonial thinking by turning it into generic identity politics. One wonders why the critique against Western domination has to be antisecularist’’ (‘‘Detranscendentalizing’’ 440). Apart from arguing that Mahmood ‘‘predicates her entire argument on an uninterrogated identification of secularism with liberalism’’ (‘‘Antisecularist’’ 455) and alleging that she

7 For Mahmood’s response to Gourgouris, in which she clarifies a set of research aims that Gourgouris in her estimation consistently misrepresents, see Mahmood, ‘‘Secular Imperatives?’’
discusses the sacredness of the Quran without considering the (to him) more pressing matter of
“how its sacredness is authorized” (457), Gourgouris also criticizes what he regards as
Mahmood’s unwitting reification of subjectivities that fall (always too “normatively,”
Gourgouris suggests) on either side of the sociopolitical, institutional, and cultural lines on which
religion is distinguished from its secular counterpart.

Citing Mahmood’s focus on an imperializing “anthropology of the subject” that attends
the (inter)nationalist politics of contemporary secularism, Gourgouris maintains that
there is something naive in founding one’s argument about the ills of the secular
imagination solely on the inarguable fact of colonialist and imperialist politics, especially
when one dares not even pose the question of what is normative in nonsecular modes of
rule. How can one assert that there is no ground on which to criticize nonsecular
modalities of political rule that seek to transform religious (not to mention nonreligious)
subjectivities so they conform to a certain politics? Shall we not speak of the “attendant
anthropology of the subject” that Mahmood’s own ethnographic argument proposes?
(“Antisecularist” 456)

Alongside his other criticisms, Gourgouris’s account of how this particular double standard bears
on Mahmood’s larger project would seem to represent a final nail in the coffin of dispute
between these consummate interlocutors. At closer range, however, Gourgouris’s and
Mahmood’s respective interests in and answers to the question of whether critique is secular are
more aligned than their scuffle suggests. Consider, as a prime instance of such convergence,
Gourgouris’s sense that his response

leaves no room for the secular to cruise, as it were, on its own epistemological
assumptions. Insofar as critique can never be anything less than self-critique, the
certainty of weighing the secular with the critical is precisely to plunge the domain of the
secular to the uncertainty of its own interrogation....Though I advocate the emancipatory
potentialities of the secular—indeed, with the aspiration of reconceptualizing and
enriching the emancipatory domain of the secular—I explicitly criticize the metaphysics
of secularism, in fact from within the domain and as the work of the secular, as an act of
secular criticism. 9 ("Antisecularist" 453-54)

9 Gourgouris’s wariness of secularism’s “epistemological assumptions” and of the metaphysics these assumptions
facilitate aligns him generally with Habermas’s project in Postmetaphysical Thinking, especially with essays
presented under the rubric, “Between Metaphysics and the Critique of Reason.” See also Cook, “A Secular State for
Juxtaposed with the queries through which Mahmood introduces the Exchange forum, Gourgouris’s censuring of secularism’s metaphysics resonates with Mahmood’s call to investigate how “distinct traditions of critique require a particular epistemology and ontological presuppositions of the subject” (“Secular?” 447)—an investigation which, in epistemological terms, solicits “critical analysis of what has been assumed to be the truth of secularism, its normative claims, and its assumptions about what constitutes ‘the human’ in this world” (“Empire” 347; emphasis added). Here, Gourgouris and Mahmood agree on a signal procedural aim: for both, secularism should neither coalesce into metaphysics nor consolidate itself as an episteme. Going forward, their divergences arguably stem from mutual misreading, driven as much by mistaken assumptions about each other’s disciplinary investments as by the undeniable lure of polemic. Accordingly, what Gourgouris (a scholar of comparative literature) sees as his interlocutor’s antisecularist “dogmatism of nativist identity politics” (“Antisecularist” 459), Mahmood regards as her effort to reconsider predominant understandings of the Muslim hijab as “speech acts that perform very different kinds of work in the making of the religious subject” (“Imperatives” 464); and what Mahmood (a socio-cultural anthropologist) sees as her interlocutor’s reactionary secularist “structure of affect” that bristles at “the mere suggestion that there might be a ‘normative impetus internal to secularism’” (“Secular?” 451), Gourgouris regards as his “internal deconstruction” of the secular,10 the aim of which is to open “a whole

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10 Arguably, Gourgouris’s notion of an “internal deconstruction,” as it pertains to the question of whether critique is secular (or, more precisely for him, as it pertains to the demands of Said’s “secular criticism”), is less im-possibly deconstructive (or, less internalizing in its critical position on behalf of a detranscendentalized secularism) than the thoroughly Derridean thesis Abeysekara advances in “The Im-Possibility of Secular Critique: The Future of Religion’s Memory.” Compared with Gourgouris, Abeysekara ups the deconstructive ante by grappling with the “promissory” element in Derrida’s challenging work on aporia, politics, and democracy: “the (secular) history of religion, if it is ever historical, can only be a history of such aporetic critique. Such an aporetic critique will be the
new horizon of thinking about contemporary political problems beyond the bipolar syndrome of secularism versus religion” (“Antisecularist” 453).

Apart from highlighting the contours of recent scholarly debate on secularism and from underscoring the disciplinary assumptions that shape any argument on the subject, this quarrel in *Public Culture* illustrates precisely how distended, thorny, and trenchant such discussions become when interlocutors misapprehend the terms, interests, and aims of each other’s work. In the case of Mahmood and Gourgouris, mutual misreading obscures a vital shared interest in challenging the epistemic and metaphysical dogmatism to which religious and secularist positions alike are susceptible. Logistically speaking, though, how would one advance and precipitate a critical challenge of this kind? What approach might one take in contesting or negotiating the (often unchecked) metaphysical baggage of an episteme, particularly an episteme as institutionally ubiquitous in Western culture as “the secular”? What forms of praxis and what objects of analysis would a disputation of this nature and significance assume or demand? In the interest of devising responses to these queries and in order to build on the tacit interest that furtively aligns Mahmood’s and Gourgouris’s respective arguments, I introduce here rubrics that roughly constitute a praxis for *Dissident Secularism*; specifically, I foreground “theo-critique” and “the secular limits of discipline” as concepts designed to serve as methodological hinges between my project’s interlocking theoretical, theological, and literary-critical frameworks.

As praxis cognizant of its ideological position on the exegetical thresholds of theory and theology, theo-critique interrogates secularism’s recalcitrance as a disciplinary episteme in the most ungodly quarters of the humanities, and particularly in the interfacing arenas of modernist studies and queer theory. Aiming for concourse between theory and theology as enterprises

heritage of religion’s im-possible future. It is an im-possible future because it will always be a promise, a promise to separate it from itself, a promise that will remain always deferred, always to come” (213).
polarized by the secularization thesis, theo-critique in a given exercise or application refrains from prescribing or subscribing exclusively to either sector, in order to linger at the crossroads of the theo-retical and the theo-logical; to finesse at such junctions the presuppositions, utilities, limits, (mis)alignments, and potential syncretisms of theoretical and theological hermeneutics; and ultimately to redeploy each “lens” in apposite measure, with the aim of rousing epistemic dissidence in literary and cultural criticism as both fold into “the bipolar syndrome of secularism versus religion” (Gourgouris “Antisecularist” 453). A primary aim of this multifarious approach is for practitioners (“theo-critics,” so to speak), or more generally those concerned with this syndrome, to read actively for epistemic contingencies of subject-formation and related avowals of agency. A twofold corollary of such theo-critical reading would find theorists (again in Gourgouris’s terms) detranscendentalizing the secular and thus construing (as concerns the present project) imbrications of queerness and religiosity across the cultural, sociopolitical, and ethical frameworks of modernism and modernity. In practical terms, working toward such an aim necessitates consistent renegotiation of the most adverse (because self-interested) polemics that secularist theorists and anti-secularist theologians assume in relation to one another; polemics, for instance, that inspire the rhetoric of primitivism or demonization in nefarious renderings of each respective opponent (e.g. the risibly unenlightened and thus primitive believer; the

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11 Happily enough for my “theo-critical” aims, the etymology of “theory” reveals a certain confluence with the roots of “theology.” Of the latter we read in the OED that the Greek root “meant ‘an account of the gods, or of God (whether legendary or philosophical)’. Varro, following the Stoics, distinguished three kinds of theologia, mythical, natural (rational), and civil, the last being the knowledge of the due rites and ceremonies of religion. This threefold division is referred to also by Tertullian and St. Augustine. In Christian Greek, the vb…was used = ‘to speak of as God, to attribute deity to’, whence…the specific sense of ‘the ascription of a divine nature to Christ’, in contrast to …the doctrine of his incarnation and human nature. Another patristic Gr. use, arising out of the primary sense, was ‘the account of God, or record of God’s ways, as given in the Bible’, whence the late Gr. and med. L. use of theologia for the Scriptures themselves.” In “theory,” meanwhile, we uncover in the Greek root “a looking at, viewing, contemplation, speculation, theory, also a sight, a spectacle, abstr. n.…spectator, looker on, < stem…to look on, view, contemplate”; further on in the entry we read of, “A body of theors (THEOR n.”—“Greek…spectator, one who travels in order to see things, also an envoy, ambassador”—“sent by a state to perform some religious rite or duty; a solemn legation.” Channeling this original interplay of the theo-logical and the theo-retical is a cornerstone of my work in this thesis.
damnable because brazenly amoral secularist). Especially on matters of common concern to both parties (e.g. political, legislative, or social-policy debates in the public sphere; exegeses of literary or cultural texts in enclaves of scholarly disputation), such polemics have the effect of preempting or terminating critical dialogue, thoroughgoing debate, and mutual critique.12

Because theory and theology in their disciplinary settings skim unevenly between the normative registers of modernism and modernity, wherein aesthetic modernism and modern aesthete are quintessentially at home in their relegations of religion and theology to an ethereal private sphere, theo-critique develops an ethics for reading the differential modernity proper to political theologies of queerness in literature and culture as well as sexuality, subjectivity, and agency more generally. While cultivating critical approaches to the most rigid or absolutist sociopolitical claims of secularism and religion, theo-critique (again, as criticism that, while pausing at junctions between the theo-retical and the theo-logical, redeploy each “lens” in measure to elicit epistemic dissidence) recognizes nevertheless the inescapability of the very secularism under critique.13 As such, theo-critique registers but ultimately mitigates the purism

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12 Concern here for persistence of dialogue, debate, and mutually-informing critique extends my introductory discussion of difficulties that follow from envisioning the public sphere as a neutrally rational (because nonreligious) entity bounded upon a singularized, theoretically universal public reason (see Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere”). To some extent, my advocacy for a public culture of critical exchange that would value reciprocity of perspectives on matters of divided interest is aligned with Amanda Anderson’s refashioning (in The Way We Argue Now) of Habermas’s theory of communicative ethics: “Promoting communicative action and rational argumentation in its broadest sense need not, and indeed does not, translate into procedures that restrict the political imagination or the subject’s relations to the multiple cultural communities in which he or she might be embedded….What is most significant in this conception of communicative ethics is holding self-reflexive questioning of norms, or postconventionality, as the moral ideal that undergirds the subject’s acts of affiliation and disaffiliation” (44). Admittedly, however, I hold fast to a deconstructive caveat that strains my alliance with Anderson’s latter-day Habermasianism. This caveat pertains to the monumental (potentially exclusionary) work that “rational argumentation” is meant to perform in the continuum that extends from Habermas to Anderson. Who or what has access to the singularity of this ideal and who or what determines its itinerary, protocol, and priorities? How will religiously-informed arguments (which hardcore secularists, who are bound to claim exclusive rights to “rational argumentation,” consider irrational non-arguments) factor into this singularity? As noted agreeably in chapter one, Habermas answers this weighty latter question by making religious and nonreligious persons responsible for grasping as fully as possible each other’s contributions to “public reason.” The question of how to implement and sustain this responsibility, however, remains a profound quandary, which Anderson tends to bypass.

13 On this score, I concur with John Brenkman’s argument that “when it comes to questions of rights, freedoms, participation, self-rule, and citizenship, the liberal and republican traditions of Western democratic thought cannot
of Ashis Nandy’s declaration that one (especially the disciplined intellectual of the secular university) may be categorically “anti-secularist”14 (“Tolerance” 73). Rather, a given pursuit of or exercise in theo-critique might canvass the productive acknowledgement of complicity in Aamir Mufti’s “secularist critique of modern secularism,” which reopens “the question of decolonization, postcolonial selfhood, and the legacies, broadly conceived, of the Enlightenment” (13); the epistemic venture in Corey Walker’s “theological thinking” as that which “thinks through the order of the theological in order to develop forms of critique which break the suturing effect of the modern theologico-political while also gesturing toward new horizons for thinking between history and transcendence”15 (208); the perspicacity of Said’s “secular criticism” whose endeavours include, as Gourgouris notes, contesting literary theory’s “metaphysical and antihistorical dogmatism,” much of which remains “covered over with the

be superseded. They are the living though damaged and burdened tradition of Western political life. The supposition of much current cultural theory is that these traditions are defunct or can be transcended or are merely complicit in the evils of capitalism, racism, or ‘the West.’ The temptation to invalidate these traditions, rather than affirming their validity while assessing their historical burden and criticizing their damaged actuality, has given rise to a style of political and cultural criticism which variously announces itself as post-Enlightenment, postmodern, postpolitical, or post-nation-state” (123).

14 To justify this position, Nandy reads secular statecraft in India as an epicenter for intolerant communalisms (politicized religious groups and economic classes) that emerge mainly in response to extreme rightwing Hindu nationalism. Nandy argues that, after WWII and the communal politics of partition, religion as a societal category in South Asia split into two forms: faith and ideology. The former denotes religion as a way of being, unaffected by the homogenizing course of puppeteer nationalism; the latter denotes the political mobilization of religious communities along lines of class and caste, through overlapping interests of nationalism and socio-economic affiliation. In the South Asian context, this dualism prompts a query: how do Indian communities transition from the former to the latter, so that the state-sponsored massacres of Punjabi Sikhs in 1984 and of Gujarati Muslims in 2002, for example, could occur? Anti-secularists answer that nationalist ideologies, under secular rubrics, exploit faith positions by mobilizing religious communities for political ends. Nandy’s anti-secularist stance is appreciable and should indeed be seen as pertinent to experiences beyond the subcontinent. The pursuance of Nandy’s anti-, however, must be greatly tempered by Brenkman’s cautions against theory that wills a flourishing transcendence of rotten sociopolitical trajectories.

15 Comparable here (though Walker does not remark on the resemblance) is David Jasper’s usage of this phrase in “From Theology to Theological Thinking: The Development of Critical Thought and Its Consequences for Theology.” Jasper writes that in post-modernity “our hermeneutical project shifts from its philosophical base in Schleiermacher and adopts the characteristics of a conversation with ‘the other’; our theology is abandoned for the more energetic mode of theological thinking” (295); accordingly, theological texts “can never give rise simply to theology, objectively understood as a system, but rather to a dynamic theological thinking, which is always prepared to respond self-reflexively to its own assertions and affirmations” (297).
rhetoric of antihumanism”\textsuperscript{16} (“Orientalism” 17); the ethical-political purchase in Srinivas Aravamudan’s reformulation of Spivak’s call to “find the secular that is not secularism…by paying much closer attention to the idiom of religious belief, especially when this idiom is turned away from theological or divine performance into marking the boundary of the lived everyday”\textsuperscript{17} (19); and the disciplinary challenge in Michael Warner’s view of “critical reading” as “the folk ideology of a learned profession,” which merits revaluation as a contingent set of “form relationships” rather than as the “coming-into-reflexivity of reading” and for which “other cultures of textualism” and “rival modes of reading” might be “something other than pretheoretically uncritical” (“Uncritical” 16).

At the Secular Limits of Discipline:

Theo-Critique and the Universal Secular Intellectual

Forthrightly, then, Theo-critique aims to recalibrate and in some sense to disempower “the secular limits of discipline.”\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, by “calling the place of the investigator into question,” a

\textsuperscript{16} Gourgouris compounds this description when he argues that “Said’s uncompromising secular thinking does not aim at the mere critique of religious or theological discourses or modes of cognition. Secular criticism, as I understand it, is only symptomatically a mode of thought antithetical to religion…we must liberate the secular from the strict opposition to the religious—which in our era means we must take away from the religious the agency of determining what is secular—and seek instead, in the secular, another epistemological mode that points to whatever is open to contention and critique, interrogation and doubt; to what has no genuine need for transcendental structures because the finitude of life and the world is insurmountable and thus conditions of existence become more precious than promises of salvation” (18). Given the caliber of work on secularism since The World, the Text, and the Critic (1983), Gourgouris might have juxtaposed Said’s secular criticism with studies that illustrate religion’s own progressive faculties with “contention and critique” on behalf of the Left, and thus its irreducibility to mere “promises of salvation” or, for that matter, to neocon televangelist programming restlessly stumbled upon at 3am.

\textsuperscript{17} Although Aravamudan does not refer to it directly in his endorsement, the following excerpt from Spivak’s essay “Terror” works as an exemplary source-text: “Secularism is too rarefied, too existentially impoverished to take on the thickness of a language. It is a mechanism to avoid violence that must be learned as mere reasonableness. It is thin as an ID card, not as thick as ‘identity.’…What I am going to suggest is not going to insist that there is some enlightened spirit of secularism for which we ought to initiate new conversion rites, but that we ought to acknowledge that secularism is only ever in the letter, and that we ought to train fiercely to protect it as such” (106). Later in the present section, I discuss Spivak’s provocative notion of secularism as “only ever in the letter.”

\textsuperscript{18} Recalling Derrida’s rubric of marginality throughout Margins of Philosophy, specifically his inaugural piece “Tympan,” I would foreground here a twofold usage of “limit”: limit as terminus, para/perimeter, boundary, or extremity capable of being transgressed (trespassed) in the interest of mastering the otherness or alterity of that which the limit marks as “beyond”; and, specifically pertinent to the nexus of theory and praxis, limit as limitation, shortcoming, drawback, disadvantage, or even weakness.
gesture which for Spivak remains a necessary yet “meaningless piety” (“Subaltern” 271), such disempowering recalibration may extricate faith from its association with pathology, elicit recognition of its supple interplay with secular and/or nonreligious positions, and enable its representation as an often complex form of agency—rather than simply as anachronism, primitivism, or irrationalism. However compounded, this objective supplements Warner’s discussion of “critical reading” (qua reading via protocols in the humanities—which are, I maintain, regulated by the ethics and politics of epistemic secularism) and “uncritical reading” (qua reading via the lenses of religious faith).¹⁹ For Warner, the adjectives at hand would need to be distinguished not so much on the basis of different technical methods, nor as reflective and unreflective versions of the mere processing of text artifacts, but as contrasting ways in which various techniques and forms can be embedded in an ethical problematic of subject-formation—in the case of critical reading, one oriented to freedom and autonomous agency against the background of a modern social imaginary….how have various arts of commentary and practices of text-rendering come to be linked to the ethical projects organized on the axis of the critical and the uncritical? And what might we see in this history if we did not take critical reading as an invisible norm? (19-20)

In fields informed by psychoanalysis, to select a theoretical camp historically apposite to both modernist studies and queer theory at their most secularist or secularizing, answering the questions Warner poses to the “invisible norm” and its operative axis may entail further scrutiny of what Judith Butler calls the “Lacanian temptation…to claim that the law figured in the fantasy is the Law in some capitalized sense” (“Competing” 155). Highlighting one secular limit of discipline among others, this temptation “is the moment in which the theory of psychoanalysis becomes a theological project. And although theology has its place, and ought not to be dismissed, it is perhaps important to acknowledge that this is a credo of faith” (155).

Significantly, if as Butler suggests “all that is necessary to start on this theological venture is the

¹⁹ “The most obvious candidates for such a program of ‘uncritical’ reading,” writes Warner, “are various styles of religious reading, though they are not the only ones” (16).
desire for theology itself” (155), then theology itself, rather than theology in neat opposition to what is normatively granted the heading of “theory,” would seem to play a far more instrumental role in the impetus to psychoanalytic thought than is generally appreciated. Congruently, if queer theory in its institutional vestments scrupulously avoids the subject of religion because it intends, in Mark Jordan’s words, “to occupy territory long held by religion, but also because it wants to deploy all-too-familiar habits of religious diagnosis and tropes of religious rhetoric” (“Trouble” 564), then this quandary of discursive alienation, substitution, and modernizing succession would represent a vanguard of normative intellectualism that reinforces secularization as a benchmark or as a critically transgressive means through which religion and theology should be managed, mitigated, contained, and relinquished in the surrogating interest of secularization within and beyond the university. 20

In these circumstances, a theo-critical focus on how epistemic secularism sutures queer-modernist studies necessitates rethinking what Spivak calls “the universal secular intellectual,” a figure “that will no longer suffice for what the university must produce today” (“Terror” 107). Central to this project of reevaluation is a return to signal texts by Immanuel Kant; for, as Spivak notes, Kant “was the philosopher who gave the best articulation to the universal secular intellectual as produced by the university” (107). Pursuant to this aim, Spivak turns to Kant’s Religion within the Limits Reason Alone (Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft, 1794; also translated as Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason), 21 a late work

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20 Akin to Chakrabarty’s discussion in Provincializing Europe of secularist historiography as epistemic (mis)translation, this formulation of the secular(izing) limit in psychoanalysis and related queer theory elicits terms of engagement from the Löwith-Blumenberg debate (see chapter one, footnote 15). Here, as in Chakrabarty’s case (see chapter one, footnote 54), Blumenberg’s thesis on secularization as systemic reoccupation seems more fitting than Löwith’s notion of epochal, palimpsestic continuity.

21 Cited hereafter as Religion. Spivak and Derrida refer to different translations and editions of this work, and I am accordingly divided. I have kept my references to the edition used by Derrida and his translators, Bennington and McLeod, in The Truth in Painting because, there, Kant’s text is cited at greater length than in Spivak’s essay. In the title of this chapter and chapter section, however, I opt for “mere reason” as per the edition cited by Spivak, because
whose title is echoed in the heading of the present chapter. In *Religion*, Spivak argues, Kant develops the idea of a common ethical life “based not on the separation of the public and the private but on the fact that all human beings have the same reason,” the universality of which elicits “the promise of secularism” (107). In a nuanced reading of “Terror” that supplements my analysis by highlighting the crucial role Spivak reserves for aesthetic judgment in her deconstruction of Kant’s *Religion*, Erin Runions notes that Spivak “opens up a particular moment in Kant’s discussion of religion as a means to destabilize political calculations based on the transcendent. How, she asks…can secularism produce ethical action, or something like morality, without being emptied of meaning by a system of political calculation?” (76).

Before she extrapolates from Kant’s *Religion* the framework for a common ethical life predicated on the singular universality of reason, rather than on the narrow epistemic privilege of political secularism as critiqued by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages* and by Joan Wallach Scott in *Politics of the Veil*, Spivak suggests that Kant’s abiding sense of the limits, strengths, and needs of reason led him to ask if it was possible to forge a species of what we might as well call secularism, which would incorporate intuitions of the transcendental. Let us see how he solved this problem and what we, who must be fair to our debt to Kant and yet must undo him, can learn from him. To begin with, although reason is one, and indeed that is the ground of ethical commonality, Kant fractures that unity, rather more than we do when we put our blind faith in secularism as we understand it. (Kant himself always asserted that the various reasons were different forms of appearance of the same reason. What I am describing here can take that on board.) Between the fractured functions of reason, Kant establishes a skewed relationship. Pure reason, of which Kant is most suspicious, is the highest function of reason. And mere reason, which is what we work with every day and which can only be accountable—zurechnungsfähig rather than responsible—is inimical to moral labor…in describing how we would philosophize the moral in pure reason, Kant asks us, literally, to make room for—einräumen—the effects of grace. (107-108)

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this phrase more faithfully captures the sense of de-transcendentalization on which Kant’s, Spivak’s and (by exegetical extension) my readings hinge.
In the interest of gradual contextualization, I defer (for a few pages) analysis of how Kant, in Spivak’s reading, *gracefully* registers “the moral in pure reason” (108). It is more important here to note that in her admittedly “simplified” (110) engagement with Kant’s *Religion*, Spivak recapitulates more often than cites his interlocking critiques (i.e. *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Judgment*, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*) to ground her discussion. Nevertheless, upon perusal of Kant’s *Religion*, one may locate a foothold for Spivak’s account in the “General Observation” appended to Book I, “Concerning the Indwelling of the Evil Principle with the Good, or, On the Radical Evil in Human Nature.” Insofar as it illuminates the challenges of rethinking Kant’s founding conception of the universal secular intellectual, this plausible foothold merits lengthy quotation:

> But in the moral religion (and of all the public religions which have ever existed, the Christian alone is moral) it is a basic principle that each must do as much as lies in his power to become a better man, and that only when he has not buried his inborn talent (Luke XIX, 12-16) but has made use of his original predisposition to good in order to become a better man, can he hope that what is not within his power will be supplied through cooperation from above. Nor is it absolutely necessary for a man to know wherein this cooperation consists…but it is essential to know what man must do in order to become worthy of this assistance. This General Observation is the first of four which are appended, one to each Book of this work, and which might bear the titles, (1) Works of Grace, (2) Miracles, (3) Mysteries, and (4) Means of Grace. These matters are, as it were, *parerga* to religion within the limits of pure reason; they do not belong within it but border upon it. Reason, conscious of her inability to satisfy her moral need, extends herself to high-flown [überschwenglich] ideas capable of supplying this lack, without, however, appropriating these ideas as an extension of her domain. Reason does not dispute the possibility or the reality of the objects of these ideas; she simply cannot adopt them into maxims of thought and action. She even holds that, if in the inscrutable realm of the supernatural there is something more than she can explain to herself, which may yet be necessary as a complement to her moral insufficiency, this will be, even though unknown, available to her good will. Reason believes this with a faith which (with respect to the possibility of this supernatural complement) might be called *reflective*; for *dogmatic* faith, which proclaims itself as a form of *knowledge*, appears to her dishonest or presumptuous. (47-8)

Without excusing as unproblematic Kant’s view that Christianity is *the* definitive moral religion in the Enlightenment arena of public faiths, Spivak gleans from this tricky passage that Kant...
assayed to know “if a secularism is possible without some intuition of the transcendental that cannot be reasonably enforced. His answer is ‘no,’ because mere reason is by nature unwilling to a moral working through (Bearbeitung)” (102). Here as elsewhere in “Terror,” Spivak’s evocative phrase, “intuition of the transcendental,” takes on multiple connotations because it extends Kant’s frame of reference in Religion, wherein “the transcendental” is affixed to four levers of theological difference within Christianity—specifically, works of grace, miracles, mysteries, and means of grace: “Radical alterity,” writes Spivak, “an otherness that reason needs but which reason cannot grasp, can be given many names. God in many languages is its most recognizable name. Some have given it the name of ‘man,’ some ‘nation,’ ‘nature,’ ‘culture’” (102; emphasis in original). Threading this plethora of referents, radical alterity is transcendental to reason insofar as the latter cannot sensibly trespass its own tripartite (pure reason, practical reason, judgment) limits to “grasp” (master, interiorize, know) the former’s supersensible measure. Under the yoke of this restriction, the transcendental remains for reason a looming, non-incorporable, yet requisite pure intuition, called upon to supplement “mere reason’s calculative moral laziness” (109). Of course, intuition (particularly for its surreptitious bearing

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22 With utmost confidence in Spivak’s fidelity to the Kantian text, I would nonetheless ground both terms (intuition and transcendental) as per Kant’s usages. Of intuition, Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason writes that “intuition can never be other than sensible, i.e. that it contains only the way in which we are affected by objects. The faculty for thinking of objects of sensible intuition, on the contrary, is the understanding…Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts)” (193-194). Of the transcendental, Kant writes most pithily that all cognition is “transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general” (133). In the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” these terms comingle in a manner favorable to Spivak’s phrasing: “I call all representations pure (in the transcendental sense) in which nothing is to be encountered that belongs to sensation. Accordingly the pure form of sensible intuitions in general is to be encountered in the mind a priori…These belong to the pure intuition, even without an actual object of the senses or sensation, as a mere form of sensibility in the mind” (156).

23 Kant’s recourse to the logic of the supplement in his Religion and Spivak’s brokering of this logic en route to her discussion of Kant’s “intuitions of the transcendental” draw us ineluctably to Derrida’s Of Grammatology, particularly the arguments that extend from “…That Dangerous Supplement…” to “From/Of the Supplement to the Source.” Because I focus at the outset of chapter five on how epistemic secularism (operating clandestinely through Snediker’s rubrics of personhood and figuration) mismanages both supplementary logic and catachresis while attempting to secularize and supersede religious discourse, I here defer formal engagement with Of Grammatology.
on the pleats of reason, understanding, and the supersensible) plays a subtler role in Kant’s wider philosophical system than this chapter, or project for that matter, can properly suggest. For the present aim of rethinking the office of the universal secular intellectual, what merits attention is the furtive yet powerful effect that the transcendental exerts upon mere reason when, via the checks and balances of Kant’s regulatory system, the latter intuits the former responsibly within established parameters.

Despite (if not because of) this exertion’s ultimately elusive character, one might nevertheless wonder how the transcendental influences mere reason within the latter’s precincts and also ponder to what end such influence leads. To the extent that this influence and its vicissitudes are explicable, the most enigmatic term in the preceding excerpt from Kant’s Religion, the word parerga, solicits careful attention. In context, Kant identifies as parerga the four levers of theological difference (works of grace, miracles, mysteries, means of grace) that border upon yet remain exterior to reason alone. Verging upon the reasonable as pure transcendental intuitions, these levers represent an inaccessible object to which reason nevertheless extends itself in order to supplement and therein satisfy the moral lacunae that rational calculation cannot independently redress. For Kant, a regulatory stipulation of this crucial yet impossible extension is for reason not to mistake “high-flown [überschwenglich]” notions as mastered tenets of its own domain. In this paradoxical clause, Kant has recourse to

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24 Briefly, however, I would point to the following passage in the Critique of Judgment for its succinct demonstration of this role and also for its indication of the “logic” of the supersensible as a terse synonym for Spivak’s phrase, “intuition of the transcendental”: “Our entire cognitive faculty is, therefore, presented with an unbounded, but, also, inaccessible field of the supersensible—in which we seek in vain for a territory, and on which, therefore, we can have no realm for theoretical cognition, be it for concepts of understanding or of reason. This field we must indeed occupy with ideas in the interest as well of the theoretical as the practical employment of reason, but in connexion with the laws arising from the concept of freedom we cannot procure for these ideas any but practical reality, which, accordingly, fails to advance our theoretical cognition one step towards the supersensible. Albeit, then, between the realm of the natural concept, as the sensible, and the realm of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, there is a great gulf fixed, so that it is not possible to pass from the former to the latter (by means of the theoretical employment of reason), just as if the two were so many separate worlds, the first of which is powerless to exercise influence on the second: still the latter is meant to influence the former—that is to say, the concept of freedom is meant to actualize in the sensible world the end proposed by its laws” (11-12).
parerga as an adjectival descriptor for such überschwenglich notions.\textsuperscript{25} As the OED shows, parergon is a singular noun that in classical Latin denotes “extra ornament or detail” and in ancient Greek signifies “by-work, subordinate or second business.” In post-classical Latin the term pertained chiefly to “an ornamental addition,” an “embellishment,” or “something subordinate or accessory to the main subject” in the fine art of painting.

Attending at length in The Truth in Painting to how this post-classical Latinate term functions in Enlightenment aesthetics, Derrida explores the parergon’s plasticity, resolve, and utility in Kant’s oeuvre. Though focused primarily on how Kant deploys the parergon in the Critique of Judgment as a means to (un)fastening the analytic of the beautiful, Derrida also turns decisively to Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone and finds in this late work that

The parergon inscribes something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field (here that of pure reason and of Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone) but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking. It is lacking in something and it is lacking from itself. (56)

As “a philosophical quasi-concept” that one may “transport intact or deformed and reformed” into other fields “according to certain rules” (55), the parergon lithely straddles Kant’s projects in Religion and Critique of Judgment. Delineating this overlap, Derrida studies Kant’s discussions of taste and judgment in the latter text, whose rubric of aesthetics elicits Derrida’s notion of a frame that would represent the outside-work parerga perform. True to Derrida’s sense of this concept’s transportability, his association of parerga with frame-work extends its pertinence well beyond the aesthetic horizons of the Critique of Judgment, making it a lucid metaphor for the expressly theological parerga in Kant’s Religion:

\textsuperscript{25} The OED lists parergic and parergal as formal adjectives. Kant’s usage of parerga thus construes the plural noun as adjectival.
*Parerga* have a thickness, a surface which separates them not only (as Kant would have it) from the integral inside, from the body proper of the *ergon*, but also from the outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung, from the space in which statue or column is erected, then, step by step, from the whole field of historical, economic, political inscription in which the drive to signature is produced...No “theory,” no “practice,” no “theoretical practice” can intervene effectively in this field if it does not weigh up and bear upon the frame, which is the decisive structure of what is at stake, at the invisible limit to (between) the interiority of meaning (put under shelter by the whole hermeneuticist, semioticist, phenomenologicalist, and formalist tradition) and (to) all the empiricisms of the extrinsic which, incapable of either seeing or reading, miss the question completely. (60-61)

As frame-work, *parergon* in this excerpt pulls reference, interpretation, and affect in two contrary directions at once: the *parergon* stands (or hangs vertically, fastened by nail and wire) both ‘for’ and ‘against’ the painting as well as both ‘for’ and ‘against’ the inscriptive world beyond (a world framed in its own way by the margins of art-work). This “whole field” of inscription, Derrida suggests, cannot take up the question of reference without first unsettling the *signatory* ground that ostensibly marks it as extrinsic (or, by implication, as objective and authoritative). For Derrida, then, the aesthetic framework of Kant’s third critique suspends the *parergon* “between work and absence of work” (64), illustrating thereby “not that it stands out

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26 The OED registers for this term a Greek etymology in *erg* (“work”), which has disciplinary roots in nineteenth-century physics: “A unit of work or energy; the amount of work done when a force of one dyne moves its point of application one centimetre in the direction of the force.” Accordingly, a *dyne* is “a unit equivalent to that force which, acting for one second on a mass of one gramme, gives it a velocity of one centimetre per second.”

27 For Derrida’s signal work on signature, to which he seems here to allude, see “Signature Event Context” in *Margins of Philosophy*.

28 In “Economimesis,” Derrida’s foray into the nexus that (un)threads production, representation, and taste in Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, he revisits the *parergon*, suggesting that its relation to signature is often mistaken as a matter of empirical veracity: “If one transfers to art a predicate which, in all rigor, seems to belong to its product, it is because the relation to the product cannot, structurally, be cut off from the relation to a productive subjectivity, however indeterminate, even anonymous it may be: we have here the implication of signature which should not be confused with the extrinsic demands of some empiricism (whether psychological, sociological, historical, etc.) The beautiful would always be the work [*l’oeuvre*] (as much the act as the object), the art whose signature remains marked at the limit of the work, neither in nor out, out and in, in the parergonal thickness of the frame. If the beautiful is never ascribed simply to the product or to the producing act, but to a certain passage to the limit between them, then it depends, provided with another elaboration, on some parergonal effect: the Fine-Arts are always of the frame and the signature” (7).

29 “The frame labors [*travailler*] indeed,” writes Derrida. “Place of labor, structurally bordered origin of surplus value, i.e., overflowed [*déborder*] on these two borders by what it overflows, it gives [*travailler*] indeed. Like wood. It creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates even as it cooperates in the production of the product, overflows it and is deduct(t)ed from it. It never lets itself be simply exposed” (Truth 75).
but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy” (61).

Transported into the arena of Kant’s *Religion*, wherein, as Derrida notes, “the context is very different but the structure is analogous and just as problematical” (55), the *parergon* achieves a fourfold theological plurality, the prongs of which are, as noted above, rooted in a “General Remark” that Kant appends to Book I.30 Given the *parergon*’s status as “a hybrid which is not a mixture or a half-measure, an outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside” (*Truth* 63), what is its effect upon aesthetic judgment and upon mere reason in the respective frames of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and *Religion*? Moreover, and particularly with respect to the latter, what role might such an effect play in an endeavour to recalibrate the secular universal intellectual?

In both Kantian texts, Derrida tells us, the *parergon*’s effect can be intrinsically beneficial or extrinsically detrimental, an affective binary that follows from the *parergon*’s bifurcation at “the limit between work and absence of work” (64). This genealogy of splinters and divisions “gives rise to a sort of pathology of the *parergon*, the forms of which must be named and classified” (64). In the case of Kant’s *Judgment*, Derrida notes that the *parergon* can augment the pleasure of taste (*Wohlgefallen des Geschmacks*), contribute to the proper and intrinsically aesthetic representation if it intervenes *by its form* (*durch seine Form*) and only by its form. If it has a “beautiful form,” it forms part of the judgment of taste properly speaking or in any case intervenes directly in it. That is, if you like, the normal *parergon*. But if on the other hand it is not beautiful, purely beautiful, i.e. of a formal beauty, it lapses into *adornment* (*Schmuck*) and harms the beauty of the work, it does wrong and causes it detriment (*Abbruch*).…What is bad, external to the pure object of taste, is thus what seduces by an attraction.…The deterioration of the *parergon*, the perversion, the adornment, is the attraction of sensory matter. (64)

30 For reminder’s sake, I relist here the four theological-parergic prongs in question: works of grace, miracles, mysteries, and means of grace.
Meanwhile, in the case of Kant’s *Religion* and its theological frame-work, the distinction between beneficial effect and detrimental effect depends on how well reason copes with its moralistic need for supplementary work, which gives it “recourse to the *parergon*, to grace, to mystery, to miracles” (64). In well-regulated measure, this supplementary work would contribute to the efficacy and accountability of reason by demarcating and fortifying respect for the limited jurisdiction, resources, and contingencies of the reasonable. Judicious accommodation of religion within the limits of reason *alone*, in other words, would ideally satisfy an affective need that the latter cannot possibly fulfill by clinging to a seductive, empowering myth of constitutive self-reliance. Of course, while recognizing the merits of such accommodation, Kant as skilled regulator of epistemological faculties also acknowledges the precariousness of the supplementary logic at hand. “It involves,” writes Derrida, “a risk and exacts a price the theory of which is elaborated” (56):

> To each *parergon* of *Religion* there is a corresponding damage, a detriment (*Nachteil*) and the four classes of dangers will correspond to the four types of *parergon*: (1) for the would-be internal experience (effects of grace), there is *fanaticism*; (2) for the would-be external experience (miracles), there is *superstition*; (3) for the would-be insight of the understanding into the supernatural order there is *illuminism*; (4) for the would-be actions of the supernatural (means of grace), there is *thaumaturgy*. These four aberrations or seductions of reason nevertheless also have in view a certain pleasing, pleasing-God (*gottgefälliger Absicht*). (56)

As Spivak notes, Kant’s “acknowledgement that reason ‘needs’ the transcendental” (“Terror” 102) leads him to consider how the Enlightenment’s universal secular intellectual might best circumvent this fourfold chain of “damages,” which would (if pursued beyond conscientious limits) preclude or forever mar the supplemental benefits religious practice holds for merely calculative reason.
Ending my explicit deferral of attention to grace, I would suggest here that Kant’s prescribed circumvention of these damages is anything but simple: “in describing how we would philosophize the moral in pure reason,” writes Spivak, Kant urges us literally, to make room for—*einträumen*—the *effects* of grace…Kant’s relentless honesty makes him shackle reason….Even within his brilliantly fractured model of the oneness of reason, Kant spoke of “effect of grace” because he could not imagine a European-style university where the theology faculty was not dominant….“Effect” comes as close as Kant can get to de-transcendentalizing Grace. Grace is caught in the figure of something like a metalepsis—the effect of an effect. Since pure reason—or indeed any kind of reason—cannot know the cause, all that is inscribed is an effect.31 (“Terror” 109)

Maintaining her penchant for suggestive terseness, Spivak again refrains from citing here the text of Kant’s *Religion* while noting how he seeks to outmaneuver the detrimental edges of each theological *parergon*. Again, perusal of Kant’s *Religion* uncovers various footholds for Spivak’s reading, the most succinct of which appears in the “General Observation” Kant appends to Book III, “The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle, and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth.” After considering the epistemic limits that frame such mysteries as atonement, election, and “the divine call (of men, as citizens, to an ethical state),” Kant writes that

> It is as though we wished to *explain* and to *render comprehensible* to ourselves in terms of a man’s freedom what happens to him; on this question God has indeed revealed His will through the moral law in us, but the *causes* due to which a free action on earth occurs or does not occur He has left in that obscurity in which human investigation must leave whatever (as an historical occurrence, though yet springing from freedom) ought to be conceived of according to the laws of cause and effect.32 (135)

31 In *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, William Connolly dovetails with Spivak’s reading of Kant: Kant draws “upon grace to help the will pull itself out of its propensity to evil. It is incorrect (‘from within the limits of reason alone’), Kant insists, to attribute grace dogmatically to God. That would be to pretend to know more about Being in itself…than we can. But we can still ‘hope’ for grace because it is needed to maintain the integrity of morality….Kant cannot follow strictly the Augustinian doctrine of grace, but he cannot remove the will from the province of grace either. So cautious sentences appear. Formulations that at first appear simply as limits upon reason with respect to grace may be read after plumbing the predicament of the Kantian will as solicitation of a hope for grace that stretches beyond the limits of reason alone….The Kantian system is built around human autonomy. Autonomy, though, is now threatened from one side by a deep propensity to evil installed in the will and from another through hope for a grace that helps to elevate the will by compromising its autonomy” (167-68).

32 Kant’s note on this passage condenses the argument at hand: “Hence we understand perfectly well what freedom is, practically (when it is a question of duty), whereas we cannot without contradiction even think of wishing to understand theoretically the causality of freedom (or its nature)” (135). As this note suggests, Kant strategically counterpoises the functions of understanding and theoretical reason. In a preceding note, he expands on their
Freedom, a key term in this passage and throughout Religion (not to mention throughout Kant’s philosophical project as a whole), is to Kantian reason a bifurcated principle, “an attribute of which man becomes aware through the determinability of his will by the unconditional moral law” (129). This attribute is not a mystery, “because the knowledge of it can be *shared* with everyone; but the ground, inscrutable to us, of this attribute is a mystery because this ground is *not given* us as an object of knowledge” (129). For Spivak, Kant’s obfuscation of causality (in its natural, moral, and agential contexts) as that which pure reason most aspires to know both exemplifies and recasts the trope of metalepsis, “the metonymical substitution of one word for another which is itself a metonym” or, more generally, “a succession of figurative substitutions” (OED). To bar the negative influence of the theological *parerga*, Kant in a specific instance of “near-metalepsis” and to the best of his ability defers the intellectual’s grasp of transcendent distinction, arguing that “we can with justice require of every mystery offered for belief that we *understand* what it is supposed to mean; and this does not happen when we merely understand the words by which it is designated *one by one*, i.e., attaching a meaning to each word—rather, these words, taken together in one concept, must admit of another meaning and not, thus taken in conjunction, frustrate all thought. It is unthinkable that God could allow this knowledge to come to us through *inspiration* whenever we on our part wish earnestly for it; for such knowledge cannot inhere in us at all because our understanding is by nature unsuited to it” (135). This argument is a variation on “The Antinomy of Pure Reason,” specifically the “Third Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas,” from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There, Kant negotiates the following antithetic: “Thesis: Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them…Antithesis: There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with the laws of nature” (484-85).

33 Kant here draws an argumentative parallel with the Newtonian physics of his day: “Similarly, the *cause* of the universal gravity of all matter in the world is unknown to us, so much so, indeed, that we can even see that we shall never know it: for the very concept of gravity presupposes a primary motive force unconditionally adhering in it. Yet gravity is no mystery but can be public to all, for its *law* is adequately known. When Newton represents it as similar to divine omnipresence in the [world of] appearance…this is not an attempt to explain it (for the existence of God in space involves a contradiction), but a sublime analogy which has regard solely to the union of corporeal beings within a world-whole, an incorporeal cause being here attributed to this union. The same result would follow upon an attempt to comprehend the self-sufficing principle of the union of rational beings in the world into an ethical state, and to explain this in terms of that principle. All we know is the duty which draws us toward such a union; the possibility of the achievement held in view when we obey that duty lies wholly beyond the limits of our insight” (129-30).

34 Comparing how Derrida and Kant set metalepsis to work, Spivak notes that “Kant’s near-metalepsis of grace still has God in the offing, although Kant is careful to bind this possibility in every way, one of the most important being the discussion of the hypothetical use of reason (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 590–604). Derrida’s argument would be that to locate the effect of grace in texts would not necessarily invoke a causeless cause (Derrida “Différence,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass.
causality—a daring feat which will preserve a certain penumbra of religion within the limits of reason alone by disillusioning those who would eschew the humility of faith to derive epistemic power from speculative metaphysics.\footnote{In \textit{Totality and Infinity}, Levinas writes with lucid consonance on precisely this point: “Knowledge as critique, as a tracing back to what precedes freedom, can only arise in a being that has an origin prior to its origin—that is created…The critical question raised in psychology or in theory of knowledge would amount to asking, for example, from what certain principle cognition is derived, or what is its cause. Infinite regression would here be indeed inevitable, and it is to this sterile course that the proceeding back beneath one’s condition, the power to pose the problem of the foundation, would be reduced. To identify the problem of the foundation with an objective knowledge of knowledge is to suppose in advance that freedom can be founded only on itself, for freedom, the determination of the other by the same, is the very movement of representation and its evidence. To identify the problem of foundation with the knowledge of knowledge is to forget the arbitrariness of freedom, which is precisely what has to be grounded” (85).}

In Kant’s remedial near-metalepsis, then, grace—the “free and unmerited favour of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowing of blessings” (OED)—undergoes strategic de-transcendentalization: it sheds its perilous appeal as a lever to divinity, retains its utility as a \textit{parergon} that supplements reason’s calculative moral laziness, and ensures that the hubris of pure reason is kept at bay. Significantly for Kant, the purpose of de-transcendentalizing grace is not to empower reason as \textit{causa sine qua non} for the secular universal intellectual, a
move likely to yield a theocracy of Reason in which autoimmunity would certainly run amuck. Notwithstanding his racist hierarchy of religious cultures, which must be deconstructed (as Spivak writes, “we must be fair to our debt to Kant and yet must undo him” [107; emphasis added]), Kant’s aim is instead to foreground secularism’s ethical promise: “that all human beings have the same reason and therefore the goal of humanity is collective” (107). In this context, grace is not secularized into or as reason for the aggrandizement of the non- or antireligious intellectual; rather, marking secularism strictly “in the letter” as a set of “abstract reasonable

36 I here rework an imperative from Spivak’s UCSB keynote address, “The Trajectory of the Subaltern in My Work”: “we must nurture the abstract…rather than make a liberation theology of reason…reason is not in fact our master, but the singularity of reason is not something that we should just ignore by saying there are many different kinds of reasons. Reason—the logicality of that structure which is abstract—is contained in fact within all kinds of cultural production which acknowledges alterity…Because of the fetishization of reason as master, we should not think that logic belongs to Europe alone.” See: http://www.uctv.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=8840. Notably, in an interview conducted by Afsaneh Najmabadi in 1991, Spivak finds in secularism’s Christian blueprints a metonymy for reason as master: “I won’t even say I’m secular, for I can’t avoid seeing secularism as laundered Christianity… I see no advantage in repeating the process of laundering a religion in order to produce ethics. I think we should use the idea of secularism as it is available, without fetishizing it” (125).

37 My allusion is to Derrida’s concept of autoimmunity in “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” Echoing W.J.T. Mitchell’s arguments from “Picturing Terror: Derrida’s Autoimmunity,” J. Hillis Miller in “Derrida Enisled” notes that this concept pertains to “a viable community… committed to preserving itself uncontaminated, safe and sound, pure, sequestered, hale and holy, while at the same time inhabited by an irresistible tendency to turn its self-protective mechanisms against itself, to sacrifice itself in an attempt to protect itself against itself and in order to preserve its relation to the holy and to achieve ‘spectral survival’” (271). On this concept, see also Haddad, “A Genealogy of Violence: From Light to the Autoimmune”; Hägglund, Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life; Naas, Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media; and my ensuing chapter on Eliot.

38 Abstract valuations of this collective goal notwithstanding, pragmatic efforts to recover secularism’s ethical promise elicit Spivak’s cautionary sense that “any assertion of the ‘universalism’ of reason-based secularism is suspect,” insofar as it “finesse the fact that such assertions are based on the assumption that the university—the place designated for the training in deep subjective change—is not only an institution of class-mobility, but of a specifically European-style class-mobility” (“Terror” 107). In her otherwise meticulous account of Spivak’s essay, Runions overlooks this caveat on institutional class mobility as it relates to the intellectual, and thus leaves unchecked the disciplinary momentum of secularization that would compel us “to run with the revolutionary force of [Kant’s] word ‘effect,’ clear out of the theological into the aesthetic” (“Terror” 108). As Spivak notes, Kant avowed suspicion of the imagination’s tendency “to shoot too far by emphasizing the task not of reason but of understanding” (109). By suggesting that in Spivak’s analysis, “Religion becomes the aesthetic” (77; emphasis added), Runions risks theologizing the latter and aestheticizing the former. This chiasmus would subtly reintroduce the overwrought teleology of the secularisation thesis, namely, that aesthetics in modernity succeeds an obsolescent theology and, as an often disavowed corollary, inherits the latter’s transcendentalsising, metaphysical baggage. If setting the aesthetic to work hinges, as Runions discerningly suggests, on its capacity to “help with morality (or, for Spivak, the ethical) in a way that is not calculative” (77), then one should first acknowledge with Paul de Man in “Aesthetic Formalization” that the free-wheeling aesthetic is susceptible to dissimulation and epistemic violence. One might then consult scholarship that redeploy the aesthetic (through double binds, checks, and balances) along various ethical-political lines: see Cascardi, Consequences of Enlightenment; Schoolman, Reason and Horror; Gourgouris, Does Literature Think?; Singer, Aesthetic Reason; and Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization.
laws that must be observed to avoid religious violence” (107-108), grace is meticulously de-transcendentalized in order for reason to honor its jurisdictional limits by not mistaking itself (tautologically and auto-immunologically) as its own effective cause.

Kant’s near-metalepsis of grace thus acts as a double parergic safeguard: it is designed to circumvent the fourfold abuse of religion beyond reason’s limits (i.e. fanaticism, superstition, illuminism, thaumaturgy) and to prevent a quasi-Eucharistic apotheosis of reason by its own ineluctable drive for self-(de)regulation. In the latter case, the absence of such a safeguard would invariably tempt reason to figure secularism in epistemic “spirit” rather than apply it vigilantly in pragmatic “letter”; without the careful metalepsis of grace and its causal effects, that is, secularism risks undergoing transfiguration from sensible “bread/wine” into transcendent “flesh/blood,” a risk that may render it as dogmatically metaphysical as the religious orthodoxies it seeks to privatize/secularize out of existence. As William Connolly notes, academics exemplify the vanguard of today’s “card-carrying secularists” (30). If, as Spivak suggests, the class production of such “sanitized secularists” enables them/us “to rationalize and privatize the transcendental” in a way that estranges them/us from the multitudes who are “without historical preparation for this particular class-episteme” (102), then rethinking the office of the intellectual through Kant’s parergic safeguards remains a deeply fraught task. Indeed, given the influence of post-Kantian, specifically Hegelian, philosophy on the institutional course of epistemic secularism, this task may seem next to impossible. As Achille Mbembe observes, resilient currents in post-Kantian Idealism have predisposed intellectuals to believe that in order to lead a happy life, we needed not be religious. Reason—the supreme form of sovereignty—was enough...we were told that the fundamental unhappiness in the human condition stemmed from the lack of realization by the human being of his or her divinity. Hegel...in particular posed the question of our unhappiness in the philosophical language of estrangement and in the Christological language of crucifixion. He argued that we were unhappy not because we believed in God, but
because in our imperfection, our flaws, we had failed to realize that we are God and God is reason. We were alienated because we had been cut off from the crucial knowledge that we, God, and Reason were one; that only we (the human) can create, and continue to empower, the universe...This story permeates Western metaphysics, and we find it repeated again and again under various guises. 39 (Spivak “Religion” 155-56)

Whereas for Kant mere reason respects a secular limit that maintains the theological as a form of alterity not to be translated into or as reason, for Hegel mere reason finds itself ballooned into Reason through the grand vistas of Idealism, the critique of which (across modernity’s ever-deepening shadow) should remain a primary labour for deconstruction. 40 In the contemporary university, the unchecked shift from late-Kantian secularism “in the letter” to post-Hegelian secularism “in the spirit” affords discipline’s irreligious limit an imperializing—indeed, a virtually unlimited—scope. For, if reason at its most theoretical is apotheosized in(to) secularism, then the purviews of both knowledge and understanding are for secularists no longer subject to an ethics of alterity that might best underwrite epistemology and compel the intellectual to consider that which cannot (or at least should not) be discursively expropriated or effaced.

39 Though Mbembe does not cite Hegel, his argument resonates with Frederick Beiser’s chapter on “Absolute Idealism,” wherein we cruise Hegel’s metonymic link between reason and God: “In his Differenschrift he states that the task of philosophy is to know the absolute (II, 25/93). In his Encyclopedia he declares that the subject matter of philosophy is God and God alone (VIII, 41, 1). And in his lectures on the philosophy of religion he affirms that philosophy and religion share one and the same object: the absolute or God (VPR 1, 33/1 116). He even equates philosophy with theology, describing philosophy as a form of worship since it is devoted to a proof of God’s existence and a determination of his nature (VPR 1, 3/1, 84). Since Hegel thinks that philosophy attempts to know God through reason, and since he understands God to be infinite or unconditioned, it follows that his philosophy is a metaphysics, and indeed in roughly the Kantian sense: for it attempts to acquire knowledge of the unconditioned through pure reason” (54-55). In Hegel’s system, reason folds into the very position Kant sought to avoid: Hegelian reason mistakes itself as its own absolute cause (rather than as effect of an effect), a corollary of which transfigures secularism from reasonable letter to epistemic spirit. On Hegelian reason and its vicissitudes in relation to Kant, see Habermas, “From Kant to Hegel and Back Again—The Move Towards Detranscendentalization.”

40 Consider Derrida’s brief yet revealing parenthetical remark in “Tympan”: “Under what conditions, then, could one mark, for a philosopheme in general, a limit, a margin that it could not infinitely reappropriate, conceive as its own, in advance engendering and internalizing the process of its expropriation (Hegel again, always), proceeding to its inversion by itself?” (Margins xv). Before Derrida, of course, the critique of Hegelian Reason reached a fulcrum with Kierkegaard, whose Fear and Trembling recasts existential responsibility by entertaining the paradox that, in making “the leap of faith,” the individual is higher than the universal. Kierkegaard seeks to rescue faith from Hegelian illusions that it can, should, and must be mediated, superseded, or sublated en route to knowledge. I have recourse briefly to Kierkegaard’s critique later in this chapter and at greater length in my reading of Auden’s poetry.
To pursue this tension between reasonable letter and epistemic spirit theo-critically and thereby consider, on behalf of today’s secular universal intellectual, the viability and importance of Kant’s regulatory parergic safeguards, I now juxtapose my critiques of Marcella Althaus-Reid’s *The Queer God* and Michael Snediker’s *Queer Optimism*, scholarly works of theology and theory (respectively) whose divergences and unexpected alignments highlight the interventionist stakes of *Dissident Secularism* for queer literary and cultural criticism.

**“Radically Outside”? Re-signification and Ideology Critique in *The Queer God***

In *The Queer God*, Marcella Althaus-Reid identifies tensions between heterodox passions and hetero-normative cultures as grounds for struggle in the contemporary politics of sexuality. These tensions, in all of their religious and sociopolitical contexts, are the focus for Althaus-Reid’s project of theological reconstruction. The avowed aim of *The Queer God* is to renegotiate, as provocatively as possible, the status of discourses separated by lines of Church and State. In large part, *The Queer God* works to dismantle these borders by showing how they adhere to “the role of ideological fictions” (130) and by illustrating the queer malleability of religious symbols, exegetical techniques, doctrinal referents, and heterosexual subjects/texts.

Essentially, Althaus-Reid’s methodology is comparative: she often juxtaposes and aims to synthesize doctrinal and biblical works with readings of desire, agency, and subjectivity in secular literature. This attempt to rework the borderlines and contents of both hetero- and queer religiosities underscores the centrality of literary imagination in Althaus-Reid’s reconstructions. Notwithstanding the importance of Althaus-Reid’s affirmation of the integrity of queer theology, some questionable assumptions underlie her method of re-territorialization; specifically, the extent to which Althaus-Reid’s critique of ideology and strategies of re-signification operate beyond or “outside” of heterosexual theology is debatable. Indeed, theories of subjection that
inform Althaus-Reid’s work suggest that her claims to ideological difference should be read with caution.

Althaus-Reid justifies her cross-referencing of theological and literary materials at multiple points throughout *The Queer God*. A philosophical reflection on this method appears in chapter seven, “Popular Anti-Theologies of Love.” Here, Althaus-Reid considers the analogy between literature and theology in terms of “critical realism”: both disciplines “speak truth and lies at the same time” (130). More specifically, while “literature expresses and re-discovers truth which could not be expressed in real life,” theology “aims to lie in the sense that its mission is to express the inexpressible” (130). With its emphasis on kinds of utterance that relate language to the ineffable, this formulation qualifies imagination, within the literary-theological continuum, as that which metaeleptically registers something of the transcendental in experience.

According to the prerogatives that Althaus-Reid establishes for queer theology, embodiment and the experiences it enables are not granted second- or third-class status: “located desire, that is, pleasure” (19), and thus the materiality of the body and of embodied experience, afford the groundwork for queer-theological inquiry. The primacy that queer theology assigns to mortal, erotic bodies\(^{41}\) facilitates Althaus-Reid’s use of the Marquis de Sade’s “texts on imagined orgies,” which function “in strict accordance with a debasement of class and social order made of bodies stretching themselves inside and outside the constraints of totality and hegemony” (25). As literary touchstones for *The Queer God’s* reconstructions, Sade’s scenes of transgression suture Althaus-Reid’s affirmative readings of those sexualities excluded from mainstream theologies of salvation. Accordingly, because “the non-heterosexual people of God” are presumed to hold a position “outside the boundaries of heterosexual ideology,” their theological

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\(^{41}\) Althaus-Reid notes that “theological bodies have usually been bodies without flesh, without bones or brains, bodies without nervous systems or blood—and, we may add, bodies without menstruation or sweat or without malnutrition and bodies without sexual relationships” (114).
insights should be of strong, resilient, and particular value\(^2\) (61). An exile of this kind is, for Althaus-Reid, “infinite although not alienating” (19). Moreover, and with much conviction, Althaus-Reid argues that such exclusion should not be interpreted “as a category lacking (settlement, or a going back home, for instance) but as a place to be in itself” (21).

To engage the biblical narrative of the destruction of Sodom in terms of Sade’s disruptive, unruly psychosexualities, Althaus-Reid draws upon Gilles Deleuze’s praxes of de- and re-territorialization—respectively, “the notion of abstracting from an original context, as for instance in moving out of an original context which has impeded not only the formation of new understandings but the creation of new links or connections among ideas” and the “act of making new connections or re-codings of reality once an original context has been superseded (although not necessarily obliterated)” (60). A challenging instance of this dislocation and intermingling of contents from (ostensibly disparate) contexts appears in chapter five, “Permutations,” where Althaus-Reid tackles the knotty issue of condemnation and culpability in the story of Lot by reading the Sodomites as participants in “a rebellious movement directed against a hegemonic theodicy” (90). “At the level of a superficial heterosexually centered reading,” she argues,

the Sodomite culture is inhospitable. From a Sadean perspective, it is Lot’s culture which lacks hospitality. Lot’s God is then the one who cannot accept the menace of heterogeneity and transgressive productions in its midst and who therefore closes the doors of the house of hospitality. There is no point denying the fact that this text is saturated with violence. Men from Sodom against these particular visitors; a father against his own daughters, and God against almost everybody and everything, threatening to destroy people and environment alike. The issue of violence in this text is regrettable but that includes God’s violence too. (91-2)

Quite problematically, Althaus-Reid does not discuss the coercive implications of the Sodomites’ imperative to “bring them [the two men/angels] unto us” (Genesis 19:5)—except to say, rather

\(^{2}\) Maxim number 129 from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* suitably allegorizes this point: “The devil has the widest perspectives for God, and that is why he keeps so far away from him—the devil being the oldest friend of knowledge” (99).
dismissively, that “threats of violence against the messengers of Lot’s God are not relevant”⁴³ (92). She does, however, suggest that “evil gestures,” specifically “the gesture of the destruction of the sexual culture of the Other,” are rooted squarely in “Lot’s God”:

not a single ‘good’ (that means ‘same’) person could be found by the monotonous, mono-loving God of destruction. In Sodom, they were all different. The destruction of Sodom functions then as a colonially minded epoee of annihilation in which everything needs to be destroyed in order to start a new (although ‘same’) genesis….Who then has expropriated life and who owns the sign of the Sadean gesture of destruction which heralds the incessant beginning of Sadean scenes? The God of Lot…Lot’s culture took over diversity, took over a nation of different good and bad people who could be, if not entirely peaceful, at least less violent than Lot’s God. (92)

While this revisionist critique is compelling for its aims of subverting hegemonic exegesis and trans-valuing scripture, its core premises—that Sadean, libertine bodies can override “the constraints of totality and hegemony” (25) and “ruin the law” by pursuing a transcendent justice beyond binary logic⁴⁴ (27)—merit querying.

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⁴³ For Althaus-Reid, exegetes of Genesis 19: 1-14 who read the implicit threat to rape Lot’s companions as a justifiable basis for the destruction of Sodom betray a gendered double-standard: “as if the rape of Dinah or Tamar could have made of heterosexuality an execrable (hetero)sexual identity, calling for God’s destruction of whole populations” (85). This is an excellent point, but Althaus-Reid neglects to consider the tripartite difference at hand: in Lot’s story, we are not limited to two genders, but must also contend with a third “gender” belonging to the angels with whom Lot is traveling. Strictly within the protocol of the text (i.e. the politics of alterity in the Hebrew Scriptures), the threat to rape angels may for the Lord weigh in as a heavier offense than the threat of male homosexual rape. However, even with this scholastic (nearly Aquinian) qualification in mind, the destruction of Sodom remains a conundrum for ethics-based queer hermeneutics.

⁴⁴ These premises uncover The Queer God’s blueprint for theological hermeneutics. Althaus-Reid’s will to subvert the binary logic characteristic of hetero-normative theologies draws her to “the libertine body as presented in Sadean literature as a hermeneutic circle…. The politics of sexual representation in Sade do not reflect any heterosexual norm; people’s affective contexts are homosexual, bisexual, lesbian relations, and generally incestuous. In the libertine narrative, and in the libertine body, binarism does not exist….To disengage ourselves theologically from binarism, there are more options than simply lesbian and gay theology. Queer Theology is a broader category whose permanent intent is instability and as libertine in a Sadean scene, its aim is not to reflect any normative project while allowing a creative process made of the interactions of different orders to happen” (26-27). Althaus-Reid’s turn to justice leads her to consider Derrida’s essay, “The Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundations of Authority’”: “there is no possibility of justice in love,” she notes, “unless law is transgressed. This is…Derrida’s argument in relation to the deconstruction of law, but not of justice and their mutual relationship which is based precisely in the destabilization of one of them, in this case the law. This comes about because laws are replaceable and the justice discourse depends on this deconstruction so that it is not subject to the fixity of laws. So Derrida says, ‘without a call for justice, we would not have any interests in deconstructing the law’….Disruption then, fulfills the law…. Queering is also the art of deconstructing laws in search of justice, an art which comes from experiences of love at the margins of the lawful or, to use Christian terms, outside the redeemable” (78).
One might ask, for instance, if redeploying the theologically-laden concept of evil (which recycles a normatively polarized system of morality stemming from hetero-theology) and ascribing it to Lot’s God succeeds in deconstructing, undoing, or surpassing the stated problem of binarism. Given that Althaus-Reid circumvents discussion of the Sodomites’ sexually coercive intentions (see footnote 43), this question seems doubly pertinent. In this instance, at least, the dualist machinery of straight religious ideology does not appear to be scrupulously dismantled; rather, in Althaus-Reid’s reading, the structure of moral understanding is inverted, rather than rigorously subverted, to indict hetero-normative theology through the same binary that it applies continuously to punish sexual others. Parsing the genesis of hetero-theology’s dyadic moral allegory would by no means instantly exonerate Lot’s God (whose wholesale destruction of Sodom represents in any case an irrevocable offense); instead, it would up the hermeneutic ante by signaling queer theology’s potential for complicity in the very circuits of logic, allegory, and argumentation that are rightly subject to critique.

Ultimately, insofar as Althaus-Reid’s architecture for queer theology is concerned, redeploying this moral dyad without the consistent gauge of deconstruction is only minimally effective, precisely because the ideological and indeed (to allude again to Derrida’s essay “Faith and Knowledge”) auto-immunological genesis of good and evil in hetero- and queer theology is left unexamined. In this framework, a further pressing question for queer theologians and their

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45 Here, Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* is an inevitable touchstone. One should ask, for instance, how Althaus-Reid’s analysis squares up against Nietzsche’s etiological understanding of good and evil in terms of a slave morality that is, in his estimation, “essentially the morality of utility”: “Here is the source of the famous antithesis ‘good’ and ‘evil’ – power and danger were felt to exist in evil, a certain dreadfulness, subtlety and strength which could not admit of contempt. Thus, according to slave morality the ‘evil’ inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely the ‘good’ who inspire fear and want to inspire it, while the ‘bad’ man is judged contemptible. The antithesis reaches its height when, consistently with slave morality, a breath of disdain finally also comes to be attached to the ‘good’ of this morality – it may be a slight and benevolent disdain – because within the slaves’ way of thinking the good man has in any event to be a harmless man: he is good-natured, easy to deceive, perhaps a bit stupid, *un bonhomme*. Whenever the slave morality comes to predominate, language exhibits a tendency to bring the words ‘good’ and ‘stupid’ closer to each other” (197).
revisionist hermeneutics is whether an extrinsic critique, from a proverbial “outside,” is truly achievable if basic structures of valuation and signification that have governed (here, Jewish and/or Christian) theology are not scrutinized. Given Althaus-Reid’s sense that progressive theologies should intuit a “Queer Bible” whose textuality would liberate exegeses from viewing scripture “as a collection of ‘originals’” by vouchsafing sacred works as “non-essentials independent of the original matrix” of heteronormativity (79), this quandary of unacknowledged (because undesired) systemic repetition warrants further attention.

It is important to recall that Althaus-Reid turns to Deleuze while generating her queer-theological protocols for razing the discourse, system, and law of hetero-theology. Referencing Deleuze’s *Sacher Masoch and Sade*, Althaus-Reid argues that Sadean philosophy reflects

> the magnitude of the oppression of the law by portraying the magnitude of the transgression necessary to eliminate it. It is precisely the imposing magnitude of the force of the law which keeps Sade attempting in vain to perform the ultimate, definitive transgression which will put an end to the moral legitimacy of a tyrant God and a tyrant state. As Deleuze points out, without this understanding we cannot comprehend the principle of the Sadean negation, which is the process of total destruction and disorder necessary to start a new order….to destroy the law (in this Queer search for Sadean justice, where law and justice are somehow indistinguishable) Sade needs to go radically outside the nature of the law and that leads him to the path of ‘absolute’ transgression. The point for us is to reflect theologically on how *Queer* represents precisely the transgression of the law and how this is related to holiness…Queer holiness does not live in the shadow of the law, but on the contrary, is independent of it…Queer holiness is based upon the ultimate negation of heterosexual thought (and its vast implications). (169-70; emphasis added)

As this concluding passage from *The Queer God* illustrates, Althaus-Reid predicates her understanding of both queer theology and queerness on an *absolute negative* transgression of hetero-hegemonies ranging from law and straight-laced renderings of sanctity to “heterosexual thought” writ large. Cast in (alternately potent and alluring) terms of “destruction,” “independence,” and “negation,” Althaus-Reid’s vision of queerness’s discursive tasks appears at once to resolve and to redirect Butler’s sense of “queer” as a site of “collective contestation” for
those under its purview (*Bodies* 230). Althaus-Reid, that is, fully exteriorizes queerness’s drive for (internal) deconstruction, concretizes “queer” (which “represents precisely the transgression of the law”), and consolidates its divisive energies in order to focus them entirely on dismantling hetero-normative systems. In the momentum of this consolidation, “queer” stands in unflinching, monolithic, and even transcendental opposition to normativity (with the possible exception that queerness is always normatively counter-normative).

The overwhelming scope of agency (both theological and sociopolitical) Althaus-Reid affords the subject of queer theology should elicit wariness, in part because she does not approach queerness through the kinds of Kantian checks and balances that might prevent it from becoming either a transcendental signification or a recalcitrant identity politics. Arguably, her (over)estimation of queerness’s facility with transgression represents, in theological context, what Amanda Anderson calls “temptations of aggrandized agency” that typify many poststructuralist forays into feminist, queer, and gender analysis. Anderson is primarily concerned with how such aggrandizement manifests in Victorian literary and cultural criticism, but her argument’s perspicacity extends well beyond the borders of scholarship devoted to nineteenth-century England. In *The Queer God*, for instance, Althaus-Reid appears to predicate her notion of queer theology upon a set of assumptions that reinforce what Anderson terms

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Admittedly, I am as before “outsourcing” an argument generated in a discrete scholarly field, in order to facilitate my own critique. To represent Anderson’s article in its own right (prior to de-/re-contextualization), I offer the following précis. Focusing on influential studies of Victorian literature and culture by Nancy Armstrong, Mary Poovey, and Elizabeth Langland, Anderson contends that many feminist theorizations of gender and power, which combine “a nuanced social constructionism with a distinctive enlargement of feminine efficacy,” exhibit “points of symptomatic strain”: “there frequently appears within these accounts a privileged and anomalous figure or two who are granted deeper insight into the workings of power, and who seem not simply to instantiate modern power but to manipulate if not inaugurate it” (50). As an example, Anderson cites “Armstrong’s treatment of the Brontës, who hold the dubious honor of ‘establishing a tradition of reading that would universalize modern desire in order to implant it within every individual as the very thing that makes him or her human’” (50). For Anderson, “particularly strong claims about the subject-constituting effects of modern power or cultural capital virtually invite symptomatic excesses in the work of critics simultaneously committed to the critical and transformative potential of feminist and materialist traditions. Less wild swings occur in feminist histories with more modest, and more tempered, approaches to the question of power and agency” (52).
“critical detachment”—an ethos of analysis “implicitly celebrated as a negative freedom that permits parodic performance or the exposure of constructed identities” while operating “through a logic of exceptionalism similar to the one that characterizes work on gender and modernity” (“Temptations” 44).

Feminist critics, Anderson suggests, have been particularly quick to aggrandize “portraits of historically situated subjects, which sit uneasily next to other figurations of women as unreflectively coextensive with forms of power” (52). While Althaus-Reid’s effort to grant the Sodomites ethical legitimacy may seem consonant with the “hagiographic recovery work” that Anderson finds in much feminist literary criticism, I discern subtler links between their respective theological and literary-historical desires for “a detached understanding” of the ideologies they wish to transcend (52). “Through figures such as [Florence] Nightingale,” Anderson argues, “critics awkwardly displace an anxiety in their own self-conceptions, awarding the valorized individual a detached understanding of the very ideological formations that they otherwise imply operate unreflectively through historical subjects” (52). In The Queer God, I would argue, a similar displacement of anxiety for detachment is at work, but one which proceeds from queer theologian to queer-theological figure, rather than from feminist critic to (historical or literary) female character. An intrepidly negative concept of freedom that mirrors Anderson’s account of idealized extrications from ideology in feminist criticism underwrites Althaus-Reid’s sense that her hermeneutic transgresses—indeed, negates—hetero-normative thinking en masse. As Anderson notes, this species of professed objectivity reflects “the marriage of auteur-theory and constructionism in much recent poststructuralist theory, where manipulative detachment by otherwise constrained subjects rather capriciously appears” (52).
Needless to say, Althaus-Reid’s characterization of her argument as fundamentally extricated from the ideology she critiques places great expectations on *The Queer God*. Critiques that avow radical forms of detachment but that fold repeatedly into positions of unacknowledged complicity cannot achieve the “absolute transgression” to which they aspire (of course, any claim to the *absoluteness* of transgression is surely aggrandized in its own right). I have already suggested that Althaus-Reid’s allegorical reenactment of binary morality in her exegesis of Genesis 19: 1-14 amounts to a project of reverse accusation (e.g. “we—the formerly wicked and now the righteous—stand apart from you—the formerly righteous and now the wicked”), which clandestinely retains rather than transgresses and negates the hetero-hegemony in question. How is critique expected to proceed from such a point? Popular political slogans that engage this ultimately relativistic and inverse rhetoric of good and evil, such as “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter,” exemplify the impasse of interests to which such thinking gives rise. This stalemate impacts Althaus-Reid’s otherwise stimulating praxis of de-/re-territorializing discourses partitioned across the thresholds of the secular and the religious.

Furthermore, by situating myriad forms of queerness and their theological insights “outside the boundaries of heterosexual ideology” (61), Althaus-Reid virtually essentializes her critique. In *The Queer God*, bisexuals, gay men, lesbians, transgendered people, and other queer folk are granted a *singular* position of ideological difference set monolithically against hetero-theology. Althaus-Reid neglects to query the (by turns) differential, relational, affective, and inter-subjective content of this singularized ideological difference. In the aftermath of this singularity, multiple questions arise. Is ideological difference reducible to or defined by forms of sexual interaction and orientation that do not align with straight intercourse (which might also, in some non-vanilla instances at least, be rather queer…)? What might ideologically traverse
divisions of sexual practice? If ideologies and their theologies are distinguished across a normative center and various, ostensibly united margins, then how are lifestyle desires such as monogamy, which traditionally has been codified in the heterosexual institution of marriage, to be understood in queer context? Is straight monogamy ideologically distinguishable from LGBT monogamy, solely because the latter has historically not been recognized by the state? Is monogamy itself an ideological bond between those who desire it at the center and those desiring it within margins—and moreover, a bond that narrows claims to ideological difference? Do anatomy and its eroticisms (which are for Althaus-Reid bound up, as epicenters of “located desire” or “pleasure” [19], with the drive of queer theology) determine ideology? Such questions and their according range of answers uncover Althaus-Reid’s presuppositions as to how radical, extrinsic, or detached a queer critique of ideology may (or may not) be. Heterosexuality may be “produced by an alignment of elements such as dualist thinking, hierarchisation and colonial processes of displacement localized in different spaces, such as those of sacred and civil society” (91), but it seems that Althaus-Reid, through her reconstructive program for queer theology, is bound to reproduce some of the very disagreeable tenets she seeks to dash.

Given the unchecked circuit between professed transgression and unwitting repetition in *The Queer God*, it may be useful to foreground Butler’s perspectives on “Subjection, Resistance, and Re-signification between Freud and Foucault” in *The Psychic Life of Power*, a work which speaks to Althaus-Reid’s ideals of extrinsic ideology critique. Focusing on a key passage from *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, in which Foucault argues that “there is no single locus of great Refusal…or pure law of the revolutionary,” Butler discerns that

Foucault formulates resistance as an effect of the very power that it is said to oppose. This insistence on the dual possibility of being both *constituted* by the law and *an effect of resistance* to the law…initiates a shift from a discourse on law, conceived as juridical (and presupposing a subject subordinated by power), to a discourse on power, which is a
field of productive, regulatory, and contestatory relations….Moreover, in its resignifications, the law itself is transmuted into that which opposes and exceeds its original purposes. In this sense, disciplinary discourse does not unilaterally constitute a subject in Foucault, or rather, if it does, it simultaneously constitutes the condition for the subject’s de-constitution. (98-9)

Butler uncovers in Foucault’s theory of subjection an agile paradox which, when juxtaposed with discourses of absolute negative transgression in *The Queer God*, sets into relief Althaus-Reid’s overstated claims for queer-theological agency. Harboring what seems tantamount to an impossible “pure law of the revolutionary,” Althaus-Reid understands agency as radically independent of systemic power and according vectors which, for Foucault and Butler at least, remain imbricated ideologically across forms of resistance. In other words, to claim transcendence Althaus-Reid forgoes the challenge of thinking through the ground of complicity.

The paradoxical kernel of subjection that underwrites Foucault’s work extends to *Dissident Secularism* a sort of cautionary leverage on the subject of ideology and on the resilient allure of transcendence: For subjects originally constituted by secularist or religious ideologies that they wish to dismantle and overcome, a pure, extrinsic, or untainted critique (or de-/re-territorialization) is not feasible. As analysis of *The Queer God* illustrates, a degree of repetition or carryover from the dominant ideological position to the margin is to a marked extent unavoidable. On this score, Butler, refashioning Foucault, asks a stirring question which informs the interests of *Dissident Secularism* as it shifts its critical focus from work in queer theology to work in queer theory: “the law turns against itself and spawns versions of itself which oppose and proliferate its animating purposes. The strategic question for Foucault is, then, how can we work the power relations by which we are worked, and in what direction?” (100).
“Chronic”/“Beyond Question”/Beyond Queering:

On the Faithful Pathogen of Queer Optimism

In Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions, Michael Snediker develops a resolutely aesthetic response to forms of critical “pessimism” that have emerged through wider debates on queer theory’s “antisocial thesis,” whose sinuous discourses on negativity have functioned in recent decades as enticing conduits for much queer theorizing in literary, cultural, and political studies. Formulated in 1995 through the publication of Leo Bersani’s Homos, queer theory’s antisocial thesis hinges on various implications of Bersani’s provocative question, “Should a homosexual be a good citizen?”\(^47\) Bersani’s question registers his unease with the effects of cultural normalization and commercial mainstreaming on queer communities and selves across North American urban centers. Imperiled by the reifying ends of certain fin-de-siècle consumerist snares and other trappings linked to assimilationist marketing of queer subcultures, collectivist political agendas for queerness began to splinter, to dissolve, and to reemerge in more “agreeable” representational modes as quests for gay marriage legislation and same-sex parenting rights became galvanized as nodes of activism.\(^48\) In this trajectory, Bersani answers his own question by recognizing as inevitable the displacement of a certain purposefully contrarian or dissident queerness from the sphere of activist politics and from the field of institutionalized theory.\(^49\) He argues that, in the context of high theory and on

\(^{47}\) Following up this question, Bersani writes that “It would difficult to imagine a less gay-affirmative question at a time when gay men and lesbians have been strenuously trying to persuade straight society that they can be good parents, good soldiers, good priests. Though I find none of these options particularly stimulating, we should certainly defend people’s rights to serve whatever worthy or unworthy cause inspires them. And yet, given the rage for respectability so visible in gay life today, some useful friction—and as a result some useful thought—may be created by questioning the compatibility of homosexuality with civic service” (113).


\(^{49}\) Bersani reveals the stakes of his argument when he pinpoints gross deficiencies in both essentialist and constructivist paradigms of LGBT work: “since we have all known men who lust for other men while otherwise feeling quite comfortable with ‘regimes of the normal,’ is queer now to be taken as delineating political rather than
ideal political grounds that would generate circumstances apposite to a flourishing of queerness in its own terms, homosexuality is best suited not to the pursuit of coherent relations with community, but rather to the eschewal of any such relations (76); and thus, to an ethos of antisociality (however dismissive, negligent, or ethically irresponsible such a position may appear to most well-intentioned, liberal-minded proponents of multiculturalism and its vicissitudes).

Inciting more than a decade of vigorous discussion, Homos serves as the epicenter for two generalizable camps of rival theorists, both of which find succinct representation in a 2005 MLA conference debate on “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory.” Nominally and in rather oversimplified terms, contemporary queer theorists may be said to cluster (however loosely) either as proponents of optimistic/positive/sociable/utopian criticism or as proponents of pessimistic/negative/antisocial/dystopian criticism. For the latter group, of course, Bersani’s arguments remain more or less theoretically useful. In the MLA’s 2005 conference debate, which merits synopsis here for its contextual pertinence to Snediker’s Queer Optimism, José Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean avow positions roughly tethered to the former camp. For Muñoz, whose arguments in “Thinking beyond Antirelationality and Antiutopianism in Queer Critique” anticipate his recent study Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (2009), “denouncing relationality first and foremost distances queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as contamination by race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of

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erotic tendencies? No longer would a boy discover that, whether he likes it or not, he is queer; indeed, all of us—even after decades of what we thought of as extravagant sexual confirmation of our queerness—would have to earn the right to that designation and to the dignity it now confers….While conceived as an act of resistance to homophobic oppression, the project of elaborating a gay identity could itself be discredited. For hasn’t that identity been exclusionary, delineating what is easily recognizable as a white, middle-class, liberal gay identity? And wasn’t this delineating act itself a sign, or rather an intellectual symptom, of the very class it described?…And yet, if these suspicions of identity are necessary, they are not necessarily liberating. Gay men and lesbians have nearly disappeared into their sophisticated awareness of how they have been constructed as gay men and lesbians. The discrediting of a specific gay identity (and the correlative distrust of etiological investigations into homosexuality) has had the curious but predictable result of eliminating the indispensable grounds for resistance to, precisely, hegemonic regimes of the normal. We have erased ourselves in the process of denaturalizing the epistemic and political regimes that have constructed us” (2-4).
sexuality as a singular trope of difference”; because it ultimately eschews queerness’s imbrications across social fields, the antirelational model represents in Muñoz’s view “the gay white man’s last stand” (“Antisocial” 825). Shifting gears, Muñoz argues “for replacing a faltering antirelational mode of queer theory with a queer utopianism,” which by reinvesting in social theory would critique “the ontological certitude” that attends the “stultifying temporal logic” of queerness’s “broken-down present” (825-26).

For his part, Dean, in a contribution titled “The Antisocial Homosexual,” contends that the thesis in question harbors an etiology that would ultimately situate its advocates beyond the horizons of queer theory proper:50 insofar as it champions homosexuality for “threatening” the social order and because it renders queerness “strategic politically to exploit,” the antisocial thesis would seem to originate in “right-wing fantasies about how ‘the homosexual agenda’ undermines the social fabric”51 (826). Those wishing to retain the antisocial thesis, Dean suggests, should at least ensure that it is “vigorously argued” in ways specific to queer theory and politics, “in order to grasp how beyond the normative coordinates of selfhood lies an orgy of connection that no regime can regulate” (827-28). Against a fractious queer negativity bent on

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50 Notably, to pinpoint a textual wellspring for the antisocial thesis in Bersani’s oeuvre, Dean foregrounds a controversial statement in the famous essay, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” which precedes *Homo* in the Bersanian corpus: “it is perhaps necessary,” writes Bersani, “to accept the pain of embracing, at least provisionally, a homophobic representation of homosexuality” (qtd. in Dean 826). In queer studies at large, however, Dean uncovers a root for the antisocial thesis not in Bersani’s texts, but rather in Guy Hocquenghem’s 1972 work, *Homosexual Desire*, whose eponymous subject is said to shatter “the imaginary identities through which we recognize ourselves and others” (827).

51 This contentious link between the antisocial thesis and conservative, rightwing conceptions of queerness is not lost upon negativists theorizing in stride with Bersani. For instance, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, a work central to the MLA conference debate and one to which I will attend at greater length, Lee Edelman deploys the link in question: “For the only queerness that queer sexualities could ever hope to signify would spring from their determined opposition to this underlying structure of the political—their opposition, that is, to the governing fantasy of achieving Symbolic closure through the marriage of identity to futurity in order to realize the social subject. Conservatives acknowledge this radical potential, which is also to say, this radical threat, of queerness more fully than liberals, for conservatism preemptively imagines the wholesale rupturing of the social fabric, whereas liberalism conservatively clings to a faith in its limitless elasticity. The discourse of the right thus tends toward a greater awareness of, and insistence on, the literalization of the figural logics that various social subjects are made to inhabit and enact, the logics that, from a ‘rational’ viewpoint, reduce individual identity to stereotypical genericity…The right, that is, better sees the inherently conflictual aspect of identities, the constant danger they face in alterity, the psychic anxiety with which they are lived” (13-14).
short-circuiting the social without much of a plan for reconstruction, Dean advocates Deleuze’s notion of \textit{becoming}, “a ceaseless movement of being that is not coordinated by teleology” and which thus may inspire “new ways of being together” grounded neither in “imaginary identity” nor in struggles for “intersubjective recognition” (827).

At the other end of this MLA debate are Judith Halberstam and Lee Edelman, both of whom rework the antisocial thesis in ways that epitomize the discourse, ethos, and drive of queer negativity. In her reflections on “The Politics of Negativity in Recent Queer Theory,” for instance, Halberstam valorizes the political potential of recent surges in queer antirelationality, finding therein “a compelling argument against a United States imperialist project of hope and one of the most powerful statements of queer studies’ contribution to an anti-imperialist, queer counterhegemonic imaginary” (823-24). Yet, in Halberstam’s view, this potential has largely been streamlined through a “gay male archive,” a “select group of queer aesthetes and camp icons and texts,” which capitalizes on a restricted circuit of affects such as “fatigue, ennui, boredom, indifference, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, insincerity, and camp” (824). Halberstam calls on queer negativists to extend their analyses to other “affectivities associated, again, with another kind of politics,” whose brazen exponents include “rage, rudeness, anger, spite, impatience, intensity, mania, sincerity, earnestness, overinvestment, incivility, and brutal honesty” (824).

As Halberstam intimates, such severe affects find a theoretical template, if not also a conceptual outlet, through the polemical criticism of her negativist colleague-in-arms, Lee Edelman. While in many ways capitulating to the gay male archive that Halberstam delineates, Edelman’s fervently-debated \textit{No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive} hones a nevertheless captivating
rejection of futurity as the meaning of queer critique and links queer theory to the death drive in order to propose a relentless form of negativity in place of the forward-looking, reproductive, and heteronormative politics of hope that animates all too many political projects. The queer subject, he argues, has been bound epistemologically to negativity, to nonsense, to antiproduction, to unintelligibility, and—instead of fighting this characterization by dragging queerness into recognition—he proposes that we embrace the negativity that we, as queer subjects, structurally represent. Edelman’s polemic about futurity ascribes to queerness the function of the limit; while the heteronormative political imagination propels itself forward in time and space through the indisputably positive image of the child, and while it projects itself back on the past through the dignified image of the parent, the queer subject stands between heterosexual optimism and its realization. (Halberstam 823)

In his contribution to the MLA debate, titled “Antagonism, Negativity, and the Subject of Queer Theory,” Edelman elaborates on Halberstam’s précis of his work, noting that the provocation to which No Future is committed banks on “queer negativity’s refusal of positive identity through a drivelike resistance to the violence, the originary violation, effected, as Adorno writes [in Negative Dialectics], by ‘the all-subjugating identity principle’” (822). Articulating this refusal through the verve of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which refines No Future’s polemic by furnishing an allegory of subjection and disruption, Edelman fashions a metonymic link between the death drive and jouissance that culminates for him in a strident political figuration of queerness:

In a political field whose limit and horizon is reproductive futurism, queerness embodies this death drive, this intransient jouissance, by figuring sexuality’s implication in the senseless pulsations of that drive. De-idealizing the metaphorics of meaning on which heteroreproduction takes its stand, queerness exposes sexuality’s inevitable coloration by the drive: its insistence on repetition, its stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to

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52 The following passage from No Future shows how Edelman redeploy Lacanian psychoanalysis allegorically in an effort to puncture the hetero-hegemony of the Symbolic: “Where futurism always anticipates, in the image of an Imaginary past, a realization of meaning that will suture identity by closing that gap, queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects, insisting on the Real of a jouissance that social reality and the futurism on which it relies have already foreclosed. Queerness, therefore, is never a matter of being or becoming but, rather, of embodying the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order. One name for this unnameable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is jouissance, sometimes translated as ‘enjoyment’: a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law…undoing the consistency of a social reality that relies on Imaginary identifications, on the structures of Symbolic law, and on the paternal metaphor of the name…to the extent that it tears the fabric of Symbolic reality as we know it, unraveling the solidity of every object, including the object as which the subject takes itself, jouissance evokes the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle” (24-5).
determinations of meaning (except insofar as it means this refusal to admit such determinations of meaning), and, above all, its rejection of spiritualization through marriage to reproductive futurism…as a name for the death drive that always informs the Symbolic order, it also names the jouissance forbidden by, but permeating, the Symbolic order itself. (27)

Apart from the syncretic link between Edelman’s psychoanalytic scheme and Althus-Ried’s theological agenda, both of which distinctively call for queers to affirm their longstanding designation as radically destructive transgressors of hetero-hegemony, No Future merits such lengthy contextualization and excretion because it serves as chief theoretical provocateur for Michael Snediker’s Queer Optimism, a work that seeks to position itself against Edelman’s polemic and thereby against wider scholarly investments in queer negativism.

Through such “felicitous persuasions” as “lyric personhood,” aesthetic figuration, and durably queer affects, Snediker’s optimizing riposte seems to represent a vanguard of “fiercely critical responses” to No Future developed by theorists simultaneously “dismayed as a result of the polemical tone of rage permeating the book” and eager to reject “Edelman’s proposals regarding futurity, political utility, queer resistance,” and “the category of the Child” (Giffney 60). Notwithstanding his agreeably bristling reception of “a book that insists that ‘the only oppositional status’ available to queers demands fealty to the death drive” (22) and his likewise agreeable wariness of “No Future’s coercive absolutism” (226 n57) for which “a revamped queer ethics predicated on ‘the corrosive force of irony’ (No Future 23)” yields “the slap-happy eschewal of The Child”53 (224 n54), Snediker clandestinely founds his endeavour “to recuperate

53 “[A]s though,” writes Snediker, “there were only one ideological Child. As though there weren’t within cultural discourse (not just the specter, but) the tenable, exquisitely precocious, touched and touching figure of a Queer Child. ‘The cult of the Child,’ Edelman writes, ‘permits no shrine to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness…is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end’ (19). Such claims seem so patently misguided and foreclosing that it’s difficult to know how to respond, beyond the obvious fact that there’s nothing queerer than childhood: cf. Henry James’s Maisie, or JonBenet Ramsey, or the Ludovic of ‘Ma Vie en Rose,’ or my own childhood home videos, which motivate in me a certain pathos not because childhood ends where queerness begins, but because my own queerness, as I bat my seahorse eyelashes or wander through leaf-piles, is so effusively, if confusedly, in full-gear” (224 n54). Glossing Edelman’s “reproductive futurism” as a reference to “the dominant
optimism’s potential critical interest” (23) on a model of subjection whose ties to the secularization thesis limit queer optimism to the purview of liberal-secularist aestheticism. For Snediker, in other words, the figure of the queer optimist ascends preeminently through the class production of liberal-secularist aesthetes. Insofar as Queer Optimism vouchsafes its investment in a non-universalizing “proliferation of local specificities” that would pluralistically counteract No Future’s “sheer absoluteness” (22), Snediker’s tethering of his project to the interests of a more or less determinable queer subjectivity compromises his modest avowal that, rather than rehash a promissory utopian futurism that harbors an “allergic relation to knowledge,” Queer Optimism asks simply for its eponymous subject to be “interesting” and thus “does not entail predisposition in a way that conventional optimism entails predisposition” (2-3).

ideology of the social” which “represents futurity in the image of the innocent child,” Tim Dean similarly notes that “Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality, with its account of an original predisposition to polymorphous perversion, long ago shattered the illusion of childhood innocence. We cannot protect kids from perverts, because we cannot effectively insulate any child from him- or herself” (“Antisocial” 827). Because Edelman’s discussion of the film Philadelphia contextualizes the excerpt from No Future that Snediker provides above, it is worthwhile to clarify that Edelman does not actually deny the queerness of children or childhood per se; rather, it is “for contemporary culture at large as for Philadelphia in particular” (19) that queerness marks childhood’s termination. Making the point in question, that is, Edelman focalizes the logic of the reproductive futurism he would have queers radically eschew in order to execute a “constant disruption of narrative signification” specific to “heteronormative culture” (24).

Though passé to some queer theorists who view it as a cultivator of paranoia, quasi-Marxist ideology critique arises here and elsewhere in my analysis not merely as a means to gauge the often shrouded purview of Queer Optimism’s interests as they align hermeneutically with Sedgwick’s “Reparative Reading” (see next footnote), but also as a means to consider the glaring (non)place of religion in a key response to the pessimistic anti-social thesis. Citing “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” Snediker links this investment to Sedgwick’s “revitalizing engagements with Silvan Tompkins’s notion of weak theory (versus the strong theory of which Edelman’s polemic is a key example)” (225 n55). Snediker’s distinction between No Future’s “one ideological Child” and Queer Optimism’s “tenable, exquisitely precocious, touched and touching figure of a Queer Child” (224 n54) folds respectively into this binary of “sheer absoluteness” and “local specificities.” Of course, it is noteworthy that Snediker’s brand of optimism derives a Queer Child—the totalizing singularity of which (for both this child and this queerness) should at least call into question Queer Optimism’s allegiance to specificities that could skirt the “ideological” temptations of universality and absoluteness. In short, one wonders if Snediker’s appeals to “a Queer Child” are any less “ideological” than Edelman’s appeals to “one ideological Child.”

On this front, Queer Optimism’s preliminary modesties unfurl as qualifications of method: “[Queer Optimism] presents a critical field and asks that this field be taken seriously. Even as my investigation extends, at certain junctures, to the likes of happiness, this is not because if one were more queerly optimistic, one necessarily would feel happier. Queer optimism doesn’t aspire toward happiness, but instead finds happiness interesting. Queer optimism, in this sense, can be considered a form of meta-optimism: it wants to think about feeling good, to make disparate aspects of feeling good thinkable. Queer Optimism, then, seeks to take positive affects as serious and interesting sites of critical investigation” (3).
In light of Snediker’s focus on affectivity (indeed, on affects that are decisively “positive” rather than “negative”), the sense of disinterestedness that attends his project to render optimism interesting while eschewing a priori the “conventional” centrifuge of predisposition (i.e., in my understanding, a certain orientation to optimism and its scope of affects that might arise through any number of subjectivizing factors—ranging from class and education to political and non/religious position) seems tenuous. Eventually, despite its rather Platonic “call for a reconceptualization of optimism itself” (2; emphasis added), Queer Optimism must lobby for the intellectual viability of specifically mediated positive affects—that is, affects construed according to special interests (however furtive) that necessarily inform critical projects of revisionism.

On such interested grounds, can Queer Optimism truly circumvent or foreclose normative channels of predisposition that raise the question of what can or cannot (will or will not) factor into the calculation of a given positive or optimistic subject? To engage this query, we might take note of how interesting circulates adjectivally in Queer Optimism at the expense of this term’s substantive purview, which would (if entertained) elicit notions of both self- and special interests. As it stands, however, queer optimism’s “disinterested interestingness” (or, less redundantly, queer optimism’s unchecked because merely interesting character) folds into the quandary of universality and relativity that attends all theories of judgment and taste, aesthetic

57 As in my introduction, I am here channeling Derrida’s notion of calculation from “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject.”

58 I mean primarily, in the OED’s terms, interest’s substantive sense of “being concerned or affected in respect of advantage or detriment; esp. an advantageous relation of this kind”; “That which is to or for the advantage of any one; good, benefit, profit, advantage.” Snediker’s indebtedness to Sedgwick’s concept of reparative reading, which bristles at the hermeneutics of suspicion and its coeval in ideology critique for their drive to tear down supposed discursive “facades” in the name of exposing an elided “truth,” may account for his ties to interesting as (unobtrusive) adjective rather than to interest as (“ideological”) noun.
and otherwise.\textsuperscript{59} Along these lines, Snediker’s modest appeal to the interesting demonstrates precisely how, in Sianne Ngai words,

the true opposite of interesting is not a disinterested but rather an explicitly interested judgment, as Giorgio Agamben [in The Man without Content] suggests in his gloss of Hegel’s view of the rise of the ironic artist as signaling the end of art’s relevance for culture as a whole: ‘Only because art has left the sphere of interest to become merely interesting do we welcome it so warmly.’ (789)

\textit{Queer Optimism}, I am arguing, manifests an implicit “interested judgment” concerning the predisposition or eligibility that its recuperative project most certainly entails. The furtiveness of this judgment, and thus of queer optimism’s prescriptive tenets, hinges on Snediker’s “theoretical preference for persons over subjects” (3):

queer optimism insists on thinking about personhood—as opposed to subjectivity—in terms of a durability neither immediately nor proleptically subject to structuralist or poststructuralist scrutiny. \textit{Queer Optimism} concerns persons, rather than subjects or even selves. The latter categories inhabit (and sometimes unknowingly curate) particular discursive labyrinths (Cartesian, Foucauldian, Althusserian, Hegelian, Lacanian, etc.) of discipline, desire, and knowledge to which my examinations of personhood at best only obliquely speak. (3)

Tempted to aggrandize agency in a way that recalls Althaus-Reid’s effort in \textit{The Queer God} to transcend heterosexual thought en masse, Snediker predicates this sheer opposition between personhood and subjectivity upon his sense that queer optimists are no less than bereft of the latter category: if thoroughly “characterized,” personhood might be “removed from the columbarium of subjectivity” (3), wherein cinerary urns containing the “discursive labyrinths” of

\textsuperscript{59} In her article, “Merely Interesting,” Sianne Ngai writes: “While the interesting will always imply the possibility of a future encounter with the object in which one’s original evaluation of it might be revised, to call an object interesting is still to claim that it is \textit{objectively} interesting. Indeed, to judge an object interesting is to claim that \textit{everyone} who encounters it \textit{will have precisely this feeling}, precisely this expectation of a future encounter in which their original evaluation of it might be revised. This claim for universal validity even in the absence of criteria (which for Kant is what finally separates aesthetic judgments from judgments of taste) may seem hard to reconcile with the suspicion that the aesthetical judgment of interesting is specific to restricted discursive communities” (787 n32). On related fissures in the concept of (dis)interest, see also During, “Interesting: the politics of the sympathetic imagination,” in \textit{Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory, and Post-Secular Modernity} (39-54); and Gaston, \textit{Derrida and Disinterest}, especially “The Ruins of Disinterest” (1-18), “Disinterest and Sovereignty” (32-42), “The Spectres of Disinterest” (43-54), and “The Interests of Reason” (55-68).
Descartes, Foucault, Althusser, Hegel, and Lacan (among others) might be said to rest in cavernous silence.⁶⁰

For his part, Snediker admits that such prompt and preferential dismissal of subjectivity as a rubric applicable to *Queer Optimism* “might signal—to those for whom persons always already are subjects of a certain presumed order—a nostalgia for some sort of prediscursive mode of being” (3). In Snediker’s estimation, however, conceding to this argument would risk “the emptying of poetic texts of their own intransigent, idiosyncratic discursive value,” a value which should assure readers that instead of “invoking persons freed from discursive necessity, *Queer Optimism* scrutinizes the conundra of discursivity at its most local—rather than importing a set of subjectival stipulations extrinsic from the discursive system of a given poem” (3).

Against “presuming that lyric persons nonproblematically could answer to queer theory’s interpellative calls” (3–4), Snediker fittingly classifies *Queer Optimism* as “a mode of scholarship beholden to New Critical close reading practices”⁶¹ (32).

⁶⁰ In ways I imagine already to be clear, Snediker’s pronouncement on the demise of subjectivity (against the apparent robustness of aestheticized personhood) does not align with the call for a “subjectless critique” that Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz advance in their introduction to *Social Text*’s 2005 “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?” issue.

⁶¹ This heralding of method dovetails with Snediker’s sense that “lyric poetry has become a genre susceptible to many of the charges likewise leveled against optimism, positive affect, and nonincoherent persons. Lyric poetry, like optimism or joy, solipsistically disengages from or flits above the crises of lived experience. Lyric poetry, like nonincoherent personhood, forges the semblance of coherence only in its severance from the conditions by which it is produced. Both of the above pronouncements—which I find equally fatuous—rehearse indictments of lyric poetry, and even more so, of the New Criticism that continues to organize lyric reception. *Queer Optimism*’s argument on behalf of the utility of poetry does not, in fact, ask for lyric poetry’s detachment from New Critical methodology. As subsequent chapters make clear, my frustration with queer theory might be characterized as frustration with the distorting lenses by which queer theory often reads (misreads and underreads) itself, distortions that formalist attention renders both discernable and inhabitable” (31–32). Without citing studies in which lyric poetry itself is viewed as inherently solipsistic (an oddly generalized claim—i.e. lyric poetry in its entirety?—for scholarship to make), Snediker counters Christopher Herbert’s and Terry Eagleton’s assessments of New Criticism. He vouchsafes this school as a corrective—or, adhering to Sedgwick’s rubric, reparative—approach to reading, capable of diagnosing and redressing (as inhabitable) no less than queer theory’s “distortions.” In context, “distortions” refers to the hermeneutics of queer negativity, whose apogee is Edelman’s *No Future*. Snediker’s recourse to this term, needless to say, suggests that there is in fact an undistorted, unambiguous, undeceived, or even veritable and singular lens by which queer theory should read—an implication whose corollary is the assumption of a proper object for queer theory’s attentions. Implications of this kind characterize *Queer Optimism* as an instance of the very “ideology critique” to which it is opposed. Ultimately, Snediker’s faith in New Criticism places great
In methodologically trouncing subjectivity for personhood, Snediker assumes that the latter category harbors no “extrinsic stipulations” of its own that might be imported into “the discursive system of a given poem.” In Snediker’s New Critical approach, which conceptualizes texts more or less as aesthetic archipelagoes unto themselves, personhood is hallowed as a rubric whose supposed immanence to lyric poems overrides contingencies of reference and power dynamics that mark subjectivity in its clammy “columbarium.” Given personhood’s labyrinthine genealogy as a concept that traverses sociopolitical, philosophical, psychological, legal, ethical, and religious contexts, a prospective queer optimist might well ask whether personhood could really stand in such tidy contradistinction to subjectivity. Is personhood not, in intellectual and expectations on his project: Queer Optimism would excoriate those “fatuous” objections to its method of aesthetic-formalist New Criticism by rendering itself accountable both to “crises of lived experience,” which elicit the queer negativity to which Queer Optimism objects, and to “the conditions by which [lyric poetry] is produced.” Taking a cue from Michael Cobb, who in a recent essay opts for a “less aestheticized conceptual space” because the aesthetic (especially when eroticized) “always seems to give us so much freedom” (“Lonely” 450; emphasis added), I argue that if Queer Optimism’s objectives prove problematic for critical praxis, this results from Snediker’s will to aggrandize agency in ways typical of “purist” (that is, unchecked and unbalanced) aesthetic criticism.

Snediker writes that his “understanding of positive personhood” (by which he means “coherent, noncorrosive, nonperformative persons”) “does not seek to reinstate the sorts of persons that queer theory, deconstruction, or psychoanalysis has aimed and aims to dismantle. In speaking of persons, I am not speaking of subjects, nor subjectivity, nor ontology. The sort of personhood at stake in my analysis … more specifically involves an aesthetic person … not manifestly extendible, as such, to a predestined phenomenological, material, or political order” (127). The distinction Snediker grants personhood via aestheticism is provocative; but nowhere in Queer Optimism do we find an account of the substantive difference between subjects and persons. What distinguishes a person from a self, from an individual, from a citizen (a category absent in Queer Optimism), or (to anticipate a rubric Snediker later deploys) from a figure? How does New Criticism extricate or suspend textual personhood’s “aesthetic particularities” from questions of ontology, or from “applicabilities beyond” the texts at hand (127)? How does lyric personhood relate to philosophical trajectories of “the person,” for instance in the writings of Thomas Hobbes? “The word person,” writes Sharon Cameron while discussing Hobbes’ legacy, “confers status (designating a rational being in distinction to a thing or an animal), value, even equality; it establishes intelligibility within a political and legal system, indicating a being having legal rights or representing others’ rights, either because he is a human being or natural person or because he is a corporate or artificial person (For Hobbes an artificial person must also be a natural person)” (viii). That Snediker does not qualify his admittedly preferential distinction seems odd, given his critique of Butler’s “pessimistic” oeuvre. In The Psychic Life of Power, Butler parses “the subject” as “a critical category” that encodes a whole grammar: distinguished from the individual, the subject “ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation” (11). “Individual” signifies that which comes to occupy “the site of the subject”—that which marks through a display of “intelligibility” the linguistic “placeholder” and “occasion” that is the subject (11). The individual emerges as an unfinished but operative result of a “structure in formation” (11), which remains formative because individuals negotiate their agency as a consequence of subjection. For Butler, subjects emerge from and are thus constituted by psychic subjection, rendering identity paradoxical at its core. Subjects achieve only a tentative form of individuation via subordination. Acknowledging the deep bind of subjection entails questioning the degree and kind of agency afforded already-subordinated subjects: what type of agency do subjects have when the terms/symbols/ideas/policies they use to define themselves
social history, subject to or subjected by various hermeneutic traditions that jostle to determine what may or may not factor into the “local” definitions of a person? Or is personhood, in the strictness of aesthetic-formalist New Criticism, readily exempt from and unaccountable to subjection in its myriad circuits? (If one were to answer this last question in the negative, then pursuance to New Criticism’s protocols would somehow not constitute a form of subjection in its own right, whereby texts are processed and meanings signified against other hermeneutic schools). Eschewing both (self-reflexive) ideology critique and the “structuralist or poststructuralist scrutiny” that governs the hermeneutics of suspicion, *Queer Optimism* sidesteps methodological queries of this sort, rendering its conception of personhood as preferential as its fleeting obituary for subjectivity.

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64 Developed at subjectivity’s expense, Snediker’s idea of personhood is bound to his view that *Queer Optimism* is essentially not beholden to ideology. Consider, for instance, his response to theorists who “presume coherence as characterizable only in the attenuated, noncritical terms against which queer theory and other poststructuralist disciplines inveigh”: “Such a dissatisfaction with personal coherence, he writes, might “sponsor a reconfiguration of coherence—the cultivation of a vocabulary of coherence that more precisely does justice to the ways in which coherence isn’t expansively, unilaterally destructive, reductive, or ideological” (26; emphasis added). Snediker neither discusses the implied relation between these adjectives, nor defines ideology in its own right. Later, he qualifies his project in terms of a “loving, nonideological recuperability of aesthetic persons” (127; emphasis added). Given his thesis that New Criticism extricates texts “from applicabilities beyond themselves” (127), Snediker’s methodological will to transcend ideology arises as a corollary. Against this claim to have achieved a nonideological criticism, I advance Spivak’s conception of ideology, which informs my critique of *Queer Optimism*’s interests by indicating what Snediker would transcend: “It is difficult to speak of a politics of interpretation without a working notion of ideology as larger than the concepts of individual consciousness and will. At its broadest implications this notion of ideology would undo the oppositions between determinism and free will and between conscious choice and unconscious reflex. Ideology in action is what a group takes to be natural and self-evident, that of which the group, as a group, must deny any historical sedimentation. It is both the condition and the effect of the constitution of the subject (of ideology) as freely willing and consciously choosing in a world that is seen as background. In turn, the subject(s) of ideology are the conditions and effects of the self-identity of the group as a group” (“Interpretations” 259).
Under the banner of unreserved (because immanently “lyric” and hence “felicitous”) personhood, Snediker nevertheless hones a set of preconditions by which queers should hermeneutically wrest themselves from pessimism to recuperate an aesthetically customized optimism. In light of the resolutely secularist and secularizing convalescence Queer Optimism proposes for its eponymous noun, Snediker can neither accommodate nor account for personhoods (let alone subjects) that are simultaneously queer, optimistic (cautiously or otherwise), and religious. For Snediker’s queer optimist, that is, religious queers and queer religiosities fold into the columbarium of subjectivity that serves as a resource for those pessimists to whom Queer Optimism gears its most “felicitous persuasions.” Given the sieving-effect of Queer Optimism’s predilection for (a certain) personhood against subjectivity, one might be tempted to riff on Bersani’s influential question—“Should a homosexual be a good citizen?”—by asking: Must queer personhood or, for that matter, queer subjectivity (optimistic or pessimistic, but in context especially the former) presuppose secularism as epistemic foundation?

“Disdain for optimism,” writes Snediker while clarifying the scope of his recuperative project, “might solicit optimism’s wholesale repudiation (à la Edelman)—or it might solicit optimism’s own redress” (26). Vouchsafing optimism’s suitability for the latter, Snediker foregrounds Gottfried Leibniz’s Discourse on Metaphysics (1686) and Theodicy (1710)—two early-modern seedbeds for optimism which develop the concept in question through a staunchly theological idiom. Rather than “pretend to do Leibniz’s theodicy justice,” Snediker aims to

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65 A well-circulated, ubiquitous descriptor, “cautious optimism” (or being “cautiously optimistic”) eludes the conceptual review that inaugurates Queer Optimism. Its absence seems all the more odd in light of Snediker’s introductory discussion of “dubious,” “hegemonic,” “woeful,” and “premature” optimism.

66 Alluding to “Is Critique Secular?,” the 2007 Townsend Center for the Humanities Symposium at UC Berkeley, Thea Gold poses this question more concisely in her film-studies article, “Is Queer Secular? Netalie Braun’s Gevald.”
delineate “where Leibnizian optimism most veers” from the endeavours of *Queer Optimism* (26). Admittedly, if Snediker does not pretend to do justice to Leibniz, then my encounter with Leibnizian optimism *through* Snediker’s problematic reading of it is apt to seem all the more questionable or perhaps simply unjustified. For, instead of responsibly working my way first through Leibniz and only thereafter through *Queer Optimism*, I immediately challenge the latter’s account of the former in forensic terms: that is, I chart Snediker’s interested misreadings of Leibniz according to how they bolster the troubling regimen of queer-secularist aestheticism. By approaching Leibniz through Snediker’s misreadings of him and of Gilles Deleuze’s *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, I thus depart from my practice elsewhere of more directly encountering texts of philosophy and theory. In my view, however, this methodological departure does not significantly compromise the genealogy of Leibniz-Kant-Kierkegaard that I delineate at the end of this chapter and on which my studies of Eliot, Crane, and Auden hinge.

Notably, *Queer Optimism*’s engagement with Leibniz is motivated not only by Snediker’s sense of optimism’s rectifiable course in intellectual history, but also by his strategic equation of Edelman’s queer pessimism with the seemingly deterministic theology that underpins “the modes of optimism” Leibniz “sponsors” (26). Accordingly, insofar as it evokes “one who hopes,” optimism “might somehow have come to name one strain of Leibniz’s philosophy, but Leibniz’s writing—even when most resembling Panglosian caricature of it67—has as little staked in hope or future as Edelman’s antioptative *No Future*” (26). Likewise, Leibniz’s theodicy is in Snediker’s estimation “as imperializing as the pessimisms of queer theory”68 (27). While

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67 See Voltaire’s *Candide*, trans. Wootton.
68 This identification of an oppressive religious analog to queer pessimism is not endemic to *Queer Optimism*. Tim Dean, for instance, considers Edelman’s argument in *No Future* categorically “nonpsychoanalytic, verging instead on a psychological idea of self-destructive pathology that derives more from Christianity than from psychoanalysis” (“Embrace” 134).
argumentatively stirring, this analogy sets into relief the secularizing (de)valuation of religion and its vicissitudes that is central to *Queer Optimism*’s antireligious *subjection* of personhood.

To pinpoint the kernel in Leibniz’s philosophy that exhorts us to “find all God’s works excellent and in complete conformity with what we might have desired” (27), Snediker furnishes excerpts from the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and from the *Theodicy*. In the former, Leibniz writes that

> it is sufficient to have the confidence that God does everything for the best and that nothing can harm those who love him. But to know in detail the reasons that could have moved him to choose this order of the universe—to allow sins, to dispense his saving grace in a certain way—surpasses the power of the finite mind, especially when it has not yet attained the enjoyment of the vision of God. (qtd. in Snediker 27)

Conceptualizing God in terms of a moral epistemology whose resources and means transcend the contingencies of humanity’s “finite mind,” this passage unfurls a kind of logic that in Snediker’s view resembles, but is not equivalent to, “a more familiarly teleological model of wishful thinking, whereby time could reveal the commensurability of God’s work and our desire” (27).

However, given the merely “sufficient” role Leibniz assigns to “confidence” (qua fidelity) in the purview of human faculties, Snediker ultimately distinguishes theodicy from wishful thinking: Leibniz accordingly “doesn’t need time to prove what faith simply makes known, faith being that which posits optimism not as a practice but as a given” (27).

In Snediker’s reading, faith’s centrality to Leibnizian optimism—its “capacity to convert all crises (past, present, future) into manifestations of the good” (27)—imperils the agency of aesthetic personhood. Specifically, by subordinating the “human experience of time (past, present, future) to a divine temporality in which temporal distinctions all but vanish” (28), Leibniz fixates on “an omniscient God that renders a person’s own thinking beside the point.”

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69 This latter excerpt from *Queer Optimism* pertains to a passage from Leibniz’s *New Essays on Human Understanding*. 
(113). To ascertain the extent to which futurity in Leibniz’s deterministic optimism “lies beyond engagement, revision, or hope” (28), Snediker turns to the *Theodicy*:

> The whole future is doubtless determined: but since we know not what it is, nor what is foreseen or resolved, we must do our duty, according to the reason that God has given us and according to the rules that he has prescribed for us; and therefore we must have a quiet mind, and leave to God himself the care for the outcome. (qtd. in Snediker 28)

“Humans perhaps equivocate,” writes Snediker while glossing this passage, “but Leibniz’s God does not” (43). Both severe and retrograde in its philosophical outlook, this apparent diminution of human agency in the face of divinity and in the name of optimism leads Snediker to qualify his project as resolutely “non-Leibnizian in its resistance to faith at the expense of thinking” (28). “Leibnizian optimism,” he suggests, “lies beyond theorization not because it consigns determination or delight to a futural horizon, but because the faith that underwrites it looms beyond interrogation” (28). Against *Queer Optimism*’s non-subjectivizing agency of lyric personhood, faith’s seeming aversion to theorization (and vice-versa) renders Leibnizian happiness “chronic and beyond question, even as the means of this interminable happiness remain, secularly speaking, altogether unavailable” (29). Through a vested equation of aesthetic epistemology and cultural power that indexes “utopic optimism’s allergic relation to knowledge,” Snediker’s queer optimist can only bristle at works like the *Theodicy* precisely because Leibniz’s “fealty to faith” seems to make knowledge “superfluous” (2).

If the narrow class production of secularist-aesthete personhood is a tacit, because ostensibly non-“subjectival,” interest of *Queer Optimism*, then the ensuing challenge I pose to its reading of Leibniz will ultimately quicken Snediker’s efforts “to clear a space for the possible

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70 In context, the furtiveness of this interest seems all the more remarkable (and thus well suited for an ideological critique the likes of which Sedgwick’s reparative readers eschew) in light of Snediker’s “reluctance to reduce queer optimism’s field before the adventure of first expanding it” (4).
generosities and generativities of queer optimism’s corresponding milieu” (4). In reading the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, *Theodicy*, and *New Essays on Human Understanding* to rectify optimism’s intellectual trajectory, Snediker gravitates to a modern, aesthetic, secular-individualist notion of agency whose poststructuralist lens misrepresents Leibniz’s theological concepts of determinism and freedom. In other words, when perusing Leibniz’s early-modern texts (which garner a preeminent place in *Queer Optimism*’s columbarium of subjectivity), Snediker does not aim to detranscendentalize the epistemic secularism that informs his own project; consequently, he cannot regard as agential the relationship between faith and reason in Leibniz’s metaphysical system.

Notably, Snediker’s secularist reading of Leibniz develops with reference to Deleuze’s *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, from which he gleans the extent to which “Leibniz’s optimism is really strange”:

> the best of all possibilities only blossoms amid the ruins of Platonic Good. If this world exists, it is not because it is the best, but because it is rather the inverse; it is the best because it is, because it is the one that is. The philosopher is still not the Inquisitor he will soon become with empiricism….He is a Lawyer, or God’s attorney. He defends God’s cause, following the word that Leibniz invents, ‘theodicy.’ (qtd. in Snediker 27)

Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz is crucial for Snediker because it foregrounds how Leibnizian optimism “eludes or renders gratuitous theorization via a tautology (Deleuze’s ‘it is the one that is’) that fashions optimism as conceptually expansive and indelible as the world itself” (29). Of course, as Snediker’s ellipsis intimates, Deleuze does not limit his analysis to the “strangeness”

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71 In seeking to redress certain missteps in Snediker’s approach to religion, secularity, and the agency (aesthetic, political, ethical) of queerness, I do not aim simply to make the project of *Queer Optimism* more amenable to alternative interests, class productions, hermeneutics, or personhoods (or, for that matter, selves, subjects, or collectivities). Rather, I am invested in examining the (non-)place that religion, theology, and their queer potentialities are afforded in a study that exemplifies a radical aesthetic intervention in queer theory’s (by *Queer Optimism*’s account) pessimistic, overly-ideological field. Similarly, through my religiously-attuned questions and counter-readings, I answer Snediker’s own wish for *Queer Optimism* to “remain conversant with disciplines and fields beyond itself” (238).
of Leibniz’s grand tautology. As it stands, the excerpt at hand registers a historicist element in
Deleuze’s interpretation, particularly his sense that Leibniz as “God’s attorney” precedes the
verve of empiricism that marks the apex of the European Enlightenment.

In eliding a key reference Deleuze makes to Immanuel Kant, however, Snediker omits
the specificity that attends the former’s view of Leibniz’s position in intellectual history: “The
philosopher,” writes Deleuze, “is still not the Inquisitor he will soon become with empiricism,
and he is even less the Judge he will become with Kant (the tribunal of Reason)” (Fold 68). As I
show shortly, Snediker’s slight omission accrues significance when read against his construal of
Leibnizian faith:

Following Leibniz, a struggle to remain optimistic in the face of calamity or distress
signals not a waver ing of optimism, per se, but a waver ing of faith, whose digital
robustness forecloses faith as analogic sliding-scale. One believes or one does not,
without gradation. Similarly, either one is optimistic, or one is not. To struggle to remain
optimistic belies that one is not optimistic, that one already has fallen from the logic by
which optimism is upheld. To believe in the goodness of God makes optimism not a
choice, or even an attitude, but faith’s inevitable extension. (Snediker 27)

This view of theodicy as an endeavour steered by nonnegotiable (even fundamentalist) faith
banks on Snediker’s sense that, for Leibniz, God’s superlative character predetermines each
human being and preempts all humanist claims to agency. Given Queer Optimism’s selective
reference to The Fold, throughout which Deleuze hones nuanced accounts of freedom and
determinism in Leibniz’s oeuvre, Snediker’s analysis seems questionable. Consider the extent to
which Snediker’s take on Leibniz is at odds with the wider reading Deleuze offers:

Inclination is the fold in the soul, inflection the way the fold is included. Whence
Leibniz’s formula: the soul is inclined without being necessitated. The motive is not even
an internal determination, but an inclination. It is not an effect of the past, but an
expression of the present…. It is not a determinism—even an internal one—but an
interiority that constitutes liberty itself. It is because the living present is essentially
variable in both extension and intensity…. Adam might have been capable enough not to
sin, but only if, at this moment, his soul could have taken another amplitude that might
constitute the unity of another movement. The act is free because it expresses the
wholeness of the soul in the present….It can be stated further that the soul is at least
determined to be what it is, and that its degree of amplitude at every moment is inscribed
in it and foreseen by God. What does all that change? That God foresees Adam’s laziness
and the narrow-mindedness of the damned does not impede one or the other from being
the motive of a free act, and not the effect of a determination. That God preordains the
degrees of a soul’s amplitude does not impede each one from being the entire soul at a
given moment….The automaton is free not because it is determined from within, but
because every time it constitutes the motive of the event that it produces. The automation
is programmed, but the “spiritual automation” is programmed by motivation for
voluntary acts, just as the “material automaton” is programmed by motivation for
mechanical actions: if things are enveloped in God’s understanding, it is such as they are,
“the free as free, and the blind and mechanical still as mechanical.” (70-72)

If reading *The Fold* beyond *Queer Optimism*’s references to it shows us that Leibniz’s
philosophy is incommensurate with the account Snediker provides, then the project of queering
optimism “itself” may not warrant an eschewal of faith (among other things) as vapid theological
determinism. (Inductively speaking, queer literary and cultural criticism—pessimistic, optimistic,
and all points between—need not preemptively assume a secularist position that renders
queerness allergic to religion.) Indeed, in honing a trajectory of argument that extends from
Leibniz to Kant and thence to Henri Bergson, Deleuze’s *The Fold* solicits a revision of
Snediker’s analysis. Specifically, one should say that for Leibniz humans certainly do
equivocate, albeit within the circuits or “folds” of inclination, inflection, and thus reason: “we
know not what [the future] is,” writes Leibniz, “nor what is foreseen or resolved” (qtd. in
Snediker 28). Accordingly, Leibniz’s “confidence that God does everything for the best” (qtd. in
Snediker 27) does not countermand reason’s propriety. God figures as omnisciently omnipotent

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72 See Deleuze’s chapter on “Sufficient Reason” (41-58). Elsewhere in *The Fold*, Deleuze writes that when Leibniz’s
metaphysics summons a constituent “to ‘live’”—yet more when it is called to reason—it unfolds in itself this region
of the world that corresponds to its enclosed enlightened zone: it is called upon to ‘develop all its perceptions,’ and
therein its task resides” (74).
without thereby revoking the monadic liberty Leibniz affords human amplitude, reason, motive, and action.\(^\text{73}\)

In a manner that returns us to Derrida’s and Spivak’s analyses of the *parergic* safeguards in Kant’s *Religion*, one may contend that Leibnizian faith registers the sheer limits of reason and that such limits (as baroque “folds”) are means by which to develop an epistemology predicated on alterity rather than on auto-immunological Reason; underscoring the potent yet imperfect cognitive faculty “that God has given us” (qtd. in Snediker 28), Leibniz views faith as reason’s nourishing but not determinative limit. Faith thus cannot “render knowledge superfluous” (Snediker 2), precisely because it does not govern optimism, let alone humanity, at reason’s expense. As Deleuze notes, Leibniz’s optimism is rather “based on the infinity of the [freely] damned as the foundation of the best of all worlds” (*Fold* 74):

> As Leibniz states, a damned soul is not eternally damned, he is merely “forever damnable,” and damns himself at every moment. Thus the damned are free—and free in the present—as are the happy souls. What damns them is their current narrow-mindedness, their lack of amplitude….It is not as if they were undergoing the effects of their past, but as if they could not be done with the current and present wound they cannot keep themselves from scratching. (71; emphasis added)

This wider view of Leibniz’s philosophy challenges Snediker’s interpretations of faith, determinism (which dovetails with most secularist conceptions of damnation across theologies), reason, intellect, temporality, agency, and of course optimism as these rubrics manifest in the

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\(^{73}\) For Leibniz, writes Deleuze, “the individual exists, and it is by virtue of the power of a concept: monad or soul. Thus this power of the concept (to become a subject) does not consist in determining a genre to infinity, but in condensing and in prolonging singularities….They are not in the least preindividual, insofar as the world is virtually first in respect to individuals that express it (God has created, not Adam the sinner, but the world in which Adam has sinned…). *In this sense the individual is the actualization of preindividual singularities, and implies no previous determination*” (64). Given Snediker’s recuperative and remedial focus on Leibniz, the latter’s concepts of (pre)individuality and singularity further challenge *Queer Optimism*’s claims for personhood as extricable from subjectivity, selfhood, and ontology. Regarding the key notion of amplitude I broach above, Deleuze writes that for Leibniz, “The amplitude of a reasonable soul is the region that it clearly expresses, that is, its living present. This amplitude is rather statistical, and subject to broad variation: the same soul does not have the same amplitude as a child, an adult, or an ageing being, in good or bad health, and so on. Amplitude even has variable limits at any given moment” (73). Leibniz’s concept of amplitude is another element in his philosophy that stands at odds with Snediker’s parsing of Leibnizian metaphysics as bleak determinism.
Discourse on Metaphysics, Theodicy, and New Essays on Human Understanding. In turn, if Leibnizian optimism and the faith that characterizes it are not after all pathologically “chronic and beyond question” (Snediker 29), then perhaps religiosity and theology are likewise not irretrievably beyond queerness/queering (optimistic or otherwise). As it stands, however, the aesthete-secularist identity politics that underwrites Queer Optimism preempts any progressively queer revision, connectivity, or retrieval of religious affect, hermeneutics, or “personhood” from Leibniz to the present. For Snediker, that is, the only temporal continuity available for Leibniz’s theodicy is a politically repugnant and ethically irresponsible one against which any conscientious lefty (queer or otherwise) might rail:

[Leibniz’s] brand of optimistic unimpeachability characterized both the exasperating contumaciousness of George W. Bush’s two terms in office, as well as Howard Dean’s famously Whitmanian barbaric yawp of January 2004. The former—now as much as then—lies beyond theorization because (among myriad less glib reasons) Bush is incapable of theorizing; the latter, beyond theorization to the extent that Dean’s whoop came on the heels of defeat….A person (e.g. George W. Bush) might possess the faith that makes credible the divinely infinite logic that to his finite mind is otherwise incomprehensible, or he might not. I raise the examples of Bush and Dean to note the ways in which optimism in past years has saturated the American political field, determining the fate of presidential campaigns, initiating and sustaining otherwise untenable-seeming policies and positions (not to mention wars). (28)

Ironically enough, this loosely trans-historical argument for kinship between Leibniz’s early-modern, faith-infused optimism and late twentieth-century, rightwing American politics finds predication in Snediker’s means for counteracting the “absoluteness” of Edelman’s No Future: “Always this, always this, always that. [Edelman’s] absoluteness, meant to rally and provoke, recalls Sedgwick’s incredulous reading of Frederic Jameson’s ukase, ‘Always historicize.’ ‘What

74 My thinking on this point, but particularly on the supposed aversion of (queer) secularity to (non-queer) religious affect, is informed by Ann Pellegrini’s argument in “Feeling Secular.” Pellegrini contends that the Iranian revolution and the resurgence of U.S. Christian fundamentalism in the late-1970s “have shaken the epistemological foundations of large segments of the US academy for whom secularism has been and remains a kind of guiding sentiment”; she proceeds by considering “the political and epistemological stakes of the secular academy’s disidentification not just with religion, but feelings coded as ‘religious.’” Rather than reject the allegedly contaminating affects of religious feelings…scholars of gender and sexuality studies might profit from considering the places where religious and secular feelings ‘touch’” (205).
could have less to do,’ Sedgwick rightly asks, ‘with historicizing than the commanding, atemporal adverb ‘always’?’

Reflecting *Queer Optimism*’s tenuous relation to both historicity and historicism (recall the “columbarium of subjectivity” and New Criticism, respectively), Sedgwick’s grammatical play on Jameson’s imperative betokens Snediker’s own methodology, wherein lyric personhood is rendered unaccountable to frameworks of subjectivity, ideology, and ontology. Moreover, in positing this odd collocation of Leibniz’s philosophy with the stupefying discourses of Bush and Dean, Snediker banks on an unexamined opposition between secularism and religion, which casts the former in the glow of liberalist queer optimism and the latter in the pallor of inane rightwing political theatre. Not only does this binary concretize religion as an anti-progressive ideology beyond queerness (or, at least beyond optimistic queering); it also discounts the (Queer) Left’s political response to the American Right—a

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75 I see a reverberation of Sedgwick’s taunting challenge to Jameson in Snediker’s pursuit of an aesthetic personhood that is distinguishable from all “extrinsic” (i.e. historical rather than “lyric”?) subjectivities and selfhoods. An excerpt from *Queer Optimism* provided earlier is worth reproducing here: with respect to Jack Spicer’s 1958 serial poem, *Billy The Kid*, but in a way which nonetheless speaks to his larger project, Snediker writes that his analysis pertains specifically to “an aesthetic person…not manifestly extendible, as such, to a predestined phenomenological, material, or political order” (127).

76 A signal ambiguity attends Sedgwick’s critique: If “always” as imperative adverb compromises historicism’s aims and praxes, then should the imperative stand alone as “historicize!”? Are we to exchange “always” for “sometimes,” “frequently,” “when possible,” or “when convenient”? Or, is the imperative to historicize entirely disposable? Given the complexity of Leibniz’s oeuvre and optimism, it is striking to find his thinking so easily juxtaposed with the likes of George W. Bush and Howard Dean. Leibniz, who for instance quarreled with Isaac Newton over which of them first discovered and explained differential calculus, appears for obvious reasons a stranger-than-strange bedfellow of these rightwing politicians. Such an uneasy collocation seems to reflect a leapfrogging approach to the history of ideas that does not find value in critical justifications for historicism that underlie Jameson’s imperative, which is now really quite advisable.

77 The extent to which this opposition goes uninvestigated in *Queer Optimism* is considerable. Despite Snediker’s consistent reliance on the logic and vocabulary of secularization (a point on which I expand in my chapter on Crane), neither “secular” nor its variant “secularity” are registered in *Queer Optimism*’s index—an absence which I read as further indication of the clandestine interest that sutures Snediker’s appeal to the “interesting.”

78 For instance, one might compare Snediker’s Leibnizian reading of Bush with Bruce Lincoln’s argument in “Bush’s God Talk”: “One is forced to conclude that Bush’s theology and his deployment of it are less systematic than pragmatic. Although he fosters the impression that his policies are grounded in deep religious conviction, the reality is often the reverse. Vague notions and attractive terms such as compassion, history, and freedom are given rhetorical, sometimes even intellectual, coherence by his staff. Bush may resonate to some of the ideas and some of the language they prepare for him, but for the most part he uses these to justify policies that have already been decided on quite other grounds. Preemptive wars, abridgments of civil liberty, cuts in social service, subsidies to
response that is bound to turn self-critical when queer secularism’s increasingly affirmative ties both to the neoliberal nation-state and U.S. imperial hegemony are recognized.  

Significantly, by not qualifying the jostling discourses of faith and reason in modernity since Leibniz, Snediker’s recuperative turn to the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, *Theodicy*, and *New Essays on Human Understanding* yields an anachronistic metonymy: Leibnizian theodicy = faith, applicable to all believers (and thus *not* to queer optimists) across religions, cultures, time, and place—arching from Leibniz himself to George W. Bush. In effect, this sweeping metonymy situates religious queers, despite their potentiality as allies on the Left, in the same dumbfounding (because faithfully optimistic) camp as Bush and Howard Dean; alternatively, of course, such a metonymy might also position non-secularist queers in a trenchantly pessimistic camp with Lee Edelman, whose theorizations verge for Tim Dean “on a psychological idea of self-destructive pathology” rooted in Christianity (“Embrace” 134). In either case, by approaching faith as a monolith that “posits optimism not as a practice but as a given” (27); that “renders knowledge,” and thus theorization and thinking itself, “superfluous” (2); and that purports via optimism “a structure in which nonhappiness might arise as an erosion of faith, as an erosion, that is, of a happiness that is otherwise structurally inescapable” (29), Snediker misconstrues faith’s agential link to reason in Leibniz’s metaphysics and metonymically distorts the subjectivity of religious belief: “One believes or one does not, without gradation. Similarly,
either one is optimistic, or one is not...To believe in the goodness of God makes optimism not a choice, or even an attitude, but faith’s inevitable extension” (27). Conceptualizing believers as automatons monolithically (i.e. “without gradation”) and deterministically (i.e. “inevitably”) beholden to a nonmodern ideology that disqualifies them from partaking in epistemologies of rational inquiry and intellectual deliberation, this secularist account of faith gives way to a paradox: as an interpretive lens that would eschew Kant’s parergic safeguards for the limits of reason, (queer) epistemic secularism seeks to foreclose religion as a mode of cultural, aesthetic, social, and political agency, even while it seeks to secularize for its own discursive empowerment the very “primitive,” “anachronistic,” or “pathological” theologies it deems ideologically backward.81

The poetry of Hart Crane, to which both Queer Optimism and Dissident Secularism attend, represents a veritable roost for this paradox; as I argue in chapter four, Snediker, amongst other queer-theoretical secularists, can approach neither the religious affectivity nor the

81 If accurate, this analysis of epistemic secularism and its corollaries for religious queers/queer religiosities (textual and existing) is bound to elicit wariness, specifically of Queer Optimism’s “positive” answer to queer pessimism. If read as a response to queer theory’s anti-social thesis, for instance, Queer Optimism’s New Critical model of figural, “lyric personhood” (dissociated from the historicist prospects of subjectivity, ideology, and ontology) hardly works to renegotiate the affective space that spurs queer pessimism. Considering Queer Optimism’s investment in an empowering class production specific to liberal secularist aesthetes, Snediker’s exclusive personhood (with its professed immanence to poetic works against the “extrinsic stipulations” of subjectivity) seems rather anti-social or asocial. The durability, coherence, and positivity for which Queer Optimism lobbies are not geared to questioning how the divisive interests of queerness relate to differential epistemologies, sociopolitical communities, the significance of public spheres, or the production of a given body politic. Although Snediker claims that his New Critical methods “are engaged with a lived world” (32), Queer Optimism’s aesthetic-formalist personhood virtually sidesteps the fraught realm of subjects, selves, communities, nationals, and citizens, wherein queers and aesthetics alike surely have an ethical stake. This critique leads me to appreciate one of Edelman’s justifications for queer pessimism: “Theodor Adorno,” he writes, “proposes [in Negative Dialectics] that ‘society stays alive, not despite its antagonism, but by means of it’” (“After” 471). Following Adorno via Edelman, we discern a “foundational negativity that keeps the symbolic from achieving self-identity to the extent that the nonidentical persists within as internal antagonism” (473). This conception of antagonism aligns with a crucial tenet of Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s classic study, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics, to which my own theorizations remain indebted: after positing that “antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the ‘experience’ of the limit of the social” (125), Laclau and Mouffe argue for “a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any ‘essence of the social,’ but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every ‘essence,’ and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism” (193). As a kind of panacea, queer optimism would placate this constitutive antagonism by secularly substituting figure for citizen, personhood for subjectivity, and aesthetics for religion.
theological interest of Crane’s texts without recourse to epistemic secularization. For Dissident Secularism, this critique extends of course beyond Crane scholarship by engaging works by and scholarship on T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden. Still, beyond the authorial parameters of Dissident Secularism, one is readily tempted to consider how epistemic secularism in its queer-theoretical vestments could possibly account for the textual and biographical religiosities of authors such as Gerard Manley Hopkins or James Baldwin, to name but two figures whose works loom at the edges of this project’s core arguments.

Notwithstanding her tendency to aggrandize agency, Althaus-Reid’s arguments for a robust queer theology stand in obvious tension with Snediker’s aesthetic regimen of queer secularism. This specific opposition between theology and theory elicits a query that anticipates and informs the dialectical tasks of my ensuing chapters on Eliot, Crane, and Auden: how might one reconcile Queer Optimism’s epistemic course with The Queer God’s eponymous aim? A preliminary answer to this question emerges from the philosophical context Snediker introduces through his turn to Leibniz and Deleuze. In adjoining my discussion of Kant’s parergic safeguards for the limits of reason with Deleuze’s pivotal references to Kant in The Fold and to Kant and Kierkegaard in Difference and Repetition, I maintain that an alternative path through modernity is available for Leibniz’s theology—a path that does not, for instance, arch forward metonymically from Leibniz only to terminate in George W. Bush. A far queerer path is viable for faith in modernity, I argue, even if the philosophers who light faith’s way are (biographically speaking) as straitlaced and proper as they come. Admitting the variance between Leibniz and Kant that Deleuze highlights in his analysis of how each philosopher understands “the two

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floors” of soul and body, one may nevertheless uncover a rigorous thread for faith that is traceable through the revolutions of empiricism, positivism, and atheistic secularism.

Deleuze argues that, “by entrusting to faith the task of overcoming the speculative death of God and healing the wound in the self,” Kierkegaard is “the culmination of Kant,” a continuity that yields

the betrothal of a self rediscovered and a god recovered, in such a manner that it is no longer possible truly to escape from either the condition or the agent…. However, there is an adventure of faith, according to which one is always the clown of one’s own faith, the comedian of one’s own ideal. For faith has its own Cogito which in turn conditions the sentiment of grace, like an interior light. Moreover, it is in this very particular Cogito that faith reflects upon itself and discovers by experiment that its condition can be given to it only as ‘recovered’, and that it is not only separated from that condition but doubled in it. Hence the believer does not lead his life only as a tragic sinner in so far as he is deprived of the condition, but as a comedian and clown, a simulacrum of himself in so far as he is doubled in the condition. Two believers cannot observe each other without laughing. (Difference 95)

Worlds apart from the mindless, robotic, and ideologically violent believer conjured in Queer Optimism, Deleuze’s believer stands in a philosophical trajectory that engenders faith as an existentially intense yet ironic, self-reflexive, comedic, and above all intellectual “adventure” marked by deep reflection, discovery, and experimentation. In a manner which recalls Derrida’s and Spivak’s readings of the fourfold parerga and near-metalepsis of grace in Kant’s Religion, Deleuze writes of faith luminously conditioning grace through a cognitive uniqueness that rivals the depth, complexity, and integrity of reason. As complementary faculties of psychic, social,

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83 “Kant will derive a great deal from Leibniz,” writes Deleuze, “most notably the respective autonomy of the two floors; but at the same time Kant turns the upper floor into something empty or inhabited, and he isolates the two floors such that in his own way he refashions two worlds, one now having nothing more than a regulatory value…. For Leibniz, the two floors are and will remain inseparable; they are really distinct and yet inseparable by dint of a presence of the upper in the lower. The upper floor is folded over the lower floor. One is not acting upon the other, but one belongs to the other, in the sense of double belonging. The soul is the principle of life through its presence and not through its action” (Fold 119).

political, and sexual life, faith and reason limn each other in ways that endure the leveling effects of secularist modernity. In *Dissident Secularism*, this remarkable filament between faith and reason (threading its way through the vertices of Leibniz, Kant, Kierkegaard, and beyond) finds a distinctive channel in Auden, whose meticulous study of Kierkegaard in the 1940s inspired numerous excurses into queer exegesis. However, as I will argue in ensuing chapters, the oeuvres of Eliot and Crane manifest respective “interior lights” that are less evidently beholden to the Leibnizian-Kantian-Kierkegaardian line herewith described. With such genealogical deviations in mind and in hermeneutic step with the “adventure” of faith to which Deleuze attends in *Difference and Repetition*, I turn now to the influential, queerly theological corpus of T.S. Eliot.
T.S. Eliot, Kantian Ideal Embodiment, and the Queer Resources of Political Theology

I do not take orthodoxy to mean that there is a narrow path laid down for every writer to follow. Even in the stricter discipline of the Church, we hardly expect every theologian to succeed in being orthodox in every particular, for it is not a sum of theologians, but the Church itself, in which orthodoxy resides. In my sense of the term, perfect orthodoxy in the individual artist is not always necessary, or even desirable. (32)

—Eliot, After Strange Gods

[We] begin to suspect that the critic owes his livelihood to the violence and extremity of his opposition to other critics, or else to some trifling oddities of his own with which he contrives to season the opinions which men already hold, and which out of vanity or sloth they prefer to maintain. We are tempted to expel the lot. Immediately after such an eviction, or as soon as relief has abated our rage, we are compelled to admit that there remain certain books, certain essays, certain sentences, certain men, who have been ‘useful’ to us. (25; emphasis added)

—Eliot, “The Function of Criticism”

I always get the impression that in commenting on Heidegger, in restituting him in an apparently very strict way, one makes him say something quite other; all the accents are changed, his language is no longer recognizable. The commentary becomes obscene and thinking otherwise becomes thinking otherwise than he, who wants to think the remainder “properly.” Here, “otherwise” would be otherwise than properly. But then what would be proper to this other? (303)

—Derrida, The Truth in Painting

How indeed can one expect something perfectly straight to be framed out of such crooked wood? (92)

—Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone

Because of what I hear,
you leave a trace [vestigio] within me—one so clear,
Lethe itself can’t blur or cancel it.

—Dante, Purgatorio, XXVI, 106-108

Hermeneutic Jurisdictions: Eliot’s Corpus and Criticism’s Cases

In Corpus, Jean-Luc Nancy writes that the model of his eponymous subject “is the Corpus Juris, a collection, or compilation, of Institutions, Digests, and other Codices comprising all the articles of Roman law” (53). “So, too, with bodies,” he continues: “their space is juridical, just as the space of the law is a space of bodies configured according to cases. The body and the case fit
each other. There is a jurisdiction proper to each body” (53). Nancy elucidates this link between
the juridical and the corporeal when considering how law relates to the plenitude of cases that
structure a corpus: “The corpus obeys a law that passes from case to case, a discrete continuity of
rules and exceptions, of demands and derogations. Jurisdiction consists less in enunciating the
absolute of the Law, or in unfolding its reasons, than in saying what the law can be here, there,
now, in this case” (53). Pursuant to a continuum of jurisdictions, a corpus becomes an index for
correspondences between itself and the cases with which it is made to “fit.”

In the context of literary studies, this relation between Corpus Juris and legislative case
closely resembles the relation between authorial oeuvre and literary criticism. Before and after
“the death of the author,”¹ a body of work garners a swathe of linkages between its contents and
the annals of criticism that, through generations of scholarship, establish circuits of reference and
conduits for hermeneutic interest. Like the cases of law that fit segments of the Corpus Juris,
modes of literary criticism may gravitate to those segments of a corpus that are most amenable to
the critic’s hermeneutic designs. For a strong case in point, one may turn to recent feminist,
gender, and queer studies of T.S. Eliot. This assemblage of research finds an important channel
in Cassandra Laity’s and Nancy Gish’s 2004 essay collection, Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in
T.S. Eliot. If it is sensible to peruse this volume as fairly representative of new feminist, gender,
and queer studies of Eliot, then the following excerpt from Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s review
indicates precisely how jurisdictional the relation between hermeneutic case and Eliot’s corpus
may be:

In general, mid-career Eliot and Christian social-thinker Eliot are scanted; Rachel Potter
is, however, a partial exception with her informed study of Eliot’s political thought.²

¹ See Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in Image—Music—Text; Burke, The Death and Rebirth of the Author:
Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida; Jane Gallop, The Deaths of the Author: Reading and
Writing in Time.
Sweeney Agonistes goes unmentioned—a curious omission given its lurid sexuality and threat, its homosocial men, its demi-mondaines, its tonal potpourri and panache, its mocking narration of feminicide, all seemingly made-to-order for the themes of this anthology. So too Coriolan. On the sweeter, formerly canonical side of things, “Ash Wednesday” (and related post-conversion work like “Ariel Poems”) also go unmentioned, along with “The Rock” and all those self-styled “minor poems”; certainly some of these texts evince gender ideas that could have been examined here. It’s always amazed me how little of Eliot’s total poetic output most Eliot critics discuss. After Strange Gods gets a brief mention; more contributors might have faced it and its implications. Finally, the gendered and strategic meanings of Eliot’s numerous post-war and late career Christian interventions into cultural and social thought are almost completely unbroached [sic]. It appears as if the spiritual is well covered in its narrative implications (martyrdom, personal transformation, homoerotic penetration, critique of banality) but not in its socio-political or theocratic implications for gender and sexuality. Desire is generally corporeal, personal, psychological, rather than shaped by power, authority, the historical moment, the construction of reception. Eliot’s own careful building (from the ruins) of a male subjectivity offering humble, yet redoubtable authority, is under-discussed. (601)

Assiduously telescoped by DuPlessis, these lacunae intimate that the rubrics of gender, desire, and sexuality tend to work in contradistinction to the “socio-political and theocratic implications” of Eliot’s social and cultural criticism, to his “late career Christian interventions,” and to his post-conversion literary output. Notably, recent work on the centrality of religion to Eliot’s corpus—the flipside, as it were, of the discontinuity between sexuality and religiosity in Eliot studies—are only to legitimate the jurisdictional bent DuPlessis highlights.3

3 Consider Barry Spurr’s ambitious study, ‘Anglo-Catholic in Religion’: T.S. Eliot and Christianity, which canvasses Eliot’s life and career from its “Sources of Faith, Familial and Philosophical (1888-1917)” to Eliot’s post-conversion claim to be “Anglo-Catholic in Religion (1927-1965)”. Spurr fleetingly broaches the topic of queer religiosity in cultural terms with reference to late-Victorian caricatures of “Anglo-Catholic priests in the mode of 1890s aesthetes, with flowing hair parted down the middle, à la Oscar [Wilde], gesturing extravagantly, in ornate sanctuaries, attended by effeminate-looking servers” (69). He also notes that “the handful of biographers who have entertained the notion that Eliot had homosexual tendencies never pursue the idea that these might have resonated with Anglo-Catholicism” (120). Charting cultural resonances between homosexuality and Anglo-Catholicism, Ellis Hanson writes that, with “[Oscar] Wilde and the Oxford movement, aestheticism joined hands with Roman Catholic ritualism to create an atmosphere of homoerotic exuberance unprecedented in the history of Christianity. Anglo-Catholicism, with its attention to ritual and vestments, acquired a certain gender-bending extravagance and exoticism within the context of Victorian puritanism. It was straight and queer, respectable and subversive, at the same time. By the 1920s, the notion of Anglo and Roman Catholicism as a magnet for homosexuals had passed from a running joke to a simple fact…. In the following decade, in Evelyn Waugh’s novel Brideshead Revisited, Charles Ryder is warned to stay away from Anglo-Catholics, since they are invariably sodomites” (Decadence 25). See also, Hilliard, “UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality.”
A provocative exception to the wider drift of Laity’s and Gish’s collection is, as DuPlessis notes, Peter Middleton’s essay, “The Masculinity behind the Ghosts of Modernism in Eliot’s *Four Quartets*.” Middleton “directly faces Eliot’s turn in the middle period” and offers a study of “Eliot’s doubleness, the helix of his daring/surrender and his repugnance/recoiling in matters of gender, sexuality, desire” (DuPlessis 600). Analyzing “Burnt Norton” in the frame of *Four Quartets*, Middleton charts Eliot’s subtle re-figurations of “‘perversity,’ weakness and ‘diminished masculinity’” (601). By uncovering a “subdued eroticism and awareness of the body” (Middleton 86), Middleton explicitly refutes one of Carol Christ’s arguments about Eliot’s post-conversion poetry—an argument that seems to anticipate, if not to underwrite, the jurisdictional penchant of *Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T.S. Eliot*. For Christ, Eliot increasingly seeks a poetic language that avoids the categories of body and gender, a language that we first find in the religious and natural figuration of the last section of *The Waste Land*. This is not androgyny, but a repression of sexual difference, a third, hooded figure one cannot recognize as man or woman. That is the language of *Four Quartets*, which in its abstraction, in its predominantly natural and religious imagery, avoids the issues of gender and body that dominate Eliot’s early poetry. (36)

Christ proffers a dichotomizing hermeneutic that circumscribes nodes of gendering, embodiment, and sexuality in Eliot’s corpus to its pre-conversion fixations and virilities (one might respectively conjure the macabre, ritualistic passions of “The Love Song of St. Sebastian” and the explorative, assaulting, unhindered lust of the young man carbuncular in *The Waste Land*).

Presaging the overall approach of Laity’s and Gish’s volume, Christ would in effect *dismember* the corpus in question (thus yielding *un corps sans corps*) precisely at its author’s religious turn.⁴

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⁴ This bifurcation of Eliot’s corpus according to the biographical fact of his religious conversion is an organizational commonplace in Eliot studies. Thus, Gordon’s *Eliot’s Early Years* ends with a chapter on Eliot’s conversion; and her subsequent volume, *Eliot’s New Life*, proceeds from Eliot’s conversion to the end of his life. Similarly, in *A Companion to T.S. Eliot*, edited by Chinitz, we find a discussion of Eliot’s literary essays divided according to his conversional year: Diepeveen, “Taking Literature Seriously: Essays to 1927” and Badenhausen, “He Do the Critic in Different Voices: The Literary Essays after 1927.”
After positing that the “natural simplicity” of Eliot’s imagery in “What the Thunder Said” (e.g. the decayed hole, the cock crowing, the damp gust) enables *The Waste Land* “to resolve its sexual conflict at the same time that it arrives at a figuration that places the poet beyond it,” Christ suggests that “abstract and ungendered terms seemed necessary to Eliot to escape his concern with bodily intactness. Even in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ [section II], written after his conversion, Eliot links the appearance of the Lady of silences to the dismemberment of his own body” (35). This reading splits Eliot’s corpus at its conversional seam and dismembers his oeuvre between two irresistibly magnetic poles: a nexus of intact, fleshy, incarnate, gendering secularity and a node of fragmentary, spiritual, disincarnate, genderless religiosity. If they are devoid of representations of gender, sexuality, corporeality, and desire in their nonreligious dimensions, then Eliot’s post-conversion works would virtually preempt the queer-theoretical inroads that critics have made through his early writings. Of course, another unavoidable corollary of this bifurcation would be its intimation that theology—as manifest, for example, in the tenets of Buddhism and Hinduism that we find in Eliot’s poetry as well as in the robust strains of Anglo-Catholic belief and liturgical idiom that imbue his later works—only countermands the endeavour of queering.

Questioning the tacit jurisdictions of queer theory for Eliot studies entails rereading his body of work as, in Nancy’s words, “a corpus of entries” for queer exegesis, through which one might cruise an “index” of unexpectedly queerable “places, postures, and recesses” (55). If read as a continuum of highly differentiated yet accessible corridors for queer reading, rather than as a body of work in which 1927 (the year of Eliot’s conversion) dons a signpost marking where queer studies habitually reach their limit, Eliot’s corpus may exemplify what Nancy calls a
Underscoring Nancy’s view that a corpus “is the topic of its every access” (55), I approach Eliot’s oeuvre as a “literature of breaching bodies” in order to engage the neglected, because austerely theologized, “pores and portals” of his post-conversion writings. I concentrate on Eliot’s works of social criticism because secularist readers (queer and otherwise) have found these texts markedly convenient to pass over as unequivocally and repellently theocratic, discursively genderless, ascetically incorporeal or disembodied, and tendentiously devoid of all but the most conservative, orthodox, and jurisdictionally unqueer(able) desires.

Inextricably Tethered, Doubly Bound: On Critical Method as Argument

In venturing queerly into Eliot’s post-1927 critical prose with an eye to its “socio-political or theocratic implications for gender and sexuality” (DuPlessis 601), I do not gauge his pre-conversion intimations or post-conversion avowals of Christian belief as performative gestures that, in the heat of their constative moments, (dis)articulate queer tendencies throughout his corpus; this consequential line of criticism has already been persuasively elaborated.

5 As Nancy posits in a shorter version of Corpus, which originally appeared in The Birth to Presence and was reprinted in the essay collection Thinking Bodies, “one is tempted to say that if there has never been any body in philosophy—other than the signifier and the signified—in literature, on the contrary, there is nothing but bodies. In yet another sense, one could say that literature and philosophy have never stopped wanting to relate to and/or oppose each other as body to soul or spirit…. In this way, we do not leave the horizon of the sign, of sense, and of mimesis. Literature mimes the body, or makes the body mime a signification (social, psychological, historical, heroic, etc.), or mimes itself as body. In this way, in all these ways at once, sense always comes back to the book as such, that is, to literature itself, but the book is never there: it has never abolished itself in its pure presence, it has not absorbed the sign into sense, not sense into the sign” (Birth 193-94). Shaped both from within by the doctrine of aesthetic impersonality, as per “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and from without by multiple schools of criticism and theory, Eliot’s corpus partakes of each corporeal “offering” Nancy sketches: “literature therefore offers us one of three things: either fiction, which is by definition bodiless, with its author, whose body is absent (in fact, we are imprisoned in his cave, where he gives us the spectacle of bodies); or bodies covered with signs, bodies that are only treasuries of signs (the bodies of Balzac, Zola or Proust—sometimes, if not often, those signs are in the first place carnal signs); or else writing itself abandoned or erect like a signifying body—such as for Roland Barthes ‘the beating (enjoying) body’ of the writer [Essais critiques], the body signifying to the point of non-significance” (193). For thorough critiques of Nancy’s suggestion that “there has never been any body in philosophy,” see Spivak, “Response to Jean-Luc Nancy” in Thinking Bodies, edited by MacCannell and Zakarin; and, more extensively, Derrida, On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy.

6 See, for instance, Kaye, “‘A Splendid Readiness for Death’: T.S Eliot, the Homosexual Cult of St. Sebastian, and World War I”; and Lamos, “The love song of T.S. Eliot: elegiac homoeroticism in the early poetry” in Gender,
Neither, for that matter, do I bank on queering as a forensic exercise that culminates in detecting traces of gender, embodiment, desire, and sexuality that for many critics are negated via Eliot’s religious aesthetics and conservatism. Forensic reading of this sort invariably risks mischaracterizing such traces, regardless of their aesthetic or theological manifestations, as derivative outcrops of earlier, conveniently “queerer” texts. Pursuing gender, embodiment, desire, and sexuality in Eliot after 1927, I suggest, is not tantamount to fielding each rubric as an extension of descriptively more “corporeal” early writings. The latter approach would entail fleshing out the corpus despite the conservative thrust of Eliot’s post-1927 religiosity. This thrust surely bears on and ambiguously inflects, rather than straightforwardly cleaves or dramatically ruptures, his oeuvre. By theorizing Eliot’s corpus as a continuum of varying and vying aesthetic, ethical, political, religious, and sexual desires, I hope instead to loosen, if not to unhinge, the bond in Eliot studies between queer exegesis and “epistemic secularism,” which bolsters the jurisdictional logic outlined above. Against the expediency of isolating queerness and its vicissitudes to one half of Eliot’s corpus, I eschew predetermining the aforementioned rubrics as either secular or religious and seek instead to deconstruct—interminably, if possible—the

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Desire, and Sexuality in T.S. Eliot. On Eliot’s correspondence and critical prose, see Lamos, Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust: “The problem of error in Eliot’s critical writings is engaged in a paradoxical economy. Like the Judeo-Christian theodicy that underlies it, this economy is driven by the demand to exclude impurities and, hence, is engaged in continually separating and expelling errors. Yet because error arises from within and masks itself as truth, it is an ever-present, inherent possibility, making the task of correction an endless struggle toward a transcendent goal” (18). In view of this errancy and its apparently religious scaffold, Lamos rereads Eliot’s essays vis-à-vis the queer recesses of his letters: “Although Eliot never explicitly mentions homosexuality or sodomy in his published essays, unlike his letters [e.g. letters to Conrad Aiken from September 1914 and January 1926], his reprobation of literary inversions [i.e. the privileging of sound over sense, of image over idea, of signs over their referents, and of poetic processes over their ends] is energized by his phobic rejection of male same-sex desire….Eliot’s critical writings bear witness both to the violent split between male friendship and sexual passion as well as to their subterranean confluence. In short, the deviant desire that Eliot denies is also the force that animates his writing” (37). Gabrielle McIntire furthers Lamos’s approach by underscoring a “major line of continuity” between Eliot’s mostly unpublished bawdy or “pornotropic” verse and his canonical writings: “between these two bodies of work” we may discern a “mutual and persistent blending of memory and desire, history and sexuality, the past and eros” (39).

For a refresher on the definition and application of this phrase, see Introduction (32-40), Chapter 1 (62-63, 80), and Soni, “In the Letter of Mere Reason: Rethinking the Universal Secular Intellectual with Immanuel Kant, Jacques Derrida, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.”
Admittedly, my endeavour to chart a queer-theological pathway through—and to find therewith queer-theological usage for—Eliot’s conservative social and religious thought is as forbidding as it is pressing. It is forbidding because Eliot’s social criticism often seems far too unyielding in its royalist conservatism, in its hierarchic vision of culture, and in its theocratic tendencies. After all, precisely how are Eliot’s social criticism and essays on religion in any way amenable to queering in general—let alone to queering that aims, as I do, for cautious negotiation, concession, and concourse (but not easy or smooth consensus) between theory and theology? This question becomes somewhat less inhibiting when one considers the acute stakes of rethinking the normative, disciplinary hermeneutics of secularism, which have led queer critics largely to ignore or to dismiss Eliot’s post-conversion career, and especially his social criticism, as an exegetical wasteland at once too immaterial, rightist, and incontrovertible for any reasonably “queer valuation.”

8 The hermeneutics of suspicion, as I argue at length in the Introduction, is to some extent synonymous or coextensive with the hermeneutics of epistemic secularism in the latter’s normative, disciplinary form. For our purposes here, Tracy Fessenden, in Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature, affords a refresher on the general argument I advance in the Introduction: secularism “flourishes in American literary studies and in the humanities more broadly to the degree that we rely on a secular liberal paradigm to avoid divisiveness in the classroom. This paradigm, part of whose work is to render religion a private matter of conscience and belief, has kept religion out of the curriculum of most academic disciplines apart from religious studies; even there, faculty typically provide students a model of detachment and objectivity, the secular scholarly gaze. Whatever the shortcomings of such a model, including its foreclosure of the possibility that committed intellectual exchange among contending positions within a culture of religious pluralism might be cultivated as a positive good, it remains entrenched insofar as our tools for engaging religion remain limited to a bland respect for others’ deeply held beliefs and a privileging of religion as belief, neither of which can safeguard the classroom from the sincere desire of any to proselytize, or to trump evidence presented in class with devout appeals to higher law. Better then (we say) to check religion at the door” (219). See also Fessenden, “Religion, Literature, Method”; and Kaufmann, “Post-Secular Puritans: Recent Retrials of Ann Hutchinson.”

9 I allude here to Meg Wesling’s “Queer Value.” Drawing on Spivak’s “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” in which the Marxist “labor theory of value” is deconstructed and retooled as a “value theory of labor” (Rosenberg and Villarejo 11), Wesling notes how Spivak unravels “moments of contradiction” in Marx’s discussion of the money-form; these contradictions “trouble the smooth transition” (Wesling 120) from, in Jakobsen’s words, “value through money to capital by way of representation and transformation” (“Homosexuals” 57). As Wesling points out, it is “use value” in relation to “exchange value” that “puts the entire chain into crisis, illustrating how the...
read Eliot’s most “unqueer(able)” texts counter-intuitively to discern a subset of theological resources for the otherwise normatively secular (i.e. nonreligious and/or antireligious) venture of queer theory? This question betrays a further methodological dimension of this chapter: to critique the epistemic circuitry of secularism in queer studies of Eliot, I am obliged to engage his political-theological arguments in a way that befits a radical theoretical openness to political theology.

As Simon During notes, recent theories of religion are often informed by an unchecked “structural link between European conservative political theology and post-colonial anti-secularism” (10) (“Mundane against”). If, as I maintain, critiquing epistemic secularism in its disciplinary form is irreducible to taking an anti-secularist stance, then any structural link between Eliot’s brand of European conservative political theology and my critique of secularist approaches to Eliot’s corpus must nevertheless be scrupulously checked and balanced, so as to avoid what During rightly labels “bad faith”: in order for secularism to be thought of “as the progressive social/intellectual distantiation from supernaturalisms,” one must remember that the modern secular “research university has long been at the heart of European, and hence global, secularism. The implications of this alignment press on us not least because it means that

impossibility of pinning down value in economic terms is matched by a similar open-endedness in the cultural. In other words, arguments that look to use value to establish the fixity of value-determinations in the cultural as an antidote for the uneven schematics of value in the economic miss the ‘irreducible complicity’ between both registers of such value-determinations” (121). As Jakobsen writes, “Each point along the chain [of value], each discontinuity, is a site for potentially effective intervention” (“Homosexuals” 60). The volatility of use value suggests “that queer labor — that is, the affectively necessary work of queer desire — both demands and enables a vision of the indeterminacy of value. As importantly, however, the value (both cultural and economic) of the queer opens up ways to think about the labor of sexuality and gender identity beyond what is recognizably queer. How, for example, might we think about the heteronormative or the queer identities constituted in relation to the productive conditions of the global sex trade, or the trafficking in undocumented labor, or even the new circuits of international adoption?” (Wesling 122-23). To these examples, I add the task of thinking queerly through the “value-determinations” of conservative political theologies, in which queerness is usually “valued” by way of marginalization, exclusion, or prescribed conversion — in short, by way of devaluation. For a complementary analysis of queerness and its (re)valuations in discourses of religious rhetoric, hate speech, and political power, see Cobb, God Hates Fags. 10 “For example,” writes During, “it would not be hard to deploy Carl Schmitt’s postwar affirmation of the anti-liberal, anti-democratic partisan for a sympathetic account of contemporary jihadism” (“Mundane against”).
academic anti-secularist arguments risk bad faith” (During “Mundane against”). My reading of Eliot’s corpus inflects this risk, precisely because I am not taking an anti-secularist stance; rather, my critique of epistemic secularism entails that I canvass Eliot’s appraisal of this subject and its “next of kin”—liberalism, individualism, democracy—in order to parse the means and ends of Eliot’s positions against the means and ends of my own. To argue in somewhat better faith, that is, I work through a trenchant double bind\(^{11}\) for which the reading practices of deconstruction serve as flashing signposts: to critique epistemic secularism as it bears on Eliot studies, I must traffic in Eliot’s conservative political theology and finesse the ethical, political, and theological cross-purposes that emerge precisely where our positions seem to be most aligned.

Tethered to and by this double bind, I concentrate on Eliot’s political theology and his critique of secularism in order to map imbrications among Eliot’s social criticism and Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. More specifically, I

\(^{11}\) This phrase hails from Gregory Bateson’s 1972 work, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Spivak *Aesthetic 4*). In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida holds that the double bind amounts to “a duplicity in the very concept of binding, obligation, bind, bond, ligament, more or less tight ligature, stricture rather than structure”; this stricture falls into exemplary relief with the case of liberty and sovereignty—two concepts central to my engagements with Eliot’s political theology: “Liberty and sovereignty are, in many respects, indissociable concepts. And we can’t take on the concept of sovereignty without also threatening the value of liberty….The double bind is that we should deconstruct, both theoretically and practically, a certain political ontotheology of sovereignty without calling into question a certain thinking of liberty in the name of which we put this deconstruction to work…. Another dimension or another figure of the same double bind would be…that of thinking an unconditionality (be it a question of liberty, gift, pardon, justice, hospitality) without indivisible sovereignty. It’s more than difficult; it’s aporetic, given that sovereignty has always given itself out to be indivisible, and therefore absolute and unconditional” (301-302). As a concept-metaphor, the double bind as Spivak renders it in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* is instructive: “Productive undoing is a difficult task. It must look carefully at the fault lines of the doing, without accusation, without excuse, with a view to use” (1). I undertake a “productive undoing” of Eliot’s conservative political theology by reading the “fault lines” that suture Eliot’s texts. “Affirmative deconstruction” and “critical intimacy” are two further synonyms for the double bind as “productive undoing.” Both phrases are couched in Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*: “in ‘Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas’ (1964, in *Writing and Difference*), Derrida embraced Levinas’s critique of Heidegger, even as he subjected it to a dismantling similar to the ones already mentioned [i.e. *Of Grammatology*, “Différance,” and “Signature Event Context”]. Such critical intimacy—rather than the usual critical distance—is a mark of affirmative deconstruction” (425). “Critical intimacy” clarifies my efforts to mark the limits of “intimacy” between my queer critique of epistemic secularism and Eliot’s brand of European conservative political theology; as well as my efforts to mark the critical difference (not always “distance”) between the means and ends of my and Eliot’s arguments. Affirmative deconstruction with an eye to use value has a philosophical premise in Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy” (in *Dissemination*), where the concept of pharmakon—connoting “both remedy and poison” (70) and indicating philosophy’s desire to transmute “poison into a counterpoison” (125)—is tracked through Plato’s *Phaedrus*. 
delineate a model of radically-immanent sensibility—or, to use the rubrics of leading-edge Kantian scholarship, transcendental or ideal embodiment—that ultimately lead Kant and Eliot to fissure the relation between ethics and politics in their respective philosophies of religion. By approaching this model of radically-immanent sensibility through the provocative lens of queerness, I aim to unsettle Eliot’s religious thought from within and thereby render it useful for my own queer-theological purposes. Through the spokes of this religious compass and its cavernous fissures between ethics and politics, I read with and against the grain of Eliot’s political theology to uncover its surprising, because furtively deconstructive, resources for queering. I thus venture along a critical path adjacent to one endorsed by Gabrielle McIntire, for whom Eliot’s corpus is irreducible to “the asexual, straight, conservative, rigidly Anglo-Catholic” figure “we rather problematically still too often have come to ‘inherit’”; I seek, in other words, to engage Eliot in a way that finds queerly useful the “uneven” character of “his investments and pronouncements” (7).

Sexing the Parergon: On the Fissures of Kant’s Critical Philosophy—

A Predicative Venture En Route to the Edges of Eliot’s Social Criticism

As a double bind tethered to the implacable etymological “bind” of religion itself, trafficking in as a means to deviating from Eliot’s religious conservatism leads me to encounter his political theology both on its own terms—“without accusation, without excuse” (Spivak Aesthetic 1)—and in terms of “fault lines” by which his texts may be “productively” undone (1); or, to borrow a “cunning passage” from Eliot’s “Gerontion,” by which one might find queerer

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12 As Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen note in Rethinking Secularism, “The origins of the term ‘religion’ are debated. Some claim that it comes from the Latin relego, ‘to read again’ or ‘repeat,’ as one might do with scripture or creeds; others argue that it comes from another Latin term, religare, ‘to bind anew,’ as in a contract or covenant; still others aver that it comes from the Latin res-legere, ‘with regard to a gathering,’ as with a religious festival or group” (7).
“corridors” of use-value for its significations.\textsuperscript{13} This movement of attention via textual fault lines assumes the nimble logic of “the trace” (or, apropos this article’s epigraph from Dante’s \textit{Purgatorio}, the “vestigio”): a paradoxical track, within a discursive system, of absence-as-presence, the “plasticity” of which the intimately-critical reader may to some extent recast through the emanative folds of “di{"e}ff{"e}rance.”\textsuperscript{14} Of course, as indicated by my prior use of Walter Benjamin’s phrase, “reading against [and therefore with] the grain,”\textsuperscript{15} this concern for the (ample yet limited) plasticity of value is not endemic to Derridean (or even Dantesque) deconstruction.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} These “corridors” open when Eliot’s speaker asks, “After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now/History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors/And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions/Guides us by vanities” (\textit{Complete 38}). My sense of these “corridors” as poised for queer-hermeneutic navigation (which while ambitious in character need not also be vain in guidance) complements McIntire’s sense that these lines elicit queer exegesis when read alongside letters between Eliot and Ezra Pound: in correspondence from January 1922, both poets equate “poetic performance with sexual fecundity” by “feminiz[ing] each other, with Pound referring affectionately to Eliot as a ‘bitch,’ and to himself in the third person as the willing midwife or doctor who ‘performed the caesarean Operation’ on the pregnant Eliot to allow for the birth of [\textit{The Waste Land}]” (\textit{Modernism 77}). Building on Wayne Koestenbaum’s study, \textit{Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration}, McIntire suggests that this “feminization of Eliot as the birthing mother who is unable to deliver his/her baby without Pound’s incisions again circumvents the perilous ‘corridors’ of female genitalia (and history) that Eliot elaborates in ‘Gerontion,’ preferring a cutting of the body and text to the physiological labor of birthing alone” (77).

\textsuperscript{14} See Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology}: “The instituted trace [the possibility common to all systems of signification] cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears as such and thus permits a certain liberty of variations among the full terms” (46-47). Geoffrey Bennington’s account of \textit{diff{ê}rance}, as the condition of (im)possibility which “permits a certain liberty of variations among the full terms,” is remarkably consonant with Eliot’s sense of history’s “cunning passages” and “contrived corridors”: \textit{diff{ê}rance} is “plunged into what it attempts to name and understand. It follows that this ‘word’ or ‘concept’ can be neither a word nor a concept, naming the condition of possibility (and therefore impossibility) of all words and concepts: but at the same time it is only a word/concept that is not sheltered from its own effects: this doubling spreads panic among all words and concepts, allowing them to be what they are only by simultaneously forbidding them from so being in the sense that has always been given to the word (and the concept) ‘word,’ and to the concept (and the word) ‘concept’” (Derrida and Bennington \textit{Derrida 74}). The “certain liberty” at stake for Derrida’s “instituted trace” has in recent years taken on a “plastic,” materialist, neurological dimension in the work of Derrida’s former student, Catherine Malabou: see \textit{What Should We Do With Our Brain?: Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction}; and \textit{The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic}. In Clayton Crockett’s estimation, Malabou advances a “new materialism” that is “based upon a new philosophy of spirit (\textit{esprit}) that is plastic because it articulates a cerebral event, \textit{cérébralité}” (2010: xvi). Consistent in some respects with Hägglund’s shrewdly materialist overhaul of deconstruction in \textit{Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life}, Malabou insists “that there is no trace apart from form” and affirms “an ‘essentially material plasticity’” (Crockett 2010: xvi).

\textsuperscript{15} Timothy Bewes locates the source of this phrase (and thus a wellspring for “symptomatic reading” and by degrees of extension the “hermeneutics of suspicion”) in Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History”: “reading against the grain emerged out of yet another reading, that of Benjamin’s Thesis 7 on the philosophy of history, where, on the basis of his own reading of the theory of ‘historical materialism,’ Benjamin announces the task of the critic as to ‘brush history against the grain.’ … Reading against the grain, by implication, involves reading the text in the name of the ‘vanquished,’ those whose fate is visible only negatively, in the form of the text’s absences, gaps, and repressions” (15-16). Reading with the grain would, “in its ideal form,” “amount to thinking the text inseparably
The Derridean traces and Benjaminian grains that engender the present double bind come into focus when Eliot’s social criticism is juxtaposed with the fissures of Kant’s Critique of Judgment and Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone. Pursuing a philosophical tangent in this section that is essential to my reading of conservative political theology in late modernism, I methodically cross-reference the fault lines of Kant’s critical philosophy with those of Eliot’s social criticism in part to extend further into the field of queer-modernist studies the purchase of a term that appears sparingly, and yet with deep consequence, in Kant’s oeuvre: the term, discussed at length in the previous chapter and both expansively recapitulated and re-contextualized anew here for its pertinence to Eliot’s social criticism, is parergon (pl. parerga; adj. parergonal) — a singular noun, we may recall, that in ancient Greek signifies “by-work, subordinate or second business,” in classical Latin denotes “extra ornament or detail,” and in post-classical Latin pertains to “something subordinate or accessory to the main subject” in the fine arts (OED). Largely by way of Derrida’s illustrious work, The Truth in Painting, the parergon has enjoyed a considerable degree of circulation, application, and transmutation in religious studies, cultural studies, and literary theory. Appearing per se (translated into German as “Nebengeschäfte: incidental business or bustle, activity or operation which comes beside or against” [Derrida Truth 56]) once in Critique of Judgment and once in Religion, the parergon from the text; that is to say, thinking its singularity, such that literature would be engaged not as the representation of thought, but as thought: a thought without an image. For this reason, any phrase such as ‘reading with the grain’ is deeply flawed; it would be more accurate to posit a reading simultaneously with and against the grain” (24). A certain political corollary of reading with and against the grain further clarifies my approach to Eliot’s conservative political theology: “To read politically is to read for the possibility not only that everything truthful has been expunged from the text but that even what has not been expunged, what is visible, has a plurality of meanings—intentionlessness—that attest to the text’s uncontainability within its own present” (Bewes 26).

16 One may deduce the apposition of “Dantesque deconstruction” through Ambrosio’s essay, “Derrida and Dante: The Promise of Writing and the Piety of Broken Promises,” in Styles of Piety: Practicing Philosophy after the Death of God.
17 Hereafter referred to as Religion.
18 See Owens, Chase, Barzilai, Dupras, Groom, Johnson (“Aurora Leigh’s”), Stokes, and Soni (“In the Letter”).
19 See “Analytic of the Beautiful,” § 14, “Elucidation by means of examples”: “Even what is called ornamentation (parerga), i.e., what is only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object,
in Derrida’s account enacts “the logic of the supplement” (Truth 64) that harks back to Of Grammatology (141-164; 269-316). As addition and replacement, Kant’s parerga—frame, garment, column, and fourfold dynamic of grace verging on the limits of reason alone—achieve both “exteriority as a surplus” and interiority through a “structural link which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the ergon [i.e. work]. And this lack would be constitutive of the very unity of the ergon. Without this lack, the ergon would have no need of a parergon” (59-60).

Overriding its “merely” ornamental or liminal status, the parergon becomes for post-Enlightenment aesthetics (in the line of Kant’s Third Critique) and for the philosophy of religion (in the line of Kant’s Religion) “an outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside” (63). As an ancillary structure, the parergon nevertheless “has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy” (61).

Constitutively, to be art at all, artwork must presuppose, erect, and regulate some kind of (figurative and literal) enclosing border that discloses—indeed, frames—the evaluative, critical world beyond itself to which it is ultimately non-identical, to which it serves as an object, and which it subjects to its own evaluative, interpretive labour. Paradoxically, even as they signify

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20 See “General Observation” to Book One, “Concerning the Indwelling of the Evil Principle with the Good, or, On the Radical Evil in Human Nature”: “This General Observation is the first of four which are appended, one to each Book of this work, and which might bear the titles, (1) Works of Grace, (2) Miracles, (3) Mysteries, and (4) Means of Grace. These matters are, as it were, parerga to religion within the limits of pure reason; they do not belong within it but border upon it. Reason, conscious of her inability to satisfy her moral need, extends herself to high-flown [überschwenglich] ideas capable of supplying this lack, without, however, appropriating these ideas as an extension of her domain. Reason does not dispute the possibility or the reality of the objects of these ideas; she simply cannot adopt them into maxims of thought and action. She even holds that, if in the inscrutable realm of the supernatural there is something more than she can explain to herself, which may yet be necessary as a complement to her moral insufficiency, this will be, even though unknown, available to her good will. Reason believes this with a faith which (with respect to the possibility of this supernatural complement) might be called reflective; for dogmatic faith, which proclaims itself as a form of knowledge, appears to her dishonest or presumptuous” (47-48).
the art object’s *liminal* and surreptitious exchange value as a material product that conditions—
“dislocates even as it cooperates in” (75)—the possibility of aesthetics, “mere” frames and other *parergonal* types retain both formal exteriority to and indeterminable use value for the literal artwork, for the aesthete, and for the psychic *work of art.* Further compounding the labour of the frame is the *parergon*’s dissemination as “a philosophical quasi-concept” that resurfaces “*intact* or deformed and reformed” (55) from the outliers of the Third Critique (see §85 “Physico-Theology,” §86 “Ethico-Theology,” and “General Remark on Teleology”) to the figuration of grace and its vicissitudes as reason’s “nonessential essentials” in Kant’s *Religion* (De Vries *Violence* 96). Sliding from the edges of fine art, beauty, sublimity, and teleological

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21 A certain “productive” tension between exchange and use value constitutes the “Analytic of the Sublime,” especially §43. After differentiating art from nature by way of analogy (“*Art* is distinguished from *nature* as making [*facere*] is from acting or *operating* in general [*agere*], and the product or the result of the former is distinguished from that of the latter as *work* [*opus*] from effect [*effectus*]”), Kant hierarchizes forms of aesthetic production and their “products,” which canvass the immaterial and the material: “By right it is only production through freedom, i.e. through an act of will that places reason at the basis of its action, that should be termed art…. *Art* is further distinguished from *handicraft*. The first is called *free*, the other may be called *renumerative art*. We look on the former as something which could only prove purposive (be a success) as play, i.e. an occupation which is agreeable on its own account; but on the second as labour, i.e. a business, which on its own account is disagreeable (drudgery), and is only attractive by means of what it results in (e.g. the pay), and which is consequently capable of being a compulsory imposition” (§43; 132-33). Thus, material objects produced (however finely) for crude market consumption are of less value than aesthetic “goods” that exercise the aesthetic play-drive (or exercisable will) per se—that is, that quicken the “play” of imagination that *feels* itself to be irreducible, in the midst of being tethered, to the faculties of reason and understanding. Whereas the marketplace of making would preserve the peculiar gap between values of exchange and use, transcendentally aesthetic “goods” would jettison exchange value by disarticulating the “drudgery” and *ideally even the material* (surely laborious!) production of *liberating art*; this it would achieve by making use of *priceless* freedom as that which is inherent to the Kantian aesthetic. In Spivak’s words, the *Critique of Judgment* vouchsafes a “programmed access to the concept of freedom as the pleasure of ‘reason … exercising dominion over sensibility’ (*CJ* 109)” and “implicitly presupposes that ‘freedom’—generated by determination or programming—is a trope of freedom” (*Critique* 11). The use value of aesthetic “play” leads the imagination to trope itself as free(dom) in the mirror of “its own account,” but as Paul de Man argues, Kant’s “transcendental philosophy undoes the very project of such a philosophy,” leaving us “with a materialism that Kant’s posterity has not yet begun to face up to” (“Phenomenality” 89). On Kant’s productive binary of “free” and “renumerative” art, see Derrida, “Economimesis.”

22 De Vries’s oxymoronic synonym for the fourfold *parerga* in *Religion* complements Spivak’s designation of Kant’s *reworking* of the frame as a “near-metalepsis”: in *Religion*, “Grace is caught in the figure of something like a metalepsis—the effect of an effect. Since pure reason—or indeed any kind of reason—cannot know the cause [of miracles, mysteries, and indeed of reason itself] all that is inscribed is an effect” (“*Terror*” 108), the ripples of which are “perceivable” at “the boundaries of mere reason” (an alternative translation of *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*). Kant’s metalepsis is partial rather than complete because his de-transcendentalization of grace from ultimate cause to effect of an effect “still has God in the offing, although Kant is careful to bind this possibility in every way, one of the most important being the discussion of the hypothetical use of reason. Derrida’s argument would be that to locate the effect of grace in texts would not necessarily invoke a causeless cause” (110). Here, “Derrida’s argument” refers to the seminal essay, “Différence.”
judgment to the brinks of religious morality, political theology, and radical evil, the *parergon* toils concentrically between analytic categories and psychic faculties: thus, in the Third Critique, the theory of judgment frames that of taste; the theory of taste enfolds the theory of the beautiful; and the latter is bounded by the theory of the aesthetic (Derrida *Truth* 69). Directing the “artful violence” (69) of these levied frames is a volatile “teleology of our own faculties” (de Man “Phenomenality” 73)—i.e. reason, imagination, and understanding (shading into judgment)—that border irredcibly upon in order to constitute one another.²³ In *Religion*, this teleological engine is circumscribed by unfathomable, enticingly penumbral mysteries of grace, which by supplementing the moral lacunae of calculative reason would safeguard it from its own auto-immunological²⁴ drive for self-(de)regulation. Bordering (on) grace, *parerga* abound.²⁵

²³ Kant examines “aesthetic judgment as what represents the subjective play of the faculties (imagination and reason) as ‘harmonious through their very contrast’” (de Man “Phenomenality” 76). “What the imagination undoes is the very labor of reason, and such a relationship cannot without difficulty be said to unite both of them, imagination and reason, in a common task or law of being” (76). This “legislative” volatility in Kant’s refractive trinity of cognition falls into relief through §26 of the “Analytic of the Sublime” (“The estimation of the magnitude of natural things requisite for the idea of the sublime”) where, as de Man notes, Kant puzzles out “how an infinite quantity can become a sensory intuition in the imagination”: “In order to make the sublime appear in space we need, says Kant, two acts of the imagination: apprehension (apprehensio) and comprehension or summation (comprehensio aesthetica), Auffassung and Zusammenfassung (p. 173; 90).…The comprehension will soon reach a point at which it is saturated and will no longer be able to take in additional apprehensions: it cannot progress beyond a certain magnitude which marks the limit of the imagination. The ability of the imagination to achieve syntheses is a boon to the understanding, which is hardly conceivable without it, but this gain is countered by a corresponding loss. The comprehension discovers its own limitation, beyond which it cannot reach” (77). As Derrida reminds us, for Kant “intuition alone relates immediately to the object,” which entails that the understanding do so “by the intermediary, precisely, of judgments. Judgment is the mediate knowledge of an object…The power to think as power to judge. One will thus find the functions of the understanding by determining the functions of unity in judgment” (*Truth* 68).

²⁴ In “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” Derrida reads community “as *com-mon auto-immunity*: no community <is possible> that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity, a principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection (that of maintaining its self-integrity intact), and this in view of some sort of invisible and spectral sur-vival” (87). A *strictly reasonable* community (for instance, one shaped legislatively and culturally by a conformist political secularism, whereby religious symbols such as the Sikh turban or the Muslim hijab are banned from institutions of public life) would exemplify Derrida’s concept of the auto-immune: by regulatory excision, hardline political secularism would seek to ruin the cultural-religious identity of part of its own membership. Derrida elaborates this concept in “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides” and in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. A sizable, rich, and multi-disciplinary body of criticism has developed around this concept: see Naas (“Nation”), Rottenberg (“Legacy”), Miller (“Enisled”), Mitchell, Haddad (“Light”), Hägglund (Radical), Mandair, Andrews, and Phillips (“Bios”).

²⁵ See Romans 5:20: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”
As Whitney Davis notes, Derrida’s *parergic* deconstruction of Kant’s Third Critique (or, his tracing of the Third Critique’s auto-deconstruction via its own destabilizing frame-work) has been widely adopted as an interpretive approach—even default mechanism—in cultural studies, with the corollary that cultural theorists “have suggested that aesthetics must retrieve—because it cannot avoid—its art-historical moment” (44). The refining, (dis/en-)-closing work of Kant’s frame, that is, should be studied as much for its *systemic* exclusions (its conditions of impossibility) as for its *systematic* inclusions (its conditions of im-possibility). An influential case in point, albeit one Davis does not cite, is Spivak’s analysis of the casually-excised yet architectonic position reserved for the aboriginals of Australia and Tierra del Fuego in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. These “raw” (because in Kant’s view forever-uncultured) natives are *parergic* to the cultivated mechanisms of gendered, hetero-normative, Euro-Enlightenment aesthetics.27

In Davis’s account, the Third Critique formalizes, purifies, and jettisons an “art-historical moment” that is not, strictly speaking, Kant’s own in 1790 and to which Derrida does not explicitly attend in *The Truth in Painting*. The moment in question belongs to Polykleitos of

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26 On the question of the historical milieu in Kantian aesthetics, Derrida addresses “the whole problematic of inscription in a milieu, of the marking out of the work in a field of which it is always difficult to decide if it is natural or artificial and, in the latter case, if it is *parergon* or *ergon*. For not every milieu, even if it is contiguous with the work, constitutes a *parergon* in the Kantian sense” (*Truth* 59).

27 See “Analytic of Teleological Judgment,” §67 (“The principle on which nature in general is judged teleologically as a system of ends”), wherein the imperially-sieved “raw man of the Analytic of the Sublime … is only a *casual* object of thought, not a paradigmatic example. He is not the subject as such; he also does not quite make it as an example of the thing or its species as natural product. If you happen to think of him, your determinant judgment cannot prove to itself that he, or a species of him, need exist….We find here the axiomatics of imperialism as a natural argument to indicate the limits of the cognition of (cultural) man. The point is, however that the New Hollander or the man from Tierra del Fuego *cannot* be the subject of speech or judgment in the world of the *Critique*. The subject as such in Kant is geopolitically differentiated” (*Critique* 26-27). This casual excision amounts to “the foreclosure of the subject whose lack of access to the position of narrator is the condition of possibility of the consolidation of Kant’s position” (9). The push-and-pull logic of the *parergon*, while not explicitly invoked by Spivak, surfaces when “we let the de Manian version of deconstruction master what is ‘outside’ the text ‘by affecting itself with it,’” a praxis through which, “in this structurally indeterminate part of the text [i.e. the foreclosed raw man], Kant’s system performs what it deconstructs and, if we read against the grain, can be made to deconstruct what it performs” (30).
Argos, a Greek sculptor who around the year 440 B.C. penned an aesthetic treatise, the *Kanon*, and cast in bronze the figure of a spear bearer, the *Doryphoros*. Studied together, treatise and figure reveal Polykleitos’s “theories about the correct proportions of the male body when represented in a statue” (Davis 39). Materializing an aesthetic “Rule or Norm”—the *Kanon*—of “the stature for a beautiful man”28 (39), the *Doryphoros* in Kant’s Third Critique exemplifies the *abstractive function* of the beautiful in an aesthetic framework that is essentially gendered, ethno-geo-graphic, culturally relativist, and ultimately racialized.29 “The normal idea,” Kant posits,

is something intermediate between all singular intuitions of individuals, with their manifold variations—a floating image for the whole genus, which nature has set as an archetype underlying those of her products that belong to the same species, but which in no single case she seems to have completely attained. But the normal idea is far from giving the complete *archetype of beauty* in the genus. It only gives the form that constitutes the indispensable condition of all beauty, and, consequently, only *correctness* in the presentation of the genius. It is, as the famous *Doryphorus* of Polycletus was called, the *rule*…It cannot, for that very reason, contain anything specifically characteristic; for otherwise it would not be the *normal idea* for the genius. (Kant *Judgment* 65)

The strong Platonic undertow of Kant’s aesthetic “rule,” which by substituting “the normal idea” for the Eternal Form renders the “correctness” of beauty constitutively and thus *vitally* spectral, elicits what Davis rightly takes to be Derrida’s “counter-Platonizing approach”:

> Despite idealist abstraction of the canonical form, aesthetic disinterestedness cannot be fully detached from its origins in sensuously appealing images; in life or in art, a

28 Davis is citing from “Analytic of the Beautiful,” §17, “The ideal of beauty”: “Say, for instance, a person has seen a thousand full-grown men. Now if he wishes to judge normal size determined upon a comparative estimate, then imagination (to my mind) allows a great number of these images (perhaps the whole thousand) to fall one upon the other, and, if I may be allowed to extend to the case the analogy of optical presentation, in the space where they come most preponderantly together, and within the contour where the place is illuminated by the greatest concentration of colour, one gets a perception of the *average size*, which alike in height and breadth is equally removed from the extreme limits of the greatest and smallest statures; and this is the stature of a beautiful man” (65).

29 For Kant, “we get the figure that underlies the normal idea of a beautiful man in the country where the comparison is instituted. For this reason a black man must necessarily (under these empirical conditions) have a different normal idea of the beauty of forms from what a white man has, and the Chinese person one different from the European. And the process would be just the same with the *model* of a beautiful horse or dog (of a peculiar breed)” (65).
“pure cut,” as Derrida calls it, cannot be made between erotic charm and ideal beauty. According to Derrida, then, Kant’s moral paragon of perfected correct beauty in art cannot be disembedded from the mosaic of sexual identifications within which the ideal supposedly emerged. (Davis 43-44)

The aesthetic transcendence whose immaculate light Kant’s Analytic of the Beautiful would glimpse through its relatively static prism is thus consistent both with the philosopher’s desire for formal extrication—that is, for extrication of and by way of form—and with an architectonic description of ideal beauty’s abstractive, potent, altogether ghostly function in the aesthetic field.

Exacting and influential as it is, Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting* makes, in Davis’s discerning estimation, “a powerful general case” for the discursive force of the beautiful in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (46; emphasis added). Limited in its concentration, this impressive generality stems in part from Derrida having methodologically overlooked certain illuminating details of the Third Critique in the context of Kant’s imagined community of readers and the original historical milieu from which Kant’s argumentative examples are drawn. In the pivotal

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31 This is not to suggest that Kantian form as such, or “formal extrication” as I am perhaps too obliquely coining the abstraction of the ideal in the Analytic of the Beautiful, gives way to a state, temporary or otherwise, of unbridled freedom (e.g. “by means of formalized ideal beauty, I aesthetically transcend my comparatively sullied or imperfect condition as spectator”) in a transcendental system of mind. As Rodolphe Gasché makes clear, formalist and aestheticist accounts of “beautiful form” in the Third Critique err precisely in construing formal beauty as no more than a “harmonious arrangement of parts into a whole,” the sole end of which is the “pleasure it stirs in the beholder. Form is perceived here as autonomous, and is celebrated for its own sake; it has no further purpose than to be subjectively pleasing” (Idea 7). Against both the aesthetic-formalist reduction of form to an autonomous circuit of pleasure and the contravening moralistic reduction of form to beauty’s ethically instructive “truth” content (8), Gasché maintains that “the notion of form in Kant’s transcendental idealism no longer concerns the constitution of things themselves. Rather, as the *Critique of Pure Reason* argues, the exclusive concern of form is the constitution of the objects of experience, for which it provides the a priori ordering principles—that is, forms of sensibility (space and time) and of the understanding (the categories). Form, here, concerns the fundamental syntheses without which no sensible intuition and no cognition would be possible. Nonetheless, form continues to have a material correlate, which is the very matter of the experience. The concept of mere form encountered in the Third Critique, on the basis of which wild objects of nature are found to be beautiful, is anything but a free-floating form…the mere form found in wild objects of nature concerns the faculties involved in securing a representation. This is also to say that it secures an experience of such ‘wild’ objects, for which no determined concept of the understanding is as yet available. Mere form here is anything but an empty, contentless arrangement. It is the form that the cognitive powers achieve in the face of wild objects whose representation suggests purposiveness, notwithstanding the absence of determinate concepts. *Mere form* is thus above all a para-epistemic concept” (8; emphasis added). Far from being emancipatory, then, “extrication of and by way of form” is on the serviceable order of an architectonic condition of possibility: it is extricated only to the extent that is para-epistemic. As an abstraction without a perfectly embodied correlate, ideal beauty partakes in this architectonic: it “constitutes the indispensable condition of all beauty” (Kant, *Judgment* 65; emphasis added).
case of Kant’s reference to the *Doryphoros*, Derrida—in incidentally somewhat like Kant himself, and thus to an extent *despite* his own cautionary account of the “pure cut” that Kant’s Third Critique would chisel between “erotic charm and ideal beauty” (Davis 44)—does not involve in his rapt deconstruction the sculpture’s original homoerotic significations. The proportionally ideal spear bearer harbors an archeological trace, at once aesthetic and sexual, of Greco-Roman athleticism and of the gymnasium itself, about which Aristophanes in *The Clouds* (II. 973-76) famously “joked that dirty old men in Athens rushed to examine the impressions of genitals and buttocks left by good-looking boys sitting in the sand” (Davis 41). In the discursive line of Aristophanes’s comedy, which was first performed in 423 B.C., and of complementary scholarship on the aesthetics of male homoeroticism in the ancient Mediterranean world, sculptors such as Polykleitos may very well have “acted like the pederastic lechers; despite the placid and graceful ideality of the sculpted figures that eventually were produced, the sculptors carried the fascinated enthusiasm, the erotic frenzy, of pederastic fetishism into art” (Davis 41).

As Davis notes, Kant in his Third Critique certainly does not register the “comic erotic ground—the original sexual joke—” (41) that accompanies Aristophanes’s, and thus perhaps the ancient popular imagination’s, views on the ubiquity of homoeroticism in male athletic society and its broader cultural subtexts. Rather, Kant’s Third Critique configures “the judgment of ideal beauty (**le beau idéal**)” as a cognitive process whereby “a *canonical* judgment” succeeds “an *interested* judgment of taste”; ideal beauty cleaves individual expressions of interested pleasure, such as a pederastic appreciation of the youthful male body, from the increasingly disinterested accumulation of multiple judgments rendered on the same or similar objects by the same person or by other people. These judgments emerge, then, in the community and as a person’s communal sensibility—a faculty, as it were, of seeing the world as others do. They are increasingly unconcerned, Kant supposed, with the empirical existence (not least the sexual

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32 See Kampen, Boymel, Bergmann, Cohen, DuBois, Kellum, and Stehle, eds., *Sexuality in Ancient Art*. 
availability) of the worldly object of judgment for the human subject of judgment, especially for the first subject in the chain or palimpsest of judgments—typically the artist himself….This process of accumulation and modification in aesthetic judgment, constituted and communicated socially, is neither mysterious nor sinister. It need not have the oppressive character that present-day (and supposedly post-Kantian) accounts of aesthetic transgression and cultural subversion seem to assume in putative opposition to normative (or Kantian) aesthetic judgment in culture. In fact, Kant supposed that the perfected ideal of beauty constitutes a desirable horizon of human freedom: the perfected ideal might unbind us from the empirical conditions of judgment, that is, from both its object and its subjectivity, whether or not this freedom, this liberation, from the cares of the self can be attained in every case by all parties who have been involved socially in constructing the ideal. (Davis 37)

Kantian transactions (not to be confused with Hegelian sublations) of object and subject; interest and disinterest; empirical nature and rational freedom; and of the “normal idea” and “all singular intuitions of individuals, with their manifold variations” (Kant Judgment 65), constitute the “communal sensibility” of each person in society and thus of each (inter-national, professional, metropolitan, civil, etc.) society’s perception of itself as (faltering interminably before, lacking all but rhetorically in, lured by the promissory character of) a community.33 “In other words,” Vivasvan Soni notes, “Kant is not theorizing the enlightenment public sphere in the third critique but the community that is its precondition: condition of possibility and impossibility”34 (9).

33 Distinctions between society and community—i.e. between society as the sum total of administrative, institutional, economic, and cultural networks of individuals in geographic or virtual space and community as a narrower, reflexive, selective, and imagined byproduct of historical affiliations and interests among people (in a given society) that are broader than any single individual’s member status—bear on and return us to the discourse of value and use-value addressed earlier in note 22. I have recourse here to Spivak’s speculative parsing of value in Marx: “It was by contemplating the made object of use (Nutz) as use-value (Gebrauchswert) and by abstracting from it that Marx deduced its irreducible value-constituent: abstract labor-power. If the worker managed this abstraction well, then we would have a society that is at once a community and socialist [Spivak is extrapolating from the dictionary definition of the adjective, gesellschaftlich, which means “social” and thus to an extent “societal”]—gemeinschaftlich, gesellschaftlich. This formulation is hopelessly utopian without an understanding of responsibility, but at least Marx thought this. I should mention here that this attempt by Marx to deconstruct the binary opposition between Gemeinschaft [community] and Gesellschaft [society] (as found in the anthropology of his time) in his vision of socialism has been obliterated in translation. It is invariably translated as ‘common to all societies’” (“Globalizing Globalization”).

34 As Soni observes, Kantian “aesthetic judgment leads us each time to an encounter with the remarkable possibility of a sensus communis, which breaches the solipsism of the subject, a common sense, which is also the sense of community. Aesthetic judgment discloses a structure that is essential and that nothing else within the subject can disclose: the possibility of and opening to community at the heart of subjectivity…The community that comes to light in the third critique is no mere empirical community: aesthetic judgments compel us to reflect on the conditions under which there can be any community at all, whether of rational communication, shared identity, or any other
As both aperture and closure on the architectonic plane of aesthetic form (Gasché 9), the transcendental intuition of community’s “precondition” (Soni 9) indicates the speculative character of Kant’s principal dyads: individual/collective, interest/disinterest. In the Kantian framework, the skeletal dialectic of aperture and closure applies evenly to the (de)construction of individuals and collectives: “subjective universality” (the communal substrate of individuals qua subjects) encodes a “psychic and social process” that is inherently “transitive” because, on the one hand, “interested judgments of individual subjects” are reconstituted by “supposedly disinterested normative [i.e. communalized] judgments”; and, on the other hand, “disinterested judgments of ideal beauty” are productively informed and affected by “personal interested judgments of taste” (Davis 38). The membrane dividing the individual from the collective is porous enough for the fastidious aesthete to surmise that we “make a logical and psychological mistake only when we describe this cycle as a unidirectional, univocal teleology, a one-way development from personal feelings to communal norms—a development that can be described all too easily, of course, as the suppression of personal feelings by communal norms” (38). This twofold mistake is in Davis’s view “a sub-Kantian idealist abstraction” imbuing the work of many “academic Kantians (as well as theorists of academic ideals in art)”; in post-Kantian determinate mode of community. The third critique, then, is a transcendental thinking of community, and the aesthetic affords an originary experience of the possibility of community” (8-9). Jean-François Lyotard affords a more technical gloss on sensus communis in the Critique of Judgment: “the ‘communal’ (gemeinschaftlich) nature of the sensus communis (and there is no reason to translate it by ‘common to all’) seeks to compare ‘in thought’ (in Gedanken) (and not ‘in thinking’) and to compare a priori (and not in experience) a singular aesthetic estimation with another estimation, whatever it may be. The aesthetic ‘community’ is not primarily constituted by the convergence of opinions given by individuals. It is ‘deployed,’ so to speak, by a work of variation that ‘thought,’ and thought alone (in Gedanken) effects in order to remove itself from its ‘private’ condition, deprived as it is of the Other by the singularity of its act of estimation….it is not the fact of the call for a sensus communis present in aesthetic feeling that needs to be established, but, rather, the legitimacy of this fact that is its necessity a priori” (219-21). For further angles on the aesthetic and community, democracy, and/or the social imaginary, see Singer, Aesthetic Reason, especially chapters two, “Aesthetic Community: Recognition as an Other Sense of Sensus Communis” (41-70) and seven, “Living in Aesthetic Community: Art and the Bonds of Productive Agency” (219-74); Gourgouris, Does Literature Think?; Cascardi, The Subject of Modernity, especially the section “Aesthetic Liberalism” (296-310); Cascardi, Consequences of Enlightenment, especially “Aesthetics as Critique” (49-90) and “The Role of Aesthetics in the Radicalization of Democracy” (175-212); and Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in an Era of Globalization.
aesthetic philosophy, that is, the centripetal “cognitive power of subjective universality”—i.e. its “consolidation of diverse sensations, impressions, and images in the constitution of the perfected ideal of beauty in art”—tends to elide this very same power’s centrifugal tendencies: its fissures and faults, “its detours and declines, and its reversions and reversals” under the aegis of Kant’s subjective universality (38-39).

A self-admitted “ultra-Kantian”\textsuperscript{35} (Kearney 66), Derrida is by no means immune to this error. In fact, the “pure cut” between le beau idéal and historicized erotic charm Derrida attributes to the Third Critique overstates the latitude (but certainly not the veracity) of “aesthetic teleologies” that “work by excluding homoerotic and other unorthodox affections”; by forcing “certain judgments…out of the overlay”; and by barring heterodox viscera from “the admirable canonical configuration, even though they belong to its dynamic conditions of possibility” (Davis 46). These teleologies of course exist: they produce aesthetic norms that “can only be queered by forcibly (re)introducing into the overlay what has been eliminated or excluded—beauty queered” (45-46). However, as a deconstructive intervention, the (sans of the) pure cut cannot account for mechanisms of communalizing induction, incorporation, inherence, and internal fissuring that Kant’s own theory of aesthetic idealization presupposes. Precisely because a “dynamic image of beauty emerges communally, it must be increasingly less vested in one person’s singular image of one man’s beauty. Correlatively, it [i.e. the image of beauty and the aesthetic judgment through which it was chiseled] must be increasingly relayed in a thousand times a thousand, a million, judgments” (Davis 40-41). In the grain of Kant’s own model, though unstated by him, “unorthodox affections” may be ensconced in, rather than always prohibited by, the “canonical configuration”: “Polykleitos’s Kanon was not just his collation of his judgments

\textsuperscript{35} In jarring conversation with John Milbank, Derrida states: “I am Kantian, but I am more than Kantian. I am constantly taking up [philosophy] within [this] tradition” (Kearney 66). Such reflexive positioning does not “prevent [Derrida] from objecting to Kant on many points, especially on the point of duty and the moral law” (66).
of taste, *his* judgment about the beauty of boys in the gymnasium. The sculptural image collated an entire community’s history of judgments” (42); accordingly, heterodox aesthetic judgments “were not always incompatible with an emergent ideal because sometimes they were *already* universalized or universalizable” (43). As surreptitious differential, fissure, and refraction, queerness is (either potentially or actually) *immanent* to the subjective universality of aesthetic-sexual norms.

For Davis, discerning this immanence draws us from the shrewd intervention of “beauty queered,” which *forcibly* compromises the integrity of the norm from without, to the *intuitive* hermeneutics of “queer beauty,” whereby at the inception of (and thus from within) idealization homoerotic significance flows smoothly into and provides a manifest dynamization of the norm (as Kant’s model presumed) even if it no longer constitutes its sole imagistic content, insofar as many other layers of significance have also been integrated into the perfected ideal. This is not quite the possibility that Derrida tells us that Kant had overlooked…. [T]he “pure cut” to which Derrida objected does not occur between sensuous charm on the one hand and ideal beauty on the other hand. It occurs *within* the construction of ideal beauty between a correct or canonical image on the one hand and its significance as a moral symbol in a perfected work of fine art on the other hand. For this reason, it is entirely possible to imagine *immoral* but correct, canonical images as deconstructive counterexamples to the artifacts cited by Kant. (47)

Davis’s internalization of Derrida’s “pure cut,” his subtle distinction between “beauty queered” from without and “queer beauty” from within, is of crucial importance to the wider arc of *Dissident Secularism*, which lobbies for and undertakes an inexorably *immanent*, rather than oppositional or reactionary, critique of secularism’s epistemology (i.e. its ethics, politics, metaphysics, and aesthetics) vis-à-vis schisms between theory and theology.

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36 “Of course,” Davis adds, certain “homosexual practices were condemned in ancient sexual aesthetics, especially those in which an older man occupied a passive role or a younger man submitted to anal penetration—an important feature of the topography of ancient pederasty to which Michel Foucault frequently adverted. But obviously the condemnation required homoerotic ideals against which it could be judged… In a sufficiently concentrated aesthetic of pederasty—a culture strictly speaking—one could see what other men found to be beautiful in a youth without taking an erotic interest in it himself. In turn *such judgments did not have to be sloughed off as unwanted sexual parochialism in the palimpsest that constituted the ideal*. They could smooth the way for its conversion into a general morality in a norm that remained valid, and could be properly applied, beyond the specific historical context and the particular social community of male lovers and their male objects of desire” (43; emphasis added).
More immediately, however, Davis’s *theoretical* distinction between exteriorized and interiorized queer aesthetics bears on any venture, whether forcible or intuitive, to queer Eliot’s *theological* prerogatives for literary aesthetics and criticism: “Literary criticism,” Eliot writes in “Religion & Literature,” “should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint” (93). Only to the extent that “there is common agreement on ethical and theological matters,” he continues, “can literary criticism be substantive” (93). Morality and religion are not equivalent, Eliot posits in “Francis Herbert Bradley,” “but they cannot beyond a certain point be treated separately”: “A system of ethics, if thorough, is explicitly or implicitly a system of theology; and to attempt to erect a complete theory of ethics without a religion is none the less to adopt some particular attitude towards religion” (59). Through the interstices and various turns of aesthetics, ethics, and religion, on which *Dissident Secularism* is predicated via my critical introduction, Eliot adapts one of Wittgenstein’s most cryptic submissions in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same)” (6.421). For Eliot, ethics and religion are *ultimately* one and the same. Aesthetics, by necessary extension, is discursively incomplete without the *organic* import of this very oneness and sameness.37 No corpus, whether literal or literary, can properly coalesce without this assimilative equation and its conscious, subconscious, and unconscious parameters.38 Mining this equation in as queer a fashion as

37 “The artistic sensibility,” Eliot maintains at an especially conservative junction in his discussion of culture and class, “is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility, the religious by its separation from the artistic; and the vestige of manners may be left to a few survivors of a vanishing class who, their sensibility untrained by either religion or art and their minds unfurnished with the material for witty conversation, will have no context in their lives to give value to their behaviour. And deterioration on the higher levels is a matter of concern, not only to the group which is visibly affected, but to the whole people” (*Notes* 26).

38 At an integrative, even gastric and subcortical, turn in “Religion & Literature,” Eliot writes that “if we, as readers, keep our religious and moral convictions in one compartment, and take our reading merely for entertainment, or on a higher plane, for aesthetic pleasure, I would point out that the author, *whatever his conscious intentions in writing*, in practice recognizes no such distinctions. The author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, *whether he knows it or not*; and we are affected by it, as human beings, *whether we intend to be* or
possible involves discerning its fissures as they manifest intuitively from within and as they emerge forcibly from without. In context, then, Davis’s suggestive distinction between queer beauty and beauty queered obtains a certain hermeneutic inflection: does Eliot’s socio-religious criticism give way to queer theology from within or to theology queered from without? While external and internal fissures are more or less evenly ascertainable, I will argue that a radically immanent (thus imminent) queer theology unfurls in Eliot’s most conservative political theology.

Parergic Sexuality:

On the Edges of Eliot’s Social Criticism through the Fissures of Kant’s Critical Philosophy

Significantly, my modernist-theological adaptation of Davis’s post-Kantian queer aesthetics is informed, if not stimulated, by Eliot’s own considerable philosophical, critical, and literary debts to Kant and, albeit less evidently, to Hegel. Deftly structured by the phenomenological category of “immediate experience” and by epistemological distinctions between reality and ideality, Eliot’s doctoral dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*, pursues its eponymous subject through an architectonic established transcendentally by Kant and retooled dialectically by Hegel.39 As Jewel Spears Brooker and

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39 Nominally, Kant/Kantianism appears in only nine fleeting passages in *Knowledge and Experience*; Hegel, for his part, is mentioned by name only twice. Despite this apparent paucity of reference, Eliot’s dissertation bears the indelible marks of German idealism as it was taken up and transmuted by the fin-de-siècle movement of British idealism, which Bradley did much to steer and which Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore, two principal analytic philosophers referenced substantially by Eliot, did much to challenge. Notably, Eliot also engages the work of other stalwarts from the British idealism movement: Bernard Bosanquet, Harold Joachim, and J. M. E. McTaggart.
William Charron have demonstrated, Kant exerted an especially powerful influence both on Eliot’s graduate work and on the trajectory of his aesthetics as a modernist. Imbedded in his life as a student, this influence betrays the depth of Eliot’s philosophical knowledge, particularly when in later years he wavers drolly on the perspicacity and osmosis of his engagement with German idealism.  

Examining three substantial essays Eliot wrote at Harvard in 1913 for Charles Bakewell’s graduate seminar on Kant, Brooker and Charron highlight Eliot’s focus on Kant’s initial subversion of, and subsequent lapse into, epistemological dualism—that is, on Kant’s refutation of the division of the world into consciousness and external objects in the first *Critique* and his lapse into absolute dichotomies [i.e. theory and practice, nature and freedom, inclination and obligation, and phenomenon and noumenon] in the second. In trying to find the corrective to Kant’s absolute distinctions, Eliot advances pieces of a provocative and sophisticated theory of opposites, more radical in its relativistic implications than anything found in Bradley or in many present day proponents. (48)

Clustered in three hermeneutic nodes that Brooker and Charron label “correlativity,” “degree relativity,” and “point of view relativity and co-ascription of opposites,” Eliot’s piecemeal...
theory—“his special Kantian-tinged relativism” (57)—harbors key implications for his poetry and criticism. For Brooker and Charron, these implications are most apparent in the non-antithetical correlative ity of core dyads—specifically, “past/present; mind of Europe/individual mind; community/individual; impersonal/personal” (58)—in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”; in the “dissociation of sensibility” as postulated in “The Metaphysical Poets,” where Eliot envisions “a unified sensibility” in early modern literature, “a state in which thought and feeling existed in a relationship of reciprocation and mutual definition” (58); and in “The Hollow Men,” where multiple dyads are not doubly bound by way of strict opposition, but rather “are related as origin or cause to consequence, with the second term involving the human realization, the materialization or incarnation of the first” (60; emphasis added).

When considered through the arc of Eliot’s modernism and his corresponding investments in intellectual history, the Kant manuscripts illustrate “how Eliot’s direct engagement with Kant’s thought may have deepened his own sense of irony in both poetic and philosophic realms” (Habib 98). Indeed, via M.A.R. Habib’s invaluable study, which I quote at length here, Eliot’s “Kantian-tinged relativism” (Brooker and Charron 57) may be recast as his Kantian-tinged irony:

In 1952 [in his introduction to Joseph Pieper’s Leisure: the Basis of Culture], looking back on his earlier philosophical career, Eliot cited the ‘divorce of philosophy from theology’ as the reason for his decision, some thirty-seven years earlier, to abandon that profession. This may help us to place the Kant papers in an appropriate context. Kant has a twofold significance in the ‘divorce’ of modern philosophy from theology which, as Eliot recognized, began with Descartes’ insistence on reason rather than revelation as the avenue to truth. On the one hand, Kant stood opposed to a line of bourgeois thinkers, notably Locke and Hume, who had effectively produced secularised and sceptical systems of thought….Kant’s distinction between phenomena and noumena was in part an effort to protect the concept of God (by elevating this to the unknowable, noumenal

considered from different points of view…The notion of something that is absolutely real or absolutely unreal, with no admixture of the opposite from any point of view, is only an ‘abstract limit’ or limiting concept” (50).

43 Specifically: idea/reality, motion/act, conception/creation, emotion/response, desire/spasm, potency/existence, and essence/descent.
world) from the rationalist and empiricist onslaught of the Enlightenment thinkers. Kant held that only the phenomenal world, grounded in sense experience, could be apprehended by the intellectual faculty of pure reason. The noumenal entities, *viz.* God, freedom and immortality, were a function of the ‘practical’ moral faculty, the will. This metaphysical gesture might be viewed as an attempt to reinstate Aquinas’ separation of the domains of intellect and will, of reason and revelation, in a modern context which was obliged to accommodate the findings of science… *Kant’s bifurcation of reality into phenomenon and noumenon effectively forces into coexistence the fundamental principles of bourgeois thought with revamped feudal attitudes. In the process of arriving at this bifurcation, he ironises the human self, separating it into an empirical ego which undergoes a variety of experiences and a transcendental ego which stands apart and detached from experience: this second ego both takes the first ego for its object and unifies it.* Hence Kant’s irony, as applied to both reality and the self, represents historically the first major attempt to reconcile the emerging contradictions of bourgeois thought within a larger, unifying perspective. (99; emphasis added)

Kant’s system, which when read on its own (pre-Kierkegaardian—indeed, pre-postmodern) terms “could hardly have been motivated by such irony,” precipitates “the notion that a single self might simultaneously harbour divergent visions of the world” (107). Accordingly, one might situate Eliot’s instrumental concept of European modernism’s “historical sense”—i.e. the mature poet’s “feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer [onward]…has a simultaneous existence and encompasses a simultaneous order” that renders the poet both traditional and contemporary (“Tradition” 49; emphasis added)—alongside Kant’s ironizing epistemology of “coexistence,” which forcefully imbricates the “revamped feudal attitudes” of early modernity with post-Cartesian, Enlightenment philosophies of nascent bourgeois subjectivity.⁴⁴ To be sure, as Eliot’s career advances, Kant’s “highly ambivalent relation to the

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⁴⁴ As Habib observes, Eliot’s absorbance of this epistemological “coexistence,” a condition or state of mind by no means synonymous with harmonization or synchronicity, passes through a major literary phase with his reading of the French symbolists, especially the work of Laforgue: “the symbol for Laforgue embodies distance from the surrounding world; the most apt name for this distance is irony, which for both Laforgue and Eliot lies at the core of the symbolic process. Irony here represents the logical extreme of…the ‘duality’ of symbolism. The Platonic bifurcation of reality by the other French symbolists is now resolved into an ironic bifurcation of subjectivity itself. Rather than viewing reality as dual, as both material and spiritual, the same reality is now viewed from more than one standpoint at once. This is the kind of irony which will undergo elaboration in Eliot’s philosophical essays” (30). In *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (1933), Eliot remarks that “the metaphysicality of Laforgue reaches in two directions: the intellectualising of the feeling and the emotionalising of the idea. Where they meet, they come into conflict, and Laforgue’s irony, an irony always employed against himself, ensues” (qtd. in Habib 65).
preceding tradition of bourgeois thought” (Habib 99) is matched by Eliot’s comparably ambivalent relation to Kant’s “ironizing” interventions in metaphysics, ethics, and politics. In his Kant papers and in the political theology of his social criticism, as we shall see, Eliot’s indebtedness to Kant is offset by an uncompromising criticism of the philosopher’s inadvertent secularizing effects on academic, cultural, and sociopolitical thought in Western modernity.

As they permeate outward from Eliot’s Kant manuscripts into his literary essays and social criticism, these effects invariably “shed an interesting light on a dilemma which has long haunted critics of Eliot”:

why are his prose writings so fraught with apparent self-contradiction? He seems to regard human nature both as essential and as socially constructed; a poet must express truths impersonally, yet truth is ‘private’; religion entails submission to an external authority yet we rightfully demand intellectual satisfaction from it. How can we make sense of such glaring discrepancies? (Habib 119)

Such self-contradictions and discrepancies prove especially consequential, if not also (for modernist scholars invested in hermeneutic ambiguity) productively unresolvable, on the paramount subjects of religion and culture in Eliot’s worldview. How, for instance, are we to understand Eliot’s cardinal acceptance of “the external authority of Anglo-Catholicism” alongside his (perhaps much stronger) sense that “Catholicism is the best intellectual explanation of the world” (Habib 122)? The implications of such asymmetry become evident when, as Habib recommends, we notice that the continuity Eliot discerned between “Kant’s speculative [or aesthetic] and moral [or ethical] worlds” parallels Eliot’s central argument in “Religion and Literature” and its precursor piece, the 1930 essay “Poetry and Propaganda”: “we aim…to terminate our enjoyment of the arts in a philosophy, and our philosophy in a religion” (qtd. in Habib 122). As Habib intimates, this unmistakable parallel would underscore the ironizing lever in the Kantian system—its forcing “into coexistence the fundamental principles of bourgeois
thought with revamped feudal attitudes” (99); and thus, the parallel at hand evinces “Eliot’s desire to return to the concentric circles of contextualisation characteristic of feudal Christianity,” wherein the (for Eliot, ultimately Dantesque) poet writes by means of a lapidary religious allegory “which in its very inscription and conception points beyond itself, insinuating itself into higher circles of reference” (122). Yet, apart from this insight and its corollaries for how we might parse the influential shadow that Kant’s ironizing critical philosophy casts on Eliot’s political theology, Habib does not venture into Eliot’s social criticism. Similarly, in charting the wider implications of the Kant manuscripts, Brooker and Charron limit their discussion to salient poems and literary essays. Queer as it is, this interpretive lacuna begs (for) certain queries.

Fortuitously, by way of McIntire’s path-breaking archival and interpretive work on Eliot, the deconstructive hinge of Kant’s Critique of Judgment and Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone—the parergon (pl. parerga)—has already obtained anchorage as well as a measure of currency in Eliot scholarship. Parerga appears, as McIntire notes, in a brief yet fascinating essay Conrad Aiken penned in 1948 to celebrate Eliot’s sixtieth birthday. Nominally, at least, the essay concerns “King Bolo and Others,” a cast of colonial and alternately obscenely sexualized, savagely violent, scatological, racially abject, and satirical subjects that populate Eliot’s mostly unpublished, coterie-based bawdy poems suggestively designated by McIntire as “pornotropic” (10-38). In characterizing this extensive poetic sequence as parerga, Aiken elicits McIntire’s fitting reference to Derrida’s The Truth in Painting, with its emphasis on the work of supplementation that surplus ornaments (or accessories “that one is obliged to welcome on the border” or “on board”) contribute (“from a certain outside”) to the intrinsic “operation” of the art object (qtd. in McIntire 38). Eliot’s pornotropic verse, accordingly, is situated on the
mysteriously porous “boundary of his other canonical poems, touching them by illuminating new limits of interpretation” (38). This liminal logic of the *parergon*, I would add, simultaneously absorbs and arcs beyond Eliot’s pornotropic verse and its relation (*sans* relation) to his poetic corpus. Precisely how queer are the con/de-tours, in/di-vestments, and dis-embodiments that constitute the fissures of Eliot’s critical corpus and concomitantly his political theology? Moreover, taking for granted there is any on which to speculate, does *parergic* queerness represent theology *queered* (forcibly from without) or *queer* theology (manifesting immanently)?

As I demonstrated in chapter two, Spivak (with Derrida in the offing) reworks Kant’s liminal theological *parerga* to recalibrate an ethics of secularism (not to be confused with secularism *as* ethics) for the intellectual as trained in and produced by the nascent nonreligious university. By attenuating the transcendental power secularism assumes when it is rendered “in the spirit” of an episteme, we uncover secularism de-transcendentalized “in the letter” of immanent mere reason (see pages 54-80). Significantly, by reading *with* the grain of Kant’s regulatory principles for epistemology and *against* the grain of his conservative-sexist-Christian-racist-Eurocentric anthropology,45 Spivak’s “lettered” approach predicates my juxtaposition of Eliot’s social criticism with Kant’s critical philosophy. This juxtaposition proceeds by way of fissures between ethics and politics that emerge when Eliot and Kant (dis)articulate (discourses of) sexuality and religion from their respective critical programs. Incongruities between ethics

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45 See Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, pages 26-31, for a broader discussion of this anthropological nexus as it underwrites Kant’s regulatory system of reason. I reproduce here the linchpins of Spivak’s analysis of the “discontinuity between sex- and race-differentiation” in Kant’s oeuvre: “When Woman is put outside of Philosophy by the Master Subject, she is argued into that dismissal, not foreclosed as a casual rhetorical gesture [as are the New Hollander and the inhabitant of Tierra del Fuego]. The ruses of the racial other are different” (30). In the discriminating realm of cultural-religious otherness and the perceived superiority of Christianity, “Kant gives us his invariable scenario. The other civilizations produced senseless supplements. Graduation into philosophy would fill up the gap of that contradiction with the proper supplement, the moral law emerging only when speculative reason has been trained not to be fearful of its own limits. Polytheism is here defined as demonology and Christian monotheism as ‘wondrous’ [*wundersam*] because, in a certain sense, it is almost philosophy, philosophy’s supplement, not really needed as specifically a religion by those who are ready for it” (31).
and politics in the corpuses of both authors constitute the traces and fault lines that enable me to pursue, under the rubric of queer exegesis, a “productive undoing” of Eliot’s most staunchly unqueer(able) writings. More specifically, where Spivak “undoes” Kant between the (agreeable) ethics of his regulatory epistemology and the (disagreeable) politics of his anthropology, I seek to “undo” Eliot between his (agreeable) ethics of what I will call “immanent religiosity” and his (disagreeable) politics of theocratic anti-secularism and anti-liberalism. Sexuality, in my reading, figures as the disavowed yet entrenched force that (de)constructively fissures Eliot’s (and Kant’s) texts from within and thereupon renders them serviceable to queering. Pursuant to my sense of the trace as a mysterious portal that (in quasi-sexual fashion) goes both ways, I eschew Eliot’s theocratic politics without claiming to have thus trounced the complex immanence he ascribes to religion in the cultures of secular modernity. Instead, through the verve of a queerly “theo-critical” analysis that draws evenhandedly from theory and theology, I rethink the ethical and political implications of such immanence for critical studies of Eliot’s oeuvre and for modernist literary and cultural criticism more generally.

46 To the extent that queer-theoretical scholarship may still be said to partake foundationally in the maneuvers of deconstruction (recall, for instance, the centrality of “deconstructive contestations” [11] to Sedgwick’s “Introduction: Axiomatic” in Epistemology of the Closet [1-63] and the definitional double binds in “Critically Queer” [223-243], the final chapter of Butler’s seminal Bodies That Matter) I would characterize as queerly deconstructive my efforts to trace sites of confrontation that surreptitiously un hinge Christian theology as such from the conservative Anglo-Catholic orthodoxy by which Eliot would seek to determine it once and for all. In other words, by “playing off one side of things [e.g. ethics] against the other, incompatible or incommensurable side [e.g. politics]” (Düttmann 284), and by associating such trace-work with the “indeterminacy of the term queer—its power to signal nonconformity that involves but extends beyond literal sexuality” (Saville 7), I chart heterodox inroads through the political theology that (a)roused Eliot’s orthodoxy.

47 In other (somewhat less playful) words, “(out)sourcing” a trace is neither a surefire portal beyond one system nor a surefire portal into another: “The thin figure of the trace lurks in the crannies of nuanced human endeavor—from the risk-taking decisiveness of politics to the grandeur of philosophy in its fullness…Immanuel Kant’s philosophy of pure reason may be a ‘management of the undermining risk of the trace’…I have also suggested that Derrida submitted to his disciplinary elders in 1968 [in the essay “Différance,” from which the following excerpt derives] that the thought of the trace can curb the universalizing arrogance of language: ‘I have attempted to indicate a way out of the closure of this framework via the ‘trace,’ which is no more than an effect than it has a cause, but which in and of itself, without extra-textual gloss [hors texte], is not sufficient to operate the necessary transgression’” (Spivak Aesthetic 493-494). Glossing this very excerpt from “Différance” in her “Response to Jean-Luc Nancy,” Spivak writes that the trace “is not sufficient for the full transgression of thinking an effect without a cause that is necessary to fulfill the desire to philosophize” (38).
Paradoxically enough, the fact that in such key works as “Catholicism and International Order,” *The Idea of a Christian Society*, and *Notes toward the Definition of Culture*, the subject of sexuality is reckoned with for the most part indirectly or metonymically (via Eliot’s deprecations of liberalism, individualism, and paganism) turns out to be the “queerest” dimension of his categorically social criticism. Despite its vital value as, in D.H. Lawrence’s words, “the blood-passion [that] is the very source and origin of us” as “social units” (*Fantasia* 183), and its importance as the condition of possibility for society and sociality, the sexual achieves a mainly (not merely) inferred and thus seemingly marginal “presence” in Eliot’s most sustained writings on culture. Consider, for instance, the following passage from “Catholicism and International Order,” in which sexuality is skirted by way of far more capacious concepts (i.e. pleasure, happiness) that are amenable to Eliot’s expeditious and “civilizing” regulations:

> Compared with any degree of Christian society that has ever been actual, there have been, or are said to have been, primitive societies in which were found a far higher average of pleasure and a far lower average of pain: advocates of sex reform are always referring us to the manners of the happy Trobriand Islanders. In comparison with any primitive society we can only say that the quality of pleasure and happiness prevailing in such society is too low to attract any civilized person: even the lowest of civilized individuals cannot adapt himself to such society without deteriorating and incidentally, in many cases, corrupting the natives with him. (123; emphasis added)

Similarly, in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot is closest to addressing sexuality as such when he fleetingly reflects on his ideal means for determining, bracketing, regulating, and naturalizing its functionality between the extremes of celibacy and procreative heterosexual marriage:

> 48 In deference to Eliot’s view of Lawrence’s *Fantasia of the Unconscious* as a “criticism of the modern world…to keep at hand and re-read” (*After 60*), I would set this passage into further relief: “The blood-consciousness and the blood-passion is the very source and origin of us. Not that we can stay at the source. Nor even make a goal of the source, as Freud does. The business of living is to travel away from the source. But you must start every single day fresh from the source….As social units, as civilized men, we have to do what we do as physical organisms. Every day, the sun sets from the sky, and darkness falls, and every day, when this happens, the tide of life turns in us. Instead of flowing upwards and outwards towards mental consciousness and activity, it turns back, to flow downwards. Downwards towards the digestion processes, downwards further to the great sexual conjunctions, downwards to sleep. That is the soul now retreating…back to the origins” (183).
We may say that religion, as distinguished from modern paganism, implies a life in conformity with nature. It may be observed that the natural life and the supernatural life have a conformity to each other which neither has with the mechanistic life: but so far has our notion of what is natural become distorted, that people who consider it ‘unnatural’ and therefore repugnant, that a person of either sex should elect a life of celibacy, consider it perfectly ‘natural’ that families should be limited to one or two children. It would perhaps be more natural, as well as in better conformity with the Will of God, if there were more celibates and if those who were married had larger families. (80; emphasis added)

Imbued with (super)natural conformity, this polarity between celibacy and procreative heterosexual marriage finds a strong echo in Notes towards the Definition of Culture, where the sexual, presumably among other sites of desire prone to excess if not disciplined through culture and religion, is nearest articulation when Eliot reflects on sin, vanity, and self-indulgence:

"Every sin that can be imagined has been practised, and the pretence of religious faith may often enough have cloaked intellectual or aesthetic vanity and self-indulgence; but, on the view of the intimacy of religion and culture which is the starting point of my examination, such phenomena as the progress to religious faith through cultural attraction are both natural and acceptable….The danger of freedom is deliquescence; the danger of strict order is petrifaction. (80-81)"

Here, authenticity of religious faith figures as the telos of authentic culture—i.e. of a culture alive to its generative “intimacy” with the religion that, for Eliot, is its ineluctable wellspring, platform, and guarantor. In a quasi-Aristotelian spirit of the ethical or golden mean between extremes (see Oser, “T.S. Eliot: the modernist Aristotle”), Eliot champions a “natural and acceptable” kind of “cultural attraction” whose end is religiosity and whose means toward this end are neither too free/delinquent nor too strict/petrified: in other words, disciplined religion via disciplined culture.

"Taking into account his paramount estimation of Catholic orthodoxy, his highly critical stance on capitalist industrialization, and his view of commercialized society as a vacuous “mob
of individuals” (which is, needless to say, a contradiction in terms), one might interpret the regulatory elisions of sexuality in Eliot’s social criticism as strategic responses to “Protestant freedom,” which as Janet Jakobsen notes at considerable (yet nonetheless admissible) length, is an incitement to sexuality over against the celibacy of priestly and monastic life, and it is an incitement specifically to matrimonial and reproductive sexuality. The shift to marriage is also a shift from communalism to individualism. Monastic celibacy was itself a communal way of life and was also part of broader networks of communities. In the reformed world, however, the Christian who clings to Christ and the widow who chooses a new husband are first and foremost individuals. In the newly formed Protestant social relations, the right relation to the (immaterial) spiritual world is no longer guaranteed by the (material) institution of the Church. Rather, the individual stands alone before God, and his (a word I use advisedly) right relation to the spiritual world is guaranteed by the immaterial substance of faith alone...This reworking of the relation between the immaterial and the material—a reformation symbolized and embodied through sex and marriage—allows for the formation of capitalism. Capitalism is itself a reworking of the relationship between the material and the immaterial. Capitalism, we must remember, is more than a set of material relations, it is fundamentally dependant on abstraction, the abstraction of labor into labor power....It is not that material and immaterial relations are not present before the Reformation, it is that this interrelation worked differently after the Reformation—the way that the immaterial is made manifest in the world is different. Thus sexual relations, and marriage in particular, come to epitomize the Protestant ordering of the world. Sex embodies the remaking of the relation between the material and immaterial worlds, and sexual relations are key to producing the individual, rather than a community, as the primary site of relation to God. Sex, like the commodity, is fetishized in modernity...Sex becomes the premier site of morality. Sex is not a realm analogous to the realm of production, but rather a necessary part of productive relations.

49 In “Catholicism and International Order,” Eliot posits that “only the Catholic, in practice, is under the manifest obligation to find out what sort of man he is—because he is under the obligation to improve that man according to definite ideals and standards. The non-Catholic, certainly the non-Christian philosopher, feeling no obligation to alter himself, and therefore no cogent need to understand himself, is apt to be under the sway of his prejudices, his social background, his individual tastes. So, I dare say, are we; but we at least, I hope, admit our duty to try to subdue them” (115). Eliot’s critique of the ravages of capitalism, a theme as central to our time as it was to his, reaches its fulcrum toward the end of The Idea of a Christian Society: “We are being made aware that the organization of society on the principle of private profit, as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism and to the exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly” (80). Earlier on, he writes that the “more highly industrialized the country, the more easily a materialistic philosophy will flourish in it, and the more deadly that philosophy will be...And the tendency of unlimited industrialism is to create bodies of men and women—of all classes—detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob. And a mob will be no less a mob if it is well fed, well clothed, well housed, and well disciplined” (53). While Eliot’s censuring of nascent neo-liberal capitalism cannot be disarticulated from his religious and social conservatism, one might nevertheless collocate his critique with William Connolly’s leftist analysis, in Capitalism and Christianity, American Style, of the ethos of greed and free-market fundamentalism that manifestly drives “the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine” and its influence on social and political policy.
And what sex produces is the individual, specifically the autonomous and free individual. (“Sex + Freedom” 294-97; emphasis added)

Deeply pertinent to Eliot’s (dis)articulations of sexuality, Jakobsen’s telescopic sketch, from her important and suggestively titled article “Sex + Freedom = Regulation,” of “the Protestant ordering of the [material and immaterial] world” and the concomitant “shift from communalism to individualism,” informs my understanding of “the decay of Protestantism” that Eliot gauges in After Strange Gods when addressing the lack of orthodoxy in modern “Anglo-Saxon literature”:

I mean that amongst writers the rejection of Christianity—Protestant Christianity—is the rule rather than the exception; and that individual writers can be understood and classified according to the type of Protestantism which surrounded their infancy, and the precise state of decay which it had reached. I should include those authors who were reared in an ‘advanced’ or agnostic atmosphere, because even agnosticism—Protestant agnosticism—has decayed in the last two generations. (38)

Protestantism’s hastened “decay”—indeed, Protestantism as hastened decay—in Anglo-Saxon literary culture is recast, in the context of The Idea of a Christian Society, as a cultural “capacity for diluting” the substance of Christianity from orthodox Catholicism to variegated Protestantism to a secularist, “liberalized or negative condition of society,” for which the only sensible antidote is “that of a positive Christian society” (55). To fortify this positive Christian society, one must commit oneself to seeing “the world as the Christian Fathers saw it” and thus to “reascending [sic] to origins [in order] to return, with greater spiritual knowledge, to our own situation” (81).

For Eliot, the decay and dilution of culture and society, their progressive heterodoxies of individuation, arise “when morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy—that is, of the habits of the community formulated, corrected, and elevated by the continuous thought and direction of the Church” (After 54; emphasis added); “and when each man is to elaborate his own [morals].” Eliot continues, “then personality [i.e. individualism] becomes a thing of alarming importance” (54). With recourse to Jakobsen’s phrasing, one might say that Eliot rues Protestant
freedom’s “incitement to sexuality over against the celibacy of priestly and monastic life” and its incitement to “matrimonial and reproductive sexuality,” precisely because, in the rapidly secularizing course of modernity, such provocations can only be (de)regulated by liberal-statist, democratic-populist, and ultimately individualist means. These means ascend in cultures of modernity to the detriment of a centralized spiritual authority, viz. the Church, whose orthodoxies may yet, in Eliot’s view, traverse (if not resolve) the public-private binary that subtends modern political secularism. Simultaneously vested with and “diluted” by the “powers of the secular modern,” the individual of secularized Protestantism is subject to what Peter Berger calls “the heretical imperative,” whereby modernity unfolds as a “universalization of heresy”.

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50 Indeed, for Eliot Protestantism’s aversions to the cultural effects of ascetic monasticism, e.g. the practice of celibacy as a life-model beyond the cloister’s high walls, renders such effects nearly perverse, and thus by extension rather queer: “It is commonly assumed that there is culture, but that it is the property of a small section of society; and from this assumption it is usual to proceed to one of two conclusions: either that culture can only be the concern of a small minority, and that therefore there is no place for it in the society of the future; or that in the society of the future the culture which has been the possession of the few must be put at the disposal of everybody. This assumption and its consequences remind us of the Puritan antipathy to monasticism and the ascetic life: for just as a culture which is only accessible to a few is now deprecated, so was the enclosed and contemplative life condemned by extreme Protestantism, and celibacy regarded with almost as much abhorrence as perversion” (Notes 32-33).

51 I borrow this apposite phrase from Scott and Hirschkind, eds., Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors.

52 As Berger notes, “‘heresy’ comes from the Greek verb hairein, which means ‘to choose.’ A hairesis originally meant, quite simply, the taking of a choice. A derived meaning is that of an opinion. In the New Testament, as in the Pauline epistles, the word already has a specifically religious connotation—that of a faction or party within the wider religious community; the rallying principle of such a faction or party is the particular religious opinion that its members have chosen...For this notion of heresy to have any meaning at all, there was presupposed the authority of a religious tradition. Only with regard to such an authority could one take a heretical attitude. The heretic denied this authority, refused to accept the tradition in toto. Instead, he picked and chose from the contents of that tradition, and from these pickings and choosings constructed his own deviant opinion” (27-28). Historical and sociopolitical contexts have changed significantly enough in modernity, Berger acknowledges, that the parameters and operation of heresy undergo modification: “In premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation...For premodern man, heresy is a possibility—usually a rather remote one; for modern man, heresy typically becomes a necessity...modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing become an imperative. Now, suddenly, heresy no longer stands out against a clear background of authoritative tradition. The background has become dim or even disappeared” (28). Eliot would concur with Berger’s conceptions of heresy and tradition. However, Eliot’s striking notion of the “mob of individuals” in mechanized, commercialized society inflects Berger’s heretical imperative as it emerges without “a clear background of authoritative tradition”: for Eliot, this imperative of picking and choosing, which is far more refracted and mediated by race/class/sex/power than Berger readily admits, comes at the paradoxical cost of the individuality that such picking and choosing would champion.
Through its thorny emphasis on discipline and regulation, Eliot’s midcareer social criticism strongly evokes the aesthetics and “ascetics” of depersonalization from his early landmark essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” wherein we read that the “progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” before “something which is more valuable”—namely, “consciousness of the past” (17) and of “existing monuments” that precede “the new (the really new) work of art” (15).\(^\text{53}\) Significantly, when considered against the illuminating backdrop of Jakobsen’s analysis and its Weberian underpinnings,\(^\text{54}\) these passages also suggest that the dissemination of particularly sexual morals through the “diluting” forces of Protestantism and secularization—that is, the centrifugal shift of “sex as the premier site of morality” (Jakobsen 297) from the communal purview of the Church to the production of individuals via secular polities\(^\text{55}\)—underwrites the ascetic regulations and elisions of sexuality as well as modernized, Protestant, secularized individualism\(^\text{56}\) in Eliot’s social criticism.

In light of this centrifugal shift and its inexorable pertinence to the dialectic of secrecy and confession that sutures Michel Foucault’s influential “repressive hypothesis,”\(^\text{57}\) I construe as

\(^\text{53}\) As Jewel Spears Brooker observes in “Writing the Self: Dialectic and Impersonality in T.S. Eliot,” from the publication of “Tradition and the Individual Society” in 1919 to the end of his life, “Eliot remained committed to [the essay’s] main points” and “extended them to culture and religion” in his social criticism (46).


\(^\text{55}\) On the contingencies of subjection, individuation, and personhood: see chapter two, footnote 62.

\(^\text{56}\) Eliot’s tempering of individualism reaches its apex in Notes towards the Definition of Culture, whose organizing rubrics are communalistic rather than individualistic: “the class,” “the elite,” “the region,” “sect and cult,” and “the unity of European culture.” When conjured at all, “the individual” is stratified hierarchically and assigned a communal function that surpasses the value of individuality: “the individuals from the dominant class who compose the nucleus of the cultural elite must not thereby be cut off from the class to which they belong, for without their membership of that class they would not have their part to play. It is their function, in relation to the producers, to transmit the culture which they have inherited; just as it is their function, in relation to the rest of their class, to keep it from ossification” (42).

\(^\text{57}\) In volume one of The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Foucault writes that “by making sex into that which, above all else, had to be confessed, the Christian pastoral always presented it as the disquieting enigma: not a thing which stubbornly shows itself, but one which always hides, the insidious presence that speaks in a voice so muted and often disguised that one risks remaining deaf to it. Doubtless the secret does not reside in that basic reality in relation to which all the incitements to speak of sex are situated—whether they try to force the secret, or whether in some obscure way they reinforce it by the manner in which they speak of it. It is a question rather of a theme that forms part of the very mechanics of these incitements: a way of giving shape to the requirement to speak about the
preeminently sexual Eliot’s endorsement “for even the humblest Christian layman” to “live what, in the modern world, is comparatively an ascetic life”:

There is no good in making Christianity easy and pleasant; ‘Youth,’ or the better part of it, is more likely to come to a difficult religion than to an easy one. For some, the intellectual way of approach must be emphasized; there is need of a more intellectual laity. For them and for others, the way of discipline and asceticism must be emphasized; for even the humblest Christian layman can and must live what, in the modern world, is comparatively an ascetic life. Discipline of the emotions is even rarer, and in the modern world still more difficult, than discipline of the mind; some eminent lay preachers of ‘discipline’ are men who know only the latter. Thought, study, mortification, sacrifice: it is such notions as these that should be impressed upon the young—who differ from the young of other times merely in having a different middle-aged generation behind them. You will never attract the young by making Christianity easy; but a good many can be attracted by finding it difficult: difficult both to the disorderly mind and to the unruly passions. (“Lambeth” 373)

For this “comparatively ascetic life,” with its discipline of mind and emotions via “thought, study, mortification, [and] sacrifice,” it would be “more natural, as well as in better conformity with the Will of God,” either to raise a large family (which means regulating sexuality according to hetero-normative reproduction, and thus ascetically confining sexuality to procreative functionality) or to commit oneself to celibacy (Idea 80). In my reading, to put it as unequivocally as possible, Eliot’s ideal of the layperson’s “comparatively ascetic life” (“Lambeth” 373; emphasis added) encompasses both procreative heterosexual marriage and celibacy, specifically when these lifestyles are juxtaposed with “values arising in a mechanized, commercialized, urbanized way of life” (Idea 81). For exemplification of the latter values, one need only turn to The Waste Land’s famous bar scene, with its working-class accents on abortion and on marriage without (desire for) children (II. 139-72); or, for that matter, to the “automatic

matter, a fable that is indispensable to the endlessly proliferating economy of the discourse on sex. What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret” (35).

Notably, in section V of “The Dry Salvages,” this catalogue of disciplinary modes is revamped as “prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action” (Collected 199).
hand” of the typist home at teatime and the “patronising” young man carbuncular59 (III. 215-56).
In juxtaposition, secular modernity’s “mechanized, commercialized, urbanized way of life” and Eliot’s comparatively ascetic laity indicate “differences between pagan and Christian society” (Idea 78), with “pagan society” signifying for Eliot “one in which the wrong spiritual values are recognized” (“Sub-Christian” 112). In reading Eliot’s endorsement of a celibate (as well as procreative) Christian lifestyle as preeminently sexual—rather than asexual—in character, I follow Benjamin Kahan’s approach to celibacy (surely the most “unsexy” of ascetic disciplines) “as a sexuality, as an identity, rather than as a ‘closeting’ screen for another identity” and “as an organization of pleasure rather than a failure, renunciation, or even ascesis of pleasure” (509-510; emphasis added). As Kahan notes, the implication of celibacy (and perhaps of asceticism generally) “in regimes of censorship and its position on the margins of sexual expression do not promise the bliss or liberation of defying power but take up Foucault’s challenge to speak within power and censorship” (510).

By way of Foucault’s archeological challenge, queering Eliot’s social criticism involves parsing its regulations for and elisions of sexuality as discursive performances of a religious

59 For a further sense in which procreative heterosexual marriage becomes, in Eliot’s theocratic scheme, one manifestation of the “comparatively ascetic life,” consider the grounds for Eliot’s dismal estimation of P.B. Shelley’s “repellent” values and positions, which indicate “the difficulty of separating Shelley [as formidable wordsmith] from his ideas and beliefs” (“Shelley and Keats” 89). Certain of Shelley’s most persistent views Eliot “positively” dislikes, while others seem “so puerile” that Eliot cannot enjoy the poetry in which they occur (91): “And I do not find it possible to skip these passages and satisfy myself with the poetry in which no proposition pushes itself forward to claim assent” (91). The “philosophy of Epipsychidion” is particularly confounding (89-90), for in this poem Eliot is “thoroughly gravely by lines like: ‘True love in this differs from dross or clay, / That to divide is not to take away… I never was attracted to that great sect / Whose doctrine is, that each one should select / Out of the crowd, a mistress or a friend / And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend / To cold oblivion…’” (92). Here, it is the bold sentiment of promiscuity (and thus of an excessive, anti-ascetic indulgence characteristic of Shelley’s antiestablishment viewpoint) over and against monogamy that “gravels” Eliot and ruins his appreciation, “a few lines later,” of “a lovely image like: ‘A vision of incarnate April, warning / With smiles and tears, Frost the anatomy / Into his summer grave’” (93). If Shelley “was humourless, pedantic, self-centered, and sometimes almost a blackguard” (89), this is in part because his poetry overwhelms Eliot with morally “repellant” ideas which culminate in a visceral “abuse of poetry” (89). By rejecting a “comparatively ascetic life,” Shelley “abuses” his considerable poetic gifts.
asceticism that is intimately charged with, rather than ultimately devoid of, sex and sexuality.\(^{60}\)

Identifying asceticism as a discursive performance, or even as a kind of *textual celibacy/celibate textuality*, that *shows* precisely because it abstains from *telling* “sex as the premier site of morality” not only channels Foucault’s dialectic of secrecy and confession; it also mirrors the paradox of asceticism’s “public [i.e. social] spectacle” of self-mortification, thereby spiriting us beyond the referential minimalism that attends Eliot’s titillating metonymies for the sexual: “The mortified flesh of the ascetic,” Julia Saville notes, “becomes his medium of self-expression and an index to the world of his spiritual worth. Paradoxically, then, a practice seemingly aimed at self-denigration, *effacing the body*, can readily translate into a public spectacle, *with the body as the focus of attention*” (11-12; emphasis added). Eliot’s regulatory elisions of the sexual elicit a contiguous focus on “bodies that matter” through their apparent effacement. More expressly, Eliot’s regulatory elisions discursively perform and enact an *ascetic sexuality*—not an asexuality rendered ascetically—that is irreducible to the trappings of biographical criticism\(^{61}\) and that underscores the link between Christian “ascetic maceration exercised on the body and the rule of permanent verbalization” that governs “the repressive hypothesis” (Foucault “Hermeneutics” 221). For Foucault, Christian ascetic maceration and the rule of permanent verbalization, which are secularized in modernity as bio-political technologies of the self, have “the same effect. So much that one can isolate as the common element to both practices the following principle”:

> the revelation of the truth about oneself cannot be dissociated from the obligation to renounce oneself. We have to sacrifice the self in order to discover the truth about ourself

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\(^{60}\) As Foucault writes, “for every good Christian” an “imperative was established: Not only will you confess to acts contravening the law, but you will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse. Insofar as possible, nothing was meant to elude this dictum, even if the words it employed had to be carefully neutralized. The Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech. The forbidding of certain words, the decency of expressions, all the censorings of vocabulary, might well have been only secondary devices compared to that great subjugation: ways of rendering it morally acceptable and technically useful” (*Introduction* 21; emphasis added).

\(^{61}\) On the vicissitudes of biographical criticism of Eliot’s corpus, in the ambit of sexuality studies and in contradistinction to queer poststructuralist accounts, see Churchill, “Outing T.S. Eliot.”
[sic], and we have to discover the truth about ourself in order to sacrifice ourself. Truth and sacrifice, the truth about ourself and the sacrifice of ourself, are deeply and closely connected. And we have to understand this sacrifice not only as a radical change in the way of life but as the consequence of a formula like this: you will become the subject of the manifestation of truth when and only when you disappear or you destroy yourself as a real body or as a real existence. (221)

The austereness of Foucault’s formulations in this passage stems in part from the austereness of his source: St. John Cassian (ca. 360-435), the Christian monk and theologian whose main work, *Conferences with the Fathers Dwelling as Hermits in Egypt*, communicates the dynamics of asceticism’s struggle with embodiment as experienced by the third-century Desert Fathers. Given Eliot’s theocentric imperative for us “to see the world as the Christian Fathers saw it” with the aim of “reascending to origins” (*Ideas* 81), Foucault’s reading of Cassian seems particularly solicitous. Indeed, the paradox, articulated so precisely by Saville, of reading asceticism’s self-mortifying, apparently disembodied performance as its most spectacular, reflexive, and acute instance of embodied self-enunciation is pertinent to what I have called Eliot’s “discursive performances of religious asceticism,” examples of what I have drawn from “Catholicism and International Order,” *The Idea of a Christian Society*, and *Notes toward the Definition of Culture*. Accordingly, the God-willing naturalness Eliot imputes to the asceticism of celibacy (in conjunction with the equally God-willing, if not equivalently ascetic, naturalness of matrimonial reproductive heterosexuality) exemplifies the disciplinary bind of “truth and sacrifice”—the inseparability of “the revelation of the truth about oneself” and “the obligation to renounce oneself”—that fascinates Foucault in his reading of Cassian and early Christian monasticism.

Through this paradox, Eliot’s regulatory elisions of the sexual (i.e. happiness and pleasure in “primitive societies” as essentially unfit for civilized Christians; celibacy and procreative heterosexual families as exemplars of theological naturalness; the comparatively ascetic life versus the mechanistic, materialistic, “pagan” values of commercialized modernity;
authenticity of religious faith via “cultural attractions” unhindered by sin, vanity, and self-indulgence; and the prioritization of congregational communality over Protestant and secular individuality) disclose, through the very structure of their disavowals, the intrinsically sexual and ultimately bodily nature of Eliot’s conservative, theocratic social criticism. In its peculiar logic, asceticism’s disclosure of (erotic or otherwise charged) embodiment through the body’s effacement conforms to Butler’s influential perspectives on the line of ascetic thought and counter-ascetic critique (i.e. the critique of “ethical imperatives and religious ideals” [Butler Psychic 53]) that imbricates Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals, Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, and Foucault’s Discipline and Punish:

Every effort to reduce itself to inaction or to nothing, to subordinate or mortify its own body, culminates inadvertently in the production of self-consciousness as a pleasure-seeking and self-aggrandizing agent. Every effort to overcome the body, pleasure, and agency proves to be nothing other than the assertion of precisely those features of the subject. (Butler Psychic 53)

Asceticism’s “surreptitious ways of reasserting the body” (Butler 55)—its implicit law of reflexively immanent embodiment versus its explicit rhetoric of performatively transcendent disembodiment—illuminates the inner logic of Eliot’s repeated circumventions, containments, prohibitions, regulations, and elisions of the sexual (body). Eliot’s many de- and renunciations of “pagan” values constitute a barbed thread of orthodox prohibition that “not only sustains, but is sustained by, the desire that it forces [or imperatively and theocratically would force] the subject to renounce”; the thoroughly performative (rather than peformative-constative) fibers of this thread show us that “renunciation takes place through the very desire that is renounced,” which means that “desire is never renounced, but becomes preserved and reasserted in the very structure of renunciation” (56). Corporeal sexual desire, with all of its potential for subversively sinful queerness, is accordingly preserved and reasserted by renunciations that differently shape
Eliot’s idealized celibates and procreative straight families. Notwithstanding Kahan’s important delineation of celibacy as its own mode of sexuality, replete with (non)normative pleasures of embodiment, queerness in Eliot’s Christian society would always-already flourish via the very renunciations by which his celibates and procreators are disciplined—or discipline themselves.

**Between Unification and Dissociation of Sensibility:**

**Exhuming Kant’s Ideal Embodiment through Eliot’s Theocratic Bodies**

Steeped in the psychic movement of preservation-via-negation that characterizes the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, asceticism’s crypto-desire—indeed, its crypto-corporeality which sutures the “ineluctability of the body” (Butler *Psychic 56*)—“parallels the ineluctability of ‘instinct’ in Freud and that of the will in Nietzsche,” for whom “the ascetic ideal, understood as a will to nothingness, is a way of interpreting all suffering as guilt” (56). The sheer stubbornness of asceticism’s attachment to myriad forms and experiences of embodiment, which it would (theoretically at least) do without, renders asceticism, in the words of Geoffrey Galt Harpham,

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62 For a penetrating discussion of Hegelian dialectics and the mechanics of *Aufhebung/sublation* in the “Lordship and Bondage” section of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, see Butler’s well-known opening chapter, “Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection: Rereading Hegel on the Unhappy Consciousness,” in *The Psychic Life of Power*. In brief, though, the (dis)embodied kernel of dialectical sublation, which strongly informs the circuitry of asceticism, runs as follows: “The bondsman takes the place of the lord by recognizing his own formative capacity, but once the lord is displaced, the bondsman becomes lord over himself, more specifically, lord over his own body; this form of reflexivity signals the passage from bondage to unhappy consciousness. It involves splitting the psyche into two parts, a lordship and a bondage internal to a single consciousness, whereby the body is again dissimulated as an alterity, but where this alterity is now interior to the psyche itself. No longer subjected as an external instrument of labor, the body is still split off from consciousness. **Reconstituted as an interior alien, the body is sustained through its disavowal as what consciousness must continue to disavow**” (42; emphasis added).

63 On the *Genealogy of Morals* concludes: “We can no longer conceal from ourselves what is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal...a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a will/...man would rather will nothingness than not will” (162-3). For Nietzsche, the ineluctability of the will, which is by no means limited to the religious sphere, shades into a certain ineluctable will to reflexive thought: “What, then, is the meaning of the ascetic ideal in the case of a philosopher? My answer is...the philosopher sees in it an optimum condition for the highest and boldest spirituality and smiles—he does not deny ‘existence,’ he rather affirms his existence and only his existence, and this perhaps to the point at which he is not far from harboring the impious wish—pereat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus, fiat! [Let the world perish, but let there be philosophy, the philosopher, me!]” (107).

64 “I do not mean to suggest,” Butler adds crucially, “that Freud’s highly problematic notion of instinct, Hegel’s inchoate body, and Nietzsche’s will are strictly equivalent. Yet I do want to suggest that these three thinkers circumscribe a kind of dialectical reversal which centers on the impossibility of a full or final reflexive suppression of what we might loosely call ‘the body’ within the confines of life” (57).
the imperative in culture and criticism. The radical immanence of the body as sound and substantial matter, from which the ascetic imperative springs and on which it (re)coils, necessarily draws us from Hegel’s dialectically “inchoate body” (Butler 57) to its vital precursor in what Angelica Nuzzo calls Kant’s “transcendental [i.e. radically immanent] embodiment”:

Transcendental embodiment indicates the philosophical methodology that Kant elaborates in the three Critiques, bringing to light the formal dimension of sensibility, namely, the only dimension that can provide a priori conditions constitutive of a universal human experience of the world. Transcendental embodiment is neither an anthropological concept nor does it disclose an anthropological view of the subject; it is rather the concept whose articulation makes anthropology (“from a pragmatic point of view”) possible for the first time. Methodologically, the notion of transcendental embodiment is opposed to the empirical view of the body as “object” of experience that arises from disciplines such as physiology, psychology, anthropology, or phenomenology….Within Kant’s transcendental investigation, on the contrary, the body is never a physical given; it is itself the condition for something to appear to us as a fact…. [T]he body is not a (more or less contingent) object of experience but a necessary condition thereof. As the transcendental site of sensibility, the body displays a formal, ideal dimension essential to our experience as human beings….Transcendently, the body is the locus in which different functions of sensibility such as imagination, intuition, and affects are exercised….Systematically, Kant’s applied philosophy—his moral psychology, anthropology, and philosophy of history—is possible only once the transcendental dimension of human embodiment has been spelled out in its entirety. (8-10)

Kant’s transcendental embodiment, as I suggest above, is paradoxically interchangeable with the notion of radically immanent embodiment. Resonating with my analysis of “formal extrication” in Kant’s Critique of Judgment (see footnote 31), Nuzzo, in her inimitable reading of “the formal dimension of sensibility” as that which provides “a priori conditions constitutive of a universal

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65 “While the term can plausibly ‘cover’ early Christianity, the concept of asceticism exceeds the ideological limitations of that culture; it may best be considered as sub-ideological, common to all culture. In this large sense, asceticism is the ‘cultural’ element in culture” (Harpham Ascetic xi); “Despite the fanaticism of its early Christian practitioners, who constantly extolled the value of ‘single-mindedness,’ asceticism is always marked by ambivalence, by a compromised binarism. To contemplate the ascetical basis of culture…is to recognize that an integral part of the cultural experience is a disquiet, an ambivalent yearning for the precultural, postcultural, anticultural, or extracultural” (xii); “In the tight sense asceticism is a product of early Christian ethics and spirituality; in the loose sense it refers to any act of self-denial undertaken as a strategy of empowerment or gratification” (xiii).

66 I draw here on Eliot’s evocative phrasing of corporeality and the Incarnation from section IV of “East Coker”: “The dripping blood our only drink, / The bloody flesh our only food: / In spite of which we like to think / That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood – / Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good ” (189-90).
human experience of the world,” lobbies for a general, foundational, and thus structurally ideal concept of embodiment as “the locus” and “necessary condition” for spatiotemporal and cognitive experience as such.67 Embodiment for Kant is at once radically immanent, i.e. a priori

67 “On Kant’s account,” Nuzzo writes, “the transcendental perspective discloses a purely formal, a priori, and thereby active (and not simply receptive) dimension of sensibility that constitutes the hitherto (philosophically) invisible form of the human body—the complex and multifunctional form that makes our cognitive, practical, and aesthetic orientation in the world possible” (8). This a priori sensibility is tightly bound to the faculty of intuition, which in empirical terms “can never be other than sensible, i.e. that it contains only the way in which we are affected by objects. The faculty for thinking of objects of sensible intuition, on the contrary, is the understanding . . . Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts)’ (Critique of Pure Reason [1787] 1998, 193-4; emphasis added). In rationalist terms, however, intuition (and, in tow with it, primal sensibility and ideal embodiment as explored by Nuzzo) also traffics in pure (“in the transcendental sense”) representations “in which nothing is to be encountered that belongs to sensation. Accordingly the pure form of sensible intuitions in general is to be encountered in the mind a priori . . . These belong to the pure intuition, even without an actual object of the senses or sensation, as a mere form of sensibility in the mind” (156; emphasis added). This mere form of sensibility in the mind is tantamount to a cognitive feeling of and for the body—the body’s original manifestation, orientation, and materialization in advance of reflective cognition (by which the body is rendered phenomenally). Occupied “not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general” (133), sensibility’s groundwork—its precipitation in the “mere form” of “pure intuition”—ushers in Kant’s ideal embodiment. Significantly, Nuzzo’s shrewdly original work on this topic belongs to a wider, equally impressive current in recent Kantian scholarship that takes for its subject embodiment at its most intrinsically sensible. Thus, what Nuzzo identifies as Kantian “ideal embodiment,” Laura Hengehold characterizes as “an internal, cognitively inaccessible difference associated with feeling” (90): “We might call it a proto-body or the body as problematic object” (90; emphasis added). Likewise, Helge Svare argues that, for Kant, “the reason why my experience of the empirical world is not threatened by the skepticism of such as Descartes is that it is established as a fact beyond doubt, that I am a body in the minimal sense…i.e., a being endowed with consciousness, extended in space and with the capacity to act and be acted upon. This is established by the intuitive and immediate awareness that I have of being such a body” (240; emphasis added). For Susan Meld Shell, the sublimity Kant ascribes to the “expression of form within nature,” which we should gauge “without insisting overscrupulously on understanding (seeing) how such expression is possible,” occurs “wherever we are aware of organic life, as is the case with our own living bodies—for we too, as Kant notes, ‘belong to nature’” (239). This complex belonging passes, as Dorothea Olkowski notes, through Kant to Deleuze, with whom we enter the profoundly dynamic “realm of the sensible, the sensible universal”: “this implies attention to visceral sensibility, to sensitivity, to information absorbed and emitted by both human and non-human entities on a cosmological scale. The realm of sensibility is neither perception nor knowledge, nor is it action; it is, rather, a sensible realm that can be experienced, understood and interpreted through the fundamental sensations of pleasure and pain” (Universal 2). Of course, fundamental sensations of pleasure and pain are the bread and butter of ascetic discourse as we encounter it in Eliot’s social criticism. On sensibility in the historical contexts of empiricism and philosophy of science, see Gaukroger, The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680-1760. Arguably, the work of Nuzzo, Hengehold, Svare, Shell, and Olkowski on embodied sensibility goes some way in attending to a lacuna that de Man charts in “Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant”: “From the organic, still asserted as architectonic principle in the Critique of Pure Reason, to the phenomenological, the rational cognition of incarnate ideas, which the best part of Kant interpretation in the nineteenth and twentieth century will single out, we have reached, in the final analysis, a materialism that, in the tradition of the reception of the third Critique, is seldom or never perceived…The critical power of a transcendental philosophy undoes the very project of such a philosophy leaving us, certainly not with an ideology—for transcendental and ideological (metaphysical) principles are part of the same system—but with a materialism that Kant’s posterity has not yet begun to face up to’” (88-9). For its part, de Man’s posterity has done much to face up to his interest in post-Kantian materialism: see Redfield, The Politics
(pre)conditions for our intuitively experiential orientation in space-time; and transcendental, i.e. the primary function of sensibility (Sinnlichkeit) as “the unifying thread of Kant’s epistemology, moral philosophy, aesthetics, and teleology of living nature” (8; emphasis added). Embodiment’s twofold function as immanent (pre)condition and transcendental unifier does not amount to a crypto-normative universalization of any particular modality of embodiment (sociocultural, religious, [dis]able-bodied, etc.). Rather, Nuzzo’s (and, for her, Kant’s) basic and acutely consequential point is that spatiotemporal human experience—as such—presupposes some (minimally reflexive or sapient) form of embodiment for cognitive faculties to be possible at all.

In the taut grip of the ascetic imperative, this universal or ideal embodiment predicates Eliot’s idealization of celibates and procreative straight families: qua sensibility in its simultaneously immanent and transcendental mode, Kantian ideal embodiment is the very substrate on which the enzymes of Eliot’s (super)natural, God-willing celibate and hetero-familial bodies would thrive. This substrate, moreover, is also the implicit site where queerness would perform its intimately fissuring work on Eliot’s discursively idealized bodies. In its application to Eliot’s social criticism, fundamental sensibility, as posited by Nuzzo, intuitively gives way to queer theology from within Eliot’s idealizations, rather than to theology queered forcibly from without. Immanently transcendental and transcendentally immanent, the ideal embodiment of Kant’s intuitive sensibility encrypts a strict measure of corporeality that queerly—indeed, parergically and simultaneously—exceeds, evades, invades, mediates, constitutively imbues, and (de)regulates the regulatory elisions of Eliot’s discursive asceticism.

The geometric subtext and force of the preceding verbs, each of which indicates the parergon’s liminal logic at the margin/center of Eliot’s idealized social types, furnish spatially moral “image[s] of thought” (Deleuze Difference 129-167) that, like lengthening silhouettes, body forth Eliot’s celibates and procreative straight families. These abstracted images of embodiment assume, as their deconstructive condition of (im)possibility, the radically queer because radically immanent, i.e. transcendental, parameters of Kantian sensibility. As intuitive human form, “mere” sensibility (i.e. Kantian “mere reason”) is universally neither male nor female; neither black nor white (nor any racialized shade between); and neither heterosexual nor homosexual (Olkowski “Every ‘One’” 58). Structurally more ideal—indeed, more ideally

68 Eliot’s attribution of God-willing naturalness to (his idealized images of) a comparatively ascetic laity (i.e. celibates and procreative straight families, over and against the naturalized individualism of secularism’s materialistic worldview), finds anchorage in Deleuze’s discussion of “the image of thought” in Difference and Repetition: “The implicit presupposition of philosophy may be found in the idea of a common sense as Cogitatio natura universalis…Postulates in philosophy are not propositions the acceptance of which the philosopher demands; but, on the contrary, propositional themes which remain implicit and are understood in a pre-philosophical manner. In this sense, conceptual philosophical thought has as its implicit presupposition a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense [i.e., for Eliot, the more “natural,” theologically conformist, comparatively ascetic life of celibacy and procreative marriage]. According to this image, thought has an affinity with the true; it formally possesses and materially wants the true…We may call this image of thought a dogmatic, orthodox or moral image…Natural good sense or common sense are thus taken to be deterministic of pure thought. Sense is able to adjudicate with regard to its own universality, and to suppose itself universal and communicable in principle” (131-2; emphasis added).

69 “And as imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen / Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name” (A Midsummer Night’s Dream 5.1.14-17)

70 This particular angle on the queer amorphousness of bare (Kantian) sensibility is, for Olkowski, tethered complexly to Deleuze and Guattari: “Every subject or object is an event, nothing but the result of contingent affects and percepts which are themselves independent of and exceeding any living being, standing on their own, simply expressing a pure sensation—freeing it from objects and from states of a subject (Deleuze and Guattari [What is Philosophy?] 1994: 163-7). In addition, every event is an effect of concepts, prospects and functives (the objects of logic and mathematics). That is, forms of content (structured materialisations) and their forms of expression (structures) intra-act, constitute and define one another. Were the world not an ongoing [i.e. becoming] process of trajectories differentiating themselves, there would be no intelligence either. It seems then that the binary thinking that arose most powerfully with the conception of an ego cogito has at last been overcome. And the implication of this is that all binaries, including those powerful cultural signs such as male-female, heterosexual-homosexual, rational-emotional, active-passive, and so on, have come undone” (“Every ‘One’” 58). As the very opening, configuring, and doing of (ultimately individuated and differential) experience, sensibility at its barest undoes the fixations on identity that are most characteristic of post-Enlightenment, bourgeois (post)modernity. In Claire Colebrook’s words, the queer difference here is between active and passive vitalism: “For the most part, ‘life as it really is’ is reduced to actual life: here, vitalism begins from living bodies (usually human, usually heterosexual, usually familial) and then asks what it means to live well…However, there is another way of understanding ‘life as it really is,’ and this is to align the real with the virtual. For Deleuze and Guattari this leads to a passive vitalism, where ‘life’ is a pre-individual plane of forces that does not act by a process of decision and self-maintenance but
structural—than the normative (celibate and procreative) idealizations it predicates in Eliot’s social criticism, Kant’s ideal embodiment is essentially nonessential. Pulsing with anticipations and elicitations of present-day “speculative materialism,” ideal embodiment is on the order of through chance encounters” (77). Such passive vitalism is intrinsically, indeed immanently, queer “in its difference and distance from already constituted images of life as necessarily fruitful, generative, organized and human” (77). Marking the “virtual” substance of sensibly embodied “realities,” queerness cruises along the seamless (yet always seeming) emergence of sensible particulars from pure (i.e. abstractly material) sensibility qua the universal. For foundational accounts of Deleuzean immanence, see Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*; Kerslake, *Immanence and the Vertigo of Philosophy: From Kant to Deleuze*; Pearson, “Pure Reserve: Deleuze, Philosophy, and Immanence”; and Smith, “The Doctrine of Univocity: Deleuze’s Ontology of Immanence.”

This ascendant rubric in continental philosophy, which I unpack at length here for its striking pertinence to Kantian ideal embodiment and therewith to the modes of (queerly or ultimately uncontainable) sensibility that lurk beneath the surfaces of Eliot’s ideal social types, is coextensive with “speculative realism”; both umbrellas cover an extraordinary range of scholarship across the humanities, social sciences, and even (in the case of Alain Badiou and his students) mathematics and theoretical physics. Prominent exponents, varying widely in their degrees of “formal” association with speculative materialism/realism, include Badiou, Catherine Malabou, Graham Harman, Iain Hamilton Grant, John Protevi, Manuel DeLanda, Levi R. Bryant, Peter Hallward, François Laruelle, Slavoj Žižek, Ray Brassier, Quentin Meillassoux, and Martin Hägglund. A cross-section of this important current in continental thinking appears in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, edited by Bryant, Smiçek, and Harman. Two of the final three scholars listed above, Brassier and Meillassoux, exemplify speculative materialism/realism at perhaps its most anti- (post-) Kantian and thus anti-phenomenological, i.e. the core Kantian distinction between the phenomenal world of objects (the ultimately inaccessible in-itself) and the noumenal inner world of the interpreting human subject. Brassier and Meillassoux take issue particularly with (post-) Kantian “correlationism,” defined by Meillassoux as “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other…Correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object ‘in itself’, in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object…Thus, one could say that up until Kant, one of the principal problems of philosophy was to think substance, while ever since Kant, it has consisted in trying to think the correlation. Prior to the advent of transcendentalism, one of the questions that divided rival philosophers most decisively was ‘Who grasps the true nature of substance? He who thinks the Idea, the individual, the atom, God? Which God?’ But ever since Kant, to discover what divides rival philosophers is no longer to ask who has grasped the true nature of substantiality, but rather to ask who has grasped the more originary correlation” (5-6). In Brassier’s view, “The challenge now is to hold to the metaphysical thread [‘that distinguishes the reality of the concept from the reality of the object’] while learning how to reconnect it to the epistemological thread [‘that divides sapience from sentience’]. For just as epistemology without metaphysics is empty, metaphysics without epistemology is blind [cf. Kant’s well-known phrase from *Critique of Pure Reason*, cited and contextualized in footnote 67: “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”]” (“Concepts” 280). For his part, Hägglund overhauls deconstruction (in the Derridean rather than de Manian line) as an uncompromising and much-criticized discourse of “radical atheism,” the key characteristic of which is Hägglund’s materialist reduction of the trace to a double movement governed by the law of autoimmunity: the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space (18). In substantive terms, nothing is exempt from time, that is, from weathering (from without) or degenerating (from within) and from (potentially) leaving a material trace of once-animate life or (in the case of abiotic matter) former state(s) of inanimate materiality. This double movement of spatiotemporal becoming hinges, from the human point of view, on the sensibility of intuition—that is, on the human orientation, however varied or cultured (hence Hägglund’s materialist reduction), in space-time. Indeed, on the score of sensible intuition, it is telling that Hägglund opens his book with the dyad of Kant and Derrida: “While Kant restricted time to a ‘transcendental’ condition for the experience of a finite consciousness, I maintain that for Derrida the spacing of time is an ‘ultratranscendental’ condition for which nothing can be exempt. The spacing of time is the condition not
universal human sensibility—that is, dynamically indeterminate because resistant to the particularisms of Eliot’s normative (i.e. more natural, theologically conformist, entirely God-willing) social types. This fundamental indeterminacy vitally inspires the “indeterminacy of the term queer—it’s power to signal nonconformity that involves but extends beyond literal sexuality” (Saville 7).

Amid the overwhelming strictures of Eliot’s idealizations, queerness can only ever manifest through the plane of the (transcendental-immanent) universal qua ideal embodiment, raw sensibility, and visceral human form: thus, queer theology rather than theology queered. Even at their most impossibly ascetic, Eliot’s idealized social types—whether hetero-, homo-, bi-, trans-, or indeed asexual in sensibility and feeling (i.e. not necessarily identity) beneath their countenances of celibacy and hetero-procreativity—cannot do without the rawness of ideal embodiment and its essentially nonessential, or immanently queer, vitality. Precisely because it is indelibly more ideal than, and ultimately predicative of, Eliot’s theocratic idealizations, Kantian sensibility is the ineluctable potency which would queerly fissure Eliot’s social types through the very terms of his theocratic scheme. On this most abstractly material of plateaus, queerness is more radically beholden to the irreducibility of the universal, sensible-material body than it is to the reducibility of any sensibly-embodied particularism (e.g. Eliot’s social types or, only for everything that can be cognized and experienced, but also for everything that can be thought or desired. The radicality of this argument emerges through Derrida’s notion of the ‘unconditional,’ which must be strictly distinguished from Kant’s. For Kant, the unconditional is the Idea of a sovereign instance that is not subjected to time and space (e.g., God). For Derrida, on the contrary, the unconditional is the spacing of time that undermines the very Idea of a sovereign instance” (10). For a related study of deconstruction’s temporalities in the Kantian foregrounds and backdrops of Derrida’s oeuvre, see Hodge, Derrida on Time; on temporality and language in Derrida’s Heideggerian trajectory, see Rapaport, Heidegger and Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language. The speculative prospects of the post-Kantian materialisms canvassed in this teeming footnote differ markedly, particularly in the cases of Meillassoux and Hägglund. Meillassoux, following Badiou, “provides a thought of infinite possibility, and one in which, while no necessary divinity currently exists, there is always hope of a God (or situation) to-come”; Hägglund’s materialism, on the other hand, is “a hope-less materialism, with little to offer contemporary debates in philosophy of religion and political theology,” and indeed, for Hägglund there is really “no need to think about philosophy of religion” (Burns 333). Arguably, for the ineluctable sensibility of Eliot’s ascetically ideal social types, Meillassoux’s (and Badiou’s) infinitely or inductively speculative materialism is more apposite, applicable, or observable than Hägglund’s finitely or reductively speculative materialism.
for that matter, the discursively-cultural bodies of postmodern identity politics, viz. race, ethnicity, class, religion, nationality, gender, sexuality, etc.). Accordingly, in the fields of culture, society, and politics, particularism’s dependence on (the claims of) universality for its emergence as difference renders queering a critically universalistic endeavour—one set against the recalcitrant, particularistic norms of embodiment that queerness as such would amorphously disrupt across bio-political spectrums of Left and Right.72

Of course, with regard to the ideal embodiment of Kantian sensibility, the plane of the universal is itself wholly susceptible to recalcitrance, exclusivity, co-optation, and defensive particularism when monopolized, rhetorically or otherwise, by an unruly (because all-too-governing) episteme. Thus, at its queerest and most corporeally sensible, the universal is always-

72 On elisions, erasures, traces, and spectral re-emergences of cultural and gender particularisms in Kant’s anthropological model of reason’s “universality,” see footnotes 27, 28, 29, and 45 in the present chapter, which glimpse the first chapter in Spivak’s Critique of Postcolonial Reason. My argument on queerness’s peculiar recourse to the field of the universal links up with James Penney’s discussion of queer theory’s “universal alternative,” which arises at the crossroads of latter-day post-structuralism and contemporary post-Marxist social theory. At this junction, the challenge is “to resuscitate from its premature cardiac arrest the category of the universal at the conclusion of a ‘postmodern’ age guilty of making a fetish of difference, and to counteract the Foucauldian narcissistic inwardness that severs the imagination of queer theory’s political future from the crucial contemporary battle over the category of ‘democracy’ and the forms of national and supranational as well as state and nonstate power through which this category is expressed” (Penney 6). Moreover, latching onto Nuzzo’s reading of embodiment’s sensible universality—i.e. the intuitively formal “dimension of sensibility” that provides “a priori conditions constitutive of a universal human experience of the world” (Nuzzo 8; emphasis added)—and noting the conspicuous (and justified, given Nuzzo’s focus on Kant’s philosophy per se, rather than on attempts, whether implicit or explicit, to grapple with Kantianism) absence of bio-political discourse in Ideal Embodiment, I would venture a queerly bio-political reframing of Kantian sensibility as elucidated by Nuzzo: complexly shaped by biopolitics and biopower—the former being “a politics in the name of life” whereby “the human body appears to be increasingly challenged and also literally traversed by technology” so that “a natural life doesn’t exist that isn’t at the same time technological as well”; and the latter signifying “a life subjected to the command of politics” (Esposito 15; emphasis added) by way of governmentality and nation-statism, (non)citizenship and subalternity, identity politics, and the wider drift of disciplinary and institutional society in late (indeed, expired) capitalism—queerness is biopolitically determined not only by the question of “which queers live and which queers die—a variable and contestable demarcation—but also [by the question of] how queers live and die” (Puar xii). Through the strictures of Eliot’s ideal Christian society, Puar’s twofold biopolitical perspective is retooled as a question of which and how queers (and thus queerness) would be captured by Eliot’s regulatory rubrics of celibacy and heterosexual procreative marriage. As ideal embodiment, mere sensibility, and sensation at its most raw, predicative, and thus universal, queerness identifies identity—i.e. Eliot’s celibates and married couples—as but “one effect of affect, a capture that proposes what one is by masking its retrospective ordering and thus its ontogenetic dimension—what one was—through the guise of an illusory futurity: what one is and will continue to be” (Puar 215; emphasis added). By rushing with queerness as it predicates and clandestinely fissures Eliot’s normative, comparatively ascetic types, we attune ourselves “to movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities” (215) that would comprise Eliot’s Christian society.
already (pre)conditioned by sociopolitical, cultural, and economic contexts that contaminate its will to purity and power, even as these very (pre)conditions “mobilize,” in the sphere of the universal, an ever-emergent “set of demands” (Butler “Restaging” 40). Kantian ideal embodiment, in other words, compels us to recognize sensibility as an, if not as the, a priori plane of universality. While (re)staging this (minimally) sensible-material embodiment as universal, however, ideal embodiment (by virtue of its very own Kantian formulation) would caution us that any such recognition is steered by the contingency and particularity of one’s own (cultural, social, political, economic, etc.) lenses for comprehending, navigating, or claiming the universal:

The main terms of modernity are subject to an innovative reuse—what some might call a ‘misuse’—precisely because they are spoken by those who are not authorized in advance to make use of them. And what emerges is a kind of political claim which, I would argue, is neither exclusively universal nor exclusively particular; where, indeed, the particular interests that inhere in certain cultural formulations of universality are exposed, and no universal is freed from its contamination by the particular contexts from which it emerges and in which it travels. Slave uprisings that insist upon the universal authorization for emancipation nevertheless borrow from a discourse that runs at least a double risk: the emancipated slave may be liberated into a new mode of subjection that the doctrine of citizenship has in store, and that doctrine may find itself conceptually riven precisely by the emancipatory claims it has made possible. There is no way to predict what will happen in such instances when the universal is wielded precisely by those who signify its contamination, but the purification of the universal into a new formalism will only reinitiate the dialectic that produces its split and spectral condition. (Butler “Restaging” 40-1; emphasis added)

Building on Butler’s exquisitely “contaminated” and “riven” points, one can discern the challenging double bind that is hard at work in ideal embodiment: it would literally be counterintuitive (in the Kantian sense of human intuitions in space-time), and thus nonsensical, not to value as universal a sensible-material substrate73 for human life as we know it. Thus, of all

73 On this point, and the idealist-materialist binary on which it pivots and which it would (ideally/materially) synthesize, I defer to Spivak’s discourse on subjective predication in “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value”: “One of the determinations of the question of value is the predication of the subject. The modern ‘idealist’ predication of the subject is consciousness. Labor-power [bound variously to the body, from the ground-level of
possible contenders for the Hegelian title of preeminent “concrete universality,” Kantian ideal embodiment is surely the most universally concretized. Nevertheless (and here the bind truly doubles down, tightening into a superlative deadlock), all exercises, programs, institutions, and instantiations that would claim, value, or situate this (“particular”) universal are by no means universal. In other words, notwithstanding its Hegelian (dialectic-synthetic) savvy, no particular mediation of the universal may prevail universally; this is intuited most acutely in the instance when one is so thoroughly impressed by the universal as to desire its (persuasive, inarguable, surreptitious) prevalence over the mediating and mediated particular. The contaminated

ideal embodiment and its Kantian sensibility, through manual labour, and thence all the way ‘up to intellectual or cognitive labour and its abstractive ‘fruits’) is a ‘materialist’ predication. Consciousness is not thought, but rather the subject’s irreducible intendedness towards the object. Correspondingly, labor-power is not work (labor), but rather the irreducible possibility that the subject be more than adequate—super-adequate—to itself, labor-power…The ‘idealist’ and the ‘materialist’ are both exclusive predications. There have been attempts to question this exclusivist opposition, generally by way of a critique of the ‘idealist’ predication of the subject: Nietzsche and Freud are the most spectacular European examples. Sometimes consciousness is analogized with labor-power as in the debates over intellectual and manual labor” (73). Of course, for Nuzzo (and perhaps for Shell, Svare, Hengehold, Olkowski, and de Man as well), Kantian sensibility would unexpectedly prove to be more spectacular, because highly potent in its surreptitiousness (consider Nuzzo’s unenviable task of exhuming ideal embodiment in a work as seemingly purely disembodied as the Critique of Pure Reason), than Nietzsche and Freud as a European example of the interplay among “the ‘idealist’ and the ‘materialist’ predications of the subject”; for, as Kant’s corpus illustrates just below the radar of pure reason, practical reason, and aesthetic judgment, both predications interpenetrate as “concepts of the subject” via their operation “on the metonymic principle of a part standing for the putative whole” (Spivak 91).

Žižek qualifies Hegelian “concrete universality” as follows: “since each particularity involves its own universality, its own notion of the Whole and its own part within it, there is no ‘neutral’ universality that would serve as the medium for these particular positions. Thus Hegelian ‘dialectical development’ is not a deployment of a particular content within universality but the process by which, in the passage from one particularity to another, the very universality that encompasses both also changes: ‘concrete universality’ designates precisely this ‘inner life’ of universality itself, this process of passage in the course of which the very universality that aims at encompassing it is caught in it, submitted to transformations” (“Holding” 316). What indeed could be more universally changeful and changefully universal than the (once post-structural, increasingly post-humanist, always-already bio-politicized, always-already bio-materialized) universally-particular human body, which shape-shifts across time, space, epistemologies, cultures, religions, ethnicities, (dis)abilities, languages, genders, sexualities, and experiences and yet “remains” what “it” most certainly is—vulnerable, perishable, inexorably finite—despite/because of its very mutability? “The” body (or, more advisedly, “The” “body”) is here subject to the tense, mutually contaminating interplay of idealist and materialist predications. As Butler writes, “the very possibility of illustrating an abstract point by a concrete example presupposes the separation of the abstract and the concrete—indeed, presupposes the production of an epistemic field defined by that binary opposition. If the abstract is itself produced through separating off and denying the concrete, and the concrete clings to the abstract as its necessary contamination, exposing the failure of its formalism to remain rigorously itself, then it follows that the abstract is fundamentally dependent on the concrete, and ‘is’ that concrete other in a way which is systematically elided by the posterior appearance of the concrete as an illustrative example of an abstract formalism” (“Restaging” 19).
movement of this double bind, which holds the universality of ideal embodiment under erasure while compelling us to recognize the sensible-material body as (predicatively) universal, is the very same movement of radical queerness in its deconstructive incitements of and resistances to institutional domestication. Ultimately, in the realm of the universal advancing (under) its own erasure, it is the institution of “the” “body”—e.g. bio-political bodies of (non)citizens, postmodern bodies of identity politics, the bodies of Eliot’s idealized celibates and procreators, or indeed (but more figuratively) the bodies of Church and State—which queerness at once incites (is subject to) and resists (subjects to “itself”).

At this junction, with queerness as provocative incitement of and resistance to discursive force-fields that engender institutions (preeminently the body-as-institution), we return anew not only to Foucault’s austere formulations on Christian ascetic maceration and the rule of permanent verbalization (“the revelation of the truth about oneself cannot be dissociated from the obligation to renounce oneself” [“Hermeneutics” 221]), but also to Butler’s sagacious views on the body’s regulatory proliferation and internalized production in post-Kantian philosophy:

If the suppression of the body is itself an instrumental movement of and by the body, then the body is inadvertently preserved in and by the instrument of its suppression. The self-

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75 “Inaccurate yet necessary,” writes Spivak in her famously self-reflexive translator’s preface to Of Grammatology: “My predicament is an analogue for a certain philosophical exigency that drives Derrida to writing ‘sous rature,’ which I translate as ‘under erasure.’ This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)” (xiv) With greater philosophical relief, one would recognize that the “clôture of metaphysics found the origin and end of its study in presence. The questioners of that enclosure—among them Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger—moved toward an articulation of the need for the strategy of ‘sous rapture.’ Nietzsche puts ‘knowing’ under erasure; Freud ‘the psyche,’ and Heidegger, explicitly, ‘Being.’ As I have argued, the name of this gesture effacing the presence of a thing and yet keeping it legible, in Derrida’s lexicon, is ‘writing,’—the gesture that both frees us from and guards us within, the metaphysical enclosure” (xli).

76 My formulations here, like those of all Western-trained scholars who traffic perhaps too often in the radical potentialities (as distinct from actualities) of queerness, remain gratefully beholden to Butler: “If the term ‘queer’ is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. Such a yielding may well become necessary in order to accommodate—without domesticating—democratizing contestations that have and will redraw the contours of the movement in ways that can never be fully anticipated in advance” (Bodies 228; emphasis added).
defeating effort of such suppression, however, not only leads to its opposite—a self-congratulatory or self-aggrandizing assertion of desire, will, the body—in more contemporary formulations it leads to the elaboration of an institution of the subject which exceeds the dialectical frame by which it is spawned. In Hegel, the suppression of bodily life shown to require the very body that it seeks to suppress; in this sense, the body is preserved in and by the very act of suppression….For Foucault, repression does not act on a pregiven field of pleasure and desire; it constitutes that field as that which is to be regulated, that which is always potentially or actually under the rubric of regulation. The repressive regime, as Foucault calls it, requires its own self-augmentation and proliferation. As such, this regime requires the field of bodily impulse to expand and proliferate as a moralized domain, such that it will continually have fresh material through which to articulate its own power. Hence, repression produces a field of infinitely moralizable bodily phenomena in order to facilitate and rationalize its own proliferation … Within the Hegelian framework, the subject, which splits itself off from its body, requires that body in order to sustain its splitting activity; the body to be suppressed is thus marshaled in the service of that suppression. For Foucault, the body to be regulated is similarly marshalled in the service of suppression, but the body is not constituted prior to that regulation. On the contrary, the body is produced as an object of regulation. (Butler Psychic 57-59; emphasis added)

Anchored, like Hegel, Foucault, and Butler, by Kant’s sensible conditions and corporeal intuitions of possibility, we can parse Eliot’s theocratic stake in this distinction between Hegel’s presumptive, self-fissuring, dialectically reinforced body and Foucault’s body as an object produced in its subjection to regulations that quicken a “finally utopian gesture”—i.e. Foucault’s sense that the “proliferation of the body by juridical regimes” may signify a “site of possible resistance” (59). Appealing to Nuzzo on the Kantian body, I read ideal embodiment, in its thrilling transcendent-immanence, as precisely that which is (as per Butler’s differentiation of Hegel from Foucault) “inadvertently preserved” in asceticism, repression, and suppression; structurally in excess of “the dialectical frame” of subjection; the “fresh material” continually poised for (re)subjection by power and agency; and the “infinitely moralizable,” rather than deterministically or finally moralized, “domain” of psychic life. Accordingly, Eliot’s moralizing theocratic types are tacitly beholden to, and are thus internally undone by, the inexorable, undisciplined, and radically visceral domain of embodiment that predicates each regulatory
idealization of the human within his idea of a Christian society. Signifying, arguably, the very “proliferation” of the body that “both marks off Foucault’s theory from Hegel’s and constitutes the site of potential resistance to regulation,” Kantian sensibility intimates how the “possibility of this resistance is derived from what is unforeseeable in proliferation” (60). In this sense, which Eliot’s own idealizations solicit, ideal embodiment is the very matter of bodies/bodying that matter(s): irreducible to matter and bound troublesomely, and thus speculatively, to mattering.77

Considered in this interpretive scheme, Eliot’s ascetic templates for idealized bodies in his Christian society are “contaminated” and “conceptually riven” (Butler “Restaging” 40-41) by the very foundational sensibility (i.e. the radically-immanent queerness of ideal embodiment) that his social types and his most influential literary criticism would (de)regulate:

A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet’s mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. We may express the difference by the following theory: The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience…. In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered….The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected. In one or two passages of Shelley’s “Triumph of Life,” in the second “Hyperion” there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility. But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated. (“Metaphysical” 287-88; emphasis added)

The proximity of Kantian sensibility (as parsed expertly by Nuzzo) to Eliot’s well-known conception of an erstwhile unified sensibility is unmistakable and profoundly suggestive. The ideal, transcendentally-immanent, and (I would add) radically-queer embodiment that

77 As Butler stipulates, “bodies that matter is not an idle pun, for to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what ‘matters’ about the body, its very intelligibility. In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where ‘to matter’ means at once ‘to materialize’ and ‘to mean’” (Bodies 32).
clandestinely sutures and operates Kant’s threefold critique of reason closely resembles the “unification of sensibility” which Eliot praises in “The Metaphysical Poets.” Consider, on the one hand, (what Eliot reads as) Donne’s cognitively and corporeally “modified,” balanced, synthesized, and “amalgamating” sensibility, whereby abstract thought (reading Spinoza) is concretized as and contaminated by sensible experience (the smell of cooking), and vice versa; whereby one’s “mode of feeling” is “directly and freshly altered by…reading and thought” (286); whereby “there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling” (286); and whereby one feels “their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose” (287). On the other hand, (re)consider how, in transcendental terms, the Kantian body displays a formal, ideal dimension essential to our experience as human beings. Such experience could not be possible if it were not rooted in the formal structure of our embodiment…. Transcendently, the body is the locus in which different functions of sensibility such as imagination, intuition, and affects are exercised. To that extent, the notion of transcendental embodiment is broader, more comprehensive, and interpretatively more fundamental than each of the functions of sensibility…. Systematically, Kant’s applied philosophy—his moral psychology, anthropology, and philosophy of history—is possible only once the transcendental dimension of human embodiment has been spelled out in its entirety. (Nuzzo 9-10; emphasis added)

Here, “formal structure” slides evenly between an abstract register of aesthetic form, i.e. Kantian ideal beauty in the Critique of Judgment (“A body’s immaterial,” Nancy suggests: “It’s a drawing, a contour, an idea.” [Corpus 150]), and a concrete register of “essential” or “fundamental” corporeality (“A body’s material,” Nancy reminds us: “It’s dense. It’s impenetrable. Penetrate it, and you break it, puncture it, tear it.” [Corpus 150]) Both registers interface impurely, subtly tainting each other in their (simultaneously abstract, concrete, and contaminated) universality.

The corporeal as such underwrites sensibility’s abstractive functions of “imagination, intuition, and affects.” Kant’s theory of sensibility, his ideal embodiment, is thus “unified” in
precisely the “sense” inferred by Eliot when he writes of a dynamic (because incorporative) sensibility before the influence of Milton and Dryden unfolded in the refinement of poetic language at the expense of crudeness in feeling (“Metaphysical” 288; in succeeding poets’ (satanically Romantic, in the Miltonic line) rebellion against “the ratiocinative, the descriptive” (288); in the grossly dissociative “sentimental age” of the early eighteenth century; and in Romantic and Victorian modes of reflection, rumination, and thinking and feeling “by fits” (288). By contrast, for Eliot the erudite metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century “looked into a good deal more than the heart [i.e. sentiment or feeling as distinct, especially in post-Romantic context, from thought]. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts” (“Metaphysical” 290)—in short, into the “bone-house” of the “mounting spirit” and into the “mean house” of the “flesh-bound” mind (Hopkins “Caged Skylark” 31-2).

Significantly, in the midst of his explicitly literary focus in “The Metaphysical Poets,” Eliot makes broad overtures to historical periods in which the poetry he treats was originally composed and which the poets he discusses reflect. In the trajectory Eliot constructs, the European Enlightenment would implicitly be anchored in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, with the former serving as an epicenter for the “dissociation of sensibility” and the latter unfurling baroquely as the “sentimental age” (288; emphasis added). Though unmentioned in this essay, Kant’s critical philosophy necessarily looms large in Eliot’s scheme, for Kant’s corpus spurred transcendental idealism as a groundbreaking branch of epistemology in the latter half of the “sentimental age”; indeed, had Eliot formally expanded his theory of (unified and dissociated) sensibility beyond the discipline of literary criticism, he most certainly would have diagnosed Kant and Kantianism as profound epistemic symptoms of sensibility’s
dissociation. However, as I sought to demonstrate with reference to studies by Nuzzo, Svare, Hengehold, Shell, Olkowski, and de Man, contemporary Kant scholarship would dispute Eliot’s implicit appraisal of Kant’s (and Kantianism’s) genealogical responsibility for and bio-political stake in the dissociation of sensibility. Kantian ideal embodiment, radical in its abstractness because contaminated by the universal common denominator of human materiality, epitomizes unified sensibility as per Eliot’s own literary and philosophical stipulations. The irony at work here is that, in Eliot’s social criticism and in the political theology it authorizes (as opposed to his literary criticism of the metaphysical poets and his philosophical criticism of post-Cartesian subjectivity), we discern an idealization of theocratic bodies discursively “produced” through performances of a religious asceticism that resembles, in its structure and corollaries, a dissociation (rather than unification) of sensibility. To channel once again Derrida’s The Truth in Painting, a work (we will recall) aptly criticized by Davis for its powerfully general deconstruction of normativity and ideality in Kant’s Third Critique, one might say that Eliot’s theocratic types presuppose an ascetic, all-too-damaging “pure cut” between a prescribed embodiment of orthodox ideals and ideal embodiment on the queerest plane imaginable:

78 For Habib, traces of such a diagnosis, as well as a parallel genealogy of dissociated sensibility in European philosophy, are evident in Eliot’s unpublished essays on Kant and in book reviews. As Habib notes, Eliot’s “appeal to a unified sensibility, whereby feeling and thought pervade each other in the apprehension of an object or experience, is a crucial element in Eliot’s reaction against the reification of reason by thinkers since the Enlightenment, as well as of imagination by many romantics. Eliot had lamented this ‘dissociation of sensibility’ or separation of human faculties in a philosophical context before identifying it as an aesthetic principle for the reading of literary history…Whereas in philosophy Eliot had traced this dissociation to Descartes, in literary history he finds it aggravated by Milton and Dryden” (208; emphasis added). In the unpublished Kant papers, one of Eliot’s pivotal claims is that the “irony of Kant’s ego in an ironic consciousness which goes back to Descartes” (Habib 109). Eliot’s most explicit published indictment of Descartes, and implicitly of bourgeois philosophy as it extends from Descartes through Kant to us, appears in his 1928 review of Jacques Maritain’s Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau: “Descartes is one of the ancestors of materialism as well as of absolute idealism, of doubt as well as of irrational faith, of the antinomy of faith and reason…Descartes remains the great typical figure of modern ‘heresy’…in the Middle Ages…the Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle had maintained its influence towards balanced wisdom, had prevented human thought from flying to peripheral extremes. In Descartes the various elements are…released from each other, so that you need only to press one aspect of his philosophy or another to produce the extremes of materialism and idealism, rationalism and blind faith” (qtd. in Habib 189).
intuitive, universal human sensibility, which dynamically resists even as it enables teleological systematization, disciplinary regulation, programmatic abstraction, and absolute concretion.

In discursively performing an ascetic “pure cut” from the very elemental charm (ideal embodiment in all its queerness) upon which they are predicated, the idealized theocratic types in Eliot’s social criticism work against his (much finer) aesthetic judgment in “The Metaphysical Poets,” and thus remain adrift in the ebb and flow of dissociation. Nevertheless, a unified sensibility—in both Kant’s and Eliot’s “senses”—lurks queerly (i.e. absolutely sensuously) beneath the idealized theocratic bodies in the latter’s Christian society. As embodiments, Eliot’s celibates and hetero-procreators are, if anything, predicatively, universally, and queerly ideal the very moment they assume the vestments and strictures of the conservative theocratic imagination. For, in its porous queerness of sheer potentiality, ideal embodiment pulses as the explosive, auto-deconstructive, immanently-critical condition of (im)possibility for Eliot’s theocratic social types. In my view, the radical (or, etymologically speaking, “rooted”) nature of this condition is strongly intimated, if not purely intuited, by the watershed theory of dissociated sensibility found in “The Metaphysical Poets,” an early essay in Eliot’s career as a literary and social critic. The radicalness of this intimation/intuition—its long-lost/longed-for (re)unification of sensibility, which (when read in theory today) spirits us through conclaves of bio-political research; debates on contingency, hegemony, and universality; and the classic double bind of idealism and materialism—seems all the more radical when we consider Eliot’s drastically revised appraisals of Donne’s sensibility in “Lancelot Andrewes,” an essay published in 1928 (seven years after the appearance of “The Metaphysical Poets”): formerly integrated, incorporative, unified, balanced, mindfully-fleshy, and fleshly-mindful, Donne’s writings are now, less than a decade later, exceedingly sundered, dissimulative, and worthy of suspicion.
Necessarily shaping both his poetry and his prose, Donne’s sensibility is now outpaced by “the shadow of the impure motive” whose authorial origin, being neither “perfectly controlled” nor spiritually disciplined, gives us “the flesh-creeper, the sorcerer of emotional orgy”79 (“Andrewes” 16; emphasis added).

As underscored earlier, Davis’s core taxonomy in *Queer Beauty*, particularly his distinction between beauty queered and queer beauty, predicates my distinction between theology queered and queer theology—that is, between theology queered forcibly from beyond its (purportedly homogenous) doctrinal thresholds, and theology as immanently, intuitively, and potentially always-already queer (if only one reads closely or closely enough, moving deliberately with and against the textual grain, tightening double binds even as they tighten themselves, gravitating to and imposing [counter]strictures as enabling constrains) from within its own doctrinal nexus. Throughout this chapter, I have lobbied for queer theology (against theology queered) as a deconstructive lever by which to access, dismantle, and open-endedly reconstruct aspects of Eliot’s theocratic social criticism and its attendant political theology. As I

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79 See also the conclusion of “Lancelot Andrewes,” where we find Donne’s indulgent and solicitous sensibility aligned loosely with an aura of dangerous “personality” exuded by Romanticism (Donne was of course pitted against the latter in “The Metaphysical Poets”): “Donne many times betrays the consequences of early Jesuit influence and of his later studies in Jesuit literature; in his cunning knowledge of the weaknesses of the human heart, his understanding of human sin, his skill in coaxing and persuading the attention of the variable human mind to Divine objects, and in a kind of smiling tolerance among his menaces of damnation. He is dangerous only for those who find in his sermons an indulgence of their sensibility, or for those who, fascinated by ‘personality’ in the romantic sense of the word—for those who find in ‘personality’ an ultimate value—forget that in the spiritual hierarchy there are places higher than of Donne…He has many means of appeal, and appeals to many temperaments and minds, and, among others, to those capable of a certain wantonness of the spirit” (26; emphasis added). On these grounds, we might connect Eliot’s eviscerations of Donne in “Lancelot Andrewes,” where Donne is an orgiastic “flesh-creeper,” with Stanley Fish’s thoughts on Donne. Fish seems to have rhetorically one-upped even Eliot on the censuring scoreboard: “Donne is sick and his poetry is sick; but he and it are sick in ways that are interestingly related to the contemporary critical scene. In short, the pleasures of diagnosis have replaced the pleasure I was able to derive from the verse…Donne is bulimic, someone who gorges himself to a point beyond satiety, and then sticks his finger down his throat and throws up. The object of his desire and of his abhorrence is not food, but words, and more specifically, the power words can exert” (“Masculine” 223). Likely, Eliot would have agreed with Fish’s appraisal (even if he would have found Fish’s graphic imagery of bulimia rather superfluous—and thus perhaps overly “Donnean” or simply too flashy); but in turn, one is obliged to note the conspicuous absence of reference to Eliot’s anti-Donne essays in Fish’s argument and works cited list.
render it in this chapter, queer theology, very much like its cousin queer beauty, banks on embodiment and sensibility as epicenters of a fungible queerness whose visceral and corporeal immanence even the most (constrictive, restrictive, conservative) theocratic idealizations cannot (ascetically, aesthetically, politically) do without. Accordingly, whereas queer beauty in Davis’s sense nullifies the pure aesthetic cut (as proposed by Derrida in The Truth in Painting) between the formal, sanitized, Kantian beau idéal on the one hand and erotic, sensuous, and historical charm on the other; queer theology in my sense nullifies the pure ascetic cut between, on the one hand, the formal, sanitized, and idealized social types of Eliot’s theocratic Christian society and, on the other hand, the erotic, sensuous, and material gravities of universal human embodiment, which queerly outstrips any attempt to determine or program it once and for all. Notably, neither Davis nor I have recourse, respectively, to the external forces of beauty queered and theology queered, for in both of our interventions, heterodox (aesthetic or theological) judgments are “not always incompatible with an emergent ideal because sometimes they were already universalized or universalizable” (Davis 43). Thus, precisely because of ideal embodiment’s inexorability or immanence as an a priori, queerer-than-queer predication of all a posteriori (aesthetic, theological, etc.) idealizations, we observe the surreptitious means by which “homoerotic significance flows smoothly into and provides a manifest dynamization of the norm” in Kant’s philosophy and in Eliot’s social criticism (47); queerness is resourcefully within the systematics of normativity, that is, even if its significance does not constitute the norm’s “sole imagistic content, insofar as many other layers of significance have also been integrated into the perfected ideal” (47).

Remarkably, however, while subject neither to (the sans of) the pure aesthetic cut nor to (the sans of) the pure ascetic cut, ideal embodiment is inherently responsible for rendering acute
cuts of its own—albeit cuts whose incisiveness is decidedly *impure* or *contaminated* in character and effect:

In an already existing political commonwealth all political citizens, as such, are in an *ethical state* [i.e. *Zustand: condition*] of nature and are entitled to remain therein; for it would be a contradiction (*in adjecto*) for the political commonwealth to compel its citizens to enter into an ethical commonwealth, since the very concept of the latter involves freedom from coercion. Every political commonwealth may indeed wish to be possessed of a sovereignty, according to the laws of virtue, over the spirits [of its citizens]; for then, when its methods of compulsion do not avail (for the human judge cannot penetrate into the depths of other men) their dispositions to virtue would bring about what is required. *But woe to the legislator who wishes to establish through force a polity directed to ethical ends!* For in doing so he would not merely achieve the very opposite of an ethical polity but also undermine his political state and make it insecure … The sublime, yet never wholly attainable, idea of an ethical commonwealth dwindles markedly under men’s hands. It becomes an institution which, at best capable of representing only the pure form of such a commonwealth, is, by the conditions of sensuous human nature, greatly circumscribed in its means for establishing such a whole. *How indeed can one expect something perfectly straight to be framed out of such crooked wood?* (Kant *Religion* 87-92; emphasis added)

I have tried to restrict my ambition of a Christian society to a social minimum: to picture, not a society of saints, but of ordinary men, of men whose Christianity is communal before being individual. It is very easy for speculation on a possible Christian order in the future to tend to come to rest in a kind of apocalyptic vision of a golden age of virtue. But we have to remember that the *Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realized, and also that it is always being realized*; we must remember that whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be—though the world is never left wholly without glory. In such a society as I imagine, as in any that is not petrified, *there will be innumerable seeds of decay*…A wholly Christian society might be a society for the most part on a low level; it would engage the cooperation of many whose Christianity was spectral or superstitious or feigned, and of many whose motives were primarily worldly and selfish. *It would require constant reform.* (Eliot *Idea* 79; emphasis added)

In their respective contexts and in juxtaposition, these passages suggest precisely how non-fundamentalist, if not quite non-dogmatic, even the most conservative philosophies/philosophers of religion can be. This striking overlap between *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* and *The Idea of a Christian Society* centers, in the first place, on Kant’s and Eliot’s manifestly shared conviction “that the ethical commonality of being (*gemeines Wesen*)—repeatedly mistranslated
[from Kant’s *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* as ‘the ethical state’) cannot form the basis of a [political] state” (Spivak *Aesthetic* 317). In ultimate terms, which are surely the most exigent of any terms available in philosophy or literary theory, ethics (religious or otherwise) and politics (conservative or otherwise) are irreducible to one another—even as their irreducibility elicits (in our own ways of *living through* the essential difference between ethics and politics) “the decision one cannot do without”: “when there are ethics and politics—at that moment, one must decide” ⁸⁰ (Derrida “Ethics” 310). Their irreducibility, in other words, ensures their mutual contamination. For instance, to live a purely political life, bound to shrewd calculations of power without openness to the question of the other, would be disastrous for epistemology: for, “It is practically persuasive that the eruption of the ethical interrupts and postpones the epistemological—the undertaking to construct the other as object of knowledge, an undertaking never to be given up” (Spivak *Aesthetic* 316). The other should be—neither evacuated nor petrified.

A similar disaster looms large for those emerging “From the conservative dark / Into the ethical life,” whose impossibly-pure civilities culminate in:

The romantic lie in the brain
Of the *sensual* man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.
(Auden “September” 88; emphasis added).

⁸⁰The gravity of Derrida’s point here solicits itself into greater relief: “I think that, in our tradition and in our society, when we speak of ethics and politics, a decision is irreducible. The moment of the decision one cannot do without it [the decision]...There are, perhaps, dimensions of community, of being together—the word *community* has always bothered me a little—of being together in the interruption, as one says today, in a relation without relation, which are, perhaps, neither ethical nor political. But when there are ethics and politics—at that moment, one must decide” (“Ethics” 310). Notably, Derrida’s “being together in the interruption” becomes, for his former student Jean-Luc Nancy, the preeminent question of *The Inoperative Community*.
To a *severely marked* extent, based solely on the passages quoted at length above, Kant and Eliot appear to circumvent both unethical politics and “the romantic lie” of the apolitically ethical life. Strictly in theoretical terms, that is, Kant’s woeful caution (to the legislator wishing “to establish through force a polity directed to ethical ends”) and Eliot’s historicist-futurist imperative (for us to “remember that whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be”) infinitely scale, rather than terminally bridge or overcome, the cavernous fissure between ethics and politics. In practice, however, both thinkers undo with relative ease the double bind at hand, leaving us with (unethically political or apolitically ethical?) *decisions*: for Kant, either cultured-patriarchal-heterosexual-Christian-European “universal” reason or uncultured, colonized, forever-subhuman savagery; for Eliot, either celibacy/procreative hetero-normativity in Christian-theocratic limelight or the moral vacuity of secular, liberal, mechanistic, pagan modernity. Cruising fault-lines with a vigilant sense of their use-value, theory can neither completely undo nor mend the faults of practice. This (meta-) double bind between the theoretical and the practical absolutely transfixes queer deconstruction, precisely because it traces the infinite challenge of what (in theory *as* practice and in practice *as* theory) is finally nonnegotiable.\(^{81}\)

In the depths of these fissures and beneath these double binds, we exhume what Nuzzo calls Kantian ideal embodiment. In the contexts of queer beauty and queer theology, ideal embodiment becomes the rushing force that, *working from within and thus upon itself, reflexively*

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\(^{81}\) As Derrida notes, “every time the ethical and the political are caught in a knot, in an irreducible intrication, this does not mean that they are simply tangled, but that what seems not to have to be negotiated politically, not to have to be reinscribed in a relation of powers, thus the nonnegotiable, the unconditional is, as unconditional, subject to political transaction: and this political transaction of the unconditional is not an accident, a degeneration, or a last resort; it is prescribed by ethical duty itself. One should not have to negotiate between two negotiables. One must negotiate the nonnegotiable. And if at this moment, the ethical is on the side—thus determination: a certain type of Kantian determination—on the side of the unconditional, thus of the nonnegotiable, etc., well then, negotiation here is always, and this is its aporetic fatality, negotiation is always negotiation of the nonnegotiable” ("Ethics" 304).
cuts the ethical-political fissures in question, using the sharp angles of each double bind it sows from the materiality and ideality at its disposal. Contamination here reaches the fever-pitch of autoimmunity; for, with Derrida (as explicated by Hägglund), we are bound to sense that such contamination cannot be ‘accepted’ or ‘refused’ in the sense of personal resolution. The necessity of ‘accepting’ contamination precedes any act of will and is concomitant with the advent of life as such. Deconstruction spells out that there can be no final cure against contamination and that all ideals of purity are untenable, since their ‘refusal’ of contamination equals nothing but death. (Hägglund 35-6)

Thus, ideal embodiment unsparingly cuts and impurely fissures (itself) into the particular embodiments we find in Kant’s and Eliot’s philosophies of religion at their most practical junctions; in turn, through the fissures it renders, universal ideal embodiment is not spared the contaminative prerogatives of particular bodies. By contrast, at their most generatively theoretical, Kant and Eliot verge on sparing ideal embodiment as an imperishable because ruinous force in and of itself: How else to qualify Kant’s appeal to “conditions of sensuous human nature,” under whose persuasions the very “idea of an ethical commonwealth dwindles markedly” (Religion 91; emphasis added)? What other recourse, apart from sexing the parergon and parergic sexuality, might we have for parsing Kant’s titillating metaphorical question, “How indeed can one expect something perfectly straight to be framed out of such crooked wood?” (92; emphasis added)? How might one otherwise understand Eliot’s grounded sense that, in his idea of a Christian society, there would always-already “be innumerable seeds of decay” (Idea 79; emphasis added)? And how tightly bound are we to ideal embodiment, in the fleshy fold of deconstructive queerness, when we notice imbrications among Eliot’s “Kingdom of Christ on earth [that] will never be realized [and yet] is always being realized” (79; emphasis added) and Derrida’s “democracy to come”?

For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the
time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: *even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present*, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept. (Derrida *Friendship* 306; emphasis added)

What are the Kingdom-of-Christ-to-come and democracy-to-come but ideal embodiments (contaminated because contaminating, riven because risen), suturing and degenerating the particular bodies from which they themselves “are” never quite unscathed?

**Clôture: Valuing Queerness, Bound and Unbound**

As I have argued, Eliot’s social and political conservatism, his regulatory elisions of the sexual, his idealizations of celibate and hetero-procreative embodiments, and his discursive performances of religious asceticism compel us to infer the sexual by way of his austere measures for intellectual discipline and religious traditionalism; the sexual, in other words, comes to light for us via Eliot’s prescribed orthodoxies, which in tempering desire (at times through “a devious way when natural obstacles have to be circumvented” [Eliot “Catholicism” 134]) would “exclude impurities” (Lamos *Deviant* 18) such as those Eliot uncovers in the writings of D.H. Lawrence. 82 If “the deviant desire that Eliot denies is also the force that animates his writing” (Lamos 37) and if the hetero-normative firewall that Eliot applied to his own literary corpus has only intensified endeavours to queer him, 83 then the lacuna of sexuality in Eliot’s social criticism becomes an ever-more exigent site for deconstructive queering.

82 For Eliot, Lawrence is “an almost perfect example of the heretic” when juxtaposed with the “ethically orthodox” James Joyce (After 38). Eliot limns Lawrence’s work according to three aspects of its “morbidity”: “the ridiculous: his lack of a sense of humour, a certain snobbery, a lack not so much of information as of the critical faculties which education should give, and an incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking”; his “keen sensibility and capacity for profound intuition—intuition from which he commonly drew the wrong conclusions”; and his “distinct sexual morbidity,” to which Eliot “shall no doubt appear to give excessive prominence” (58). This threefold morbidity derives signally from Lawrence’s “deplorable religious upbringing which gave [him] his lust for intellectual independence: like most people who do not know what orthodoxy is, he hated it” (58). Eliot imagines that Lawrence lived his life “on the spiritual level,” but characterizes his spirituality as “sick” (60). This leaves Lawrence’s readers in the lurch, for his writings “may appeal, not to those who are well and able to discriminate, but to the sick and debile and confused; and will appeal not to what remains of health in them, but to their sickness” (61).

83 “Although a homosexual interpretation of literary texts was too low for Eliot’s explicit condemnation in his published prose, it was not below his notice or public censure. His successful threat of legal action in 1952 to suppress John Peter’s remarkable reading of same-sex desire in *The Waste Land* [“A New Interpretation of The
Indeed, precisely because queerness is a *redoubled* elision (i.e. queerness is a *more* deviant lacuna than the broader lacuna of sexuality writ large, for which it functions in Eliot’s worldview as an extreme synecdoche) in Eliot’s religious estimation of the social, one might turn profitably to Lee Edelman’s valuation of queerness as that which dismantles the hetero-normative framework of “reproductive futurism”.\(^8^4\) as a value, which in the wake of Jasbir Puar’s influential study, *Terrorist Assemblages*, must be checked carefully against the biopolitical plots of both hetero-normativity and homo-normativity (see introduction, pages 21-26), queerness resides in its challenge to *value as defined by the social*, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself. For by figuring a refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity, while refusing as well any backdoor hope for dialectical

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Waste Land* Essays in Criticism 2 (July 1952): 242-266]—a reading in which the word ‘homosexual’ does not appear—makes abundantly clear that norms of sexual purity are at stake in Eliot’s injunctions against the supposed contamination of the poetic realm” (Lamos Deviant 44).

\(^8^4\) I broach this phrase in chapter two, but would add the following definition from the opening of No Future: “reproductive futurism” imposes “an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (2). What Edelman calls “reproductive futurism” Spivak calls “reproductive heteronormativity”: “Sexual difference and reproductive heteronormativity (RHN) are the irreducible. Briefly, this is upstream from straight/queer/trans. ‘Hetero’ here is the antonym of ‘auto.’ For example, the queer use of childbearing is the extra-moral use of difference….We are in a double bind with RHN through the variety of our sexualities. This normativity extends to reproduction, with all its psychic uses, so that ‘human’ can be established and distinguished from experiencing beings. Hence ‘norms’” (Aesthetic 123-124). Edelman’s prose may be more lucid than Spivak’s, but for both thinkers the ideological engine that propels and “norms” (as transitive verb) the social into futurity via institutions of state and culture is thoroughly “hetero-logical” in orientation; thus, progressive resistance to hetero-hegemony and the mechanisms of gendering is easily co-opted in the midst of “internalized postfeminism” and “mainstream gay movements reproducing the morphology of reproductive heteronormativity” (Spivak 132). Edelman and Spivak part company, however, on the question of how to address the predicament of co-optation: whereas Edelman seeks to explode the hegemony of “reproductive futurism” with recourse to a psychoanalytic notion of queerness-as-negation, Spivak keeps within view the rigid double bind of both “reproductive heteronormativity” and capitalism as “agenc[ies] of validation” that are bound to compromise the radical momentum of feminist and queer resistance (130). My reading of Eliot’s social criticism would inflect Edelman’s and Spivak’s discussions, precisely because the sheer austereness of Eliot’s religious conservatism as articulated in his “official” views on society (and thus not necessarily in his poetry or letters) renders sexuality as such—even heteronormativity—a tacit rather than programmatically explicit “organizing principle.” Approaching Eliot through the lens of No Future in particular, as I do here, seems apposite given Edelman’s pivotal reference to The Waste Land: after highlighting an allusion to Eliot’s poem in P.D. James’s novel, *The Children of Men* (specifically in the narrator’s line, “all the pleasures of the mind and senses sometimes seem to me no more than pathetic and crumbling defenses shored up against our ruins”), Edelman underscores a related passage from “A Game of Chess” (line 164): “What you get married for if you don’t want children?” The Waste Land brings out “the function of the child as the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests: the secular theology that shapes at once the meaning of our collective narratives and our collective narratives of meaning” (12).
access to meaning, the queer disposseses the social order of the ground on which it rests: a faith that politics, whether of the left or of the right, implicitly affirms. (Edelman *No Future* 6; emphasis added)

My double-bound approach to Eliot’s political theology, whereby his social criticism was set at productive cross-purposes with my broader disciplinary critique of epistemic secularism, thus finds a conduit in Edelman’s perspective on the hegemonic faith through which hetero-normative and homo-normative society deterministically values futurity: like *No Future*, that is, *Dissident Secularism* is privy to deep-seated imbrications among the politics of left and right, which cannot be resolved or transcended once and for all via procedural appeals to ethics or, for that matter, to related “bipartisan” critiques formulated in an ostensibly neutral “third space” between the political aisles.85 Admittedly, when we eventually (for who can live abstractly or carry on in theory uncontaminated by the concretions and sheer errors of practice?) loosen our grip on the *parergic* frame that keeps queer or (metonymically) deconstructive exegesis moving along, we should recognize that even the most ensnaring double binds are poised to “come undone.”86

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85 There really can be no “middle way” if, following Eliot’s reasoning, “this middle way will…be found to be the way of orthodoxy; a way of mediation, but never, in those matters which permanently matter, a way of compromise” (“Catholicism” 135).

86 Cf. the concluding sentence of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*: “Marx could hold *The Science of Logic* and the Blue Books together; but that was still only Europe; and in the doing it came undone” (421).
Chapter 4

“A Prevalent Piety”: Queering Religion in the Poetry and Correspondence of Hart Crane

As for Mr. Hart Crane, he is a singular case; he, too, commands a diapason. But it is a diapason of which the phrases are anything but clearly outlined, the images anything but definite. Mr. Crane has a most remarkable style, a style that is strikingly original—almost something like a great style, if there could be such a thing as a great style which was, not merely not applied to a great subject, but not, so far as one can see, applied to any subject at all….His poetry is a disponible, as they say about French troops. We are eagerly waiting to see to which part of the front he will move it: just at present, it is killing time in the cafés behind the lines. (168-9)

—Edmund Wilson, “The Muses Out of Work,” in The Shores of Light

One doesn’t have to turn to homosexuals to find instances of missing sensibilities. Of course I’m sick of all this talk about balls and cunts in criticism. It’s obvious that balls are needed…. You don’t seem to realize that the whole topic is something of a myth anyway, and is consequently modified in the characteristics of the image by each age in each civilization. (544)

—Crane, letter to Yvor Winters, May 29, 1927

There is no settling tank in God. (117)

—Crane, “After Jonah,” Complete Poems and Selected Letters

“The Essential Religious Motive throughout My Work”:

A Forensic Introduction to the Queerness of Religion in Crane

In a letter written in 1930 to Herbert Weinstock, an editor whose favorable review of The Bridge appeared in an issue of the Milwaukee Journal, Hart Crane briefly discusses the religious implications of his poetry. Acknowledging Weinstock’s uncannily accurate sense of Crane’s “objectives in writing,” of his “particular symbolism,” and of his “intentional,” occasionally-achieved “condensation and ‘density’ of structure,” Crane answers his reviewer’s question as to whether there is an “essential religious motive” (640) underwriting both White Buildings (1926), his breakthrough collection of lyric poems, and The Bridge (1930), a composite long poem that attempts nothing less than a “mystical synthesis of ‘America,’” whereby “History and fact, location, etc. all have to be transfigured into abstract form that would function almost
independently of its subject matter” (321). Perhaps with T.S. Eliot’s “Ash-Wednesday” in mind, Crane admits to having never “consciously approached any subject in a religious mood; it is only afterward that I, or someone else generally, have noticed a prevalent piety”: “This last-mentioned feature commits me to self-consciousness on a score that makes me belie myself a little” (640). “God save me,” he amusingly exclaims, “from a Messianic predisposition!” (640).

Significantly, Crane’s ironic disclosure—his refreshed “self-consciousness on a score” that makes him “belie” himself only “a little”—of a latent or unconscious “religious mood,” “essential religious motive,” and “prevailant piety” gives way to one of many critical references to Eliot in his correspondence. Having just specified his “Messianic predisposition”—a complex incarnational metonymy for his poetry’s underlying spiritual mood, motive, and piety—Crane alludes to harsh criticisms *The Bridge* received upon publication. In defense of its formal, conceptual, and thematic integrity, Crane writes that he spent “nearly five years, with innumerable readings,” to persuade himself “of the essential unity of that poem. And *The Bridge*,” he thunders on, “is at least as complicated in its structure and inferences as the *Wasteland* [sic]—perhaps more so” (640). Here, Crane’s sense of his own surreptitiously religious motive in and for literary aesthetics elicits his contrast of *The Bridge* to *The Waste Land*. Indeed, in virtually all of his poems, Crane persistently aims to counteract, to remedy, and to transcend what he regards as the sexual and spiritual pessimism—the overwhelming “deadness”—of Eliot’s early masterpiece and the culture it purports to canvass.²

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¹ In a letter to Allen Tate, dated 7 September 1930, Crane explains that Tate’s poem, “The Cross,” keeps him “guessing a little too strenuously. I can’t help thinking it perhaps too condensed…a not entirely fused mélange of ecclesiastical and highly-personalized imagery. In which case you sin no more than Eliot in the recent ‘Ash-Wednesday’” (650).

² To Gorham Munson, on 20 November 1922, Crane asks: “What do you think of Eliot’s *The Wastelands* [sic]? I was rather disappointed. It was good, of course, but so damned dead. Neither does it, in my opinion, add anything important to Eliot’s achievement” (298). To Munson again, less than a year later (5 January 1923), Crane writes that, while no one else composing verse in English “can command so much respect…as Eliot,” the latter figures as Crane’s “point of departure toward an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his
For all of its gravity in Crane’s poetry and prevalence in his correspondence, the pious subject of religion has gradually fallen out of critical focus roughly since the publication in 1990 of Thomas Yingling’s seminal study, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text*, in which Crane’s “homotextuality” transcends the sexually-repressive religious culture of his time. After critiquing Yingling’s key argument that Crane emancipates Dionysus from Christ in “Lachrymae Christi” as a means for secular queerness to override hetero-normative religion, I reconsider in this chapter the aesthetic optimism that mysteriously informs “The Circumstance,” a brief lyric poem Crane drafted but left unfinished in 1932 during his turbulent residence in Mexico as a Guggenheim Fellow. Refocusing on Michael Snediker’s *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*, which I critique at length in chapter two, I discuss how a secular aesthetics of personhood necessarily misconstrues “The Circumstance.” The secularist hermeneutic that organizes *Queer Optimism*, I argue, cannot account for the intricacies of Aztec iconography, theology, history, and culture in Crane’s fragmentary poem.

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own case. But I would happily apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble toward a more positive, or (if I may put it so in a sceptical [sic] age) ecstatic goal. I should not think of this if a kind of rhythm and ecstasy [sic] were not (at odd moments, and rare!) a very real thing to me. I feel that Eliot ignores certain spiritual events and possibilities as real and powerful now as, say in the time of Blake. Certainly the man has dug the ground and buried hope as deep and as direfully as it can ever be done. He has outclassed Baudelaire with a devastating humor that the earlier poet lacked” (308). Of his three-part poem, “The Marriage of Faustus and Helen,” Crane writes to Louis Untermeyer (19 January 1923) that, while each part may be read in isolation, “Combined, they are designed to erect an almost antithetical spiritual attitude to the pessimism of *The Waste Land*, although the poem was well finished before *The Wasteland* [sic] appeared. It has been my conviction, based on personal experience (whether my poems prove it or not) that ecstasy [sic] and beauty are as possible to the active imagination now as ever. (What did Blake have from ‘the outside’ to excite him?)…This mystical fusion of beauty is my religion. Simply, then, I regard my poem as a kind of bridge that is, to my way of thinking, a more creative and stimulating thing than the settled formula of Mr. Eliot, superior technician that he is!” (310-11). To Waldo Frank (27 February 1923), Crane writes of “the complete renunciation symbolized in *The Waste Land* [sic] and, though less, in *Ulysses*” (326). Crane’s stance against Eliot casts the latter as an *enabling* antagonist: in Harold Bloom’s words, “The *Waste Land*, from the moment of its appearance, was Crane’s inevitable antagonist…The glory of *The Bridge* (1930) is its ambivalent warfare with *The Waste Land*, without which Crane would not have been the miracle he was” (“Centenary” xiv-xv). Such “ambivalent warfare” places Crane in general aesthetic quarters with Wallace Stevens. In a much-cited letter from 11 November 1922, Stevens writes that *The Waste Land* “is, of course, all the rage. As poetry it is surely negligible. What it may be in other respects is a large subject on which one could talk for a month. If it is a supreme cry of despair it is Eliot’s and not his generation’s. Personally, I think it’s a bore” (qtd. in Olson 253). More to the point, in a letter from later in his career, Stevens declares: “Eliot and I are dead opposites and I have been doing about everything that we would not be likely to do” (ibid.).
Throughout this chapter I focus on Crane’s rhetorical, paratextual, and allusive strategies with the goal of salvaging religion for queerness without recourse to epistemic secularism (as per chapter two). To unsettle the persistent claim that queer agency in literary and cultural theory is restricted to the epistemology of secularism, I argue that understanding Crane’s aesthetics in theoretical and theological contexts involves fashioning a critique that pays rather than secularizes its debts to the queer resources of religion. Ultimately, then, in my pursuit of Crane’s supple engagements with Dionysus, Christ, and Aztec theology, I aspire to synthesize the idioms of homosexuality and religion that inform the heterodox tenets of his own queer theology, through which he boldly reconsiders the sacred spaces of American modernism.

To elaborate here a necessary “discourse on method” for “‘A Prevalent Piety’: Queering Religion in the Poetry and Correspondence of Hart Crane,” I would underscore that my concentration on Yingling’s Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text and on Snediker’s Queer Optimism is set into relief, both in the main text and in the footnotes, by critical engagement with multiple lines of Crane scholarship across its approximately eighty-year history. In the context of modernist literary historiography, Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text and “Hart Crane’s Smile” in Queer Optimism figure as surefire epicenters of nascent and recent queer-secularist exegesis, respectively. As I illustrate with reference to other scholarly works, queer-secularist exegesis constitutes an influential, if not nearly prevailing, hermeneutic in the genealogy of Crane studies. Thus, by critiquing this hermeneutic chiefly via Yingling’s and Snediker’s representative contributions to it, my argument does not canvass Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text and “Hart Crane’s Smile” as serendipitous straw-texts; rather, given Dissident Secularism’s aim to treat both the oeuvres and the critical receptions of each literary author vis-à-vis the interplay of queer sexuality, theology, and transatlantic modernism, I approach both
scholarly works as bookending a much wider current in Crane studies whose significant provenance and consequential scope I am perforce bound to critique.

Pursuant to this aim, my discrete readings of Crane’s poetry are more or less intertwined with my critiques of his hetero-normatively religious and queer-secularist exegetes. Tethered in this way, the general approach or critical voice of this chapter is decidedly “interventionist” and ultimately “forensic” in character: while developing my own analyses of Crane’s poetics, that is, I simultaneously intervene in the extant genealogy of Crane studies; examine therein genealogical standards in literary criticism and hermeneutic norms in queer theory, which, if diligently followed or unequivocally inherited, would preclude my theo-critical angle on Crane’s corpus; and undertake a “forensic audit,” so to speak, of representative scholarship whose standards and norms either reinforce a queer-secularist template for or underwrite a hetero-normatively religious approach to the intricacies of Crane’s oeuvre.

Consonant with Dissident Secularism’s textual maneuvers as a whole, the “forensic intervention” offered in this chapter proceeds in queer-deconstructive fashion, thus rearticulating my solidarity with “those on the left” for whom theory, amid its many heralded deaths, may yet traffic in procedures of “debunking” that issue “from the general suspicion in which all orthodoxies and arrangements of power are held once it is realized that their basis is not reason or nature but the success of some rhetorical-political agenda” (Fish “Rhetoric” 56); an agenda, I hardly need to add, from which Dissident Secularism is doubtless not exempt. I seek, more precisely, “to expose the contingent and therefore challengeable basis” (56) of hetero-normatively religious and queer-secularist approaches to Crane. An upshot of this equitable exposure, I maintain, is a theo-critical study that hinges on a “deconstructive practice” whereby
“a more positive residue” (56) of democratic criticism—i.e. ethical, aesthetic, and religious difference in relation to political or disciplinary power—may inform queer literary theory.³

³ “The reasoning is that by repeatedly uncovering the historical and ideological basis of established structures (both political and cognitive), one becomes sensitized to the effects of ideology and begins to clear a space in which those effects can be combated; and as that sensitivity grows more acute, the area of combat will become larger until it encompasses the underlying structure of assumptions that confers a spurious legitimacy on the powers that currently be. The claim, in short, is that the radically rhetorical insight of Nietzschean/Derridean thought can do radical political work; becoming aware that everything is rhetorical is the first step in countering the power of rhetoric and liberating us from its force” (Fish “Rhetoric” 56-7). One should check Fish’s characterization here by noting that any so-called “liberation” from rhetorical forces of ideological, political, and cognitive structures would not be spared the rigors of deconstructive probity, which at its “purest” will not hesitate to dismantle itself the moment it is “given” the reflexive opportunity to do so; for, mutatis mutandis, “liberation” is its own ideological, political, and cognitive structure, replete with rhetorical wiles, cunning edges, implicit and explicit violence, prodigious strictures, and writhing carryovers smuggled (un)cannily from hitherto “dismantled” systems. This is precisely the issue with “post-colonialisms and “post-” secularisms, among myriad examples of dialectical bonds between structure and deconstruction; between a politics of disagreeable inheritance and individually- or collectively-willed liberations therefrom; or between power and agency in their “post-” modern frameworks. Fish’s skeptical emphasis on leftist deconstruction’s “combative” mode, in any event, elicits a further (über-) methodological—or (meta-) meta-critical—query on the extent to which this chapter’s “forensic” character is also inevitably polemical. Surely, as I mark in the remainder of this footnote via deconstruction’s transatlantic masters, polemic is far from optimal as a tonal lever for such text-processing; in this regard, if I am unnecessarily polemical (albeit perhaps suitably forensic) in my reading of Crane’s exegetes en route to Crane’s poetics, then I am admittedly a weak practitioner of the very theoretical line by which my research is drawn. As Samir Haddad observes, Derrida late in his career “confesses that on occasion he transgresses the law he gives himself”; “These polemical moments Derrida earlier describes as forcing him ‘to speak of what [he does] not admire,’ moments which he ‘never initiate[s],’ and they presumably include his responses to attacks on his work as found in the exchange with John Searle reprinted in Limited Inc. his comments on Habermas’s reading of him in Philosophical Discourse of Modernity….These polemical turns in Derrida’s writings would depart from the life-guarding path of deconstructive readings, since his aim is to extinguish such attacks, not to keep them alive” (Derrida 30-1). Incidentally, regarding Derrida’s Specters of Marx, one should add to Haddad’s list the interlocutory polemics in Derrida’s “Marx & Sons,” and therein his sniping response to Spivak’s Marxist territoriality in “Ghostwriting.” Turning to deconstruction in America, Ellen Rooney underscores Paul de Man’s preference for anti-polemical criticism vis-à-vis his difference from Fish: “Fish works as a polemist to demonstrate that the imperative to persuasion is a universal; he argues that polemic or rhetoric in the pursuit of persuasion is essential to literary studies, literally impossible to evade because we are all inside interpretation….de Man offers an anti-polemic that universalizes figural language, defending the ‘rigorously unreliable’ rhetoric of tropes as essential to all discourse, impossible to evade because we are all inside language; de Man’s tropological analysis refuses polemic, seeming to render it not covert, but impotent. Thus, de Man’s intricate rhetorical strategy is an ironic reversal of Fish’s open polemic for open polemic. The impossibility of escaping polemic is replaced by the impossibility of entering polemic” (158-9). Arguably, my forensic position is somewhere between Fish’s outright polemic and Derrida’s/de Man’s rhetorical anti-polemical, which may yet turn polemical given the circumstances. Like John H. Smith in Dialectics of the Will, I strive here for “a constructive dialectic” predicated on “a more dialogical and less agonistic form of polemic” (18). Of course, if “strong argument is itself necessarily an ethos, and a not-very-appealing one at that” (Anderson Way 147), then my reader is apt to disagree with my self-positioning among interventionist, forensic, deconstructive, and polemical modes; place me entirely in the combative Fishian camp; and agree with Foucault in his sharp aversion to polemic as he defines it: “The polemict...proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in the search for truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat. For him, then, the game consists not of recognizing this person as a subject having the right to speak but of abolishing him, as interlocutor, from any possible dialogue” (qtd. in Anderson Way 146-7).
Before God, After Transcendence: Queer-Secularist Exegesis, Hetero-Normative Criticism, and the Reconstruction of Crane’s Prevalent Piety

In *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text*, a study written in aftermath of Foucault’s and Sedgwick’s research into the “archaeological historiography” of sexuality (25), Yingling uncovers a “homosexual sublime” that informs, if not governs, Crane’s poetics. Significantly, for Yingling queer sublimity is predicated on a “structure of transcendence” (155) that is most strikingly evident in “Lachrymae Christi,” an intricate lyric poem featured in *White Buildings*:

Whitely, while benzine  
Rinsings of the moon  
Dissolve all but the windows of the mills  
(Inside the sure machinery  
Is still  
And curdled only where a sill  
Sluices its one unyielding smile)

Immaculate venom binds  
The fox’s teeth, and swart  
Thorns freshen on the year’s  
First blood. From flanks unfended,  
Twanged red perfidies of spring  
Are trillion on the hill.

And the nights opening  
Chant pyramids,—  
Anoint with innocence,—recall

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4 Of this phrase, Yingling argues that “the homosexual body may function as a locus of the sublime in modernity not because it is in any way natural for it to do so, but precisely because of the increasing ideological disruptions it is asked both to signify and elide: that body becomes the figure of opacity and Otherness for the culture and the subjectivity it gives rise to” (148-9). This figuration influences Crane’s poetics most noticeably through his highly unconventional syntax: “If the heterosexual discourse of Thoreau and Emerson is an in-semination of the world through meanings established by the father’s word, Crane’s discourse and the homosexual discourse it more generally indicates is a dissemination; Crane replaces the clear syntax of insight with one that is opaque. The concept of dissemination in Derrida implies in part an infinite postponement of closure; it is a figure for the uncontrollable slippage and infinite regress of meaning, indicating a textuality not under authorial control or critical tutelage…The disseminated text is, therefore, an unruly one that does not know how to behave; it shoots its mouth off, so to speak, as well as shooting off from other parts of its body, so (in order) to speak” (151-2). The temporarily ecstatic, exhausted, and ejaculatory subtexts of Yingling’s “homosexual sublime” resonate strongly with Jean-Luc Nancy’s reflections in “The Sublime Offering”: “It is the aesthetic logic of philosophy and the philosophical logic of aesthetics. The feeling of the sublime, in its emotion, makes this logic vacillate, because it substitutes for this logic what forms, again, its exact reverse, or rather (which comes down to the same thing) a sort of logical exasperation, a passage to the limit: touching presentation on its limit, or rather, being touched, attained by it” (44).
To music and retrieve what perjuries
Had galvanized the eyes.

While chime
Beneath and all around
Distilling clemencies,—worms’
Inaudible whistle, tunneling
Not penitence
But song, as these
Perpetual fountains, vines,—

Thy Nazarene and tinder eyes.

(Let sphinxes from the ripe
Borage of death have cleared my tongue
Once and again; vermin and rod
No longer bind. Some sentient cloud
Of tears flocks through the tendoned loam:
Betrayed stones slowly speak.)

Names peeling from Thine eyes
And their undimming lattices of flame,
Spell out in palm and pain
Compulsion of the year, O Nazarene.

Lean long from sable, slender boughs,
Unstanched and luminous. And as the nights
Strike from Thee perfect spheres,
Lift up in lilac-emerald breath the grail
Of earth again—

Thy face
From charred and riven stakes, O
Dionysus, Thy
Unmangled target smile. (14-15)

For Yingling, this poem’s metaphoric vehicle may in (largely nominal) part be Christological,
but on closer queer inspection its metaphoric tenor is not (155). In other words, the “structure of
transcendence” in “Lachrymae Christi,” only “sounds Christian” (155; emphasis added):

The poem names celebration rather than penitence as the proper relation to divinity:
vermin and rod no longer bind as images of fallen flesh and punishment [“Let sphinxes
from the ripe/Borage of death have cleared my tongue/Once and again; vermin and
rod/No longer bind”]; the world itself becomes a body, “tendoned loam.” And the last
stanza locates the poem’s authenticity in a pagan apostrophe to a god burned at the stake [“Thy face/From charred and riven stakes, O/Dionysus, Thy/Unmangled target smile”]. Transcendence in this poem occurs in and through the body of god dismembered in joy and given over to a cycle of sacrificial beauty, and it occurs in a final apostrophe [“O/Dionysus”] (the figure through which lyric most powerfully suggests the presence of voice)...The homosexual reference in this vision of sacrifice is strong....The dismembered body is for Crane the eroticized body carried to its logical extreme. (155)

As explicated through Yingling’s vehicle-tenor distinction and similarly parsed by subsequent queer critics, “Lachrymae Christi” stirs up discursive echoes from modern literature and philosophy, situating the poem in a rich textual compass not necessarily bound to its author’s intentions. For instance, the “sacrificial beauty” (Yingling 155), imagery of dismemberment upon “charred and riven stakes,” and “targeted” joy recall both the corporeal “dissemblance” in part II of Eliot’s “Ash-Wednesday” (“Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining/We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other” [Complete 92; emphasis added]) and Eliot’s early poem, “The Death of Saint Narcissus.” The latter’s masochistic saint, in becoming “a dancer to God,” revels in his “love” for martyrdom’s “burning arrows”: “his white skin surrendered itself to the redness of blood, and satisfied him” (606; emphasis added).

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5 Thus, for Michael Snediker: “‘Lachrymae Christi,’ the poem’s title, connotes both the tears Jesus weeps upon being crucified, and a brand of sweet wine of the same name. Getting drunk and getting crucified are two ways of imagining a body in throes. It may be useful to recall that intoxication often conjures the idiom of being plastered as it does being sloshed, or smashed; and that being plastered isn’t just the precondition to being smashed, but its own state. While the poem’s title prepares a reader for some bodily crisis, the crisis of the poem’s opening stanza is a far cry from the title’s comparable perspicuity” (52-3). “[C]omparable perspicuity” denotes the literal distinguishability of Jesus’s tears from sweet wine, albeit with “Christi” and the poem’s double evocation of the “Nazarene” (“Thy Nazarene and tender eyes” and “O Nazarene”) drawing us to the former. This “perspicuity” is equivalent to Yingling’s Christian-sounding metaphoric vehicle. Against this vehicle, “the crisis of the poem’s opening stanza” unfolds as a “landscape (such as it might be)...not illuminated [i.e. in any Christological sense] by the moon, but dissolved by it, moonlight turned not to silver but to benzine. Illumination, in this context, occasions not greater clarity, but the threat of erasure, to which the stanza seems no less vulnerable [in its compositional syntax] than the scene the stanza evokes” (53). Loaded with nonreligious ambiguity and serving thus as a counterpoint to the doctrinaire faith of the Nazarene, this “threat of erasure” is equivalent to Yingling’s pagan-aesthetic tenor: that is, emancipated from and emancipatory beyond the pious vehicle of “Christi”/“Nazarene.” This conquest of vehicle by tenor amounts to a “structure of transcendence” that governs both Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text and “Hart Crane’s Smile” in Snediker’s Queer Optimism. For a further instance of the queer-aesthetic tenor’s transcendence of the orthodox-religious vehicle in Crane, see Tim Dean’s case for the loosening of liturgical and “ecclesiastical resonance” in “Legend,” the lyric that opens White Buildings: there, he argues, a sexual “‘logic of ecstasy’ liberates the self from itself” vis-à-vis queerly heterodox, occultist mysticism (“Privacy” 94).
Similarly, Crane’s “rod,” his apostrophic emphasis on divinity dismembered, and his fragmentary animal imagery—i.e. “venom,” “fox’s teeth,” “tunneling” “worms,” “sphinxes,” “vermin”—conjure the “heaped” detritus (“these last strands of man”), ferocious “lionlimb,” “darksome devouring eyes,” “bruisèd bones,” snakelike “coil,” and kissed phallic “rod” of Hopkins’s “Carrion Comfort” (60-1). Given Crane’s ecstatic discovery of Hopkins in 1928 and Yingling’s case for the blissful quality of dismemberment of “Lachrymae Christi,” one may argue that Crane had proleptically taken up Hopkins’s “lapped strength,” “stol[e]n joy,” precluded “laugh,” and speculative “chéer” (61) years before encountering Hopkins in print.

Indeed, in Crane’s alchemical imagination, Hopkins’s despairing “turns of tempest” resurface as “Some sentient cloud/Of tears” that catachrestically “flocks through the tendoned loam.”

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6 Consider as well the subtle overlap between the thorn and blood imagery in Crane’s second stanza—“Immaculate venom binds / The fox’s teeth, and swart / Thorns freshen on the year’s / First blood”—and the last lines in “Carrion Comfort,” which allude to the Crucifixion and Jesus’s crown of thorns: “That night, that year / Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.” Hopkins alludes to Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning,” and thus typologically to Christ’s anguished question, mouthed through the dripping blood of the crown of thorns during his Crucifixion: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). For a fine reading of “Carrion Comfort” in the context of Hopkins’s “terrible” sonnets, see Julia Saville, “Courtly Masochism and the ‘Terrible’ Sonnets,” in A Queer Chivalry (131-57).

7 To Winters (27 January 1928), Crane extols Hopkins as “a revelation…of unrealized possibilities. I did not know that words could come so near a transfiguration to pure musical notation—at the same time retaining every minute literal signification! What a man—and what daring! It will be long before I shall be quiet about him” (568). To Samuel Loveman (5 February 1928), Crane admits that in reading Hopkins: “I have discovered that I am not as original in some of my stylisms [sic] as I had thought I was” (572). One may discern a clear imprint of Hopkins in Crane, rendered after Crane’s discovery of Hopkins, when Hopkins’s “The Windhover” is read alongside “The Hurricane” (Crane Complete 85).

8 Cf. Eliot, “Ash-Wednesday,” part IV: “The new years walk, restoring / Through a bright cloud of tears. the years, restoring / With a new verse the ancient rhyme” (94; emphasis added). Encapsulating the self-possessed wherewithal of P.B. Shelley’s “The Cloud,” through whose stormy “banner” (line 62) we may recall the divine whirlwind in the Book of Job (38:1), Crane’s “sentient” cloud manifests both as literal air-mass and as figurative gale of emotion “shed” so as to shroud one’s sight. As such, Crane appears to up the romantic ante when sharing airspace with Eliot’s restoratively “bright” cloud. The latter’s brightness, however, signals literal illumination while also shading synonymously into the adjectives “intelligent,” “clever,” “enlightened,” and thus already “sentient.” Notably, then, Crane’s and Eliot’s clouds may be comparably sentient, sapient, emotive, and even mystical or prayerful: à la the circuitry of nomenclature in Derrida’s On the Name, Crane’s intimation of negative theology in stanza six—“Names peeling from Thine eyes…O Nazarene”—may be compared with Eliot’s peeling and whirling of Word from word / world through Word in “Ash-Wednesday,” section V: “Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard, / The Word without a word, the Word within / The world and for the world; / Against the Word the unstillled world still whirled / About the centre of the silent Word” (Complete 96). In this sense, perhaps both clouds descend from the mystical The Cloud of Unknowing, an allusion to which we find in Eliot’s “Little Gidding,” section V: “With the drawing of the Love and the Voice of this Calling” (Complete 197).
In aesthetic terms, the figure of Friedrich Nietzsche—the core philosophical echo haunting “Lachrymae Christi” and Yingling’s exegesis thereof—is certainly as evocative as the poem’s forceful ricochet through the corpuses of Eliot and Hopkins. One cannot read far into either poem or exegesis without referring Dionysus, “the body of god dismembered in joy,” to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. As Mario Costa notes, *The Birth of Tragedy* renders “Apollonian and Dionysian impulses” as “two [constructive and destructive, respectively] elements of creativity”; Nietzsche champions the latter to such an extent that the Dionysian impulse “achieved a position of preeminence in his thinking,” particularly for its “wild, erotic, destructive, and frenzied force” (48). In an emancipatory gesture, aimed at releasing Crane’s queer aesthetic from its premature burial in hetero-normative criticism, Yingling unlatches the lyric from its Christological anchorage in the titular “Christi” and twofold reference to “Nazarene,” in turn fastening queer transcendence to the poem’s final Dionysian apostrophe. To be sure, for Yingling such *transcendence* proceeds via *antecedence*: arching before Christianity, ostensibly to a far more sexually-variegated ancient Greece, amounts to a kind of queer transcendence *beyond* Christianity. In other words, the aesthetic cult and mythological religion of Dionysian *paganism* is tantamount here to a post-Christian *secular* order whereby the complex joy of queer aesthetics—the homosexual sublime—may be parsed as such. For queer-secularist exegesis as Yingling renders it, Dionysus figures as a *secular, profane, or nonreligious god*, a

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*As Joseph Riddel suggests, “Lachrymae Christi” and *The Birth of Tragedy* interface through “the dismemberment of Dionysus,” which Nietzsche describes “in terms of the agony of individuation” (485).*

*In linking Crane’s poem to *The Birth of Tragedy*, John Irwin provides a more comprehensive schematic of the deities: “Apollo is the god of reason and logic, of the confines of the city and the limits of the self, ‘the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*’, and Dionysus is the god of instinct and ecstasy, of the countryside and of an ecstatic intoxication that overwhelms the limits of the individual self through a sense of identification with the primordial unity of all things” (290).*
tricky guarantor of queerness vis-à-vis the joyful pagan dismemberment, rather than despotic Judeo-Christian providence, he undertakes.\textsuperscript{11}

Philosophically, moreover, the joyous dismemberment of divinity in Crane’s poem leads us not only to The Birth of Tragedy, but also to Nietzsche’s The Gay Science: “God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too” (167). Referring elliptically to “a cycle of sacrificial beauty” in “Lachrymae Christi” (155; emphasis added), Yingling only intimates that Dionysus, even after his dismemberment, may resurface as a spectral divinity that must be “vanquished” or dismembered all over again. At his mythological core, however, Dionysus is constituted by this very repetition: it determines his figurative roots in the literal grape vine as well as his ritual (dis)embodiments on the ancient Greek stage.\textsuperscript{12} Downplaying the pagan god’s shadowy return enables Yingling to outpace hetero-normative readings that cast Crane, in Jerome Mazzaro’s words, as a “poet-quester” whose sheer excesses in life and art made him an “archetypal visionary victim, Dionysus-Christ” (qtd. in New 190).

Justly critical of this interpretive line, Yingling uncouples Dionysus from Christ as a gesture of queer emancipation. In this manner, he seeks to dissociate the queerness of Crane’s visionary talent from the narrative of victimhood, replete as it is with Christian subtexts of

\textsuperscript{11} Yingling’s key claim is that the “dismembered [Dionysian] body is for Crane the eroticized [queer] body carried to its logical extreme” (155). This argument, which finds violence in queer eroticism and embodiment, accrues connotations when considered alongside Costa’s discussion of Nietzsche: “The transformation of eros/desire wrought by Nietzsche strips desire of its inherently divine and intermediary status…As a manifestation of the will to power, which has as its aim the (too often violent) expansion of its own power, erotic love, and more broadly, human desire, are construed as unavoidably, if not essentially, antagonistic and agonistic. Moreover, desire does not mediate the human and the divine; rather, the loss of the divine renders any desire for God virtually, if not completely, impossible. In the wake of the final death and absence of God, the desire for God can only express itself in the creation of new gods, gods created in our own image. Herein, it seems, lies the ultimate satisfaction of human desire: to become gods ourselves” (48).

\textsuperscript{12} As Edith Hamilton notes, Dionysus “was the vine, which is always pruned as nothing else that bears fruit; every branch cut away, only the bare stock left; through the winter a dead thing to look at, an old gnarled stump seeming incapable of ever putting forth leaves again…his death was terrible: he was torn to pieces, in some stories by the Titans, in others by Hera’s orders. He was always brought back to life; he died and rose again” (61).
hetero-normativity, phobic censure, and irrevocable judgment. However, such uncoupling and
downplaying of the god’s shadowy return elide the unmistakable theological-epochal continuity
between Dionysus and Christ, figures sutured together by more than Mazzaro’s artful hyphen:

[Dionysus] was always brought back to life; he died and rose again. It was his joyful
resurrection they celebrated in the theater, but the idea of terrible deeds done to him and
done by men under his influence was too closely associated with him ever to be
forgotten. He was more than the suffering god. He was the tragic god. There was none
other. He had still another side. He was the assurance that death does not end all. His
worshippers believed that his death and resurrection showed that the soul lives on forever
after the body dies….In his resurrection he was the embodiment of the life that is stronger
than death. He and not Persephone became the center of the belief in immortality. (Hamilton 61-2)

With the sole exception of terrible deeds “done by men under [Dionysus’s intoxicating]
influence,” the continuities between Dionysus and Christ are at once glaring and suggestive.
More specifically, Hamilton’s characterizations of Dionysus’s theological tenets shade into
Christ and the doctrine of the Resurrection as elaborated by Saint Paul in First Corinthians: at the
Resurrection, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death”\(^{13}\) (15:26). In his resurrection,
consonantly, Dionysus embodies “life that is stronger than death.” Just as Dionysus’s death and
resurrection indicate the soul’s eternal life after the body’s death, Christ shows us (through
Paul’s epistles) that what is “sown in weakness” is “raised in power”; what is “sown a physical
body” is “raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body” (15:
43-45). At once aesthetic and epochal-epistemic,\(^{14}\) these continuities pinpoint the elision in

\(^{13}\) Thus Paul, alluding to Hosea 13:14, parses the Resurrection as the event whereby “this mortal body puts on
immortality” and “Death has been swallowed up in victory,” enabling us to ask, “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15: 53-55).

\(^{14}\) On this epochal-epistemic continuity from pre-Christian paganisim to the early institutional cultures of
Christianity, see Franz Rosenzweig: “Taking the offensive, the Church had overpowered the pagan idea, but only at
the very beginning, up to the end of the Patristics, just so long, that is, as the idea was still a living expression and
not yet solely a memory. Augustine, audacious as only a victor can be, played fast and loose with the wisdom of the
Hellenes, but no medieval Scholastic dared to do this. Love had the power to wrestle with pagan philosophers, but
its weapons were useless against pagan philosophy” (280). The persistence of this influence gave way to the
mingling of “living memories of paganism” within “the Christian populace,” or Christendom (280). For
Rosenzweig, the intensity of this mingling resulted in “new pagans, pagans in a world already Christian, internalized
Yingling’s claim that queer transcendence “in this poem occurs in and through the body of god dismembered in joy” (155; emphasis added). As Hamilton notes, “It was his joyful resurrection [the ancient Greeks] celebrated in the theater” (62: emphasis added). Attenuating the theological overlay between Christ and Dionysus enables Yingling to minimize the former as aesthetically oppressive and to maximize the latter as a quasi-secularized figure of queer agency.

Reintroducing here my theological adaptation of *Queer Beauty*, in which Whitney Davis elaborates his shrewd distinction between “beauty queered” forcibly from without and “queer beauty” arising intuitively within an object or concept (see chapter three), I maintain that Yingling is attached to the former: in effect, he delineates “the homosexual sublime” by hermeneutically forcing the Christian element in “Lachrymae Christi” out of the poem’s aesthetic field, a move that in turn forces the pagan-secular element into the emancipatory limelight of a certain queerness. Through his forensic archaeology of Crane’s homosexual text, Yingling strives to institute something like a “pure cut” (as per chapter three’s discussion of Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting*) between Christ and Dionysus, aestheticizing the latter on behalf of a liberated sexuality which transcends the hetero-normative will to theologize with or through the Nazarene. Neither “theology queered” nor “queer theology,” as per my earlier reworking and approximation of Davis’s binary, applies here: for, theology as such—or, in Yingling’s scheme, specifically Christian theology—is anathema to the homosexual sublime and its lyric textures in memories, that is, in a Christian exterior, pagan souls in a world whose body had been converted to Christianity” (280-1). Accordingly, the “Pauline centuries,” on Rosenzweig’s account, “saw the pagan figures come back to life everywhere, saw the attempt by the nations to partition Christianity, by the states to divide the Empire, by the individuals to break down classes, by the personalities to burst the profession. In these three centuries—or four with its aftereffects—the Christian world-body seemed to disintegrate again. This was the price paid for the successful Christianization of the soul, for the belated conversion of a pagan spirit never wholly deceased and now reawakened” (281). On specific doctrinal continuities and theological cusps during these centuries, see Seeberg, “Historical Introduction: Greek-Roman Heathenism in Its Relation to Christianity”; Miller, “Subtle Embodiments: Imagining the Holy in Late Antiquity”; Stang, “‘Being Neither Oneself nor Someone Else’: The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysus the Aeropagite”; Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*; and, with an exquisite deconstructive twist, Miriam Leonard’s edited collection, *Derrida and Antiquity*, which centers on Derrida’s essay, “We Other Greeks.”
Crane’s imaginary. At this point, one may infer that Yingling’s case for a virtual incision between Dionysus and the Nazarene in “Lachrymae Christi” is persuasive only to readers for whom queerness is a fastidiously secular affair; or, in other words, for readers banking on a metonymy that aligns pre- or post-Christian paganism with anti- or nonreligious secularity.\(^\text{15}\)

Turning to a broader antithetical account of “Lachrymae Christi,”\(^\text{16}\) in which aesthetic agency is bound to the Nazarene rather than to Dionysus and in which Crane’s sexuality is not explicitly drawn into the exegesis, we can sympathize with—even while critiquing—Yingling’s recoil from Christian theology and his attendant queer recourse to pre-Christian paganism.

Consider Herbert Leibowitz’s sheer Christianization of the speaker in “Lachrymae Christi”:

The poet celebrates the return of his vision to its proper business—the pursuit of harmony and beauty—after its errant course and “perjuries,” which, incidentally, recall Judas’ perfidies…. “Chant pyramids” points forward to the “sphinxes” and “betrayed stones” of stanza five that “slowly speak,” suggesting the freeing of Crane’s imagination from its infatuation with death and self-deceit: his tongue is cleared to sing, that is, to write poems. “Anoint with innocence” pertains to this newfelt [sic] absolution, as though he were crowned with something more precious than the laurel—innocence and self-respect, balm to a spirit wounded by “swart thorns,” the prickings [sic] of conscience…even the worm, which usually devours corpses and is traditionally the macabre reminder of man’s mortality, is heard “tunneling/Not penitence/But song.” Christ’s death is the reason for this outburst of cosmic delight; His tears and blood (“Perpetual fountains, vines”), ordinarily emblems of cosmic delight, are here fruitful assurances of an inexhaustible forgiveness of man’s sins. (186-7)

\(^{15}\) Indicating precisely how tethered we are to the tightest of double binds, this metonymy is as familiar and appealing to the queer-progressive Left, represented here by Yingling, as it is to the hetero-normative, theocratic Right. Of the latter, we may recall from chapter three that in Eliot’s social criticism, paganism and secularism are resplendent birds of a feather: “in the atmosphere of the modern world,” in which they possess “a seductiveness with which Christianity cannot compete” (Eliot “Revelation” 190), paganism and secularism are metonymically imbricated. As David Edwards notes in his introduction to Eliot’s The Idea of a Christian Society and Other Writings: “In an address delivered in 1943 and subsequently developed for delivery to an audience in Paris in 1945, he declared: ‘The trouble of the modern age is not merely the inability to believe certain things about God and man which our forefathers believed, but the ability to feel towards God and man as they did. A belief in which you no longer believe is something which to some extent you can still understand; but when religious feeling disappears, the words in which men have been glad to express it become meaningless.’ It would follow that the term ‘secular,’ which he had wished to avoid in his preference for ‘pagan’ or ‘infidel,’ was becoming inescapable” (39).

\(^{16}\) Broader, that is, than Jerome Mazzaro’s account of Dionysus-Christ glimpsed via Elisa New above.
While not cited by Yingling, this analysis is fairly representative of Crane criticism before the ascendance of both gay and lesbian studies and queer theory.\textsuperscript{17} For readers aware of Crane’s often agonizing sense of his own homosexuality and eventual suicide after attempting a heterosexual relationship with Peggy Baird Cowley in 1932,\textsuperscript{18} Leibowitz’s reflections on the speaker’s “errant course” and wounded spirit, “Judas’ perfidies,” the poet’s “infatuation with death and self-deceit,” phallic “prickings of conscience,” and “man’s sins” are apt to imply a biographical, hetero-normative account of Crane’s queerness and the difficult poetics to which it contributed. Through theological “absolution”—a “balm” of “innocence and self-respect,” “cosmic delight,” and “inexhaustible forgiveness”—Christianity remedies the speaker’s sexually and spiritually errant course in “Lachrymae Christi.” Indeed, this remedy is potent enough for Leibowitz to anticipate Mazzaro in dissolving the violent, dismembered queerness of Dionysus into Christ’s magnanimous, salvific Resurrection. Predicating and outstripping Mazzaro’s hyphen, this dissolution manifests in Leibowitz’s singular pronoun: “Although he is the object of derision and abuse (‘target’), Christ-Dionysus is unmangled, and he is able to work miraculous, life-enhancing acts, to ‘Lift up in lilac-emerald breath the grail/Of earth again’” (191; emphasis added). If “Crane addresses Christ directly in a tone of affectionate certainty, as though Crane

\textsuperscript{17} Among the most caustic pre-LGBT criticisms of Crane’s life and work are courtesy of Yvor Winters, with whom Crane ended his lively correspondence as a result of Winters’s grousing and dismissive review of \textit{The Bridge} in 1930: “The social restraints, the products of generations of religious discipline, which operated to minimize the influence of Romantic philosophy in the personal lives of Emerson and Whitman, were at most only slightly operative in Crane’s career. He was unfortunate in having a somewhat violent emotional constitution: his behavior on the whole would seem to indicate a more or less manic-depressive makeup, although this diagnosis is the post-mortem guess of an amateur, and is based on evidence that is largely hearsay. He was certainly homosexual, however, and he became a chronic and extreme alcoholic. I should judge that he cultivated these weaknesses on principle; in any event, it is well known that he cultivated them assiduously; and as an avowed Whitmanian, he would have been justified by his principles in cultivating all of his impulses” (131).

\textsuperscript{18} Peggy Baird Cowley was at the time divorcing from Malcolm Cowley, editor of the \textit{New Republic}. See Crane’s letter to Samuel Loveman, 10 March 1932 (725-6); and to Solomon Grunberg, 20 March 1932 (726-8).
were a pupil repeating to himself the lesson he has learned from his savior-mentor” (190), then Christ ultimately jettisons the queerness of Dionysus’s religious, and thus cultural, difference.\(^{19}\)

Annulling this synthesis, or more accurately its prescribed conversion, Yingling exhumes Dionysus as a reparative gesture through which to resist the Christocentric view that Crane “celebrates the return of his vision to its proper business—the pursuit of harmony and beauty—after its errant course” (Leibowitz 186; emphasis added). In offsetting this corrective stance and the hetero-normative theology it advances, Yingling reads “Lachrymae Christi” as achieving “authenticity in a pagan apostrophe to a god burned at the stake” and as naming “celebration rather than penitence as the proper relation to divinity” (155; emphasis). Christianizing as it proceeds, Leibowitz’s interpretation exemplifies a wider drift in scholarship that purports to theologize with Crane, but does so largely without critical affirmation of his (work’s) queerness.\(^{20}\) Yingling’s reading, on the other hand, seeks to aestheticize queerly with Crane, but does so largely without critical affirmation of the “prevalent piety” that informs his oeuvre.

Concomitantly, both critics locate Crane’s well-known celebratory optimism in what appear to

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\(^{19}\) As Saint Paul declares: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

\(^{20}\) Bloom, for instance, only glances at “the inevitability of sexual orientation to the assumption of [Crane’s] poethood [sic]” (“Gnosis” 254) while he distinguishes between Crane’s religion “as a man”—“an inchoate mixture of Christian Science background, an immersion in Ouspensky [a Russian occultist], and an all but Catholic yearning”—and his religion “as a poet”: “American Orphism, the Emersonian or national religion of our poetry, which Crane inherited, quite directly, from his prime precursor Whitman” (254). For her part, in an otherwise excellent study, “Hand of Fire: Crane” in The Regenerate Lyric, Elisa New is closest to introducing queerness as a constructive tenet of Crane’s theological interests when she locates his poetry within “the Whitmanian fellowship” of “immutable aloneness”: Crane answers “Whitman’s birds-eye sanctification of high and low with a stern conviction of human suffering; Whitman’s disavowal of the one for the many with his rededication to the one; and Whitman’s poetics of camaraderie with an insistence on ‘the world that comes to each of us alone’…this immutable aloneness is Crane’s theological signature and my starting point for a reading of Crane which allows the fundamental privacy—and, yes, obscurity—of his vision, but makes of that privacy a context giving to obscurity purpose” (185). For Tim Dean such “fundamental privacy—and, yes, obscurity” is bound to the ethics, politics, and aesthetics of (un)closeting, and is thus irreducible to a theology of “immutable aloneness”: “homosexual signs signify only within a system governed by the terms of the closet, which structures intelligibility according to a series of overlaid oppositions between heterosexuality and homosexuality, open homosexuality and secret homosexuality, knowledge and ignorance…[Crane] deplores the very logic of the closet itself. That is, he desires to escape not any particular closet but the terms that make such an escape so fraught with significance in the first place” (“Privacy” 91).
be divergent quarters of his poetics: for Leibowitz, Crane’s celebration is altogether curative in its assent to the revelation of Christianity, whereby queerly sexual (among other) “[s]ins can be forgiven” and “bodies rise from the dead” in a holistic vision of eschatological judgment (Auden “Limestone” 187); for Yingling, meanwhile, Crane’s optimism revels in its opulent contribution to the homosexual sublime’s fragmentation of divinity, which mirrors the eros of self-shattering.

Pursuant to the queerness of theo-critique, which seeks to negotiate interminably between theology and theory, I maintain that Leibowitz and Yingling considerably overstate their respective positions. Arguably, that is, Crane is at once more queerly religious or religiously heterodox than Leibowitz takes him to be and is more queerly secular or secularly heterodox than Yingling permits him to be. At (“charred and riven”) stake for both interpretations of “Lachrymae Christi” is not, ultimately, the fateful aesthetic choice between Christianity and paganism/secularity, Christ and Dionysus, or heterosexuality and homosexuality. The bona fide interpretive challenge, rather, is to parse the constitutive tension that at once structures and subverts these determined binaries, particularly as each formidable pair comes to frame, inform, animate, and elucidate Crane’s writing through the annals of literary criticism.

One may clearly discern and answer this challenge through the mysterious crosshatching that haunts the poem’s title, which “connotes both the tears Jesus weeps upon being crucified and a brand of sweet wine of the same name” (Snediker 52; emphasis added) that intimates Dionysian intoxication. If we consider both the iconography of the Crucifixion, in which Jesus’s tears mingle seamlessly with stigmatic blood,21 and the Garden of Gethsemane passage in which Jesus’s agony causes his sweat to become “like great drops of blood falling down on the ground”

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21 See “The Triumph of Christ” in Didron, Christian Iconography, or, The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages, especially pages 303-5. Recall as well Leibowitz’s reference to Christ’s “tears and blood (‘Perpetual fountains, vines’),” which manifest in Crane’s poem not as “emblems of sorrow,” but rather as “fruitful assurances of an inexhaustible forgiveness of man’s sins” (187).
(Luke 22:44), we may detect a strong theological metonymy between tears and blood. Through the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist, moreover, this metonymy widens its scope to include the ritual symbols of transubstantiation, whereby bread and wine are mystically transfigured as Christ’s body and blood. Twenty-two Tears, blood, and wine are thus, in the iconographic and sacramental traditions of Christian theology, consistent as spiritual substances. Because the mythological cult of Dionysus may predicate early Christological doctrines in ways Hamilton and other scholars imply (see footnote 14), one cannot scrupulously allegorize Christ’s tears, blood, and wine without gauging the groundwork and precedent of the suffering pagan deity. In his ritual dismemberment and figurative roots in the harvested grape wine, however, Dionysus’s own tears, blood, and wine are culturally irreducible to Christian iconographies of the Passion and its Eucharistic afterlife. Dionysus is not Christ, just as Christ is not Dionysus. Nevertheless, from the vantage point of Crane’s historical moment as well as our own, we would do well to admit that the identity of the one deity cannot be assiduously posited without thinking (all the way) through the identity of the other deity. In this sense, Jesus’s agonized tears and stigmatic blood are virtually Dionysian in their transubstantiation into sweet wine, even as Christ’s Passion and Resurrection are not pure repetitions of Dionysus’s cyclical dismemberment and reconstitution.

22 On the mystical element in transubstantiation, Henri Cardinal de Lubac SJ writes instructively of “the ratio mystica through which the thing lies within the sign, and the sign, in some way, and to different degrees depending on the case, participates in the higher reality of the thing. Or again, if we concentrate less on the text than on the rites, we could say that it is the secret power by which the thing operates across the sign and through which the sign participates, here again in widely differing ways, in the higher efficacy of the thing. This is the origin of the adverbial form mystically, (or in the mystery), which is so frequently used, but determines in an exclusive sense neither one or other of the terms which the verb places in conjunction, but rather the relationship itself which the verb is expressing: ‘the bread is mystically turned into the body of Christ’. This is also the source for some authors’ use of the verb to make mystical, to be made mystical, or to mysticize [sic]. This is also the source of such subtle interchanges as the sacrament of the mystery and the mystery of the sacrament. Finally this is the origin of the phenomenon…of a transfer of attributes, of an exchange or a ‘communication of idiom’, between the two poles of attraction and location of the ‘mystery’” (52-3).

23 Cf. Riddle’s dissimilar perspective on this mixing of deities and their divine fluids, especially in light of Crane’s reference to the chemical benzine: “If the tears of Christ (and by metamorphosis, of Dionysus) are the wine which redeems agony, the ‘benzine / Rinsings’ of the opening stanzas are anything but sacramental. They are venomous, sterilizing, death-rendering; they negate the ground of life, and compel the sacrifice of the creative act” (487). For
To be sure, by positing that Crane in “Lachrymae Christi” reciprocally embeds, sinuously interlaces, or doubly binds Dionysus and Christ, I am arguing that as deities their historical distinguishability (hailing from discrete religious traditions) is only as certain or positive as their virtual identification as mytho-poetic symbols (hailing from the same trajectory of cultural memory or exchange). As a theistic tension that (de)constructs the divinities, traditions, and cultural memories or exchanges in question, this counterbalance between distinguishability and identification is not tantamount to equivocation for equivocation’s sake, or to ambivalence for ambivalence’s sake. To the contrary, in the very terms of origination24 that imbricate Greco-Roman paganism and Christianity (on the one hand) and Judaism and Christianity (on the other hand), the (de)constructive entanglement of Dionysus and Christ—the lithe simultaneity of their difference and their identity—follows the theoretical circuit of Derridean aporias:

Aporias are distinguished from logical categories such as dilemmas or paradoxes; as experiences is from presupposition. Aporias are known in the experience of being passed through, although they are non-passages; they are thus disclosed in effacement... Formalization is achieved by passing through or “solving” aporias, treating them as practical logical problems....Justice cannot pass in a direct line to law; that line is a non-passage, an aporia. Yet justice is disclosed in law, even as its own effacement. This is the peculiar nature of the deconstructive embrace. (Spivak Critique 427)

To the extent that one must pass through Dionysus to reach Christ or through Christ to reach Dionysus in historiographies of Western religion, “[f]ormalization is achieved” and the aporia of

his (yet more) queerly irreverent part, Gregory Woods locates in the poem “a nocturnal townscape peopled with cruisers and prowlers” fueled by “the drinking of wine”; however, in his rather hasty (if not “premature”) metonymic reading, the alcoholic beverage is more likely an ejaculatory white than a bloody red: “The wine is white, and is linked in the poem with the moonlight which bathes the factories of the city area concerned. In its name, the wine (and, incidentally, the poem) is explicitly likened to the secretions of a man’s body, his tears; which may duly be assumed to have, here, some covert reference to his semen: but semen emitted in sadness, rather than joy. The sexual image is of fellatio; for, like wine, the semen is drunk to excess in the moonlit streets, to intoxicating effect; and...it fills men’s mouths to capacity” (147). Notwithstanding the challenge of parsing an orgasmic (even orgiastic) sadness or despondent ejaculation, the possibility of such a reading is surely not beyond Crane’s vision.

24 “The earlier work [of deconstruction in Derrida’s corpus]—broadly grasped as the necessary yet impossible argument from différence—insisted that all institutions of origin concealed the splitting off from something other than the origin, in order for the origin to be instituted. This was a making indeterminate of any answer to questions of origin, as to what it was from which the supposedly original thing or thought, in description or definition, was being differentiated. It is this question, instituted at the origin, that had to be guarded or kept as a task in the first phase of deconstruction” (Spivak Critique 426).
origin, inheritance, legacy, and lineage between Hellenism and Christianity is “solved” when we
decide to mark the former from the latter as conspicuous branches in a genealogy of culture.\textsuperscript{25} As
Samir Haddad notes, “one can graft the term ‘aporia’ onto this structure of a divided legacy”:

the structure of aporia is necessarily an inherited one, since the conditional laws that form
one arm of the contradiction are found in chains of historical practices and norms…. Further, the aporetic structure of legacies implies that there are limits to what one can
choose. Consider the case of the legacy of the injunction to be hospitable…for Derrida
this aporia is divided—there is never one law of hospitality, but a multiplicity consisting
of an unconditional law and conditional laws. This multiplicity is irreducible, since each
regime of law relies on the other even as they are in contradiction with each other. This
being the case, what could it mean to choose among the multiple strands of this legacy?
One cannot choose one arm of the aporia over the other, for that would dispel the aporia.
Instead, the choice involved must in some way affirm the aporia and maintain its
contradictory tension. The choice made by an heir cannot negate the necessary disunity of
the injunction. (\textit{Inheritance} 24-5)

Accordingly, just as there is a multiplicity of often competing hospitalities within any singular
“injunction to be hospitable,” so is there a multiplicity of often competing Christianities within
Christianity, Christs within Christ, spirits within spirit, religions within religion, and gods within
gods/God. As one of Christianity’s inmost traces, Hellenism tends Dionysus as an aporetic
fissure \textit{within} the doctrine of Jesus Christ, at once suturing and dividing the textual Messiah.

Mutatis mutandis, in the secularizing aftermath of Christianity and its concomitant (re)fashioning
of “world religions” via European universalism (Masuzawa 1-120), Christ retroactively fissures
Dionysus, i.e. the Nazarene’s aporetic, anticipatory, “prosthetic substitute” (Derrida \textit{Aporias} 12).

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. Derrida, \textit{Aporias}: “It had to be a matter of [\textit{il devait y aller du}] the nonpassage, or rather from the experience
of the nonpassage, the experience of what happens [\textit{se passe}] and is fascinating [\textit{passionne}] in this nonpassage,
paralyzing us in this separation in a way that is not necessarily negative: before a door, a threshold, a border, a line,
or simply the edge or the approach of the other as such. It should be a matter of [\textit{devrait y aller du}] what, in sum,
appears to block our way or to separate us in the very place where \textit{it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem},
a project, or a projection, that is, at the point where the very project or the problematic task becomes
impossible and where we are exposed, absolutely without protection, without problem, and without prosthesis,
without possible substitution, singularly exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness, that is to say,
disarmed, delivered to the other, incapable of even sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority
of a secret. There, in sum, in this place of aporia, \textit{there is no longer any problem}. Not that, alas or fortunately, the
solutions have been given, but because one could no longer even find a problem that would constitute itself and that
one would keep in front of oneself, as a presentable object or project, as a protective representative or a prosthetic
substitute, as some kind of border still to cross or behind which to protect oneself” (12).
Moreover, the logic of aporia that structures the origin, inheritance, legacy, and lineage of Dionysus and Christ is decidedly spectral and thus spectrally undecidable. Dionysus and Christ haunt each other across the “threshold,” “border,” “line, or simply the edge” (Derrida Aporias 12) on which their theological, historical, and cultural discreteness is decided. Apropos the trajectory of deconstruction that spirits us through Derrida’s Specters of Marx,26 even as we decide on difference over identification or vice versa, we are in the craw of the undecidable:

Undecidable must be understood to refer not only to essential incompleteness and inconsistency, bearing in mind their distinction from ambiguity, but also to indicate a level vaster than that which is encompassed by the opposition between what is decidable and undecidable….the undecidables [sic] constitute both the medium or the element between the binary philosophical oppositions and between philosophy and its Other, as well as the medium that encompasses these coupled terms….By virtue of their constituting a space in between conceptual dyads and, at the same time, comprising them, the infrastructural undecidables are ‘the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other’ (D, [Dissemination] p.127). Their undecidability, their ‘floating indetermination,’ permits the substitution and the play of the conceptual binary oppositions, which, by turning into one another, become incapable of denominating and

26 “Throughout Specters of Marx,” Haddad notes, “Derrida does not cease to remind the reader that there is no single legacy of Marx, but several. There is no single voice, no single spirit, and no single specter. They are always more than one. Derrida’s task is thus to maintain this plurality in his engagement with these legacies. How does he proceed? Addressing directly his inheritance of Marxism, he writes that ‘one must [il faut] filter, select, differentiate, restructure the questions…one must assume the inheritance of Marxism, assume its most ‘living’ part, which is to say, paradoxically, that which continues to put back on the drawing board the question of life, spirit, or the spectral, of life-death beyond the opposition between life and death’ (SOM, 54/SDM, 93-94). This suggests that for Derrida the action of sorting constituting his inheritance from Marxism centers on the question of specters, as announced in the title of the book. And it is precisely here that Derrida locates a stark division in Marx’s work. On the one hand, Derrida argues that Marx was obsessed by ghosts—they appear continuously across his oeuvre—and much of the analysis is concerned with examining those moments when ghosts are in play. But on the other hand, Derrida demonstrates how, in all of these instances, Marx tries to chase those ghosts away and resolve their indetermination. Marx’s legacy vis-à-vis specters is thus divided, and this division is captured in the double meaning of the word ‘conjuration.’ This means both to evoke a spirit and to exorcise it….It is not a question of simply aligning life with transformation and death with a static ontology, and choosing one over the other. The choice in inheritance can privilege one over the other, certainly, but not in a way that this other is dispelled” (Inheritance 25-7). See also Derrida, ‘The Deconstruction of Actuality”: “Hypothesis: there is always more than one spirit. When one speaks of spirit one immediately evokes spirits, specters; and whoever inherits chooses one spirit rather than another. One makes selections, one filters, one sifts through the ghosts or through the injunctions of each spirit. There is legacy only where assignments are multiple and contradictory, secret enough to defy interpretation, to carry the unlimited risk of active interpretation. It is here a decision and a responsibility can be taken. Without double bind, there is no responsibility. A legacy must retain an undecidable reserve” (111). For elaborations on legacy’s “undecidable reserve” in and beyong Derrida’s Specters of Marx, see Sprinker, ed., Ghostly Demarcations; Lucy; Glorieux and Hasimbegovic; Dillon; Bulley; Watt; Rottenberg, Inheriting the Future; Abeyesekara, The Politics of Postsecular Religion; Cixous; Moore; Phillips (“Asphodel”); Sellars; Alfano; Wijaya; and Wood, “Some thing, some one, some ghost.”
defining the medium from they emerge (D, p. 93). Thus, if one calls infrastructures ‘ambivalent’ or ‘ambiguous,’ it is in the sense that they do not offer themselves to mastery in terms of simple and clear-cut distinctions. (Gasché Tain 241-2)

By way of this necessary theoretical tangent, I am arguing that the infrastructural undecidability of “Lachrymae Christi” forces us to pursue “the spectral—rather than spiritual—dimension” (Haddad Inheritance 27) that (dis)figures concourse between Dionysus and the Nazarene. If Crane’s Dionysus seems more consolidated and emancipatory than his Christ, or if Crane’s Christ seems more fundamental and redemptive than his Dionysus, then the one subordinated divinity of “Lachrymae Christi” “must retain an undecidable reserve” (Derrida “Actuality” 111); this undecidable reserve haunts the exegetical decision to separate and hierarchize Crane’s divinities, enabling us to detect the trace of one deity within the (dis)figuration of the other.27

Perusing Crane’s “Letter to Harriet Monroe,” in which he argues that poetry’s “emotional dynamics are not to be confused with any absolute order of rationalized definitions” and that its “rationale of metaphor belongs to another order of experience than science”28 (167), we can appreciate in Crane’s (rather than Derrida’s) terms the supple simultaneity of difference and identity encoded in the “Lachrymae Christi”: Christ (his tears, blood, wine, Crucifixion, and

27 Uncompromisingly double-bound, the aporia of origin, inheritance, legacy, and lineage is a constitutive tension not only in historiographies of religion, but also of political theology as enshrined in the mid-twentieth century by Ernst Kantorowicz in The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology. A rich, sizeable body of scholarship has developed around the focal genealogy in Kantorowicz’s study, which voluminously tracks “the change from the Pauline corpus Christi to the mediaeval corpus ecclesiae mysticum, thence to the corpus reipublicae mysticum which was equated with the corpus morale et politicum of the commonwealth, until finally (though confused by the notion of Dignitas) the slogan emerged saying that every abbot was a ‘mystical body’ or a ‘body politic,’ and that accordingly the king, too, was, or had, a body politic which ‘never died.’ Notwithstanding, therefore, some similarities with disconnected pagan concepts, the King’s Two Bodies is an offshoot of Christian theological thought and consequently stands as a landmark of Christian political theology” (506). For recent work that engages, inflects, expands, and variously recalibrates this genealogy, see Santner, The Royal Remains; Agamben, The Kingdom and the Glory; Anidjar, The Jew, the Arab and Semites; Hammill and Lupton; Hammill; Lupton, “Pauline Edifications”; Biddick; Rust; Kahn; Lezra; and Kneidel.

28 See also Crane’s “General Aims and Theories”: “the motivation of the poem must be derived from the implicit emotional dynamics of the materials used, and the terms of expression employed are often selected less for their logical (literal) significance than for their associational meanings. Via this and their metaphorical interrelationships, the entire construction of the poem is raised on the organic principle of a ‘logic of metaphor,’ which antedates our so-called pure logic, and which is the general basis of all speech, hence consciousness and thought-extension” (Complete 163).
Resurrection) is *and* is not Dionysus (his tears, blood, wine, dismemberment, and reconstitution). Straddling both the logic of difference provided by “rationalized definitions” and the figural identity that accompanies the “emotional dynamics” of metaphor as “another order of experience than science,” Crane’s poem ultimately challenges Leibowitz’s and Yingling’s vying emphases on *celebratory transcendence*. Neither Leibowitz’s religious exegesis, which suggests the poem overhauls its speaker’s errant, sinful, or queer desire via Christian faith; nor Yingling’s secular reading, which lobbies for the speaker’s transcendence of religious hetero-normativity via the dismemberment of a pagan deity, can account for the *celebratory immanence* that marks the *relation* between the Nazarene and Dionysus in “Lachrymae Christi.” For, if the poem’s title delicately subverts the aesthetic opposition between Christianity and paganism, finding the one through the other while also maintaining their historical difference as religiosities, then critics should doubt Yingling’s location of the poem’s transcendent “authenticity” in the final “pagan apostrophe to a god burned at the stake” (155). Concomitantly, Leibowitz’s view that Christ transcendently delivers the speaker from his “errant course” (186) turns exceedingly dubious.

Foiling these transcendent schemes, Crane’s imagination seems capacious enough to facilitate the interpenetration, mutual constitution, and reciprocal immanence of the Nazarene and Dionysus, particularly on the technical plane of imagery, apostrophe, stanza construction, and syntax. The parallelism of stanzas six and eight, where we respectively find Crane’s apostrophes to the Nazarene and to Dionysus, indicates that neither deity transcends, absorbs, or converts its perceived rival; rather, both deities are correspondent figures whom Crane (dis)figures symmetrically, drawing both into the same fold of (de)composition. Evenly lineated, albeit with slighter diction in the latter, both stanzas mirror each other in ways that level their exegetical import. As a synecdoche for the divine visage, “Thine eyes” in stanza six parallel
“Thy face” in stanza eight; spirited by the discourse of negative theology, which paradoxically endeavours to approach God by way of negating the very possibility of doing so, stanza six’s “Names peeling from Thine eyes” offer us a prepositional echo of “Thy face From charred and riven stakes”; stanza six’s ocular “lattices of flame” are “undimming” in a manner that reinforces the “Unmangled” “target smile” of stanza eight. The former adjective, which suggests a divine spark that is inextinguishable in the midst of violent execution, foresees the latter adjective’s intimation of a divine substance that is unbreakable in the face of ritual sacrifice. The Nazarene’s stigmatic “palm and pain,” moreover, strongly anticipate Dionysus’s disjointed pose on “charred and riven stakes.” The deft symmetry of these stanzas, which culminate in balanced apostrophes to each deity and challenge Christopher Nealon’s view that the poem’s “images range too far afield from one another for their relations to be the basis of the poem’s coherence” (36), precludes both the Nazarene’s transcendence of Dionysus and Dionysus’s transcendence of the Nazarene. Mutually implicated in each other’s brokenness and phoenix-like reconstitutions,

29 See Sells, Mystical Languages of Unsaying; Budick and Iser, eds., Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory; Marion, “In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of ‘Negative Theology’”; and Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” and On the Name. On the stunning passage in question, see also Eric Sundquist, for whom Crane’s lines signal “yet another Word which oversignifies [sic] to the point of namelessness…an endless string of sacrifices and recoveries in which names must be periodically stripped from the eyes like malignant growths whose fixed presence will result in blindness and a loss of the name’s mystery” (385).

30 My argument here overlaps somewhat with Snediker’s rather baroque-phrased discussion of the poem’s final quatrain: “the face signals not the dissolution of Dionysiac [sic] frenzy but rather a counterintuitively nonbachannalian [double sic] ‘unmangled[ness].’ This unmangledness forms a frame with the first stanza’s ‘unyielding.’ The poem counters its dismantling energies with an intense valuation of the nondismantleable [sic]” (54). For Snediker, however, “the nondismantleable” amounts to overwhelmingly Platonic conceptions of “intransigence” and “durability itself,” which are irreducible to any particular affect—religious emotion, for instance, or a queerly prevalent piety—one might otherwise discern in “Lachrymae Christi” (54; emphasis added).

31 Articulated this way, my formalist argument for crosshatching parallelism runs counter to a central tenet in Riddel’s influential construal of the poem. Effectively reversing the allegorical drift of Leibowitz’s Christocentric reading, Riddel posits that Crane unilaterally “metamorphoses Christ into Dionysus, and for a very good reason. For the one signifies the necessity of history, and its Apollonian dream, the other the transformation which denies history. Analogously with Dionysus’ tears, which in Nietzsche’s version of the myth give birth to man, Christ’s symbolize the fortunate fall, the simultaneous betrayal and rationalization of individuation…Yet the smile of Dionysus, one notes, is not an achieved and communicated vision in the poem; it is the ecstasy of anticipated fulfillment. For the moment of the poet’s betrayal and dismemberment is, like Dionysus’, as inevitable as his transcendence…It is not just that one must precede the other in sequence; the one is the other. The tears of Christ...
both deities are queerly immanent to and for one another; such imbrication illuminates Crane’s aesthetic as more finely attuned to the immanence of queer theology as opposed to any transcendental force of theology queered.

At this junction we may venture further to situate Crane’s aesthetics between Yingling’s theoretical stance on the queerness of divine dismemberment and Leibowitz’s theological focus on hetero-normative Christian salvation. To mediate these aesthetic extremes theo-critically, I turn here to one of Crane’s famous neologisms, which appears in part III of “Voyages.”

Appositely enough, this neologism resonates with my earlier focus on transubstantiation:

Star kissing star through wave on wave unto
Your body rocking!

and where death, if shed,
Presumes no carnage, but this single change,—
Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn
The silken skilled transmemberment of song” (26; emphasis added).

Citing an impassioned letter Crane wrote to Waldo Frank in 1924, in which he homo-eroticizes transubstantiation and transubstantiates homoeroticism,

32 Bernard Heringman discerns in these (history’s betrayal) are redeemed by Dionysus’s smile (which denies history)” (491; emphasis added). If indeed “the one is the other,” then the other is not the one; for, in Riddel’s account, Christ is redeemed by Dionysus, suggesting a relation of power and transcendence that is far from mutual, evenhanded, nonaligned, or impartial.

32 “In April, 1924, Crane wrote a letter to Waldo Frank from his room overlooking the harbor in New York, where he was engaged in an intensely happy love affair with a young man who lived with him there between trips to sea. One passage from it is particularly a propos: ‘I think the sea has thrown itself upon me and been answered, at least in part, and I believe I am little changed— not essentially, but changed and transubstantiated as anyone is who has asked a question and been answered’” (Heringman 18). Curiously, despite its titular focus on what is perhaps Crane’s most well-known neologism, Lee Edelman’s Transmemberment of Song sidesteps the import of “transubstantiation” at a key point in an exegesis of “Voyages”: “In the letter to Waldo Frank where Crane wrote of the love affair that prompted this sequence, he characterized that experience as one of ‘transformation’ and ‘transubstantiation.’ The term he employs in the poem itself, though, is far richer than either of these. ‘Transmemberment’ conflates ‘transformation’ and ‘dismemberment,’ yoking together the movements of chiasmus and anacoluthon, the preparatory stages of Crane’s rhetorical project. Yet the term invokes another essential word as well, one that figures prominently in that rhetorical enterprise of reduction and reconstruction. Between ‘dismember’ and ‘transmember’ lies Crane’s pivotal term: ‘remember.’ This liminal word encompasses both the destructive, ‘whitening’ aspect of memory (as in ‘I can remember much forgetfulness’ [see ‘Forgetfulness’])...and its movement toward reconstructive, emblematic designs (as in ‘Repose of Rivers’ where the poet declares: ‘Finally, in that memory all things nurse’)” (148). One might ask Edelman how Crane, in coining “transmemberment” vis-à-vis his experience of being homo-erotically “changed and transubstantiated” (Heringman 18), might forget (to remember) “transubstantiation” as a compound term whose prefix, reference to materiality (i.e. “substance” shading corporeally into the sexual “member”), and doctrinal meaning alike inform and enable the neologism at hand.
lines a provocative relation “between the word *transubstantiated* in the letter” and “*transmemberment* in the poem” (18); “intent on realizing and extending the idea of *transubstantiation* suggested in his letter,” Heringman argues, Crane develops a metaphorical idea that poet and lover are really in the same place, that is, the track the poet makes (in his vision) in the sea is the same as that his lover makes…the poet joins his lover on the sea by means of a mystical vision, projecting his spirit in a death-like ecstasy perhaps, and then…in the immortal communion of song. The transforming sea of the letter is now, in the poem, a vehicle for the poet’s projection of himself, because it is also the actual vehicle of his beloved…the I, poet or speaker, merges with sea, sky and light into a sort of continuum which contains and supports the *you*. (19)

Crane’s visionary intermingling of same-sex desire and death—his “death-like ecstasy” and “immortal communion of song”—reach their fulcrum in his exquisite image of lovemaking in which “death, if shed, Presumes no carnage.” Rather than fleshy slaughter, that is, sexual experience as a species of death—figures forth in a “single change”: “transmemberment of song,” a phrase connoting bodies altered in pleasure and praise beyond the sum total of their physical parts or sexual members. In adapting the doctrine of transubstantiation for secular

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33 As Heringman notes, “The sensuality of the metaphors, converging on body, works in two directions, making the continuum sensual and the sensuality cosmic. The shedding of death, whether it means death as transcended or death as suffered, becomes the assumption of immortality, requiring no fleshy destruction but only something like Yeats’ ‘artifice of eternity,’ to be realized, however, in an ecstasy which starts with the flesh. Love is somehow equated with death, in what may well be an extension of the Elizabethan pun and the ‘metaphysical shudder’” (19-20). In this reading, Crane’s verb “shed” connotes ejaculation or orgasm.

34 Here, queer (-minded) Americanists are apt to spot a strong echo of Whitmanian homosexual transcendentalism, and in the same vein, an anticipation of John Ashbery: “Crane fits somewhere between these two writers in his attitude toward the body’s relation to language. His interest in the body has something to do with modernity and its research into the trope of structure... But the specific urgency with which that trope is eroticized in Crane’s text would have to do, it seems, with the decentering pressures homosexuality placed on identity in the early decades of this century. In Crane’s text, as in that of Whitman, the homosexual body is a site of sublimity if not of transcendent or cosmic knowledge, and, as in Ashbery’s text, Crane’s practice of dissemination is grounded in the body’s occlusion of the perfect transparency of speech” (Yingling 156). Crane’s homoerotic “transmemberment of song” is particularly Whitmanian in its echo of “one of the famous passages opening ‘Song of Myself’ [beginning ‘I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning, / How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn’d over upon me’].” in which Whitman “enacts a moment of transparent sexual union between two men that has always been read as a figure for the union between his body and his soul….it is important to see that through his narcissistic and genital understanding of sexuality, Whitman is able to sexualize the Emersonian notion of transcendence” (157). In the “Cape Hatteras” section of *The Bridge*, Crane joins hands with Whitman through the latter’s queer trajectory for transcendence: “yes, Walt, / Afoot again, and onward without halt,— / Not soon, nor suddenly,—no, never to let go / My hand / in yours, / Walt Whitman— / so—” (Crane Complete 60). As Yingling notes, “[t]he union with Whitman Crane describes in ‘Cape Hatteras,’ and the legitimacy this grants to acts of male homosexuality, must be seen…as a singularly brave attempt in the canon of modern American literature” (213). For
homoeroticism, “Voyages” leads us back to the imagery of Crucifixion and dismemberment in “Lachrymae Christi.” There, as we have seen, the Nazarene’s stigmatically bloody Passion structurally parallels Dionysus’s ritual dismemberment, even on the plane of balanced prepositions, apostrophes, and corporeal synecdoches.

As (dis)figurations wrought by religious passion, which ultimately differs from the secular throes of homoeroticism, the parallel body parts (bodies in parts, bodies apart) of “Lachrymae Christi” certainly do presume carnage; in this light, they are markedly dissimilar to the ecstatic, metamorphosed sexual members of “Voyages.” Nevertheless, the parallelism of deities joyously riven affords a certain “membership” with the elated, oceanic homoeroticism of “Voyages.” Specifically, like the seafaring and sea-becoming lovers in “Voyages,” the Nazarene and Dionysus are far more transmembered than they are dismembered: that is, each deity is disfigured and reconfigured through the careful parallelism and crosshatching of Crane’s stanzas. Redirecting us to the vinous fold of transubstantiation in the poem’s title, Crane’s dismembered deities scrupulously transmember one another. In this way, Crane’s “prevalent piety” outstrips the religious designs of hetero-normative criticism and the reparative gestures of queer-secularist exegesis.

Crane’s Mexican Circumstances:

On the Erosion of Cultural and Religious Difference in Queer-Secularist Exegesis

Notwithstanding certain lapses in their judgments of what I take to be Crane’s prevalent piety, Yingling and Leibowitz are right to underscore (in their opposing ways) the celebratory nature of Crane’s poetry and the wider aesthetic compass in which it should be studied. Indeed, through virtually all of the sea-changes in Crane scholarship since the poet’s suicide in 1932,
Crane’s aesthetics of celebration and intricate motifs of ecstasy—his “wildly declamatory style” (Sundquist 378)—have remained critical touchstones. Significantly, however, as hetero-normatively religious perspectives on Crane’s poetry have waned, queer-secularist approaches have gradually taken their place. While this succession continues to open vistas for innovative work on a difficult modernist poet, it has also incrementally jettisoned discussions of how queerness might positively—even optimistically—relate to religion in Crane’s aesthetics.

A foreclosure of precisely this sort, I have argued, is an unfortunate corollary of Yingling’s path-breaking effort to salvage Crane’s “homosexual text” from the mainly Christian diagnostics of hetero-normative criticism. With its implication that celebratory queerness is unachievable in the doctrinal confines of (here specifically Christian) revelation, Yingling’s opposition of pagan joy to monotheistic solemnity is ultimately precarious. Revisiting the previous section’s analysis of the Eucharist, for instance, one might wonder how joy would not be sacramentally relevant for the mystical “event” of transubstantiation, whereby the symbolic dismemberment of the Lord constitutes the worshipful congregation. Such congregations, of course, are not without their queerly “transmembered” believers. For such exegetes, it may be altogether dubious to read Crane’s prevalent piety as an insignificant or aberrant feature of his poetics. Indeed, queer readers of this persuasion are unlikely to infer that the dynamic “religious mood” (*Complete* 640) of Crane’s poetry merits the allegedly curative forces of secularization.

In recent Crane scholarship, the queer-secularist approach delineated above reaches its curative apex in Michael Snediker’s “Hart Crane’s Smile: Affirming Certain Things,” which appears in *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*. Supplementing chapter two’s extensive critique of Snediker’s theoretical investments in antireligious secularism, my intervention in this section aims to challenge *Queer Optimism’s*
absolute foreclosure of both *theological* and *cultural* difference in Crane’s unfinished 1932 poem, “The Circumstance,” which was drafted while Crane was residing in Mexico on a Guggenheim Fellowship. In deconstructing Snediker’s antireligious focus on this lushly theological lyric, I simultaneously provide a theo-critical counterargument: notwithstanding its status both as an incomplete draft and as a mere synecdoche for Crane’s unwritten “blank verse tragedy of Aztec mythology—for which I shall have to study the obscure calendars of dead kings” (*Complete* 488), “The Circumstance” registers its author’s considerable study of and exposure to Aztec culture in its theological, historical, cosmological, and ritual contexts. Through its archeological aesthetic, I maintain, “The Circumstance” seeks to unearth the religious and social memory of indigenous central-Mexican culture as Crane encountered it in the post-revolutionary 1930s. By foreclosing this ethical angle on the poem, Snediker aims to secularize Crane’s aesthetics in the name of a queerly durable personhood. By contrast, I argue that “The Circumstance” arches toward a religious, cultural, and historical otherness before which Crane’s “lyric personhood” queerly trembles rather than secularly emboldens itself.

Nevertheless, prior to elaborating my critique of Snediker’s queer-secularist exegesis, I would reproduce “The Circumstance” *precisely* as Crane drafted it before committing suicide:

The Circumstance

*To Xochipilli*

The anointed stone, the coruscated crown—
The drastic throne, the
Desperate sweet eyepit-basins of a bloody foreign clown—
Couched on bloody basins floating bone
Of a dismounted people…

If you could buy the stones,
Display the stumbling bones
Urging your unsuspecting
Shins, sus-
Taining nothing in time but more and more of Time,
Mercurially might add but would
Subtract and concentrate…. If you
Could drink the sun as did and does
Xochipilli.—as they who’ve
Gone have done, as they
Who’ve done…. A god of flowers in statued
Stone… of love—

If you could die, then starve, who live
Thereafter, stronger than death smiles in flowering stone;—
You could stop time, give florescent
Time a longer answer back (shave lighting,
Possess a halo full the winds of time)
A longer answer force, more enduring answer
As they did—and have done…. (143)

In introducing “The Circumstance,” I emphasize reproducing the text *precisely* as Crane drafted it because, in *Queer Optimism*, Snediker’s reproduction omits the poem’s dedication: “To Xochipilli,” the Aztec deity “of flowers” and “of love” after whom the religious idol described in the poem was originally “statued” in “Stone” (see Figure 1). A slight inaccuracy for any literary critic beholden to the protocols of New Criticism, Snediker’s omission of the poem’s paratextual dedication may at first glance seem trivial, or perhaps even unnoticeable. After all, as the text of “The Circumstance” unfurls beyond the opening thresholds of both title and dedication, the Aztec god certainly is named: “If you / Could drink the sun as did and does / Xochipilli.” Such recurrent nomenclature might thus seem superfluous for the labours of practical criticism: for instance, why replicate the dedication, however slight it may be in its italicized phrasing, when the text of the poem already performs the task of designation?

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35 Xochipilli is pronounced *Sho-chee-pe’e-ly* (Vaillant 339).
36 See chapter two for a focused critique of Snediker’s affirmations of New Criticism’s reading practices.
This ethical question intensifies when we consider Snediker’s complete exegesis of “The Circumstance,” which I reproduce here in full (rather than risk the distortions of paraphrase)\(^\text{37}\)

with omission only of those passages that digress from Snediker’s attention to the poem as such:

The stone that “The Circumstance” anoints is a statue of Xochipilli, Aztec god of flowers, games, beauty, and song. So fun-loving a god might seem a suitable object of optimistic devotion. Crane’s interest in Xochipilli doesn’t follow so predictable a course, no more so than did his letters’ theorizations of optimism as not only an insistence on the merit of joy, but the merit of insistence…. In the spirit of queer optimism (rather than optimism), “The Circumstance” does not posit Xochipilli as “anointed” for the felicities that fall under his jurisdiction. The stone Xochipilli, moreover, is not “anointed” insofar as the statue affords access to some numinous body for which it stands as proxy. Such deference depends on a religious faith, structurally identical to metaphor; both faith and metaphor, in turn, depend on a future that likewise organizes optimism, but displaces the present “circumstance” that is queer optimism’s particular province. Against these hypothetical accounts of worship, Crane’s relation to the stone idol is aesthetically motivated, and intently secular. This secularity is structurally identical to those nonmetaphorical [sic] phenomena I have already traced. “The Circumstance” honors the stone Xochipilli less for being Xochipilli than for being stone—for outlasting the Aztecs (“dismounted people”) ostensibly responsible for it, for presenting not a metaphor for perdurability, but a literalization [sic] of it. The poem’s study of lyric durability doesn’t simply recapitulate canonical fantasies of a poem existing long after poet or time of poem’s writing; for one, “The Circumstance” offers itself not as a Shakespearean sonnet or Horatian ode, but as a series of iambic fragments, ellipses, and attenuated repetitions (“as they who’ve/Gone have done, as they/Who’ve done”)… “The Circumstance” differently holds itself out—holds out—as a sustaining of relationality. It’s not that if “[y]ou could stop time,” you might master it (the poem is far removed from the unhappy binary of mastery/failure in which Crane too often has been caught). Rather, in stopping time, one could “give florescent/Time a longer answer back,” a “more enduring answer.” Time spots, yet still flowers (or to note the specificity of the suffix, is beginning to flower), just as stone flowers (“flowering stone”). While it is difficult adequately to parse “death smiles in flowering stone,” such difficulty does not compromise my argument but impels it. Is “death,” here, a noun or an adjective? Is “smiles” a noun or a verb? The overdeterminness [sic] of Crane’s formulation amounts to “[a] longer answer” in its own right, sustaining the poem not only as unremittingly being-written, but being-read. Even to begin to ask these questions of Crane—beyond grammatical surfeits, how might we even begin to ideate (beyond the stronghold of critical negativity) “death smiles in flowering stone”?—is to make possible if not definitive answers then “longer” ones. (76-8)

\(^{37}\) If for the New Critics, “one important fact about literary texts—and especially, about poems—was that they could not be paraphrased, that their form carried with it some unspecifiable, or unspeakably particular, literary quality that transcended pedestrian content” (Hungerford 16), then I, as a pedestrian critic of New Criticism at its most aesthetically antireligious, am averse to paraphrasing an altogether literary exegesis of “The Circumstance.”
For the sake of establishing context, I defer (for only a few paragraphs) attention to how Snediker (mis)construes, or perhaps too-selectively treats, the specific imagery, structure, and “grammatical surfeits” of “The Circumstance.” At present, however, it is important to underscore Snediker’s sheer prioritization of such technical features over the poem’s authorial, cultural, and historical backdrops and, undoubtedly, over its manifold “circumstances.” Drawing its rationale from the text-centric methodology of New Criticism, this prioritization highlights Snediker’s omission of “To Xochipilli” as a gesture that is much more significant than an oversight.

For instance, in positing “Crane’s interest in Xochipilli,” Snediker does not account for Crane’s “conception of a drama (a true tragedy) based on the circumstances of the Conquest” of Mexico by the Spanish, c. 1518-1521, an ambitious idea Crane conceived “during the composition of The Bridge” (Complete 669; emphasis added). Neither does Snediker discuss Crane’s multiple research contacts in the U.S. and Mexico, which included prominent Mexican artists, cultural and art historians, and a professional archaeologist with whom he participated in an excavation and attended an indigenous religious festival. By eliding these contextual factors, which surely inform “The Circumstance” as a fragment of Crane’s unwritten tragic drama,

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38 Such figures, whose published works Crane consulted and with whom he discussed at length his ongoing vision of a tragic drama based on the Conquest, include novelist and cultural critic Waldo Frank, author of Virgin Spain (1925) and American Hispana (1931); muralist, painter, and radical socialist David Siqueiros, with whom Crane shared his residence; historian Anita Brenner, author of Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots (1929); historian and translator Lesley Baird Simpson, author of The Encomienda in New Spain (1929); and archaeologist Milton Roarke, with whom Crane “took a pick and shovel” in September 1931 to excavate an Aztec pyramid in the valley of Anahuac (Complete 688); and with whom he attended “the yearly festival (fiesta) of Tepotzéco, the ancient Aztec god of pulque [a sacred alcoholic beverage], whose temple, partially ruined by the Spaniards and recent revolutions, still hangs on one of the perilous cliffs confronting the town [Tepoztlan]” (689). Crane’s research into many of the regions he visited was not casual: of Tepoztlan, for instance, he notes that “two books and a dozen articles have been written… (see Stuart Chase’s Mexico and Carleton Beals’ Mexican Maize)” (689). In sidestepping all of these contextual matters, Snediker jettisons consideration of how Crane might historically factor into what Helen Delpar calls The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935. On this score, see also Alarcón, The Aztec Palimpsest: Mexico in the Modern Imagination and Lerner, The Maya of Modernism: Art, Architecture, and Film.
Snediker at once furthers an already unpromising lineage in Crane scholarship and renders problematic his omission of what may be a quite well-researched dedication.

Considering “The Circumstance” without its dedication, in any event, quickens Snediker’s aesthetic detachment of the poem from the very contexts and backdrops through which it was drafted. The dedicatory “To,” in other words, situates Crane’s intentionality and orientation as a poet addressing, if not engaging, an object in space-time or a subject in the conceptual sphere of thought; the “To” historicizes Crane as a poet referring (his writing) to an object with which he must have had some degree of “acquaintance,” or even perhaps “familiarity.” As such, the dedication’s absence may serve to prepare Queer Optimism’s readers for one of Snediker’s key claims—a claim that would prove far more difficult to advance if the dedication had retained its rightful paratextual status: namely, that the poem “honors the stone Xochipilli less for being Xochipilli than for being stone—for outlasting the Aztecs (‘dismounted people’) ostensibly responsible for it, for presenting not a metaphor for perdurability, but a...
literalization [sic] of it” (77; emphasis added). To involve the dedication in an exegesis of the poem, one would have to address precisely what the dedication addresses, if not what it apostrophizes: not the stone object destined to become a cordoned-off museum piece, but rather the Aztec deity Xochipilli—“some numinous body”—for which the idol “stands as proxy” (77). However, engaging the numinous character of the idol is tantamount to an uncritical “deference” that “depends on a religious faith, structurally identical to metaphor” (77). Queer-secularist optimism thus risks contamination by religion if it pursues the idol’s own cultural theology.

When one elides the poem’s historical genesis in the research and quasi-anthropological fieldwork Crane carried out in Mexico as a Guggenheim Fellow, “The Circumstance” becomes a grammatically-playful discourse on a piece of carved stone that is only ostensibly traceable to the Aztec civilization—or, parenthetically, the “(‘dismounted people’)”—from which it hails. In this reading, Crane “honors” the relic not as a relic at all, but rather as curiously whittled material that survives the cultural-historical conditions under which it was originally—yet seemingly—fashioned. Rigorously valuing “the present ‘circumstance’ that is queer optimism’s particular province” (77; emphasis added), this appreciation of the object’s literal materiality, or its stony “literalization,” comes at the enormous expense of what I call the relic’s *artifactuality*: the factual trace of the idol’s historical production as an aesthetic object that one may parse in theological and/or secular-artistic terms.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{40}\) “Artifactuality,” as I delineate it here, points up the severe phenomenological reduction in Snediker’s argument that Crane “literalizes” the idol in purely secular-materialist terms. Following from Snediker’s eschewal of “both faith and metaphor” for their naïve dependencies “on a future that likewise organizes optimism, but displaces the present ‘circumstance’ that is queer optimism’s particular province” (77; emphasis added), Snediker seems to riff on Edmund Husserl’s “phenomenological method of reduction”: the goal of this reduction is “to get ‘back to the things themselves [zu den Sachen selbst],’ that is to say, to recover how the world was ‘first’ experienced and constituted through consciousness. The practice of *epoché* or ‘bracketing,’ central to the reduction, would help put out of play preconceived objectivity [e.g. Crane’s dedicatee, or the history the dedicatee indicates], uncover the world’s essential structure and provide an exact description of things as these were met with in immediate experience” (Mildenberg 42). Another touchstone here is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who “uses the reduction to articulate the aesthetic experience of the modernist artist and the ontology of the artwork. Through the method of ‘bracketing,’ not
Simultaneously emphasizing the relic’s materialization in the present and its aesthetic indication of a past life-world that “made” sense of the object in ways queer optimism simply will not entertain, artifactuality canvasses Paul de Man’s critique, in “The Rhetoric of Blindness,” of New Criticism’s textual fetishism:

The American New Critics arrived at a description of literary language as a language of irony and ambiguity despite the fact that they remained committed to a Coleridgean notion of organic form. They disguised a foreknowledge of hermeneutic circularity only the scientific or rational individual, but also the creating artist can relearn ‘to look at the world’ as it is met with in immediate, pre-objective experience, ‘before it is a thing one speaks of […] before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations’” (50). The latter significations, in Snediker’s discussion of “The Circumstance,” may very well be the idol’s historical, cultural, and theological iconography as an Aztec object. In any case, for Snediker’s take on Crane’s immediate perception of the object, “the thing itself” is the stone in its literal stoniness. If Sara Ahmed’s groundbreaking study, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, is any measure of the queerness in Snediker’s phenomenological reduction, then we are obliged to play on the etymology of circumstance, which derives from the “Latin circumstāntia, from circumstāre ‘encircle, encompass,’ from circum ‘around’ + stare ‘stand’” (OED): “So how does the object arrive into one’s field of vision? What is behind its arrival? …If phenomenology turns us toward things, in terms of how they reveal themselves in the present, then we may also need to ‘follow’ such things around. We may need to supplement phenomenology with an ‘ethnography of things.’ …So our question, as an ‘ethno-phenomenological’ one, would be: How did I or we arrive at the point where it is possible to witness the arrival of the object? How is the arrival a form of witnessing in which ‘what arrives’ becomes a ‘what’ only in the event of being apprehended as a ‘what’?... If phenomenologists were simply to ‘look at’ the object that they face, then they would be erasing the ‘signs’ of history. They would apprehend the object as simply there, as given in its sensuous certainty rather than as ‘having got there,’ an arrival that is at once the way in which objects are binding and how they assume a social form... Objects take the shape of this history; objects ‘have value’ and they take shape through labor. They are formed out of labor, but they also ‘take the form’ of that labor” (Ahmed 38–41; emphasis added). The phenomenological reduction in Queer Optimism is entirely contrary to Ahmed’s thesis in Queer Phenomenology; the former is thus perhaps more akin to the “straight phenomenology” Ahmed challenges. Two corollaries follow from this observation. First, that Snediker’s emphasis on “the present ‘circumstance,’” to the detriment of both a religiously-naïve futurity and a merely ostensible cultural past, is more in keeping with the “chrononormativity” against which Elizabeth Freeman devises the rubrics of “queer temporalities” and “queer histories”: “Chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate... ‘hidden rhythms,’ forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege. Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time” (3). Thus, Aztec temporalities indicated by the idol are converted into the chrononormativity of queer-secularist materialism, which determines presence for the present at the expense of radical historical otherness. Second, consulting Patricia Rae’s work on William James’s “epistemological optimism,” we are bound to infer that the antireligious optimism in Queer Optimism is not epistemologically optimistic: “James’s redefinition of the divinity in the language of psychology directly shapes his recommendations for how the mystic [e.g. worshippers in Aztec culture or possibly Crane in his approach thereto] should articulate the insights gleaned from its appearance...James can no longer authorize the articulation of the insights as if they are God-given Truths. But just as he insists the mystic’s uncertainty about the divinity does not mean he is to dismiss it as an illusion, so he insists that his uncertainty about the insights should not lead him to conclude they are falsehoods” (118). Following Rae on James, we might grant Crane’s poetics an epistemological optimism that is absent in Queer Optimism.

41 In “Form and Intent in the American New Criticism,” de Man asks whether we are “confronted here with a flagrant contradiction”: “On the one hand, we blame American criticism for considering literary texts as if they were natural objects but, on the other hand, we praise it for possessing a sense of formal unity that belongs precisely to a
under a reified notion of a literary text as an objective “thing.” Here it is the concept of form that is made to function in a radically ambivalent manner, both as a creator and undoer [sic] of organic totalities…. The final insight, here again, annihilated the premises that led up to it, but it is left to the reader to draw a conclusion that the critics cannot face if they are to pursue their task. (104)

In “The Circumstance,” hermeneutic circularity involves a productive relation between the poem, Crane’s research on Mexico, and the historical/theological backdrops of Aztec culture that afford the lyric its “numinous” referents. Without these backdrops, “The Circumstance” as we have it would have been inconceivable. Nevertheless, in positing “The Circumstance” as a nearly free-floating “objective ‘thing,’” Snediker characterizes the idol as ostensibly an historical product of Aztec culture and as affording merely “hypothetical accounts of worship” (77; emphasis added). Here, literary form functions ambivalently, as per de Man’s critique: despite his omission of the dedication, Snediker cannot fully expunge Xochipilli’s theological trace from the poem’s aesthetic textures. Angling nonetheless to transcend such ambivalence, Snediker conflates “The Circumstance” (as a nearly “objective ‘thing’”) with the stone object to which it refers. This conflation proceeds through a metaphor of literalness: aesthetically nonreligious and secularly objectifying. “The Circumstance” sees in the stone “not a metaphor for perdurability,” which would verge precariously on “numinous” faith, but rather perdurability’s “literalization.” Collapsing distinctions between stone and poem, Snediker then infers a “lyric durability”: queer-secular aestheticism is precisely as substantial as the stone which outlasts Aztec religious culture.

If, following de Man, we agree that “it is left to the reader to draw a conclusion that the critics cannot face if they are to pursue their task,” then there are at least three conclusions to draw here. The first hinges on Snediker’s conflation of the literalness of phenomenal objects and the figurativeness of literary texts; significantly, this conflation is not endemic to his sense of the living and natural organism. Is not this sense of the unity of forms being supported by the large metaphor that shapes a great deal of nineteenth-century poetry and thought?” (27).
stone figure in “The Circumstance.” Parsing the final line of “Possessions,” where Crane imagines “bright stones wherein our smiling plays” (Complete 14), Snediker suggests that Crane “literally encrypts smiles” (68) within “bright stones.” Concomitantly, he poses richly theoretical queries not to be found in his reading of “The Circumstance” and its literally iconographic stone:

“Wherein,” as a preposition, describes relation, but what does it mean to imagine an inside to a rock? ...Are we talking geodes? Or a stony crypt? Or might “wherein” refer not to a literal interiority, but to the stone’s reflective surface, as when one speaks of objects “in” a mirror. Regardless, these various scenarios indicate a lexical maze in which smiles are preserved at the expense of being removed. But then how can smiles in individual stones play? Does each smile live in its own stone? Are stones shared? Are stones bright because illuminated by the smile, like a face’s blush? Do smiles play with each other, or by themselves? Is playing an active enterprise, as in games, or an incessant reeling, like the play of a radio? The poem’s enigmatic final line mobilizes these problems of relationality, interiority, and agency, which smiling occasions but does not resolve. (64-5)

Like the stones they would playfully inhabit, smiles here are literal affairs. Snediker does not, for example, parse facial smiles as metaphors of pleasurable sensation or (fore)play elsewhere in the amorous body. Stones, too, are literally stones: geodes, a crypt, a reflective rock. Construed in this way, a literal encryption of smiles in stone is impossible. Stones are abiotic: without faces, muscles, organs, cognition, or emotion. Even depictions of smiles etched into stone, as in “The Circumstance,” are not tantamount to literal smiles (playing) within literal stones. Slipping cut-out paper smiles into fissures of a rock, moreover, would not yield a literal encryption of smiles. By claiming that Crane “literally encrypts smiles” when he writes of “bright stones wherein our smiling plays,” Snediker not only forgets that “[a] literary text is not a phenomenal event that can be granted any form of positive existence, whether as a fact of nature or as an act of mind”⁴² (de

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⁴² De Man continues: “It leads to no transcendental perception, intuition, or knowledge but merely solicits an understanding that has to remain immanent because it poses the problem of intelligibility in its own terms. The area of immanence is necessarily part of all critical discourse. Criticism is a metaphor for the act of reading, and this act is itself inexhaustible” (107).
Man 107); he also misses Crane’s brilliant queer-theological pun on stone imagery in the Book of Revelation and on stones *as a metaphor* for testicles in homosexual intercourse.⁴³

To be sure, Snediker’s questionable exploration of literally encrypted smiles in “Possessions” predicates his argument for “lyric durability” in “The Circumstance.” The latter contention, however, ascends at the discursive expense of Aztec history, culture, and theology, subjects with which Crane was becoming increasingly well “acquainted” before his untimely suicide. For queer exegetes attuned to Crane’s prevalent piety, or more generally to his vigorous religious mood, dashing the religious iconography of a brutally “dismounted people” in favor of an optimized queer-secularist aestheticism should prove deeply problematic from the incontrovertible standpoints of ethics and politics. From its shadowy depths, this problematic elicits our second de Manian conclusion: left to its own free-wheeling devices, cruising hastily without the checks and balances of a radical otherness that cannot (or at least should not) be assimilated into oneself, the aesthetic as a cognitive field is bound to behave unethically, if not violently. As de Man writes in “Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist’s *Über das Marionettentheater*”:

None of the connotations associated with reality can invade art without being neutralized by aesthetic distance. Kleist’s story suggests however that this may be a ruse to hide the flaw that marred aesthetic perfection from the start or, in a more persuasive reading, to enjoy, under the cover of aesthetic distance, pleasures that have to do with the inflicting of wounds rather than with gracefulness….If the aesthetic model is itself flawed or, worse, if it covers up this lesion by a self-serving idealization, then the classical concept of aesthetic education is open to suspicion. The theoretical problem, however, has been displaced: from the specular model of the text as imitation, we have moved on to the

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⁴³ “Revelation’s image of the white stone inscribed with the individual’s secret name [Revelation 2:17] points forward to the promise in 3:12: ‘Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God…and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.’ So Jesus will give the individual a white stone with the individual’s new secret name and will write on him the name of God and God’s city….a linking of the inscribed white stone with the image of the new Jerusalem that points forward to chapter 21…and particularly to verses 18 through 21, where the twelve types of ‘bright stones’ that garnish the foundations of the city’s walls are named….Physical love lurks beneath the surface of the imagery Crane borrowed from Revelation….for though ‘bright stones’ can be seen as an allusion to the jeweled foundations of the new Jerusalem, *stones* is also a slang word for testicles, which gives another, more sexual meaning to ‘wherein our smiling plays’” (Irwin 288-9).
question of reading as the necessity to decide between signified and referent, between violence on the stage and violence in the streets. (280)

An ethical decision of precisely the latter sort is enacted, in my view, not only in Snediker’s omission of Crane’s dedicatee, whose original worshippers suffered the brutality of the Conquest, but also in his antireligious secularization or aesthetic “neutralization” of “The Circumstance” in toto. In this “aesthetic model,” as de Man would call it, the historical “violence in the streets” is forced out of the hermeneutic frame: ultimately, optimistic queerness gravitates to the idol not for its ethical potential as an important lens on the history of a dismounted people, but rather for its secularized “aesthetic distance” from the very religious history it indicates.

“Aesthetic education by no means fails,” de Man writes, “it succeeds all too well, to the point of hiding the violence that makes it possible” (289). If any “idealization” informs Queer Optimism’s secularist stance on Crane’s Mexican circumstances, then the “lesion” its aesthetic model conceals pertains both to its own mechanisms of “aesthetic distance” and to the historical suffering its distance aesthetically elides. The admitted severity of this judgment only intensifies when we consider Snediker’s tapered references to de Man’s “Aesthetic Formalization” essay in “Emily Dickinson’s Queer Pain,” Queer Optimism’s second chapter:

Knowledge, for de Man, is precisely what secures the aesthetic’s practical and political relevance. “What gives the aesthetic its power and hence its practical, political impact, is its link with knowledge, the epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears over the horizon of discourses.” And this link to knowledge depends for de Man…on the aesthetic’s “reference to systems of formalization and notation rigorous enough to be patterned on the model of mathematical language.”…What is understood, de Man continues, “is that the increased formalization of consciousness, as in a machine…, far from destroying aesthetic effect, enhances it; consciousness’s loss is aesthetic’s gain.” If we are willing to wager aesthetics as consolation for the loss of consciousness, it indubitably is in our own interests to understand, as inventively as possible, what we gain in such a turn to aesthetics. (125; emphasis added)

Pursuant to “the loss of consciousness” and historical context that mark his reading of “The Circumstance,” Snediker’s focus on “our own interests” and on “what we gain in such a turn to

...
aesthetics” involves a grave omission of de Man’s wider argument. The omission in question, as I understand it, is the ethical as a question: specifically, what happens to otherness in the snares of aesthetic formalization? As Cynthia Chase notes in “Trappings of an Education,” a classic essay whose precision overhauls Snediker’s overly-selective turn to “Aesthetic Formalization”:

In de Man’s reading of Kleist’s text, the aspiration to gracefulness, to that “aesthetic state,” is demystified as in fact the aspiration to authority, to the authority of that which is self-engendered, self-authoring. The imitation of the work of art is motivated by and conceals the work’s idealization as just such a self-engendering whole. Imitation, and grace, art, supposedly a process of reflection or of unconcealment [sic] and a matter of truth (the truth of nature), is rather a performance of idealization. “The imitation conceals the idealization it performs.” That process is cognitively aberrant and performatively violent (what detracts from the form as a whole will have to be eliminated). (52; emphasis added)

Neither demystified nor de Manian, Queer Optimism is replete with such “aspiration[s] to authority,” which impose a queer-secularist formalism on the structure, content, and context of Crane’s draft. This imposition, articulated as a reading that is New-Critically immanent to the text, violates the referential place of history in “The Circumstance”: it eliminates the dedication and then jettisons the idol’s iconography in favor of its “literal” materiality. Returning to Davis’s Queer Beauty, as I did in my earlier critique of Yingling’s preference for Dionysus, I would categorize such maneuvering as a further species of “beauty queered.” Coextensive with Yingling’s hermeneutics, this species shows us that the “pure cut” of the historical from the aesthetic is not rendered by Crane, whose aesthetics are indeed quite historicized. Rather, the cut is rendered by the critic, for whom emancipatory queerness is as irreligious as stones are solid.

De Man’s methodological critique of the New Criticism’s “concept of form,” which “is made to function in a radically ambivalent manner” as “a creator and undoer [sic] of organic totalities” (“Rhetoric” 104), elicits my third de Manian conclusion and leads me thereafter to parse “The Circumstance” in a queerly post-secularist fashion. In a note to “Hart Crane’s Smile,” which bears reproduction in full, Snediker reinforces a keystone of New-Critical methodology:

This oscillation within Crane’s poetry between fluid and nonfluid (resonant enough in Crane’s book titles, White Buildings, The Bridge, Key West) is reflected in Crane criticism, whose trope of choice in describing fluidities in Crane’s poetry is booze. R.P. Blackmur paradigmatically characterizes the language of “Lachrymae Christi” as “in the flux of intoxicated sense”…and its principle of association (which Crane would later himself denominate the logic of metaphor) as “resembl[ing] the notion of wine…the notion of extralogical, intoxicated metamorphosis of the senses [which both] controls and innervates Crane’s whole sensibility.” To discuss Crane’s poems as though liquor were both origin and constitutive energy conjures an especial problematic of intentional fallacy, in simultaneously claiming that poetic meaning lies beyond the purview of the poem proper, but that meaning as such would speak in the slurs of a “rum-scallion.” (234n.16; emphasis added)

As a watchword of New Criticism and the formalisms by which it is organized, the avoidance of intentional fallacy would result in “a hardening of the text into a sheer surface that prevents the stylistic analysis from penetrating beyond the sensory appearances” (de Man “Form” 27). New Critics are wary of “the principle of intentionality,” de Man writes, because its introduction “would imperil the organic analogy” of the text as an objective thing “and lead to a loss of the sense of form; hence the understandable need of the New Critics to protect their greatest source

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As de Man notes, “Wimsatt and Beardsley coined the expression ‘intentional fallacy’ as far back as 1942 and this formula, better than any other, delimits the horizon within which this criticism has operated. The expression was developed later on by Wimsatt in his book The Verbal Icon, where it is used to assert the autonomy and the unity of poetic consciousness. Wimsatt wants to defend the province of poetry against the intrusions of crude deterministic systems, historical or psychological, that oversimplify the complex relationship between theme and style. And he focuses on the concept of intention as the breach through which these foreign bodies reach into the poetic domain. But, in doing so, he allows us to observe the very moment at which his concern with autonomy, most legitimate in itself, leads him into contradictory assumptions about the ontological status of the work of literature” (“Form” 24).
of strength” (28). In the passage above, this wariness proves ethically significant for the interpretive process: by countering Blackmur’s sense that Crane’s poetics reflect his frequent bouts of intoxication or alcoholism, Snediker disarticulates Crane’s poetry from the unwarranted reductions of literary criticism. In turn, this opens Crane’s poetry to a wider range of exegetical possibilities. If, however, Snediker breaches his own injunction against intentional fallacy when he proceeds to interpret Crane’s poetry, then we are apt to concur with de Man that New Criticism necessarily enters “the hermeneutic circle of interpretation” (29): there, of course, “the rejection of the principle of intentionality, dismissed as fallacious,” prevents literary criticism from constituting “a truly coherent theory of literary form” (32). Significantly, the breach in Snediker’s injunction occurs in his reading of “The Circumstance,” when he discerns both intentionality and motivation in the concept of secularity: “Against these hypothetical accounts of worship, Crane’s relation to the stone idol is aesthetically motivated, and intently secular” (77; emphasis added). Snediker does not predicate this intentional fallacy on references to Crane’s letters. As a phenomenological reading of the reproduced text, moreover, the fallacy is unsubstantiated. Ultimately, the omission of “To Xochipilli”—a dedication grammatically oriented, motivated, and intended as an address to the deity—elucidates the critic’s intentions.

“Toward the other across time”: On the Very Queer Reintroduction of “[To] Xochipilli”

Looking over the newspaper, she came on an odd little item… This little item was among the Spanish information, and was headed: The Gods of Antiquity Return to Mexico. (56)

—D.H. Lawrence, The Plumberd Serpent (1926)

In terms of practical criticism, what happens if we hermeneutically reintroduce Crane’s dedication? What aesthetic, ethical, and religious differences might such a reintroduction precipitate in a wider reading of “The Circumstance”—a poem whose religious iconography,

46 This sense of form, in turn, presupposes an “idea of totality” constituted by “closed forms that strive for ordered and consistent systems and have an almost irresistible tendency to transform themselves into objective structures” (31).
steeped in dense allusions to indigenous Mexican history, should not be “dismounted” by a queer-secularist formalism? If the dedication is exegetically reinstated and parsed according to its proper grammatical and phenomenological structures, might “To Xochipilli” rightfully challenge the forceful “pure cut” of “beauty queered,” which informs the approach of Queer Optimism? More to the point: might the salvaged rigor of the dedication generate analysis that is ethically aligned with “queer beauty” and its sibling, “queer theology,” both of which strive to intuit queerness as an immanent dimension of historical, aesthetic, and religious discourses? We may begin to answer these questions by consulting Gerard Genette’s Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, which includes a meticulous and quite emphatic study of “dedications and inscriptions.” Because Genette’s argument enables mine, I quote him at length:

The dedication is always a matter of demonstration, ostentation, exhibition: it proclaims a relationship, whether intellectual or personal, actual or symbolic, and this proclamation is always at the service of the work, as a reason for elevating the work’s standing or as a theme for commentary…the dedication, I said, is the proclamation (sincere or not) of a relationship (of one kind or another) between the author and some person, group, or entity. Except for additional encroachments on the functions of the preface, the dedication’s own function—which, for all that, is not unimportant—is exhausted in that proclamation. This is so whether the proclamation is explicit or not—that is, whether it states precisely the nature of the relationship…or whether it prefers to be elusive and indefinite about the relationship, depending on the reader (and perhaps the dedicatee himself) to try to pin it down…on the threshold or at the conclusion of a work, one cannot mention a person or a thing as a privileged addressee without invoking that person or thing in some way…and therefore implicating the person or thing as a kind of ideal inspirer…The dedicatee is always in some way responsible for the work that is dedicated to him and to which he brings, willy-nilly, a little of his support and therefore participation. (135-6; emphasis added)

With Genette’s careful guidance, we may theorize Crane’s “actual” and “symbolic” relationships to Xochipilli as a stone idol and as an Aztec deity. Concomitantly, we may theorize “actual” and “symbolic” relationships between “The Circumstance” as a poem and “To Xochipilli” as a dedication. Crane’s ambitious project as a Guggenheim Fellow, as I have noted with reference to his letters and to extant criticism on poems he drafted in Mexico, was to compose a poetic
“drama (a true tragedy) based on the circumstances of the Conquest” (Complete 669; emphasis added). Notwithstanding its incomplete form, “The Circumstance” reflects the “true tragedy” of these historical “circumstances”; indeed, it represents a fascinating building-block or cornerstone of what may have become Crane’s major long poem after The Bridge.

Vis-à-vis this unwritten ghost text, which forever haunts Crane scholarship via the fragmentary drafts he composed before his suicide, one may reasonably posit that Crane’s “actual” relationship to Xochipilli as a literal stone idol and as a numinous Aztec deity was strictly research-based: Xochipilli, as a deity in the Aztec pantheon with a corresponding material relic, was both a theological subject and a material object with which Crane sought “familiarity” so as to write his poetic tragedy. On the other hand, Crane’s “symbolic” relationship to Xochipilli, “whether intellectual or personal,” remains a question for which literary criticism yields no empirical answer. In his letters and critical prose, the genres through which his personal intentions as a poet are either demonstrable or inferable, Crane does not specify any “symbolic” bond he personally felt with the Aztec pantheon. Nevertheless, the absence of such a declaration does not corroborate the argument that “Crane’s relation to the stone idol is aesthetically motivated, and intently secular” (Snediker 77; emphasis added). Neither, for that matter, does an absence of this (intentional) sort confirm that “Crane is not a mystic but a realist for whom the fact of structure (metrical and grammatical), as the condition of presence, stands as the unalterable fact of ‘the world’” (Grossman 223). In his own private life and public times, Crane may or may not have been a thoroughgoing realist; he may or may not

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47 “Mystic language in Crane,” Grossman continues, “serves in the place of the language of desire severely conceived, for which there is no other language in the dialects of poetry. Crane’s major poems put poetry in question, in so far as they are experiments that seek to discover whether there is anything a man can say (whether there is any poem) consistent with unconcealed human hope. This is the cultural question that lies inside the intensity of Crane’s poetics; it is this issue that is at stake when we decide whether there is, or is not, a good poem by Crane among those…that are marked by the ‘absolute,’ the unrelinquishing [sic] intensities of his concern” (233).
have had an “intently secular” purpose in drafting “The Circumstance.” In exegetical terms, the radically undecided character of Crane’s aesthetics—which are irreducible to any particular realism, mysticism, secularism, queerness, or even “prevalent piety”—is what matters. At stake is not the detection of a skeleton key, but rather negotiability among all such critical templates.

Returning to Paratexts, we would do well to spot Genette’s emphasis on the dedication’s liminal status between the dedicatee and the literary work as such: “The dedicatee is always in some way responsible for the work that is dedicated to him” (136; emphasis added). This insight bears on “The Circumstance” if we recall how, in Snediker’s argument, the poetic speaker shades intentionally into the figure of Crane himself: “Crane’s relation to the stone idol,” Snediker writes. How can one be sure Crane’s speaker is a self-reflexive projection of the poet? Or that the lyric’s “scene” is a phenomenological loop in which Crane himself literally stands or sits before (or merely passes by) the stone idol and relates it to himself via the intentionality of queer-secularist formalism? Reintroducing the dedication solicits these questions; for, if the “dedicatee is always in some way responsible for the work that is dedicated to him,” then critics are likewise responsible for referring (and thus including) the dedication to the work as such, particularly when we cannot be sure the poet maintained a personal, symbolic, or spiritual relationship with the dedicatee. When charted, the circuit of responsibility between the dedicatee and the work opens both to queer speculation that is at once theoretical and theological, i.e. theo-critical. This circuit allows us to read the poem in terms that are simultaneously “ethno-phenomenological”

48 See footnote 20 in the present chapter for Harold Bloom’s distinction between biographical contexts wherein one could trace Crane’s exposure to religion “as a man,” which we should note is irreducible to any identity-political sense of Crane’s own religiousness, and the literary or aesthetic contexts wherein one could trace Crane’s exposure to religion as an American poet in the line of Emerson and Whitman. Crane, unlike Eliot and Auden, did not undergo a public institutional religious conversion and did not declare any religious or secularist affiliation that bears on his poetic practice or on his ideological “identity” as a poet; thus, claiming him wholesale as a non-mystical realist or as an irreligious queer secularist holds very little critical purchase for the study of his verse and aesthetics.
(Ahmed 39), as per Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, and deeply critical of “chrononormativity” (Freeman 3), as per Freeman’s *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*.

For instance, what if the poetic speaker is not Crane himself, but an Aztec worshipper of Xochipilli who, via Crane’s “drama (a true tragedy) based on the circumstances of the Conquest” (*Complete* 669; emphasis added), stands or kneels before the idol and the deity it represents? (See Figure 2) What if the phenomenology of this standing or kneeling is imaginatively *pre*-secularist, *pre*-materialist, and not reducible to a postmodern aesthetic formalism? Moreover, if the “dismounted people” of line 5 are indeed the Aztecs perishing in the violent and diseased throes of Spanish colonialism, then to whom does the pronoun “they” refer? “As they” appears thrice (see lines 14, 15, and 24) in an elegiac mood of loss and remembrance marked by the past-perfect tense: “as they who’ve / Gone,” “as they / Who’ve done,” “As they did—and have done….,” Are “they” the indigenous casualties of predatory European colonialism, for whom there is nonetheless life “Thereafter” (line 19)? Consonantly, how should critics identify the pronoun “you” in the hypothetical, subjunctive construction “If you could,” which like the past-perfect “As they” appears thrice (see lines 6, 11-12, and 18) and culminates in the “You could” of line 20? Because the poetic speaker, unlike the lyric’s dedication, does not address Xochipilli directly (see line 14, where the deity is named in the third person), might both “you” and the “bloody foreign clown” of line 3 reference the conquistadors, for whom the idolatrous worship of polytheistic gods would be tantamount to primitive barbarism? Is the hypothetical, subjunctive clause of line 6—“If you could buy the stones” (emphasis added)—an ethical glimpse into the cosmology of pre-Conquest Aztec culture and religion, in which an “anointed stone” cannot be purchased precisely because its value transcends the lust for silver and gold that drove the conquistadors to destroy the ancient civilizations of the Americas?

49 For steeper definitions of these important terms, see footnote 40 in this chapter.
These questions suggest that the dedication serves an important ethical function in its responsibility to and for the literary work: “To Xochipilli” may signify the deity while also serving as a metonymy for “the dismounted people” by whom it was worshipped. This metonymy is an upshot of Genette’s argument for the circuit of responsibility between dedication and text: shuttling from one to the other in “The Circumstance,” we find a poetic speaker (for whom, we should note, there is no reflexive “I”) torn between the proper name of a god, a dispossessed “they,” and an alienating “you.” In this nexus, Xochipilli arches between past and present, at once having imbibed and imbibing the sun “as they who’ve / Gone have done, as they

Figure 2: A drawing of Xochipilli, one of the deities described in the Codex Borgia (a Mesoamerican manuscript on divinities and rituals, generally thought to have been composed before the Spanish conquest). Public domain. Web. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AXochipilli_3.jpg>
Who’ve done”⁵⁰ (lines 12-16). Xochipilli’s ritual presence communicates, quite elegiacally, the presence of the departed in the midst of persistent historical losses. Descending in this way from the liminal paratext into the poem, the dedicatee contributes “a little of his support and therefore participation” in the work of art (Genette 136), while illustrating a research-based relationship between Crane as the author, the Aztecs as a “group,” and Xochipilli as an “entity” (135).

Significantly, a descent of precisely this kind may help us to conceptualize against the “chrononormativity” that governs Snediker’s queer-optimized reading of “The Circumstance.” Rather than calculating the stasis of an unadulterated secular present in which stones are de-theologized by the sheer force of “lyric durability” and “beauty queered,” “The Circumstance” more likely unearths what Freeman calls a queer “ethics of responsibility” toward the other across time—toward the dead or toward that which was impossible in a given historical moment, each understood as calls for a different future to which we cannot but answer with imperfect and incomplete reparations…the present is thereby always split, but split by prior violence and future possibility rather than simply by the nature of signification…we are thereby bound not only to history (that is, we do not make it just as we please), but also, and crucially, to the other who always takes precedence and has priority and thus splits our selfhood, detours our forward-moving agency. Here, time does not heal but further fissures history. (9-10)

Freeman’s concept of an “answer” that can only manifest through “imperfect and incomplete reparations” strongly echoes the final stanza of “The Circumstance,” in which the Aztec speaker’s subjunctive response to the “bloody foreign clown” (line 3) culminates in an ethical call for “a longer answer back” (line 21) to those “who’ve / Gone” (lines 14-15): “A longer answer force, more enduring answer” (line 23). Crane’s likely approximation of Aztec cosmology intensifies the elegiac ethics that imbues this longing for a “more enduring answer.”

⁵⁰ In Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots, a work Crane studied in depth while in Mexico, Anita Brenner notes that the sacred alcoholic beverage “pulque” “is ancient. The Mexican pantheon had four hundred gods,” each of which was in some fashion “tutelary of the drink” (172). Xochipilli’s drinking of “the sun” may symbolize the wider pantheon’s consumption of pulque: “It was a valuable channel to heightened sensation; a divine gift. Elaborate laws regulated its use. None but the old and very honorable might partake of it at pleasure. The maguey from which it is extracted was a sacred plant. Ritual governed the course of its reservoir, from under the large, curled rosette to a destined respectful gullet” (172).
Focusing on lines 18-19, “If you could die, then starve, who live / Thereafter, stronger than death smiles in flowering stone,” we might consider Thomas Joyce’s archaeological work on the Aztec “Thereafter”:

Though living in the underworld, the souls of the dead were not deprived of the light of the sun, since it was supposed to pass through the infernal regions during the night on its journey back to the east. The souls of infants dying still unstained by sin were believed to be received in a special paradise by Tonacatecutli [god of fertility], where they spent their time flitting from flower to flower in the form of humming birds. (103)

Crane’s enigmatic phrase, “shave lightning” (line 21), captures the imagery of light’s refracted passage “through the infernal regions.” More suggestive, though, is Crane’s collocation of death with both smiling and flowering, an association reinforced two lines later by a remarkable pun on “florescent / Time”51; that is, on the cosmological “Time” (line 10) of the “Thereafter” in which innocent souls are transformed into flitting pollinators. In this context, the imagery of “flowering stone” magnifies the presence of abstract Aztec cosmology within the palpable iconography of the literal, now-museumized idol: Xochipilli, “A god of flowers in statued / Stone” (lines 16-17).

Clôture: From the Force of Lyric Durability to the Leeway of Lyric Phenomenology

Through its challenging “iambic fragments, ellipses, and attenuated repetitions” (Snediker 77), therefore, “The Circumstance” may not in fact lobby for a secularist “lyric durability” (77). To the contrary, the poem draws its readers into the stony fissures of what I will call Crane’s lyric phenomenology, a religiously open-ended approach to the aesthetic object whereby a queer “ethics of responsibility” (Freeman 9) resists the evacuation of cultural and religious difference. Riffing on Crane’s playful question in “Hieroglyphic,” “Did one look at what one saw / Or did one see what one looked at?” (Complete 144), lyric phenomenology banks on H.W. Fawkner’s concept of “the leeway needed for a dynamic apperception of things”:

51 See the OED on florescence: “the process of flowering…ORIGIN late 18th cent: from modern Latin florescentia, from Latin florescere ‘begin to flower,’ based on flos, flor- ‘flower.’”
If the gaze is to be phenomenological, subjectivism must not be allowed to set up its dearly-loved epistemological interval between seer and seen….It is not a matter of acknowledging or cancelling the leeway needed for a dynamic apperception of things—but a matter of understanding that leeway as *immanent to the phenomenon* rather than as some sort of shaky epistemological gap between cognitive poles….A phenomenologist gives the phenomenon the amount of leeway *required by it*—which simply is the amount that it needs to make an approach on the very paths of appearing that immanently belong to it as its specific showing-routes. There is a leeway that is immanent to everything that exists, and it is through *this* leeway that life qua affectivity is given—namely through itself. (82-3)

Fawkner’s emphasis on “leeway as *immanent to the phenomenon*” overlaps powerfully with Ahmed’s recent work on “ethno-phenomenology,” which proved instrumental to my earlier conception of *artifactuality* and therewith to my critique of *Queer Optimism* in this chapter. Both scholars’ concepts, moreover, converge in my theological adaptation of Davis’s “queer beauty”: “queer theology,” as I have argued throughout this dissertation, is an immanent affair—an affair with immanence. Like Fawkner’s “leeway” and Ahmed’s “ethno-phenomenology,” queer theology works to intuit (rather than force) queerness through the texts, traditions, and objects it studies. In this chapter, accordingly, I have sought to intuit the queerness of Crane’s “prevalent piety,” rather than to secularize it by the pure force of “beauty queered.” “Betrayed stones slowly speak,” Crane writes in “Lachrymae Christi” (*Complete* 15; emphasis added): figuratively, that is, “stones,” stone figures, and (dis)figurations of stone may “treacherously reveal,” “unintentionally reveal,” gradually “be evidence of,” or etymologically (as per the Latin *tradere*), “hand over” (OED) whatever bright gems they may harbor beneath their various surfaces. Queering such betrayals, revelations, indications, or handovers from within Crane’s aesthetics, rather than wrenching them from without, demands the leeway of a certain horticultural patience; for, in Crane’s peculiar and ironizing case, even “stones” may “flower.”
Chapter 5

“Where flesh and mind / Are delivered from mistrust”:

Christ, Caliban, and the Queerness of Incarnation in W.H. Auden’s For the Time Being

Christ did not enchant men; He demanded that they believe in Him. Except on one occasion, the Transfiguration. For a brief while, Peter, James, and John were permitted to see Him in His glory. For that brief while they had no need of faith. The vision vanished, and the memory of it did not prevent them from all forsaking Him when He was arrested, or Peter from denying that he had ever known Him. (150)

—Auden, A Certain World: A Commonplace Book

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass. (xxiii)

—Oscar Wilde, “The Preface” to The Picture of Dorian Gray

I finished The Age of Anxiety which made [me] very anxious as to the probable poetic course of Mr. Auden. I thought the little book a frightful bore. Why must all the old poets go in for sermons? It was a rather sad day when they all discovered Kierkegaard! Later I re-read some of Wordsworth’s beautiful poems and found him much more palatable.

—Wallace Stevens, letter to Rodríguez Feo (qtd. in Olson 248)

A Triangulating Introduction: On the Tricky Placement of Auden between Eliot and Crane

If one opted to triangulate, rather than linearize, T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, and W.H. Auden in the discursive continuum of “Dissident Secularism,” a shape known in plane trigonometry as a scalene triangle would promptly arise. In this analogy, each literary figure constitutes a distinct locus in the grid of twentieth-century literary history. As soon as straight lines are accordingly drawn between these loci to form a triangle, the lines themselves turn out to be queerly unequal in length. For if, as I suggest at the outset of chapter four, the aesthetic, sexual, and spiritual distance between Eliot and Crane is already quite vast, then Auden’s manifestation on the same literary grid further complicates the overall geometry: Auden affords queer criticism a locus that is only seemingly aligned with Eliot in the latter’s remoteness from Crane. Admittedly, if Auden and Eliot were proximate in their equidistance from Crane, the task of triangulation would be far
easier; rather than a lopsided scalene model, that is, our analogy would hinge on the isosceles form, which comprises two sides of equal length and, correspondingly, two interior vertices whose angles are equivalent. In turn, these given equivalences of distance and angularity would “solve” the puzzle of this dissertation’s literary polygon: as a cryptic outlier pulsating in the nebula beyond the orbits of Eliot and Auden, Crane’s variable—the singularity and “odd-one-out” value of his queer aesthetics—would be determined.\textsuperscript{1} If, however, Auden’s whereabouts in the interstellar zone that separates Eliot and Crane is rather undecided, then we are bound to a scalene model in which there is asymmetry on all three sides; in which all internal angles are oblique; and in which all values (linear and angular) are indeterminable because Auden’s “place,” as the triangulating point on our grid, is surprisingly difficult to ascertain.

In a study that concerns three authors whose oeuvres are too easily constellated via the isosceles model, the scalene analogy I offer here may prove useful. After all, Crane’s emphatic sense of his own “optimistic” poetics as antithetical to Eliot’s skilful “pessimism” already establishes a brazen polarity. Auden would consequently appear to gravitate fully to Eliot’s pole, even to the extent of “find[ing] himself in apostolic succession to Eliot” (Bloom 3; emphasis added). Indeed, alongside Auden’s implied distaste for Crane’s poetry and grim view of its influence on aspiring poets in the 1940s,\textsuperscript{2} the considerable degree of overlap between Auden’s and Eliot’s careers further underscores the appeal of an isosceles model. More

\textsuperscript{1} As per my analogy with plane trigonometry, for a triangle in which two internal angles are known to be equivalent and in which the lengths of two sides are known to be the same (hence an isosceles), the unknown value of the third angle would be determined by adding the two known values and subtracting that figure from 180 degrees (the sum total of interior angles for any given triangle). Accordingly, one would determine the value of the unknown side by applying the trigonometric law of cosines: see Nave, “Law of Cosines.”

\textsuperscript{2} In table-talk conversation on 23 April 1947, Auden spoke of attending “a literary club meeting at Columbia [University]…None of the students seemed to be at all interested in technique. They’d talk about the Four Quartets, but nobody seemed at all interested in Eliot’s imitation of Dante. Now that’s a question you’d think a young poet would be quite concerned about. But they weren’t. They mostly seemed to be imitating Hart Crane. There was some [Edna St. Vincent] Millay, some [Wallace] Stevens, even some me, I’m afraid. Very bad. They mostly imitated the diction. ‘Intricate trigonometry of the rears’ was one line. I know where that came from’ (Ansen 50-1). With this “very bad” line in mind, I would apologize to Auden for drawing him, Eliot, and Crane into a trigonometry that, while not especially “intricate” as per Crane’s poetics, may yet prove serviceable for the literary “rears” at hand.
specifically, we may recall that both authors (re)turned to Anglo-Catholic communion within thirteen years of one another—Eliot in 1927, Auden in 1940; specifically, we may recall that both authors (re)turned to Anglo-Catholic communion within thirteen years of one another—Eliot in 1927, Auden in 1940; that both religious (re)turns were roughly contiguous with each author’s shift in transatlantic citizenship: Eliot’s conversion from Unitarianism to Anglicanism occurs within months of his naturalization as a British citizen, while Auden’s Episcopalian homecoming to the Anglicanism of his youth unfolds six years before his postwar Americanization in 1946; that both authors published major religious poems, which were drafted in concert with their experiences of (re)conversion: in Eliot’s case, 1927’s “Journey of the Magi,” 1928’s “A Song for Simeon,” and 1930’s “Ash-Wednesday”; in Auden’s, 1944’s extensive Nativity poem, “For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio” (parts of which were set to music by Benjamin Britten). Finally, via the secularist hermeneutic that has similarly fashioned Eliot and Auden scholarship, we may recall that the religious (re)turns, conversional poetics, and transatlantic crossings of both authors have served as cultural indicators for the scholarly bisection of their corpuses. Harboring traces of an irreligious literary criticism (and thus not necessarily a wholesale criticism of theology or religiousness as such), this resilient mode of “oeuvre organization” rules the aesthetic effects of each author’s personal religiosity.4

3 Notably, a letter from Auden to Eliot, dated 17 December 1940, appears to be Auden’s “first clear statement of his new beliefs”: “He enclosed a list of errata for ‘New Year Letter’—Eliot was his editor at Faber & Faber—and reported…’I think a lot about you and whether you are safe, the more so because, thanks to Charles Williams and [Søren] Kierkegaard, I have come to pretty much the same position as yourself, which I was brought up in anyway. (Please don’t tell anyone about this.)’” (Mendelson Later 158-9). Auden’s closing plea echoes the confidentiality of Eliot’s letter to W. Force Stead, Anglican clergyman and chaplain of Worcester College, dated 3 February 1927: “I want your advice, information & your practical assistance in getting Confirmation with the Anglican Church…But meanwhile I rely upon you not to mention this to anyone. I do not want any publicity or notoriety—for the moment, it concerns me alone, & not the public—not even those nearest me. I hate spectacular ‘conversions’” (Letters 404).

4 Onerous yet vital, this point solicits ample evidence before my scalene analogy proceeds. By canvassing lines of scholarship in juxtaposition, I catalogue here the secularist “rupture” in each author’s reception. In Eliot’s case, critics often treat “Ash-Wednesday” as an epicenter that bisects the corpus into secular and religious spheres. As I note in chapter three (see pages 118-23), this epicenter remains a tacitly “jurisdictional” convention in Eliot studies. We can trace its advent (as a kind of “pure cut”) through key critics in the 1930s and 40s. “Ash-Wednesday,” writes Tate, is “a brief moment of religious experience in an age that believes religion to be a kind of defeatism and puts all its hope for man in finding the right secular order…In The Waste Land the prestige of our secular faith gave to the style a special character. This faith was the hard, coherent medium through which the discredited forms of the historic cultures emerged only to be stifled…It is not that his recent verse is better than that of the period ending with The Waste Land. Actually it is less spectacular and less complex in subject matter; for Eliot less frequently
Tempting critics at times to overlook major discrepancies in the poets’ aesthetics, ethics, and politics, the (un)canniness of these parallels between Eliot and Auden has readily aligned them as imbricated exemplars of “theological ways of reading literature” in the twentieth century (Medcalf). Similarly, genealogical metaphors of anxiety and influence that figure Auden as objectifies his leading emotion, humility, into irony” (131-3). For Wilson, the “imagery upon which ‘Ash-Wednesday’ so largely relies and which is less vivid because more artificial than that of Eliot’s earlier poems, seems to me a definite feature of inferiority” (733). “Through The Waste Land and ‘The Hollow Men,’” writes Matthiessen, “resounded the poet’s dread of death and dissolution…But here [“Ash-Wednesday”] that terror has been transcended in a vision of death itself as the promised land” (118). “The poetry from Ash-Wednesday onward,” Leavis argues, in an essay that anticipates Cooper on Eliot’s “transition to the late candour” (1-27), “is a searching of experience, a spiritual discipline, a technique for sincerity” (111). Variations on these arguments recur from midcentury to the present: see Kenner (224-35), Hay (90-100); Martin; Manganiello (65-83); Moody (136-54); Crawford (188); and Donoghue (155). This binary approach is mirrored in Auden studies, which often distinguishes between “the early secular Auden” and “the later religious convert (temporizer, reactionary, sellout)” (Boly 41). Thus, where Gordon divides Eliot’s Early Years from Eliot’s New Life via rubrics of conversion and British citizenship, Mendelson divides Early Auden from Later Auden via rubrics of (re)conversion and Americanization. Divisions at 1927 in A Companion to T.S. Eliot, edited by Chinitz (see footnote 4 in chapter three), mirror divisions at 1940 in The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden, edited by Smith; see particularly entries by Deane and Jenkins. W.H. Auden in Context, edited by Sharpe, inflects this frontier by splitting the topic of Auden and homosexuality at 1939 via Auden’s shift in citizenship; see particularly entries by Woods and Bozorth. For Boly (40-3), such fractures in Auden studies originate with Randall Jarrell, who in 1945 splintered the oeuvre (as it stood then) into three phases of decreasing value: “Ur-Auden,” where “everything happens inside the realm of causal or magical necessity” (Jarrell 83); “Moral Auden,” where “everything that is important happens in the realm of logical or ethical necessity” (86); and, “from 1940—” “Paul,” where “everything that is important happens in the realm of Grace” (87). Jarrell’s view of 1940 as the vitiating, irrevocable cusp was trenchantly reinforced by Philip Larkin, who in 1960 reviewed Homage to Clio under the title, “What’s Become of Wystan?”: Larkin begins his review by “trying to imagine a discussion of Auden between one man who had read nothing of his after 1940 and another who had read nothing before” (Larkin 414). As in Eliot studies, variations on this incision in Auden scholarship recur from mid-century to onward: see, for instance, Spender, Fraser, Izzo, Ohmann, Beach, Greenberg, Nelson, Buell, and Repogle. A more syncretic line of reception, which variously seeks to mend Jarrell’s splintering approach, includes studies by Spears, Bahlke, Boly, McDiarmid, Wasley (Age of Auden), Bozorth (Auden’s Games), Gwiazda, and Jacobs, whose What Became of Wystan: Change and Continuity in Auden’s Poetry tackles Larkin’s review. 5 On aesthetic incongruities, consider Bloom’s well-known differentiation of Auden from Eliot: “One of Auden’s many virtues is, unlike Eliot and other literary Christians, he has spared us, and mostly refrained from devotional verse. For the Time Being…is a long and unhappy exception, but even it, unlike much Eliot, does not offer us the disciplined humility of the poet as our aesthetic experience…Eliot is gone, and Auden now occupies his place, though with a difference…Auden is wittier, gentler, much less dogmatic, and does not feel compelled to demonstrate the authenticity of his Christian humanism by a judicious anti-Semitism. He has more wisdom and more humor than Eliot, and his talent is nowhere near so sparse, as the enormous range of his lyrics show” (2-3). Zeroing in on “a judicious anti-Semitism,” one should not underestimate the ethical-political differences at hand: “Eliot’s gift to Auden of After Strange Gods was the occasion, in a letter of 1934, of a rare expression of political differences. Auden said he had read the Primer with great interest, but some of Eliot’s ‘general remarks’ had ‘rather shocked’ him, because ‘if put into practice in a political scale’ they would ‘produce a world in which neither I nor you I think would like to live.’ We can assume he was thinking of Eliot’s notorious claim about ‘free-thinking Jews,’ later quoted in ‘For the Time Being’ (1943). There, the narrator comments sardonically that ‘the recent restrictions / Upon aliens and free-thinking Jews are beginning / To have a salutary effect on public morale’…Eliot seems to have been unusually forbearing about the ways Auden alluded to him, and this war-time echo of After Strange Gods offers a grimly serious retort to it” (Haughton 290-1). On Auden’s “implicit undoing” of arguments in Eliot’s Notes toward the Definition of Culture, see McDiarmid (10-11) and Mendelson, Later Auden (301-3).
Eliot’s apostolic successor (Bloom 3) tend to neglect the chronic difficulty of periodizing Auden as a belated modernist, as a postmodernist, or even as a chameleonic post-modernist. Indeed, if we accept Mendelson’s view that Auden proves an exception to modernism’s aesthetic ideals, then Auden and Eliot are even farther afield than their aforementioned disparities suggest:

[Auden] differed from his modernist predecessors such as Yeats, Lawrence, Eliot or Pound, who had turned nostalgically away from a flawed present to some lost illusory Eden where life was unified, hierarchy secure, and the grand style a natural extension of the vernacular….Modernism, disenfranchised from the past by its own sense of isolated “modernity,” could bring its literary tradition into the present only as battered ironic fragments (as in Eliot) or by visionary heroic efforts (like Pound’s) to “make it new.” For Auden, it had never grown old⁶…the surest way to misunderstand Auden is to read him as the modernists’ heir. Except in his very earliest and latest poems, there is virtually nothing modernist about him. From the viewpoint of literary history, this is the most important aspect of his work. Most critics of twentieth-century poetry, however, still judge poems by their conformity to modernist norms; consequently, a myth has grown up around Auden to the effect that he fell into a decline almost as soon as he began writing. Critics who give credence to this myth mean, in fact, that Auden stopped writing the sort of poems they know how to read. (“Preface” ix-xi; emphasis added)

Mendelson persuasively renders Auden as a chameleonic figure, a poet writing for the most part outside or around “the excesses of the peripatetic Ezra Pound-James Joyce axis of modernism” (Hart 28). Recently adapted in Auden studies through the rubrics of postmodernism and (post)modernist transnationalism,⁷ Mendelson’s thesis here is primarily aesthetic: at the start of his career, Auden was a modernist of sorts, and we surely uncover traces of modernist aesthetics

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⁶ Echoing major studies of modernism and fascism (see, for instance, Surette, Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics; Sherry, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism; North, The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound; Hewitt, Fascist Modernism; and Morrison, The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Paul de Man), Mendelson develops this argument as follows: “Modernism tended to look back toward the lost reigns of a native aristocracy; too often, it found the reflected glory of ancient ‘tradition’ in political leaders who promised to restore social grandeur and unity through coercive force. Auden’s refusal to idealize the past saved him from comparable fits of mistaken generosity” (x).

in his late poems;\(^8\) yet, for the vast majority of his oeuvre, Auden consistently refashioned his poetics through “a voice almost unknown to English poetry since the end of the eighteenth century: the voice of a citizen who knows the obligations of his citizenship” (Mendelson xi).

Notwithstanding his career’s (un)canny parallels with Eliot’s, which seem to render him the latter’s successor, Auden’s post-modernist aesthetics of citizenship and deeper ethical-political disparities with his modernist predecessor further skew the expected isosceles model. Indeed, given my dissertation’s rubric of Transatlantic Modernism, the post-modernist dimensions of Auden’s corpus may well place him, more so than Crane, in the position of triangulated outlier; for, despite their sharp polarizations on myriad fronts, Crane and Eliot are nonetheless modernists—from their debut publications to their swan songs. In the scalene triangle that duly emerges, the chameleonic post-modernist affords an uneasy hinge for this polarity: Auden certainly does not migrate unreservedly from Eliot’s precinct toward Crane’s (whose poetics Auden deprecated), but both poets’ relatively “optimistic” distances from Eliot’s perceived “pessimism” nevertheless draw them into an awkward yet productive relation on our literary grid. Accordingly, by angling the scalene so that Auden inches hesitantly nearer Crane, both poets’ homosexuality and queer aesthetics assume a contiguity that is rarely afforded such

\(^8\) Mendelson’s expert sense of Auden’s early shift from and late resumption of modernist aesthetics bears precise reference here: from 1927 to 1933 “his voice retained something of the modernist accent he had learned from Eliot, and his poems used the free verse had had learned from the same school. These first poems often have the air of gnomic fragments; they seem to be elements of some hidden private myth whose individual details never quite resolve themselves into a unified narrative. The same qualities of division and irresolution that mark the poems also mark the world they describe, a world where doomed heroes look down in isolation on an equally doomed society…The turn away from this early style, and from the manner and subjects of modernism, can be dated precisely. Auden prepared for it in the late spring of 1933, in a series of poems that expressed first the hope of a release from isolation and from the delusive wish for an innocent place elsewhere, and, finally, asked for the will and strength to ‘rebuild our cities, not dream of islands’ [from the sestina, “Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys’]” (xi). In his final years, upon returning to England from America (with residential stopovers in lower Austria), “A nostalgic note, absent since his earliest poems, began to enter his work once more…He wrote again of a doomed landscape: not an external one, but the microcosmos [sic] of his own aging body” (xvii).
discrepant authors. Upon inspection, in fact, we discover that this unusual propinquity binds the most trailblazing work of queer criticism in Auden studies to the most trailblazing work of queer criticism in Crane studies. In Auden’s Games of Knowledge (2001), that is, Richard Bozorth foregrounds his key debts to Thomas Yinging’s Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text (1990):

But just as Auden was adept at encoding homosexuality in his work, so too are those who form what may be termed the “pathologizing” school of Auden criticism...The notorious hostility of F.R. Leavis...reflects sexual as well as cultural and literary politics, whereby Auden was a case of homosexual failure...Leavis seems almost to imply that the closet ruined Auden’s work (though one doubts he thought Auden should have come out). Such claims have a history of application to homosexual writers; Leavis’s views bear an uncanny likeness to the critical topos of Hart Crane’s “failure” from the debilitating effects of homosexuality (see Yingling 59-60). Auden is linked to Crane, in fact, by Randall Jarrell as an example of how “the feelings of isolation and the guilt feelings associated with sex are enormously intensified” when the family, “our culture’s normal complex of togetherness (Sex-Children-Authority) is broken up”...by 1945...[Jarrell] saw Auden as having failed to outgrow his earlier “sexual isolation”...“In the end he submits to the universe without a question; but it turns out

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9 See, for instance, Gregory Woods’s juxtaposition of chapters on Crane and Auden in Articulate Flesh: Male Homo-Eroticism and Modern Poetry. It is rare to find these poets in such snug proximity, and to uncover cross-referencing of this sort across Crane’s and Auden’s vastly different corpuses: focusing on Auden’s debut hand-printed 1928 collection, specifically on a gnomic fragment (beginning “Last night, sucked giddy down / The funnel of my dream” and ending “And reached his hand to mine”) that envisions coalminers in a “buried engine-room,” Woods argues that: “Here, as in Crane’s ‘Episode of Hands,’ is the need of the bourgeois, homosexual poet to make physical and, if possible, spiritual contact with a working man, a need which is the basis of Auden’s early politics. In Auden’s dream, even the workplace is involved in the sensual experience of union...Auden was aware of the anal nature of funnel, burial, ‘ticking silence,’ and oil; not to mention the painful ecstasy of penetration. But a wet dream is not sexual intercourse. This early in his career, his poems show a marked gap between desire and actuality” (176).

10 “I am indebted for this term,” Bozorth writes in his endnotes, “to Thomas E. Yingling’s study of Hart Crane (see 1-23, 59-60)” (268n.9).

11 In context, Jarrell finds that Auden “has been cut off from any real union with Authority by his revolt against it; and sexual relations, the next chance at ‘Togetherness,’ are to him no more than a predetermined, repetitively senseless process of isolated growth—the object of love is a mere external pretext, not essentially different from the class of abnormal fetishes of which it is, so to speak, the one normal member. The Family is gone. But if it, our culture’s normal complex of togetherness, is broken up, both the feelings of isolation and the guilt feeling connected with sex are enormously intensified. This is particularly apparent with Hart Crane: his helpless rejection of the normal family, the normal sexual situation of union, isolated him both from his past and in his future—for he knew that he himself was never going to repeat this situation; and, in his present, what sexual ties he attempted had for him no trace of permanence, of acceptance by authority” (93-4).

12 By the 1940s “Auden no longer feels so much anxiety about sexuality, after he has filed it under Religion; even its guilt is lost in the guilt of that universal depravity which has rolled back its flood over every human action...sexuality is now swallowed up in salvation—or, worse, damnation...Auden is completely alone, but the knowledge of his isolation is not a burden but a blessing: he knows that we have always been alone, except in our paradoxical union with the Wholly Other, God...Our isolation is the complete aloneness of the man who stands for every minute of his life, in fear and trembling and abject dread, before his God...it was inevitable that Auden should arrive at this point. His anxiety is fundamental; and the one thing that anxiety cannot do is accept itself” (Jarrell 101-2).
that the universe is his own shadow on the wall beside his bed.”…Auden’s work of the 1940s, it seems, was a lonely invert’s metaphysical pillow talk. (7-9)

Thus, where the “fruit” of Crane’s homosexual failure is The Bridge and his suicide, the “fruit” of Auden’s homosexual failure is his post-modernist American turn and, particularly for Jarrell, his post-1940 embrace of Kierkegaardian existentialism, by which means he had “narcissistically rationalized his own [sexual] anxieties by projecting them onto everything” (Bozorth 9). For all their stimulating contrasts, then, Auden and Crane are united by “Authority” (Jarrell 94) as flops.

Although they are imbricated as path-breaking ventures that challenge hetero-normative criticism, Yingling’s study of Crane (as examined in chapter four) differs in at least one cardinal respect from Bozorth’s study of Auden: whereas Yingling’s emancipatory intervention tends to disarticulate Crane’s “prevalent piety” from his queer aesthetics, Bozorth, in a superb chapter on “God and the Unspeakable,” suggestively identifies a “queer metaphysics or queer theology” in Auden’s lyric poems, which unfolds through nimble metaphors of truth, lies, and “angularity”:

In giving the lie to neat distinctions between closeted and out, honesty and hypocrisy, “‘The Truest Poetry Is the Most Feigning’” [1953] shows Auden tracing once more the trajectory of his ancestry in Wilde, Byron, and Shakespeare….Through his angularity, in other words, Auden is also pursuing a game of knowledge about sameness and difference, universal and particular. Metaphysics, for the later Auden, has to be a self-consciously ridiculous enterprise—a performance art that never forgets its station, its particular “human position” [“Musée des Beaux Arts,” line 3]. To call this queer metaphysics or queer theology might seem like bowing to a later critical fashion that, had he lived to see it, Auden would probably have deplored as grotesquely indiscreet. But it is hard to know how better to describe his deconstruction of norms, sexual and otherwise. (236)

While somewhat under-theorized, Bozorth’s important perspective on the “deconstruction of norms” that underwrites Auden’s “queer metaphysics or queer theology” elicits my sense of a further uncharted “angularity” that connects Crane and Auden. By consolidating my scalene analogy and therein dismantling the isosceles model, this angularity predicates the core
argument\(^{13}\) of the present chapter: in lieu of Bozorth’s fleeting attention to the long poems of the 1940s,\(^{14}\) which for Jarrell represent the pious summit of Auden’s sexual “isolation,”\(^{15}\) I discern a compelling resemblance between the (de)construction of Christ and Caliban in Auden’s *For the Time Being* (a book published in 1944 that contains “For the Time Being” and “The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*”) and the (de)construction of Christ and Dionysus in Crane’s “Lachrymae Christi.”\(^ {16}\) Notwithstanding vast disparities in compositional scale, poetic form, and lyric texture, one may distinguish in Auden’s skilful juxtaposition of Christ and Caliban a strategy of queer aesthetics that *resembles*, rather than symmetrically duplicates, what I take to be Crane’s “crosshatching parallelism” of Christ and Dionysus.

Admittedly, as a 117-page book encompassing two long poems, each of which incorporates short verses and prose sections, *For the Time Being*’s interplay of Christ and Caliban is not as readily detectable as the equivocal “chemistry”\(^{17}\) between the Nazarene and the pagan deity in Crane’s dense 45-line lyric. At closer range, nevertheless, *For the Time Being* appears to undertake the same kind of aesthetic experiment as “Lachrymae Christi”: rather than banking on motifs or flights of transcendence, both works revel in and thus “reveal” queerness as radical immanence—or, more precisely, as a *mutual* (de)construction of religious and secular aesthetics.

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\(^{13}\) By “core argument,” I mean this chapter’s wider continuity with preceding studies in the dissertation.

\(^{14}\) Bozorth’s limited yet nonetheless perceptive consideration of Auden’s long poems from the 1940s (pages 207-9) stems from his methodological emphasis: “Auden’s significance as a homosexual poet lies in his deployment of the individual poem, particularly the lyric, as a site of epistemological and erotic encounter. To be convincing, such an argument requires detailed reading procedures that cannot be extended to every possible shorter poem, much less to the longer works of the 1940s neglected here…this book concentrates on Auden’s earlier work because it was in the 1920s and 30s that he was most acutely preoccupied with making theoretical sense of homosexuality” (17).

\(^{15}\) “The stages of Auden’s development can even be diagrammed,” Jarrell argues: “In Stage I Anxiety and Guilt are fused in an Isolated, Sexual core…In Stage II an active Anxiety dominates this core; it has pushed Sexuality to the side as far as it can, and attempts rather unsuccessfully to mitigate its confessed Guilt and Isolation by reforming the Authority it pulls down to it…But in Stage II Anxiety, Guilt, and Isolation are themselves the *relations of Authority* to the core; they are Grace…the means by which Authority is manipulating the core into salvation. In this stage Sexuality, mutated into Agape, its itself floating somewhere up near God. The reader may complain about my last diagram: ‘But what is left to be the core?’ That is the point I was making: there is nothing left” (105).

\(^{16}\) See pages 191-208 of chapter four.

\(^{17}\) Recall how, in the visionary opening lines of “Lachrymae Christi,” “benzine / Rinsings of the moon / Dissolve all but the windows of the mills.”
One Book, Two Poems, and a Muted Encounter between the Messiah and the Monster:

An Argument for Interfacing “For the Time Being” and “The Sea and the Mirror”

Quite curiously, amid the voluminous scholarship on Auden’s corpus, direct comparisons of “For the Time Being” and “The Sea and the Mirror” (and thus sustained treatments of For the Time Being as a singular intra-related publication) are relatively scarce. Effectively protracting the book’s dichotomizing reception in 1944-1945, when most academic and professional critics gauged the poems as in essence unrelated and read “For the Time Being” as a hapless companion to “The Sea and the Mirror,”18 this lacuna in Auden studies is at odds with For the Time Being’s own textual history. As Mendelson notes, Auden reworked key “abandoned” portions of the Christmas oratorio for inclusion in his poetic commentary on The Tempest: thus, a deserted oratorio lyric in which the poet’s aesthetic talent or literary “gift speaks in the first person” resurfaces in the commentary as the crucial “‘Postscript’ spoken by Ariel to Caliban: ‘Weep no more but pity me, / Fleet persistent shadow cast / By your lameness’” (Mendelson Later 213). Likewise, in replacing “Simeon-as-poet with Simeon-as-theologian” in the oratorio’s final draft, Auden reworked the former’s discarded lines and incorporated them into the commentary’s second section, “Prospero to Ariel,” which features a “lonely, self-isolating Prospero” (213).

18 In W.H. Auden: The Critical Heritage, edited by Haffenden, see Schorer, “Auden’s Beautiful Flights”; Levin, “Through the Looking Glass”; MacCarthy, “Beauty and Bugbear”; Kingsmill, “On Auden’s Self-Consciousness, Occluded Pastures”; Spender, “On Argument or Experience”; and Lienhardt, “Auden’s Inverted Development.” With the slender exception of Levin, whom I quote on two fronts below, all reviewers markedly subordinate “For the Time Being” to “The Sea and the Mirror” and the construe former as, in MacCarthy’s words, superfluous “Bugbear” that is only bibliographically connected to the latter’s “Beauty.” Levin, while ultimately joining his fellow reviewers in “still expect[ing] something more truly humane from a poet whose writing has been so lucent and polished a mirror of the time being” (334), nevertheless judges that Auden has “wisely allowed Shakespeare and the gospels to provide the text for his comments….Taken together, as mystery and masque, they [Auden’s two long poems] represent the alpha and omega of the theatrical cycle…Thus the oratorio [i.e. “For the Time Being”] picks up the whimsical theme of the commentary [i.e. “The Sea and the Mirror’], and carries it through a series of resourceful modulations to a music-hall finale, setting the Flight into Egypt—‘the Land of Unlikeness’—against a real-estate development of the Waste Land. The perplexities and strivings of the intellectual, the man with the mirror, are profoundly grasped and impressively orchestrated” (332-3).
Both bibliographically and compositionally, then, “For the Time Being” is intricately linked to “The Sea and the Mirror.” Nevertheless, in recent Auden scholarship, perceived divisions between the poems appear to have all but crystallized, even to a fallacious extent. For instance, Matthew Mutter aptly enlists Auden’s “criticism of magical poetics” to appraise the scholarly return of “magic and occultism to prominence as categories for understanding the aspirations of modernist literature”\(^1\) (58); yet, after tracing the contours of disenchantment through Auden’s adaptations of Prospero and Caliban, Mutter writes: “Auden knew very well that Enlightenment rationalism could be complicit with imperialism and dramatized the problem in his Christmas oratorio, *For the Time Being* (1942), which was published just two years before *The Sea and the Mirror* (1944)” (64; emphasis added). Acutely conspicuous in light of his esteem for Arthur Kirsch’s *Auden and Christianity* as one of “the best books on the intellectual and poetic consequences of Auden’s conversion to Christianity”\(^2\) (79n.2), Mutter’s ostensibly minor error on the poems’ publication history derives from his consultation of Auden’s *Collected Poems*, edited chronologically by Mendelson; there, one conveniently finds dates of composition italicized at the end of each poem. While this oversight does not markedly compromise the rigor of Mutter’s perspectives on each individual poem, it does hinder him from interlocking them in

\(^{1}\)Mutter collocates his reading of Auden with a critique of post-secular research in literary and cultural studies. “Auden’s critique of magical thinking,” Mutter suggests, is “a critique of a distinctly modern problem, not an act of condescension toward the religious practices of so-called primitive, non-Western cultures (though of course it does bear on the modern Western engagement with, and appropriation of, such practices). Magic is Auden’s name for a strategy by which poets try to recuperate the perceived existential losses of secular modernity” (60). Mutter deploys his study of Auden against Helen Sword, who in *Ghostwriting Modernism* “values the ‘empowering’ agency of occultism, its ‘subversive celebrations of the alternate, often feminine, modes of writing; its transgressions of the traditional divide between high and low culture; and its . . . tendency to privilege form over content (9)” (62); and Gauri Viswanathan, in whose “Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy” “various modes of heterodox modernist spirituality—occultism, Gnosticism, spiritualism, theosophy—are given credit for forging ‘alternate knowledge systems,’ but the emphasis is always placed on ‘alternate’ rather than ‘knowledge’ (‘Secularism’ 468)” (63). See also his critique of Randall Styers’s *Making Magic: Religion, Magic and Science in the Modern World*, which “exemplifies the problems besetting the desire to make magic a counter-ideology” (63).

\(^{2}\)Kirsch provides a fastidious bibliographic lead-in to his chapter on *For the Time Being*: “The volume entitled *For the Time Being*, which was published in 1944, consists of “For the Time Being,” which Auden began writing towards the end of 1941 and finished in July 1942, and *The Sea and the Mirror*, which he wrote from October 1942 to February 1944, while he was teaching at Swarthmore College” (39).
ways their very co-publication solicits. It deters him, in other words, from engaging Kirsch’s shrewd perception as to why Auden “placed ‘For the Time Being’ last in the volume, though he wrote it first”: he did so “because he thought that the secular, if religiously informed, exploration of art in The Sea and the Mirror should be a prelude to the manifestly religious representation of the Incarnation in ‘For the Time Being’” (39).

Arguably, this structural decision informs the poems individually by signposting their inverted trajectories in For the Time Being and Collected Poems. Without a correct bibliographic “trace,” however, crosspollination among the poems does not become an exegetical priority. Mutter, that is, grants the works only once flickering instance of continuity: “Prospero’s desire to take revenge on the Romans for their grammar21 and Herod’s self-conscious linking of imperialism and secular rationality22 disclose Auden’s awareness of the fact that magical thinking is an understandable mode of resistance to the tyranny of secular empire” (65). Sound as it is, this perceptive argument verges on the incidental; for, in “The Sea and the Mirror” and “For

21 See “The Sea and the Mirror,” Chapter I: “Prospero to Ariel,” whose poetic form Auden devised as “couplets of thirteen and eleven syllables, with the vowels elided” (qtd. in Kirsch Sea 77): “When I woke into my life, a sobbing dwarf / Whom giants served only as they pleased, I was not what I seemed; / Beyond their busy backs I made a magic / To ride away from a father’s imperfect justice, / Take vengeance on the Romans for their grammar, / Usurp the popular earth and blot out for ever / The gross insult of being a mere one among many” (Auden For 10).

22 See “For the Time Being,” “The Massacre of the Innocents” I: “Herod”: “In twenty years the darkness has pushed back a few inches. And what, after all, is the whole Empire, with its few thousand square miles on which it is possible to lead the Rational Life, but a tiny patch of light compared with those immense areas of barbaric night that surround it on all sides, that incoherent wilderness of rage and terror…where it is firmly believed that the world was created by a giant with three heads or that the motions of the stars are controlled from the liver of a rogue elephant?” (For 113-14). In his critical edition of “For the Time Being,” Alan Jacobs reminds us that the second chapter of Matthew’s Gospel is occupied with a story about what happened when Herod the Great, the king of Judea by allowance of the Romans, learned that ‘the King of the Jews’ had been born and wanted to destroy this rival. Not knowing who the child is, Herod “was exceeding wroth, and set forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under…Herod’s speech [in ‘For the Time Being’] parodies the Meditations of the philosopher and (from 161 to 180 CE) Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius” (Jacobs “Notes” 89-90). In his inimitable Later Auden, Mendelson notes that “Herod’s speech restates in dramatized form Auden’s argument that liberalism, which exposed the workings of power behind moral systems, had left itself without an answer to Hitler, who went a giant step further by dropping all pretense of morality and acknowledging power as his sole means and motive” (192).
the Time Being,” Prospero and Herod are respectively dwarfed by far grander figures who surprisingly have yet to be cross-referenced in Auden studies—namely, Caliban and Christ.

Toward elaborating the hermeneutic that enables me to crosshatch these poems’ central figures, I would counterpoise Mutter on Auden’s post-1940 aesthetics of “disenchantment” with Robert Caserio on Auden’s aesthetics of “queer citizenship” in his American phase. Without misconstruing the bibliography of _For the Time Being_, Caserio still withholds “The Sea and the Mirror” from his key argument, through which he queers Mendelson’s view that Auden’s poetry harbors “the voice of a citizen who knows the obligations of his citizenship” (“Preface” xi):

_Auden, even as he turns from one national citizenship to another, acts out…a conversion of citizenship itself, a new paradoxical—indeed perverse—characterization of it. Taking out American citizenship papers, Auden repudiates detached political neutrality; at the same time, by becoming a U.S. citizen during the wartime composition of _New Year Letter, For the Time Being, _and _The Age of Anxiety_, the poet uses the poems to redefine what it means to be a modern national. The redefinition limns the uncertainty of one’s political passport….The subject and the origin of Auden’s civic voice canonizes not a state of inclusion, but a state of allegiance-on-the-move, a refugeeism [sic], whereby neutral citizenship is both cancelled and reinstated. The refugee isn’t _settled_ by citizenship papers…the poet’s poems work to make his reader see that the dignity of citizenship inheres in a concretely enacted state of being _between or among_ nations._

To be clear, Caserio parses “_For the Time Being_” as a singular work, rather than as book of two poems. Affording one reference to the “The Sea and the Mirror” in its overlay with “For the Time Being,” this approach yields a bibliographic disjunction reminiscent of Mutter’s study. More peculiar, however, is the leapfrogging effect that results from Caserio’s interpretation: proceeding reverse-chronologically, from _The Age of Anxiety_ (composed from July 1944 to November 1946 and published in 1946) to “For the Time Being,” Caserio ultimately bypasses

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23 Caserio observes that Auden “applied for citizenship, and registered for the draft in 1940, concurrent with the writing of _New Year Letter_. Auden’s next long poem, _For the Time Being_, spans the end of 1941—not long after Auden discovered [Chester] Kallman’s secret infidelity (since late 1940) with an English merchant marine sailor— and September, 1942, when Auden was rejected by the draft board on account of his homosexuality. _For the Time Being_, as we shall see, uses the Nativity story in order to meditate on fidelity and infidelity in gay marriage, and on citizenship and exile; and the start of _The Sea and the Mirror_ belongs to the moment of the draft board rejection. During the composition of these poems, Auden’s citizenship application was in suspense” (92).
“The Sea and the Mirror” as Auden’s intervening long poem. Focusing on the latter’s lean cameo in Caserio’s elucidation, in which only “the start of The Sea and the Mirror belongs to the moment of [Auden’s] draft board rejection [in 1942]” (92; emphasis added), one is apt to inquire how the poem as a whole might factor into Auden’s unique queering of citizenship. If as Kirsch suggests “the secular, if religiously informed, exploration of art in The Sea and the Mirror” both prefaces and presages “the manifestly religious representation of the Incarnation in ‘For the Time Being’” (Auden 39), then this inquiry obliges us to dovetail the elisions in Mutter’s account of disenchantment and in Caserio’s sense of queer citizenship in Auden’s work.

Approached sans its deeper imbrications with “For the Time Being,” “The Sea and the Mirror” in Mutter’s construal sheds its “religiously informed” character in favor of its secular-aesthetic dimensions. Thus, Mutter argues, “in Auden’s re-telling, the problem of magic does not concern the primitive rationality of the native Caliban, but the despotic speech of the colonizer Prospero” (62; emphasis added). Effaced by Prospero’s more troublesome “despotic” wizardry, Caliban’s relatively unproblematic, “knotty, late Jamesian pastiche” (61) recedes further from its viable textual interface with Christ in “For the Time Being.” Correspondingly, when Caserio sidesteps “The Sea and the Mirror” in his analysis of Auden’s “queer citizenship,” our reading of pivotal lines from section four of “The Summons”—“the dream of a Perfect State or No State at all, / To which we fly for refuge, is part of our punishment” (qtd. in Caserio 102)—is tethered to an overly-religious gloss: “Moreover, it is to be remarked that the Perfect State probably is also the Perfect Religious State, which Auden encapsulates in For the Time Being in ‘The Meditation of Simeon’” (102). Here, the Nativity’s religious import for Auden’s queering of wartime citizenship eclipses the secular undercurrents of “For the Time Being,” which bind it intricately to “The Sea and the Mirror.” Consequently, in Caserio’s reading “the Perfect Religious State”
does not readily encounter the germs of *its own deconstruction* at the end of “For the Time Being” and, far more baroquely, throughout “The Sea and the Mirror.” Auden’s strategy of crosspollination from one poem to the other—predominantly, that is, from Christ to Caliban and vice versa—in fact *offsets* the “Perfect Religious State” via the secularly “Perfect Aesthetic State.” *For the Time Being* thus dialectically interfaces the “Perfect” States of the oratorio’s Messiah and the commentary’s Monster to ensure their *mutual* (de)construction. As such, the textual interface as I perceive it supplements Caserio’s view that for Auden “the dignity of citizenship inheres in a concretely enacted state of being *between or among* nations” (91).

Interminably “*between or among*” the textual “States” of these long poems, I pursue the subtle “movements” of corporeality across “For the Time Being” and “The Sea and the Mirror,” attending in particular to valences of embodiment as spirit materializes flesh through Christ’s Incarnation; and as flesh materializes spirit through Caliban’s carnality. Given the poems’ textual history, whereby the commentary *precedes* the oratorio in *For the Time Being* and thereafter chronologically *succeeds* the oratorio in Auden’s *Collected Poems*, comparative studies may sequence analyses of these works in either direction—24—as long as a trace of the poems’ bibliographic inversion is consistently acknowledged. By tracking Auden’s inversions of flesh and spirit, I hermeneutically deploy the poems’ bibliographic trace and argue that Christ and Caliban are dialectically *immanent* to one another: for Auden, more precisely, the Incarnation is empty without carnality, just as carnality is blind without the insights of spirit.25

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24 That is, by treating “For the Time Being” before or after treating “The Sea and the Mirror”; of course, one might instead consistently intertwine, rather than bifurcate in order to intertwine, analyses of the poems. For my part, I opt to read the oratorio before the commentary because of Jesus’s “historical” precedence over Shakespeare’s Caliban.

25 I echo here Kant’s well-known formulation, which I discuss in chapters two (see footnote 22) and three (see footnotes 67 and 71), from this *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i.e., to bring them under concepts)” (193-194).
Thus, mutatis mutandis, the ostensible “Religious State” of “For the Time Being” and the apparently secular “Aesthetic State” of “The Sea and the Mirror” (de)construct each other via Auden’s transfiguration of embodiment across the poems. Queer citizenship, as per Caserio’s model, unfolds along this textual “border”—the permeable margin between Caliban’s queerly erotic yet “Drab mortality”26 and the paradox of Christ’s hallowed materialization. Gauging Auden’s studies in existential Protestant theology in the 1940s, one may liken this liaison of the drab and the hallowed to Søren Kierkegaard’s ethically-interlocking “aesthetic” and “religious” spheres. The furtive interdependence of aesthetic and religious “angles,” I maintain, illustrates the import of theological doctrine for secular desire and of secular revisionism for religious conviction. Crosshatching these poems, then, facilitates a kind of syncretism, if not a heterodox collusion, between Christ’s phenomenal Incarnation and Caliban’s prodigal carnality.

“How could the Eternal do a temporal act, / The Infinite become a finite fact?” (For 66):

On the Doctrine of Incarnation and the Queerness of Heresy in “For the Time Being”

Admittedly, by approaching “For the Time Being” through the lens of corporeality, my argument uncovers an intriguing conundrum: strictly speaking, in Auden’s Nativity poem the Christ-Child is not represented, described, or rendered “in the flesh.” With the slight exception of Mary’s lullaby in section one of “At the Manger,” where the effects of the Messiah’s embodiment are most “affective,” the poem does not afford any definitive Epiphany. Rather, Auden’s exegetes largely infer Christ’s bodily presence, or absent-presence, through flitting perceptions of the oratorio’s key speakers: Gabriel, Mary, the Wise Men, the Shepherds, and Simeon. Paraphrasing a linchpin of Auden’s postscript to “The Shield of Perseus,” which appears in The Dyer’s Hand (457), Alan Jacobs notes that “the Incarnate Word is present but

26 See Auden’s “Postscript (Ariel to Caliban. Echo by the Prompter)” in “The Sea and the Mirror,” to which I will return at greater length: “Weep no more but pity me, / Fleet persistent shadow cast / By your lameness, caught at last, / Helplessly in love with you, / Elegance, art, fascination, / Fascinated by / Drab mortality” (For 59).
silent. The Christ child does not speak or act, but is rather the object of speech and action”
(“Introduction” xx). As a poetic strategy, this aspect of the oratorio begets implications that hinge, in part at least, on one of Auden’s key remarks to Alan Ansen on 16 November 1946:

_A Christmas Oratorio_ was written before _The Sea and the Mirror_. It’s the only direct treatment of sacred subjects I shall ever attempt…I hesitated before deciding in which order the two things should go. You know it’s impossible to represent Christ in art. We’ve got used to the Old Masters because they’re formal, but in their day those pictures must have seemed outrageous. You can see Him at birth, or after He’s dead. Perhaps after the Resurrection, but show Him healing the sick or blessing people because they have faith, and the interest shifts to those people.²⁷ (Ansen 3)

Auden’s “treatment of sacred subjects” in “For the Time Being” is “direct” only _in relation_ to religion’s obliqueness in later poems such as “The Sea and the Mirror” and the much-anthologized “In Praise of Limestone”²⁸ (composed May 1948). Read singly, that is, the Christmas oratorio holds fast to Auden’s thesis on the necessary indirection that governs artistic representations of Christ. Indeed, although Auden concedes to Ansen that we “can see him at birth” in the “formal” works of the Old Renaissance Masters, the Nativity poem consistently elides him from our perspective as readers. As if concurring with Leo Steinberg, for whom “four centuries of deepening secularism” culminated in the “demythologizing [of] Christianity” and in

²⁷ Cf. 1938’s “Musée des Beaux Arts”: “About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters: how well they understood / Its human position… They never forgot / That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course / Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot / Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer’s horse / Scratches its innocent behind on a tree” (Collected 146-7). Auden expands his remark to Ansen in _The Dyer’s Hand_: “if [Christ] were visually recognizable, he would be a god of the pagan kind. The best the painter can do is to paint either the Bambino with the Madonna or the dead Christ on the cross, for every baby and every corpse seems to be both individual and universal, the baby, the corpse. But neither a baby nor a corpse can say _I am the Way_” (457). Notably, by the late 1950s Auden compromises his earlier vow never again to attempt a direct treatment of sacred subjects: see 1958’s “Friday’s Child,” a powerful lyric on the Crucifixion dedicated to the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred at Flossenburg at the end of World War II. Auden writes that we “are free / To guess from the insulted face / Just what Appearances He saves / By suffering in a public place / A death reserved for slaves” (Collected 510).
²⁸ See the latter half of the poem’s third and final stanza, where ironic reference to the mundane concerns of punctuality, ageing, and good manners as “our Common Prayer” gives way to speculation on the Resurrection, the Sacrament of Penance, and Canonization: “In so far as we have to look forward / To death as a fact, no doubt we are right: But if / Sins can be forgiven, if bodies rise from the dead, / These modifications of matter into / Innocent athletes and gesticulating fountains, / Made solely for pleasure, make a further point: / The blessed will not care what angle they are regarded from, / Having nothing to hide” (Collected 415). If a religious current animates this sizable short poem, as many critics suggest, then these few lines are its most direct indication.
profaning the Incarnation as a mystery (4), Auden spares us overt imagery of the Christ-Child; for, as Steinberg suggests, today’s secularized populace is “content to stop at the demythicized [sic] image,” seeing in the Christ-Child or God-Man only “a human image drawn to all appearances from the natural world, far afield from the mysteries of the [Apostolic] Creed” (4).

Significantly, as Auden states in a letter written to his bemused father after the oratorio’s composition, the corporeal indirection that marks “For the Time Being” as a refashioning of the Nativity has structural precedents in popular medieval literature. Auden’s oratorio has clear affinities with the medieval mystery play. Essentially a drama of the Incarnation, of the Word made Flesh, the mystery, or craft, cycles enacted the events of biblical history from Creation to Doomsday within a secular, and often cosmic, story in order to make religious history understandable in terms of ordinary human experience. The plays were performed by amateur groups made up of townspeople, frequently craft guilds appropriate to particular episodes...The mystery drama was likely to have originated in the Feast of Corpus Christi, in which the Eucharist was led in procession from the altar of the church into the marketplace of the town, manifesting the presence of Christ in the daily lives of the townspeople. (Kirsch Auden 40)

Because Kirsch refrains from citing examples, I would underscore the oratorio’s specific affinities with the Annunciation sequence and speeches of Simeon in “The Weavers’ Pageant” in The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays (117-33); “Joseph’s Trouble about Mary” by the Pewterers and Founders, “The Nativity” by the Tilethatchers, “Herod” and “The Magi” by the Masons and Goldsmiths, “The Flight into Egypt” by the Marshals, and “The Slaughter of the Innocents” by the Girdlers and Nailers in The York Mystery Plays (48-97); and, chiefly via the “Four Faculties”

29 For his part, Steinberg would quibble with Auden’s sense that “in their day those pictures must have seemed outrageous” (Ansen 3): “the intent was not to diminish but, on the contrary, to confirm the mystery of the Incarnation. Lifelikeness posed no threat, because these Renaissance artists regarded the godhead in the person of Jesus as too self-evident to be dimmed by his manhood” (4).

30 “Sorry you are puzzled by the oratorio. Perhaps you were expecting a purely historical account as one might give of the battle of Waterloo, whereas I was trying to treat it as a religious event which eternally recurs every time it is accepted...I am not the first to treat the Christian data in this way, until the 18th Cent. It was always done, in the Mystery Plays for instance...It is only in the last two centuries that religion has been ‘humanized,’ and therefore treated historically as something that happened a long time ago, hence the nursery picture of Jesus in a nightgown and a Parsifal beard. If a return to the older method now seems startling it is partly because of the acceleration in the rate of historical change due to industrialization—there is a far greater difference between the accidents of life in 1600 AD and in 1942 than between those of 30 AD and 1600” (qtd. in Jacobs “Introduction” xxi).

A less-noticed precedent, which takes up in non-dramatic form the Christ-Child’s indirect presence in the aforesaid mystery plays, is Milton’s 1645 poem “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity.” Otherwise absorbed by the Incarnation’s heroic banishment of polytheistic idols and deities, an usurpation to which Auden is more mutedly drawn in “For the Time Being,” Milton inquires as to whether “the sacred vein” of the “heavenly muse” will “Afford a present to the infant God” (lines 15-16; emphasis added). In effect, Milton himself answers this inquiry by diminishing the Christ-Child’s manifestation throughout the poem’s 244 lines. Thus, in the first stanza of “The Hymn,” we read simply of “the heaven-born-child / All meanly wrapped in the rude manger” (lines 30-1). Thereafter, in stanza sixteen Milton’s imagery centers fleetingly on “The babe” that “lies yet in smiling infancy,” auguring thereby a spectacular unsmiling death “on the bitter cross” undertaken to “redeem our loss” (lines 151-3; emphasis added). Rather less descriptively, by the twenty-seventh and final stanza, “the virgin blest, / Hath laid her babe to rest” (lines 237-8). Here, Milton emphasizes an overall cognitive state instead of a sole facial expression: the infantile “sleeping Lord” is attended by a “handmaid lamp,” while “all about the courtly stable, / Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable” (lines 242-4).

Perusing Jacobs’s notes on “At the Manger” in his critical edition of “For the Time Being” (“Notes” 85), one discerns an epigram from *The Dyer’s Hand* that underlines somnolence as a common trait of the newborn Incarnate Word in Milton’s and Auden’s Nativity poems: “A

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31 In “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity,” see stanzas 19-25 where Milton tracks the epochal defeat and ruinous departure of Apollo, Peor, Baalim, Dagon, Astartaroth, “Libyc Hammon,” Thammuz, Moloch, Isis, Orus, Anubis, Osiris, and Typhon. In “For the Time Being,” see Auden’s references to Caesar (61, 86-9, 114), Hercules (61), Achilles (113), and Zeus (115).

32 Cf. the previous chapter’s discussion of divine visages, or rather pieces thereof, amid the violence of ritual and punitive sacrifice. In particular, the Miltonic babe’s “smiling infancy” and eventual crucifixion in adulthood recall Dionysus’s “Unmangled target smile”—the final line of “Lachrymae Christi” (Crane 15).
task for the existential theologian,” writes Auden, is “to preach a sermon on the topic *The Sleep of Christ*” (103). While existential preaching in “For the Time Being” is mainly reserved for “The Meditation of Simeon,” the sleep of Christ nonetheless factors topically into Auden’s “At the Manger” sequence, where the corporeal humanness of the divine is at its least implicit:

O shut your bright eyes that mine must endanger
With their watchfulness; protected by its shade
Escape from my care: what can you discover
From my tender look but how to be afraid?
Love can but confirm the more it would deny.
    Close your bright eye.

Sleep. What have you learned from the womb that bore you
But an anxiety your Father cannot feel?
Sleep. What will the flesh that I gave do for you,
Or my mother love, but tempt you from His will?
Why was I chosen to teach His Son to weep?
    Little One, sleep.

Dream. In human dreams earth ascends to Heaven
Where no one need pray nor ever feel alone.
In your first few hours of life here, O have you
Chosen already what death must be your own?
How soon will you start on the Sorrowful Way?
    Dream while you may. (*For 98*)

For Anthony Hecht, this passage reveals Auden’s interest in generic conventions of the lullaby, “an archetypal version of pastoral poetry” (275) whereby “a knowing, experienced adult” sings (here in alternating, slant-rhyming quatrains capped by couplets) to pacify “any tendency to childish tears” in “an inexperienced and innocent child” (275-6). Mary’s lullaby, Hecht argues, repeats the commonplace of presenting “foreknowledge that an infant’s innocence and heedless bliss is doomed in the very nature of things to be lost” (275). By encouraging her son “to dream as an avenue of escape from the worldly miseries that crowd upon the consciousness of the adult,” Mary intimates a *humanly* “benign relationship between the stronger and the weaker” (276)—or, between mother and child. Hecht compellingly suggests that Auden intensifies this
relationship throughout the lullaby by complicating Mary’s maternal lament, particularly in relation to Jesus’s otherworldly paternity: as if “by malicious genetic division, her son will inherit what is painful only from her, what is blessed and perfect only from his heavenly Father” (277). Thus, in the second stanza, Mary asks two potent rhetorical questions: “What have you learned from the womb that bore you / But an anxiety your Father cannot feel?”; “What will the flesh that I gave do for you, / Or my mother love, but tempt you from His will?” Dolefully, both questions subordinate the maternal finitude of embodiment to the paternal infinitude of divinity: the vulnerability of the Christ-Child’s “bright eyes,” anxious “flesh,” somnolent “human dreams,” and capacity “to weep” may distance him, in Mary’s view, from the Father’s “will.”

33 Try as I may, at this stage of my argument I can only interpret the lullaby as a discourse of maternal self-subordination to, if not self-denigration before, the immaculate paternity of the divine. For, a binary opposition between humanity/maternity and divinity/paternity, mediated by the sleep of Christ, clearly structures Auden’s verses; and this opposition is sharply hierarchized in patriarchal terms via Mary’s rhetorical questions. As I cannot hermeneutically rescue (let alone wrest) Auden’s Mary from her patriarchal indoctrination, feminist corollaries necessarily enter the fray: patriarchal Christian theology of precisely the sort that engenders Mary’s lullaby renders the Virgin not as “a model that empowers women through their sexuality, but rather a model that encourages repression and denial of women’s sexuality and once again emphasizes the negative aspect of women’s natures” (Isherwood and McEwan 67). Indeed, feminist theologian Mary Daly “sees nothing positive in the image of Mary for women. For her it symbolizes that total erasing of Mary’s self. She is the archetypal rape victim who sets the pattern for all women. A symbol that depicts the internalized acceptance of sexual violence” (Daly 69). By further subordinating her fleshy femininity to the immaterial but nonetheless phallic force of the masculine Lord, Auden’s Mary seems to fold into the essentialist logic of patriarchal theology. This logic, as Kwok Pui-lan notes, replaced “classical ideals of civic manhood” with a “Christian ascetic model of masculinity” at whose center “Christian writers imagine themselves as holy men or spiritual fathers, fighting for truth for God and exemplifying the Christian model of living….Such a hypertranscendental [sic] masculinity…led to two lasting consequences. First, in order to differentiate itself from a women-identified carnal order, this ascetic masculinity incorporated in itself what was traditionally marked as ‘feminine,’ such as virginal modesty, disengagement from the public, reluctance to compete, maternal profundity, and nurturance…Second, the female gender was identified as the embodiment of carnality, sex, and evil by the early church fathers, while virginity was upheld as a virtue for young girls and women” (Pui-lan 11); such “male-centered, dualistic, and idealistic interpretations of Mary did not help women to develop their self-esteem and assert their power” (157). Naturally, then, one cannot but wish that Auden’s Mary—or the biblical Mary herself—had always-already turned out to be a progressive-leftist-radical feminist theologian, or better yet, philosopher, to whom one might extend a range of comfy solidarities. Given the lullaby’s hierarchic gendering, however, I would urge us not to commit an intentional fallacy by reading Auden’s Mary as a symptom of Auden’s personal stance on the religious subject of feminism. The antifeminist or misogynist strains in the lullaby do not typecast Auden’s religious imagination, or my exegesis thereof, as antifeminist or misogynist. Rather, because antifeminism and misogyny are deep-seated historical aspects of Christian theology; and because Auden’s For the Time Being is steeped (however playfully) in Christian theology as an historical discourse, I urge
Arguably, because this intensification of maternal sorrow lures us deeper into the affective core of the Incarnation, where it becomes an experiential mystery or guiding paradox for Christian faith, we are obliged to supplement Hecht’s thesis that Auden keeps Mary’s stanzas securely “in the tradition of lullabies” (277). This tradition, as Hecht conveys it, usually centers on a “benign relationship” between “stronger” parent and “weaker” child (276), culminating in the former speaking “of grief while engaged in concealing or assuaging grief” (277). While Auden undoubtedly structures Mary’s verses to achieve precisely this sort of maternal circuitry, the lullaby’s internal dynamics of “strength” and “weakness” are not as generically clear-cut as Hecht appears to suggest. In doctrinal terms, that is, what ultimately distinguishes strength from weakness in the case of the Incarnation, with its virgin birth and “humanized divinity”? If Mary’s verses pivot on her distressing sense that a “genetic division” occurred in the Immaculate Conception, through which Christ “will inherit what is painful only from her” and “what is blessed and perfect only from his heavenly Father” (277), then here we are in the grip of a specific phase in the Incarnation’s labyrinthine history as a doctrine. In accordance with the mid-Augustinianism of the poem’s final chorus, which pronounces “He is the Way” and catechizes us to “Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness”34 (For 124; emphasis added),

us to read the lullaby’s gendered hierarchy as an indication of the religious orthodoxy that Auden ultimately queers, both in For the Time Being and in his shift as a believer from conventional Anglicanism to early heretical Christianity. This twofold queering, both in Auden’s poetry and in his religious life, unfolds via the pages ahead.  

34 As Jacobs notes (92), “the Land of Unlikeness” derives from Book VII of Augustine’s Confessions: “Thou art my God, to Thee do I sigh night and day. Thee when I first knew, Thou liftedst me up, that I might see there was what I might see, and that I was not yet such as to see. And Thou didst beat back the weakness of my sight, streaming forth Thy beams of light upon me most strongly, and I trembled with love and awe: and I perceived myself to be far off from Thee, in the region of unlikeness” (114). As its sectional summary indicates, Book VII represents Augustine’s theological development at midstream, and thus as it most transitional: “Augustine’s thirty-first year; gradually extricated from his errors, but still with material conceptions of God…sees that the cause of sin lies in free-will, rejects the Manichean heresy, but cannot altogether embrace the doctrine of the Church; recovered from the belief in Astrology, but miserably perplexed about the origin of evil; is led to find in the Platonists the seeds of the doctrine of the Divinity of the Word, but not of His humiliation; hence he obtains clearer notions of God’s majesty, but, not knowing Christ to be the Mediator, remains estranged from Him; all his doubts removed by the study of Holy Scripture, especially St. Paul” (102). Given the transitional midpoint of “For the Time Being” in Auden’s sprawling career, the poem’s closing allusion to the transitional midpoint in Augustine’s trajectory is apposite.
Mary’s lullaby “heightens the consciousness of His existence in the flesh, and in this context the denial of anxiety in the Father further accents the Child’s humanity” (Kirsch Auden 47; emphasis added). Thus, Mary dualistically theologizes the Christ-Child’s “nature”: as an un-synthesized, undiluted, or unadulterated composite of immanent humanity and transcendent divinity, Jesus “in the flesh” may radically tip the scale of his own binary nature: “What will the flesh that I gave do for you, / Or my mother love, but tempt you from His will?” (For 98; emphasis added).

Significantly, this ascription of weakness to Christ’s humanity, and thus to Mary’s own “anxious” embodiment as the Incarnation’s maternal conduit, harbors a construal of the “Two Natures” doctrine of Christ. As Reinhold Seeberg shows, St. Ambrose had by the fifth century fortified Christ’s nature as “a two-fold substance (substantia)...both of divinity and of flesh”35:

The distinctio of the two natures or substances is to be sharply preserved...The immutability and immunity from death of the divine nature...as well as the completeness of the human nature with the “rational soul”...are guarded. Around the “immutable wisdom” has been thrown the “mantle of flesh”...[Ambrose] speaks of an emptying (exinanire) and a hiding (celare) of the divinity...without thereby attaining any greater lucidity, inasmuch as the form of God and the form of a servant are, nevertheless, alike regarded as belonging to the incarnate Being...But the two natures are now combined in one person: “The One is of two-formed and two-fold (biformis et geminaeque) nature, partaking of divinity and of the body...The Lord of majesty is said to have been crucified, because, partaking of both natures, i.e., the human and the divine, he endured the sufferings in the nature of man.” (Seeberg 256-7)

Mary’s lullaby dramatically inflects St. Ambrose’s terms for the utter paradox of Christ’s twofold nature—i.e. his divine immunity from death and, simultaneously, the “completeness of the human nature” through which (as Auden writes in “Friday’s Child”) Jesus suffers “in a public place / A death reserved for slaves” (Collected 510). While for Mary the Christ-Child certainly partakes “of both natures,” his anxiously corporeal distance from God the Father nonetheless renders him overly susceptible to humanity’s vulnerability, cruelty, and weakness.

35 Seeberg quotes here, as in the ensuing excerpt, from De fide ad Gratianum, de incarnations sacramento by St. Ambrose (Aurelius Ambrosius, c. 340 - 4 April 397), composed in A.D. 397.
Consider how Mary apprehensively “endanger[s]” Jesus simply with her physical
“watchfulness”; how her “tender” gaze may inculcate in him only “how to be afraid”; how her
conferral of organs, bones, and skin is tantamount to a profane breach with the very divinity
“hidden” beneath his “mantle of flesh” (Seeberg 256); how her motherly pedagogy terminates in
the viscera of sheer affect, through which she must “teach His Son to weep”; how the delicately-
swaddled Incarnate Word leads Mary, quite ironically, to close her lullaby by directing the
“human dreams” of His Son “to Heaven / Where no one need pray nor ever feel alone” (For 98);
and, evoking the taut proximity of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion in Milton’s “On the
Morning of Christ’s Nativity” (lines 151-3), how Mary asks “His Son” whether he has “[c]hosen
already” the death that “must be” his own and when he will “start on the Sorrowful Way” (98).
For Auden’s Mary, arguably, Christ’s humanity quite nearly overwhelms or cancels his divinity.

By augmenting Christ’s humanity to these poignant extents, Auden’s Mary theologizes
Jesus in a manner that strongly resembles core tenets of Arianism, the fourth-century heretical
challenge to dominant strains of Trinitarian Christology (whereby the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Spirit are distinct personages of the same monotheistic God) emanating from Alexandria,
Egypt. Because of its subversive charges against Trinitarian exegesis and revelation, Arianism
provoked both the Council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed in 325. In Christianity and Classical
Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine, a work Auden praised in a
review published in The New Republic on 25 September 1944,36 Charles Norris Cochrane writes:

Arius [AD 256-336] thought of his problem as one of “composition.”…to show how
God, the eternal and immutable, could enter into combination with nature, the world of
“flux,” without suffering degradation in respect of His essential attributes. This problem
he attempted to solve on characteristically classical lines. It may here be recalled that

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36 Cochrane’s book is still in print. Notably, its 2003 edition features on the back cover a blurb from Auden’s
original book review: “Since the appearance of the first edition in 1940, I have read this book many times, and my
conviction of its importance to the understanding not only of the epoch with which it is concerned, but also of our
own, has increased with each reading” (Auden “Augustus to Augustine” 33).
Aristotle, when faced with the same question, had argued that, while nature was everywhere in motion, God, not being in space and time, was therefore not in motion. From this he had drawn the logical inference that God could not be the author of nature as a whole, but only of the orderliness in nature…Arius, on the other hand, following the Neoplatonists, had produced in his *logos* a derivative deity which however, since it was subject to time, could only be described as *deus in fieri*. That is, he protected the substance of the Father but at the expense of that of the Son. In opposition to these conclusions, the actions of the [Nicene] fathers was to reaffirm the sense of a substantial or essential union of the divine and the human in the historical Jesus…This belief rested ultimately on the text: “the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us” [John 1:14]…the Master was in no sense a “creature,” “naturally” subject to time.37 (257-8)

Both Mendelson and Jacobs document Cochrane’s seminal impact on Auden’s religious aesthetics in the 1940s, and particularly on his drafting of “For the Time Being,”38 but neither scholar identifies a precise overlay between Arianism (as Cochrane delineates it) and the solemn estrangement of God the Father from Christ the Son that shapes Mary’s lullaby. I would conjecture a strong link between the passage from Cochrane quoted above and Auden’s (re)writing of the Virgin Mary. “What have you learned from the womb that bore you,” Mary inquires rhetorically, “But an anxiety your Father cannot feel?” 39 (For 98; emphasis added). If

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38 Mendelson shows that “For the Time Being” is indebted to Cochrane not only conceptually, but also via the poem’s phraseology: from the “warning to Joseph, ‘There is one World of Nature and one Life,’” which “adapts Cochrane’s report that for Christianity ‘there was but one world of experience and that common to all human beings on precisely the same terms’”; to “Auden’s Baconian Wise Man, who disciplines his intelligence with an ‘ascesis of the senses’” and thus “echoes Cochrane’s account of Plotinus’s ‘rigorous programme of ascesis…i.e. of sense-perception and positive knowledge’” (*Later* 184-7). Mendelson cites numerous other debts. Jacobs suggests that what Auden learned most from his rereading of Cochrane’s study “is that—in Augustinian terms—the relationship between the City of Man and the City of God is endlessly fraught and historically variable” (“Auden’s Theology” 176), a lesson that might draw us back to chapter three’s concluding arguments on Eliot, Kant, and Derrida.

39 I would indicate here how Mary’s sense of her own embodiment factors into the Arian anxiety she (believes she) confers on Christ. Auden intimates the orthodox teleology of the Incarnation via Gabriel, whose Annunciation to Mary centers on how she may typologically repair the sins of Eve: “What her negation wounded, may / Your affirmation heal today” (For 74). Moreover, Gabriel explains, “Love’s will requires your own, that in / The flesh whose love you do not know, / Love’s knowledge into flesh may grow” (74). Mary’s “knowledge” does not include the experience of carnal passion; she has not been objectified sexually and has not objectified another as such. As a vessel for divine fertility in the orthodox account, then, Mary’s body is ideal. Auden accordingly phrases Mary’s “insemination” in paradoxical terms: while “Love’s knowledge” is not rooted in the carnality of flesh, through Mary’s body such knowledge may nevertheless grow “into flesh” (74)—i.e. into Jesus Christ. Significantly, however, Mary’s immediate response to the Annunciation establishes the very textures of anxiety through which
God the Father is divinely—and thus completely—immune from the fleshy anxiety, suffering, and “Sorrowful Way” predestined for Christ the Son, then Auden’s Mary is an Arian heretic insofar as she protects “the substance of the Father…at the expense of that of the Son” (Cochrane 258; emphasis added). In Mary’s heretical view, that is, the Father is “unoriginated, unbegotten [double sic], without beginning,” whereas the Son “had a beginning, and was from a non-existent state created by the Father before the beginning of the world” (Seeberg 203). As a “derivative deity” (Cochrane 258), Arianism’s Christ is more creaturely than uncreated, more radically human (or immanently material) than abstractly divine (or transcendentally immaterial).

Through Mary’s lullaby, furthermore, Auden ups the heretical ante of Christ’s creaturely nature by deploying Kierkegaardian “anxiety,” which headlines Auden’s Pulitzer-Prize-winning 1946 work, The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue. If by 1946 Auden significantly widens his imaginative foray into anxiety and existentialist “dread,”40 in “For the Time Being” the Kierkegaardian concept at hand is figured far more compactly. The “anxiety” that God the Father

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40 Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb expertly traces in The Age of Anxiety a “[d]read for ‘man’ [that] derives from his inability to suppress the sense that he should have been otherwise, and his corresponding inability to articulate this sense derives from the fact that he is bound to express himself as he is and not as he should have been. In order to express this thought, which seems to break the bounds of articulate expression, Malin exploits that grammatical distinction between ‘I’ and ‘Me’…By making a grammatical distinction into an ontological one, Malin can separate the self into two distinct beings: the ‘pure I’ and the implicitly impure ‘Me.’ The self—which, as Kierkegaard explains in The Concept of Dread and even more forcefully in The Sickness unto Death—consists in nothing other than the relation between these two beings; it furthermore knows itself to be ‘absconded’ ([Auden Collected Poems] 463) and thus in dread only on the basis of this distinction….In Malin’s Kierkegaardian revision of the self-posting I as it was conceived by German Idealism, the ‘pure I’ does not simply posit itself, as if it were an infinite being that falls into finitude the moment it knows itself as something in particular; rather, the ‘pure I’ comes across a ready-made ‘Me’ whom it is constrained to justify and ‘greet’” (88).
“cannot feel” (For 98) is a suggestive metonymy for the experience of embodiment in Christian psychology, as per Kierkegaard’s definition of the human as a peculiarly dreadful “synthesis”:

That anxiety makes its appearance is the pivot upon which everything turns. Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit...Inasmuch as it is now present, it is in a sense a hostile power, for it constantly disturbs the relation between soul and body, a relation that indeed has persistence and yet does not have endurance, inasmuch as it first receives the latter by the spirit. On the other hand, spirit is a friendly power, since it is precisely that which constitutes the relation. What, then, is man’s relation to this ambiguous power? How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates to itself as anxiety. (Kierkegaard Anxiety 43-4)

Kierkegaard’s quasi-Trinitarian logic, which respectively substitutes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with the psychical, the physical, and the spiritual fields of “Man,” arguably informs the affective reasoning of Mary’s lullaby. There, in Kierkegaardian terms, Mary ascribes a reflexive anxiety to Jesus’s humanity, which emerges from the simultaneously “hostile” and “friendly” maneuvers of spirit as it mediates “soul and body.” Because God the Father cannot feel the anxious reflexivity entailed by human embodiment, Mary’s ascription situates Christ more so within Kierkegaard’s anthropological trinity than in orthodoxy’s theological Trinity.

Remarkably, by turning to the New Testament itself, we may pinpoint scriptural grounds both for the Arianism that steers Mary’s anxiety and for the Trinitarian orthodoxy of the Nicene Council: on the one hand, during the Festival of Dedication (Hanukkah) in Jerusalem, Christ states unequivocally: “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30), and thereafter, “the Father is in

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41 As The Concept of Anxiety belongs to Kierkegaard’s brilliant pseudonymous authorship, I should in principle refer to Vigilius Haufnienis’s definition of the human as a peculiarly dreadful ‘synthesis.’

42 Cf. Kierkegaard’s (or, pseudonymously, Anti-Climacus’s) The Sickness unto Death, which furthers this “anxious” point with tangled poise: “The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation’s relating to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity. In short a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two terms” (43).
me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38). Deemed blasphemous (John 10:31-39), these claims suggest a Trinitarian identity whereby the verbal “are” of the first passage and the prepositional “in” of the second connote the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, toward the end of his Crucifixion (at “about three o’clock”) Jesus cries out “‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46). Agonized psychologically, physically, and spiritually by despair, which is for Kierkegaard the linchpin of human consciousness in search of selfhood, Christ at this spectacular moment is humanly (or maternally) estranged from divinity (or paternity). Auden’s Mary sees the latter—Christ’s “Sorrowful Way”—as acutely plausible.

Significantly, the preponderance of heretical Christology at this crucial junction in “For the Time Being” resonates with Auden’s own heterodox assent to the Incarnation as an article of faith. If the embers of Arianism that flicker through Mary’s lullaby are any indication of Auden’s personal stake (as a believer) in Christianity’s unorthodox fibers, then we gain much by turning to “Heresies,” his 1966 review of E.R. Dodds’s study Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety:

As an Episcopalian, I do not believe that Christianity did triumph or has triumphed. Thus, while I consider the fourth-century victory of Christian doctrine over Neoplatonism, Manichaeism, Gnosticism, Mithraism, etc., to have been what school history books used to call “a good thing,” I consider the adoption of Christianity as the official state religion, backed by the coercive powers of the State, however desirable it may have seemed at the time, to have been a “bad,” that is to say, un-Christian thing. (41)

Here, under the heading of religion, Auden distinguishes subtly between ethics and politics. As a believer, he positions himself in an interminable gap between the perceived virtue of doctrinal streamlining in the fourth century, when the Nicene Council rejected subversive or otherwise fractious mysticisms; and the perceived vice of a coercively statist and imperial religion that

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43 “The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of those are you going to stone me?’ The Jews answered, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God’” (John 10:31-4).
44 “Is despair a merit or a defect? Purely dialectically it is both....The possibility of this sickness is man’s advantage over the beast, and it is an advantage which characterizes him quite otherwise than the upright posture, for it bespeaks the infinite erectness or loftiness of his being spirit...Despair is the imbalance in a relation of synthesis, in a relation which relates to itself...the possibility of the imbalance lies in the synthesis” (Sickness 44-5).
early orthodox Christianity would eventually become.\textsuperscript{45} Undoubtedly, via the antipluralism that informed its verdict on heretics and blasphemers, the Council demonstrates a basic inseparability of religious ethics and political power: its moral justification of doctrine, with which Auden concurs, predicates the very same religious imperialism to which Auden \textit{as a Christian} objects.

How then does Auden’s religious position \textit{between} ethics and politics inform his abiding concern with the body of Christ and the humanity it discloses? To answer this question, we must first observe how, by inhabiting this uneasy fissure between virtue and vice, Auden is disinclined to \textit{mend} the gap at hand with any secular ideology of bureaucratic management or any violently well-intentioned “neutrality.” For instance, in “The Massacre of the Innocents,” the oratorio’s penultimate division, Auden satirizes Herod the Great as a modern-secular-liberal administrator:

Why is it that in the end civilization always has to call in these professional tidiers to whom it is all one whether it be Pythagoras or a homicidal lunatic that they are instructed to exterminate?...I don’t want to be horrid. Why can’t they see that the notion of a finite God is absurd? ...I’ve worked like a slave. Ask anyone you like. I read all the official dispatches without skipping. I’ve taken elocution lessons. I’ve hardly ever taken bribes...I’ve tried to be good. I brush my teeth every night. I haven’t had sex for a month. I object. I’m a liberal. I want everyone to be happy. I wish I had never been born.\textsuperscript{46} (117)

Against secular-liberalism’s executive will to bridge or manage the radical gap that religion opens, and thus make “everyone” happy, Auden submits to the logic of an adamant \textit{double bind}, whereby religion is perpetually fractured by \textit{its own} counter-pressures of ethics and politics:

\textsuperscript{45}"The charge," writes Auden in the same review, “which may justly be brought against the Church is, not that it has been unpractical or apolitical, but that it has so often been all too political, all too ready to make shady deals with any temporal power which would advance what it believed to be its interests” (47).

\textsuperscript{46} On this passage, see Mendelson: “Herod states the plausible argument that rationality makes against revelation, and ends by wringing his hands over the necessary murder as he calls in the army to defend civilized values… [Auden] made Herod a well-meaning liberal reformer, dedicated to the task of bringing light to the barbarian darkness. Herod foresees the consequences of the Incarnation in the same way that any well-meaning rationalist perceives an eruption of absurd irrationality. He cannot imagine it as a manifestation of a universal absolute, only as an apotheosis of individual uniqueness…His conclusion that civilization must be saved even if this means sending in the army is the logical consequence of his argument, and the self-pitying of his final lines…is the inevitable effect of his confrontation with an absolute that he cannot understand but that his own idealism makes it impossible for him to ignore. Herod’s speech restates in dramatized form Auden’s argument that liberalism, which exposed the workings of power behind moral systems, had left itself without an answer to Hitler, who went a giant step further by dropping all pretense of morality and acknowledging power as his sole means and motive” (\textit{Later} 191-2).
the positive content of a proposition, what it asserts to be true, is never so clear as what it excludes as being false. Dogmatic theology, for example, came into being more to exclude heresy than to define orthodoxy, and one reason why theology must continue to be and grow is that the heresies of one age are never the same as the heresies of another.47 The Christian faith is always a scandal to the imagination and reason of the flesh, but the particular aspect which seems most scandalous depends upon the prevailing mentality of a period or a culture. (“Mystics” 51-2)

For Auden, religion is a dialectical process in history, whereby the ethics and politics of heterodoxy must one day replace orthodoxy’s strictures. The singular constant in this process, as Auden construes it, is “the human scale of the body”: “The body,” Mendelson notes, “was at the heart of Auden’s literary, ethical, and theological understanding of the world” (“The Body” 195).

Accordingly, when Auden exemplifies religion’s dialectical process, he focuses on the “scandal” of Christ’s humanity, which as Mary’s Arian lullaby shows is the crux of the oratorio:

to both the gnostics of the fourth century and the liberal humanists of the eighteenth, the Cross was an offense, but for quite different reasons. The gnostic said: “Christ was the Son of God, therefore He cannot have been physically crucified. The Crucifixion was an illusion.” The liberal humanist said: “Christ was physically crucified, therefore He cannot have been the Son of God. His claim was a delusion.” In our day, the stumbling block is again different…most Christians will find themselves in understanding sympathy with Simone Weil’s difficulty: “If the Gospels omitted all mention of Christ’s resurrection, faith would be easier for me. The Cross by itself suffices me.” (“Mystics” 52)

Weil’s representativeness for modern Christendom hinges on her view that the Resurrection is an impossible doctrine for the physical body—both Jesus’s and ours. In Kierkegaardian terms, the will to assent to such a doctrine forces one’s human understanding to take sheer “offense” at theology’s monstrous paradox48 (Fragments 37-54). If the Crucifixion, unlike the Resurrection,

47 Cf. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: “The great epochs of our life are the occasions when we gain the courage to rebaptize [sic] our evil qualities as our best qualities” (97).
48 In Philosophical Fragments, Kierkegaard (via the pseudonym Johannes Climacus) writes in auto-deconstructive terms that “if a human being is to come truly to know something about the unknown (the god), he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. The understanding cannot come to know this by itself (since, as we have seen, it is a contradiction); if it is going to come to know this, it must come to know this from the god, and if it does come to know this, it cannot understand this and consequently cannot come to know this, for how could it understand the absolutely different?... At this point we seem to stand at a paradox” (46); consequently, “[w]hen the understanding wants to have pity upon the paradox and assist it to an explanation, the paradox does not put up with that but considers it appropriate for the understanding to do that, for is that not what
“suffices” today for one’s sensible faith, this is because “the Gospel contains a conception of human life, not a theology”\(^{49}\) (Weil qtd. in Cameron 110). Ostensibly irreligious, Weil’s “offended” stance on the Gospel in fact dovetails with Auden’s faith in the Resurrection as a doctrine that “asserts the sacred importance of the body”\(^{50}\) in *worldly human life* ("Mystics" 68).

Pursuing further Auden’s own heterodox beliefs, his Arian inflection of Mary’s lullaby, and his perspectives in “Heresies,” I see in the representativeness he ascribes to Simone Weil’s “difficulty” with the Resurrection an indirect—even “secular”—validation of his own *materialist* theology of the body. As Jacobs and Kirsch show, the arc of Auden’s theological stance widened considerably during his literary career, deviating from orthodox logic on God the Father to a far more heterodox—in essence pre-Nicene—“sense” of the Trinity’s substance(s) and character(s):

Anne Fremantle [a British-born scholar of religion] reported having intense theological debates with him—especially about *Patripassianism, the belief that the Father shared in the sufferings of the Son on the Cross*\(^{50}\)—in 1931, when Auden almost certainly had no philosophers are for—to make supernatural things ordinary and banal?...So it is with offense. Everything it says about the paradox it has learned from the paradox, even though, making use of an acoustical illusion, it insists that it itself has originated the paradox” (53). Cf. two passages from “The Meditation of Simeon,” in “For the Time Being”: “Before the Infinite could manifest Itself in the finite, it was necessary that man should first have reached that point along his road to Knowledge where, just as it rises from the swamps of Confusion onto the sunny slopes of Objectivity, it forks in opposite directions towards the One and the Many; where, therefore, in order to proceed at all, he must decide which is Real and which only Appearance, yet at the same time cannot escape the knowledge that his choice is arbitrary and subjective” (For 106-7); “The Word could not be made Flesh until men had reached a state of absolute contradiction between clarity and despair in which they would have no choice but either to accept absolutely or to reject absolutely, yet in their choice there should be no element of luck, for they would be fully conscious of what they were accepting or rejecting” (108).

\(^{49}\) Sharon Cameron argues that, “although God is central to Weil’s practice of attention (as its object or its point) doctrine doesn’t matter to her”; Weil in fact explicitly repudiated “Christian dogma as at once antagonistic to individual spiritual practice and bound to exclusions that render any incarnation of Christianity impossible” (110).

\(^{50}\) A Christian heresy from the third century, Patripassianism was the more influential form of “Monarchianism,” which generally “made an effort to reconcile Monotheism...with the divinity of Christ without resort to the expedient of the ‘second God’” hypothesis (Seeberg 163). Of “Patripassian Monarchianism,” Seeberg writes that the term “may be traced to [Quintus Septimius Florens] Tertullian [c. 160 AD – c. 225],” who lobbied against the heresy. Patripassianism’s premise is that “he who is called Father and Son is one and the same, not one from the other, but he from himself, called by name Father and Son according to the figure of the times...not concealing from those who approach him that he is the Father” (qt. in Seeberg 166). Praxeas of Asia Minor (whose dates are uncertain, but who is thought to have died early in the third century) underscores this oneness and sameness while emphasizing on the consistency of God’s suffering: “the Father was born and the Father suffered. Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the Father born, the Father suffering, God himself, the omnipotent Lord” (qt. in Seeberg 167). With Sabellius [third century; dates uncertain], Patripassianism’s premise achieves greater subtlety than Praxeas’s “oneness” thesis: “He himself is the Father; he himself is the Son; he himself is the Holy Spirit...there are three names in one object (hypostasis), either as in man, body and soul and spirit” (qt. in Seeberg 168). The Roman
religious beliefs. Fremantle, then a committed Anglican, ‘passionately believed’ that the Father did indeed so suffer; but Auden reminded her that the first of the Articles of Religion in the Book of Common Prayer affirms that God is ‘without body, parts, or passions.’ Fremantle commented, ‘Wystan [was] always more theoretically sound than I.’ If such debates were for Auden a kind of intellectual game, it is noteworthy that he found the game worth playing. He seems to have thought it desirable to have an articulate theology even when he had no beliefs or experiences to which theology needed to correspond. (Jacobs “Auden’s Theology” 170; emphasis added)

Before his (re)conversion to Anglicanism in 1940, then, Auden had assumed a “playful” yet deeply learned perspective on the gravity of religious orthodoxy: Fremantle may hold fast to the Patripassian “belief that the Father shared in the sufferings of the Son on the Cross,” but in Auden’s view the degree to which this belief renders her “a committed Anglican” is questionable; for, if orthodoxy indeed consolidates the Anglicanism to which one lays claim, then Fremantle’s standpoint is deviant. Auden thus out-theologizes even a scholar of religion.

Taking this “intellectual game” as a locus for the continuum of Auden’s theology, we may reconsider Arianism’s significance in “For the Time Being,” which was composed roughly ten years after Auden had corrected Fremantle from his then nonreligious position. Mary’s lullaby, I argue above, risks overly humanizing Christ by ascribing to him a Kierkegaardian anxiety that God the Father—as a Revelation “without being”—can neither feel nor experience. The heresy Mary entertains is Christ’s status as a derivative creature whose immanent humanness may diminish, if not excise, his transcendent divinity. Arguably, the Arian dynamics of Mary’s lullaby represent more for Auden than an aesthetic romp through Christianity’s heretical vistas. Instead of aesthetic playfulness, that is, Mary’s Arianism may symbolize a

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bishop Callistus [d. 223] inflected Sabellius’s view: “For that which is seen, which is the man, this is the Son; but the Spirit dwelling in the Son, this is the Father…and the Father suffered with the Son” (qtd. in Seeberg 168).

51 See Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being. As David Tracy notes in his “Foreword” to the English translation: “Reason, for Marion, is capable of thinking Being. But reason is not capable of iconically disclosing God, except within the confines of Being. For Marion, true theology, focused iconically on God’s excessive self-revelation as Love, needs to abandon all the metaphysics of the subject which have defined modernity. Genuine theology needs to abandon as well the onto-theological horizon which may confine even Thomas Aquinas to understand God in terms of ‘Being.’…True theology needs, therefore, ‘God without Being.’ Theology needs to cease being modern theology in order to become again theology” (xiii-xiv).
turning point in the complex grid of Auden’s beliefs: “Later in his life,” Kirsch notes in *Auden and Christianity*, “Auden changed his mind about the Father’s remoteness and adopted the *Patripassion* [sic] heresy, which states that the Father shared Christ’s human anxiety and grief” (47; emphasis added). Enacting his view that “theology must continue to be and grow” because “the heresies of one age are never the same as the heresies of another” (“Mystics” 52), Auden eventually assumes Fremantle’s heretical stance, against which he had leveled the provisos of Anglican orthodoxy. In miniature, then, the arc of Auden’s theology—which begins with the conformist Book of Common Prayer and ends with the heretical Patripassianism of the third century—embodies the dialectical process of religion that Auden explores in “The Protestant Mystics.” Through this process, Mary’s Arianism represents a luminous midpoint at which Christ is *more creaturely* than divine, while the uncreated Father is *transcendently nonhuman* and abstracted from (the Son’s) human suffering. Auden’s ensuing step from Arianism to Patripassianism, which humanizes God the Father through the creaturely suffering of Christ the Son, is a corollary of his increasingly materialist worldview: now, though uncreated and nonhuman, God still *feels, experiences*, and even *embodies* the human creature’s suffering and its Kierkegaardian anxiety.

The gravity that draws Auden to the heretical enigma of Patripassianism uncovers an immaterial divinity that is *haunted from within* by the greater Trinity’s incarnate, material, and creaturely experience of humanness: Christ (with the Holy Spirit mysteriously in tow as conveyor) descends, suffers humanly beyond the threshold of abjection, and ascends, relaying thereby a traumatic memory of the flesh that is provocatively *inherited* by the fleshless Father. Riffing on Eric Santner’s *On Creaturely Life*, to which I shall return when discussing “The Sea and the Mirror,” one might say that Auden’s Patripassianism ensures that the immortal Holy
Trinity *en masse* experiences and *for all eternity survives* “the dimension of [Pauline] law that
*undeadens*, renders subjects creaturely (in Paul’s terms, binds them to decay, makes them carnal
in an emphatic sense)”\(^52\) (127). In other words, the Incarnation “subjects” divinity to *carnality*—
which it survives as divine, but from whose creaturely *weakness* it cannot recover.\(^53\)

For the Trinity (or so I imagine—not pretending to speak on behalf of any Trinitarian
member), this Patripassian survival unfolds as a traumatic yet welcome burden: by fleshing out
the fleshless, the creaturely trace of humanity within divinity thaws the latter’s erstwhile-icy
transcendence, yielding a radically different kind of Trinity. Instead of a “harmonious and
balanced exchange between God and his creation,” this *wounded* Trinity discloses “a radical
antagonism at the very heart of divinity” (Žižek “Dialectical Clarity” 253). The heretical line that
so captivates Auden illustrates that there is no “trinity in/of God-in-itself, independently of God’s
relation to his creation, to spatiotemporal reality”; rather, the forever-wounded Trinity is

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\(^{52}\) This point may reap further rewards from Santner’s superb work on the “uncanny proximity” that ripples “the
animal/human divide” in modern philosophy. Specifically, à la my unavoidable pun on *Incarnation* in the next
sentence of the main text, I would interpolate “divinity” into the “creaturely” logic of “animal” and “human” that
Santner unfurls here: “Agamben points to the ways Heidegger’s very insistence on the radical ontological distinction
between animal and human life—one conceived, precisely, in opposition to Rilke’s still ‘metaphysical’
understanding of the animal/human divide—brings the two kinds of life into uncanny proximity, one duly noted by
Heidegger himself. That is to say, for Heidegger man’s freedom and destiny as ‘world-forming’ include a
dimension—I am tempted to say a traumatic dimension—that brings him into proximity to the animal, that renders
him, in a certain sense, creaturely” (10). Keeping in mind Santner’s ensuing collocation of Heidegger and St. Paul,
one is apt to inquire how far afield divinity might “really” be from existence’s creaturely dimension if the
human/animal divide has already trembled via its own “world-forming” freedom: “one of the points at which this
proximity begins to register in Heidegger’s argument is where he refers to the Pauline conception of a longing for
redemption immanent in creaturely life itself, in the haunting vision of creation groaning in travail (Romans 8:18-
22). Paul’s words suggest to Heidegger that the ‘animal's poverty in the world [is] a problem intrinsic to animality
itself” …the animal “finds itself essentially exposed to something other than itself, something that can indeed never
be manifest to the animal either as a being or as a non-being. But precisely such exposure, writes Heidegger,
‘brings an essential disruption [wesenhaft Erschütterung] into the essence of the animal’” (10).

\(^{53}\) I deploy “weakness” here in the theological sense developed by John Caputo in *The Weakness of God*: “God’s
transcendence is the power of a spirit, not of the sword. The transcendence of God is not at odds with the weak force
of God; it *is* the weak force of God. Otherwise it would not be transcendence of God but transcendence of the world,
which is a strong force, one with a real army and the real power to enforce its word…If it is true that we can hardly
resist God’s promise, it is not less true that this irresistible force is weak—for on our premise, God can only
promise. The weak force of God is to lay *claim* upon us—*uns in Anspruch nehmen*, as Heidegger would say—but
not the way a sovereign power in the domain of being invades and then lays claim to territory, overpowers its native
population and plants a foreign flag, but in the way of a summons that calls and provokes, an appeal that incites or
invites us…The name of God harbors an unconditional appeal without the sovereign force to enforce it” (38).
of God-for-ourselves, the way God relates to his ‘household,’ incarnates himself in the mortal body of Christ visible and palpable to us, and then, after dying, rises again as the Holy Spirit, as the spirit of love between believers, i.e., as a collection of believers…what was going on in the earthly reality of Palestine two thousand years ago was a process in the very heart of God himself; there was (and is) no higher reality backing it up. (253-4)

For the heretical Auden, I gather, Slavoj Žižek’s contention here would prove eminently agreeable. By shifting our philosophical attention from an aloof divinity-in-itself to an engaged divinity-for-ourselves, theology in its Christian vector becomes a worldly or even secularly religious ‘matter,’ which is not tantamount to irreligious profanity or post-religious spirituality. A secularly-religious outlook in fact signifies a this-worldly theology that pivots on corporeality in “deliberate opposition to a widespread tendency in Christian thought to treat the body as inherently fallen” (Mendelson “The Body” 196). Auden, as Mendelson specifies, “treats [the body] as a promise of salvation” (196; emphasis added): “‘But if / Sins can be forgiven, if bodies rise from the dead’—the two promises of Christianity—then the body is crucial to both those promises” (199). Accordingly, “those promises” are at once owed to and owned by the body.55

Given the dialectics of orthodoxy and heterodoxy that fissure religion’s history in “The Protestant Mystics” and “Heresies,” Auden’s sharp emphasis on bodies that matter not only explains his Patripassian distaste for those mystical forces of the third century that nearly metamorphosed Christianity “into Gnosticism”56 (“Heresies” 43). More suggestively, as I posit

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52 These are among the closing lines of “In Praise of Limestone” (Collected 415).
54 In my view, Auden’s subjection of Trinitarian orthodoxy to the heresy of creaturely Patipassianism affords a striking counterpoint to any sense of antifeminism or misogyny one might ascribe to Mary’s Arian lullaby in “At the Manger” (recall footnote 33). For, clearly, it is by virtue of Mary’s womanly flesh that the Trinity is queered. There is no radical queerness in or queering of the Trinity without the flesh by which divinity is heretically mothered. First and foremost, then, “those promises” to which Mendelson alludes are owed to and owned by Mary’s body, or metonymically by mothers’ bodies. Thus, in Auden’s heretical scheme, the hierarchic gendering of Mary’s lullaby comes undone through the creaturely Patripassianism that shapes For the Time Being as an intra-textual whole.
55 “Even during the prosperous years of the Antonine peace [96 AD -192 AD], radically dualistic theories which were neither Platonic nor Christian began to be propounded and their influence grew stronger as the political and economic conditions in the Empire grew worse. Some held that the Cosmos had been created either by an Evil Spirit, or by an ignorant one, or by ‘bodiless intelligences who became bored with contemplating God and turned to the inferior’ [Auden is quoting here as elsewhere in this excerpt from Dodd’s Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety, the book under review in ‘Heresies’]; others concluded that it had somehow or other fallen into the power
below, Auden’s corporeal-ism also elucidates his remarkable attraction to the Incarnation and ultimately to Patripassianism as doctrines that are, in his stirring estimation, *immanently queer.*

In theoretical terms, to be sure, there is a deep-seated resonance between queerness and heresy, which persists on an etymological level: “queer: ORIGIN early 16th cent.: considered to be from German *quer* ‘oblique, perverse,’ but the origin is doubtful” (OED); “heresy: ORIGIN Middle English: from Old French *heresie,* based on Latin *haeresis,* from Greek *hairesis* ‘choice’ (in ecclesiastical Greek ‘heretical sect’), from *haireomai* ‘choose’” (OED). Although queerness as sexuality may not be a veritable “choice,” all heresies are necessarily “oblique,” “perverse,” and thus “queer,” particularly in relation to reigning orthodoxies by which they are curbed. Likewise, if hetero-normativity prevails as cultural orthodoxy, then queerness in any of its manifestations is tantamount to *an iteration* of heresy: whether subtly or boldly, queerness’s obliquity and perversity deviate from the norm, destabilize orthodox justifications of the norm’s primacy or “given-ness,” and reframe the norm as a discursively *particular* life-world that is arbitrary, contestable, and resistible. “But there is no guarantee,” to cite a seminal caveat on how (not) to queer orthodoxies, “that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion” (Butler *Bodies* 231). Indeed, vis-à-vis Auden’s point on the historical dialectics that *relativize* heresy and orthodox throughout a religion’s earthly career, the heretical streak of queerness is governed by “*the weakness in the norm*” (Butler 237) in precisely the same way that Auden’s Patripassianism is governed by “*the weakness of God*” (Caputo 38). In both cases, the norm and God are subject to “rearticulation” (Butler 237), rather than to perpetual subversion.

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of star-demons. *The incarnation of the human soul in a fleshy body, living and dying on earth, was felt by many to be a curse not a blessing,* and accounted for as being either ‘the punishment for an earlier sin committed in Heaven, or the result of a false choice made by the soul itself.’ Consequently, to an increasing number the body became an object of disgust and resentment. ‘Plotinus appeared ashamed of having a body at all; St. Anthony blushed every time he had to eat or satisfy any other bodily function.’ Among some Christians—the Pagans seem to have been less afflicted—it was fornication, not pride, which came more and more to be regarded as the archetypal sin, and violent mortification of the flesh as the only road to salvation” (Auden “Heresies” 42-3; emphasis added).
As the biographical contexts of *For the Time Being* (i.e. both poems) indicate, the entanglements of theological heresy and queer sexuality were most acute for Auden in the early 1940s. In particular, a letter Auden wrote to his life-partner Chester Kallman on Christmas Day, 1941, three years before the publication of *For the Time Being*, remains a vital companion piece to many of the works Auden composed during his first decade in America. The letter, which unfurls as an anaphoric verse epistle, deftly synthesizes Auden’s emotional, erotic, theological, and camp responses to Kallman’s confession of sexual infidelity. Of all the epistolary verses reproduced in Kirsch’s critical edition of “The Sea and the Mirror,” three function in my view as indispensable subtexts for any study of queerness and religious heresy in “For the Time Being”:

> Because, suffering on your account the torments of sexual jealousy, I have had a glimpse of the infinite vileness of masculine conceit;  
> As this morning, I think of Joseph, I think of you.

> Because mothers have much to do with your queerness and mine, because we have both lost ours, and because Mary is a camp name;  
> As this morning I think of Mary, I think of you.

> Because in the eyes of our bohemian friends our relationship is absurd;  
> As this morning I think of the Paradox of the Incarnation, I think of you.  
> (Kirsch “Introduction” *Sea* xvii).

Unfortunately, Kirsch makes only contextual remarks on the letter’s significance for the poetry Auden was conceiving and drafting in 1941. “This remarkable letter is an elegy,” Kirsch rightly notes: “Auden and Kallman remained intimate friends for the rest of their lives and often lived together, but the relationship became more that of parent and child” (xvii). Likewise, in *Auden and Christianity*, Kirsch briskly qualifies the verse epistle as a “private and confessional” blend “of Auden’s homosexuality and his Christian faith,” which “draws upon a tradition of the intimate combination of religious and erotic feeling in medieval and Renaissance poetry” (25). For his part, Mendelson also diminishes the letter’s exegetical bearing on “For the Time Being.”
After reproducing the epistle’s text in full, Mendelson argues that “[n]one of [the letter’s content] is visible in the oratorio itself, which makes a great point of retelling the Christmas story in the language and setting of a contemporary public world known to everyone” (*Later* 183).

By minimizing the letter’s considerable import for the style and substance of Auden’s Christmas oratorio, Kirsch and Mendelson overlook echoes between the letter’s intimation of tormented “sexual jealousy” and key lines from “The Temptation of St. Joseph”: “Where are you, Father, where?”, Joseph asks dolefully, having been “Caught in the jealous trap / Of an empty house” where he sits “alone in the dark” and hears “Everything, everything”: “The drip of the bathroom tap, / The creak of the sofa spring, / The wind in the air-shaft” (*For* 78). These drab details “Make the same remark / Stupidly, stupidly / Over and over again” (78), leading him to ask the Lord selfishly: “Father, what have I done? / Answer me, Father, how / Can I answer the tactless wall” or, yet more exigently, “the pompous furniture now?” (79). Against the maternal sorrows that structure Mary’s heretical lullaby and her initial response to Gabriel in “The Annunciation” (where her flesh paradoxically rejoices “in terror and fire” before the Word of the Lord [74]), Joseph’s “jealous trap” and banal neuroses in “an empty house” illustrate “the infinite vileness of masculine conceit” that we find in Auden’s verse epistle to Kallman.

Moreover, despite emphasizing the “personal meaning” Auden attached to the oratorio by dedicating it to the memory of his “pious mother” (Mendelson 182)—“In Memoriam / Constance Rosalie Auden / 1870-1941” (*For* 61)—Mendelson does not intertwine Auden’s dedication with the letter’s musings on motherhood, queerness, and the “camp name” of Mary. “With *this* Mary at the center,” Caserio suggests in his account of Auden’s epistle to Kallman, “all Christmas becomes Christian High Camp” (100; emphasis added). “Mary” is a camp name in queer subculture, a name for queerness and for queers who are *exceptionally* queer, which enables us to
read Joseph and Mary as “the gay Jewish couple” (103). As such, “Mary” necessarily signifies a homosexual male even as she signifies the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception, and the Incarnation. For Caserio, the allegory embedded in Auden’s verse epistle allows us to reread “For the Time Being” through such soap-operatic textures:

Because Auden recently had discovered Kallman’s infidelity, Auden identifies with Joseph, who represents jealous male “vileness” and “conceit” at the discovery that his Mary has had intercourse elsewhere. He identifies with Herod, too, because Herod, jealous like Joseph, wants to kill whoever threatens devotion to him…Auden also identifies his marriage to Kallman with “the Holy Family” (“because you are to me emotionally a mother, physically a father, and intellectually a son” [a passage from the letter that I have not reproduced above]) and with the Paradox of the Incarnation (“because in the eyes of our [bohemian] friends our relationship is absurd”). Since in the context of Auden’s allegory, the Incarnation, whereby god becomes man, also sounds like a literalizing of gay awe at the advent of male beauty (“He’s divine!”), perhaps it’s not surprising that in Auden’s fantasia even the shepherds at the crèche turn out to be gay sailors and rough trade. (100-1)

Deploying Auden’s epistle as an allegorical Rosetta stone, Caserio decodes the Nativity’s main players in “For the Time Being” largely at the expense of the poem’s other master-text: Christianity’s orthodoxies and heterodoxies throughout the centuries. If we opt to merge Caserio’s secular allegory of queer camp with Christianity’s sacred allegory of religious doctrine, then we in fact up the heretical ante of Auden’s core subject: the Incarnation.

Specifically, by reading Auden’s epistle into “For the Time Being,” we are drawn to reconsider Mary through the multiple registers of her “identity”: she is simultaneously the Virgin Mary of Christian orthodoxy, Auden’s and Kallman’s mothers (who “have much to do” with their sons’ queerness); the homosexual male of queer camp; and the adulterous Kallman in contradistinction to Auden-as-Joseph. Once sufficiently blurred, Mary’s allegorical “identity” destabilizes the Incarnation’s significance, reflecting Auden’s own heretical passage from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer to Arianism to Patrispianism: “Because in the eyes of our bohemian friends our relationship is absurd; / As this morning I think of the Paradox of the
Incarnation, I think of you.” Here, Auden’s reasoning is beholden to the synchronicity of Mary’s holiness, her campy queerness, her extramarital infidelity, and in metonymic terms, her motherhood of gay men: queer life-partnership in 1940s New York is as “absurd” as “the Paradox of the Incarnation,” through which Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Lord God Himself “pass” through queerest of heresies.57 Perhaps most blasphemously, as queer sons of religiously camp mothers, Auden and Kallman are in some profane way Incarnate Words unto themselves.

In each of Auden’s verse paragraphs, as we have seen, he re-signifies the Nativity story’s figures, events, and concepts according to psychological impressions of Kallman’s betrayal; addressed specifically to Kallman, these psychological referents transform the Nativity story into an allegory of intense personal suffering and recollection. The refrain “I think of you” identifies Kallman with the Nativity’s individual characters and ideas, each of which is associated with Auden’s subjective response: “the torments of sexual jealousy” and “the infinite vileness of masculine conceit” are incorporated into the allegory of Auden-as-Joseph, which figures Kallman as Mary who “has had intercourse elsewhere” (Caserio 100); the Virgin Mary bonds allegorically with mothers of homosexual men, an attachment that queers the Incarnation itself by further destabilizing Christ’s allegorical identity; lastly, the Incarnation’s paradox of divinity manifested in humanity figures for Auden as the heretical substance of his “absurd” relationship with Kallman. His letter thus functions as an unsparing index for the Incarnation’s queerness.

57 Cf. “Queering God in Relationships: Trinitarians and God the Orgy” in Atlhaus-Reid, The Queer God: “If we wanted to reflect on a second coming of Christ, we should need to start by acknowledging that the second coming of the divinity is a sexual coming and a sexual kenosis [on which more in ensuing paragraphs]. Theology has conceived God in history as a relationship (a community, for instance) expressed in the Trinitarian metaphor. That relationship has been politicised, culturalised [sic], and made the centre of gender reflections in Feminist Theologies. However, more reflection is needed to sexualise the Trinity, in order to understand our kenotic existence not only as a sexual one but as a dissident one. The task of Queer Theology is precisely to deepen this reflection on the sexual relationship manifested in the Trinity and to consider how God in the Trinity may come out in a relationship outside heterosexuality. The queering of the Trinity is simply the following: How might the Trinity lead us into the kenosis of heterosexual practices, within justice but outside the law?” (46).
Taken as a rubric or pre-text, Auden’s letter is a suggestive blueprint for the queer theology we find in many of the poems from his American phase: it re-signifies scriptural narratives and their according doctrines via heterodox desires, therein marking the body and its experiences as tools for exegesis.\(^{58}\) In this way, Auden’s theological imagination, particularly for its grasp of the Incarnation, is aligned with certain modes of exegesis developed by Marcella Althaus-Reid in *The Queer God*, a work I discuss at length in chapter two. Althaus-Reid studies the Incarnation as “the act of kenosis of God in Jesus (that self-emptiness of God’s power, amongst other attributes, in order to become human)” (37). By situating the immaterial or transcendent within the corporeal, kenosis, as Althaus-Reid explains it, forces theology to think “beyond the God-Father in Jesus” and to understand the Incarnation as an event which generates, above all, a vulnerable God figure (37). Althaus-Reid extends this reading of kenosis in the subsection “Mono-loving”: in traditional exegesis, the term pertains to “God’s voluntary letting go of Godself in Christ,” a move from Being to being that complicates “the way the two natures of the divine and the human can interrelate with each other” (55). Althaus-Reid queers this doctrine by arguing that the relinquishing of Godself is tantamount to the Lord being “consumed by an inner desire for submission” to the flesh (65). Queering the Incarnation thus differentiates *without antagonizing* flesh and spirit. As mutually-constitutive opposites, that is, flesh and spirit possess interchangeable desires for mastery and submission: “The dream which gave birth to Jesus was primarily a desire to make of the master a host, and of the host, a master\(^ {59}\)” (64).

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\(^{58}\) In *The Queer God*, Althaus-Reid persuasively states that traditionally, “theological bodies have usually been bodies without flesh, without bones or brains, bodies without nervous systems or blood – and, we may add, bodies without menstruation or sweat or without malnutrition and bodies without sexual relationships” (114). In the letter, the centrality of Auden’s own body, in all of its desirous and emotional states, conforms to the reconstructive agenda set out in Althaus-Reid’s discussion of queer theology.

\(^{59}\) Further on in *The Queer God*, Althaus-Reid pursues this line of thought in a way that tips the scale to grant embodied experience a level of meaning it has been denied in traditional hetero-normative theology: “For the Trinity to be left at the gate means true kenosis,” she writes, “a kenosis where God does not grant Godself privilege and thus discovers the meaning of incarnation” (75).
Althaus-Reid’s interpretation of kenosis provides a further template through which to understand Auden’s letter to Kallman, both on its own terms and as an allegorical pre-text for the overtly incarnational “For the Time Being.” The concept of God incarnate, emptied of Godself to privilege the mortality of the human body, underwrites the form of identification in Auden’s epistle: there, “the Paradox of the Incarnation” is not contemplated strictly on “its own terms,” but rather (or also) on the terms of the poet’s suffering and sorrowful relationship. By emptying Godself from Jesus, the Incarnation allows Auden to infuse the Son with meanings pertinent to homoerotic desire, love, and betrayal. Significantly, then, Althaus-Reid’s rethinking of kenosis may function as a theoretical pre-text for Auden’s epistle, which functions in its own right as an allegorical pre-text to “For the Time Being”; this sexual-textual chain chiefly informs Auden’s rewriting of Mary, whose wider role in the oratorio recasts the association that Auden made, in his letter to Kallman, between the Immaculate Conception and the mothers of queers. An upshot of this allegorical chain is undoubtedly the association of Christ—*qua* the materiality of the immaterial—with Auden’s and Kallman’s relationship and with queer desire in general.

Given the supple heterodoxy—or corporeal-ism—that underwrites the poetics of Auden’s theology in “For the Time Being,” one is perhaps obliged to rethink Hecht’s general claim that the oratorio is categorically “religious,” insofar as it “enjoys the advantage of its Biblical narrative background, which gives to it a meaningful sequence of events” (244). “For the Time Being” certainly does bank on this narrative background, but as I have argued, the poem’s heretical interior lures us deeper than we might expect into a world of embodied experience—a domain for which the term “religion” has traditionally proved too otherworldly. For Auden, theological systems are oriented firmly toward *the time being*, or the world at hand:

> In the meantime
> There are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair,
Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem
From insignificance. The happy morning is over,
The night of agony still to come; the time is noon:
When the Spirit must practice his scales of rejoicing
God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph. (For 124)

In a skillful gloss on this passage, Mendelson observes both the subtle “comedy of the narrator’s
disillusionment” with otherworldliness and Auden’s strategy of closing the oratorio with “a
profound evocation of the ordinary difficulty of faith in a world where the Christmas decorations
have been put back in their boxes (‘some have got broken’)” (193). The poem ends, he notes,
“with neither dread nor hope, looking instead toward the ordinary world from which vision and
intensity have been withdrawn” (193). Thus, because “the time is noon” and life goes on, there
are banking deadlines to meet, tasks of maintenance to perform, and assignments to complete. In
this noontime world, religion’s immanent value is to “redeem” the human engine from its
backsliding into an anxious void of “insignificance”; and yet, when spirited upward through
“scales of rejoicing,” “the world” as such retains a “triumph” all its own. For Auden, that is, God
has no interest in coveting the glory of a world in which He partakes. In turn, “the Perfect
Religious State” Caserio sees Auden encapsulating in “The Meditation of Simeon” (102) comes
at least halfway undone by the poem’s conclusion. Following Auden’s dialectics of orthodoxy
and heresy, the Religious City of Divinity is always subject to the Secular City of Humanity, and
vice versa. As Auden implies in “The Flight into Egypt” through Joseph’s allusion to For the
Time Being’s Shakespearean commentary—“Mirror, let us pass through the glass / No authority
can pass” (120)—this logic of mutual subjection certainly extends to “The Sea and the Mirror.”

60 See Eliot, The Waste Land, section III, “The Fire Sermon”: “At the violet hour, when the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting” (lines 215-17).
“Art opens the fishiest eye / To the Flesh and the Devil” (*For 8*):

Caliban’s Carnality between Aesthetic and Religious States in “The Sea and the Mirror”

In its “Preface (*The Stage Manager to the Critics*),” “The Sea and the Mirror” offers complex responses to Joseph’s plea, relayed during the Holy Family’s flight from Herod, for the “Mirror” to allow him, Mary, and Jesus to “pass through the glass / No authority can pass.”

Hinging on Joseph’s appeal to the “Mirror” and his sense of a political “authority” not held by the exiled Holy Family, the Preface poses questions that will haunt “The Sea and the Mirror”:

O what authority gives
Existence its surprise?
Science is happy to answer
That the ghosts who haunt our lives
Are handy with mirrors and wire,
That song and sugar and fire,
Courage and come-hither eyes
Have a genius for taking pains.
But how does one think up a habit?
Our wonder, our terror remains. (7-8)

Embedded in a ten-line stanza, which Auden constructs through an evenly-divided yet irregular rhyme scheme (*abcaddbefe*), the Stage Manager’s questions and answers complicate the very stakes of Joseph’s plea. Whereas in “For the Time Being,” the Holy Family flees from an “authority” that is chiefly political (recall Auden’s satire of Herod as a modern-secular-liberal administrator), in “The Sea and the Mirror” “authority” pertains instantly to “Existence” and its existential air of “surprise,” “wonder,” and “terror”; notably, as affects that crisscross the threshold between secularity and religiosity, these nouns extend the oratorio’s theological focus on embodied anxiety, which Auden inflects through Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety* and its “anthropological trinity.” In the commentary’s Preface, more specifically, surprise, wonder, and terror enlist anxiety as the latter ventures to “pass” with the Holy Family from the equivocal texts of religious Epiphany and Revelation through the glassy aesthetic plane of the “Mirror.”
Significantly, in the oratorio’s final movement, the mundane secularity of “noontime” not only prefigures the (by turns) surprised, wondrous, and terrified reflections to which anxiety is privy in the “Mirror” of Auden’s Shakespearean commentary; this secular poetics of “noontime” also anticipates the Stage Manager’s recourse to “Science” for a possible answer to his own existential query on “authority.” Drawing the Holy Family behind the surface of the “Mirror” through which they would pass, that is, the Stage Manager entertains empiricism’s resolve to unveil the supernatural as smoke and mirrors: “the ghosts who haunt our lives,” including perhaps the Holy Ghost of Trinitarian Christology, “Are handy with mirrors and [with the] wire” that allows us to frame and suspend the reflecting glass upon our walls. In other words, “passing” without “authority” from “For the Time Being” to “The Sea and the Mirror” entails a rigorous “philosophy of reflection” (Gasché 13-54) whose canvass is ample enough to address at once the objectivities of science and the subjectivities of existentialism, in which the gap “Between Shall-I and I-Will” caves into “The lion’s mouth whose hunger / No metaphors can fill” (For 8). As indicated above by my citation of Rodolphe Gasché’s study, The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection, Auden’s logic in this stanza pivots on a concerted breakthrough toward radical otherness (with respect to the philosophical concept—of the concept)…within philosophy, the form of an a posteriority or an empiricism. But this is an effect of the specular nature of philosophical reflection, philosophy being incapable of inscribing (comprehending) what is outside it otherwise than through the appropriating assimilation of a negative image of it, and dissemination is written on the back—the tain⁶¹—of that mirror. Not on its inverted specter. (Derrida Dissemination 33)

⁶¹ On this term, see Gasché: “the dominant misconception of Derrida is based on the confusion by many literary critics of deconstruction with reflexivity. Reflection and reflexivity, however, are precisely what will not fit in Derrida’s work—not because he would wish to refuse or reject them in favor of a dream of immediacy, but because his work questions reflection’s unthought [sic], and thus the limits of its possibility. This book’s title… alludes to that ‘beyond’ of the orchestrated mirror play of reflection that Derrida’s philosophy seeks to conceptualize. Tain, a word altered from the French étain, according to the OED, refers to the tinfoil, the silver lining, the lustreless back of the mirror. Derrida’s philosophy, rather than being a philosophy of reflection, is engaged in the systematic exploration of that dull surface without which no reflection and no specular and speculative activity would be possible, but at the same time has no place and no part in reflection’s scintillating play” (5-6).
Like Derrida in *Dissemination*, Auden in “The Sea and the Mirror” initially situates us—as well as the Holy Family in their pursuit of safe passage—before the mirror’s reflecting surface, where we achieve a “specular” presence to and a “spectral” manifestation of ourselves. Soon thereafter, however, Derrida and Auden opt to place us behind the framework of the same mirror’s physical apparatus, where our glassy images swiftly vanish into the hard textures of wood, nail, and wire.

To follow the “seminal” trace of signification in philosophy and poetics, we must turn from the mirror’s surface to its dusty unreflecting apparatus—or, vis-à-vis my queer-Kantian arguments in chapters two and three, to its parerga. The narcissistic will to gaze softly into our own “come-hither eyes” (Auden *For 8*) on the mirror’s glassy facade is precisely what leads Derrida to locate dissemination’s sharpest traces “on the back—the tain—of that mirror. Not on its inverted specter” (33; emphasis added). Concomitantly, this same temptation prompts Auden’s Stage Manager to ask: “How does one think up a habit?” (8). That is, how are we habituated to prefer one side of the mirror to the other? Why do we favor spitting images to the wire that backs them?

By implicitly gesturing the Holy Family and Shakespeare’s theatergoing critics (to whom the Preface is addressed) toward the tain of the artistic mirror upon whose surface they now gaze, the Stage Manager leads us into the vivid nominal fold of “The Sea and the Mirror.” As Auden strongly indicates in “Caliban to the Audience,” the poem’s title alludes to a famous meta-theatrical exchange between Hamlet and the First Player in *The Tragedy of Hamlet*:

HAMLET: … in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperature that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to

62 “You yourself,” Caliban states in his post-performance address to the Bard, “we seem to remember, have spoken of the conjured spectacle as ‘a mirror held up to nature,’ a phrase misleading in its aphoristic sweep but indicative at least of one aspect of the relation between the real and the imagined, their mutual reversal of value” (*For 39*; emphasis added). I will return in due course to this allusion’s bearing on “The Sea and the Mirror,” and particularly to Caliban’s inference on the “mutual reversal of value” between “the real” of the natural world and “the imagined” of the specular, speculative, and spectral mirror of art.
very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o’erdoing Termagant. *It out-Herods Herod.* Pray you avoid it.

FIRST PLAYER: I warrant your honour.

HAMLET: …Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at first and now, was and is to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (3.2.5-23; emphasis added)

Curiously, when pinpointing Caliban’s allusion to the meta-theatrical crux of *Hamlet,* Auden scholars tend to cite only lines 21-23. By widening the compass of Caliban’s allusion to *Hamlet,* however, I would emphasize Auden’s own meta-theatrical, meta-poetic, and reflexive designs for “The Sea and the Mirror”—a work he organized via post- or meta-performance monologues from *The Tempest*’s characters and producers, each of whom speaks in a discrete poetic form that appears in one of five divisions: “Preface (Stage Manager to the Critics),” “Chapter I: Prospero to Ariel,” “Chapter II: The Supporting Cast (Sotto Voce),” “Chapter III: Caliban to the Audience,” and “Postscript (Ariel to Caliban. Echo by the Prompter).”

Perhaps more suggestively, by rereading “the mirror up to nature” in the broader context of *Hamlet* 3.2, we notice not only the deftness in Auden’s substitution of “Sea” for “Nature,” but also the taut proximity of “tempest” and “Herod” to the very Shakespearean metaphor that predicates Auden’s commentary on *The Tempest.* Near the end of “For the Time Being,” as I argue above, Auden refers the Holy Family to a “Mirror” through which “No authority can

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63 The “groundlings,” as G.R. Hibbard points out in his detailed notes to the Oxford Shakespeare edition, are “spectators who stood on the ground in the yard of the public theatres, the cheapest part of the hose. First found in this passage, and not used elsewhere in Shakespeare, grounding, in this sense, appears to be an ingenious punning variation on the ‘name given to various small fishes which live at the bottom of the water’ (OED 3 and 1). One cannot help wondering how the groundlings at the Globe responded to Hamlet’s sally at their expense” (247-8).

64 “Termagant” is the “‘name of an imaginary deity held in mediaeval Christendom to be worshipped by Mohammedans: in the mystery plays represented as a violent overbearing personage’ (OED)” (Hibbard 248).

65 See, for instance, the textual range Kirsch allots to *Hamlet* when he glosses Caliban’s allusion to “a mirror held up to nature” (Kirsch 99).

66 Cf. Charles Baudelaire, “Man and the Sea,” poem 14 in *The Flowers of Evil:* “Free man, you’ll love the ocean endlessly! / It is your mirror, you observe your soul / In how its billows endlessly unroll— / Your spirit’s bitter depths are there to see. / You plunge in joy to your reflection’s core, / With eyes and heart seizing it all along; / Your heart sometimes neglects its proper song / Distracted by the ocean’s savage roar” (33; emphasis added).
pass.” In *Hamlet* 3.2, Herod, the authority from whom the Holy Family flees, signifies the histrionic excess Hamlet’s Players must circumvent by adhering to “the modesty of nature” and by holding “the mirror up to nature.” Consonantly, Hamlet’s sense of dramatic passion as a tempest, alongside “torrent” and “whirlwind,” further spirits the Holy Family of “For the Time Being” beyond the oratorio’s marginal threshold with “The Sea and the Mirror”; by allegorically ‘smuggling’ Joseph, Mary, and Jesus across this textual borderline, that is, Auden implicitly situates the heterodox body of Christ both before the mirror of art, which will reflect the Messiah’s “form and pressure” in “the very age and body of the time” (Hamlet 3.2.21-3); and behind the reflective surface, where the mirror’s “wire” (Auden For 7) and tain bolster virtue’s “own image” (Hamlet 3.2.22) via the disseminative “ghosts who haunt our lives” (Auden 7).

For its plausibility, this interpretation of “The Sea and the Mirror” as an allegorical port of entry for the oratorio’s rather queer Holy Family hinges largely on two crucial remarks from Auden’s correspondence and table talk, both of which highlight the commentary’s philosophical, aesthetic, and religious aims. “The Sea and the Mirror,” Mendelson explains in *Later Auden*, is a poem about poetry. Its subtitle describes it as “A Commentary on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest,*” as if it were a work of literary criticism. In form it is a long quasi-dramatic work in verse and prose in which the characters of Shakespeare’s play comment on their experiences and most of them have strong opinions about the relation between art and life. Prospero and Caliban, who are given the longest speeches, talk about little else. Auden confirm this interpretation in letters to friends. He told Ursula Niebuhr that “The Sea and the Mirror” was “really about the Christian conception of art,” and to Theodore Spencer he wrote that it was “my Ars Poetica, in the same way I believe *The Tempest* to be Shakespeare’s, i.e., I am attempting, which in a way is absurd, to show, in a work of art, the limitation of art.” (205)

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67 On Shakespeare’s association of Herod the Great with “a robustious periwig-pated fellow” whose poor acting skills “tear a passion to tatters, to very rags,” see Hibbard: “out-Herods Herod” connotes surpassing “the excesses of Herod. In the Coventry cycle [to which I refer earlier when opening my discussion of ‘For the Time Being’], which Shakespeare when young could have seen, Herod, on hearing that the Magi have returned to their own lands without informing him of the whereabouts of the infant Christ, breaks into a violent rage ‘in the pageant and in the streets also’ (Adams, *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, p. 163)” (Hibbard 248).

68 For Hibbard, this line connotes “the true state of things as they are now. The age is ‘the period we live in’ and the body of the time is the ‘essential, substantial nature of the time’” (248).
Ironically pursuing “the limitation of art” through “a work of art,” despite the latter’s sundry enticements to aesthetic liberation, Auden concedes that his Shakespearean commentary “in a way is absurd.” Arguably, because Kierkegaard’s writings serve as a dynamic backdrop for many of Auden’s intellectual and literary endeavours after 1940, the descriptor “absurd” is apt to resonate with the radical epistemology of faith in *Fear and Trembling*⁶⁹: “The absurd does not belong to the differences that lie within the *domain* of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, [or] the unforeseen” (46; emphasis added). Rather, the absurd “belong[s]” outside the precincts, limits, and thus *limitations* of “the finite world where [the understanding] dominates” (47). Used by Auden in concert with “limitation” to qualify boundaries and shortcomings proper to secular aesthetics in modernity, the term “absurd” in its Kierkegaardian sense implies another precinct against which art and the artist will necessarily chafe in their nonreligious “domain of the understanding.” Ultimately, as a lay, non-liturgical, and thus secular work of art that surreptitiously advances a “Christian conception” of aesthetics, “The Sea and the Mirror” delineates the zone of “the absurd” as wrought by a religious “paradox of faith”; bordering in *parergic* fashion on the secular understanding’s “finite world” of aesthetic play, this radical domain of religious paradox and absurdity harbors “an interiority that is incommensurable with [the] exteriority” (69) that governs the understanding.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Kierkegaard’s pseudonym for this masterpiece is Johannes de Silentio.
⁷⁰ “In Hegelian philosophy,” Johannes de Silentio remarks in a passage that elucidates tensions between secular and religious aesthetics, “*das Aussere (die Entäußerung)* [the outer (the externalization)] is higher than *das Innere* [the inner]…But faith is the paradox that interiority is higher than exteriority… Thus, in the ethical view of life, it is the task of the single individual to strip himself of the qualification of interiority and to express this in something external. Every time the individual shrinks from it, every time he withholds himself in or slips down again into the qualifications of feeling, mood, etc. that belong to interiority, he trespasses, he is immersed in spiritual trial [*Anfaegtelse*]. The paradox of faith is that there is an interiority that is incommensurable with exteriority…Recent philosophy has allowed itself simply to substitute the immediate for ‘faith.’ If that is done, then it is ridiculous to deny that there has always been faith. This puts faith in the rather commonplace company of feelings, moods, idiosyncrasies, *vapeurs* [vagaries], etc. If so, philosophy may be correct in saying that one ought not to stop there. But nothing justifies philosophy in using this language. Faith is preceded by a movement of infinity; only then does faith commence, *nec opinare* [unexpected], by virtue of the absurd…only when the individual has emptied himself in the finite, only then has the point been reached where faith can break through” (Kierkegaard *Fear* 69).
Amid the friction of these “incommensurable” realms, Christ’s heterodox passage from the oratorio’s Egyptian desert, through the “Mirror,” and thence to the tain of the aesthetic commentary reinforces Auden’s “absurd” effort to intertwine religion and secularity in *For the Time Being*. Vis-à-vis Kierkegaard’s existentialism, which imbricates while differentiating between aesthetic, ethical, and religious “spheres,” Auden in “The Sea and the Mirror” does not conflate religious interiority and secular exteriority. True to Kierkegaardian form, that is, these domains persist as incommensurable—even while Auden draws Christ into the commentary’s lush textures through an implicitly “Christian conception of art.” This implication of Christ in Auden’s ironizing “work of art” on “the limitation of art” (Mendelson *Later* 205) interposes the two “States” in *For the Time Being*: the imperfect “Religious State” of the oratorio and the imperfect “Aesthetic State” of the commentary. In turn, although the States themselves remain considerably at odds, their key “citizens”—Christ and Caliban—happen to possess the necessary travel documents. As Auden implies in conversation with Alan Ansen, recorded March 1947, the aesthetic stakes of such an *inter-spherical* movement are at once intriguing and novel:

71 See Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life’s Way: Studies by Various Persons, Complied, Forwarded to the Press, and Published by Hilarius Bookbinder*: “The esthetic result is in the external and can be shown. With the aid of opera glasses, it can be shown…that the hero conquers, that the magnanimous man falls in the battle and is carried in dead…This is precisely the imperfection of the esthetic… the ethical cannot regard the esthetic in any other way than to regard a direct union with it a misalliance…The ethical asks only about guilty or not guilty…The ethical is proud and declares: When I have judged, then nothing more is needed. This means that the ethical wants to be separated from the esthetic and the externality that is the latter’s imperfection; it desires to enter into a more glorious alliance, and this is with the religious. The religious then plays the same role as the esthetic, but as the superior; it spaces out the limitless speed of the ethical, and development takes place there. But the scene is in the internal…The esthetic outcome is in the external, and the external is the guarantee that the outcome is there; we see that the hero has triumphed, has conquered that country, and now we are finished. The religious outcome, indifferent toward the external, is assured only in the internal, that is, in faith…The religious is simply and solely qualitatively dialectic and disdains quantity, in which esthetics has its task” (441-3). For Žižek, Kierkegaard’s *spherical* existentialism overhauls “the ‘modern age’ opposition between external lifeless ritual and pure inner sentimental conviction: not through a pseudo-Hegelian synthesis, so that we re-establish an authentic social life in which ‘external’ social rituals are again permeated with authentic inner conviction…but by endorsing the paradox of authentic faith in which radical externality coincides with pure internality” (*Ticklish* 212). On Auden’s enthusiastic but ultimately critical appreciation of the spherical logic that organizes Kierkegaard’s existentialism, see his two major essays on the “melancholy Dane”: “Søren Kierkegaard” and “A Knight of Doeful Countenance.” Also of note is Auden’s turn to the existential spheres in *The Enchafèd Flood; or, the Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (83-7). For scholarly discussion of Auden’s Kierkegaardian bent, see Rachel Wetzsteon, *Influential Ghosts: A Study of Auden’s Sources*. 
The Catholics haven’t really evolved a Christian aesthetic. They didn’t take over Aristotle’s metaphysics, so why persist in a pagan aesthetic? After all, they didn’t condemn works of art as being unchristian. Even St. Thomas relies on Aristotle’s aesthetic. In fact, one wonders just how Christian he was…And the unsureness [sic] of the Catholic Church in dealing with the movies is another example. They have a good answer for almost everything—contraception, for example. But their attitude towards manifestly heretical movies, which they let by, is thoroughly inconsistent. You know, I am beginning to feel that even Dante isn’t really a Christian writer. He’s really the greatest poet. It’s amazing how much harder it gets when one has come to take things seriously. Before I became a believer it was easy to accept Dante’s theology and suspend disbelief. But now I’m coming to doubt whether he really was a Christian. He doesn’t realize that God suffers. (Ansen 33-4)

Debatable as they are, Auden’s views revolve around his Kierkegaardian distinction between an unelaborated “Christian aesthetic” and an established secular or “pagan aesthetic.” For Auden, Christianity has not developed a coherent philosophy of art by which to mark its own aesthetic stances (whatever they may be) from those enshrined in Greek Antiquity’s “pagan” conventions and in the nascent “secular” traditions of Renaissance Europe. Corollaries of this argument include not only Auden’s sense of the inconsistencies that mar Catholicism’s aesthetic judgment of films that are “manifestly heretical,” but also his doubts as to the very Christianity of St. Thomas and Dante; for, in the foundational aesthetic sphere, St. Thomas’s Aristotelian baggage may inadvertently derail his ethical passage to the domain of religion, faith, and thus absurdity. Consonantly, following upon his own Patripassian conviction of the Trinity’s quasi-creaturely suffering, Auden conjectures that Dante’s theology is less Christian than we imagine; for, in the mediating ethical sphere, “Dante’s Hell consists of punishments imposed from without, not of

72 Cf. Auden on the cosmological trajectory of the Newtonian “Great Chain of Being”: “creation was complete, every kind of thing which could possibly exist was already there without room for the admission of any extra novelty, and arranged in an orderly and rationally comprehensible hierarchy of being. Such a cosmology has important theological consequences. Like the Orthodox Christian God and unlike the God of Plato and Aristotle, He is the creator of the world; but unlike the Christian God, and like that of Plato and Aristotle, God and the World have no real mutual relation. While the Greek Universe loves and tries to model itself on the unconscious self-sufficient god, the Newtonian Universe is the passive neutral stuff. God imposes rational order, which it obeys, but to which it does not respond, for the natural world is no longer thought of as an organism” (Enchaféd 49).
sinners who deliberately stay there, which is the Christian belief” (Ansen 34). If Dante’s ethical zone is inconsistent, then so is his religious sphere: “He doesn’t realize that God suffers” (34).

By the mid-twentieth century Auden was not alone in his intellectual view that “[t]he Catholics haven’t really evolved a Christian aesthetic” (34). Between 1961 and 1985, Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar completed a 16-part study of Christianity, the first seven volumes of which he called *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics.* In *Volume I: Seeing the Form,* von Balthasar first traces “The Elimination of Aesthetics from Theology” (70-8); he then advances “From an Aesthetic Theology to a Theological Aesthetics” (79-116) that will shape *The Glory of the Lord*’s remaining volumes. Auden’s theological and aesthetic aims in *For the Time Being,* as I understand its interfacing structure, dovetail signally with von Balthasar’s intentions in *The Glory of the Lord.* Indeed, notwithstanding their generic differences, both works ultimately grapple with secular modernity’s core “aesthetic contract”:

The conventions or terms of the [aesthetic] contract are precisely those problems an artistic or intellectual community is willing to undertake for the duration of the contract. Examples of particular aesthetic contracts include “German tragic drama,” “the Elizabethan sonnet,” *décadence,* modernism, and postmodernism…The aesthetic contract is in effect so long as its always provisional and tentative solutions are to problems whose relevance is agreed upon by some consensus…A new order of government or a new system of production or technology may so alter living and thinking conditions as to invalidate a particular aesthetic contract…Artworks that become the basis for aesthetic contracts hover between an exciting hypothesis regarding possibility and a plausible analysis of existing conditions… “Creative freedom” is itself a clause deriving from one

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74 “We here attempt,” von Balthasar writes, “to develop a Christian theology in the light of the third transcendental, that is to say: to complement the vision of the true and the good with that of the beautiful. This introduction will show how impoverished Christian thinking has been by the growing loss of this perspective which once so strongly informed theology. It is not, therefore, our intent to yield to some whim and force theology into a little travelled side-road, but rather to restore theology to a main artery which it has abandoned. But this is in no sense to imply that the aesthetic perspective ought now to dominate theology in the place of the logical and the ethical. It is true, however, that the transcendentals [sic] are inseparable, and that neglecting one can only have a devastating effect on the others…we recommend that this attempt…not be dismissed *a priori* as ‘aestheticism’” (9). Notably, whereas von Balthasar pursues the aesthetic as a field long-neglected by theology, Auden perhaps overstates the case by arguing that Catholic philosophy has “not really evolved a Christian aesthetic” (Ansen 33). Von Balthasar might reply to Auden by claiming that the aesthetic field in question merits *reconstruction,* rather than construction.
particular aesthetic contract, a late-Enlightenment-Romantic one…whose terms are elaborated, among others, by Kant, Schlegel, and Kierkegaard. (Sussman 165-6)

For von Balthasar and Auden, the epicenter of modernity’s aesthetic contract is “the secular nature of the theological void,” which “the artist was constructed to fill”; for both authors, moreover, the artist—a “human-born deity of creative and intellectual endeavor”—is “encrusted with metaphysical values so persistent that we are laboring at their productive illumination even today” (135). Relying “for its format on stipulations made by Rousseau in The Social Contract” (167), the aesthetic contract in Henry Sussman’s account curiously elides a major “late-Enlightenment-Romantic” exemplar of “creative freedom” to whom The Glory of the Lord responds explicitly and to whom For the Time Being, I submit, responds implicitly.

Consequentially, in von Balthasar’s Seeing the Form, the first historical proper names we encounter are Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller: “When beauty becomes a form which is no longer understood as being identical with Being, spirit, and freedom, we have entered an age of aestheticism” (22). “Borrowing from Kant,” von Balthasar continues, Schiller ventures boldly into this “age of aestheticism” by elaborating “spirit’s splendour in the beauty [i.e. not Beauty] of form” and by arguing for “spirit’s sovereign freedom” in “an existence fully governed by the aesthetic principle” (22; emphasis added). As von Balthasar explains in Volume V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age, Schiller’s thought-experiment culminates in a forceful secularization of “the Christian eschatology of the resurrection”; Schiller’s aesthetic prosthesis replaces “the miracle of the grace of the personal God” with “the miracle of the divine charis of man (who had always been divine)” (538). Von Balthasar echoes Auden’s perspective on the magnetic force of aesthetics in Greek Antiquity when he pinpoints Schiller’s reduction of the infinite process of the becoming of the world towards God to the progress of mankind towards its highest (perhaps unattainable, only approachable) idea, and finally the provenance of the ideal from the Greeks….Thus the inquiry into Being
and God is lost to sight, and the spotlight falls on man actively involved in the agôn and in tragedy: on a being who possesses ideals but not gods, on a being who possesses its majesty and its glory within itself. Man has no need of myth; he is his own myth. (540)

Coupled with theoretical criticism leveled against Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* for its misreading of Kant, von Balthasar’s theological intervention ups the ante for “The Sea and the Mirror,” whose clandestine aim—as a secular work of art—is to delineate “a Christian aesthetic” (Ansen 33). More precisely, because Schiller develops “the earliest formal theory of an aesthetic state” (Chytry 70), Auden’s “absurd” endeavour “to show, in a work of art, the limitation of art” (Mendelson *Later* 205) inevitably collides with Schiller’s aesthetic state.

At closer range, this implicit collision transpires through the poem Auden crafts for Gonzalo in “Chapter II: *The Supporting Cast (Sotto Voce).*” Described in *The Tempest* as “an honest old councillor” (98) and by Auden as a “good but stupid character” (qtd. in Kirsch “Notes” 86) “who fails to acknowledge the existence of evil” (86), Gonzalo in “The Sea and the Mirror” admits to not having “trusted the Absurd” (*For* 21). As the stanza’s sole capitalized abstraction, “the Absurd” is bound to evoke Auden’s study of Kierkegaard, whose epistemology

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75 “Schiller goes on to valorize,” Paul de Man writes in “Kant and Schiller”: “And he will valorize the practical over the theoretical. The practical sublime, which is the only one he will keep talking about…is valorized completely at the expense of the theoretical sublime, where he got Kant right. So he adds something to Kant which is not in Kant, and then he valorizes what he has added as being more important than what really was in Kant” (140); Schiller, de Man continues, “goes much too far in the direction of establishing…the possibility of a pure intellect entirely separated from the material world, entirely separated from the sensory experience…[Schiller] posits pure intellect, which was unreachable in Kant…in Schiller, pure intellect comes in, as imagination comes in, to remedy our incapacity, whereas in Kant it is the failure of the imagination that leads to aesthetic contemplation. The two discourses are completely disjoint from each other at this point, and [Schiller’s] idealization is precisely what does not take place in Kant…in Schiller, the aesthetic is transcended by a pure intellect, which in Kant is theologically and philosophically inconceivable. This transcendence of the aesthetic in Schiller differs entirely from the disruption of the aesthetic as return to the materiality of the inscription, to the letter, that we found in Kant” (146). See also de Man, “Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist’s *Über das Marionettentheater*”; Martinson, *Harmonious Tensions: The Writings of Friedrich Schiller*, especially chapter five, “The Tasks of Culture: Beauty and the Aesthetic Education of the Human Being”; Cohen, “Political Thrillers: Hitchcock, de Man, and Secret Agency in the ‘Aesthetic State’”; Newmark, “Death in Venice: Irony, Detachment, and the Aesthetic State” in *Irony on Occasion: From Schlegel and Kierkegaard to Derrida and De Man*; Redfield, “De Man, Schiller, and the Politics of Reception” in *The Politics of Aesthetics*; Bennett, “‘How is It, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians?’: Foucault, Schiller, and the Aestheticization of Ethics”; Kooy, *Coleridge, Schiller and Aesthetic Education*; Schutjer, *Narrating Community after Kant*; Spivak, “Introduction” to *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*; and, for attention to Schiller via German Idealism, Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. 
of faith (as I note above) lends “the Absurd” its own interiorized domain of religious passion.

“Had [Gonzalo] trusted the Absurd,” we read, all of his fellow characters on the island “would have begun to dance / Jigs of self-deliverance” (21; emphasis added). Locked, however, in the island’s verdant aesthetic field, where myriad surfaces obscure the all-important tain of human experience, Gonzalo encounters the world largely through the fancy of “speculation”; in turn, he merely freezes “Vision into an idea, / Irony into a joke” (21). Markedly, despite his newfound awareness of religious Absurdity’s more solemn vistas, Auden’s Gonzalo basically resumes the mode of glassy speculation that originally lured him toward “Doubt and insufficient love” (21):

Farewell, dear island of our wreck.
All have been restored to health,
All have seen the Commonwealth,
There is nothing to forgive. (21)

By freezing Gonzalo’s aesthetic “[v]ision into an idea” of “the Commonwealth,” these lines at once introduce the specter of Schiller’s “aesthetic state,” allude deftly to Gonzalo’s famous lines in the play’s second act, and afford a dubious construal of The Tempest’s conclusion. Consider how, in The Tempest 2.1, Sebastian and Antonio mock Gonzalo’s vision of his aesthetic state:

GONZALO
I’th’ commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things, for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all,
And women too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty—
SEBASTIAN Yet he would be king on’t.
ANTONIO The latter end of this commonwealth forgets the beginning. (145-56)

As Stephen Orgel observes in his notes to the Oxford Shakespeare edition, Gonzalo’s highly-aestheticized depiction of his very own colonial “plantation of this isle” (2.1.141) “is closely
related to a section of Montaigne’s essay ‘Of the Cannibals’ (135). Carrying this vision to “prelapsarian” (Orgel 135) extremes with the twofold stipulation that “All things in common nature should produce / Without sweat or endeavour” (lines 157-8) and that “nature should bring forth / Of its own kind all foison, all abundance / To feed my innocent people” (160-2), Gonzalo does not heed his jeering interlocutors: Sebastian signals the contradiction in Gonzalo’s kingdom without sovereignty and Antonio dashes the vision’s wider illogicality. Consequently, even after suggesting he winnowed a moment of “Irony into a joke” played at his own expense, Auden’s Gonzalo nevertheless considers his “Commonwealth” as veritably “seen” rather than mocked as illusory (For 21). Captivated by this aesthetic state, Auden’s Gonzalo persists in his skepticism of the religious Absurd and thus misjudges the degree to which The Tempest resolves its moral conflict: “All have been restored to health,” he says, and “There is nothing to forgive” (21).

Mirroring Paul de Man’s critique of Schiller in “Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist’s Über das Marionettentheater,” a landmark essay explored at length in the previous chapter, Auden

76 Orgel quotes from the essay: “It is a nation...that hath no kind of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate nor of political superiority, no use of service, of riches or of poverty, no contracts, no successions, no divinities [sic], no occupation but idle, no respect of kindred but common, no apparel but natural, no manuring [sic] of lands, no use of wine, corn, or metal. The very words that import lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulation, covetousness, envy, detraction, and pardon were never heard of amongst them” (135).

77 Cf. Gonzalo’s effort to deflect the mockery he elicits. To King Alonso, for whom Gonzalo “dost talk nothing” (2.1.170), Gonzalo replies: “I do well believe your highness, and did it to minister occasion to these gentlemen, who are of such sensible and nimble limbs that they always use to laugh at nothing” (171-3). “‘Twas you we laughed at” (174), Antonio replies, prompting Gonzalo to underscore “nothing” rather than himself as mockery’s object: “Who in this kind of merry fooling am nothing to you; so you may continue, and laugh at nothing still” (175-6).

78 Auden argues that “The Tempest is full of music of all kinds, yet it is not one of the plays in which, in a symbolic sense, harmony and concord finally triumph over dissonant disorder. The three romantic comedies which precede it, Pericles, Cymbeline, and The Winter’s Tale, and which deal with similar themes, injustice, plots, separation, all end in a blaze of joy—the wrongers [sic] repent, the wronged forgive, the earthly music is a true reflection of the heavenly. The Tempest ends much more sourly. The only wrongdoer who expresses genuine repentance is Alonso; and what a world of difference there is between Cymbeline’s ‘Pardon’s the word to all,’ and Prospero’s ‘For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother / Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive / Thy rankest fault—all of them; and require / My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know / Thou must restore.’ Justice has triumphed over injustice, not because it is more harmonious, but because it commands superior force” (Dyer’s 526). Cf. Antonio’s poem, composed aptly enough in Dante’s terza rima, in “The Sea and the Mirror”: “Antonio, sweet brother, has to laugh. / How easy you have made it to refuse / Peace to your greatness! Break your wand in half, / The fragments will join; / burn your books or lose / Them in the sea, they will soon reappear, / Not even damaged: as long as I choose / To wear my fashion, whatever you wear / Is a magic robe; while I stand outside / Your circle, the will to charm is still there. / As I exist so you shall be denied” (For 18). Vis-à-vis Auden’s interpretation of The Tempest’s sour resolution, see Beckwith, “Making Good in The Tempest” in Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness.
shapes Gonzalo’s poem as a subtle parody of free-wheeling aestheticism. In his post- or meta-
performance monologue, Gonzalo admits to the laughably un-ironic presentation of his ideal
“Commonwealth” in The Tempest; nevertheless, upon bidding farewell to the “dear island of our
wreck,” he suddenly undercuts his own self-conscious criticism and thence relapses un-ironically
into the outlandish pastures of his singular “Commonwealth,” which in his estimation “All have
seen” (21; emphasis added). The allure of perfection in the aesthetic state, Auden seems to
indicate in Gonzalo’s poem, is potent enough to undo even one’s well-earned discernment of
irony’s self-reflexive merits. In this context, an implicit target of “The Sea and the Mirror” is
the political and ethical legacy of Schiller’s aestheticism in On the Aesthetic Education of Man:

In the midst of the awful realm of powers, and of the sacred realm of laws, the aesthetic
creative impulse is building unawares a third joyous realm of play and of appearance, in
which it releases mankind from all the shackles of circumstance and frees him from
everything that may be called constraint, whether physical or moral. If in the dynamic
state of rights man encounters man as force and restricts his activity, if in the ethical state
of duties he opposes him with the majesty of law and fetters his will, in the sphere of
cultivated society, in the aesthetic state, he need appear to him only as shape, confront
him only as an object of free play. To grant freedom by means of freedom is the
fundamental law of this kingdom. (Schiller 137)

Formal and generic distinctions notwithstanding, this passage resonates strongly with the
architecture of Gonzalo’s Commonwealth in The Tempest 2.1.145-56. Just as Sebastian simpers
at the contradiction in Gonzalo’s kingdom without sovereignty, so might we question how the
abstract “free play” in Schiller’s aesthetic state could possibly unshackle us “from everything
that may be called constraint, whether physical or moral”; similarly, just as Antonio punctures
the discursive logic of Gonzalo’s idyllic plantation, whose “latter end…forgets the beginning”
(2.1.156), so might we perforate the teleological reasoning that spirits us un-ironically from “the

Cf. Auden in conversation with Ansen: “The thing that reconciles one to [St. Thomas] is the great vision he had in
the closing days of his life when he said, about his work, ‘It’s all straw.’ You remember what Kierkegaard said
about Hegel: ‘If he’d only said after he’d written his books, It’s all a joke, Hegel would have been a great man’ (33).
dynamic state of rights” to “the ethical state of duties” to Schiller’s “aesthetic state,” with its lithe tautology of “freedom by means of freedom” and its viewpoint on the human as a “shape.”80

Notably, Auden’s most explicit response to the secularizing “aesthetic contract” that descends from Schiller’s On the Aesthetic Education of Man appears in “Squares and Oblongs”:

A society which really was like a poem and embodied all the esthetic values of beauty, order, economy, subordination of detail to the whole effect, would be a nightmare of horror, based on selective breeding, extermination of the physically or mentally unfit, absolute obedience to its Dictator, and a large slave class kept out of sight in cellars. (Complete Prose 349)

Written in 1947, this passage countermands the aesthetic ideals of European fascism while also glancing backward to the Enlightenment’s radicalization of the aesthetic field: “Everything in the aesthetic State, even the subservient tool, is a free citizen having equal rights with the noblest” (Schiller 140); “and the intellect,” Schiller maintains in his deviation from Kant, “which forcibly moulds [sic] the passive multitude to its designs, must here ask for assent” (140; emphasis added). Precisely because he was not a reactionary thinker, Auden neither disarticulates nor bypasses this democratic kernel in aesthetic theory, even though he sees aestheticism as too-readily collaborative with ideological propaganda. In fact, in “The Sea and the Mirror,” or rather in For the Time Being as a singular book of two interfacing poems, Auden consistently grapples

80 Cf. Auden’s imagery of the human as aesthetic shape or object in Alonso’s poem on the realm of kings: “Remember as bells and cannon boom / The cold deep that does not envy you, / The sunburnt superficial kingdom / Where a king is an object” (For 23; emphasis added); “Only your darkness can tell you what / A prince’s ornate mirror dare not, / Which you should fear more—the sea in which a tyrant sinks entangled in rich / Robes while a mistress turns a white back / Upon his sputter, or the desert / Where an emperor stands in his shirt / While his diary is read by sneering / Beggars, and far off he notices / A lean horror flapping and hopping / Toward him with inhuman swiftness” (23; emphasis added). Schiller’s “shapely” reduction of the human bears emphasis here because, as de Man observes, Schiller ultimately refers to “shapes” as if they were subjects or citizens: “The aesthetic, as is clear from Schiller’s formulation, is primarily a social and political model, ethically grounded in an assumedly Kantian notion of freedom...The ‘state’ that is here being advocated is not just a state of mind or of soul, but a principle of political value and authority that has its own claims on the shape and limits of our freedom” (“Aesthetic” 264; emphasis added). See also Josef Chytry: “Schiller’s Aesthetic Letters is a political document. Schiller makes this clear from the very outset when he asserts his concern for a concrete political problem to be solved through the aesthetic, since ‘it is beauty through which the way is made to freedom.’ The ‘problem’ to which Schiller refers is, of course, the condition of the French Revolution just after the execution of Louis XVI” (77).
with this democratic kernel: he subtly regulates the emancipatory claims of secular aestheticism by way of a “Christian conception of art” (Mendelson Later 205).

Smuggled across the Egyptian desert and then through the “Mirror” of Auden’s Shakespearean commentary, at whose center resides “Creature Caliban” (Lupton), the creaturely body of Christ facilitates this regulation:

As a biological organism Man is a natural creature subject to the necessities of nature; as a being with consciousness and will, he is at the same time a historical person with the freedom of the spirit. The Tempest seems to me a manichean work, not because it shows the relation of Nature [Caliban] to Spirit [Ariel] as one of conflict and hostility, which in fallen man it is, but because it puts the blame for this upon Nature and makes the Spirit innocent...The natural, conforming to necessity, cannot imagine possibility. The closest it can come to a relation with the possible is as a vague dream; without Prospero, Ariel can only be known to Caliban as “sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.” (Auden Dyer’s 130-1; emphasis added)

Auden’s Pauline allegory of The Tempest, which he reinforces in The Dyer’s Hand by alluding to Andrew Marvell’s “A Dialogue between the Soul and Body,” distinguishes “Caliban, the embodiment of the natural” from “Ariel, the invisible spirit of imagination” (132). In Auden’s judgment, this allegory is intrinsic enough to Shakespeare’s aesthetics for the polarity at hand to be standardized in performance:

In a stage production, Caliban should be as monstrously conspicuous as possible, and, indeed, suggest, as far as decency permits, the phallic. Ariel, on the other hand, except when he assumes a specific disguise at Prospero’s order, e.g., when he appears as a harpy, should, ideally, be invisible, a disembodied voice, an ideal which, in these days of microphones and loud-speakers, should be realizable. (132-3)

81 In “Balaam and His Ass,” the essay from which the excerpt above derives, Auden quotes eight lines of Marvell’s 44-line poem: “Body: O who shall me deliver whole, / From bonds of this tyrannic soul? / Which, stretcht upright, impales me so, / That mine own Precipice I go... Soul: What Magick could me thus confine / Within another’s grief to pine? / Where whatsoever it complain, / I feel, that cannot feel, the pain” (Dyer’s 128). In “Hic Et Ille,” to make a consonant point on body and soul with Marvell in the offing, Auden alludes to The Tempest 1.2.362-4: “You taught me language and my profit on’t Is, I know to curse. In the debate between the Body and the Soul, if the former could present its own case objectively, it would always win. As it is, it can only protest the Soul’s misstatement of its case by subjective acts of rebellion, coughs, belches, constipation, etc., which always put it in the wrong” (Dyer’s 100). On Marvell’s poem beyond Auden’s telling deployments of it in his prose, see Osmond, Mutual Accusation: Seventeenth-Century Body and Soul Dialogues in Their Literary and Theological Contexts. On prospective grounds for allegorizing The Tempest as Auden does, see Johnson, “Body and Soul, Stage and Sexuality in The Tempest.”

82 Cf. Vaughan and Vaughan, “Stage History” and “Screen History” in Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History.
By attributing Manichaeism and thus radical dualism to *The Tempest*’s worldview, Auden in his critical prose establishes a hermeneutic that he will deconstruct in his poetic commentary on the play. Through the meta-theatrical designs of “The Sea and the Mirror,” Auden develops an “Ars Poetica” that *questions* the aesthetic and theological position of what he takes to be Shakespeare’s “Ars Poetics” (Mendelson *Later* 205). Consonant with his *Patripassian*—and thus *anti-Manichean*—stance on the dialectics of Christian heresy, Auden *radicalizes* Caliban’s creaturely account of himself as monstrous, as “phallic,” and as Prospero’s “impervious disgrace” that “sprawls in the weeds and will not be repaired” (Auden *For* 12-13). If indeed *The Tempest* and “The Sea and the Mirror” are extended cases of the body-soul dialogue, then Auden levels their aesthetic fields by having the body “present its own case objectively” (*Dyer*’s 100).

As Julia Reinhard Lupton argues, Shakespeare’s Caliban complicates our sense of what it means to be a “creature” or to be “creaturely.” “The world of creatures,” Lupton posits, constitutes an infinity rather than a totality, since it is made up of a series of singularities that do not congeal into a single set...By maintaining Caliban as creature, Shakespeare manages to isolate within the category of the human...a permanent state of emergency. As such, the creature materializes a profane moment within the idealism of theology, and thus defines in its very primitivism a possible face of modernity, understood not as the negation but as the remainder of a theological vision. If we want to find a new universalism in the play...it is not by reasserting that “Caliban is human,” but rather by saying that “all humans are creatures,” that all humans constitute an exception to their own set... [Shakespeare’s] decisive crystallization of a certain material moment within the theology of the creature might help us find a postsecular solution to the predicament of modern humanity. (*Citizen-Saints* 178)

The fleshy heresy of Auden’s *Patripassianism*, as explored in this chapter’s previous section, intensifies Lupton’s appeal for us to discern in the creature—and above all in “Creature Caliban”—a profane materiality “within the idealism of theology.” For, if Auden draws his creaturely Christ *into* Caliban’s realm, then both “the theological vision” and the religious “remainder” at stake are doubly heterodox: creaturely life, in Auden’s materialist sense, *becomes*
a definitive part of theology’s idealism, rather than the latter’s residue in the secular “face of modernity.” As Auden would remind us, the Trinity and humanity do retain an ultimate distinction, but both still heretically partake of each other on the grounds of embodiment. Thus, Auden leads us to adapt one of Eric Santner’s exquisite points in On Creaturely Life: “Creature” is indeed “the signifier of an ongoing exposure, of being caught up in the process of becoming creature through the dictates of divine alterity” (28); yet it is also a heretical reversal of this exposure or becoming creature—from the creaturely toward the divine, or creaturely-divine.83

In this exegetical context, consider how in “The Sea and the Mirror” Caliban-the-Body and Ariel-the-Spirit relate to one another, particularly in “Chapter III: Caliban to the Audience” and in the “Postscript (Ariel to Caliban. Echo by the Prompter).” At a key point in Chapter III, Auden unravels Caliban as “the voice of the inarticulate flesh”84 (Mendelson “Body” 198) by focusing precisely on what would occur if we “really left [him] alone to go [his] whole “free-wheeling way to disorder, to be drunk every day before lunch, to jump stark naked from bed to bed, to have a fit every week or a major operation every other year, to forge cheques or water the widow’s stock” (For 45-6). Without discipline and punishment, Caliban’s bodily impulses turn to regular intoxication, sexual promiscuity, emotional breakdowns, mischief, self-harm, and even a few indictable counts of forgery. Through such “genuine escapades,” Caliban-the-Body “might, after countless skids and punctures, have come by the bumpy third-class road of guilt and remorse” (46; emphasis added). From this perspective of sheer anti-ascetic indulgence, however, corporeality’s “free-wheeling way to disorder” might seem preferable to the havoc of attempting

83 In an early version of “Creature Caliban,” which appears in Shakespeare Quarterly, Lupton phrases her core argument in a manner that strikingly resembles pre-Nicene debates over the fundamental nature of Jesus Christ: “Caliban, I argue here, takes shape beneath the arc of wonder that moves throughout the play between ‘creatures’ and ‘mankind,’ between animate beings in general and their realization in the form of humanity. Is he man or fish? creature or person? This indeterminacy at the heart of Caliban also sets him adrift between the cosmos in its vast totality—the brave new world of primal Creation—and the particular worlds defined by culture and nation” (2).

84 See also Servotte, “Auden’s Caliban: Man’s ‘Drab Mortality,’” in Constellation Caliban: Figurations of a Character.
to regulate or to structure the wild interplay of Caliban-the-Body and Ariel-the-Spirit, or Artistic Imagination. Auden’s Caliban asks whether it is possible

that, not content with inveigling Caliban into Ariel’s kingdom, you have also let loose Ariel in Caliban’s? We note with alarm that when the other members of the final tableau [i.e. of characters from *The Tempest*] were dismissed, He [Ariel] was not returned to His arboreal confinement as He should have been. Where is He now? For if the intrusion of the real has disconcerted and incommoded the poetic, that is a mere bagatelle compared to the damage which the poetic would inflict if it ever succeeded in intruding upon the real. We want no Ariel here, breaking down our picket fences in the name of fraternity, seducing our wives in the name of romance, and robbing us of our sacred pecuniary deposits in the name of justice. Where is Ariel? What have you done with Him? For we won’t, we daren’t leave until you give us a satisfactory answer. (40-1)

Auden’s comedic effects in this passage hinge on the litotes he reserves for visions of Ariel’s intrusions “upon the real” of everyday corporeal life. As indicated by the excerpt from “Squares and Oblongs” reproduced earlier in this section, Auden’s ultimate sense of the “damage which the poetic would inflict if it ever succeeded in intruding upon the real” is not limited to suburban white-picket-fence-breaking, the seduction of others’ wives, and the well-intentioned escapades of Robin Hood. Indeed, for Auden the poetic’s *intrusion* upon a resistant reality is tantamount to the Schillerian aesthetic state in its violent, propagandistic, mid-twentieth-century incarnations.

Nevertheless, for Caliban-the-Real or Caliban-the-Body, the intrusive threat of Ariel’s aesthetic state is hardly omnipresent. In fact, from the viewpoint of Auden’s Caliban and thus in contradistinction to Robert Browning’s 1864 dramatic monologue “Caliban upon Setebos,” the real body maintains a literal upper *hand* over the self-theologizing poetic spirit, precisely because it always-already brandishes the *tain* of the mirror that supports both the artist’s reflection of herself and her reflection of nature in art.\(^85\) The artist’s transformative moment, in moving from

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\(^{85}\) As Vaughan and Vaughan point out in their consideration of Browning’s dramatic monologue: “When Darwinism spurred philosophical speculations about humanity’s place in an evolving universe, critics quickly put Caliban to new sociological uses…To Browning, Caliban is an amphibian—half man, half fish—who lives on the margins of humanity but reveals essential human traits such as selfishness and self-deception. Browning’s poem, a satire on Victorian [natural] theologians, describes the conception of God that might occur to a less-than-human creature.
glassy surface to wiry tain, is “indicative at least of one aspect of the relation between the real and the imagined, their mutual reversal of value” (39); for, by realizing in ethical terms that embodiment, in whatever form or to whatever extent, predicates the abstract vistas of aesthetic production, the artist yields an interpenetration and revaluation of existential spheres.

Significantly, in “Caliban to the Audience,” this transformative moment occurs when the artist, much like Prospero in The Tempest, wishes finally to extricate herself from the lush proceedings of Ariel’s high-flown (überschwenglich, as Kant would say) aesthetics:

Collecting all your strength for the distasteful task, you finally manage to stammer or shout ‘You are free, Good-bye,’ but to your dismay He whose obedience through all the enchanted years has never been less than perfect, now refuses to budge. Striding up to him in fury, you glare into His unblinking eyes and stop dead, transfixed with horror at seeing there, not what you had always expected to see, a conqueror smiling at a conqueror, both promising mountains and marvels, but a gibbering, fist-clenched creature with which you are all too familiar, for this is the first time indeed that you have met the only subject that you have, who is not a dream amenable to magic but the too solid flesh you must acknowledge as your own; at last you have come face to face with me, and are appalled to learn how far I am from being, in any sense, your dish; how completely lacking in that poise and calm and all forgiving because all understanding good nature which to the critical eye is so wonderfully and domestically present on every page of your published inventions. (44; emphasis added)

In this passage, Ariel’s eyes figure as the artist’s mirror, wherein the artist sees her embodied self—“the all too solid flesh you must acknowledge as your own”86—as the unglamorous

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86 “Can you wonder then,” Auden’s Caliban inquires, “when, as was bound to happen sooner or later, your charms, because they no longer amuse you, have cracked and your spirits, because you are tired of giving orders, have ceased to obey, and you are left alone with me, the dark thing you could never abide to be with, if I do not yield you kind answer or admire you for the achievements I was never allowed to profit from, if I resent hearing you speak of...
corporeal tain, without which the mirror of art would crash to the floor. Caliban’s self-deprecating language throughout the excerpt gauges the artist’s creaturely recognition of her own embodiment as irreducible to “that poise and calm” by which her “published inventions” are aestheticized. Ironically, however, the apparent chasm here between Ariel and Caliban turns out to be a figment of the artist’s sudden disenchantment with the claims of aesthetic splendor and consequent shock at (re-)discovering her own “all too solid flesh”: the artist is Caliban-the-Body or Caliban-the-Real, a jolting perception that stems from the reflective gaze of Ariel-the-Spirit or Ariel-the-Poetic. A logical circuit thus governs this moment, for there is no artist and thus no art without the real body; and no real body without the imagination’s capacity to configure a world in which to be real. Ariel’s understated response to Caliban in the commentary’s “Postscript” reinforces this logical circuitry: the poetic spirit is “Helplessly in love” with the real body and “Fascinated by / Drab mortality” (59); Ariel’s aesthetic “perfection” harbors an “entire devotion” to “the mercy of [Caliban’s corporeal] will” (59); and when the dissonant “falsehoods” of both “sworn comrade[s]” are “divided,” they “shall become, / One evaporating sigh” (59-60). To paraphrase Auden’s Ariel via Eliot in *Four Quartets*: in death “body and soul begin to fall asunder” (*Complete* 194), leading to a literal expiration of their Kierkegaardian synthesis. The circuitry of Caliban, Ariel, and the human is thus abstractly logical and somatically existential.

**Clôture: “On this side of the mirror”**

“Religion and culture,” Auden’s Caliban declares, “seem to be represented by a catholic belief that something is lacking which must be found”:

but as to what that something is, the keys of heaven, the missing heir, genius, the smells of childhood, or a sense of humour, why it is lacking, whether it has been deliberately

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your neglect of me as your ‘exile,’ of the pains you never took with me as ‘all lost’? But why continue? From now on we shall have, as we both know only too well, no company but each other’s, and if I have had, as I consider, a good deal to put up with from you, I must own that, after all, I am not just the person I would have chosen for a life companion myself” (*For* 46).
stolen, or accidentally lost or just hidden for a lark, and who is responsible, our ancestors, ourselves, the social structure, or mysterious wicked powers, there are as many faiths as there are searchers, and clues can be found behind every clock, under every stone, and in every hollow tree to support all of the them. (54)

If read in the context of *For the Time Being*, and thus *across* the threshold that separates “For the Time Being” and “The Sea and the Mirror,” this passage affords a textual “clue” as to what is lacking among “religious” (or theological) and “cultural” (or secular) approaches to Auden’s American phase. Implicitly subscribing to a hermeneutic rift between the theological and the secular, such dichotomous approaches not only “lack” each other; they also “miss” the crucial role Auden reserves for queerness as an intricate bridge that traverses his transatlantic career.

By imbricating Christ and Caliban, two conventionally estranged figures, I sought in this chapter to parse Auden’s queer fascinations with embodiment, heresy, aesthetics, and related subjects as each (de)constructs the putative divide between theology and secularity in Auden’s corpus. In my interpretation of *For the Time Being* as an intra-related book, the mutual (de)construction of the oratorio’s “Religious State” and the commentary’s “Secular State” pivots nimbly on what Auden’s Caliban loquaciously identifies as the “first big crisis” of disenchantment:

> the breaking of the childish spell in which, so long as it enclosed you, there was, for you, no mirror, for everything that happened was a miracle—it was just as extraordinary for a chair to be a chair as for it to turn into a horse; it was no more absurd that the girding on of coal-scuttle and poker should transform you into noble Hector than that you should have a father and mother who called you Tommy—and it was therefore only necessary for you to presuppose one genius, one unrivalled I to wish these wonders in all their endless plenitude and novelty to be, is, in relation to your present, behind, that your singular transparent globes of enchantment have shattered one by one, and you have now all come together in the larger colder emptier room on this side of the mirror which *does* force your eyes to recognize and reckon with the two of us, your ears detect the irreconcilable difference between my reiterated affirmation of what your furnished circumstances categorically are, and His successive propositions as to everything else which they conditionally might be. (*For* 47-8)
Pure aestheticism’s bejeweled “childish spell,” whereby imaginative abstraction is unaccountable to ethical distinctions between “noble Hector” and veritable “Tommy,” shatters as “transparent globes of enchantment.” Consequently, standing cautiously with close-toed shoes among transparent globular shards, we behold the unadorned tain “in the larger colder emptier room on this side of the mirror.” In this rather drafty space, where our sudden detachment or remoteness from aestheticized images of ourselves is precisely as large, cold, and empty as the room that supports the mirror’s dusty tain, Caliban-the-Body’s “furnished circumstances” of being and Ariel-the-Spirit’s “successive propositions” of subjunctive becoming achieve a “restored relation” (For 58) via the circuitry traced in this chapter’s previous subsection. Even while “[r]isking enchantment” (Eliot Complete 179) as we gaze into the “secular blur” of “our contrived fissures of mirror and proscenium arch” (For 58), we may nevertheless read For the Time Being as an especially “fruitful / Island in the sea” of Auden’s transatlantic crossing, and as a text wherein “flesh and mind / Are delivered from mistrust” (25).
Chapter 6

Conclusion

“Religion can hardly revive, because it cannot decay”:

In Queer Theology / Queer Theory We Trust

Lone scholars, sniping from the walls
Of learned periodicals,
    Our facts defend,
Our intellectual marines,
Landing in little magazines
    Capture a trend. (182)
—Auden, “Under Which Lyre,” Selected Poems

At the secular limits of discipline, where theory and theology negotiate interminably between each other’s interests, the corpuses of Eliot, Crane, and Auden variously disclose religion as radically immanent for secular modernity. Triangulated via the literary scalene model outlined in chapter five, the oeuvres explored in this thesis illustrate precisely how religion is not expunged, superseded, bracketed, converted, or transcended on the emancipatory grounds of epistemic secularism. To the contrary, in Eliot’s conservative Anglo-Catholic orthodoxy; in Crane’s imagery of Dionysian paganism, the Nazarene’s Crucifixion, and the Aztec pantheon; and in Auden’s Trinitarian heresies of pre-Nicene Christology, we uncover religion as a veritable queer resource for literary theory and modernist literary studies at their most recalcitrantly secularist.

For the aims of Dissident Secularism, queerness is in part a discursive force of abstraction that renders interstitial space between theology, as a system of doctrines for assent, and religion, as a flawed existential experience of such a system. In, as, or via this space, queerness performs far different work than secularist literary theory and queer-modernist studies expect it to perform: for all its “temptations of aggrandized agency” (Anderson), queerness need not transcend theological systems or religious experience. Indeed, on closer inspection, queerness fissures the theological within itself and the religious within itself, as well as fissuring
the relation between the theological and the religious. This is not tantamount to the claim that queering is equivalent to siding with doubt or to holding fast to skeptical distance within an uneven exploration of the supernatural; nor is it tantamount to reducing queerness to a sexy radicalization of doubt in proximity to a relatively unsexy faith. As opposed to being synonymous with doubt and its craw of aggrandized agency, queerness for Dissident Secularism is an interpretive force that prizes the irreducible dialectic of faith and doubt—their mutual (de)construction—in the disciplinary grid of sexuality via its aesthetics, ethics, and politics.

Adapting the notion of transversality from Félix Guattari’s Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics, Calvin Schrag captures my sense of this mutual (de)construction when he writes of a “dialectical enrichment” that attends “self-understanding” and “shared responsibility” among “several groups” divided, for instance, by hetero-normative religious faith and homo-normative secularist doubt: dialectical “transversality avoids both the hegemony of a decision-making process that proceeds vertically from top down and the impasse of horizontally dispersed groups warring with each other” (Schrag 119). Betraying the normative ideal that underwrites my conception of theo-critique as an interminable negotiation between the interests of theology and theory, transversality’s key feature is its “delimitation of hermeneutics” by “the intrusion of that which is other, the weight of alterity, the incursivity of disclosure. The directive of the transversal logos is to acknowledge the reality of the other” (134). For the strongest, longest-standing currents in queer-modernist criticism, I have argued, this otherness is ultimately

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1 Schrag elaborates: “There is here a shift from the circle of understanding to a diagonal of thinking that intersects the surfaces of hermeneutical circles….The effects of such are discernible…in negotiating disputes across political and religious lines of force. Disputes between Arab and Jew, Indian and Pakistani, Irish Republican Army and British Crown, all of which exhibit a strong undertow of political and religious differences, become negotiable only to the degree that there is acknowledgment of the reality and integrity of the other as other” (134-35). To Schrag’s examples, I add these combinations: queer secularists vs. queer religious believers; queer secularists vs. hetero-normative religious believers; queer religious believers vs. hetero-normative religious believers; queer religious believers vs. hetero-normative secularists; queer secularists vs. hetero-normative secularists; and of course hetero-normative secularists vs. hetero-normative religious believers.
determined through the prerogatives of epistemic secularism, for which religious experience and theology are fundamentally non- or anti-theoretical anachronisms. As such, to borrow Schrag’s terminology, the otherness of faith, religion, and theology for much queer-modernist studies is all too frequently unreal, unacknowledged, non-incursive, weightless, and non-intrusive. Accordingly, one of my objectives in *Dissident Secularism* has been to realize, to acknowledge, to incur, to weigh, and to welcome the theo-critical intrusion of religious alterity into the erstwhile secularist folds of queer-modernist studies.

As a corporeal and palpable experience of sexuality, moreover, queerness is always a “site of collective contestation” (Butler *Bodies* 228) among jostling identity positions crossing the LGBT spectrum in all the world’s cultures. In this sense, queerness further externalizes or fleshes out the often disavowed or implicit contestation I discern at the core of any “unalloyed” theology, “unalloyed” religion, or “unalloyed” relation between the theological and the religious.

Set against the queer-secularist grain in modernist literary studies, which I have canvassed and critiqued throughout *Dissident Secularism*, my argument here extends its logic of contestation into the terrain of epistemic secularism: in order to queer secularist literary criticism in queer-modernist studies, one must cultivate dissidence for, within, and on behalf of the secular. One must rethink the secular, secularism, and secularization as far less grandiose—and thus far more democratically malleable, porous, fragile, pliable, and negotiable—than a consolidated episteme. If secularism is marked by fragility and negotiability, rather than by muscular authority, then queerness may productively take root as a form of immanent critique *within* secularism, religion, and theology. The Kantian-inspired queer theology embedded in Eliot’s social criticism and its discursive performances of religious asceticism; the aporetic or spectral zone of undecidability between the “transmembered” deities in Crane’s “Lachrymae Christi” and the leeway of lyric
phenomenology in Crane’s “The Circumstance”; and the heretical implications of creaturely life in Auden’s imbricated renderings of Christ and Caliban exemplify the immanence of queer theology, rather than the transcendence of theology queered, in three major literary modernists.

Peering through the blossoms and foliage that spring from queerness’s roots in immanent critique, we may underscore the extent to which influential models for research on queer sexualities in modernist studies and in the humanities more generally presuppose secularism or enforce secularization as a benchmark for the “achievement of modernity”; likewise, in modernist studies, in the humanities more generally, and in the world beyond academia, we may work to conceive of religious foundations for queer subjects to whom secularism remains a key factor in the emancipatory history of many sexual cultures. In this regard, rethinking the stakes of queer-modernist studies by means of the Kantian Enlightenment has allowed me to regulate, in *parergic* Kantian fashion, the queer excesses of epistemic secularism, which include its overstatement of philosophical modernity as a teleological emancipation from religion and its latter-day quarantining of queerness from theology. An upshot of this regulatory Kantian leverage, I maintain, is Habermas’s recent perspective on religiously-informed arguments as existentially vital (and thus incapable of tidily undergoing secularist privatization) for major constituencies of democratic nation-states; in turn, this vitality occasions a challenge for epistemic translation in the name of public reason to be a two-way (i)deal, incumbent on both secularists and non-secularists (Habermas “Religion”). Thus, toward an arduous, even impossible, democratic future, we require a mutuality of dialogical exchange across, or a mutual (de)construction of, the divide separating hardcore secularists and hardcore religious believers.

Notwithstanding the disastrous pitfalls of political liberalism, which in Auden’s estimation leaves Herod the Great at our administrative helm, we should want secularists to be
empathetically assuming the interiority of their religious opponents, and vice versa. A democratic challenge of precisely this sort is one possible corollary of Leo Bersani’s question, examined in chapter two: “Should a homosexual be a good citizen?” (Homos 113). Given the disciplinary interests of *Dissident Secularism*, Bersani’s question is apt to elicit yet another query: (how) should a homosexual rethink his or her stake in civic culture, in democracy, and in dominant modes of (secularist) intellectualism, riven as these fields are by escalating tensions of anti-religion and anti-secularism? If in the first place a homosexual has the right to be a citizen, and thus perhaps to ask Bersani’s ethical question about queerness and citizenship, then this self-questioning homosexual *should* rethink the emancipatory allure of epistemic secularism, which so often claims queerness for itself in the spheres of civic culture, democracy, and intellectualism. By critiquing the secularist safeguards of queer-modernist studies in the context of the theoretical humanities, I have gauged such questions in philosophical and literary terms.

More specifically, I have argued that Eliot, Crane, and Auden overlap remarkably on the subject/object of the body: in each oeuvre, embodiment figures as immanently theological and thus as immanently queer(able). Because it assumes a theo-critical plasticity on the threshold that ultimately separates theory and theology, embodiment unfurls as queer(able) *from within*—that is, as queer theology, rather than theology queered. This corporeal overlap among Eliot, Crane, and Auden is all the more significant in light of their biographical, aesthetic, ethical, political, and religious differences, as triangulated at the beginning of chapter five and more diffusely throughout *Dissident Secularism*. Set into relief by his disavowed yet nonetheless entrenched queerness, Eliot’s conservative political theology is offset by Crane’s optimistic challenge to the arch-modernist’s perceived “pessimism.” Moreover, Crane’s avowed yet nonetheless pained homosexuality serves as a glaring counterpoint to Eliot’s sexual identity politics, as exemplified
by his censorious threat in 1952 to sue literary critic John Peter over his pioneering queer study of *The Waste Land* (see chapter three, note 83). For his chameleonic modernist/postmodernist part, Auden differs remarkably from Crane in poetic terms, but meets him on the terrain of an equally avowed yet differently pained homosexuality. Furthermore, Auden’s transatlantic career mirrors—or, for Harold Bloom, inherits—the intricate conversational arc of Eliot’s corpus.

Although Auden and Crane critique Eliot’s aesthetics, ethics, and politics in different ways and to varying extents, both are nonetheless profoundly indebted to Eliot as a professional beacon and as an enabling antagonist, respectively.

Notably, biographical disparities between Eliot’s disavowed queerness and Crane’s and Auden’s homosexual life-worlds matter little to my argument. For, notwithstanding their oblique tri-angularities, the oeuvres of Eliot, Crane, and Auden are marked by comparable histories of scholarly reception: Eliot’s and Auden’s oeuvres are similarly “zoned” at their religious conversions, at which point queer exegesis has typically reached its limit; while relatively compact and thus less apt to be secularly partitioned, Crane’s corpus is nonetheless riven by hetero-normatively religious and queer-secularist approaches. By focusing on the immanence of queer theology in each author’s preoccupation with corporeality, I have sought to (re)negotiate, rather than further polarize, these binary tensions between the secular and the religious. Indeed, amid the doctrines, genres, poetic forms, and historical contexts to which *Dissident Secularism* attends, the theo-critical plasticity of the body in Eliot, Crane, and Auden gradually manifests as the very material that doubly binds, or inextricably tethers, sexuality and religion in modernism.

We may conclusively tighten this bind by returning to Eliot, the poet-critic who most (dis)orients the trajectories of Crane and Auden on the grid of twentieth-century literature. Centering on the difference between sex/sexuality as a concern that replaces religion in secular
modernity, and sex/sexuality and religion as concerns that are singular and thus non-substitutive, the following analysis underscores a line of argument pertinent to each author treated in my dissertation. In “The Modern Mind,” Eliot responds to I.A. Richards, who in the second edition of *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926) argues that canto XXVI of Dante’s *Purgatorio* “illuminates [The Waste Land’s and Eliot’s] persistent concern with sex, the problem of our generation, as religion was the problem of the last” (292; emphasis added). Eliot admits

the importance of Canto XXVI, and it was shrewd of Mr. Richards to notice it; but in his contrast of sex and religion he makes a distinction which is too subtle for me to grasp. One might think that sex and religion were ‘problems’ like Free Trade and Imperial Preference; it seems odd that the human race should have gone on for so many thousands of years before it suddenly realized that religion and sex, one right after the other, presented problems….To Matthew Arnold we owe the credit of bringing the religious issue explicitly into the discussion of literature and poetry; and with due respect to Mr. Richards, and with Mr. Richards himself as a witness, it does not seem to me that this ‘issue’ has been wholly put aside and replaced by that of ‘sex.’ My contemporaries seem to me still to be occupied with it, whether they call themselves churchmen, or agnostics, or rationalists, or social revolutionists. (127-28)

As Dominic Manganiello points out, in this passage Eliot certainly “does not fail to acknowledge the importance of Dante’s canto” (72), even though he does not engage Richards’s related sense

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2 The queer-theological implications of *Purgatorio* Canto XXVI, and particularly of Arnaut Daniel’s appearance, can hardly be underestimated: “In the *Purgatorio*, sodomy is no longer a sin of violence against nature but one of excessive love. The circle of the lustful in Canto XXVI is occupied by both sodomites and *ermaphrodite*, which is sometimes translated as *hermaphrodites* but which here is equivalent to ‘heterosexuals.’” (See Joseph Pequigney, “Sodomy in Dante’s *Inferno* and *Purgatory*,” *Representations* 36 [Fall 1991]: 22-42). As one of the latter, Arnaut Daniel, like the sodomites, is guilty of sensual indulgence. Pequigney also points out that Virgil, Dante’s guide and the dear friend whom Statius addresses in Canto XXV, was known to have been attracted to boys” (Lamos “Elegiac” 40). Given the rich inter-textual web that the *Divine Comedy* as a whole affords Eliot’s corpus, Arnaut Daniel’s revelation of himself to Dante in Canto XXVI is apt to conjure the most Dantesque moment in Eliot’s poetry: his imitation of Dante’s *terza rima* in *Four Quartets*, where Eliot’s speaker meets “The eyes of a familiar compound ghost/Both intimate and unidentifiable” (*Complete* 193). As Lamos notes, “Although the sodomites in Hell (Canto XV) occupy the last ring and are compelled to tread on an arid and barren plain reminiscent of *The Waste Land*, Dante is surprised to discover there his beloved teacher, Brunetto Latini, in a recognition scene that Eliot openly imitates in the ‘dead patrol’ section of *Little Gidding*” (“Elegiac” 40). Moreover, the imagery of Arnaut Daniel’s self-concealment in purgatorial fire, which follows his self-revelation to Dante, also recalls the epigraph to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: through this para-textual cusp, we enter *Inferno* Canto XXVII, lines 61-66, where Guido da Montefeltro (c1220-1298), “a renowned Ghibelline leader whose conversion Dante had praised as exemplary in his *Convivio* (iv, xxviii, 8)” (Mandelbaum 382), “overcomes his initial reluctance to reveal his identity when he takes Dante for one of the damned like himself, consigned to hell for eternity. This mistaken first impression—Dante is actually one of the living—leads to another: his story will never be told on earth. Secure in
that the locus of sex and religion in The Waste Land may reside in the figure of Tiresias in whom “many aspects of the one fact of sex” (Richards 292)—namely, biological sex and sexual difference; sexual metamorphosis, as per Tiresias’s roles in Greek mythology; (trans)gendering; “sex” as the sexual act; and “sex” as sexuality in the erotic terms of one’s orientation—are encrypted. Eliot’s surefire acknowledgement of the canto’s importance, however, leaves his response to Richards’s “too subtle” distinction between sex/sexuality and religion all the more provocative for its manifest “caginess” (Manganiello 72). For instance, Eliot does not explicitly state that religion cannot be thought, let alone practiced, without sex/sexuality; nor does he explicitly state that sex/sexuality cannot be thought, let alone practiced, without religion.

Catching Eliot’s reference to Arnold, and recalling his censure of the secularization thesis Arnold championed, one discerns an argumentative trace of Arnold in Richards’s sense that religion is replaced by sex/sexuality as modernity’s glaring “problem.” Metonymically, that is, Richards situates “sex” in the secularizing place of Arnold’s humanism.

Like humanism, sex/sexuality is integral to the emancipatory vision of secularization. Indeed, once declared the substitutive “problem,” sex/sexuality turns out to be the gauge of advanced secularization and its quandaries: “For, if religious repression is the problem” facing sex and sexuality, “then freedom from religion [i.e. secularism] is the answer. This traditional view plays into the larger Enlightenment narrative in which freedom from religion and the development of secularism bring about human liberation” (Jakobsen “Sex, Secularism”). For all its caginess, Eliot’s response to Richards’s sex-centric interpretation of The Waste Land is consonant with Jakobsen’s argument that “religious regulation and secular freedom” are “mutually constitutive”:

this assumption, Guido attempts painfully and laboriously to project his voice through the roaring flame in which he is wrapped” (Manganiello 18).
I make this argument because modern freedom, even the Enlightenment freedom that is first and foremost supposed to be liberated from religion, has religious roots. Those roots can be found in the Protestant Reformation, and they inform not just the “religious Right” but also the secularism that draws upon the Enlightenment (and its religious heritage).³ (“Sex, Secularism”; emphasis added)

Jakobsen’s crucial point, on the mutual constitution or contamination of religious regulation and secular freedom, sets into relief what I take to be Eliot’s main critique of Richards: that his secularizing “contrast of sex and religion” is “too subtle” (“Mind” 127) or, to unmask Eliot’s litotes, too sophistic or even programmatic. The “issue” of religion cannot be “wholly put aside and replaced by that of ‘sex’” (128) because religion and sex/sexuality are as mutually constitutive as religion and secularism. By way of “modern freedom,” of course, secularism abides only a metonymic keystroke away from sex/sexuality. Eliot’s response thus invites us to inflect, via chiasmus, Jakobsen’s key formulation: religious regulation and secular/sexual freedom are unthinkable without their constitutive inversions—secular/sexual regulation and religious freedom. For, in Eliot’s scheme of hermeneutic singularities, “nothing in this world or the next is a substitute for anything else; and if you find that you must do without something, such as religious faith or philosophic belief, then you must just do without it” (“Matthew Arnold” 113). Arguably, notwithstanding their disparities, the corpuses of Crane and Auden instantiate Eliot’s approach to sex/sexuality and religion as non-substitutive singularities: with all three authors, I have argued, secular and religious desires persist on a transversal grid of theo-critical negotiation, rather than on a plane of displacement, replacement, acquisition, or conquest.

Moreover, we might gauge the theoretical canniness or even prescience of Richards’s substitutive angle on *The Waste Land*. Specifically, how does Richards’s *theoretical* view of sex/sexuality/secularism as a replacement for the “problem” of religion interface with the

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³ “A robust religious freedom,” Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini write, “is not in tension with, but is in fact a crucial ground for meaningful sexual freedom. That is, rather than see religious freedom as threatened by or the opposite of sexual freedom, we see these two freedoms as intertwined, even interstructured [sic]” (“Political Debates” 1231).
theological implications of Eliot’s anti-substitutive, singularizing response? Appreciating Richards’s “generational” take on *The Waste Land* draws us into the ambit of Foucault’s work from the 1960s, specifically “A Preface to Transgression” (1963) and *The Order of Things* (1966). Jeremy Carrette, an eminent reader of *homo religiosus* in Foucault, singles out these works as essential to what he calls “Foucault’s theological model” (81). Advancing the anti-humanism of the French intellectual scene of the 1960s, Foucault fuses the “dead God of [the Marquis de] Sade,” Nietzsche’s shadow of God (79), and Bataille’s argument that “the question of (male) sexuality” occupies “the empty space” left by the tangled demise of God and Man (81). In this compass, Foucault uncovers sexuality “as an act where the ‘absence of God’ is manifest”: “the language of (male) sexuality emerged out of the death of God” (82). Sexuality and the death of God are intrinsically connected, tied together at the limits of human thought. According to Foucault [in “A Preface to Transgression”], in (male) sexuality we face not only the absence of God but also our own death. The body and God are thus fundamentally fused

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4 As Carrette notes, Jean-Paul Sartre engaged with Alexandre Kojève’s 1930s lectures on Hegel to devise “his humanist atheism where man replaced God in the creation of an ‘inverted theology,’” an existentialist paradigm trenchantly characterized by Foucault as a deeply problematic “theologization of man” (79). Critical departures from Sartre’s paradigm, including those spearheaded (deconstructively) by Derrida and (archeologically) by Foucault, opted instead to pair the death of God “with the death of man in the critique of subjectivity” (79). “The attack on God is linked to the attack on man,” Carrette explains, “opening a new space of reflection where, as Foucault put it, the death of God and the last man are ‘engaged in a contest with more than one round’” (79). This open-ended contest is precisely what is at stake in Nietzsche’s shadow of God: see Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*; Stauffer’s and Bergo’s collection, *Nietzsche and Levinas: “After the Death of a Certain God”*; and Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*.

5 Regarding the Marquis de Sade, Foucault in “A Preface to Transgression,” writes: “From the moment that Sade delivered its first words and marked out, in a single discourse, the boundaries of what suddenly became its kingdom, the language of sexuality has lifted us into the night where God is absent, and where all of our actions are addressed to this absence” (qtd. in Carrette 82). “Rather than the death of God,” Foucault writes of divinity’s postmortem shadow in *The Order of Things*, “or, rather, in the wake of that death and in the profound correlation with it—what Nietzsche’s thought heralds is the end of his [i.e. God’s] murderer; it is the explosion of man’s face in laughter” (qtd. in Carrette 80). Referencing “A Preface to Transgression” again, Carrette notes how Foucault engages Bataille to outline “the predicament of the death of God and how the situation since Sade has brought about the emergence of sexuality at the limits of existence. At the limits of existence there is the possibility of transgression… Foucault…extrapolates the idea of transgression from Bataille’s work on society, where transgression completes and transcends the taboo, to create an elusive and enigmatic notion” (81). Bataille’s key work on the interplay of sexuality, transgression, society, taboo, and religious experience is *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. For a superb account of sexuality’s stake in God’s death and religion’s return, see Jordan, “The Return of Religion during the Reign of Sexuality,” in *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion*. 
together in the realisation of the finitude of human life. This problematic of the finite nature of existence is taken up in a different context in Foucault’s *The Order of Things*. Here Foucault saw the modern creation of the figure of ‘man’ as born out of the realisation of finite existence. The body, desire and language are discovered at the limits of existence, at death. (Carrette 82)

Albeit brisk and underdeveloped, Richards’s sense that *The Waste Land* hinges on a generational displacement of religion by sex/sexuality as the foremost issue for modernist culture strongly anticipates Foucault’s reading of sexuality as the supplemental aftermath of God’s and humanity’s deaths.

The proximity of Foucault’s synthesis of Sade, Nietzsche, and Bataille to the supplementary logic Richards finds in *The Waste Land* enables us to locate in Eliot’s prose a more expansive response to such substitutive thinking. Hailing from “Thoughts After Lambeth,” this response unravels the implications of Eliot’s retort to Richards in “The Modern Mind” and affords a counterpoint to Foucault’s sketch of the knotted deaths of God and humanity:

> The Press may continue for a time, for the Press is always behind the times, to organize battues of popular notables, with the religion of a this [sic] and of a that; and to excite such persons to talk nonsense about the revival or decay of ‘religion.’ Religion can hardly revive, because it cannot decay. To put the matter bluntly on the lowest level, it is not to anybody’s interest that religion should disappear. If it did, many compositors would be thrown out of work; the audiences of our best-selling scientists would shrink to almost nothing; and the typewriters of the Huxley brothers would cease from tapping. Without religion the whole human race would die, as according to W.H.R. Rivers, some Melanesian tribes have died, solely of boredom. Everyone would be affected: the man who regularly has a run in his car and a round of golf on Sunday, quite as much as the punctilious churchgoer. Dr. Sigmund Freud, with characteristic delicacy of feeling, has reminded us that we should ‘leave Heaven to the angels and the sparrows’; following his hint, we may safely leave ‘religion’ to Mr. Julian Huxley and Dr. Freud. (370)

Logically, if neither religion nor God is perishable, then humanity too can philosophically neither perish nor revive. With Eliot, we arrive at a Christian humanism (Oser *Return* 36-51; 85-101;121-149); at a Christian humanism shaped by a wider modernist humanism (Sicari 161-200); or at a “religious humanism” that differs from “the more secular humanism of…other classicists”
(Vanheste 152). For Eliot, religion’s “decay” and the “death of God” exemplify heterodoxies of bad faith that orthodoxy must work to recalibrate for itself (Viswanathan “Blasphemy” 408-12).

As I argue in chapter three, the ineluctability of the sexual body in Eliot’s social criticism compromises or *queers* the rigor of his appeals to orthodoxy. For their parts, Crane and Auden quicken this queer compromise by enacting heterodoxies in their poetics. When triangulated in the continuum of *Dissident Secularism*, therefore, Eliot, Crane, and Auden collectively *perform* the dialectics of orthodoxy and heterodoxy that shape both religion and “the secularism that draws upon the Enlightenment (and its religious heritage)” (Jakobsen “Sex, Secularism”).

Against sex/sexuality’s epochal replacement of religion via the death of God, the dialectics of orthodoxy and heterodoxy pinpoint the *immanence of embodiment* as a plastic force that mutually constitutes religion and secularism, and thus religion and sex/sexuality. A corollary of this mutual constitution, I submit, is the imposition of Kantian checks and balances in two directions: first, on the religious claim to immanence in and (re)mastery of secular polities and cultures; and second, on epistemic secularism’s claim to masterful transcendence of religion. Doubly binding religious immanence to secular transcendence, I argue, cautions strongly against tipping the hermeneutic scale in favour of immanence over transcendence; or, mutatis mutandis, of transcendence over immanence. This strong caution solicits consistent deconstructive negotiation—and thus not consensus—between the dialectical aisles of ethics and politics.

Double-bound reading of this sort has guided my queer exegeses of Eliot, Crane, and Auden by keeping queer theory and queer theology in productive, interminable, and interpenetrating tension; rather than in static or unserviceable opposition. By interfacing religious immanence and secular transcendence, I have sought in *Dissident Secularism* to deconstruct the trenchant religious-antireligious binary of epistemic secularism, which continues to steer the
postmodern course of much literary theory and queer-modernist criticism. In my dissertation’s trajectory, secularism may well remain an immanent condition of, but not necessarily an epistemic precondition for, queer-modernist studies and the theoretical humanities. Rather than seeking to trounce secularism in a reactionary verve of bad faith, I have aspired in this thesis to vouchsafe the *critically queer* value of theology and religion for queer-modernist studies.
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