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Glossolalia is an open-access, peer-reviewed graduate journal of religion that publishes biannually out of Yale Divinity School. Grounded in a strong belief in the need for further collective academic utterance at the graduate level, *Glossolalia* exists as a multidisciplinary space for academic papers and analysis. Though initially founded (and subsequently re-founded) by Yale graduate students, *Glossolalia* welcomes submissions from the worldwide community of scholars and academics.

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Most respected readers of *Glossolalia*,

It is with the greatest enthusiasm that I can proclaim the sustained success of *Glossolalia* in the year 2017. In the face of an increasingly fractured world, free academic discourse must continue to be fostered, and the community behind that discourse, however threatened, must maintain its astute vigilance. Sitting at the helm of an open-access publication, a part of this responsibility falls upon us to promote that scholarly utterance, and we are eternally honored to play even the most miniscule of roles in this collective effort.

In 2017, an acute sense of confusion permeated the realms of the political, the religious, the public, and the private; thus, a quest to further understand this confusion underscored our request for papers upon this theme. As is quickly becoming custom, a vast collection of academics from around the world responded to our call. Submissions arrived from scholars at a variety of professional levels, many from within the academy and some from without. Gathered from among these submissions, the three papers contained herein stand as the utmost exemplars of intellectual labor, as well as presentations of scholarly voice through that most glorious method of academic discourse.

With gratitude for their sustained efforts, we present the writings of these three magnificent scholars, whose work profoundly engages with the theme of religion and its oft confusing aspects.

Wishing you all the very best,

Alexander D'Alisera
Editor in Chief

AT A LOSS

Dante's Antiphon to Recent Marxist Voices

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Scarcity is the foundation of human history. It is the condition of our development, the force of our industry. So claimed Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.[1] Fifteen years later, after he had seriously reconsidered the tenets of Marxism, Sartre gave an interview in which he carried the claim further. "I consider that scarcity is the phenomenon in which we live," he said. "Even here, among ourselves, there is scarcity in our conversation: scarcity of ideas, scarcity of understanding. I may not understand your questions or may answer them badly—that, too, is scarcity."[2] Two things have happened since he wrote the *Critique*. First, he has intensified his earlier account of scarcity, now using the term to describe breakdowns in communication. On this score, it has gained

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 202.
[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Interview with Michel Rybalka," *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Schilpp (Lasalle, IL: Open Court, 1981), 30.

greater resonance with plain language: we lack understanding; we come up short on ideas.

But Sartre is also saying something far more probing, affected as he is by his immediate context. After many years in the public eye, he expects that this interview, like so many others, will reveal an inescapable sense of poverty. Misunderstanding is continual. The same goes for undeveloped or unclear ideas. Sartre now indicates that scarcity, while it is an economic ill, is not definitively treatable by resource distribution. It is an incurable syndrome, caused by twin existential deficiencies of comprehension and creativity. And because these deficiencies are incurable—odd as it sounds—*confusion is certain*. Sartre does not put it so blatantly, perhaps because his comments are made off the cuff. Then again, perhaps he is avoiding the paradox of Plato's *Meno*, which looms large before him: if misunderstanding is the status quo, how can we understand the status quo? For if we have understood the status quo, misunderstanding is not the status quo; if, on the other hand, we have misunderstood the status quo, how do we know *what* we have misunderstood? It is a question Sartre does not ask, let alone answer. We must turn elsewhere.

As my title promises, this is an essay about Dante. I wish to put him in dialectical relation to recent neo-Marxist thought, but I have begun with Sartre because his view remains incisive. He has shown that scarcity is not initially a term of measure, and I take him to be right. (What would motivate us to count our resources if not some pre-numeric sense of a problem?) Scarcity, in its most basic position, is a term of want. It names a phenomenon found in the oscillations of appetite and anxiety, which together generate the call for a good not had. In other words, scarcity does not originate in the measure of resources "out there," in the world beyond our bodies. It originates "in here," in the perceived relation of our bodies to what is out there. I am not suggesting it is conjured up by or confined to

the self; it is nothing if not shared and cultural. Nonetheless, it exists in the translation process between one's consciousness and all else. This essay therefore works from the assumption that scarcity is, in a word, egocentric; it is peculiar to human awareness. Other animals certainly suffer deprivation and confusion, but they cannot name it as such. We must name it for them, because the phenomenon as we know it emerges from a nexus of human capacities: the rational, the moral, and—I will emphasize—the linguistic. Scarcity is a concept made possible only in the subjunctive range of grammar. If not for the sense that something *should* be full, or that something *could* be lost, 'scarcity' would have no utility. It is not concretely a thing. You cannot point to it as you can a building or a fish or a ball. It does exist, but only in the tacit work of a narrative (*i.e.* about *that* starving person, who *should* be fed).

Keeping this in mind, I want to advance the cause of narrative theology. What kind of thinking enables the phrase *I shall not want*? I am particularly interested in Dante's way of setting up the question. Like Augustine, he writes a narrative grounded in promised fullness, portraying his own character's deliverance from privation. But unlike Augustine, Dante's narrative has exercised little influence on theology since the postliberal turn. Denys Turner says that Dante was a great narrative theologian, but even Turner is a bit careless in saying Dante reinvented the genre.[3] Of course, Turner's claim is not groundless. A modern librarian might classify the *Commedia* as a poetic work of fiction, entirely distinct from Augustine's *Confessions*. But if we force these two stories to exist only on the modern poles of the literal and the fictional, we will miss their common ground in Christian allegory. And on this ground, I argue that the Christian tradition has always novelized the problem at hand.[4] The literal and

[3] Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 109.
[4] Space does not allow for the development of this thought, but Augustine did not in fact originate narrative theology. He simply magnified the effects of a

the figurative equally constitute the real. Moreover, the literal *is* figurative; the material world is symbolic of a deeper creativity.[5] The *Commedia* thus represents the late medieval development, not the reinvention, of Augustine's genre. In other words, for a consummate theological presentation which is both narratival *and* scholastic, we need look no further than Dante.

I have begun with Sartre because he sets off down Dante's path, defining confusion as a kind of want. Scarcity, in his view, names at least two hungers—one for truth and the other for goods. (The third, which Sartre does not take up here, is the hunger for beauty.[6]) These demonstrate the same existential gape at a profound, unavoidable absence. As we will see in this essay, Dante gets beyond Sartre's dilemma, because he is able to assume a great deal more about the way these hungers relate. To start with, Dante recognizes vice as a truthful category. Desires can be rightly or wrongly placed. And when desire is misplaced, it has a skewing effect—a scarcifying effect—on understanding. This is the core problem of the *Commedia*. At its outset, Dante's character finds himself lost in the woods, struggling to regain *la verace via* (the true way). He is chased off course by three beasts—a leopard, a lion, and a wolf—classically thought to

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method passed on to him. His conversion, we should recall, began when Ambrose demonstrated the power of allegorical interpretation (*Confessions* V.14.24). The same method allowed Augustine to read himself and all of history into the story of redemption.

[5] The allegorical method arguably led Hugh of St. Victor to formulate this oft-repeated idea: "The whole visible world is like a book written by God…" A lengthier translation can be found in Gabriel Josipivici, *The World and the Book* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 29.

[6] Many would agree that Sartre's most evocative account of beauty's absence is his novel *Nausea*. Sartre's own pilgrim character, Roquentin, is overtaken with disgust at the strangeness of things in the world, which fall away from essential and integral meaning. We will see that Dante's answer to *Nausea* is the same as his answer to scarcity.

symbolize lust, pride, and greed.[7] In the language of 1 John, the beasts represent all that is in the world. St. Thomas Aquinas likewise says these sins are the multilateral cause of all sin, because they summarize one appetite for goods without God.[8]

The wolf holds my interest here. Dante's bestiary alters the Johannine order, leading some commentators to suggest the progression of a man's lifecycle: sins of youth, sins of manhood, sins of age.[9] If this is the case, then Dante's character, lost "mid-way through life's journey," has been driven farthest from the path by the desire to secure a paradise on earth. The wolf is the empty pursuit of a well-heeled retirement. She is the gaunt metamorphosis of the other beasts, which in their final degree of habituation are no longer beautiful or powerful; they are ravenous and malnourished—*carca ne la sua magrezza* (laden in her thinness).[10] This semiology, suggested by Sayers and others, is compelling and probably right. But it is certainly incomplete, because the wolf takes on sharper definition when Virgil appears to Dante and foretells her demise. "Many are the animals she mates with," he says, "and there will be yet more…"[11] Not only is the wolf the metamorphosis of other sins; she is their mate and their mother. Her greedy nature, akin to the first two beasts, is absolutely predominant. Her starving frame creates all kinds of sin

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[7] Some have argued that it is unnecessary to fix a discrete idea to each beast (for instance John Demaray, "The Pilgrim Texts and Dante's Three Beasts," *Italica* 46.3 (1969), 238. But this does not acknowledge Virgil's later explanation of the wolf, who is the impetus of Italy's avarice.

[8] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a2ae.77.5. Hereafter *ST*.

[9] See the note in Dorothy Sayers' translation: *Hell* (London: Penguin, 1949), 75. Her position looks especially probable when contrasted to Dante's *Convivio* IV.xxvi, in which Dante reads Virgil's *Aeneid* as an allegory for the three ages of man's maturation. See also David Scott Wilson-Okamura, "Lavinia and Beatrice: The Second Half of the *Aeneid* in the Middle Ages," *Dante Studies* No. 119 (2001), 107.

[10] *Inferno* I.50. Each part of Dante's trilogy will be abbreviated as follows: *Inf.*, *Purg.*, *Par.* Translations are my own.

[11] *Inf.* I.100-101.

and reduces all sin back to itself. The wolf, then, is Dante's analogue for "all that is in the world." Virgil says as much: she is the figure let loose from hell by primal envy.[12] No wonder she is the sole prey of the heavenly hound, whom Virgil predicts will soon chase the wolf from Italy's every villa.

Scholars are again divided on the identity of the hound. (The Holy Spirit? A literal figure from history? The *Commedia* itself?[13]) In a sense, the question requires no answer. The hound is simply the wolf's opposite but not her equal. The *type* of opposition is what Dante displays, because unlike the wolf, the hound "shall not feed on lands or lucre…"[14] The hound feeds instead on endless plenty—wisdom, love, and virtue. His food is immaterial, which is precisely what makes his food hardier; he feasts on the very attributes originating all material things.[15]

Wisdom, love, and virtue. These will resolve the perplexity of want. But how? If Dante is to understand—if he is to feed upon the hound's hardier goods—he will require two very critical means: a pilgrimage and a guide. These divine foods cannot be given all at once, nor can they be self-prepared. They are necessarily spread out over a journey, because they change the eater over time. John Freccero has traced a fitting parallel to the seventh book of the *Confessions*, where Augustine recalls himself in "the region of unlikeness" after taking a second mistress.[16] At this point, says Augustine, he had deduced that God must be incorruptible, but he remained unable to see how that should affect his slavery to lust.

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[12] *Inf.* I.110-111.
[13] See Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice* (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2005), 113; Claudia Rattazzi Papka ""Tra feltro e feltro": Dante's Cartaceous Apocalypse," *Dante Studies*, No. 117 (1999), 36.
[14] *Inf.* I.105.
[15] Dante soon sees these very attributes inscribed on hell's gate. Hell itself is a divine institution, not a Homeric netherworld ruled by Satan. (*Inferno* III.4-7)
[16] John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 153ff.

Then, after reading some Platonist works, he heard God as if from afar, saying: "I am the food of grown men: grow and you shall eat Me. And you shall not change me into yourself as bodily food, but into me you shall be changed."[17] Dante must now embrace the same Eucharistic possibility, which will be his answer to Meno's paradox: not precisely knowing his problem, Dante must feed upon an excess, a truth greater than his mind. It is an intake of knowledge available only to faith. And what a strange faith it is, resting as it does on a pagan poet. We will soon be better situated to ponder this paradox more thoroughly; for now, let it suffice to say that Dante is unable to sort himself out, and Virgil is a very present help. The only way back to the true path is to follow a pagan through hell. Frightened of what he does not understand, Dante wavers:

> Since if I come I will abandon myself,
> I am afraid my coming may be crazy.
> You are wise; you are an expert at what I cannot reason.[18]

Dante's character evokes the problem of Sartre. His lack of understanding—as we will see—is more fundamentally a lack of *self*-understanding: *Who am I to become?* Dante is deficient in himself. But he blindly entrusts himself to Virgil's connoisseurship, as if to say: *You know the food of wisdom better than I. You know what I need to know, despite whatever pangs of resistance I feel in following.*

Virtual Reality and Language

One of my critical aims so far has been to show that scarcity is not rooted in material lack. But I have bypassed a valid question: in what sense is scarcity a fact of materiality? Hardt and Negri posed this question a decade ago, noticing a shift in the way we define the

[17] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), VII, x.
[18] *Inf.* II.35-37.

problem. Before the digital age, it was clear that goods were naturally exclusive. They existed in one place at a time and belonged to one party at a time. But we now understand the opposite to be true, at least in some cases. I can download a book, and I am not technically removing it from the number available to all. Its copies are without quantity or boundary, accessible from several places at once. For Hardt and Negri, this new mode of acquisition signifies a newly possible communism, because it outmodes the logic which says, "if you have it I cannot have it."[19] Downloadable goods disrupt the core sense of nature in John Locke's thesis on property.[20] How strange, then, that Locke's view continues to justify the structures of the market; his doctrine now requires enforcement. Digital goods, which could be released and reproduced almost *ad infinitum*, must now be monetized by an artificially limited release.[21] Scarcity has become pathologically necessary—as if, without depleting and privatizing what is common, the modern individual ceases to be.

Hardt and Negri therefore urge a new political identity upon the possessors of virtual reality. This new politics, however, is not owing to some recent mutation of our nature; it is grounded more truthfully in the real. Locke's main mistake was to take one class of goods as the only kind: "Material property, such as land or water or a car, cannot be in two places at once: my having and using it negates your having and using it." [22] Hardt and Negri have no dispute with Locke here. But they insist upon a second kind of good, arguably the more important of the two, because it shapes our view of the first:

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[19] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 180.
[20] Classically, the water I draw from a common spring is my water and not yours, by the rightful earnings of my labor. See John Locke, "Of Property", in his *Second Treatise of Government*, §§31, 36-38.
[21] Limited release dates back to the century following Locke, with the physiocrats of France. See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), 29-49.
[22] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 311.

> Immaterial property, however, such as an idea or an image or a form of communication, is infinitely reproducible. It can be everywhere at once, and my using and having it does not hinder yours. On the contrary, as Thomas Jefferson says, ideas are enhanced by their communication: when I light my candle from yours they both seem to burn brighter.[23]

We will soon see that Thomas Jefferson reveals a great deal more than Hardt and Negri are ready to accept. But they find him provocative because although he was influenced by Locke, his sense of human nature transcends Locke's universe. A lush virtual economy has always existed as freely sharable, defying bounded and exclusive notions of nature. Although its boundlessness was less globally patent in Jefferson's era, there was always an immaterial commons, the conditions of which were at last materialized in digital networks.[24] On this reading, digital technology has widened the hidden fissure in Locke's state of nature, showing the prior fault in his model. And we virtual realizers must now face the plausible—indeed necessary—task of rethinking how we symbolize our relation to the world. It may turn out that *economy*, as we often compass the term, is only the surface of an irreducible abundance. The goods we possess must not only be exclusive.[25] Some must be excessive. That

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[23] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 311.

[24] A parallel exists in Marx, for whom the realm of freedom is something beyond the necessities of raw physical need. Socialized man therefore makes use of all forms of production to open the way to such a realm. See *Capital Vol. 3* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 800.

[25] I recognize that not all Lockean thinkers hold this view. Often, air and sunlight are considered non-commodities held in common. However, Locke believes that what is common is made *valuable* as it is made private by labor. As common, the goods of nature are only *potentially* valuable. Thus, air itself is potentially valuable as a commodity; and this represents the impetus which Hardt and Negri find appalling.

is, some goods must exist only as far as they are shared and reproduced freely.

But how do we pierce the rind for the fruit? How can we overcome the habits of scarcity, if virtuality announces a better, more progressive social contract? Perceptively, Hardt and Negri indicate the necessity of love, which must exceed the immediate 'mine and ours' of the nuclear, bourgeois family. If we are ever to outgrow this need to privatize, to create exclusivity where there is none, we must tap into something older than the social contract of atomized individuals. They specify: we must emulate premodern Christian and Judaic practices. It is a bold claim. Readers of Augustine will likely wonder if Hardt and Negri have suffered a conversion from materialism; for they are describing *caritas*, the generous nature of God, shared with and by faithful humanity. Hardt and Negri anticipate this suspicion and demur. Love need not be a metaphysical reality, they say. It was always "incarnated in the common material political project."[26] They therefore reclaim love in the tradition of Marx as soon as they nearly transgress him. The careful reader will be dissatisfied with this, because they offer two solutions which are not interactive. They suggest that an immaterial class of goods creates an alternative world structure, but they reduce all action to materiality. Whence comes the power?

A fresh reading of Dante is not only helpful but appropriate here for two reasons. First, Dante represents the sort of love Hardt and Negri advocate, but he shows that they are too timid in following it through. If love must transcend the private and familial, it must also exceed the mortally political. The politics of love must participate in an excess of good, reflecting a picture of primordial existence which transcends a bounded state of nature. Secondly, Dante is a perennial favorite of Marxists. I am critiquing the movement from within,

[26] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 352.

following one of its own prototypes. I should quickly add, however, that my critique is not limited to Marxism; the Marxist spirit has typically gained mobility as an outgrowth of Lockean problematics. In both schemas, the peasant's revolt is justified by the common right to material existence. The same logic ennobles laborers to unite, to take arms when necessary and abolish hegemonic infrastructure. Herein lies the correspondence of the left and the right to this day: liberty is deliverance *from* scarcity *to* self-possession. Whether this will occur through many private estates or one held in common—that is our debate. But in the words of Alain Badiou, the political divide is now no more than a soft contradiction. Capitalism irrevocably configures both sides—a fact which, in my judgment, reveals the Lockean underpinnings of Marxism. Hence, as Badiou also says, true resistance now seems impossible without the conviction "that something needs to be done that escapes the law of the world."[27]

I contend that this is precisely Dante's gift to the present era. He does not neatly solve our problem; he creates an alternative problematic. Put simply, Dante reads the Lockean-Marxist sequence backwards: scarcity is the *outcome*, not the *incitement*, of self-possession. In a state of self-government, there is no final reference beyond the self. Although I may identify with others who form the self-governed body in aggregate, there is no decisive hope of love or commonality. There is only flux and threat, because there is no decisive guidance to be found in another—someone worthy of trust, who inhabits the ultimately real domain of wisdom more maturely. For Dante, therefore, self-government devolves to *homo incurvatus in se*, man twisted in on himself.

Still, there are good reasons why Dante continues to stir imaginations on the left. Cesare Casarino has suggested that Dante anticipates Marx by observing the virtuality of our nature, exactly in

[27] Alain Badiou with Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. Louise Burchell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 3-4.

parallel with the discussion above.[28] In the short work *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Dante asserts that God gave language to Adam not in any one specific tongue, but in the capacity for one. Language is an Aristotelian potency—a pre-actualized *virtus* or ability. It is thus displayed by, but is not the same as, any given form of speech.[29] In other words, our knowledge of language *as faculty* is indirect, known only through regional languages. The linguistic faculty, a virtual reserve common to all humans, is not uniformly comprehensible. It remains shrouded even as it is revealed, virtually suspended outside all geopolitical dialect and definition. Taking note of this, Casarino employs Dante to open a neo-Marxist anthropology, because language *per se* can be taken to represent the nascence of a new world. For if linguistic potency is common to all, a new language is possible for all. To put it pragmatically: language may always change, and it may therefore change whatever it effects. Deep within human virtuality is the possibility of another world, another way of knowing, structuring and circulating things—another *Lebensform* in Wittgenstein's sense.

Along these lines, it is quite telling that Dante would choose vernacular Italian for his *Commedia*. Not only did he sentence certain clerics to the Inferno; his language broke from the Latin strictures of theology (albeit by a very idealistic Catholicism). Dante wrote the lyrics for a new mode of Italian commonality. Engels was therefore somewhat justified in praising Dante's Party spirit, because Dante activated a new thesis for the uneducated class.[30] There was now a supra-Latin yet vulgar Paradise of God, and everyone could accompany the poet in imagining *virtus* to that end, both linguistically

[28] Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 8-15.
[29] Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia* I.iv.1-6.
[30] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 6* (Great Britain: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 271.

and morally. Dante's epic indeed created a common identity for working people in the highly fractious city-states of Italy. But we must immediately note Dante's great difference from any sort of materialist project. At no point did Dante suppose the Italian tongue could be developed apart from the theo-directional potencies of creation. Human virtuality, our capacity to speak and create, had to imply the possibility of becoming like God. In other words, if we are really to take Dante's line of approach, we must retrace his link between the virtual and the virtuous. We must speak about the Word himself, whose incarnation resists the constitutive project of materialist equity. One might think of the feeding of the 5,000 as a kind of ontological exhibit. The multiplied loaves are not an exposition of distributive justice in a fixed quantum; they are an apocalypse of true liberality, a glimpse into the cosmos *as creation*. Here we will find Dante's pivotal difference from Hardt and Negri, who think that love can be incarnated in material self-reference. The gospels hang everything on the opposite claim. For Dante, materiality is only possible in the Word. The creative power of love is not finally contingent on materiality but on creativity itself, which is boundlessly verbal.

Dante will thus agree with Hardt and Negri that scarcity is more an outlook than a material problem. He will also agree that it can be transcended by means of images and ideas, *ergo* language shared with others in the mode of political love. But he will insist that when love's poetry alters the perception of scarcity (thus altering the problem itself), it is because love and language derive power from immaterial Being. Hardt and Negri have almost lighted upon this, but without metaphysics to 'twist' their desire upward (as Virgil says to Dante in *Purgatorio* XV), their project is doomed to falter. For them, virtual reality cannot truly signify infinity. It remains an empty significance, gestural in only one direction, back to the finite and the temporal. A downloaded book—even a book shared by all—remains bound in a

computer process, prone to obsolescence and decay, embedded in the proprietary labors of upkeep and production. The same is then true for minds and language, which must undoubtedly shrink to the custodial narratives of neurology and healthcare. Virtuality is physicality. It is depreciable, like the economic scarcity it ought to resist.[31] Under these circumstances, Jefferson's metaphor cannot even extend as far as Hardt and Negri claim. Lighting my candle with yours may double our light, but it will also increase the rate at which we are plunged into darkness.

Dante will suggest that instead, love is an uncreated light. If we will, we can possess it by reflecting it to others, who might then also shine it back to us and on to others forever. Let me illustrate this by way of anecdote. Not long ago, I saw an intriguing piece of art called a light painting. The artist had mounted dozens of little mirrors to a massive wall so that they jutted out sideways, facing each other at odd angles. Using a single light in the corner, she produced some fifty rays of light, all playing back and forth across the wall's expanse. To call this a *painting* is of course metonymical, since paint, when used, is used up. Light, on the other hand, can be multiplied. The work suggested something limitless, as if a single light's energy could be increased forever by reflection. This is the kind of potentiality Dante uses to illustrate the economics of love, taught at first by Virgil on the purgatorial ascent. We will turn to this passage presently, but several problems have now arisen in the ambit of language and material, and these require more immediate attention.

[31] The transhumanist movement wishes rid us of this problem once and for all by uploading consciousness. By remaining rooted in material use, their inevitably hegemonic project comes up against the same futility as Hardt and Negri. One should note that the term 'transhumanism' originated with Dante's *trasumanar*, a novel verb in *Par.* I.70. It is exactly Dante's sense of the term that I wish to employ in its original sense, since it is only applicable for the one 'for whom grace reserves the experience'.

The Verbal Aspect of Creation

In a light painting, the light will eventually burn out. But with Dante, we are engaged in a fully allegorical universe. Nothing is ever reduced to absolute literality, because all things exist as signs of what they are not, namely God. (Lucifer himself is a warped trinity with three heads. In Dante's allegory, we find there are two ways for moral agents to be not-God—a good way an evil way—but all beings which are not-God refer unavoidably to the Being which they are not.) This is the secret answer to Dante's problem of scarcity. Hardt and Negri almost got us to this point, but they kept us from its full brilliance by reducing virtuality to something with no supernatural locus. They suggest a limitless reproduction of ideas, but they fail to see the cacophonous result. For it must be asked: in their ideal system, what kinds of ideas will be limitlessly produced? All kinds? If so, how does this not lead to an even greater perplexity, a more agonizing scarcity of understanding? The mere multiplication of ideas will not, strictly speaking, satisfy the human appetite for truth. Perhaps Hardt and Negri would therefore think it necessary to control the reproduction of some ideas; but then who authorizes the good ones? Who adjudicates the networks of limitlessness? And how can this be called a limitless virtual economy? In the end, how is this not another hegemonic power deserving revolution?

For Dante, our linguistic nature does not merely suggest untold virtual abundance. It suggests that we always exist in the perception of another.[32] The Word of God's mind always eternally perceives us, as Augustine says in the *De Trinitate*.[33] In Augustine's terms, human language is therefore *enigmatic* of God's Word. That is, our own verbality is like God's and yet not, and we will only understand the

[32] "In fact, we believe that for the human, it is more natural to be perceived than to perceive." See *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, I.v.1.
[33] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV,11,20.

former sense by means of the latter.[34] For example: humans gain verbal knowledge about things because things exist *a priori*, whereas for God, things gain existence because he knows them.[35] God's verbality is not created, but creating.[36] Our linguistic habitus exists in utter dissimilarity to God, bound as we are in the process of learning and becoming. Still, even at this point of difference, we bear a similarity to God—precisely *because* of our mutability. Human language is inexhaustible and unfixed. Its mutation and development reveal a deep and boundless creativity, like the infinite plenitude of God's own being verbalized.

This is why in *Paradiso* XXVI, Dante borrows an image from Horace, picturing words as leaves upon a branch.[37] Just as leaves fall and are replaced, the mortal use of words is always in transition. For Horace, the cycle signifies the inevitability of death, but Dante inverts the emphasis, drawing focus to the leaf's origin and source of renewal. The image now calls to mind Christ's teaching in the Gospel: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit…"[38] Indeed, Dante's image is voiced by none other than Adam, whom Dante distinguishes as *pomo* (fruit).[39] Adam appears as a figure of Dante's own poetic method, representing the human task of creation, of naming things and thereby constituting their verbal existence in the world. The entire episode is verdant, rich with wild garden imagery, and its setting indicates the surprising, sometimes bewildering beauty

[34] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV,10,19.
[35] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV,13,22.
[36] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV,1,1.
[37] See Horace, *Ars Poetica* 60-63. Actually, Dante borrows the image from *Homer* via Horace. Here is Samuel Butler's translation of Apollo's speech in *Iliad* XXI, line 463: "…miserable mortals, who come out like leaves in summer and eat the fruit of the field, and presently fall lifeless to the ground…"
[38] John 15:5 (KJV).
[39] *Par.* XXVI.91.

of theo-directional fulfillment. Far from foreclosing diversity in nature, the divine telos multiplies it. All kinds of new things might happen, as evidenced by Dante's language itself. Drawing ever closer to God, Dante pushes vernacular Italian well beyond its former scope, establishing all kinds of novel words to suit his needs.[40] It is as if his experience in God's economy surpasses all prior classification.[41] Novel words become necessary because of Dante's ontological difference from God; yet the difference—and the scarcity of Dante's understanding—proves generative. It produces more and more mediated terms of relation, ways of signifying God in keeping with God's own excess.

Hence, when Dante is at a loss for words, he says more. Scarcity, in this case, gives way to abundance, because the absence of understanding is not a sign of confusion but of awe. True, language is always excessive and non-quantifiable. But Dante's lyricism is *fruitful* because the finite word is not limited by reference to the finite. With novelized expressions, he guides the reader to see what language can do in a universe already verbalized by love.

Inferiority and Metaphysics

Language is indeed a uniquely human labor. As Marx noted well, it is how we effect change in the material world.[42] Yet Dante says more. Language itself is an infinitely renewable good, enabling a vision beyond (but not without) the materiality of the senses.[43] The

[40] Joseph Luzzi, "'As a Leaf on a Branch…': Dante's Neologisms," *PMLA* 125, No. 2 (March 2010), 330.
[41] See Brenda Deen Schildgen, "Dante's Neologisms in the Paradiso and the Latin Rhetorical Tradition," *Dante Studies* No. 107 (1989), 111, 113.
[42] Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 178. This bears striking resemblance to Augustine's conviction that a mental word precedes work for both God and humanity. See *De Trinitate* XV,11,20.
[43] In fact, the canto begins with Dante's character blinded by glory. To gain back his sight, he must see with his words, and he speaks of God as Alpha and Omega. The alphabetic metaphor takes us toward the doctrines of First Cause

reader might wonder again: what about material goods? Have we indeed answered this question? What about the perplexity of the physical economy? Are we to simply describe food and water in a fictive abundance, when there are obvious shortages? What about the concrete, the real? Are the poor to subsist on words alone?

No, but neither are they to live by bread alone. We must not forget that from the beginning, Marx was bent on articulating the laborer's hope. The problem was the wage worker's alienation from himself, from his own internal fulfillment. Through the material dialectic, laborers would one day be psychologically whole, no longer subject to an upper class. Thus *material* was a highly abstract narrative subjunction. Marx indeed imagined a world beyond his senses, but he did not carry its implications far enough, as I am suggesting Dante did.

My case will be helped by what I take to be a more searching and introspective atheism, found once again in Sartre. During the rise of Stalin, he argued that Marxism only exists insofar as it is generated by an inferiority complex.[44] If the final transcendence of scarcity were to occur, Marxism would actually lose its essence. The self simply wants to be other than it is. Reduced to this premise, Marxism actually possesses the nature of consumerism, because it articulates the same acquisitive, existential unrest: *I always feel inferior to the image of my fulfilled self. I am always in want.* Furthermore, the image of my fulfilled self represents a world ideally disposed to me, and I cannot help but want others to serve that ideal.[45] Even the projection of a

and Final Good, which are not only linguistic, and not only metaphysical, but narratival.

[44] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 658.

[45] Sartre 1956, 471-534.

proletarian party does not eradicate the problem. The concrete other is always a difficulty, because he likewise intends to enslave me.[46]

Sartre's distillation of Marx is incisive, and many (if not most) in the Marxist line now tend to agree that there is no proletarian eschaton.[47] Sartre was simply one of the first to admit it. He followed Hegel far enough to say that humans struggle against one another for power, yet he disagreed that such relations can ever be transcended. For him, the proletarian ideal amounts to a variation on Hobbes or even Nietzsche.[48] Competition of interests, and hence material disproportion, is the inescapable consequence of our being. We are basically a lack, an unstable existence which, when truly regarded in essence, is nothing. We are not the sort of beings who repose in ourselves, as Augustine said of God.[49] The self always lacks itself, 'nihilated' in two directions: forward, as the present 'in itself' negates the existence of a satisfied future 'for itself'; and backward, from the projection of a satisfied 'for itself' to the present 'in itself'. To say it without Hegel's technical language: the present is insufficient, but the settled future never comes. The perception of an authentic self is therefore rooted in a dreadful feedback loop of nothingness. 'I am' is a fictive unit with no restful existence. Identity *is* scarcity.

Against this metaphysical horizon, the digital marketplace can be seen capitalizing upon our predicament. Consider the term *upgrade*.

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[46] If this sounds overstated, consider Kant's prescript for a kingdom of ends, which undergirds the practices of informed consent to this day, in everything from science to sex. Exploitation is the entropic pull of modern political relations, which Kant also observed and wanted to ward off with the idea of autonomous permission.

[47] Including Hardt and Negri. See *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 63-66.

[48] I grant that this was less true in Sartre's later work; but even then, he seemed skeptical that the scarcity formed by competing interests could ever fully disappear. See Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 34.

[49] Augustine, *Confessions* XIII,38,53.

It suggests movement, yet there is no terminus. The marketed self is a climber toward beatitude, but the climb has no lasting achievement. A completed purchase—though it promises a completed self—will soon be overtaken by obsolescence and want. Necessarily so; the market produces the same lack it is poised to resolve, precisely through techniques of upgrade. This must be the case, as we have seen; the modern individual cannot exist without exclusivity and scarcity. Sartre thus sees that the indivisible self exists only as a fiction of desire. He is brave enough to carry individualism to its radical metaphysical attrition, and this is what finally prompts him to say that God exists in the same way. Sartre's revocation of God is unique, because it does not occur on the basis of humanity's absolute presence. Atheism for him is a paradox vis-à-vis St. Thomas. If God is the *causa sui*, God is merely the projection of what we wish we were: existence without need. When we project this needlessness as God, we cannot escape the reflexive language of two selves. *Causa sui*: one self must cause the other. God him*self* is therefore nothing, just the same as my*self*. No such singularity exists at any moment.[50]

I believe Sartre has closed in on the core problem of Dante's *Commedia*. But what he misses, along with Locke and Marx, is the *analogia entis* delivering Dante from the same ultimate scarcity. God's being as 'pure self' does not exist before us without God's being in many selves; just as God's verbality does not exist before us without the process and change of human dialect. Reading Dante, one will come to such conclusions as: I can only know God if I know God in others; I can only know God by becoming like God; and by mutual reflection of God, we together will find peace in our true nature. The Russian theologian Pavel Florensky is worth quoting here, because, using Hegel's language, he anticipates and chastens Sartre to an astounding degree:

[50] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 400.

> Evil selfhood, deprived of all objectivity (for the source of all objectivity is God), becomes naked subjectivity, which eternally exists and preserves its freedom, but only *for itself*. This selfhood is therefore unreal. And, after mysterious division [that is, the obtainment of a new identity in God], my "in itself" becomes pure objectivity, eternally real, but only "for another," insofar as it has not revealed itself for itself in loving selfhood, and therefore, being real "for another" is eternally real.[51]

Subject, Verb, and Object

Like Augustine, Dante is well aware that the self is a narrated figure—always becoming, always arriving at the future that is its own. Not only does Dante cast himself in his own story; the *Commedia*'s format is polyphonic, with many souls giving account of their lives. In the first part, the souls have gotten it wrong, closing their existence from God in various attempts at being utterly self-reflective, self-possessed, and self-governed. In the final part, souls have gotten it right, opening themselves to God as analogies of his being. Dante the pilgrim must confusedly deal with his own tendencies in both directions. For him, the whole journey is catechistic, purgative, heuristic. The *Purgatorio* therefore typifies Dante's journey even as it typifies our own. For us, the midpoint is the best expression of the whole. We have begun but not yet arrived.

With this in mind, we can finally come back to the light painting begun in the middle of the epic, as Virgil and Dante ascend Mount Purgatory. The pair has just departed the terrace of the envious, where Guido del Duca laments the futility of loving goods that cannot be shared: "O human race, why put your heart / where work

[51] Pavel Florensky, trans. Boris Jakim, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 157. The bracketed statement is my own for clarity.

is a negation of partnership?"[52] The phrase is puzzling, and Dante turns to Virgil for an explanation. It comes in the form of a contrast. There are two kinds of work, Virgil says. In the first, laborers must split the good for which they toil. The second, however, is a process of multiplication: the more souls there are who say *nostro* (ours), the more good each soul has. This is the highest form of love, says Virgil, which Dante would understand if his desires were *torcesse in suso* (twisted upward).[53] As is often the case, Dante's character remains confused, stuck in the language of scarcity. How can it be that when a good is distributed, there is more and not less of it? How can such an economy exist? Virgil's answer expounds the heart of Augustinian charity.

Such an economy depends on "that infinite and ineffable good." In other words, the final good of such an economy is first explicated by what it is not, *e.g.* limited and speakable. Virgil then says that the good is *là sù* (on high, or literally 'up there'); yet despite all its transcendence and negativity, the good is present here and now. It "flows to love as a sunbeam falls upon a lit body."[54] A charitable person is an image of the good, the way a person in the sun is an image of light. So the good is known *via positiva*, by participation; yet it never ceases to be known *via negativa*, because we can never find its limit. The more souls there are who set their minds on things above—*là sù s'intende* (intend on high)—the more good there is to love. Each beloved soul becomes a mirror of the good to others, who then reflect and reproduce the same light to others, and on it goes forever. Therefore, true love is quite unlike the pursuit of a depreciable commodity. It does not posit value according to scarcity, because actually, it increases by distribution. To put it another way, love does not value what it does not have, because love is its own

[52] *Purg.* XIV.86-87.
[53] *Purg.* XV.67-69.
[54] *Purg.* XV.67-69.

good. The more one loves, the more good one has. Love is ever active, ever substantive. At its purest, love is the subject, the object, and the verb of truth. Love loves love.

Virgil himself is somewhat perplexed by this, conveying to Dante the necessity of Beatrice, who will be the greater guide in these matters. We must remember that Virgil cannot pursue knowledge by faith in God. Yet it should be understood that God's light has shone throughout the whole *Commedia*, and Virgil was its first vessel. "O glory and light of all other poets!" Dante exclaims, recognizing his hero.[55] Just when Dante has lost the light of the true way, he sees it in Virgil, who consoles him with a testimony of God's reflectivity. The account is worth telling here, because although Virgil does not know love by name, he has been visited by Dante's love, Beatrice. "Her eyes shown (*Lucevan*) brighter than the stars," Virgil tells him.[56]

Virgil's testimony operates like Russian nesting dolls, telling the testimony of Beatrice, who has told Virgil the testimony of St. Lucy. Told chronologically, the story is as follows: A Lady in heaven (Virgil does not say her name) has taken pity on Dante, calling upon St. Lucy to help him.[57] Lucy, the patroness of sight, has then commissioned Beatrice, saying, "He loves you," indicating how uniquely Beatrice is suited for the rescue of this particular soul. Moved by love from heaven, Beatrice recounts these events to Virgil, her eyes now *lucent* with tears. The Latin root *lux*, *lucis* draws the whole sympathetic chain of command together, granting a preview of later expositions of light and reflection. For now, the entire heavenly scene exists in a story, which Virgil tells Dante in order to persuade him that his path through hell will end in glory. A strange

[55] *Inf.* I.42.
[56] *Inf.* II.55.
[57] Ralph McInerny helpfully notes that Mary, like Christ, is not named in hell. *Dante and the Blessed Virgin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 32.

faith is required of Dante, as I have said; he can perceive heaven's light only through a citizen of hell. But the divine light chooses Virgil for the same reason it chooses Beatrice—to attract Dante, to make him light-like. Heaven's particularized generosity cannot be overstated here, because Virgil, by his *parola ornata* (polished words), represents the ascent of natural skill. Though world-renowned, Virgil is now commissioned for a single, frightened, uniquely poetic soul. Many have pointed out that in the *Commedia*, Virgil characterizes the pagan liberal arts and the cardinal virtues. He too is a figure of light, if we include the sort of enlightenment accorded to natural potency, like that of Aristotle in the syllabus of St. Thomas.[58] Virgil will illuminate Dante's mind in just these ways, as befits the capacity of natural reason. Yet Dante the writer, by putting Virgil at the command of Beatrice, understands pagan wisdom allegorically. Nature is a gift from beyond its own *ratio*, or reasoning. Hence, Virgil can lead Dante toward heaven only at the disposal of grace, and faith is already required of Dante. We should see that Dante's faith rests not in Virgil so much as in the subject of Virgil's story—*i.e.*, divine intervention.[59]

Let us pause here to ask a rather peculiar question. How can God afford to love Dante so specifically? I frame my question financially, because it is natural to wonder what makes Dante worth such an investment. Why should God allocate the time and labor of the angelic Beatrice, or the brilliant Virgil, to Dante? To whom should we ascribe worth in this transaction? A case might be made that Dante feels his talents to be valuable to God.[60] After all, he places

[58] See Giovanni Boccaccio, trans. Michael Papio, *Boccaccio's Expositions on Dante's Comedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 141.
[59] Dante's character waivers when guided only by Virgil, at the end of *Inf.* I. He requires the story and promise of Beatrice in *Inf.* II.
[60] This could be why he casts himself as a new Aeneas or St. Paul, taken into the afterlife ahead of time. See Kevin Brownlee, "Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures from Dido," *MLN* 108, No. 1 (1993), 2.

himself in the company of the great poets in limbo, and Boccaccio later feels the need to excuse him for inordinately desiring honor.[61] But the reader should not overlook the plain sense of Dante's initial trepidation with Virgil: "Consider my strength (*virtû*), and whether I am able, / before you trust me with the high road."[62] He first casts himself as morally weak. So what makes Dante worth God's investment? My question is meant to divulge something like a theology of divine favor.

Returning to Virgil's teaching, we will recall that love never implies scarcity. Nor does divine hierarchic favor tend toward unfair measure; there is no measure. The fact that Dante is loved so particularly does not come at the expense of other souls, since love, like language, is not fundamentally material. Yet even after beginning his heavenly ascent with Beatrice, Dante remains perplexed, stuck in the mindset of division and scarcity. How can it be that the souls in the lower spheres of paradise do not envy those placed higher? Do they not wish to receive a greater portion of the good? The first soul to speak to him is Piccarda, who happily answers his question. The virtue of charity has filled every soul's particular desire, she says. Hence the souls of lower heaven, each uniquely created, wish for the sort of filling which only they may have.[63] Piccarda's happiness, like those in every sphere, is unique to her place. She in fact derives joy in her place *because* it displays the particularizing favor of charity. God's love for those in higher spheres has not cost her any satisfaction. Just the opposite: if she thought of it in terms of scarcity or loss, she would be denying the very good which fills her, namely God's very particular love for the other.

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[61] Boccaccio, trans. J.G. Nichols, *Life of Dante* (London: Hesperus Press Ltd, 2002), 43.
[62] *Inf.* II.11.
[63] See John Took, "'S'io m'intuassi, come tu t'inmii' ('Par'., IX.81): Patterns of Collective Being in Dante," *The Modern Language Review* 101, No. 2 (April 2006), 407.

The exposition continues when souls in a higher sphere cry out to Dante, "Here comes one who will increase our loves (*nostri amori*)!"[64] Love, Dante is learning, is procreative. It wishes to multiply, to diversify. That is the meaning of its eternality in finite terms. Eternal being does not merely expand forever beyond our phenomenal experience. It produces more and more unique refractions of itself through us (and here we might again recall the nature of language). God can thus afford to be particularly generous to Dante, because love does not diminish when shared. Augustine says the same with reference to the society typified by Abel:

> For the possession of goodness is by no means diminished by being shared with a partner… on the contrary, the possession of goodness is increased in proportion to the concord and charity of those who share it. In short, he who is unwilling to share this possession cannot have it; and he who is most willing to admit others to a share of it will have the greatest abundance to himself.[65]

On this point, Florensky is again worth quoting: "For one who loves transforms all he has into himself, while one who hates loses even what he has."[66] The same theme, begun by Virgil in *Purgatorio*, is at last taken up fully by Beatrice in the uppermost sphere of *Paradiso*. As she prepares Dante for his final vision, she expounds the metaphysics of love from its origin:

> It was not by having a good acquired for himself
> (that being impossible), but because his splendor

[64] *Par.* V.105.
[65] Augustine, *City of God,* trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), XV.5.
[66] Florensky, *Pillar…Truth*, 157.

> could, re-splendoring, say, *I exist*;
> in his eternity without time,
> beyond every other comprehension, as it pleased him,
> Eternal Love was opened in new loves.[67]

It is a variation on a theme from the *Confessions*, in which Augustine recognizes that God has no need of our goods, since all that is good is God's.[68] Aquinas says the same in the *Summa*: goodness and being are essentially the same, because God is the origin and fruition of both.[69] But Dante puts the idea down in profound rhyme. God cannot increase the store of God's goodness, because there is no absence to necessitate acquisition—*acquisto*. Thus, the new loves of Love are *created* rather than *acquired*, repeating "I am" in a way that suits derivative things—*Subsisto*.

Beatrice soon urges Dante to turn and see countless thousands of human mirrors, each unique in how they radiate love's sweetness, yet all one in God's light. The mirror motif extends unutterably to Dante's final vision of divinity: *the* reflection, the fundamental shining-out-and-back of all being. Absolute self-reflection is only generative in God. Thus, even as Dante's eyes grow accustomed to God's light, he sees new features emerging. The divine brilliance now appears *pinta de la nostra effige* (painted with our likeness).[70] We may infer something Christic here, but Dante only permits it by a personal pronoun, insofar as God looks like us. Not only are we the image of God, but—and it must be said reverently—God is *our* image. Dante is at a loss. In loving God, we love our true likeness. And in loving our true likeness, we become like God, flaming out to attract others to their true selves. The teaching of Virgil rings true: the more souls

[67] *Par.* XXIX.13-18.
[68] *Confessions* VII.xi.17.
[69] *ST* 1a.5.1, "Whether goodness differs really from being?"
[70] *Par.* XXXIII.131.

there are who say *nostra*, the more good each soul has. Dante has seen the endless, final wonder. God is ours. Love without enclosure is ours for the sharing.

Scarce Understanding

I have argued that a 'commons' is indeed evoked by virtual reality. Strengthening the claim of Hardt and Negri, we can now say it is more properly a communion—even a communion of saints—through whom the virtual is identified with the virtuous. In short, virtual reality must refer to the immaterial and the incarnated, the multiplying sharedness of being together. It must refer to a guided ascent—to the potential for love's increase in a verbal creation. Human nature is not thereby foreclosed; it holds the sublime possibility of eternal surprise. A theo-directional *Lebensform* can emerge in unique speech communities, each of which can novelize the *koine* of their place and time. And if their *koine* can be novelized, so too can their economy. Language constitutes our material culture; this much was understood by both Dante and Marx. But only Dante can compel his readers to share the good by multiplying it, rooting themselves in the polyphony of Christian allegorical tradition.

Augustine's term for allegorical reading is *uno atque altero*—"one and yet another."[71] The universe in which this method is possible is one of gratuity and analogy. It is a cosmos in which the literal meaning is always conceptive, never reduced to a single 'self'. One could be forgiven for sketching Augustine's phrase too simply along Gadamer's lines, noting how a text always coproduces meanings in excess of its authorship. But Augustine's idea is not precisely the same.[72] Rather than promoting a text's unbounded subjectivity, he pursues its unbounded fulfillment. Not a cacophony; but a polyphony. Both engender Sartre's sense of lack—a mental scarcity

[71] *Confessions* V, 14, 24.
[72] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 1989), 296.

of understanding. But Christian allegorical tradition rests in the purposive good beyond the interpreter's mind. The gift of love transcends reason. It both satisfies and exceeds the knower. So, as Augustine once said to his parish, "the very desire with which you want to understand is itself a prayer to God."[73] Sartre's milieu might be transformed in these terms. To do so would presuppose that on the one hand, Dante's vision agrees with Sartre: we scarcely understand. On the other hand, the scarcity of our understanding *is understandable* in two directions—both of which Sartre misunderstood. The first is repentance. The penitent see the perplexity of their sin, the warp of their desire for self without God. Secondly, they are struck wordless by the light into which they are called. Witness the poet in love. Here, prior categories fail to circumscribe the true goodness of beauty. This type of cognitive scarcity, as we have seen, generates new language.

Although God transcends the poet, God gives Godself to the poet in a multiplicity of presences, each a unique refrain of eternal Being. The poet might then join in, speaking as another unique reflection of God's creativity, thereby novelizing communion beyond its present boundaries. The poet learns to read herself into the concerted promise of I Am, the One Who Is.[74] She learns to tell of herself (and so become herself, enacting herself) as a unique love of love. Although her works are novel, they are not merely avant-garde; they rest on the hallowed ground of divine symbol. The burning bush, in all its novelty and resistance to former categories, signifies Being—as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. By apprenticing herself to the heritage and promise of the voice calling from the undying fire, the narrative theologian ruptures the stories of exclusion and fear. Emerging from the malnourished place

[73] Augustine's sermon 152.1, in *Sermons 148-183 on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 48.
[74] See *ST* 1a.13.11.

of envy, she gradually ascends into the paradisal overflow, where goods are not valued for their scarcity but for their givenness. Goods will soon appear to be exponents of the infinite, given to be given again, multiplied in love's allegorical action.

The Christian allegorist therefore possesses the good by sharing it. Not only does she serve those in need; she novelizes neediness. Pavel Florensky understood this as he read Christ's parable of the talents. How are resources multiplied? Or rather: how is the good multiplied? "Through self-giving. Man receives as he gives. When he gives himself wholly in love, he receives himself, but grounded and deepened in another; that is, he doubles his being."[75] The divided self of Sartre becomes one whole, but not one standing alone. We are multiplied in friendship, in hypostatic union with the truth.

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[75] Florensky, *Pillar…Truth*, 158.

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FRACTURING THE EUCHARIST

The De-Centered Tabernacle and Lay Gestural Confusion

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The Catholic Liturgical Movement and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council have instituted sweeping practical and theological changes to the liturgies of the Church, and in their large-scale revisions have created some unintended consequences. One such consequence is the confusion over reverent gestures associated with the Eucharist. Twentieth-century theologians emphasized the liturgical action of the Eucharistic celebration, whose importance had long been neglected, in addition to the previously long-held emphasis on the reverence for the material elements as the body and blood of Christ. After Vatican II, at the approval of Episcopal authority, some churches re-arranged their spaces so that the tabernacle, containing previously consecrated Eucharistic elements

(also referred to as the Blessed Sacrament), was moved away from the front and center of the church, so as to emphasize the altar of the Eucharistic celebration.

This was an over-correction; counter to the goals of the Liturgical Movement, this arrangement disrupts the unity of Eucharistic celebrations. When the tabernacle is in the visual center of the sanctuary, on a high altar or behind the altar of celebration, a layperson in the nave can visually connect previous Eucharists in the tabernacle and present and future Eucharists celebrated on the altar, creating continuity between them. When the tabernacle is de-centered, this visual and spatial continuity is lost, and the unity of Eucharistic celebrations is de-emphasized. This paper will examine this disorientation through lay confusion over reverent gesture: when the tabernacle is de-centered, a layperson cannot easily ascertain where to bow or genuflect, resulting in liturgical disorientation before Mass even begins.

Modern liturgical scholars have argued that the early church did not conceive of the Eucharist as a blessed *object* but rather as an *action* of a thanksgiving meal. Nathan Mitchell has traced the historical development of the adoration of the Eucharist outside Mass. He argues that the earliest communities regarded Eucharist as the "community's meal" which then shifted to "an emphasis on *ritual food*."[1] Over time, the ritual food itself became disengaged from the Eucharistic actions associated with the food: the Eucharistic species became a cultic object.[2] A cult of the Blessed Sacrament emerged, flourishing in medieval times, in which the Eucharist "is not only blessed and consumed, it is also reverenced, greeted, acclaimed and adored."[3] The species began to be reserved at the front of the church, and by the sixteenth century was housed in a tabernacle placed on the Eucharistic altar.[4] Meanwhile, the meal aspect of the Eucharist disappeared, and Communion reception by the laity declined.[5]

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[1] Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982), 39.
[2] Mitchell 1982, 16.
[3] Mitchell 1982, 56.
[4] Mitchell 1982, 164.
[5] Mitchell 1982, 109.

Liturgical problems developed from the cult of the reserved sacrament. The laity showed little concern for, or comprehension of, the liturgy surrounding the Eucharist, understanding it as a sacred object to be visually adored, not food to be eaten. Clifford Howell writes that when the laity did receive Communion, it was often from the reserved sacrament, not newly consecrated. This reduced the understanding and primacy of liturgical action: "Holy Communion was not seen as 'sharing the Sacrifice' so much as 'receiving Christ.'"[6] Writing before Vatican II, Howell complains:

> …few have any clear grasp of the fact that they are sharing in the *Sacrifice* of the *altar*. The whole symbolism—the halt in the action of the Mass, opening of tabernacle, bringing forth of hosts not offered at this Mass—leads their minds away from this fact.[7]

The Catholic Church sought to correct these errors and to "restore" altar-Communion as the "*authentic* form of Communion."[8] The Second Vatican Council revised the liturgy to emphasize Eucharistic action. Mitchell praises the reforms as "a return to the primitive liturgical genre of a holy meal," but that the "return does not disqualify those cultic customs" associated with the Blessed Sacrament.[9] The tabernacle, however, as a relatively "recent" innovation, need not be front-and-center in the church.[10] The early conciliar document *Inter Oecumenici* calls for the tabernacle to be placed "in the middle of the main altar,"[11] but over time, church authorities would insist on removing the tabernacle from the area of Eucharistic celebration. They emphasized the Eucharistic action, altar, and assembly, *contra* the reserved sacrament.

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[6] Clifford W. Howell, "One Thing Often Leads to Another," *Worship* 29, no. 1 (1954): 31.
[7] Howell 1954, 31.
[8] Howell 1954, 33.
[9] Mitchell 1982, 7.
[10] Mitchell 1982, 168.
[11] *Inter Oecumenici: Instruction on Implementing Liturgical Norms* (Sept. 26, 1964), 95.

The Eucharist is primarily a liturgical action, the reformers argued. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*) calls the celebration of Mass "the center of the whole of Christian life for the Church both universal and local"[12]; *Eucharisticum Mysterium* says that the Eucharistic action "is the origin and consummation" of the reserved sacred species.[13] Moreover, Mark Boyer argues that the conciliar and post-conciliar documents "demonstrate how the reservation of the Eucharist is secondary to the celebration of the Eucharist"[14]; under such principles, *Environment & Art in Catholic Worship* (*EACW*) argues that the tabernacle should be placed in a separate room "so that no confusion can take place between the celebration of the [E]ucharist and reservation," though the document also claims that this "does not mean it has been neglected to a secondary place of no importance."[15] The tabernacle in the sanctuary would supposedly distract from the Eucharistic liturgy, which constitutes the "real" Eucharist.

Additionally, the documents emphasize the primacy of the altar of celebration and the gathered assembly. *GIRM,* praising the altar as place of sacrifice, table, and "center of thanksgiving,"[16] calls for the altar to be "the center toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns."[17] Michael Witczak demonstrates how the priest's gestural actions—profound bow, kiss, and incense—place the altar at the center of the liturgy.[18] *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar* (*RDCA*) argues that churches should have only one altar in a liturgical space; the tabernacle should be placed on another altar in a separate chapel.[19] Boyer exalts the

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[12] *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*), 3rd. ed. (2011), 16.
[13] *Eucharisticum Mysterium: Instruction on Eucharistic Worship [EM]* (May 25, 1967), 3.
[14] Mark G. Boyer, *The Liturgical Environment: What the Documents Say* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 116.
[15] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Environment & Art in Catholic Worship [EACW]* (1986), 78.
[16] *GIRM,* 296.
[17] *GIRM*, 299.
[18] Michael G. Witczak, "To Celebrate Word and Sacrament Worthily: Revisiting the Introductory Rites," *Liturgical Ministry* 12 (2003), 139.
[19] *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar [RDCA]* (1978), chp. 4, 7.

altar even further in his chapter "The Altar Is Christ,"[20] writing that the altar and the assembly are "other Christs."[21] *RDCA* also claims that those in the assembly become "spiritual altars…the living stones out of which the Lord Jesus builds the Church's altar."[22] *EACW* argues that "the sacred" is found primarily in the assembly and its actions;[23] the liturgical space is but a "skin" meant to serve the assembly's actions, not intrinsically capable of bearing the sacred.[24] Eucharistic action, the altar where it occurs, and the people who perform it should be prioritized over and against the cultic object of the reserved Eucharistic species.

With such understandings, the reserved host is denigrated, despite protestations to the contrary. Mitchell insists that using presently-consecrated hosts is the *only* option, for "what is at stake is nothing less than *the integrity of sacramental signs*."[25] Thus, the reserved sacrament should not be present at Mass; according to *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass,* "The [E]ucharistic presence of Christ is the fruit of the consecration and should appear to be such."[26] The tabernacle should not be on the altar, according to *EACW,* "for the altar is a place for action not for reservation."[27] If the tabernacle is left on a high altar, it should be unadorned and left alone, Boyer writes: "Only the one altar signifies the one assembly gathered around the one Savior."[28] Such placement should be a last resort, however, "to avoid the confusion that can take place between the celebration of the Eucharist and the reservation of the Eucharist."[29] The Eucharistic species outside the celebration of Mass is de-emphasized. Pope Paul VI warned in *Mysterium Fidei* that emphasizing Eucharistic action would ultimately lead to the belief

[20] Boyer 1990, 35-57.
[21] Boyer 1990, 43.
[22] *RDCA*, chp. 4, 2.
[23] *EACW*, 29.
[24] *EACW*, 42.
[25] Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence: The Work of Eucharist* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998), 30.
[26] *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (1973), 3.
[27] *EACW,* 80.
[28] Boyer 1990, 50.
[29] Boyer 1990, 122.

"that Christ Our Lord is no longer present in the consecrated Hosts that remain after the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass has been completed."[30] His fears came true, as over time, documents and liturgists insisted that, in Mitchell's words, the elements "are not relics to be admired, but active symbols that continue to invite people to nourishment."[31]

However, the tabernacle with the reserved sacrament has long been an object of lay devotion, especially manifest in gestures of adoration. Though Mitchell and others are concerned primarily with prolonged adoration of the species during Exposition and Benediction, the laity are also prone to genuflect before the tabernacle when they see it upon entering church for Mass. As we have seen, the post-conciliar documents consider this inappropriate, as Mass should involve *celebrating* through *action*, not *adoring objects*. However, these interpretations fail to consider the importance of reverent gesture on the laity's disposition as Mass begins.

Reverent gestures are important ways for the laity to prepare for Mass by embodying worship, acknowledging God's presence, and submitting to God. Gestures as bodily actions bring about a fuller worship experience. The U.S. Bishops document *Built of Living Stones* states:

> Gestures, language, and actions are the *physical*, *visible*, and *public* expressions by which human beings understand and manifest their inner life…These human actions as well as physical objects are also the signs by which Christians express and deepen their relationship to God.[32]

Antonio Donghi praises genuflection as the "most common and spontaneous gesture" when entering church, in which the worshiper "makes an act of faith, signifying the ritual and communal vitality of the liturgical celebration."[33] When genuflecting before the tabernacle,

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[30] Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei: On the Holy Eucharist* (Sept. 3, 1965), 11.
[31] Mitchell 1982, 245.
[32] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship* (2003), 8.
[33] Antonio Donghi, *Words and Gestures in the Liturgy,* trans. William McDonough, Dominic Serra, and Ted Bertagni (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 16.

the worshiper internalizes the knowledge of God's presence in the Eucharist. According to Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, as "Worship is one of those fundamental acts that affect the whole man," then "bending the knee before the presence of the living God" is a full act of worship.[34] Genuflecting signifies and embodies submission to God. As Donghi writes, "Our genuflecting is an active living of our faith. It is a making conscious what it means to believe."[35] For the worshiper entering the church, genuflecting orients the soul and body to a spirit of worship.

Reverencing the sacrament is an ancient practice; Mitchell writes of North Africans in Augustine's time who would reverence the Eucharist and of Cyril of Jerusalem, who called for reverent gestures,[36] as well as of the medieval monk Lanfranc, who specifically mentions genuflection.[37] Despite these facts, the documents do not mention lay genuflection before Mass, instead focusing on priestly action: *GIRM* instructs priests to bow before and kiss the altar at the end of the procession.[38] For Witczak, the "movement by the assembled people is straightforward": they simply stand for the introductory rites.[39] There is no mention of lay genuflection before Mass, though it is a time-honored and widespread practice. Ignoring this custom, and de-centering the tabernacle, causes the following lay dilemma.

Mrs. Murphy[40] walks into a post-conciliar church and begins to prepare for Mass. She walks down the center aisle of the nave and picks a pew, and looks ahead of her as she begins to bend her right knee, expecting to see the tabernacle in front of the apse. But it is not there. There is a freestanding altar with a small crucifix. Where

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[34] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 191.
[35] Donghi 2009, 18.
[36] Mitchell 1982, 44-45.
[37] Mitchell 1982, 186.
[38] *GIRM,* 49.
[39] Witczak 2003, 137
[40] The liturgical character "Mrs. Murphy" is borrowed from Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology: Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); and David Fagerberg, *What Is Liturgical Theology?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992).

is the tabernacle? She looks around frantically. Finally, she locates it, hidden in the shadows, unadorned, in the right transept on a small altar.

She hesitates. She thinks she should genuflect before the tabernacle, but this seems awkward, since it is off to the side, and there are pews, flowers, and the organ console between it and her. Should she just ignore it? That would be blasphemous. Maybe she should gesture before the altar, since it is front and center; that would make spatial sense, and she would not look as strange and conspicuous if she gestured toward the front, where all the action happens.

But wait—why the altar? Nothing is there but a crucifix, which never seems to command much attention during the liturgy. She's heard people say that the altar is the center of the liturgy. But the liturgy has not begun yet. If the altar is of supreme importance because of liturgical action, and no action is occurring, does that make it still supremely important, in this moment? If she reverenced the altar now, would it be like reverencing pre-consecrated elements, which Peter the Singer considered idolatrous?[41] The church design suggests that reverencing the host in the tabernacle is not a good thing; but is reverencing an empty altar any better?

Perhaps she should reverence both. Should she bow or genuflect? Bow to one and genuflect to the other? The priest bows several times in the Mass to the altar; should she do that? Should she bow deeply or just give one of those little head-nods?[42] She wants to bow and reverence God's presence, but it seems that such presence has been scattered hither and thither. She looks around and sees the parishioners do various things: some genuflect before the altar, some bow before it, some give head-nods to the tabernacle in the corner,

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[41] Mitchell 1982, 153.

[42] *GIRM* distinguishes between the meaning of a bow and a genuflection. A genuflection "signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament," while a bow "signifies reverence and honor shown to the persons themselves or to the signs that represent them," and can be made during the mention of the Trinity, Virgin, saint as a bow of the head, or a profound bow to the altar (274-275). However, the *GIRM* is focused on priestly action and cannot be expected to be known deeply by the laity.

while most people do nothing, walking up to the pew and sitting down, chatting all the while. Mrs. Murphy sidles into her pew and sits, dejected. She's already confused and Mass has not yet begun.

This fictional tale is an over-dramatization, but some accounts attest to such gestural confusion. Brian MacGarry writes of a "remote" African church wherein the congregants would genuflect before the altar, or the priest, or toward a wall, even with no Blessed Sacrament present, and could give no coherent explanation for their actions.[43] A respondent posed a question to EWTN.com with confusion on how to reverence the Blessed Sacrament, having seen so many different gestures.[44] The silence about lay genuflections in the post-conciliar liturgical documents shows that the writers did not even *consider* this devotional act, or, if they did, sought to suppress it by removing the tabernacle or de-centering it. In either case, the writings have not given any pointers for the laity upon entering the church. Mitchell writes that the laity need direction, with the attitude "Just tell us what to do, and we'll do it."[45] The documents are silent, indicating that, like Mrs. Murphy, the laity should do nothing when entering church but sit down and wait. Nothing important happens until the liturgy begins.

There are good reasons to place the tabernacle front-and-center in the church beyond, but including, lay genuflection before Mass. Centering or de-centering the tabernacle affects an important element in liturgy: vision. The way things are placed in church creates an implied hierarchy based on their placement and visibility. According to *EACW,* when church structure draws visual attention to certain elements, it tends to "create a sense that what is seen is proximate, important and personal."[46] Churches tend to be structured so that one's vision is drawn to the center, usually toward the front. Artifacts to the sides and back of the building are not as

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[43] Brian MacGarry, "The Eucharist as Treasure," *African Ecclesial Review* 42, no. 5-6 (2000), 249.

[44] Edward McNamara, "The Zenit Daily Dispatch: Tabernacles, Adoration and Double Genuflections," *Eternal Word Television Network*, July 26, 2005, https://www.ewtn.com/library/Liturgy/zlitur92.htm.

[45] Mitchell 1998, 9.

[46] *EACW*, 50.

immediately noticeable to the laity. Mitchell argues that newer church designs, such as those de-centering the tabernacle, attempt to draw visual attention away from objects and toward liturgical action.[47] The Church, in so doing, is trying to eliminate the "confusion" of laypeople focusing on "objects" such as the Blessed Sacrament and instead recognize the importance of the Mass as an event. When a tabernacle is de-centered, it is no accident. The tabernacle should not be at the focal point of the sanctuary because it should not be the focal point of Mass.

However, de-centering the tabernacle fractures the Eucharist. When Mrs. Murphy can't decide whether to gesture before the altar or the tabernacle, she demonstrates this: the Eucharist has been separated into lesser, previous celebrations (tabernacle) and more important and pertinent present-future celebrations (altar). Ironically, such a separation goes strongly against the liturgical movement and conciliar reforms. Recent Catholic writings have emphasized, first, the unity of Eucharistic celebrations across time; second, the unity of the Blessed Sacrament with the Eucharistic liturgy; and third, for the liturgical space to foster a sense of liturgical unity. When the tabernacle is de-centered, these themes are imperiled.

First, the Catholic Church has long emphasized that Eucharistic celebrations are not atomistic events, but local expressions of one connected paschal banquet. The medieval *sancta* and *fermentum* rites, in which a reserved portion of the host was dropped into the chalice, signified the unity of Masses celebrated at different times and the unity of Masses celebrated in one diocese, respectively.[48] More recently, Pope John Paul II wrote that at each celebration of Mass, the community "is led back in spirit" to the sacrifice of Christ[49]; the "*sacrifice is made present ever anew*" at each Eucharistic celebration.[50] Ratzinger, who writes that "In the Eucharist we are caught up and

[47] Mitchell 1982, 387.
[48] Mitchell 1982, 58-59.
[49] Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia: Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist and the Church* (Apr. 17, 2003), 4.
[50] *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 2003, 12.

made contemporary with the Paschal Mystery of Christ,"[51] argues that the liturgy only makes sense if it takes place in a broader context, in which "Past, present, and future interpenetrate and touch upon eternity."[52] As all Eucharistic celebrations are connected across time, they foster a worldwide community. According to *Eucharisticum Mysterium,* in the Eucharist, "each person will then feel himself united with his brethren in the communion of the Church, local and universal, and even in a way with all men."[53] All Eucharists are connected in a spatial, temporal, ecclesial, and cosmic sense.

Second, in the midst of the renewed emphasis on Eucharistic action, modern Catholic writers have attempted to unify the reserved sacrament with the celebration, arguing that the reserved host is dependent on the liturgy, not divorced from it. Mitchell is adamant that the two reinforce each other: though he insists that devotion to the reserved sacrament only makes sense if it is understood within a fuller context of the Eucharistic liturgy,[54] he writes that in the use of the sacrament outside Mass, its symbolism "is eclipsed, but not destroyed," that "the sacramental symbols of eucharist continue to affirm the Lord's presence and the assembly's liturgical action, even though the celebration of Mass is over."[55] The Blessed Sacrament only exists through the liturgy, and when this is understood, celebration and reservation reinforce one another.

Third, Catholic writings have urged that liturgical spaces are to be designed in order to foster a sense of liturgical unity, including a holistic understanding of the Eucharist. According to *EACW,* "the space should communicate an integrity," and the "wholeness of the total space should be strikingly evident."[56] Similarly, *Built of Living Stones* urges that "the design of the church should reflect the unity of the entire assembly,"[57] and that there should only be one altar in

[51] Ratzinger 2000, 57.
[52] Ratzinger 2000, 60.
[53] *EM,* 18.
[54] Mitchell 1982, 213.
[55] Mitchell 1982, 258.
[56] *EACW,* 53.
[57] *Built of Living Stones* 2003, 37.

order to signify that there is one Eucharist and one church.[58] The space should serve the connection and co-dependence of all actors and rites within the liturgy.

When the tabernacle is de-centered, these ideas are not expressed. In moving the reserved host, lest any "confusion" occur, modern liturgists have actually *created* confusion for the laity who genuflect to prepare for Mass. *EACW* warns against the duplication of signs and objects, lest their symbolism be diminished;[59] this is precisely what happens in such cases. Rather than understanding there to be one Eucharist connected across time and communities, churches who de-center the tabernacle split the Eucharist into those past (in the tabernacle) and present and future (on the altar). In fact, Boyer blatantly denies the necessity of a connection, writing, "the Eucharist is not reserved from one celebration to another in order to facilitate the Communion of the people."[60] Rather than expressing unity between the reserved sacrament and the liturgy, de-centering the tabernacle makes it seem lesser and not the "true" sacrament. And rather than finding a spatial integrity in which all elements are in harmony, those wishing to genuflect will have to split their reverence if the tabernacle is de-centered.

De-centering the tabernacle is nonsensical. It is a top-down imposition, urged by priests and officials, denying the importance of the common lay practice of genuflecting upon entering the sanctuary, and attempting to erase it. If the tabernacle was left in the center of the church, in direct line of sight with the altar of celebration, then the laity have a visual connection between past Eucharists and future ones; continuity is preserved. One could genuflect in front of *both* the tabernacle and the altar, and thus reverence the Eucharistic mystery holistically. This way, the laity can celebrate the local celebration at a particular Mass, yet connect it to previous Eucharists.

When the tabernacle is de-centered, the gestures are multiplied, the Eucharist is divided, and Eucharistic unity disappears. The

[58] *Built of Living Stones* 2003, 56.
[59] *EACW*, 86.
[60] Boyer 1990, 123.

architecture implies that what matters is the immediate, local Eucharist to be celebrated on the altar. The permanence of the reserved sacrament is de-emphasized. This goes against ancient Catholic teaching, re-affirmed in the *Catechism*, which insists: "the Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist,"[61] and further, that:

> …the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the church and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.[62]

Ratzinger writes that reservation does not diminish the Eucharistic liturgy, "but simply signifies its complete fulfillment. For this Presence has the effect, of course, of keeping the Eucharist forever in church."[63] For Ratzinger, a church with no reserved sacrament is "somehow dead….But a church in which the eternal light is burning before the tabernacle is always alive."[64] When the reserved sacrament is not the first thing one sees upon entering the church, set up as the center of focus, then one may not have the sort of encounter Ratzinger describes, of a "deepened awareness of faith…impelled by the knowledge that in the consecrated species *he* is there and remains there."[65] The reverent disposition that comes from a sincere genuflection in preparing for Mass is gone. Instead, as the liturgical space suggests and the documents insists, one must wait to summon God through liturgical action.

The documents do not repudiate the rites of Exposition and Benediction; however, in these rites, God is understood to be in the reserved sacrament, and worthy of reverence. This arbitrary designation borders on a "pick-and-choose" theology of real

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[61] *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana,* 1997, 1377.
[62] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1997, 1379.
[63] Ratzinger 2000, 90.
[64] Ratzinger 2000, 90.
[65] Ratzinger 2000, 89.

presence, in which the church can decide when God is "really" present, or "present enough" to merit reverence. Continental philosopher Jean-Luc Marion warns against this tendency: the community decides that God is present in the elements (or not present), and thus, "the bread and wine serve as a simple perceptible medium for a wholly intellectual or representational process" leading "to a gnostic intellectualism that in fact disqualifies every liturgy."[66] In such cases, the community is not conscious of God, but ultimately of itself, of its own volitional process that "decides" that Christ's presence is there. Displaying the tabernacle can help avoid such a consciousness-based theology, as God's presence is *external*. But if the tabernacle is not prominently displayed, a layperson accustomed to genuflecting must presumably summon God's presence from *within*. However, as Marion argues, encountering God's presence in the sacrament is preferable to summoning the presence from within: "In becoming conscious of the thing where Eucharistic presence is embodied, the believing community does not become conscious of itself, but of another, of the Other par excellence."[67] Moreover, genuflecting allows for a full-bodied encounter with God. If this gesture is removed along with the tabernacle, preparing for Mass becomes an activity of mind and spirit. This is hardly in keeping with the liturgical movement's insistence on the "full, active, conscious participation" of the laity, body and soul.

One may object using Mitchell's reasoning. He argues that in the new liturgy and its corresponding spaces, unlike in the "static centrality supplied by the host…in the tabernacle," there is no literal "center," but rather, the liturgical motion leads to ever-changing focal points.[68] Thus, de-centering the tabernacle is not really denigrating it, because in reality there is no center. There are two problems with this. First, churches *are* structured to have focal points. The post-conciliar documents are clear that the focal point should be the altar, and most certainly *not* the tabernacle. Second, if

[66] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Horse-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 166-167.
[67] Marion 1991, 168.
[68] Mitchell 1982, 387.

churches have no focal point, as Mitchell argues, then a scattered setup remains such that the liturgical reformers abhor, with no sense of unity—the sort of setup that leads to Mrs. Murphy's despondence in the example above.

One may also argue that a focus on liturgical action, not objects, leads to a fuller understanding of sacramental mystery. Mitchell writes, "by focusing attention on ritual action rather than cultic object, the reformed liturgy invites us to a deeper participation in that mystery-laden liturgy of the world,"[69] so that we do not reduce the sacraments to a few "magic words" with cultic holy objects, but rather, that we may see the entire liturgy constituting the sacraments. Though it is right to insist that sacraments are liturgical acts, when the tabernacle is de-centered based on such a principle, a common aspect of traditional lay devotion—genuflecting before Mass—has been eliminated, and "deeper participation" is hampered. Though a quick and simple gesture, genuflection is meaningful as it is one of the first things the laity do when entering church. It is part of preparing for Mass. It acknowledges God's continuing presence before the liturgy has begun. How does eliminating this foster "deeper participation in mystery"?

A third concern, repeated often in this paper, is that if the tabernacle is centered, it would "distract" the laity from the Eucharistic liturgy and they would be "confused" in their devotions toward it rather than toward the altar of celebration. Though valid for the Tridentine liturgy, when the tabernacle was placed on the altar of celebration and the laity communed through the reserved sacrament, this critique makes no sense in the context of a freestanding altar. If the tabernacle sits on a high altar, or behind the main altar more generally, during the Eucharistic celebration the priest will be in the *versus populum* posture, standing between the laity and the tabernacle and obscuring its view. The present Eucharistic sacrifice will naturally be the center of attention. Thus, this concern is not a valid reason to de-center the tabernacle. If the Eucharistic liturgy *is not even occurring*, the laity have every reason to genuflect before the tabernacle, and it *ought* to be front and center in order to

[69] Mitchell 1982, 389.

emphasize the continuing Eucharistic presence of God from Mass to Mass.

In an attempt to re-awaken the understanding that the Eucharist is a celebratory action and not merely an object, the Catholic Church over-corrected by calling for the de-centering of the tabernacle. This was an insult to the lay devotion of genuflecting before Mass. In such situations, it is unclear where to gesture and in what manner. Such confusion and multiplication of gestures creates a Eucharistic fracture, in which past, present, and future Eucharists are separated, with past Eucharists denigrated. This affects the laity's disposition before Mass by giving the impression that God is not already present in the reserved sacrament, but is summoned only through liturgical action. Thankfully, recent church documents have sought to correct this abuse.[70] One can hope church authorities and liturgical experts do not continue to suppress lay genuflection before Mass by de-centering or removing the tabernacle.

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[70] Such as *The Spirit of the Liturgy, Catechism,* and *Built of Living Stones.*

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"THAT SUPPOSITION THAT CALLYD IS ARTE"

Confuse Distributyve and Skelton's Parrot [1]

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At some time in the early 1520s, a satire against Cardinal Wolsey and the new method of teaching Latin was narrated by a parrot.[2] This bird was immortal and, in a sense, divine. It was also wily, ostentatiously learned, rude, deliberately obfuscatory, and in places surprisingly frank, stating more than once that it spoke directly for the poem's author, the former Rector of Diss John Skelton. The parrot also said that the meaning of its many obscure rants and references would be clear to those with the eyes to see: in other words, although the meaning was somewhat hidden, that meaning was overtly declared. Although the poem has been studied in some depth, particularly in relation to the political and pedagogical issues addressed within, the fact that a divine bird (traditionally a vehicle for truth) is so famously obscurantist raises a number of interesting questions. This paper charts the various precedents current in pre-

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ARC Centre for the History of Emotions conference 'Sourcing Emotions in the Medieval and Early Modern World', University of Western Australia, 27-29 June 2013, and to the Medieval and Early Modern Cohort graduate seminar at the University of Melbourne. I am grateful to those present for their feedback.

[2] In this paper I cite line numbers from the electronic version of *Speke, Parrot*, accessible at http://www.skeltonproject.org/spekeparott.

Reformation England that made a parrot the perfect narrator of divine confusion.

Parrots stood for many things in the early sixteenth century, partaking of both Babel and Logos, imitation and sentience. In certain medieval discourse, a popinjay (or parrot) signified a beautiful or praiseworthy person, referring to the bird's beauty and rarity. It was considered to have been born in heaven and there, to have learned not only how to speak but how to think. After 1492, the growing popularity of parrots as luxury pets led to their transformation into a symbol for worthless but decorative courtiers, as reflected in the sense of "popinjay" as an ostentatious fool. Thus, Skelton's Parrot is both divine and decadent. This makes it a very unreliable narrator that complicates the social function and persona of the court poet, combining artifice and hypocrisy with divine wisdom. Parrot introduces himself as speaking most ancient and modern languages,[3] having the gift since his birth from Dame Philology.[4] Now, however, Logos has become Babel: although Parrot can speak languages "*aptlye*", mankind cannot; "*reason and wyte wanteth.*"[5]

Parrot uses "*that supposition that callyd is arte. / Confuse distributyve"* to recast the relationship between Babel and Logos. References to traditions, ideas, and tags of diverse languages are used to legitimize the idea of confusion as a spiritual and logical tool: "*Thus dyvers of language by lernyng I grow.*"[6] Further:

> *The mirror that I tote in, quasi diaphonum,*
> *Vel quasi speculum, in enigmate,*
> *Elencticum, or ells enthimematicum,*
> *For logicians to loke on, somewhat sophistice;*
> *Rhetoricyons and oratours in freshe humanyte,*
> *Support Parrot, I pray you, with your suffrage ornate,*
> *Of confuse tantum avoiydynge the checkmate.*[7]

[3] *Speke, Parrot* 25-42.
[4] *Speke, Parrot* 43-5.
[5] *Speke, Parrot* 53.
[6] *Speke, Parrot* 103.
[7] *Speke, Parrot* 190-96.

Confusion in this sense is not always bewilderment or lack of ability to distinguish. As the next verse says, "*that supposition that callyd is arte*" shows that Parrot is adept at supposition theory, a branch of medieval logic. Rather than with signification, or the imposition of meaning on a word, in supposition an already-meaningful term 'stands in for' another referent, as it does in synecdoche and symbolism. This is the case in *Speke, Parrot*, where animals stand for families and professions, Biblical figures for contemporaries' personal qualities, and lines of liturgy for entire hymns and services.[8] *Confuse distributyve* supposition refers to all of these referents being 'fused' together in a cumulative way: X is Y-1, and also Y-2, and also Y-3. It is an important part of Parrot's message that the many instances of supposition are to be understood cumulatively—Wolsey is Moloch, and also the golden calf, and also the king's mastiff; Parrot is Psittacus the son of Deucalion, standing for Logos, and also Pamphilus de Amore Galatheae, the lady's pet.

Arthur Kinney calls *confuse distributyve* supposition an effect that "scatters or distributes its meaning throughout the poem so that the significance grows in the mind of the reader as he [*sic*] progresses through it (as often with Scripture),"[9] and shows it to be an important technique in the sixteenth-century preaching in which Skelton would have been trained.[10] Skelton was born circa 1460, took degrees from Oxford and Cambridge, and was then appointed tutor to the young Henry VIII, then Duke of York, in 1494. In 1498 he was appointed rector of Diss in Norfolk, possibly at the wishes of Margaret of Beaufort, the king's mother, and in 1512 he was brought back to court as Orator Regius. While Skelton's predilections may have been more for court and secular life than for the priesthood, it

[8] Many of these have been expounded, for example, by F.W. Brownlow, "'Speke, Parrot': Skelton's Allegorical Denunciation of Cardinal Wolsey." *Studies in Philology* 65.2 (1968): 124-139. See also Arthur F. Kinney, *John Skelton, Priest as Poet: Seasons of Discovery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 15-30.

[9] Kinney 1987, 15. *Cf.* Brownlow 1968, 137, quoted in Kinney 1987, 205.

[10] Kinney 1987, 39-40. See also Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 126-135.

is notable that his orthodox Catholicism was never doubted. The poem written before *Speke, Parrot* was a lively condemnation of a parishioner's habit of training his hawk inside the church, in which some readers have found sincere spiritual, rather than social, outrage.[11] The work immediately following *Speke, Parrot,* entitled *Colyn Clout*, is also a comprehensive catalogue of complaints against clerical abuses. Kinney argues that *confuse distributyve* permeated secular and sacred modes of thinking alike; in early fifteenth-century liturgy, Goliardic poetry, and mystery plays, as in *Speke, Parrot*, "it is not the event but the significance of the event that matters," built up by "interpretive repetitions" throughout the mass, poem, or play.[12]

Speke, Parrot has had a critical reputation for being obscure, and generally critics have therefore regarded it as either a failure as literature, or ahead of its time.[13] The scarcity of evidence for its contemporary readership and reception does not help; historians have been limited largely to publishing records and marginal glosses.[14] While we may not know the extent to which contemporary readers and hearers found the poem obscure, or to what degree the obscurity bothered them, we can ask: what could the parrot signal to a sixteenth-century audience?[15]

In classical times, parrots were known both as mindless imitators of human speech and divine manifestations of the voice of the divine, who could greet humans without being taught. For Pliny the Elder, the parrot "which comes from India...a green bird with a red circlet around its neck," could only imitate speech, rather than speak or think for itself: "It can be taught to speak; it greets its master and repeats words said to it…" It was also very hard-headed, if not

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[11] For Skelton's life see Peter Green, *John Skelton* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1960).

[12] Kinney 1987, 91.

[13] *Cf.* Peter Green, *John Skelton. Writers & Their Work.* (London: Published for The British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, 1960), 13.

[14] For textual history see for example Jane Griffiths, *John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006); John Scattergood (ed.) *John Skelton: The Complete English Poems, revised edition* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

[15] A detailed exploration is in David Lawton, 'Skelton's Use of Persona.' *Essays in Criticism* XXX: 1 (1 January 1980), 9-28.

actually dull-witted, and to learn, it was necessary to be hit on the head with an iron bar.[16]

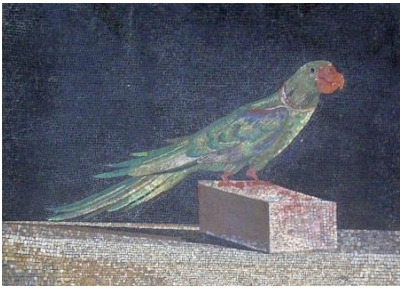

Figure 1
Mosaic of a parrot from Palace V in Pergamon, 160-150 BCE. Pergamon Museum, Collection of Classical Antiquities, Berlin.

While Pliny's observations might be understood to have represented certain classical attitudes to parrots around the ancient Mediterranean, medieval sources appear to have been dominated by a more mystical view of parrots.[17] Boccaccio emphasised the bird's divine origin, before it lived in the East, and saw the green color as evidence of its figurative, and perhaps literal, immortality:

> Psittacus ... having ... the learning of his grandfather Prometheus, ... travelled among the Ethiopians, where he was held in the greatest veneration when he had passed a very long time there ...[T]he fame of his strength and name ... endured in his perpetual green colour...[18]

[16] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, Book 10:58, ed. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A. (London. Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1855). Available online at http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0978.phi001.perseus-eng1:10.58.
[17] *Cf.* Bruce Boehrer, *Parrot Culture: Our 2500-Year-Long Fascination with the World's Most Talkative Bird* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 23-4.
[18] '*Psytacus ... Promethei aui sui doctrinis imbutus ad aethiopias abiit: ubi in maxima veneratione habitus cum in longissimum evasisset aevum ... Huius ego fictionis causam credo sui nominis virtutis phamam: quae eo cano mortuo viriditate duravit perpetua ...*' Boccacio, *Genealogiae* 4.49 (1371 MS, first published Venice 1472), trans. in Boehrer 2004, 33.

Skelton's parrot describes himself as the same breed, "*My fethers fresshe as the emerawde grene, / Abowte my necke a cerculett lyke the riche rubye.*"[19] Skelton knew Boccaccio's works ("*John Bochas with his volumys grete*"[20]) and probably particularly *De Genealogia Deorum*: Parrot refers to himself several times as Psittacus.[21] He is: *a byrde of Paradyse, / By Nature devysed of a wonderowus kynde,... Eufrates, that flodde, dryvythe me into Ynde, / Where men of that country by fortune me fynde, / And send me to greate ladyes of estate.*[22] Far from being a recalcitrant learner, this parrot has superhuman understanding.

For Isidore of Seville, the green bird from exotic India with the red collar could greet humans naturally, but must learn other words by imitation. Parrots could learn to produce many speech acts, but could only comprehend one:

> It can speak articulated words, so that if you did not see it you would think it was a person speaking. By nature it greets people by saying "Ave"; from this came the saying "I a parrot will learn to say the names of others from you, but I learned on my own to say 'Hail Caesar.'"[23]

Sir John Mandeville also found parrots to be able both to produce and to comprehend language, but rather than drawing the distinction between speech acts, Mandeville described two kinds of parrots. In

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[19] *Speke, Parrot* 16-17.

[20] John Skelton, *A Garland of Laurel*, line 365. In Alexander Dyce (ed.), *The Poetical Works of John Skelton: With Notes, and Some Account of the Author and His Writings* (London: T. Rodd, 1843), 376.

[21] *Speke, Parrot* 28, 229, 373, 518.

[22] *Speke, Parrot* 1-7.

[23] Isidore of Seville, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, and J. A. Beach.; with the collaboration of Muriel Hall. *The etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), XII. vii. 24, p. 265.
See M. Valerii Martialis *Epigrammaton libri*, recognovit W[ilhelm] Heraeus (Leipzig: Jacobus Borovskij, 1925/1976). Perseus Digital Library. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:phi,1294,002:14:73

the kingdom of Prester John, roughly approximate to modern Ethopia, he wrote:

> there be many popinjays … And they speak of their proper nature, and salute men that go through the deserts, and speak to them as apertly as though it were a man ... And there be also of another manner ... and they speak not, or but little, for they can not but cry.[24]

In Christian Europe, the parrot's *Ave Caesar* became *Ave Maria*, a prophecy of the birth of Christ. The parrot was thus a divine messenger, and as some authors would have it, an incarnation of the Logos, the word of God itself.[25] Several late medieval images of the Madonna and Child depict Mary with a parrot.[26]

Figure 2
Detail from Jan van Eyck, The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele, 1434-36. Oil on wood, 122 x 157 cm. Groeningemuseum, Bruges.

[24] Sir John Mandeville. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville: The Fantastic 14th-Century Account of a Journey to the East* (Mineola: Dover Publications), 181.
[25] Kinney 1987, 16; Nathaniel Owen Wallace, 'The Responsibilities of Madness: John Skelton, "Speke Parrot", and Homeopathic Satire', *Studies in Philology* 82:1 (1985), 61.
[26] For example see Martin Schongauer, *Virgin and Child with a Parrot*, 1470-1475. Musee Unterlinden, Colmar. http://www.musee-unterlinden.com/en/collections/la-vierge-au-perroquet/; Sebald Beham after Barthel Beham, *The Virgin and Child with the Parrot*, 1549. Art Institute, Chicago. http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/77433.

Indeed, in 1430 Lydgate himself addressed Mary as "*O popinjay, plumed with all cleanness.*"[27] The reverse of Eva, this Ave symbolised the virgin birth's reversal of original sin, with which the parrot was also associated in medieval and early modern art. The parrot as a symbol of the purity and holiness associated with the divine and more specifically with Mary herself, also appears in other late medieval images of women.

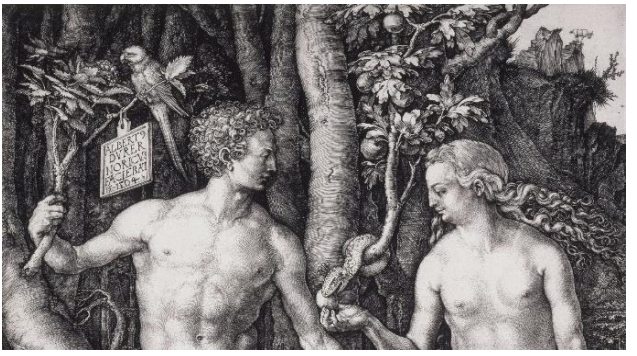

Figure 3
Detail from Albrecht Dürer, The Fall of Man (Adam and Eve), 1504. Print Engraving, 252 x 194 mm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 4
Detail from La Dame à la licorne, late-fifteenth century. Tapestry, 3.75 m x 4.60 m. Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris.

However, after 1492, parrots became increasingly numerous in European courts, and the association between lady and parrot

[27] John Lydgate, *Ballade at the Reverence of Our Lady* in *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate,* ed. H. N. MacCracken, vol. 1, *EETSES* 107 (1911; reprint 1961), 258.

shifted. The lady was now once again Eve as well as remaining Mary, and the parrot became pet as well as prophet. Skelton's parrot too is both, situating himself from the beginning as "*a mynyon to wayte upon a quene; / 'My propyre Parott, my lytell pratye fole.' / With ladyes I lerne and goe with them to scole.*"[28] This role, which scholars have seen as somewhat sexual and somewhat pedagogical,[29] shades into the Christological as well: in his recitation to Galathea of the old ballad in which Besse is the church and Christ the lover, Parrot says "*I wyl be ferme and stabyll, / And to yow serviceabyll, / And also prophetabyll.*"[30] This could be interpreted in a number of ways, as Parrot prompts us to do: otherwise "*lost is the hole sentens.*"[31]

Color symbolism may have played a part in this. We have seen that for Boccaccio, the parrot's green plumage was evidence of immortality. Heather Dalton has shown that while parrots and other "exotic birds ... were employed in Renaissance paintings to symbolise victory and purity, as well as to evoke magnificence,"[32] for a white cockatoo in sixteenth-century Mantua "its colour, or rather lack of it, appears to have given it the edge over other parrots when it came to symbolising holiness."[33] Of course, purity and rarity coincide, and economically, as the birds became a commoner luxury, their mystique and consequent holiness would have lessened simply through numbers.

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[28] *Speke, Parrot* 19-21.

[29] Griffiths 2006, 98, quoted in Antony J. Hasler, *Court Poetry in Late Medieval England and Scotland: Allegories of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 157. See also Kinney 1987, 25-6, who provides later verses of the song that support this reading.

[30] *Speke, Parrot* 246-8.

[31] *Speke, Parrot* 182.

[32] Heather Dalton, 'The Parrot in the Picture: A Sulphur Crested Cockatoo in Fifteenth-century Mantua'. Seminar given at the University of Melbourne Medieval Round Table, 1 August 2011. Abstract available from http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/amems/seminars-reading-groups/medieval-round-table/2011.

[33] Heather Dalton, 'A Sulphur-crested Cockatoo in fifteenth-century Mantua: rethinking symbols of sanctity and patterns of trade', *Renaissance Studies* 28: 5 (November 2014), 685. I am indebted to this article and the earlier seminar for many valuable leads on parrot lore.

However, just before the Reformation, the social, economic, and political circumstances in the history of the parrot as a symbol intersected such that parrots could be an appropriate vehicle, perhaps the most appropriate vehicle, for religious confusion. According to the art of *confuse distributyve*, it is the combination of signs that creates the whole significance, and there are contemporary precedents for this. Jean Lemaire de Belges's *Épîtres de l'amant vert* (1505) is also narrated by a parrot, the green lover of the title, who kills himself after the death of his mistress' brother. Subsequently, the parrot returns and consoles his mistress for both deaths with a Dante-esque account of his journey to the underworld. Here, the parrot has a dual role: as messenger and prophet able to travel between the human and divine worlds, and simultaneously as hedonist lady's pet and/or substitute lover.[34] Further east, in the mythical birthplace of the parrot, a similar tradition is in evidence. The *Tūtī'nāmah* (*Book of the parrot*) is a collection of fifty-two moral tales told by a parrot to his mistress, to distract her from meeting her lover during her husband's prolonged absence. The story was translated into Persian around 1335 from Sanskrit, and became popular in Mughal courts from the sixteenth century forward.[35]

In Sir David Lindsay's 1529 satire on the church, *The Testament and Complaint of our Sovereign Lord's Papyngo*, the parrot, a pet of the king, can speak any language untaught, and after death, is torn apart by other birds, situating it as a divine martyr.[36] Skelton's Parrot is "*by nature devised of a wondrous kind*"[37]: "*When Parrot is dead, he doth not putrefy*."[38] In fact, Parrot identifies with "*mannes soule, that Chryst so dere*

[34] *Cf.* Ovid, *Amores* II: VI, c 15 BCE, a lament for a dead pet parrot.
[35] Ziya′ u′d-din Nakhshabi, *Tales of a parrot = The Cleveland Museum of Art's Ṭūṭīnāma*, ed. and trans. Muhammed A. Simsar (Cleveland: The Museum, 1978). Available in facsimile at http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/186409.
[36] Sir David Lindsay, *The Testament and Complaint of our Sovereign Lord's Papingo*, in *The warkis of the famous and vorthie knicht Schir Dauid Lyndesay of the Mont, alias, Lyoun King of Armes. Newly correctit, and vindicate from the former errouris quhairwith thay war befoir corruptit: and augmentit with sindrie warkis quhilk was not befoir imprentit. The contentis of the buke, and quhat warkis ar augmentit, the nixt syde sall schaw* (Edinburgh: Iohne Scot, [1568]), 122.
[37] *Speke, Parrot* 2.
[38] *Speke, Parrot* 213.

bought."[39] Just as one interpretation of Parrot's song to Galathea has Christ recalling the errant church, the parrot signalled a call for church reform, in this case representing both Christ and the soul.

It also symbolised the speech of unwitting or ungodly priests: for Boehrer at least, Reformation played "a major role in creating one of the most enduring clichés of modern western animal representation": the mindless mimicry of the parrot.[40] Even before the Reformation, Skelton's Parrot is a symbol of mindless mimicry, and for Tyndale in 1528: "*The prest ought to…,not to playe the popengay with Credo saye ye, volo saye ye and baptismum saye ye, for there ought to be no mummynge in soch a mater.*"[41] As has been noted, the main subject of this satire is Thomas Wolsey, whose rise to power during the late 1510s and early 1520s was clearly alarming to Skelton on both political and theological grounds. The various enormities Skelton complained of are fairly transparently detailed in the poem's last section:

> *He tryhumfythe, he trumpythe, he turnythe all up and downe,*
> *With, 'Skyregalyard, prowde palyard, vaunteperler, ye prate!*
> *Hys wolnys hede, wanne, bloo as lede, gapythe over the crowne:*
> *Hyt ys to fere leste he wolde were the garland on hys pate,*
> *Peregall with all prynces farre passyng hys estate;*
> *For of ower regente the regiment he hathe, ex qua vi,*
> *Patet per versus, quod ex vi bolte harvi...*
> *So prodigall expence and so shamfull reconyng…*
> *So muche portlye pride, with pursys penyles…*
> *So myche pride of prelattes, so cruell and so kene…*
> *So myche mokkyshe makyng of statutes of array…*
> *So many vacabondes, so many beggers bolde;*
> *So myche decay of monesteries and of relygious places;*
> *So hote hatered agayste the Chyrche, and cheryte so colde…*
> *So myche sayntuary brekyng, and prevylegidde barryd…*

[39] *Speke, Parrot* 215.
[40] Bruce Boehrer, *Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 95.
[41] William Tyndale, *The obedience of a Christen man.* 1st ed., 1528 (1 vol.) f. lxxxixv. Marlborow [Antw.] H. luft STC 24446.

> *So rygorous revelyng, in a prelate specially;*
> *So bold and so braggyng, and was so baselye borne;*
> *So lordlye of hys lokes and so dysdayneslye.*[42]

This more familiar type of "confusion," of which Parrot complains, has been explored perhaps most thoroughly by Greg Walker, particularly in relation to contemporary politics.[43] Most modern commentators, however have noted Skelton's pointed literary campaigning against Wolsey on both political and theological grounds: and of course, in pre-Reformation England the theological was political.

Like Skelton's Parrot, both l'Amant Vert and Papyngo are royal pets, a new version of the bird as metaphor for the court poet. Skelton's Parrot, the pampered but disregarded pet of the court ladies, laments the decadence in which it lives and the chaotic nonsense spoken around it.[44] The parrot can speak many languages and knows a number of Biblical references with which to satirize the contemporary political situation, but is either interrupted by the court ladies wanting entertainment, or breaks off the satire to ask for sweetmeats.[45] Parrot (and therefore Skelton) "put[s] himself forward as an alternative advisor, whose fragmentary speech is as apt reflection of the political misrule he satirizes."[46] Like Mandeville's parrots he "speaks to them as aptly" as a human, but at times he "cannot but cry." Thus both theologically and politically, Skelton refers both to Babel and to "the Pentecostal gift of tongues,"[47] the

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[42] *Speke, Parrot* 431-507.
[43] Greg Walker. *John Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[44] John Skelton, *Here after foloweth certayne bokes, co[m]pyled by mayster Skelton, Poet Laureat whose names here after shall appere. Speke parrot The deth of the noble prince Kyng Edwarde the fourth. A treatyse of the Scottes. Ware the hawke The tunnyng of Elynour Rummynge.* Printed at London: By Richard Lant, for Henry Tab, dwelling in Pauls church yard, at the sygne of Iudith, [1545?] STC (2nd ed.) / 22598.
[45] Griffiths 2006*,* especially 90-93.
[46] Griffiths 2006, 79.
[47] John M. Berdan, 'Speke, Parrot. An Interpretation of Skelton's Satire', *Modern Language Notes* 30: 5 (May 1915), 142; Kinney 1987, 17.

understanding of both together through the method of *confuse distributyve* representing the Logos.

One of Parrot's chief complaints of Wolsey, as hinted in Tyndale's remark, is the uncomprehending way contemporary scholars (and therefore clergy) learned languages. Wolsey had recently founded a chair in Greek at Christ Church, Oxford, and Parrot complains that the students could only repeat fragments of the canonical texts without being able to understand enough to produce the simplest sentence on their own "*they cannot say in Greke, rydynge by the way,/ How, hosteler, fetche my hors a botell of hay!*"[48] This complaint reflects a current debate of the 1520s: the so-called Grammarians' War, a pamphlet war that centred on the "old" style of teaching Latin by grammatical precept and the "new" style of learning by imitation, as the students of Greek at Oxford were taught. Jane Griffiths extrapolates how Parrot's *confuse distibutyve*, his "shredis of sentence" (92) is a reflection on the practice of imitation. It was also a demonstration of the usefulness of *imitatio*, the much more nuanced practice of learning content and style well enough and from enough different authorities as to make the content anew (the usual metaphor was the digestive process.) Griffiths finds that teaching by imitation "creates an audience unable to appreciate the urgency of Parrot's apocalyptic warnings." These "teaching methods are thus figured as one of the threats to the kingdom."[49]

As Griffiths expounds on the teaching of style by imitation versus by grammatical precept, the former would appear to represent a view of language as Logos, "the pure and universal Latin" from which it is unwise to deviate with neologisms: *nova non sine quodam periculo fingimus*.[50] The proponents of teaching by grammatical rule on the other hand take a more charitable view of the Babel of vernaculars: "*every countre doth avaunse with laude his owne language… sythen al speches suffre confusyon save hebrewe*."[51]

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[48] *Speke, Parrot* 146-7.

[49] Griffiths 2006, 80.

[50] William Horman, *Vulgaria*, *STC* 13811 (London: Richard Pynson, 1519), fols. 303v, 305, quoted in Griffiths 2006, 85.

[51] Robert Whittinton, *Vulgaria*, in *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton*, ed. Beatrice White, EEETS os 187 (1932), 94, quoted in

For Griffiths, Parrot's *confuse distributyve* "demand[s] a collaborative relationship between writer and reader."[52] The de-contextualization of proverbs create "that element of surprise essential to startle the reader into engagement with the text," and further, "by contrast [teaching by imitation of style is] liable to promote... the false assumption that a certain familiar word or phrase has an immutable meaning," thus stifling both creativity in reading and free speech in political and poetic writing.[53]

Kinney also finds Parrot's early languages as Babel. For Kinney, Parrot is an exile from paradise whose "knowledge separates him from the fallen world he inhabits": "the confuse distributive…will allow him to prophesy the future by recalling splintered but appropriately typological events...and then reinventing them"[54]: when all of the languages of Babel are combined, the whole is the Logos (just as every color on the spectrum is combined in white.)

Skelton has often been seen as a peculiarly transitional poet, between the mystery play and the Rabelaisian, representing either very late medieval or very early modern sensibilities: or, of course, both. Anna Torti, among others, has addressed the *confuse distributyve* in *Speke, Parrot* from a chronological point of view, as representing a (self-reflective) transitional style between medieval and early modern poetics; "from medieval literary models to more typically Renaissance ones."[55] I would suggest that the contrasting methods Skelton refers to and discusses here between imitation and *imitatio*, repetition and comprehension, are not necessarily of different times. The *confuse distributyve* of medieval logic that Skelton so specifically employs is, for one, medieval, rather than proto-modern or postmodern. It asks hearers to mediate between learned and invented understandings. If we understand *confuse distributyve* as a method of logic rather than of poetics, it still works in the same way,

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Griffiths 2006*,* 84. This difference prefigures what are now known as prescriptive and descriptive attitudes to language change.

[52] Griffiths 2006, 93.

[53] Griffiths 2006, 99.

[54] Kinney 1987*,* 19.

[55] Anna Torti, *The Glass of Form: Mirroring Structures from Chaucer to Skelton* (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 129.

with part standing for the whole, and the more and more diverse the parts the richer and more complete the whole. As one of Skelton's earliest modern commentators, F. W. Brownlow, noted, "*Speke, Parrot* is a typically medieval work of art in that… it is manifestly incomplete without the cooperation of an audience of informed readers."[56] But how does that cooperation work? How do Parrot and his audience train each other?

In our own times, Irene Pepperberg's work with Alex, an African grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*), suggests that while parrots (and other birds) do "mindlessly mimic," Alex could also "learn to use human speech referentially" if training was referential, functional, and socially rich. While babbling to himself in his cage, Alex spontaneously coined new words from parts of words he had learned, just as young children do, and when these comprised existing English words that were reinforced by trainers, Alex learned how to use these words referentially. While Alex learned referential terms by imitating his trainers, the process of generating new words showed (for Pepperberg) that Alex was not just imitating language, but recognizing component parts and spontaneously recombining them[57] — just as Skelton's Parrot does. The meaning of these terms was eventually mapped to "appropriate referents" not just by Alex but by the humans around him, just as Skelton's Parrot prompts the humans around him to do.

It is clear from the foregoing work that in the early sixteenth century, several ideas about parrots held currency at the same time. Parrots were divine, could prophesy, told stories to their mistresses, could imitate any language, and in some cases did not have to be taught. At the same time they were also foolish. Skelton's parrot, as we have seen, is all of these. He can imitate each of many languages, and comprehend a totality of language in general: to be able to imitate each is to be able to comprehend all. The many languages of parrot symbolism meant that the confused Babel of languages

[56] Brownlow 1968, 137. Quoted in Kinney 1987, 205.

[57] Irene M. Pepperberg, 'Vocal Learning in Grey Parrots: A Brief Review of Perception, Production, and Cross-Species Comparisons.' *Brain & Language* 115 (2010): 81-91, 85.

represented not the opposite of Logos but Logos itself, through the Pauline mirror in the parrot's cage of the court.

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