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‘Inlargednesse of Mind and Activity of Spirit’: Gender Identities in the Religious Writings of mid-Seventeenth-Century England

A Doctoral Thesis

by

Anna Katarzyna Warzycha

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University
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Condemne me not for making such a coyle
About my Book, alas it is my Childe.
Just like a Bird, when her Young are in Nest,
Goes in, and out, and hops and takes no Rest;
But when their Young are fledg’d, their heads out peep,
Lord what a chirping does the Old one keep.
So I, for feare my Strengthlesse Childe should fall
Against a doore, or stoole, aloud I call,
Bid have a care of such a dangerous place:
Thus write I much, to hinder all disgrace.

~ Margaret Cavendish, ‘An Excuse for so Much Writ upon my Verses’, Poems and Fancies (A8°)
Abstract

In dominant seventeenth-century thinking women’s bodies, minds, and spirits were not only inferior to men’s, but also more prone to evil. This study explores the ways in which the women writers attempted to redefine these assumptions. Through an analysis organised along various spiritual transformations the writers claim to go through, the study presents an insight into seventeenth-century women’s construction and redefinition of femininity. The symbolic process of women’s spiritual transfiguration results in them identifying with the metaphorical figure of Zion and in positioning women as godly agents of God, whereas male writers’ transformations eventuate in their being effeminized and being turned into ‘Crooked Agents’ of God. Therefore, the study shows how the potentials inherent in the biblical figure of Zion were used in establishing a connection with God and in forming female and male authorial identity. The thesis draws on the understudied voices of women such as the anonymous Eliza, Elizabeth Major, An Collins or Gertrude More, and is contextualized by male-authored texts, some of them considered as canonical and popular in contemporary literature. Considering male authors for this project is crucial in establishing the flexibility of femininity as well as masculinity, and it also shows that the women writers deserve the same critical attention as their male contemporaries. The study also builds on the analysis of early-modern understanding of the relations between the body, mind, and spirit through drawing on the biblical, pre-Christian, and early Christian teachings. Hence it identifies the writers’ familiarity with such philosophical schools as those of St. Augustine, Aristotle, Plato or Pythagoras. By examining various textual intricacies, the study attempts to further establish the religious leanings of the writers, although the lack of biographical information in some cases makes the discussion more speculative.

Through the use of witty language, syntactically intricate structures, and complex imagery to express their emotional and spiritual states and to explain abstract concepts, some of the women’s writings fit metaphysical conventions. Therefore, the study examines poetical devices and various structural elements, and by drawing on the representatives of the metaphysical school like George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and Thomas Traherne, implicitly explores this literary criticism.

Keywords: women, seventeenth century, Zion, mystical marriage, body, mind, spirit, Aristotle, Augustine, Song of Songs
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Abbreviations

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Abbreviations

ELH       English Literary History (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1934-2012)
ODNB      Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Online edn: 2004-12)
OED       Oxford English Dictionary Online (Online edn: 1860s-2012)
Introduction

Christopher Hill accurately describes the mid-seventeenth-century as a time when the ‘world turned upside down’.¹ Many important social and political events occurred during a short period of time. King Charles I was executed in 1649, and in 1653 Oliver Cromwell established the Protectorate. As Neal Keeble states, Puritans ‘took the King for a Tyrant and an Enemy, and really intended absolutely to master him, or ruin him’.² However, the monarchy was again restored in 1660 with Charles II as the new King. The Interregnum was a time of socio-political experimentation, or rather turmoil, and it meant instability in almost every aspect of peoples’ lives. Keeble describes it as ‘a world without the traditional assurances of security and stability, without readily recognizable emblems of order, a world in which customs, precedents, traditions and authorities could no longer be relied upon’.³

Since such instability affected all social classes, it became a reason why people demonstrated their politico-religious stands publicly. During this time public opinion mattered more than ever, and opinions of individuals were best expressed by an affiliation with a chosen congregation, so these religious groups became numerous. The radical wing of the Puritan movement, labelled as dissenters, was split into several congregations, such as Levellers, Anabaptists (Baptists), Ranters, and later Quakers, with many more appearing. These congregations feared, and were strongly opposed to, the Catholic Church with the Pope at its head, and each of them wanted to create a new world of stability. The creation of these religious groups also gave women a chance to speak publicly. Some of them, like the Quakers, allowed women to air their views in public and even encouraged them to publish pamphlets.⁴ Others proposed political flexibility that was often seen as promoting anarchy, heresy, and even sexual freedom, such as for example, the Ranters, who as J. F. McGregor has established, were ‘rude, swinish, and filthy’.⁵ Radical religion was intertwined with radical politics. These ideas mostly centred on the monarchy and proposed rethinking certain aspects of its power: such as the extent to which the King should listen to his subjects, where the boundary of people’s obedience to their sovereign lay, what the role of Parliament was,

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and what therefore were the limits of the King’s authority. Because of numerous conflicting radical voices and traditional opinions, the English Revolution is seen as an ideological war; a war of ideas, which was disseminated orally and through the press. The latter became more prolific than ever. As Keeble has pointed out, ‘Never before had so many people turned to writing, never before had so many seen their thoughts into print, and never before had what they printed generated such extensive and public debate’. This meant that people started consciously promoting certain religious and political beliefs, making use of propaganda in publishing, and so they also read various texts critically, carefully analysing their contents. For instance, propagandist texts included The King’s Cabinet Opened (1645), which was published by the Parliamentarians and revealed Charles I’s compromising correspondence, and Eikon Basilike (1649) was published on behalf of the Royalists, which presented the King as a martyr. Each side aimed at discrediting the other through these public documents.

Although the theatres were closed, the period of civil wars witnessed a remarkable development in literature, in the form of prose and poetry. Not only did various forms of pamphlets start to appear, but spiritual autobiographies, conversion narratives, and devotional meditations were also written, as new genres rapidly emerged. As Thomas Corns has noted, ‘creative writing found a fresh and much closer engagement with the domain of politics, redefining notions of what was possible or appropriate for the writer to attempt’. The literature of this time can be characterised by withdrawal from the physical world, as the experiences of isolation, searching for a new identity, and reflection became more prominent. Keeble argues that

There is an elegiac note, and an unmistakable regret and longing […], but there is hardly submissiveness. Similarly, what we might be tempted to think of as fanciful excursions into the remote world of romance on the part of Royalist writers of fiction, and as escapism in their readers, prove to be resilient re-engagement with contemporary political affairs.

These trends were probably a product of social mourning for the King’s death, which resulted in feelings of denial, anger, confusion, grief, as well as resignation. Apart from male voices, such as those of John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, Abraham Cowley, Richard Lovelace, Robert Herrick, and Richard Crashaw, who variously interpreted political beliefs

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and religious doctrine, the literature of this period was also represented by women writers, like Margaret Cavendish, Anne Bradstreet, or Katherine Philips, who similarly expressed their opinion about the socio-political situation of the English civil wars. Katharine Gray has pointed out that

the two decades of the Interregnum produced over 30 percent of published women’s writings for the whole of the seventeenth-century – as opposed to only 9 percent in the forty preceding years – their output shifting from more traditional forms and genres, such as poetry, to newer and often more radical forms such as prophecy and political commentary.\(^{11}\)

The publication of women’s writing, and the experience of hearing them preach publicly was an exceptional achievement, considering the contemporary belief that ‘whore is scarce a more reproachful name than poetess’.\(^{12}\) While negotiating their authorial identity, women wrote and published collaboratively with men, and this very often took on a form of competition as they demonstrated a sense of their own agency in writing. This, however, meant the traditional view that ‘Man is made to govern commonwealths, and women their private families’ was challenged by their freedom of speech and the written word that this time offered.\(^{13}\) The patriarchal establishment wanted to deny women active participation in socio-political affairs, explaining that their inability resulted from their inferiority.

The inferiority of the female mind, spirit, and body was related to the belief that woman was more prone to evil. This assumption was justified by reference to biological, Aristotelian, and some theological traditions that stated that a woman was just a reflection of ‘a regenerate and perfect person’, as Keeble describes her, rather than being modelled on the divine, like men.\(^{14}\) Women were denied authority in any sphere apart from their homes, this exclusion being justified through the assumption that women were created to perform no other role than that of a mother, wife, or housewife. Therefore, as various recent critics on the literature of this period have argued, the activity of writing was perceived as unfeminine, and, in Hilary Hinds’s words, writing women ‘risked ridicule, violence and even imprisonment in order to speak their words and publish their texts’.\(^{15}\) However, this ‘weaker vessel’ made a


\(^{13}\) Margaret Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio* (London: Printed for J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655), A4\(^v\).


significant contribution to the literary canon, publishing on every possible topic. This thesis will argue that the writers that it focuses on embody the complicated identity of Zion, who, on the one hand, can be described as a fragile, female figure and, on the other, as a powerful executor of God’s plan. Both male and female authors use this figure to establish a mystical union with God. The women’s writings will, therefore, be contextualized by more canonical male-authored texts, highlighting the differences between their authorial voices. The thesis will also consider femininity as a tool that women and men used in order to enter into a nuptial relationship with the Divine. This will demonstrate how femininity was redefined. Before the thesis proceeds with a detailed analysis of both female and male writings, the introduction will highlight women’s position in the seventeenth century and outline the dichotomy of femininity and masculinity.

Women’s place in the seventeenth-century world was determined as dichotomous to the men’s position. Femininity and masculinity were hence socially established as binary opposites and marked boundaries that conditioned the social order. As Hinds has succinctly explained, these cultural boundaries were defined as natural:

These ideas concerning the nature of women had been systematised and justified in four main ways: men were active, women passive; women were subordinate because they were cursed at the Fall; women were less robust than men; and the spiritual signification of sex difference was seen to lie in the parallel between women and the soul and the man and Godhead. Above all, women were associated with sensuality, and were feared for their incitement to lust and concupiscence in men.16

These assumptions were very much inferred from the humoral theory that conditioned the differences between the male and the female body. Elaine Hobby explains that the imperfection of the female ‘complexion’, physical and psychological well being, was assigned to its unbalanced content (blood, choler, melancholy or black choler, and phlegm). Women’s bodies were considered as colder because of the excessive wetness, as opposed to the hotter male bodies. The wetness was believed to be the reason why women’s bodies were less dense and not as healthy as the male.17 The excess of blood, therefore, needed to be released in the form of a menstrual flow. These beliefs were also a source of establishing a patriarchal model of a virtuous, good wife. A woman was expected to be loving, caring, obedient to her husband, and to provide offspring. In Patricia Crawford’s words, she was to

16 Hinds, *God’s Englishwomen*, p. 34.
fulfil the role of a ‘nursing mother’ on a literal and symbolic level.\textsuperscript{\ref{fn:5}} Women then occupied a designated private sphere that could be classified as an enclosure of their homes. This was considered as the natural space for a woman, who was believed to be an imperfect man, as the seventeenth-century world sometimes doubted that women had souls at all. The basis of this was the biblical story of creation, where the first man, Adam, is made in the image of God, and the first woman, Eve, is described as having been made from his rib. This suggests that she is created in the image of a man rather than that of God. A woman was, therefore, considered a mere reflection of a man, but a man, on the other hand, was believed to reflect the Divine. Thereby, the spirituality of a woman became a problematic matter.

As such, the seventeenth-century perception of femininity had negative connotations and needed to be counterbalanced by masculinity. These assumptions conditioned women’s submission to their husbands, who became their heads. This arrangement allowed men to direct their wives. Thomas Gataker, a seventeenth-century clerical and scholarly authority on marriage matters, taught that

\begin{quote}
The man is as the head, and the woman is as the body [...] And as it is against the order of Nature that the body should rule the head; so it is no less against the course of all good that the woman should usurp authority to herself over her husband, her head.\textsuperscript{\ref{fn:18}}
\end{quote}

The seventeenth-century perception of femininity has negative connotations and any attempt at acting against the social order was perceived as a transgression and a sign of a corrupt mind for it was believed that ‘unchaste gestures are evident signs of unchaste mind’.\textsuperscript{\ref{fn:19}} The key virtues of womanhood were chastity and piety, and these could be demonstrated by action and words. Diane Willen calls attention to the fact that the practice of piety gave women comfort and assertion: ‘In theory and often in practice, the husband functioned as head of the religious household, the wife as “yoke fellow”, a spiritual companion responsible for the religious education of their young children’.\textsuperscript{\ref{fn:20}} Religious meditations, private spiritual practices, and instructing their children and household were acceptable occupations for women.

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{\ref{fn:18}} Thomas Gataker, \textit{Marriage Duties and Briefely Couched Together out of Colossians 3. 18, 19} (London: William Jones, 1620), p. 9.
\end{footnotes}
Since the public sphere was men’s domain, the public act of women airing views was considered as breaching it. Thomas Becon, a seventeenth-century licensed preacher, declared that

I suffer not a woman to teach, neither to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence [...] let your women keep silence in the congregations. For it is not permitted unto them to speak, but to be under obedience, as saith the law. If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the congregation.  

Even so, the act of prophecy was very popular in seventeenth-century England. Between the early 1650s and 1660, the year Charles II was restored to the throne, nearly three hundred visionary women prophesied and wrote, describing themselves as God’s instruments. They claimed to be passing on God’s messages to the people. Although women could perform very few public roles, they could act as prophets and visionaries, or sectarian figureheads. They could also translate religious texts and serve as patrons of the clergy. According to Phyllis Mack, prophecy was a sign of wisdom, prudence, sincerity, and avoidance of irresponsible, light-hearted behaviour as well as idle activities. On the other hand, prophets provoked suspicion. As Mack explains, women prophets were labelled as witches; they were ‘antimalistic creatures’, who were unable to think independently, and their bodies were polluted. The women poets discussed in this thesis cannot be strictly categorised as prophets or visionaries, since apart from the didactic tone of their poetry and positioning themselves as ‘divinely inspired interpreters’, there is no evidence of their preaching and performing the act of conversion with others publicly, or being in a trance-like state when writing. As will be shown, some texts include prophetic qualities, though. Positioned as God’s agents, these female writers establish the act of writing as a virtuous duty that needs to be fulfilled. The voice they obtain is licensed to critique the social and political situation publicly, and as a result the element of privacy becomes eliminated from the notion of femininity. The service

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24 Willen, ‘Religion and the Construction of the Feminine’, p. 25. Willen has pointed out that the initial roles women performed within the enclosure of their homes were teaching prayers and instructing children as well as being servants. With time they started participating in the outside world by becoming involved in charitable activities and serving their godly communities.
the female writers perform, as God’s agents, significantly differs from the male, whose leading voice is naturally considered as public, and these male writers thus display confidence in their creative and writing skills. However, their sinful conscience affects the quality of the service they offer to God and reminds them repeatedly that they cannot become his worthy instruments. The male writers therefore deny their ability to become exemplary instruments of God, while the women writers fight their sinful nature, so that the quality of their service is unaltered and, as a consequence, they become the exemplary agents of God.

Women’s writing in seventeenth-century England became quite prolific. Hobby has established that ‘between 1649 and 1688 writings by more than 200 women were published on every conceivable topic’. However, the activity of writing itself was considered as unnatural as well as unfeminine, and writing women could have been imprisoned, suffered corporal punishment, or derided for their attempts to publicize their texts or air their views publicly. Recent criticism has assumed that female writers were self-conscious and therefore they often hid themselves behind a pseudonym or manuscript copy to publicize their views. Carol Barash has pointed out that manuscript circulation was mostly practised by the elite and well-educated. A copy would circulate among family and friends who shared similar political interests, and sometimes the aim of circulation was to improve the quality of the writings, or perhaps even rewrite and copy it. It was easier for women to air their views in a friendly circle than be exposed to the critique of an unknown audience. On the other hand, it was impossible to predict precisely the audience who would read the writings and this is why women’s voices could have gained recognition and started establishing a reputation outside the planned circles of readers such as families, friends, and religious congregations. Such a circulation of literary works did not guarantee anonymity, and could not be, therefore, considered as a sort of a shelter. The author of the manuscript copy would be recognized as a writer who establishes a public female voice and attempts to redefine the idea of femininity. The advantage of manuscript circulation was the precision of the message that the author of the text aimed to convey. Peter Beal has aptly pointed out that manuscripts were perceived as

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30 Margaret Ezell, *The Patriarch’s Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 62. Ezell has argued against this claim, proposing that cultural studies tend to focus on isolated, eccentric cases, instead of analyzing the general pattern of women’s participation in social life as evidence, for instance, in manuscript circulation.
'closer to the speech, more likely to register sound', and therefore that a manuscript was ‘private and personalized both in its means of production and in the nature of the social function’. Since society associated women with privacy, manuscript circulation would be seen as more adequate too. However, the existence of a manuscript did not guarantee a faithful account of the author’s message. The reputation of a scribe was far from impeccable in the seventeenth century. Jeremiah Wells described him as a trickster or conjuror, who uses the legal formulae, ambiguous abbreviations, and even archaic script and language of his documents as a means to confuse and deceive; a criminal, who deserves to lose his ears; a thief; a forger or perjurer; a disease or plague; a monster; a viper, wolf, beast of prey, rat, vermin, or pariah; a leech, worm, louse, or rather parasite which ultimately destroys what it feeds on-gnawing their Livelyhood out of the bowells of those they hung upon.

Publishing, on the other hand, was an even more dangerous and risky option to consider for a female writer. As Ezell has said of Grace Carrie of Bristol, ‘she fears that her thoughts might be perverted by “voulgar” readers; her objections concern the lack of quality in published treatises and the loss of control over her readership and their application of her writing’. The disadvantage of a published text is that it is more likely to have been altered, or even more corrupted, than a manuscript copy. This might have been another reason for not publishing literary works by women, as then the probability of being misunderstood became even larger. The fact that female writings were usually published posthumously is a clear indication that elements of anxiety about the exposure and the alteration of the message were certainly present.

Women’s fear of being misunderstood was combined with the fear of the conventions set by the male-dominated society, which denied the authority of women in any sphere apart from their homes. The privacy of their family and a house was the established enclosure women were supposed to consider as their world. Wendy Wall has explained that ‘A woman’s decision to “presse the Presse”, to venture far from her place “at home within” and

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34 Ezell, *The Patriarch’s Wife*, p. 65. Ezell explains that Carrie decided to circulate her volume first (in spite of her friends’ encouragement to publish it), since she did not consider print as a reliable means of improving quality and value of her volume. Carrie says that it was ‘unfit, that such divine & miraculous truth should be made common in these times wherein so many falsifies and false printed papers are set fourth’. She was also afraid of the potential corruptibility of her words. She feared the audience, especially ‘the voulgar people’ and their ‘scandalous mouthes’ that could ‘eclipse the truth hereof’.
from her passive and 'pressed' silent "feminine" role, could be seen as a sign of her refusal to respect sanctioned cultural boundaries". 35 Both print and manuscript circulation were two of the means of breaking the boundaries of privacy in order to explore other worlds. Wall has explained that 'published words were associated with promiscuity, the female writer could become a "fallen" woman in a double sense: branded as a harlot or a member of the nonelite'. 36 Nevertheless, by risking such a social stigma this 'weaker vessel', did contribute to the redefinition of femininity. 37 The female writers established their authorial identity through devotional writing that became a necessary virtue of femininity. 38 Through the role of God’s agents or prophets, women authorized their voices, making them a reliable source of knowledge and understanding, and their sex as exceptional in performing this service. As Anita Pacheco has pointed out:

The female author, by this account, would be read not as an autonomous ‘great writer’ but as a product of history who was also an agent, capable of negotiating her marginal position and of intervening creatively in a masculine discursive system. 39

A woman writer becomes not only God’s agent, but also a skilful representative defending her position, and this defence leads to significant social alterations and empowerment of her voice.

Religion then becomes a powerful factor determining every sphere of human life. Achsah Guibbory understands religion as a ‘cultural system expressing the symbolic logic of a society. Religion redefines not only a worldview but society’s construction of human identity and of social relations’. 40 Thomas Corns and David Loewenstein highlight the inseparability of religion and politics in seventeenth-century England:

Recent historians of radical religious culture in the English Revolution have rightly emphasized that in this period of intense religious ferment and conflict, religion and

36 Wall, The Imprint of Gender, p. 281.
37 1 Peter 3:7. The apostle assumes that ‘Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered’.
38 W. Scott Howard, ‘An Collins and the Politics of Mourning’, in Speaking Grief in English Literary Culture: Shakespeare to Milton, ed. by Margo Swiss and David A. Kent (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), pp. 177-96 (p. 181). Howard has described devotional writings ‘as secular practices of religious mourning by which a writer purges the soul’s imperfections in order to achieve a spiritual enlightenment’.
politics were inseparable: religion was politicized and radicalism often took a religious form.\textsuperscript{41}

Indeed, the women writers use the form of a devotional meditation in order to comment on the socio-political situation of the country they lived in. The power of religious writings therefore cannot be underestimated; they constitute a way to express personal opinions, to influence others’ points of view, to demonstrate understanding of the Divine, and above all to establish an intimate connection with him that would be simultaneously displayed and accepted by the public. As Helen Wilcox says of religious lyrics, ‘the poems deconstruct as well as construct texts; their business is, often quite self-consciously, to read, interpret, and rewrite the books of the Bible, Nature, and the individual soul’.\textsuperscript{42} Religious writing was an exceptionally powerful tool used both for political and personal reasons. Elizabeth Clarke has established that the text of the Song of Songs has been ambiguously used in various sermons, commentaries and in poetry, especially in the time of religio-political turmoil.\textsuperscript{43} This thesis, however, uses the traditional interpretation of it and draws on its gendered language. The biblical story of the lovers becomes a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and his Church, and the relationship is mirrored in many seventeenth-century devotional writings. It especially encourages women, who present themselves as the biblical brides, to pick up a pen and enter the public sphere, as required by their spiritual spouse, Christ. The intimacy of the nuptial union between the believer and Christ, however, becomes controversial. The erotically charged language of the Song of Solomon allowed a certain sexual freedom, and the mystical garden invited sensuality, intimacy, and physical closeness that were very often present both in female and male-authored texts. While discussing the detailed understanding of the biblical images, this thesis will also attempt to identify religious leanings or in some cases indicate if a writer might be a member of the established church, rather than a dissenter.

Since this thesis offers women’s writing in the context of male works, it will highlight how men adopted some feminine qualities and women, on the other hand, some male

\textsuperscript{43} Elizabeth Clarke, Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Clarke explores textual and spiritual intricacies of the Song of Songs and demonstrates that numerous versions were produced with a view to encode various doctrines. It was, therefore, used as a source of metaphors that were variously applied also in politics, as religion and politics were inseparable at that time.

\textsuperscript{44} Guibbory, Ceremony and Community, p. 24.
attributes, a process that arguably therefore loosened the link between sex and gender. In order to illustrate that, the project utilises the biblical figure of Zion, who apart from emblematic qualities becomes feminized in various male and female portrayals. As well as contextualizing the figure of Zion, the thesis also offers a metaphorical narrative that explains the process of transfiguration she experiences, and the female and male-authored texts will reflect this symbolic process. Starting from a state of wickedness and immortality, the authors are reminded about the existence of God through his punishing them. This punishment takes on a form of mental torment or physical illness. Establishing a connection with the Divine becomes a symbol of recovery, and this is usually done through the authors assuring their position among God’s elect. They symbolically become God’s temples and put on Christ’s robes of righteousness, and the divine encasement is a sign of their entrance into a mystical marriage where they occupy the position of a bride. This position allows them to create a complex image of a devotional writer who becomes God’s instrument, a moral guide for their audience, denying a desire for fame and sharing the authorship of their writings with the Almighty. Through experiencing ‘inlargednesse of mind and activity of spirit’, women are able to manipulate their authorial identity, while crossing the boundaries between masculine and feminine in metaphorical and spiritual worlds. The flexible use of various images in religious denominations, which this metaphorical narrative analyses, will indicate that doctrinal borders were also constantly changing, depending on the shifts in socio-political situations.

In order to establish the symbolic aspect of the thesis, the first chapter will scrutinize the allegory of Zion, who is presented as a bride in a nuptial unity with God. Her symbolic status is considered most important to her, in that the women writers mirror the image of the biblical Zion and by transforming their minds, bodies, and spirits, they finally become exemplary agents of God. The second chapter therefore shows how the female body becomes the temple of God, and how its feminine qualities enhance this achievement; through implementing pre-Christian, early Christian, and Christian teachings the writers master their souls in godly service. Chapter 3 illustrates the spiritual object-focus transfiguration of their souls that is based on the biblical transformation that Zion experiences. From being inhabited with sinful children symbolising her filthy garment, she then undresses and later dons the celestial robe that reflects the completion of the process. Its accomplishment entitles the souls to occupy the position of God’s spouse and allows them to experience ‘ravishing delights’. The women writers are able to conceive their writings and assign their fatherhood to God.
Natural philosophy had linked the feminine with the corporeal matter of nature and the masculine with spirit.\footnote{Guibbory, \textit{Ceremony and Community}, p. 24.} This gendered distinction, as Guibbory explains, resulted in the belief that ‘As the wife is identified with the body and the husband with the spirit/Christ, the orderly submission of wife to husband symbolically enacts the proper order of Christian life’.\footnote{Guibbory, \textit{Ceremony and Community}, p. 24.} However, chapter 4 shows how the male position shifts when they enter into the mystical marriage with God, and chapter 5 indicates how the overall transformation influences women’s voices and their role as God’s agents. Their idealized image is contrasted with the male crookedness (corrupt human nature) that inhibits the male writers from performing the godly service well.

Because many of the women included in this project are relatively unknown, the inclusion of their biographical information further contextualizes their literary work. The majority of the texts discussed in this thesis are considered autobiographical, where the religious practices and spiritual exercises they describe permeated their lives. This thesis assumes that a work of literature is a reflection of and reflects on authors’ lives, providing readers with information concerning their understanding of the circumstances, environment, and the world they lived and wrote in. This approach, as Elaine Showalter explains, involves exploring the ‘history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity, the trajectory of the individual or collective female career, and the evolution or laws of a female literary tradition’.\footnote{Neeru Tandon, \textit{Feminism: Paradigm Shift} (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008), p. 84.} Through this method I will present an insight into seventeenth-century women’s construction of femininity, exploring women’s representations of female minds and spirits.

The core women writers this thesis discusses all utilise the genre of religious meditation and lyric poetry. Although the critics usually discuss some of the women writers together, the individual study of their volumes of prose and poetry will indicate various intricacies that will allow a clear distinction of individualized voices. One such writer is Gertrude More (1606-1633), who was a Catholic. Performing the role of a nun in ‘Our Lady of Comfort’ in exile in Cambrai, More became a spiritual guide for her sisters. Her supervisor, Father Augustine Baker, the author of her biography, explains that ‘Dame Gertrude […] appears to have been a tower of strength to her Sisters, encouraging them by
her cheerful confidence in God and by solid arguments’.\textsuperscript{47} This strength and devotion to God, More partly owed to her upbringing. Born in a devout Catholic family (her father was Mr Crisacre More, her grandfather was Sir Thomas More, and her mother, Elizabeth Gage), More’s adherence to the faith was constantly cultivated. As Baker claims, Dame More ‘had a strong propensity towards God, partly the result of grace, and partly a natural endowment in which […] the intellective soul in some degree at least appeared to partake’.\textsuperscript{48} More’s volumes of prose, with several poems, demonstrate her piety and instruct all believers to regular spiritual practices. 

\textit{The Holy Practises of a Divine Lover or the Sainctly Ideors Devotions, The Spiritual Exercises of the Most Vertuous and Religious D. Gertrude More of the Holy Order of S. Bennet and English Congregation of our Ladies of Comfort in Cambray, and The Confessiones Amantis: The Confessions of a Loving & Pious Soule to Allmghty God} were all published in Paris in 1657, when the author resided in the Bridge’s Convent that was protected by Queen Henrietta Maria, who was also a Catholic.\textsuperscript{49} The writings use various biblical images in exploration of the relationship between the body, mind, and the spirit. More participates in mystical tradition based on the biblical Song of Songs; Christ becomes her divine lover. Her writing abounds with the images of piercing, fiery darts, melting hearts, and ravishing sensations, implying her intimate union with the Divine. As Dorothy Latz has pointed out, More’s soul is ‘lost in Divine Love, and is in direct and loving union with Infinite Reality’.\textsuperscript{50}

The anonymous author of \textit{Eliza’s Babes: Or the Virgin’s Offering} (1652), the second key woman writer this thesis discusses, also establishes such an intimate union with the Prophet. The volume was printed once and is available in two copies at the University of Illinois and the British Library, and is the only source of information about her.\textsuperscript{51} Even though it is in part a spiritual autobiography, specific details about her life are excluded; instead what a reader is offered is a generic pattern that makes it impossible to separate an individual from an image. Since very little is known about the author of this volume, she has become recognised as Eliza. This might be either her pseudonym or indeed her real name. On the title page Eliza calls herself ‘a Lady, who only desires to advance the glory of God, and

\textsuperscript{48} Baker, \textit{The Inner Life}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{50} Latz, ‘\textit{Glow-Warm Light’}, p. 34.
not her own’ (p. 56). This indicates that she might have been a member of the gentry. Her volume is dedicated to her ‘Sisters’ (p. 8), alluding either to her siblings or possibly to the religious congregation she was a member of. There are no details concerning this matter, apart from her sisters’ initials included in the titles of her two poems: ‘To my Sister. S. G.’ (p. 8) and ‘To my Sister, S. S.’ (p. 27). The fact that Eliza identifies strongly with the Virgin Mary might imply that she was affiliated with Catholicism or high-church Anglicanism. Her spiritual mentor’s initial is supposedly revealed in her poem ‘My Bill of Thanks to Mr. C.’ (p. 47), but this information is insufficient to identify him. As a devotional work, Eliza’s text is based on the Bible to a large extent, specifically such books as Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Romans, Luke, Hosea, Isaiah, and Ephesians. However, her witty volume is also permeated with sarcasm and irony, and is influenced by such canonical writers as George Herbert and Edward Wither.

A similar anonymity pertains in the case of An Collins. Her Divine Songs and Meditacions (1653) are the only account of her existence. The only copy of the small octavo consists of 52 leaves and is preserved at the Huntington Library. Although there have been speculations about a 1658 copy, no evidence has been found to support it. The text does not mention any family connections, but implies that she considered herself a member of the Christian community and this is her supposed audience. It is difficult, though, to specify Collins’s religious leanings. The content of the volume indicates her strong Calvinistic connections, but Richard Bishop, authorized by Archbishop Laud in 1637, printed it. Although considered as spiritual autobiography, the volume of poetry seems to be written with the attention to detail as far as the poetic form and the figurative language are concerned, encouraging a reader to consider it as a work of art. Her volume consists of miscellaneous poems, with various metrical and stanzaic patterns, which adapt forms of ballads, songs, translations, and imitations. Stanley N. Stewart reads her devotional poetry as an act of departure from her physical suffering; it verbalizes her ‘denial of the body and the world [and shows her mind as] the enclosed garden the figure of “heavenly bliss”’, which

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marks exactly the departure from the bounds of time’. Various images of nature such as winter connected with dryness or springtime with blooming flowers and singing birds indicate the author’s psychological states that are partly impacted by her condition. It has been variously speculated that the poet might have been suffering from a sort of disfigurement left by an illness, such as smallpox or paralysis, which limited her mobility. Therefore, her volume demonstrates her journey from the verge of melancholy (the seventeenth-century term for depression) to grace, and the biblical passages, marked on the margins of the text, such as Ephesians, Corinthians, Galatians, John’s Gospel, illustrate this journey. Her volume is yet another example of dissolution of the boundaries between the public and the private. She displays her therapeutic relationship with God and encourages other Christians to follow her. I think, therefore, that other women writers, seeking authorial identity, would seriously consider this encouragement.

Elizabeth Major (b. 1628) also establishes her authorial identity through the intricacies of her volume. Her *Honey on the Rod: Or a Comfortable Contemplation for One in Affliction with Sundry Poems on Several Subjects* (1656) was licensed for publication by Joseph Caryl who was one of the leading nonconformists and a rector of St Magnus, situated in London. It might be assumed therefore that Major was his parishioner or perhaps protégée. If this is the case, Sara Ross has further speculated that Major’s father could be John Major and Mary Allton of Blackfriars, and this means that she was born about 1628. There is, however, no evidence in the volume to confirm this information, neither is there any indication that Cary and Major were acquainted. The author demonstrates her excellent knowledge of both the Bible and Latin, which indicates that she was well educated, but the text, similarly to the two previously discussed volumes, does not give away much personal information either. The only autobiographical information available to the reader is included in the second part of her volume entitled *Sin and Mercy Discovered: Or the Vail Taken Little from Before Both*:

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57 All subsequent references are to Elizabeth Major, *Honey on the Rod: Or a Comfortable Contemplation for One in Affliction with Sundry Poems on Several Subjects*, ed. by Anne Lake Prescott and Betty S. Travitsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
I was, till the fifteenth or sixteenth year of my age, brought up by a godly and careful Father (my Mother being taken from me in my infancy) from whom I went to a great and honorable Family, where no vice I think was tolerated; and under a wise and vertuous Governness I lived nere ten years, til God was pleased to visit me with Lameness, by the taking of a great heat and cold, which weakness did not violently seize on me, but by degrees deprived me of my strength, and in a short time made me almost unable to go or help my self: Then I was forc’t to repair home to my Father again, where I was persued with an inordinate desire of recovery; and having some money in my own hands, I endeavored the accomplishing of that desire, without an humble and obedient submission to the will of God in it (and this, O this was my great evil). (h2)

Major indicates that there was a time in her life when she was detached from the faith, wasting her time on spending ‘money, and onely gaining a sight and knowledge of those things, I humbly desire my soul may ever abhor’ (h2'). However, she managed to be back in grace, and in her volume she takes a role of a spiritual mentor and a guide. Hence the volume offers a detailed account of Major’s inner state.

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) is a well-known seventeenth-century woman writer, and her authorial identity will add a twist to the selection of writers this thesis discusses. Born in Northampton to Thomas Dudley and his first wife Dorothy, Bradstreet was one of five children.59 Her upbringing was rigorous. It might be inferred from her memoirs that already at the age of 6 or 7 she was reading scriptures.60 Along with a pious puritan upbringing, her parents took care of her secular education. Her volume of prose and poetry shows that the poet was familiar with works of Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, and Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas. Bradstreet’s practice of writing became more intense in 1630s, after having moved to New England with her husband Simon. As a mother of eight children, Bradstreet builds her authorial identity around the mother’s legacy. Some poems, however, criticise the soci-political situation of the civil wars and reveal her pro-women attitude. As opposed to the other women writers included in this project, Bradstreet does not represent herself as God’s mouthpiece. Her voice is rather self-aware and self-confident. The occasional self-effacing moments, implying the author’s inability to produce high quality poetry, become insignificant, when a reader experiences the intricacies of her poetical form combined with numerous metaphors and informed by various historical facts. As Jeannine Hensley puts it,

Anne Bradstreet now stands with Edward Taylor as one of the two true poets of seventeenth-century New England, and modern collections of American poetry would be foolish to ignore her lyrics. While statements about her ability usually evade direct evaluation and refer rather to her sincerity, personal charm, and whimsicality – none of these attributes being irrelevant, however – we must now affirm that our first poet was a genuine, if minor, poet.  

The inclusion of Bradstreet in this thesis aims to show that the less known women writers such as Eliza, Collins, More or Major, whose volumes were probably printed as many times as Bradstreet’s, also deserve a similar recognition.

The selection of the women writers will be contextualized by more canonical male-authored texts. Religious meditations that involve an exploration of the mind, spirit, and body are included in writings by John Donne (1572-1631) and George Herbert (1593-1633). They have been variously discussed as influential and inspirational male writers. The number of printed and reprinted texts (sermons, essays, poems, letters) implies that the imagery, style, form, and the content of these texts were very much appreciated in the early-modern world as well as the authors themselves. The Temple, for instance, was first printed in 1633 and, as Wilcox has established, by 1641 six editions had already existed. As Frances Cruickshank has pointed out, it is a ‘product of indoor meditations on the ritual and décor of the church; [...] we picture him gazing at the stained glass windows, contemplating the altar, perhaps practising in the pulpit’. It also offers the author’s rethinking of his position in the intimate relationship with God, so too, do Donne’s Holy Sonnets (1633). David Colclough has argued that the sonnets are ‘exhortatory, despairing, and demanding by turns, and they make use of virtually the full range of Donne’s intellectual pursuits’. This thesis, however, will mainly concentrate on his perception of the mystical marriage, which is expressed in the sophisticated metaphors as well as intricate forms. The project also draws on other key figures of the Interregnum such as Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) and Henry Vaughan (1621-1695). Marvell’s poetry is enigmatic and as such is open to various interpretations. Although he cannot be pinned down as solely a devotional writer, his poems convey complex connections made between the physical and spiritual worlds, informed by the pre-Christian beliefs. Hence they will constitute a comprehensive context for the women writers who also

63 Frances Cruickshank, Verse and Poetics in George Herbert and John Donne (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 66.
imply familiarity with Greek thought. Vaughan’s literary work will be used in a similar way. Phillip West has pointed out that the poet, ‘like other seventeenth-century Protestant Britons, had learnt to manipulate scripture to read the shape of his life and to compose the shape of its return to God’.65 His *Silex Scintillans: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1655) represented an ardent believer who shows the path to the other life. While progressing, the author proclaims to experience various stages such as shame, detachment from the physical world, and ravishing delights as he reaches his destination. Richard Crashaw (1613-1649) shares this multi-layered experience. *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652) is a controversial volume of poetry, as was its author, who is considered as a riddle to critics. Frank Fabry describes him as an ‘enigma – at best, eccentric; at worst, perverse’,66 but Crashaw’s religiosity will be shown to be commenting centrally on matters of materiality and spirituality. This dimension of his work will be illuminated by what is shown in the work of his female contemporaries. The work of Thomas Traherne (1636/7-1674) will be used in a similar way. Traherne’s spiritual writing, included in *Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings* (1966), is also permeated with pre-Christian, and early Christian ideas as well as impressive and complex metaphors, through which the poet analyses the situation of the fallen soul. Similarly to Collins, the poet was anonymous and he remained like that until the twentieth century.67 Therefore, his authorial identity might be considered in a similar fashion to women’s.


66 Frank Fabry, ‘Richard Crashaw and the Art of Allusion: Pastoral in “A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Sainte Teresa”’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), 373-82.

1. Metaphorical Zion

The allegorical figure of Zion stands for a metaphorical Christian church, a mother of all believers, and a wife of Christ. Zion hence performs a significant, and arguably crucial, role in God’s design, yet her image is more complex than this. Although she is considered an allegory, the Bible genders her image and this process of gendering is further feminized by the male authored-text. Therefore, these texts except for acknowledging her emblematic qualities, tend to alter the image of Zion through idealized notions of seventeenth-century femininity, and subsequently use her figure, as well as her voice, as a tool to express complaint, suffering, dissatisfaction, and emotions. Hence Zion’s position shifts accordingly.

This chapter will analyse the emblematic qualities of Zion and how the attitudes towards women are shadowed through in her representations. It will also show the interdependence of her relationship with God and highlight the various uses of the allegory in concrete realities, some relating to religious and political circumstances, others applying to personal life events. The chapter will start by scrutinising the biblical image of Zion, and her rival – Babylon. These understandings will be shown to be informed by St. Augustine’s thinking that was widely applied in the seventeenth century. Then the chapter will turn to highlighting the application of the allegorical figures in various religious denominations, and this will be followed by an analysis of Zion’s voice in selected radicals’ writings. My argument will begin with female authors, Lady Eleanor Davis and Anne Wentworth, who while discussing personal details, identify with metaphorical Zion. Then the chapter will turn to two male-authored texts, Zion in Distress: Or, The Sad and Lamentable Complaint of Zion and her Children (1666) and A Voice out of Sion (1663). Both authors, Benjamin Keach and Robert Falkner, feminize the figure of Sion. The former was a Particular Baptist minister, persecuted for his unlicensed preaching. This is why the title page of his pamphlet from 1666, including a fierce critique of the Catholic Church, does not show the name of the

author. The latter, Falkner, was a Quaker whose pamphlet takes on the form of prophetic warning that is directed to all people, and in particular to the English nation. These two pamphlets will be contrasted with John Grave’s portrayal of a confident and strict figure of Zion, which is included in *A Song of Zion* (1662), and by a physical description of Zion that is offered anonymously in *Sion Shining in Gospel-Glory* (1652). While representing the Quaker society in New America, Grave expressed his frustration and anger that the congregation had to face unjust persecutions taking place in the 1650s. The author of the last pamphlet, T. W. has not been identified yet. His pamphlet criticises Catholicism and favours the Church of England, claiming that it rightfully represents the authority of God.

Arguably, the most central aspect to Zion’s identity is the equation of her with a suffering mother. The Bible portrays Zion as a distressed parent who is disappointed in her sinning children (Christians). She is slowly being destroyed by the deterioration of her sons and daughters. Jeremiah, for instance, claims that ‘a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, “How are we spoiled! We are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out”’ (Jeremiah 9. 19).  

Zion is illustrated as an exemplary mother who is partly responsible for her children’s failure to comply with God’s rules, and she locates the source of their imperfections in herself, sharing their disgrace and devastation. The inhabitants of Zion are also portrayed as her physically suffering body (a group of unbelievers) that needs to be cured, and God becomes their healer. He says to Zion: ‘For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, […] because they called thee an Outcast, saying, this is Zion, whom no man seeketh after’ (Jeremiah 30. 17). Zion’s position here is presented as marginal. The unbelievers might be interpreted as naughty young children who rebel against their mother and deny her authority as a parent and a spiritual guide. The wounds, thus, might be viewed as their unbelief and sinfulness that undermine Zion’s parental skills, and their father, God, is seen as the ultimate measure, a firm male hand, that will successfully lead them on the right track. Therefore, some emblematic qualities of Zion, such as suffering and motherhood, resemble female characteristics.

In contrast to the depiction of Zion as authoritative role-model, she is also, by turns, retiring and self-effacing, thus showing the two very opposite sides of motherhood encoded in one single image. She is depicted as passive, in that there are no signs of her undertaking any action of recovery, but instead, her wailing is heard by God and makes him start

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3 All subsequent references are to *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), unless indicated differently.
rebuilding Zion. The book of Psalms indicates that God will ‘arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come’ (Psalm 102. 12-13). This shows that it is God who decides the time his holy city will be supported and her children redeemed ‘with judgment, and her converts with righteousness’ (Isaiah 1. 27). He becomes an incentive for her to start acting upon her situation. God tells her: ‘Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean’ (Isaiah 52. 1). The state of ruin, caused by the defiled, is represented by her ragged clothing, which needs to be substituted with celestial attire in order to signify her transformation from her sick state into a full recovery. However, this also indicates that, even when having the authority to reprimand her daughters, Zion is dominated by God and she is subordinate to him.

The two different sides of Zion are hence combined as though she is both degraded and venerated. More pragmatically, perhaps, her role as a love-interest shows that her position in the relationship with God, thus, resembles the position of seventeenth-century exemplary wife. Indeed, Revelation describes Zion as ‘a bride adorned for her husband’ (Revelation 21. 2), who is to represent her husband, in that ‘Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth’ (Psalm 50. 2). The Divine exemplifies his beauty through his spouse, and Zion as an exemplary wife, respectfully represents her husband. She is established as an example for all her daughters to follow.

Zion is also represented as a geographical location in the Bible, perhaps predominantly so, and this complicates the picture we have of her as an anthropomorphised woman. However, even when Zion is referred to as a place, not a mother, she is still often given female characteristics to embody the righteousness of God’s land. Zion is hence portrayed as the Lord’s symbolic mountain, which highlights her incontrovertible authority. She is described as ‘Mount Zion [that] rejoices’ (Psalm 48. 11). Psalm 48 announces that ‘The villages of Judah are glad Because of your judgements. Walk about Zion, and go all around her, Count her towers, Mark well her bulwarks; Consider well her palaces’ (Psalm 48. 11-13). A mountain is usually associated with enormity and remoteness, and so inaccessibility. Zion’s magnitude is emphasised by comparing her structure to a fortress with towers. This presentation also alludes to the image of a great and powerful God. The Psalm reads:
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy Mountain. [...] God is her palaces; He is known himself as her refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. (Psalm 48. 1-7).

The fear of the kings is associated with the image of woman experiencing labour pains, and so the impregnability of the fortress becomes somewhat weakened by this allusion. It is not her strength commanding respect or her inaccessibility making the exploration impossible, but rather her womanish suffering that causes perplexity and draws ‘the kings’ away from getting involved in further exploration. God acting upon Zion eliminates this weakness, or imperfection, and assures her safety by sheltering her from trouble and danger.

The image of Zion, at once mighty and vulnerable can be traced in glosses on the Bible that unpick this complex network of signs. On the one hand, for instance, Augustine explains:

For when the bars of her gates shall be strengthened, none shall go in or come out from her; consequently we ought to understand the peace of her borders as that final peace we are wishing to declare. For even the mystical name of the city itself, that is, Jerusalem, means as I have already said: ‘Vision of Peace’.  

The massive and stable construction reflects the greatness of God. Zion is not then independent; her strength comes from the Divine who makes sure that the city is a safe idyll. On the other hand, recent reinterpretations of Psalm 48, proposed by James Duna and John William Rogerson in their *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, assume that the story of the anxious kings offers a contrast between the greatness of God and Zion’s impregnability. They argue that

On the one hand, the hostile kings who were aligned against Zion saw it and were panic-stricken and horrified. Two similes are used to describe this reaction in greater detail, namely, that of a ‘woman in labour’ and that of a devastating storm. On the other hand, ‘we’ – referring to the worshippers of the Lord – also saw the city, but seeing it through the eyes of their faith, they interpret it and recognize it as their stronghold and symbol of God’s presence.

This dependence on a male God implies that any attempt at a female existence without a male support is unsuccessful. When Zion is left alone, her strength weakens and she gradually

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turns into a ruin that is full of unbelievers. This reflects a seventeenth-century assumption that naturally a woman’s place is in a male-dominated relationship, where a woman is subordinate to her husband, and the status of being married itself gives her social authority. Only owing to the male Lord, Zion maintains an image of a powerful and remote city, which is built on the mountain and guarded by Him.

This image of a powerful city of God, Jerusalem, combined with the roles God assigns to it, again strengthens Zion’s authority. As stated by Jaap Dekker, ‘The heart of the Zion tradition lies in the belief that YHWH [GOD] chose Zion as his dwelling place and that Zion is thus the city of the great king’. She might therefore be considered as a territory that has been conquered by God and then converted into a temple that is inhabited by him. Indeed, Augustine explains:

He himself [The Lord] lives in Zion, which means ‘Contemplation’ (Speculatio), and contains the image of the Church which now is, just as Jerusalem contains the image of the Church which will be, that is, of the city of the saints already enjoying angelic life; for Jerusalem means ‘Vision of Peace’. Contemplation precedes vision, just as this Church precedes the one which is promised, the immortal and eternal city. God’s Temple reflects a metaphorical paradise. However, it is also viewed as a passive instrument of God, through which the godly law is introduced. As God’s messenger, Zion is in possession of an educative power. The book of Isaiah states that the Almighty ‘will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’ (Isaiah 2. 3). What is meant here is that God’s ways are not limited to daughters and sons of Zion only, but go beyond her borders and reach all nations in the world. Zion is, then, shown to be a mediator between God and their children. She is fundamental to God’s plan, representing a powerful and solid place of great prosperity that all believers should go to in order to be redeemed and blessed. Psalm 14 shows that God trusts her to be the perfect place for his beloved people: it states that ‘the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!’ (Psalm 14. 7). This position, Dekker explains, is also encouraged by Calvinism, since ‘Calvin emphasises the idea that the church stems from Zion in which the beginning of God’s spiritual temple is to be found’. Indeed, the Lord assures his people that he laid ‘Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure

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foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste’ (Isaiah 28. 16). In Dekker’s words, ‘The stone in Zion is identified unequivocally with Christ’.\(^9\) This shows that God entrusts Zion with the salvation of humanity, making her a foundation of religion, without which building a prosperous and successful mass of believers would not be feasible. Psalm 128 says that ‘The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life’ (Psalm 128. 5). Thence Zion is regarded as a right hand of God, who ‘is the Lord in Zion; and he is high above all the people’ (Psalm 99. 2).

Arguably, the most important role assigned to Zion is representing the metaphorical garden of God, whose inhabitants need to be transformed into her worthy children. Dekker maintains that Zion is the promised future of her residents, since she shall be filled with justice and righteousness. In [Isaiah] 33. 15 this new future is focused on Zion: God has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. The consequences of this become visible in 33. 14-16 where it is stated that there is only place in a renewed Zion for those who have radically rejected every form of social injustice.\(^10\)

Zion represents an unquestionable authority that is strengthened by God’s protection. She also stands for a society of believers, which ought to follow godly rules, yet in order to become the new Eden, Zion’s inhabitants need to go through a transformation:

For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. (Isaiah 51. 3)

Zion’s ‘waste places’, which might be viewed as her offenders and social outcasts, will be brought to conformity with God’s laws. Then the land will flourish and turn into the metaphorical garden. Chapter 25 of Augustine’s account of Zion succinctly describes her prominent role in God’s plan:

This is the most glorious city of God; this is the city which knows and worships one God: she is celebrated by the holy angels, who invite us to their society, and desire us to become fellow-citizens with them in this city; for they do not wish us to worship them as our Gods, but to join them in worshipping their God and ours; nor to sacrifice to them, but together with them, to become a sacrifice to God.\(^11\)

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This image of the city invites equality between the angels and the inhabitants of Zion; the only superiority is God. Even though God appears to be of the highest power, his relationship with Zion becomes interdependended. Although representing a powerful authority of God, Zion depends on the Divine’s ‘maintenance’ and protection, and God needs Zion as his dwelling place as well as the place where their children can be produced. On the one hand, as a parent Zion is entitled to reprimand her children, but on the other, without the support of her divine husband, she is not able to control them. She needs a ‘strong male hand’ that will assist her children’s upbringing, through which the new laws will be introduced. God therefore establishes the law, and Zion implements it.

In order to fully understand the image of Zion, both as a suffering mother and geographical location, her antithetical allegory of Babylon needs to be explored. Zion has a rival, also portrayed as a woman and a female city, which is described as the great whore of Babylon. The Bible introduces her as

a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns […] And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Revelation 17. 3-5)

The colour, ‘scarlet’, is associated with nobility and therefore implies the ‘beast’ occupying the top of the hellish hierarchical ladder, which mirrors the position of God in heavenly hierarchy. According to Jeremiah, Babylon’s children are fallen people, who have been expelled from Zion for they are not worthy of being her inhabitants; they have acted against God’s doctrine and his holy temple by committing various iniquities. Augustine terms Babylon as the ‘city and the community of the unrighteous; for it is said to mean “Confusion”’. Thereby, Babylon and her children are doomed. Revelation prophesies that ‘the ten horns […] on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire’ (Revelation 17. 16). Babylon’s own evil nature will destroy her as the beast will become disloyal and turn against her. The whore will become naked,

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12 Jeremiah 20. 20-23. Hear ye therefore the word of the LORD, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon: Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes; And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; Because they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the LORD.

13 O’Daly, Augustine’s City of God, p. 63.
which is a double image for debauchery and shame. Such words as ‘fire’ and ‘burn’ imply the association of hell, and the images of havoc refer to the body of the Babylon, which, similarly to Zion, consists of her children. Babylon’s inhabitants, however, are iniquitous and will therefore be wiped out, as Jeremiah says that every ‘daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor, it is time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come’ (Jeremiah 51. 33). The Great Harlot, portrayed as a parent and a city, becomes then an antithesis of Zion. Babylon being seated on the top of the ‘beast’ implies her female superiority of the male. Her end, however, demonstrates that the male ‘beast’, which embodies the Satan, claims back his total superiority and power in hell. This situation is similar to that of Zion and God. The former seems to have power, but this power significantly depends on the latter. Whereas their relationship is rather interdependent, the relationship between the Satan and Babylon is nowhere near it: the Great Harlot is destroyed as soon as it is not needed. What is significant is that God’s revenge for Babylon’s children is combined with Zion’s, as Jeremiah says that ‘it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple’ (Jeremiah 51. 11). God thus seems to act on behalf of Zion, who lost her children to Babylonian lands.

The Bible, therefore, portrays Zion and Babylon as in a continuous conflict and war over their children. In Augustine’s words, the course of these two cities ‘runs intermingled through the vicissitudes of time, from the beginning of the human race until the end of the world, and who will then be separated at the last judgement’. 14 Both are positioned as mothers who fight for their children, and both are illustrated as contrasting cities, which aim to attract as many inhabitants as possible. They are, however, situated on the opposite ends of the spectrum of evil and good. Zion is a perfect wife and a symbol of chastity, beautifully adorned, who produces godly children, whereas Babylon is a naked harlot, with a liking for all kinds of sin, and her children follow her example.

These dichotomous images of Zion and Babylon were widely employed in the seventeenth-century religious and political world, in which any kind of metaphor played a significant role. Terence Hawkes explains that

The metaphor had a didactic role and was concerned to manifest truths, ideas and values that carried public assent. Its function was to reinforce an established view of

14 O’Daly, Augustine’s City of God, p. 63.
the world, certainly not to challenge or question that view by means of a particular ‘local’ or ‘singular’ insight.15

The metaphorical figures of Zion and Babylon were, therefore, variously used in concrete realities of the religious turmoil and civil wars. For instance, Catholics, who were unfavourably received or perhaps even feared by seventeenth-century English society, were labelled as the Whore of Babylon. Frances E. Dolan explains that this term was specifically applied to describe ‘corruption within the church long before the Reformation and widely used after the Reformation to denounce the Roman church, the pope, and particular Catholics, especially women’.16 The epithet, Dolan further points out, can be classified as the language of gender abuse. This term also genders, or perhaps even prostitutes, the Catholic Church, which becomes an embodiment of evil. The Church of England, by contrast, was linked with the metaphorical Zion and her followers. As Dekker has argued, the term Zion stands for the city of Jerusalem, and its inhabitants are to be included in it, but sometimes it might be used in reference to all people of God.17

Various religious groups also used the antithetical images of Zion and Babylon to mark their significant role and to diminish the importance of other religious groups. For instance, various Baptist women writers, such as Sara Jones, considered their community as Zion and its members as her daughters and sons.18 As Rachel Adcock has noticed, Jones argued that it was imperative for the prophesying women to direct their public words to their congregation for the sake of Sion.19 Adcock elaborates that Jones’s assumption was based on 1 Corinthians 14. 31: ‘the witnesse of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophacie, speake one by one’, and therefore Jones argues that everybody regardless of sex had to speak in front of their congregation ‘for Sions sake be not silent’ (C105). This also implies that their congregation was viewed as God’s dwelling. Thomas Edwards, the author of Gangraena (1646), saw the other denominations as the symbolical Babylon too. His pamphlet, apart from his critique of heretical beliefs of sectaries, identified the Independent government as the seat

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of the beast and criticised the lack of significant support for the Presbyterians. Quakers, in a similar manner, applied metaphors of Zion and Babylon in their congregation. Elaine Hobby has noticed that Quakers used the Bible symbolically, and so the biblical metaphors were employed in interpretation of every day situations. She argues that

Within this theology, the common female similes and metaphors that occur in the Bible (evil-doers are symbolically harlots, strumpets, the Whore of Babylon) can also be revivified to provide a new role for women, one not delimited by negative images of female sexuality, or by their traditional functions as wives and mothers.

Accordingly, the author of *A Testimonie of the Touch-Stone* (1656), Margaret Fell, indicates that the doctrine of the Ranters was believed to be the ‘beast which hath seven heads and ten horns’. Fell played one of the pivotal roles in her community. As Judith Kegan Gardiner has established, ‘She acted as an organizer, administrator, polemicist, theologian, treasurer, and corresponding secretary to encourage Quakers, especially missionaroes and prisoners’.

She was considered a metaphorical ‘mother in Israel’ for the Quaker community, and so the way she applied the biblical metaphors was likely to be copied by other members. Mack maintains that George Fox, who gathered the Society of Friends in 1650s, in his sermons that were addressed to the congregation calls its members ‘my babes’ or ‘dear babes of God’, emphasising that he saw them as God’s elect.

Puritans constitute another example of believers who applied the biblical metaphors in a similar fashion. As Francis J. Bremer explains, ‘Cotton Mather and his contemporaries depicted them as the new chosen people and Winthrop as the New American Nehemiah of the New Jerusalem’. Hence Anne Bradstreet considers her religious community, as well as

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20 Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 91. Adecock argues that the *Gangraena* series ‘uses the extended metaphor of a gangrenous “disease” attacking the “body” of the nation as a representation of how the sectaries’ heretical beliefs were infecting the country at an uncontrollable (and incurable) rate’ (‘Daughters of Zion and Mothers in Israel’, pp. 16-17).


26 Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America’s Forgotten Founding Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 383. In April 1630 Winthrop sailed on the Arbella to New England. In his sermon ‘The Model of Christian Charity’, he spelt out his conviction that in embarking on their venture the colonists entered into a covenant with God and that they were under an obligation to form an exemplary society that would serve as
the land they inhabited, New England, as the metaphorical daughter of Zion. In ‘A Dialogue between the Old England and New: Concerning their Present Troubles, Anno, 1642’ (p. 191), the poet discusses the socio-political by presenting a dialogue between despairing Old England and her daughter, New England. The poem positions Old England as the biblical Zion, whose body is composed of sinning Christians causing the sickness, and so her daughter is to learn from her mother’s mistakes in order to avoid them in her future.

Christopher Hill shows how the symbols of Sion and Babylon were often mobilised in various pamphlets and sermons throughout the seventeenth century. For instance, the years before King Charles I was beheaded had abounded in such literature. Edward Symmons, a clergyman of the Church of England, in 1644 identified the place of Babylon’s dwelling as Rome and insisted that its location could not be England.27 However, in 1643 Francis Cheynell, a religious controversialist and ejected minister, informed the House of Commons that ‘It is neither rebellion nor treason to fight for the King, to recover his power out of the hand of the beast’.28 His sermon was published in the form of a pamphlet, *Sions Memento and Gods Alarm*, and identified the source of the Babylonish behaviour in those Protestants who ‘violently oppose[d] all powerful preaching’ (p. 19).29 In the same year and to the same audience, Henry Wilkinson, also a Church of England clergymen and ejected minister, preached that Parliament would prevail in the war against the ‘Apocalyptic beast and all his complices’.30 According to him, ‘the old house built up by the faction of Antichrist is leprous’ and the upcoming hellish ‘militia’ would be involved in the war. However, a year later Joseph Caryl reassured the Parliament that the leader of the ‘militia’ would be Christ himself. There were also a number of anonymous pamphlets printed during that time, for instance, *England’s Alarm to War against the Beast* or *England’s Second Alarm*, which foresaw that the fight between Sion and Babylon would be long and bloody. The statements made in those pamphlets and sermons were purposefully ambiguous and the images of the beast and Sion were used in a highly symbolic way. The metaphors were also adaptable to the concrete, current situation. In 1647 Mary Cary, a poet and author of numerous meditations, was convinced that the ‘King of England was one of those that was of one mind with the

30 Hill, *Antichrist*, p. 86.
beast’, and in 1649, the New Model Army abolished the Sabbath, tithes, ministers, 
magistrates, believing them to be a mark of the beast. The association of the monarchy with 
the beast was cultivated for many years. Influential men, such as John Goodwin, Milton, 
Colonel Goffe, Army leaders, and Levellers, continuously promoted the tainted image of 
Charles I as the tenth horn of the beast, and when Oliver Cromwell refused to accept the 
offered throne of England in 1657, it was partly because of that altered image of the 
monarchy.

The allegory of Zion, denoting innocence, purity, and righteousness, was also used in 
autobiographical writings in order to present the author, who identified with the image, in a 
favourable light. Lady Eleanor Davis’s account of Zion, for example, involves her personal 
situation, instead of an enactment on behalf of a particular religious community. Davis, a 
prolific pamphleteer, was imprisoned in Bedlam on numerous occasions for her prophecies. 
Her pamphlets aimed to criticise both the monarchy and episcopacy. Esther S. Cope 
maintains that Davis positions herself not only as a prophet, but also as a symbol of the godly 
people and as a representative of women, since she had also the audacity to question the 
patriarchal establishment of femininity. In her pamphlets, Davis takes on an androgynous 
form: sometimes she calls herself a prophet and on occasions a prophetress, which might be 
connected with her pro-women attitude. Her religious stance cannot be identified 
unequivocally. Sometimes she seems to show Calvinistic interests, but on other occasions she 
appears to sympathise with Anglicanism. The prophet, however, precisely applies the biblical 
images of Babylon and Sion. The city of London, for her, becomes ‘A compound of Babylon 
the Great’, and Archbishop Laud is identified with the beast from the bottomless pit. In 
Sions Lamentation (1649), written on the death of her oldest grandson, Henry Hastings, Davis 
positions her daughter, Lucy Hastings, as mourning Sion:

after so long time, that had a son then nourished by her with so much travel, grown 
up, came to take him a wife, when fell down and died, the house turned upside (as 
though) overthrowed the lights fleeing the city, & cc. into which Park or Field fled, 
purposed to take up her rest; whereupon her passion to divert, spreads that catalogue 
of confusion the present case greatest of all Sion, the mother of all […] Spoken to

31 Hill, Antichrist, p. 107 and 106.
33 Esther S. Cope, Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies Never Soe Mad a Ladie (Ann Arbor: 
34 Eleanor Davis, Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davis, ed. by Esther S. Cope (New York and Oxford: 
35 Davis, Prophetic Writings, p. 351 and pp. 139-41.
Sion her self, at whose fearful voice cast out the earth shook, which besides her sons farewell, some future thing reveals, a prophetical voyce[.] (p. 274)

Davis compares Lucy’s suffering to a motherly suffering of the figure of Sion, which is caused by her children’s death. Each child is compared to a light that ornaments the city, but when they are gone, the city becomes prophetically desolate. The prophet claims to contact Sion herself and illustrates her voice as powerful, causing the earth to shake. This shows that Davis differentiates between her perception of the figure of Sion as actively expressing her misery and her anger at losing her children, and the biblical one, who passively waits for God to act upon her unhappiness. Davis’s presentation of Sion, therefore, rejects the established code of feminine passivity and steps into masculine activeness.

Fifteen years after the restoration of the monarchy Anne Wentworth, another example of a pamphleteer, offers her account of her personal marital situation that, similarly to Davis, is also informed by biblical images. Wentworth, a one-time Baptist, used the images of Zion and Babylon to illustrate her unhappy marriage and her dire straits as a woman. She was married for 18 years before she decided to reveal the reason of her misery by writing prophetic pamphlets. Her excommunication from the London Baptist community took place in February 1675, after she had left her abusive husband, and in the following year her first pamphlet, A True Account of Anne Wentworths: Being Cruelly, Unjustfully, and Unchristianly Dealt with by Some of Those People Called Anabaptists, of the Particular Opinion, and All the Cause She Gave, and What She Hath Done, was published as a response to such a turn of events and in order to express her distress. She defended her stance by saying that her earthly husband had treated her body as ‘the ground, and as the street for him to go over’ (p. 8). It was a matter of importance that the time of her revelation coincided with her long illness that left her consumed to skin and bone, a forlorn sad spectacle to be seen; unlike a woman, for my days had been spent with sighing, and my years with crying, for day and night the hand of the Lord was heavy upon me, and my moisture was turned into the drought of Summer. (p. 9)

This indicates that her long-term illness is seen as God’s acting upon her; she is one of the elect. Therefore, in her autobiographical accounts her abusive husband is portrayed as the

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Whore of Babylon.\textsuperscript{37} This comparison is explicitly made in \textit{The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Just as He Spake in the Verses, at Several Times and Sometimes in Prose, unto His Faithful Servant Anne Wentworth, Who Suffereth for His Name} (1679). Hobby maintains that this pamphlet is ‘ecstatic in tone and saturated with the Bible language that marks Wentworth out as a prophet in the Revolutionary tradition’.\textsuperscript{38} In ‘Revelation XV’, she says that ‘The word of the Lord came unto me, and said’:

\begin{quote}
Zion and Babylon they did fight it out,  
And Zion and whole Babylon rout:  
And wounded Babylon very deep,  
That Zion might rejoice and no more weep. (p. 17)
\end{quote}

Wentworth connects the war between the biblical Zion and Babylon to her personal situation, and identifies with Zion in order to empower her status and trustworthiness.

Her pamphlets also point out the unfairness of her persecutions, referring mainly to her excommunication by the Baptist Church, which occurred as a result of her separation from her husband. She exposes her voice at a command of Christ in order to question the social conventions of femininity and of marriage. She says:

\begin{quote}
The Lord shewed me why the people did not understand me, nor my work; \textit{Because they will not (saith the Lord) go to the root of the matter, but blind themselves with poring so much upon a Man and his Wife, and will look no further: but continue writing all faults in thy forehead, as delusions and disobeying of thy Husband, and see none in themselves [...] they will not see, how I have placed the two Spirits in a Man and his Wife, to figure out Zion and Babylon, which I purposed before the beginning of the World}. (p. 9)
\end{quote}

The pamphlet expresses both her anger about the Baptist Church that ejected her and her frustration with being unable to reject radically feminine obedience and passivity. It also repudiates the idea of subordination for the sake of her faith. As John Bunyan reminded his readers, women have to remember that ‘both by creation and transgression they are made to be in subjection to their husbands’ and this subjection must not be ignored.\textsuperscript{39} Wentworth, thus, also situates Babylon as representative of a patriarchal society that makes a woman,

\textsuperscript{37} Wentworth wrote numerous pamphlets. However, those extant are the two mentioned above plus \textit{A Vindication of Anne Wentworth Tending to Be Better Preparing of All People for Her Larger Testimony, Which is Making Ready for Publick View. Published According to the Will of God, and Direction of Charity} ([n. p.]: [n. pub.], 1677), and \textit{Englands Spiritual Pill} ([n. p.]: [n. pub.], 1678).

\textsuperscript{38} Hobby, ‘Prophecy, Enthusiasm and Female Pamphleteers’, p. 173.

who tries to rebel against its conventions, an outcast. The fact that she leaves her husband on the pretext of Christ’s command, however, makes her fall into a different kind of subordination: to her spiritual spouse. According to Katherine Gillespie, Wentworth ‘retains the indisputable right to perform this transfer of power from her “earthly husband” to her “Heavenly Bridegroom” not because she is a subject multiply interpellated by earthly powers, but because she is singly interpellated by God alone’. Nevertheless, the seventeenth-century norms are still applied to her spiritual world (even though they are invalidated in her earthly world), and this manoeuvre positions her as an exemplary mystical wife and a believer. Wentworth, as well as Davis, uses the status of allegorical Zion for personal reasons. This helps them position themselves on the side of innocent victims that need to defend themselves against evil and maintain their image of virtuous women.

Benjamin Keach’s works abound in the dichotomous allegories of Zion and Babylon, and hence require detailed analysis, but by contrast with the writers I have already addressed, he uses these allegories to represent his religious stance rather than his personal situation. His voice cannot be disassociated from the allegorical voice of Zion, in that the concerns he expresses represent his community, and his Zion speaks out of a concrete, dramatic situation. Keach was one of the ministers of the Particular Baptist community and since his family was not well-off, Keach was rigorously self-educated, mostly studying the Bible. His literary work is, therefore, permeated with biblical images, and in particular with the antithetical figures of Zion and Babylon. Zion in Distress: Or, The Sad and Lamentable Complaint of Zion and her Children (1666), which was at first published anonymously, is one of Keach’s numerous pamphlets that attack the Catholic Church together with its head, the pope, whom he describes as ‘Rome’s black hellish crew’ (A5 V). This pamphlet is written in the form of a conversation between four interlocutors: Zion, Zion’s Sons, Babylon, and Christ. Keach puts Zion in charge of all believers, so that her sons symbolize followers of God, and her motherly

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41 The first edition of Zion in Distress does not have a date. It is indicated, though, that it was printed in the ‘fatal year’, which means that it might be the year of the Great Fire in London, 1666. Elizabeth Clark points out that the later edition of Sion in Distress (1681) clearly positions Sion as a symbol of the True Protestant Church, and her enemy is not the Catholic church any more, but ‘the restored ceremonial and hierarchical Church of England’ [Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 195]. Keach writes:

   For some that wish me well, do yet …
   Retain some Romish Fragments, which displeases
   The meek, the humble, self-denying JESUS. (p. 22)

All subsequent references are to Benjamin Keach, Zion in Distress: Or, The Sad and Lamentable Complaint of Zion and her Children (London: [n. pub.], 1666).
image develops into their church. What is significant here is that the daughters of Zion are non-existent. This shows the author’s inclination to believe that women are not spiritually worthy of becoming upholders of God’s doctrine. Ironically, however, by comparing Zion to God’s temple, Keach locates the source of faith in the feminized figure of Zion, whose emblematic qualities have much in common with Calvin’s belief, assuming that ‘Just as God’s spiritual temple was to have its beginning in Zion, so our faith nurtured by the Law and Prophets is to be founded on Christ. Although this faith has spread throughout the world, it has its origin in Zion’. 42

Drawing on the Bible and on seventeenth-century conventions, Keach offers a feminized portrayal of the biblical Zion. Her metaphorical suffering symbolizes the suffering of the English church when losing its followers. It is both psychological and spiritual, as the despairing Zion says:

Ah! Poor I am, mean, low, and desolate;
And few there be that pity my estate:
A long time I had in the wickedness
Wander’s about in sore and great distress. (p. 2)

Although Zion’s speech resembles the form of a dramatic monologue, since she speaks out of a dramatic and conflicted situation, and her voice is presented as other than the author’s, it cannot be completely disassociated from Keach. Her emotions can be linked with that of the author, insofar as the speaker’s situation is copied from the author’s. Realising her dilapidated state, Zion displays a self-pitying attitude and weakness. Her believers, Sons of Zion, are portrayed as her ill body that needs to be cured, and the relationship she has with them is strictly parental, in that they express their care about her well-being by offering their help in resolving the situation. They say:

Shall we arise against this beast of Prey
To rescue thee, and take his strength away,
Who hath so long time been thine Enemy,
Ruling o’er thee and thine in cruelty? (p. 7)

The offer of help comes from confident and strong Sons – nothing is mentioned about her daughters – and so men are presented as active and women as passive. Zion is also depicted as a victim of the ‘Romish beast’ (p. 8), waiting for the right moment to take revenge on her oppressor, since Christ, she argues, ‘shall Redemption bring’, and thus ‘To suffer still it is for

me appointed’ (p. 8). This servile and subordinate attitude comes from the position of a mystical spouse that Zion occupies; she identifies with the love from the Song of Solomon, when she says: ‘I am thy love, Dove, the undefiled one’ (p. 15). The spouses are shown to be intimate, in that Zion claims to be ‘ravished’ by her spouse and ‘embraced in the Arms of love’ (p. 21). Even though this produces their children, Zion is portrayed as not directly involved in their godly upbringing. This reflects seventeenth-century social convention, which, as Crawford explains, assumed that a man shouldered responsibility for the ‘godly conduct of the family under his governance’. While suffering, Zion presents yet another virtuous, feminine trait: patience. Nicolas Breton’s manual, *The Good and the Badde* (1615), teaches:

A quiet woman is like to still wind, which neither chills the body nor blows dust in the face. Her patience is a virtue that wins the heart of love, and her wisdom makes her will well worthy of regard. Hence the figure of Zion promotes feminine passivity and silence, key traits of a virtuous woman, and is also depicted as more prone to evil, and so to sin, than a man. As a result, while talking to the Lord, she justifies her sinful nature saying that ‘Long time between the Serpent vile and me: | Though knowest there has been bitter Enmity’ (p. 13). Keach’s Zion might thus embody the biblical Eve and shows her awareness of being held responsible for original sin; a burden that was assigned to every seventeenth-century woman who represented the first, biblical woman. This leads to Zion’s complaints about being treated as an inferior object of people’s abuse:

> Whilst I become the Object of Men’s scoff.  
> Zion am I, that no man doth regard:  
> Men’s hearts against me now are grown so hard:  
> Hurled to and fro, and tost as with the wind;  
> And no one dram of comfort can I find. (p. 2)

Zion is portrayed as a social outcast, a desolate land, and her loneliness might correspond to the social status of an unmarried woman. This image might, therefore, emphasise the absence of her husband, God.

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44 Nicholas Breton, *The Good and the Badde, or Descriptions of the Worthies and Unworthies of This Age Where the Best May See their Graces, and the Worst Discerne their Basenesse* (London: George Purslowe, 1616), p. 28.
Keach also implements in his pamphlet the image of Zion’s enemy that is the great whore of Babylon. She is presented as a woman, but her image is an antithesis of both Zion as well as a seventeenth-century virtuous woman. Zion turns to her sons to explain that the whore is great Babylon,

Which owns no Christ in truth to be her Head.
This is that Romish Antichristian Harlot,
Who for long time hath sat bedeck’d in Scarlet,
Upon the beast which from the sea rise,
Whose fore-head’s spread with names of Blasphemies. (p. 10)

As John MacQueen elaborates, Keach uses an allegory from the Bible, where beast and Lamb are opposite images, as well as the cities, with Babylon representing the beast, and New Jerusalem representing Christ’s people. This shows that Babylon is positioned as the beast’s head, not as his body, as opposed to Zion, who occupies a subordinate position in her mystical marriage and becomes a body that is directed by the head, Christ. This conjunction is an emblematic feature of the allegory and also a reflection of a seventeenth-century relationship between a woman and a man, in which the former is the body and the later is the head. Babylon is, however, illustrated as a negation of anything virtuous, feminine, and good, and so she reverses this hierarchy. Zion explains: ‘For she [the whore] hath many of my Children slain; | She makes the beast to run at me, and roar’ (p. 9). This shows that the ‘bloody Whore’ (p. 25) is able to control the beast, who is said to come from hell:

From hell beneath, this Monster did proceed,
As in the Revelations you may read:
He is the little horn, the Man of sin,
Above twelve hundred years my Foe hath bin. (p. 7)

This description refers to the pope, who is also described by Zion as the ‘Fiend of hell’ (p. 31), associating Catholicism with evil, and so the author urges the children of Babylon to leave her mother: ‘For Babylon see that you haste away; | […] and fly to Christ your rock’ (p. 33). A reference to the ‘rock’ stands for stability and safety, and the reverse hierarchy of power, where the female head (Babylon) controls the male body (a pope), is applied to the Catholic Church emphasising its chaos of corruption. The seventeenth-century world would consider such an inverted hierarchy unacceptable and shameful, since the matter of control was considered to be a manly quality as opposed to feminine submissiveness. The image of

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45 John MacQueen, Allegory (Bristol: Methuen, 1976), p. 36.
gendered Babylon becomes, therefore, an antithesis of a seventeenth-century virtuous woman too. These relations show that emblematic qualities were very often translated and applied in concrete social situations.

Keach presents the metaphorical Zion as an exemplary, yet feminized, woman, who is directed by her male head and patiently endures her suffering, so her voice is identified with that of God’s chaste spouse. Babylon, by contrast, is positioned on the opposite end of the spectrum, as a denial of such a natural order, and her voice becomes that of a defiled whore. The author is caught up in this dichotomy, which reflects his personal situation, and therefore his distress is expressed through the feminized image of Zion. He consciously uses her emblematic and feminized traits as a tool to convey his feelings of disappointment and mental suffering, as well as to complain about the religious circumstances.

*A Voice out of Sion unto All Inhabitants of the Earth* (1663) is another example of an apocalyptic pamphlet that, similarly to *Zion in Distress*, presents the despairing voice of Sion, who makes a warning to ‘all the inhabitants of Earth’.\(^{46}\) The last page of the pamphlet explains that the text is prophetic and was written as a sign from God. Robert Falkner, the author of the pamphlet, who is recognised by Rosemary Moore as a Quaker, says that while walking in the evening he ‘saw fire rain from Heaven […]’, by which God signified these things […] which must shortly come to pass’ (p. 8).\(^{47}\) This shows that Falkner might have considered himself as a prophet. Whereas from the Quaker perspective, this position gave him an advantage of being associated with a messenger from the Old Testament, it stigmatized him as an outsider of society.\(^{48}\) The double image of dejected Sion might therefore represent both his community and himself.

Falkner’s pamphlet does not individualize Sion’s voice; instead, she is mostly positioned as God’s passive messenger or his mouthpiece, who keeps repeating his words to all people while foretelling a horrifying day of God’s coming:

> Hear, O Earth, and give ye ear to the Inhabitants, thereof, for the Lord hath spoken, yea the mighty God hath uttered his terrible Voice, saying, I will arise, I will arise and shake terribly the Earth, that the Pillars thereof standing shall fall, and never more to be raised again; yea the lofty and tall Cedars shall bend, and the sturdy Oaks shall

\(^{46}\) All subsequent references are to Robert Falkner, *A Voice out of Sion unto All the Inhabitants of the Earth with a Few Words of the Dealings with God in Love with England whose Visitation in Mercy Draws to an End* (London: [n. pub.], 1663), p. 3.


\(^{48}\) Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 133.
bow, and the Rocks shall melt before my Appearance, and the Mountains shall be removed, and the little Hills shall tremble and flee away from the Presence[.] (p. 3)

By differentiating between various natural obstacles such as hills and rock, Sion might refer to concrete people, either unbelievers or enemies of the community, and situations that inhibit its development. However horrific her prophecy is, her figure is rather feminized, since she is mostly presented as a suffering, passive female, waiting for God’s action to change the corruption of all nations. Sion announces her misery and despair that are caused, in particular, by the failure of the English nation, which is supposed to be the elect. Englishmen are considered as predisposed to maintain Christianity and to lead Christian nations. Sion wails:

Oh England, England, I am in pain and anguish of spirit of thee above all nations of Earth, because thou hast been a professing Nation, a Nation professing Christianity in the highest measure, above all the Nations of Earth, and now to see desolation coming upon thee, it hath filled my heart with sorrow, and this is the cry of my soul. (p. 4)

While taking the burden of her children’s misconduct off her shoulders, God says to Sion: ‘Rest thou in peace, for behold I have opened my own Fountain’ (p. 4). This implies that she is too exhausted to bear her misery any longer. Although this feminizes her image, Falkner acknowledges her godly authority by describing her as ‘the City of the Lord’, as opposed to Babylon, who symbolizes ‘the City of confusion, who is drunk with the blood of the Saints’ (p. 7). This occurs only once in the text, but it rebalances Sion’s emblematic qualities. The rebalance is, nevertheless, incomplete, since the lack of strong, decisive, educative qualities does not position Sion as active. She is rather presented as receptive, as a land owned by God.

However, her authority, combined with that of God, whose voice plays a dominant role in his pamphlet, becomes the author’s tool to express his disregard for the people’s corruption. By mobilising the metaphorical figure to describe a concrete situation of the religious congregation, Falkner’s voice becomes inseparable from Sion’s, and this voice is also likely to reflect the author’s feelings about his congregation, which, instead of becoming dominant, played a minor role in the religious world. Falkner speaks out of a concrete dramatic situation and chooses to use the feminized figure of Sion to complain and express his emotional suffering.

A Song of Sion (1662) is another pamphlet that, similarly to A Voice out of Sion, warns about the consequences of those who contribute to Sion’s suffering. John Grave, the author of the pamphlet, was a citizen of New England, and specifically of Virginia. As Walter Cochrane Bronson has established, Grave was a Quaker too and his pamphlet expresses his
outrage about recent persecutions of his congregation.\(^\text{49}\) The text was to be also sent to ‘some of his [the author’s] friends in England’ (A1).\(^\text{50}\) The title page includes a concise message, written in a verse form by the publisher, of what presumably the Quaker community meant for them. It reads:

The seed is sown, from which rare fruits do spring
The Plant is grown, that heavenly virtues bring;
The dead now lives, that’s risen from the graves,
That praises gives, to him that sinners saves. (A1)

The semantically charged rhyming couplets indicate that the time of spring will bring about the flourishing faith, and this time will be the time of salvation for the dead. In this case, the title Sion refers to this religious group, whose members are positioned as fruitful upholders of God’s doctrine – the elect. Her voice, therefore, can be associated with that of the author and possibly with the members of the congregation too.

Grave presents the figure of Sion as God’s messenger, whose voice is sonorous, dramatic, and appealing, and so it stands for strength rather than weakness. He argues that her ‘words most true, | [are] proceeding from above’ (p. 4), and so her duty is to reprimand ungodly people of all continents and to warn them:

A general Warning for all men to see,
That now the world fully may be;
And given unto you as a lovely song,
That in your minds you may retain it long;
And a Witness against those let it rise,
That desperately Christ’s Light despise.
Tremble ye proud ones, let your fury halt
That so rebel, and yet yourselves exalt;
Now mark this well, O thou America,
Europe also, Asia and Africa. (p. 3)

Although the text is to be sung, the tone of the song would not be light-hearted because of its message. Grave’s Sion chooses this form purposefully so that the rhyming couplets would facilitate the process of memorizing the warning. Since this poetic form does not resemble dramatic monologue, it is another reason for identifying the voice of Sion with that of the author. Sion does not plead, but actively gives orders: ‘Be silent now all people, young and


\(^{50}\) All subsequent references are to John Grave, *A Song of Sion Written by a Citizen Thereof, Whose Outward Habitation is in Virginia, and Being Sent to Some of his Friends in England, the Same Is Found Fitting to Be Published, for to Warn the Seed of Evil Doers* (London: [n. pub], 1662).
old, | Give ear all Nations, let your eyes behold’ (p. 3), and her frustration at people’s misconduct is emphasised while she is asking many rhetorical questions:

O wretched men, would you yourselves enthrone,
And seek to rule, where Christ should rule alone?
Think you the Lord not angry is for this?
Or do you think, that ye his stroak shall miss? (pp. 3-4)

Sion specifically warns hypocrites who count on luck. There is no suffering, weakness or hesitations, nor doubt in her voice, but her firm and tough voice reflects more her emblematic qualities than feminine traits. The only account of suffering in *A Song of Sion* is the misery of her godly people. When Christ hears their complaints, he will eventually end their misery by ‘destroy[ing] great Babel’s Whore’ (p. 3), and the believers will be rewarded. As Sion says,

Christ’s precious ones, whom he so dearly loves,
Hath heard your groans, you are his spouse, his doves.
Therefore, arise, your royal robe put on;
Christ makes you wise, on Thrones to sit upon. (p. 9)

All inhabitants of Sion are Christ’s metaphorical spouses who will dwell with him and will be attired in his bright garment as a symbol of a new heavenly life. This time Sion does not identify herself with the suffering of her people. She is beyond that, since her role is that of a guard, who points out wrongdoing and reminds people about the consequences of iniquitous conduct. This reminder appears to be an actual threat to all irreligious nations:

O mankind all, mark well your call,
Now hear most pure tidings.
Fear God most high, him magnifie,
And dread his iron rod,
For nations must, do what is just,
And serve the living God. (p. 5)

Even though Sion threatens all ungodly people, and her warning is sonorous and powerful, foretelling ‘Great terror, woe and horror, | To those God’s spirit grieve’ (p. 9), she is passive while God is punishing them. She therefore functions as God’s helper, who is entrusted with being effective; God believes in the strength of her voice.

Grave’s figure of Sion represents emblematic qualities and it might be assumed that Sion’s self-confidence comes from the author’s belief that he, as a Quaker, is a member of the elect. Even though Quakers were heavily persecuted by Puritans at that time, by expressing
his outrage, Grave could also claim Quakers’ entitlement to freely inhabit New England. Hence the author may consider himself as a representative of godly people coming from Sion. New England, as the holy city, the mountain of the Lord, well prosperous, was regarded to be the promised future for believers. Grave, then, represents both the land and the Quaker community, and by speaking on Sion’s behalf articulates his as well as their own concerns. This means that his voice cannot be disassociated with that of Sion, as both are speaking out of dramatic and conflicted situations.

_Sion Shining in Gospel-Glory: Or, the Churches Advancement and Saints Engagement in Gospel-Times; with Some Hints of Thankfulness for England Deliverance from the Popish Plot of the Powder Treason_ (1652) is another pamphlet that focuses on the allegorical Sion. Its author is known as T. W. and, as he claims, the pamphlet is a ‘the summe of a SERMON Preached at St Michaels in Cornhill, London, upon the 5th Novemb. 1652’ (A1). The sermon attacks Catholics with the pope as their leader. The author positions the Church of England as God’s elect, the promised Jerusalem, and Catholics as those who are ‘slain in the streets of Rome’ and who live in ‘Sodom’ (p. 28) with the pope being depicted as an embodiment of the beast. The sermon expresses gratitude of Sion’s inhabitants for thwarting an attempt at destroying the Parliament, the Gunpowder Plot (1605). It says: ‘God hath wrought for his English Sion, from the Popish Plot of the Powder Treason, a mercy to be celebrated this day with Praises’ (p. 20). Although the image of Jerusalem has much in common with the biblical description, it focuses on the appearance of Zion and her abilities to act as a leader of Christians. By contrast to Grave’s, this work emphasises her confidence.

_Sion Shining in Gospel-Glory_ (1652) introduces a physical image of Sion, who is dressed in ‘her rich Attire and excellent Ornaments for Beauty and Glory’ (A4). Her clothing symbolizes her union with Christ, in that the author argues that she is positioned as ‘the sweet spouse of the great King’ (A4), who is ‘spotless, all-fair, all-glorious within, her cloathing also is of wrought gold’ (A2). Her emblematic chaste appearance and her ‘perfection of beauty’ Sion owes to God who through his ‘own comeliness put [it] upon her’ (p. 5). This alludes to Ezekiel 16. 7-14, which describes how the Lord saved Jerusalem from her inhabitants’ iniquity by a metaphorical act of offering his robes to the city:

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51 All subsequent references are to T. W., _Sion Shining in Gospel-Glory: Or, the Churches Advancement and Saints Engagement in Gospel-Times with Some Hints of Thankfulness for Englands Deliverance from the Popish Plot of the Powder Treason: Being the Summe of a Sermon Preached at St Michaels in Cornhill, London, upon the 5th of Novemb_ (London: A. Miller, 1652).
I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. (Ezekiel 16. 7-8)

By including the description of her breast and hair the anonymous author offers a sexualised image of Sion that feminizes her. This alludes to the Song of Solomon, which promotes the idea of mystical marriage and positions Sion as a spouse of possessive God. The act of dressing Sion thus not only signifies her children’s spiritual conversion, but also Sion’s entrance into a nuptial relationship with God. As a result of this transfiguration, Sion becomes a queen: ‘This is the Woman cloth’d with the Sun, that hath the moon under her feet, and upon her head a Crown of twelve Stars’ (p. 4). This image refers to chapter 12 in Revelation that tells a story of a woman who was about to give a birth to a ‘man child’, but ‘A great red dragon’ was waiting for the baby to devour him. When the baby came, he turned out to be very powerful so that he could ‘rule all nations with a rod of iron’ (Revelation 12. 5), and hence he was retained by God. When a war occurred in heaven, the man child together with his angels fought the dragon and made him fall down to hell, where he became the Satan. Not only does this reference position Sion as a brave woman whose children will prevail over the followers of the red dragon (the pope), but also her children become the offspring of her mystical union with God.

52 Ezekiel 16. 9-14: Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD.

53 Revelation 12. 1-10. And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child, and cried travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.
The status of being Sion and God’s children entitles them to take advantage of their parents’ rich wardrobes, offering clothes of faith. This is why they are welcome to wear the ‘Armour of Light’ (p. 7) too:

Know ye not (o beloved) the beauty of her Grace, the excellence of her Glory? Arise, be enlightened, come and see. This Prophet opens unto you her [Sion’s] well-furnished Chamber, and here presents you with the golden Key of her costly Closet. Here behold. (p. 2)

The wealth Christ offers is a metaphor for spiritual richness that can be gained through inhabiting Sion. A believer is granted a key that will unlock her rooms, and as long as one is an ardent believer, is allowed to stay in the magnificent house of Zion, where souls will be provided with the best of possible clothing – faith. There is, however, a condition made by God: ‘Be ravished with the beauty of her [Sion’s] Grace, and admire the brightness of her Glory. Walk in her light, and you shall partake in her brightness and beauty’ (p. 5). A believer needs to give in and be penetrated by Sion’s charm in order to partake in her glory. Her wardrobe thus becomes of the same quality as Christ’s, who also gives out his clothes with the aim of covering the nakedness of unbelievers:

See your own nakedness and blush to behold the shame of your nakedness: See the Wardrobe of the Gospel open, and Christ Jesus with his own hands offering you rich Robes of his own Righteousness: Put forth the hand of Faith, and put them upon your naked souls. (p. 15)

Both Christ’s and Zion’s wardrobes symbolize faith, and by this symbolic act of dressing unbelievers, they make them realise their iniquitous conduct and encourage them to become members of the Protestant Church. Their nakedness, by contrast, becomes a symbol of Christ’s absence, debauchery and shame.

T. W. offers an account of Sion that focuses on her emblematic qualities rather than the feminine traits and those are further emphasised by the fact that she symbolizes God’s place of dwelling, which the author persuades all people to live in by saying:

Put off your shoes from your feet, and walk up to the Mount Zion, and behold the Lord in his Glory, who hath vouchsafed this miraculous mercy and seasonable salvation to his Saints. Lift up your eyes to the hills from which the help of God’s Israel comes. (p. 22)

Sion becomes therefore the only place of salvation and eternal bliss to those living in her, and constitutes ‘the Church of God [that] is the Crown of the earth, and the Glory of the world.
The world is wrapt in darkness till she Arise and Shine' (p. 5). As a queen on earth, established by God, she is unquestionably powerful. The states of darkness, which refers to ‘the darkness of Popery’ (p. 5) (damnation), and light (bliss) on earth are dependable on her well-being, and this is why, the author promotes the biblical account of her allegorical figure.

This portrayal of Zion, combining physicality with spirituality, enhances the emblematic qualities of the biblical Sion, who becomes a strong, authoritative figure, expecting her people to follow her. T. W. does not present her as a suffering woman, but one whose wealth attracts attention and tempts unbelievers. This, however, might also allude to feminine vanity. As Ian Maclean has pointed out, ‘There are certain moral theologians who profess to doubt whether woman is made in the image of God, but only as a ploy by which to castigate female vanity and evil of cosmetics and finery’.\(^{54}\) Zion is indeed identified as an attractive woman, possessing a house of grandeur, but by accepting her invitation one will be situated amongst the most affluent (spiritually enriched) people in the world. The author, instead of focusing on the maternal relationship of Sion with her children, disconnects her emotionally from them and puts her on a pedestal in order to display her spiritual beauty. This metaphorical image, next to enhancing the emblematic qualities, also promotes her seductive attributes, reversing their perception as making them virtuous.

By way of conclusion, the antithetical figures of Zion and Babylon were very often applied metaphorically in seventeenth-century literature, and sometimes apart from presenting their emblematic qualities, some writers further gendered the allegories. Not only is Zion’s powerful authoritative voice able to express her anger and frustration about her sinful children, but is also feminized and represents a suffering and crying mother, who feels responsible for her children’s imperfections. Although portrayed as an impregnable fortress, Zion is characterised by passivity and patience, and without male protection and help (God’s shield and support), her defence system is ruined. She becomes God’s tool, sometimes his mouthpiece, and the radical writers discussed in this chapter associate their voices with her in order to express their emotion, to complain, and to express their disgust with the current religious situation. Some of them like Keach or Falkner even further feminize her already gendered image to dramatize their religious stand and conflicted situation of their congregations. Others such as Grave and T. W. emphasise the emblematic qualities of Sion, and while making her voice authoritative, associate it with theirs too. The former, Grave’s

presentation, equips Zion with a powerful voice of disregard, which rather reflects ideas about the biblical Zion than idealized femininity; Zion’s metaphorical voice becomes educative. The reprimanding speech, revealing frustration or even righteous anger, makes the figure of Zion a confident and tough guide for the church. The latter, T. W., uses feminine vanity, and by positioning it on the positive end of the spectrum, shows Zion as an embodiment of beauty, not belittling her authority as a symbolic church on earth. This portrayal strengthens Zion’s authority as well as her emblematic qualities and emphasises its uniqueness.
2. The Exemplary Temple

My soul, in struggling thou dost Ill,
The Chicken in the Shell lies still:
Soe doth the Embryon in the Womb,
Soe doth the Corps, within the Tomb,
Soe doth the Flower, Sleep in its Cause,
Obedient all to Natures Laws.
But tho’art still striving to be free,
As if none were in Bonds but thee. (1-8)¹

In mid-seventeenth-century English culture, the human body, because of its mortality, was considered to be only a temporary home for the soul. After its death God might call the soul to his keeping, offering a heavenly form of everlasting existence. However, since the body was thought to be carnal, sensual, and weak, it constituted a temptation to sin and was also a source of physical suffering. Hence the soul, during its stay in its earthly temple, was believed to have been influenced by its corrupt nature. This belief was based not only on the Bible and early Christian fathers such as St. Augustine, but also on pre-Christian theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras. Both Nigel Smith and N. H. Keeble have traced how the ideas of these Greek philosophers were reinstated in the seventeenth century and actively promoted in every field of life from politics to religion.² Although it has been claimed that this Greek thought was available mostly for the wealthy and educated, this chapter will indicate that knowledge of it was also available to some, at least, of the middling sort, and to women as well as to men. Key elements in this thinking will be outlined briefly before this chapter moves on to explore its incorporation in the verse that is the main focus of this thesis.

Plato explains that ‘until its return to heaven the soul is locked in the body as in a tomb or prison, chained as in the dark cave, in exile from the upper world’.³ Aristotle sees a way out of this confinement through the use of the human mind, which has the ability to connect with the Almighty. He claims that ‘Intellectual knowledge is the exercise of

² Nigel Smith and N. H. Keeble, Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660 (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). Through his exploration of a wide range of literary works (from Milton’s Paradise Lost to epics and romance), Smith scrutinises the impact of politics on writing that partly involves ideologies of Pagan philosophers. In his study of the historical circumstances and context under which nonconformity was established and writing was produced, Keeble briefly mentions the role of Pagan philosophers in this literary culture, in The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).
something divine in us, for in using our intellect we human beings become, as much as possible for us, divine and immortal. 4 This is why the act of contemplation, considered as ‘divine in the strictest and highest sense’, becomes crucial on the way to freedom from earthly thraldom. 5 Nevertheless, intellectual knowledge must be developed somehow and, since a human being begins its life in ignorance, the body is necessary in order to gain experience. Aristotle elaborates:

We must build our knowledge on a foundation of empirical investigation, because we are dependent on our senses to find Forms outside ourselves, in corporeal objects composed of both matter and Form. Finally, we are unlike God also in that we are unable to contemplate uninterruptedly the Forms we do know, as we grow weary and distracted and need sleep. 6

For Aristotle, an imperfect human being, modelled on the Divine, is able to strive to achieve perfection and the body itself is a factor in that. At the same time, it is the case that the body’s physical limitations have an effect: for instance, the human body, when suffering from illness, does not derive pleasure from the physical world and, consequently, the person gradually withdraws from it, turning to an inner self in order to find consolation. This leads to the development of a higher level of pleasure – the spiritual. Through this process it is possible for the body to become worthy of the status of being God’s temple.

The significance of such ideas in seventeenth-century England was all the greater given that the Bible admonishes sinners who consciously corrupt their bodies:

Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? [...] He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Know ye not that your body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. (1 Corinthians 6. 15-20)

However, in this examination of the relationship between the carnal body and the mind, for Aristotle part of why the matter of the body as the temple of the Holy Ghost was problematic, in the case of a female body, was because a woman was just a reflection of ‘a regenerate man’s image’, rather than being modelled on God, like men. 7 Hence female bodies as well as minds were thought to be even more prone to depravity than male ones, raising the question of whether it is probable that God would allow a soul to live in a treacherous feminine body.

4 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 20.
5 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 20.
6 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 21.
Those following Aristotle’s thinking, therefore, raised the question of whether woman, an imperfect man, had been given a soul at all. The basis of the debate in the early-modern period was again the Bible, where a woman is described as having been made from a man’s rib (Genesis 2. 21). The uncertainty arises as to whether she was created in the image of God or rather of a man. If the latter is believed to be the case, a woman’s body is unable ever to become a temple of God. Maclean notices the crucial additional fact that in the Genesis story, woman was created whilst Adam was asleep, and a ‘sleeping man is only half of a man; similarly, the principle creating woman is only semi-virile’.8 Those who supported the idea that women have souls, like the Quaker George Fox, also based their argument on the Bible. They chose the alternative biblical story of the creation, where Adam and Eve where created simultaneously. Genesis 1. 27 reads: ‘God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them’. They also sought for evidence to support their beliefs by citing the biblical female figures. For instance, the Virgin Mary says that ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God’ (Luke 1. 46-7).9 The fact that she is a saintly female figure, whose statement is included in the Bible, was used by some to argue that women possess souls. Others, by contrast, including John Donne, speculated that if women have souls, the importance of the human soul might be decreased. He argues that ‘their [women’s] bodily instruments’ may be compared to animals’, and so, like an animal not deserve the possession of a soul.10 An important component of thinking on this matter is that in the seventeenth century, spirituality was commonly considered to be strictly connected with reason; rationality was considered as a property of the human soul.11 The upshot of such ideas is that, if the spiritual status of a woman was not certain, neither was her intellectual one.

The final twist in all of this is the fact that in early-modern thinking, spirituality and intellect were influenced by the bodily humours. According to Galen, whose writings underpinned seventeenth-century medical literature and practices, female bodies are characterised by cold and moist humours and, therefore are not able to produce enough heat.

9 George Fox, The Journal (London: Thomas Northcott, 1675), pp. 8-9, quoted in N. H. Keeble, The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman, p. 46. George Fox wrote this later in his life with the benefit of hindsight, at a time when the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was struggling for acceptance.
11 Keeble, The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman, p. 44.
This makes them passive and altogether imperfect human beings. Yet this imperfection was also caused by an additional factor, differentiating a female body from a male one, the womb. As Keeble explains, ‘To the womb and its humoral complexion were attributed a whole series not only of physical ills, but of mental aberrations and temperamental defects, particularly those quintessentially female complaints, irrationality, uncontrollable passion and hysteria or “womb disease”’. This indicates that in early-modern England a bond between the womb and female mind was established, with the womb being in control of the mind.

Could, then, a defective body be able to become the temple of the Holy Ghost? This chapter will explore how selected female and male writers perceived the role of their bodies, which were corrupted and sometimes suffered from ‘indisposition’, in God’s service, giving an insight into their spiritual dilemmas and discovering their intellectual knowledge. Even though various critics have claimed that this poetry shows women’s physical suffering being interpreted as either a punishment for disobedience towards the Almighty or as a reflection of mental suffering that is characteristic of women’s weak bodies and minds, I will show that it might be considered as a factor that triggers the process of purification, resulting in the body becoming God’s dwelling. Without both the body and the mind this process of purgation would not be able to begin, and nor would salvation be attainable. Secondly, since a weak body is more prone to illness, women are more likely to succeed in being members of God’s elect than men, as an ailment disables them from deriving physical pleasures. This leads to the possibility that the weak, female body might actually be considered as an exemplary temple of God. Both male and women writers discussed in this chapter aspire to become such a temple, and since the Bible presents Zion’s body as an emblematic God’s dwelling, their successful transformation leads their bodies to become representative of that body of Zion. Her body, which suffers from iniquity and corruption of her children, in a similar way to their bodies that struggle with fleshy temptations, needs to be first purged from iniquities and corruption so that God can inhabit them.

My argument begins with An Collins, whose writings embody some of the issues that have been discussed so far. The poet records feelings of acute physical pain as well as mental

12 Tamara Harvey, ““Now Sisters… Impart your Usefulness and Force”: Anne Bradstreet’s Feminist Functionalism in The Tenth Muse (1650)’, Early American Literature, 35 (2000), 5-28 (p. 13).
13 Keeble, The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman, pp. 19-20. As Keeble explains further, ‘womb disease’, also called during the seventeenth century ‘the mother’, appeared when the womb was frustrated and ‘its resentment caused physical and psychological disorder. To it was also attributed woman’s sexual appetite’. The unsatisfied womb, usually both in virgins and widows, was believed to cause women to yearn for ‘lust, and infinite men, and lie down to them’ (p. 29).
torment, going through a process of transformation from a state of melancholy, or even despair, to happiness. By contrast, the next writer considered, Eliza, whilst suffering physically and disregarding earthly existence, prepares herself for salvation. A similar preparatory stage is described by the poets I will then go on to discuss: Thomas Traherne, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan. They believe that the body, although described as God’s dwelling, corrupts the soul. In order to resist the deprivation of the flesh, the spirit has to develop the ability to see God, establishing a firm relationship with the Divine. Then the body can begin a process of preparation for God’s inhabitation. The chapter will then turn to the discussion of Anne Bradstreet, Elizabeth Major and Gertrude More’s writings. These God-fearing poets, whilst undergoing the process of preparation for God’s coming, weep tears of spiritual anguish. The chapter will end with the analysis of Richard Crashaw’s poetry, as his speaker, following the biblical figures, expresses remorse through the same feminine tears.

An Collins’s spiritual autobiography, *Divine Songs and Meditations*, presents her whole life as being accompanied by illness. In ‘The Discourse’ (p. 10) the poet clarifies:

   Even in my Cradle did my Crosses breed,
   And so grew up with me, unto this day. […]
   For one distemper could no sooner dy,
   But many others would his room supply. (57, 63)

This indicates not only that the illness was chronic, but that it seriously impaired her mobility. According to a statement from ‘To the Reader’, she became to ‘the house confined’ (p. 1). Moreover, as portrayed in the ‘Preamble’ (p. 70) to her meditations, such a physical state had a severe impact on her thoughts, pushing her to the threshold of despair. She finds herself,

   Amid the Ocean of Adversity,
   Near whelmed in the Waves of sore Vexacion,
   Tormented with the Floods of Misery,
   And almost in the Gulfe of Despairacion,
   Near destitute of Comfort, full of Woes[.] (1-5)

Physical agony is, thus, accompanied by mental torment and might even be interpreted, as Bronwen Price has argued, as ‘an indicator of internal suffering’. Nonetheless, once she has

realised that her outer ‘man’ – the body – is only vanity, she turns to her inner self in order to rouse herself to another level of pleasure. In ‘The Preface’ (p. 3), Collins says:

My mental powers seeming long to sleep;  
Were summoned up by want of waking mind  
Their wanted course of exercise to keep. (2-4)

Due to that physical suffering, not only is her mind refreshed, but also her soul is revived. The poet proclaims that ‘it pleased God to give me such inlargednesse of mind and activity of spirit that this seemingly desolate condition proved to me most delightful’ (p. 1). Having forgotten about the sensual pleasure that was unreachable for her, Collins became ‘affected to poetry’ (p. 1), and by directing her ‘thoughts for Theologicall employments’ (p. 1), she became a devotional writer. Therefore, no more are her mind’s activities connected with her body, but with ‘spirituall mocio’ (37). By this, Collins displays her awareness of the difference between the ‘carnal mind’ and the ‘spiritual mind’. This distinction is based on the Bible, and specifically, on Romans 8. 7, where Paul explains that ‘to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the “carnal mind” is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God’ (Romans 8. 7). Hence the ‘spiritual mind’ is elevated to perfection and, as such, performs a purifying action on the ‘carnal mind’ as well as on the body. This is why, in ‘Another Song’ (p. 58) the poet criticises those whose spirits are ‘polluted’ (31) by living in ‘blockish ignorance’ (32), driven by ‘their wants’ (34), which is even worse than ‘outward Crosses | Infirmities, Reproach, or Losses’ (35-6). Her mind turns to the spiritual and, thus her ‘sacrifice is as pleasing incense’ (40). Through the agency of God, she becomes one of his servants or instruments, perhaps even an executor of his will. She considers herself as having moved from the category of the fallen, to that of the elect, entitled to salvation, and the illness with its concomitant suffering is assigned to the process of purification.

This process leads to her liberation and is one of the main concerns of her spiritual meditations. In her ‘Fourth Meditation’ (p. 78) the poet asks God to give ‘these strong purgations | That may we call our daily molestations’ (5-6) so that her body, symbolising the temple of God, can become worthy of its status. As Price has argued, ‘Collins’s suffering [...] becomes a sign of purification, enabling a recasting of self whereby she can tear away the

16 Collins, ‘A Song Shewing Mercies of God to his People, by Interlacing Cordiall Comforts with Fatherly Chastisments’, p. 36.
trapping of her flesh and be liberated from the stifling confines of the body’.  

Having positioned herself as God’s agent in her ‘First Meditation’ (p. 68), Collins teaches that

> Each member of thy body thou dost guide,  
> Then exercise them in Gods service most  
> Let every part be thoroughly sanctified  
> As a meet Temple for the Holy Ghost;  
> Sin must not in our mortall bodies raign  
> It must expelled be although with pain. (79-84)

In order to become God’s temple, Collins shows that a believer needs to purge themselves from sin and the desire for carnal pleasures. According to Price, ‘her confinement […] seems to place her in a tomb-like existence in which she is on the cusp between life and death’.  

This ‘cusp’ becomes a motivation for her to find another dimension of happiness by developing her ‘spiritual mind’.

In Collins’s case, the ‘empirical investigation’ is focused on her physical suffering, which triggers her to connect with her inner self or rather an ‘inner man’, as Augustine terms it, so “the secret place of the rational soul”, becomes the Temple in which we pray to God’. Consequently, the poet implies that salvation is not attainable without the body which becomes a primary factor in being saved, initiating the process of bringing an entity back to health.

The anonymous author of *Eliza’s Babes* also suffers, but, by contrast to Collins, her suffering is rather mental than physical. This is not her main concern, however, as the volume is devoted to her devotional pleasures, and the mental torment, the author reveals, is caused by her suspension between physical and spiritual worlds. In ‘The Rapture’ (p. 66) the speaker says that ‘This earthly state’s, too meane for mee’ (5), since ‘that sin, too much abides in me’ (12), connecting corruption with the physical world and its vanities. Liam Semler has argued that ‘Eliza […] reminds her soul how when Satan was drawing her away into “vain delights of this wicked world”, her loving God “sent a heavy dullness into all the powers of thy soul and body”, thereby enforcing her retreat from worldly delights’.

In ‘My Wishes’ (p. 68) the poet indeed reveals an unstoppable determination to abandon such vain pleasures by saying that

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I wish no wit to wrong my Brother,  
I wish not wealth to wrong another;  
I wish no worldly wish at all  
I wish from sin God would me bring,  
I wish for heaven, at my ending. (1-6)

Eliza’s speaker detests conceited and rich people, who think that knowledge, education, and money make them powerful and entitle them to harm others with impunity. Although the unbreakable link she has with these iniquities is her body, having realised that, Eliza starts acting with the aim of liberating her thoughts from this thraldom of corruption by directing her attention towards her spirit. ‘Vain Thoughts Banisht’ (p. 73) symbolizes the speaker’s transformation that involves expelling her immoral thoughts by saying goodbye to them. The speaker announces:

Adieu vain thought, Adieu, adieu,  
My Soul no more delights in you,  
You’r no companion for my spirit,  
I must a heaven of blisse inherit. (1-4)

Since her mind is influenced by earthly life and it is, therefore, no use to her soul, Eliza’s speaker manages to ‘banish’ her ‘vain thoughts’ (8). The poet differentiates between her ‘carnal’ and ‘spiritual’ minds, and is conscious of the fact that in order for her body to become a temple of God, she needs to fight not only the desires of the former, but also the sensuality that causes corruption to her body.

Eliza wins the battle with the ‘carnal mind’ and earthly pleasures and establishes her body as God’s dwelling. Once her thoughts have been purified, her body is ready to perform a service for the Almighty: in ‘The Temple’ (p. 127) the speaking voice promulgates that ‘all the faculties of my body be imployed by my Soul, humbly to serve thee, I shall live and express a glorying heart, because I know this body is the Temple of Deity’ (p. 128). Eliza follows Aristotle’s statement that ‘The soul gives life to the body or flesh, not the other way round’, and also that ‘Souls have the job of governing bodies and thence can get mired in sense-perception, lust, pain, and imagination’.21 This is why a determination to fight the corruption of the mind and the body is significant in order to succeed and be rewarded by heavenly bliss. As Pythagoras explains, ‘Each soul involved in the conflict of good and evil, seeks escape from the purgatorial round of lives and deaths into a better world of unity and

21 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 46 and p. 28.
Eliza’s speaker, actively searching for this escape, declares that ‘all the members of my body be imployed in thy service’, asking her Heavenly Father to make her ‘hands administer to thy [his] Saints, and not stretch but to covetousness’ (p. 128). In ‘The Retribution’ (p. 87) the speaker’s consciousness reminds her that, indeed, she is not in possession of her own body, insofar as her ‘heart and eyes, and all’ are God’s (9), and were so even before she was of their possession. This makes her believe that her body, even though temporarily retained on earth, becomes God’s temple. The speaker is convinced that ‘where I am a Heaven must be, | For thou doth bring a Heaven with thee’ (1-2), which shows that Eliza’s body is inhabited by divine power, and therefore ‘Neither [her] soul nor [her] body could take delight in those things, which others call pleasures’ (p. 106). She elevates herself above all the physical and worldly pleasures. As Michael Rex has rightly observed, Eliza presents herself as an ‘antithesis of the real world around her’. She identifies with her soul rather than her body or her ‘carnal mind’. However, this identification is triggered by the withdrawal of her body from earthly pleasures, which would not be possible, but for physical pain.

Thomas Traherne shares Eliza’s assumption about the soul undergoing depravity, whilst being entrapped in the human body, and hence involved in the conflict between carnality and spirituality. The fallen soul, whose state is meticulously analysed in his writing, is depicted as a perfect version of a corrupted human being. By following Aristotelian thinking, the poet imposes on the spirit such capacities as ‘nutritive, perceptive, intellective, and motive’. Educated in Oxford, Traherne studied ‘Logic, Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics, Geometry, Astronomy, Poesy, Medicine, Grammar, Music, Rhetoric [...], Arts, Trades, and Mechanism’, and this education is reflected by his body of work too.

One of the numerous poems included in his Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings (1966), which has much in common with Eliza’s perception of spirituality, is ‘Wonder’ (p. 4) that describes the first encounter of the fallen soul with the earth. At first it

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26 All subsequent references are to Thomas Traherne, Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings, ed. by Anne Ridler (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), and to The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne, ed. by Bertram Dobell (La Vergne: Nabu Press, 2010).
appears to be a divine place ‘soft’, ‘sweet’, ‘fair’, ‘so bright and pure | o rich and great’ (12, 14). However, then the speaking voice admits that

Harsh ragged objects were concealed,
Oppressions tears and cries,
Sin, griefs, complaints, dissentions, weeping eyes,
Were hid, and only things revealed
Which heavenly Spirits and the Angels prize. (25-9)

It is indicated that unembodied souls stay in ‘the state of Innocence | And bliss’, but as they are exposed to the earthly iniquities, their state undergoes corruption. The speaker blames ‘envy, avarice | And fraud’ (50-1) for this gradual annihilation. The source of this immorality is humanity, since the spirit itself is unable to yearn for wealth, vanity or lasciviousness. The speaker of ‘Innocence’ (p. 11) proclaims that in such a state,

No inward inclination did I feel
To avarice or pride; my soul did kneel
In admiration all the day. No lust, nor strife,
Polluted then my infant life.

No fraud nor anger in me mov’d
No malice, jealousy, or spite;
All that I saw I truly lov’ed:
Contentment only and delight
Were in my soul. O Heav’n! What bliss
Did I enjoy and feel! (25-35)

The soul is free from all negative human emotions. It is the body and its carnal qualities that cause the corruptible feelings and drives.

These qualities are meticulously discussed in ‘The Preparative’ (p. 15), where, contrary to recent criticism of James J. Balakier, who maintains that Traherne ‘paints [...] a picture of himself within the womb’, I would maintain that again the fall of the soul is depicted and this portrayal is based mainly on the ideas of the early Christian fathers. Augustine elucidates that ‘The fall into embodiment is a myth representing the lower and mutable part of the soul’s turning to perishable things, taking an inordinate interest in governing particular human bodies, being captivated by bodily needs, lusts, and

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perceptions’. 28 Therefore, ‘an inward man’ after the fall became trapped in the human body, which, according to Platonism, constitutes ‘a punishment or prison for our souls rather than a part of the original goodness of God’s creation’. 29 In ‘The Preparative’ the spirit’s fall and imprisonment in the flesh is suggested by the soul being situated in unfamiliar surroundings. The speaker says: ‘I was within | A house I knew not, newly cloth’d with skin’ (9-10). The spirit’s lack of knowledge about its body might allude to its innocent state before the fall. Knowledge as well as the body are temptations for the spirit. These are two corrupting powers in every human life according to seventeenth-century theorists. Although entrapped within the body, the spirit maintains some of the heavenly qualities, in that it is still described as ‘A living endless eye’ (12). Traherne refers here to the quality of vision. Since the human soul never dies, it is a tool to see the heavenly house. This idea is partly drawn from Aristotle’s psychological theory, which claims that the quality of sight is strictly connected with the ability to see through the eyes of the soul, and this is made possible due to light shining. Aristotle imagines ‘the soul as being something like the light in an illuminated light bulb. The light emanates from the central filament but it permeates the entire bulb; so it is with a soul’. 30 This is why the speaker’s soul is viewed as ‘an inward Sphere of Light [...] bounded with the sky’ (13-15). His soul is positioned as a mediator between himself and God. Developing Aristotle’s idea, Augustine expounds that

This is the higher part of the soul, eternally contemplating intelligible things, eternally present here in the intelligible realm because it is one of the things in that realm. Hence the higher soul is itself an intelligible world filled with light, as it reflects the whole of the intelligible world in the divine Mind, where every part embraces the whole. 31

This also presents the author’s awareness of the difference between the ‘carnal’ and ‘spiritual’ minds. The former is polluted by the body, and the latter is responsible for establishing a relationship with God. The ‘spiritual mind’, identified with the higher part of the soul and disconnected from the corruption of the body, does not experience the needs that are typical for the flesh.

Traherne imposes on the soul the qualities that are related to the body in a similar manner, showing the debt of seventeenth-century poets to these earlier theological

28 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 120.
29 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 46.
31 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 38.
speculations. The spirit can hear the ‘angels’ singing (38), smell ‘perfumes’ (32) (alluding to the smell of Jesus allegorised as lover in ‘Song of Songs’ (Song of Songs 3. 6.)), and taste by using its ‘tongue’ (34). Traherne’s soul is also equipped with ‘A naked simple pure Intelligence’ (20). This might mean that his soul is ‘inexperienced’, and thus has not yet been corrupted by the body and carnal knowledge. However, on the other hand, this ‘Intelligence’ is highly dangerous for the soul, insofar as it is a source of curiosity or a form of drive to know things. This can have destructive consequences, as was the case for Adam and Eve. Eve, tempted by the serpent, which symbolizes her curiosity, ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and so did Adam, also as a result of his curious mind. This intelligence is also a means of understanding experience, learning from it, and a means of everlasting wisdom. This pre-Christian tradition is, then, understood through an Aristotelian perspective. As Aristotle explains further, ‘The capacity for thought is the part of the soul most likely to survive the death of the body’.32 Traherne’s soul is therefore described as ‘A meditating inward eye | Gazing at quiet’ (27-8), which is an ideal condition for religious reflections and for establishing a relationship with God, and this specifically refers to Augustine’s thinking:

The human mind in the act of contemplation is not merely cousin to mythological deities in the visible heavens but is divine in the strictest and highest sense, being no different from the mind of God.33

This state reflects a total devotion to spiritual development, during which the speaker is delighted with ‘every thing | [...] that was their heavenly King’ (29-30), that is everything that brings spiritual joy. As Plato argues, ‘We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself’.34

When separated from the body, the soul is exhilarated by the Divine, even ‘inflamed’ (65) with a desire to know more about God. Only then is the soul ‘even [...] pure and serene’ (66), and deserves to become a ‘Court of Residence’ (68), meaning God’s mansion, where spiritual ‘beauty, excellence [...] And pleasure’ live (67-8). Accordingly, in ‘The Instruction’ (p. 19) Traherne’s speaker preaches that it is necessary to:

32 Aristotle, De Anima, p. 201.
33 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 20-1.
SPUE out thy filth, thy flesh abjure;
Let not contingents thee defile,
For transients only are impure,
And aery things thy soul beguile. (1-4)

Heaven is attainable, thanks to a well-prepared soul which is a foundation for a development of God’s glory. However, to make the soul ready for this, it has to be imprisoned in the human body as God’s correction. ‘The Salutation’ (p. 1) portrays the soul as God’s gift though, insofar as Traherne’s speaker says:

From dust I rise,
And out of nothing now awake,
These brighter regions which salute mine eyes,
A gift from God I take.
The earth, the seas the light, the day, the skies,
The sun and stars are mine; if those I prize. (25-30)

Here the speaking voice identifies with the biblical Adam, who has been given life and established as a ruler of the world, in that it is indicated in Genesis.35 This ‘glorious store’ (33) was ‘adorn[ed]’ (4) for this human by God to show his significance, seeing that he is God’s ‘son and heir’ (36). The world is the store and Adam becomes a metaphorical customer. ‘The Salutation’ therefore shows appreciation for both the gift of life and the body, as the speaker reveals that although feeling like a ‘stranger here | Strange things doth meet, strange glories see’ (37-8). Due to his body, he can experience

such joys as ear or tongue
To celebrate or see:
Such sounds to hear, such hands to feel, such feet,
Beneath the skies on such a ground to meet. (15-18)

The body becomes a means of this empirical experience, through which this human is able to learn and explore the world around him.

This world, even though initially created by God as a wonderful gift to humanity, ironically has been depraved by humanity, and in one of his poems from Christian Ethics, ‘Of Meekness’ (p. 160), Traherne proclaims:

Mankind is sick, the World distemper’d lies
Oppresset with Sins and Miseries.

35 Genesis 1. 26: And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
Their Sins are Woes; a long corrupted Train
Of Poyson, drawn from Adam’s vein.
Stains all his seed, and all his Kin
Are one Disease of Life within;
    They all torment themselves!
The World’s one Bedlam, or a greater Cave
Of Mad-men that do always rave. (1-9)

This indicates that the world’s corruption began with the biblical Adam and since then this disease has been spread. Depraved human nature must suffer preparation for God’s coming, whilst their bodies are being purified from the sinfulness of sensual pleasures. This idea of preparation of one’s soul might have its origin in the Bible, where Moses declares: ‘The Lord’ to be his ‘strength and song [and] salvation’. Hence he will ‘prepare him [God] an inhabitation’ (Exodus 15. 2). The process of preparation, however, would not be achievable without the body that takes on a role of a motivator for the soul to return to the state of innocence and purity. By introducing these binary opposites of the body situated as both God’s gift, on the one hand, and God’s punishment, on the other, Traherne perhaps indicates that this is the only way to get humanity ready for heavenly joy.

Andrew Marvell’s poetry also alludes to the pre-Christian theory concerning the fall of the soul. In a similar manner to Traherne, Marvell shows how earthly existence alters the state of the spirit, and Marvell’s ‘On a Drop of Dew’ (p. 39) illustrates this change.\(^{36}\) The poem comes from a popular literary tradition of perceiving dewdrops, in Nigel Smith’s words, as ‘microcosm of eternity’.\(^{37}\) The dewdrop is variously interpreted as a symbol of transience, immortality or divine incarnation.\(^{38}\) Thus, it is viewed as representative of spirituality too. Robert Wilcher connects Marvell’s drop of dew with the spirit sent from heaven. He argues that the ‘poem begins with a visually precise account of a drop of dew settling on the petals of rose’.\(^{39}\) This rose represents the perishable that is contrasted with the spirituality of the soul. What the poem in fact explores is, therefore, the relation between heaven and spirit, based on pre-Christian teachings. The drop of dew embodies the spirit, which falls from ‘the clear region where ’twas born’ (5). The fall causes the innocent soul to become ‘restless […] and unsecure’ (15), and as a result it emanates not pure but a ‘mournful

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\(^{36}\) All subsequent references are to Andrew Marvell, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Nigel Smith (Harlow: Pearson, 2007).


light’ (13). This reflects the corruption the soul undergoes when it comes in contact with earth. The unfamiliar, alien surrounding causes her

Trembling lest grow impure:
Till the warm sun pity its pain,
And to the skies exhale it back again. (16-18)

Marvell alludes here to the circulatory nature of the soul’s life and this cycle is analogical to the pre-Christian idea of the soul’s fall into the body. According to Pythagoras, ‘The soul is not simply immortal, but must inhabit the circle of necessity as the condition for its return to the divine. The habitation of the circle of necessity effectuates the existence and kinship of all life’. This shows that the spirit’s destiny is to become entrapped in a corrupted body and to experience earthly existence; it will be released upon the mortification of the flesh. Then the spirit can reclaim its perfect light. The speaker emphasises the disparity between heavens (spirituality) and earth (physicality) by putting them on the opposite ends of the spectrum:

Dark beneath, but bright above:
Here disdaining, there in love.
How loose and easy hence to go:
How girt and ready to ascend. (31-34)

This also indicates that by nature the soul belongs to the Almighty, yearns for his love, and is always alert to his calling. The unity of the elements from two worlds, physical and spiritual, is therefore impossible to function in harmony.

The idea of the soul being entrapped in the sinful body is further developed in another of Marvell’s poems: ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body’ (p. 63). The title interlocutors explore their interdependent relationship. As Smith has pointed out, even though the speakers seem to address the third party, instead of each other, the dramatic tone is maintained. Through the eyes of the soul Marvell depicts the seventeenth-century idea of a corrupt body. Soul complains of her unfortunate fate of falling into the flesh, since it becomes entrapped by ‘bolts of bones, that fettered stands | In feet; and manacles in hands’ (3-4). Soul is portrayed as an enslaved prisoner who is completely dependent on the oppressive Body. Not only is the spirit’s freedom taken, but its spiritual senses are also numbed by fleshy senses. Soul complains that it is ‘Here blinded with an eye; and there | Deaf with the drumming of an ear’ (5-6), and it is being tortured by having a ‘vain head, and double heart’

(10). This alludes to the biblical idea of the ‘carnal mind’ as a source of sin. Its corruptible influence overpowers the innocent spirit, which complains that it is

Constrained not only to endure
Diseases, but, what’s worse, the cure:
And ready oft the port to gain,
Am shipwracked into health again. (27-30)

The rhyming couplets reiterate the humorous tone of the conversation. The oxymoronic phrase ‘shipwracked into health’ indicates that the spirit prefers the body to be in pain. Perhaps the spirit hopes that a sick flesh is not able to benefit from earthly sinful pleasure. It is implied therefore that the only way of curing the body is to cause its withdrawal from the physical world of pleasures. This leads the ‘carnal mind’ to be directed to the spiritual and gradually subordinate to it. Although the spirit must suffer the bodily ailments, the end justifies the means. However, the cure implemented by the body seems be unacceptable for the spirit, as it probably drives the body even more into sin.

The body offers a different perspective on the relationship formed with the spirit. Body presents itself as a victim of the ‘tyrannical soul’ (12), which pushes it to the threshold of despair. This ‘ill spirit’ (20) is illustrated as spiteful, since the body complains that it ‘Has made me live to let me die’ (18). Without it the body cannot live, but, on the other hand, with it the body is being constantly reprimanded for its natural instincts, so yearning for earthly pleasures. The body hence starts questioning the soul’s actions: ‘What but a soul could have the wit | To build me up for sin so fit?’ (41-42). The soul becomes responsible for enlivening the body. It thus embodies the image of an architect, whose motifs for this fleshy, imperfect creation are not known. The spirit is further depicted as a skilful manipulator of the body, which acts as its conscience. The body says:

first the cramp of Hope does tear:
And then the palsy shakes of Fear. […]
Joy’s cheerful madness does perplex:
Or Sorrow’s other madness vex
Which Knowledge Forces me to know;
And Memory will not forgo. (33, 40)

A physician cannot cure the mental instability that is caused by the spirit. The mental tortures are, therefore, considered as worse than any physical illness. The semantic rhyme emphasises the mental torment of the body and introduces a comic tone. Additionally, the sibilance
reiterates the torment forced by the conscience. As a result, Body presents itself as an innocent victim, and implies that this conjunction is not meant to exist.

The consensus between the body and the soul is not achieved in the poem. Wilcher argues that ‘arguments of both Body and Soul would lead to a rejection of life as it is known to humankind’. Although the poem shows two opposite elements that are forced to coexist, and thus presents two different perspectives, it also highlights the inextricability of the soul and the body. The soul would be unable to recognise sin without the corrupt body, and the body, on the other hand, would not be capable of realising its sinful nature without a clear conscience. This constant conflict also shows that, similarly to Traherne, Marvell’s poem is informed by the thinking of Pythagoras, who assumes that each soul’s destiny is to be involved in the fight between good and evil in order to be reunited with the Divine.

The matter of physicality and spirituality is also discussed in ‘A Dialogue, Between the Resolved Soul, and Created Pleasure’ (p. 35). Marvell wrote this poem in the form of a conversation between Charge, Pleasure, and Soul. Unlike ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and Body’, this poem focuses on the function of the soul and the corruption of the worldly things and nature. However, the corrupt things that tempt the victorious soul epitomize the fleshy pleasures. Pleasure offers nature’s various fruits, such as ‘roses’ and ‘plums’, which would form ‘downy pillows’ (19-21) for the tired soul. It presents the soul with ‘perfumes pleased’ (25) and attempts to ‘attract thine [Soul’s] eye’ (32) with the beauty of earthly creations such as ‘gold’ (58). Pleasure also prepares charming music, ‘Which the posting winds recall, | And suspend the river’s fall (39-40), and offers ‘Nature’s banquet’ (14) to suit even the most sophisticated palate. It even wants to award Soul with a power to rule over half of the world (65). All the gifts are connected with the earthly life and most of them bring bodily pleasures. Pleasure attacks all the five senses: a sense of hearing, smelling, taste, sight and touch. Finally, it also tries to influence the soul’s mind. Even so, it is not successful, since Soul rejects the earthly temptations and points out the higher forms of those pleasures. This shows that the author, similarly to Traherne, follows Aristotle’s teaching on five spiritual capacities. The soul prefers heavenly manna to feed on (17-18) and heavenly fragrance (29-30) to the earthly. Her form of relaxation is her focus on thoughts (23-24), and her spiritual eyes appreciate only truthful God’s creation, not the ‘earth disguised’ (36) things. The witty soul also recognises Pleasure’s attempt at trying to confine her mind and confidently warns that

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42 Wilcher, Andrew Marvell, p. 58.
‘None can chain a mind | Whom this sweet chordage cannot bind’ (43-44). The spirit’s rejecting stance might be based on the teaching of Matthew 6. 25, who instructs to ‘take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?’ This shows the soul’s superiority over the body. In a similar manner to ‘A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body’, the conversation indicates that the forced entity, composed of the body and the soul, cannot exist. Even so, each of them benefits from the conjunction by developing their knowledge about the other. On the other hand, however, the knowledge has a positive and a negative consequence: the body realises its sinful nature, but the innocence and spotlessness of the soul are always ruined.

The kind of thinking that informs Marvell’s disregard of earthly pleasures and vanities is also reflected in *Silex Scintillans*, whose author, Henry Vaughan, as a devoted believer, condemns earthy life, explaining that

All that in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lusts thereof, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever. (p. 80)

‘The World’ (p. 78) is associated with iniquity and, as an immoral place to live, makes Vaughan’s speaker ‘all filth, and obscene’ (8). In ‘Resurrection and Immortality’ (p. 7), written in the form of dialogue between the soul and the body, the former is positioned as a mentor to the latter that becomes its student. This student seems to be unsuccessful, as he is rebuked by the sarcastic soul that says: ‘Poore, querulous handful! Was’t for this | I taught thee all that is?’ (19-20). As Gerald Hammond maintains, ‘This is a poem of soul and body, Vaughan’s spiritual nature admonishing his physical being for its attraction towards the grosser delights of the flesh, and calling it to wake up from “drunkenness, surfeits, care” and redeem the day’. Indeed, the speaker of ‘The Seed Growing Secretly’ (p. 137) is convinced that

Our souls diseased first, and then
Our bodies; poisons that Intreat
With fatal sweetness, till we eat. (12-14)

43 ‘Chordage’ is translated as ‘biding ropes’, in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, p. 36.
44 All subsequent references are to *Henry Vaughan*, ed. by Louis L. Martz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
The act of eating refers to Holy Communion. Unless the soul is deprived of the body, the corrupting influence will be unstoppable. However, the poet is aware of the fact that there is help for such a stray sheep as himself. He prays, therefore, to be taken to a heavenly home, since ‘This world but laughs at those that weep’ (52). His weeping reveals his mental torment, whose source is his suspension in the physical world. As Philip West has declared, ‘The tears Vaughan urges are not internal, “spiritual” tears but also real ones, a brine which will also work the inner supplying of the ghostly wits. True repentance is simultaneously an inward and outward weeping, a double cleansing action’, and similarly to Collins and Eliza, this two-level purgation is visible in both his mental suffering and his physical indisposition.46 As stated by Alan Rudrum in his biography of the poet, his three-stage illness is indeed concomitant with his writings.47

Although his body is prone to evil, the speaker sees God’s purifying action and it becomes evident that Vaughan’s ‘inner man’ appears to have a connection with the Divine. In ‘The Retreat’ (p. 28), he proceeds to clarify:

Before I taught my tongue to wound
My Conscience with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A sev’ral sin to ev’ry sense,
But felt thorough all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness. (15-20)

The poet implies that his body is the source of his sinfulness, seeing that he blames his ‘tongue’ for wounding his ‘conscience’, in other words, his mind. The ‘black art’ that is probably a reference to his ‘fleshy mind’, as an opposite of the ‘divine art’, affected all his senses. What Vaughan alludes to here is that even though his human body and mind manage to dominate him, this does not appease the ‘spiritual mind’, a residence of the Divine, in that the ‘bright’ light of bliss could be still evident. His deep belief in this metaphorical divine tie between him and the Almighty allows him to consider his body as part of Christ’s. ‘The Knot’ reads:

For Coalescent by that Band  
We are his [Christ’s] body grown,

Nourished with favours from his hand
Whom for our head we own. (9-12)

Having assured himself about this ‘divine art’ within him, the speaker of ‘Ascension Hymn’ (p. 106) begs God: ‘Resume thy spirit from this world of thrall | Into true liberty!’ (35-6). This metaphorical prison might refer either to his existence on earth or to his body, taking on a tomb-like form. This shows that the writer adopts Pythagoras’s assumption that ‘The body is a tomb, the basic character of our deep nature is conflict: it is only the soul as a gift from an external God which redeems us from this prison of mortal combat and suffering’. 48 In ‘The Ass’ (p. 145), Vaughan’s speaker, who describes himself as the title ass, reveals his attempts to use this tomb pragmatically. Being conscious of the fact that it is attainable only due to God’s gift, the spirit, he prays to the Almighty:

So give me grace ever to rest,
And build on it, because the best;
Teach both mine eyes and feet to move
Within those bounds set by thy love. (13-16)

Having devoted his body to God’s service, he realises that it will never be sinless, since only ‘He that is dead, is freed from sin’ (p. 24), yet he views the physical suffering as a means of redemption and freedom from earthly thrall. In his ‘Admission’ (p. 63), not only does the speaker yearn for this body to go through this agony, but he also wishes for his human sinful heart to acquire the same qualities as Christ. As a result, the speaker asks God:

O give me then a thankful heart! A heart
After thy own, not mine;
So after thine, that all, and ev’ry part
Of mine, may wait on thine. (25-8)

The poet aims at identification with Christ, at becoming as humble, good-natured, and devoted as Christ and wishes to feel his pain in order to become worthy of residence of God. This shows that he also decides to undertake the process of preparation that Traherne earlier succinctly describes.

Similarly to Vaughan, Gertrude More, a catholic nun, also yearns to abandon her corrupted body. She presents herself as a spiritual leader whose spiritual edifications are set as an example to follow. Amongst many spiritual directions in The Holy Practises of a Divine Lover or the Sainctly Ideors Devotions More teaches, for example, that ‘It will suffice to

48 Luchte, *Pythagoras and the Doctrine of Transmigration*, p. 76.
exercise and use daily two mental exercises, to wit, the one on the morning, the other at the most convenient time in the evening. These ‘Devotions’ aim to exercise the spirit and the mind (p. 27). The body, on the other hand, is considered as an enclosure for them, as More says: ‘I cannot enjoy, till my soul be set free from this corruptible flesh’. In a similar manner to other religious writers discussed in this chapter, driven by the teachings of Augustine, More desires to break free from the corrupted human body so that she can join her mystical spouse in a heavenly mansion, and the next chapter discusses this in detail. Even though she harshly discredits the body as corrupt, she acknowledges that its weaknesses and ailments are a means of perfecting her humility. They are necessary to establish the connection with the Divine and prepare her body to become his place of dwelling. She also promotes a separation of the spiritual life from any earthly created things, since, as she explains, ‘when we adhere to any created thing we become a slave to our Passion, and are in eminent danger of sinne’ (p. 29). Her appeal to abandon any admiration for the perishable is especially directed to women, who she describes as ‘silly to all things that this world admires’ (p. 189). Women are hence the most contemptible creatures living (p. 189). The ‘silly women’ are more prone to evil than men, insofar as they ‘seek, and desire so much the favour and praise of the world, to have the friendship of men, and by letters and tokens to draw their hearts from thee [God] unto them’ (p. 190). This causes imperfections to their devotional passion, since it becomes tainted by their commitment to the earthly love, and they should be able to offer an undivided heart to God.

For More, mental infirmities are more dangerous to human being than the bodily, ‘For the disease of the mind in which I languish are much more grievous than those of the body. For these make us but ungrateful to men, but the other make us displeasing in thine eyes’. Even so, she believes that God, as a ‘Physician’, is able to cure both the mind and the body, and those afflictions occur for a reason. More proclaims that ‘I have writ in more light to read when I am either in obscurity of temptation, or other bodily indisposition to which I may

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49 Gertrude More, *The Holy Practises of a Divine Lover or the Saintly Ideors Devotions* (Paris: Lewis De La Fosse, 1657), p. 30. The collection of her works, entitled *The Writings of Dame Gertrude More*, was edited by Dom Benedict Weld-Blundell, who was More’s patron, and was published in 1910 in London by R. & T Washbourne. This collection is not used in the thesis, as it does not contain all of the literary works I would like to discuss.


be often incident’ (p. 8). Both mental and physical indispositions are, therefore, considered as a trigger for her to connect with the Divine and to produce spiritually beneficial guidance. However, according to her warning, in order to achieve the status of the holy temple of God not only ‘withdrawing all inordinate affection from all created things’ needs to take place, but one also needs to implement moderation in gaining knowledge.\(^5\) This applies especially for the weak female minds. More elaborates that those souls who are apt to ask questions though they be never so quiet, devout innocent natures, or have never so much wit, and judgement they will never proper in a contemplative course, and in those instructions. And therefore will do well, and much better to take the ordinary instructions of these days: and it were well if such souls never heard nor read contemplative books, and instructions; because they misunderstanding them will make both them-selves, and others also with them, to lay the defect which was only in them upon the unfitness of the instruction for woman: for it will seem to them that they cannot possibly be practised by women without perils, and dangers unspeakable: which wrong done to souls put out of their way by this means. (p. 61)

The writer follows here the seventeenth-century conventions of keeping women in ignorance, as too much knowledge might easily turn their inferior intellect from calm to confusion; in More’s words: to a ‘great stir’ (p. 64). Reason, thus, as More experienced, is a dangerous instrument that needs to be exercised competently. She proclaims that ‘reason I had having so many occasions to try me within and without, and to put me into perplexity, and feare’ (p. 90). The writer does not totally dismiss the devotional practices, but she indicates that there should be a certain limit, as not all the people are equipped with the ability to comprehend the ‘contemplative instructions’ (p. 90). The full comprehension of the Almighty comes with divine wisdom, and this is achievable only by a constant aspiration for perfection. More instructs that this wisdom should come before simplicity, as

This virtue of simplicity becometh more, and more perfect in the soule, as she increaseth in humility, and charity […] In this way our reason becomes clearer and able to comprehend what is necessary for us […] For we cannot be truly simplified in our soule, but by thy heavenly gift for true wisdom. (p. 12)

The link between simplicity, the spirit and the mind is, therefore, established, and the body is discredited as a necessary component of this otherwise perfect equation. The notion of simplicity indicates an honest and innocent style of life. This alludes to 2 Corinthians 1. 12, which reads: ‘For our reioycing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicitie

and godly sinceritie, not with fleshly wisedome, but by the grace of God'. Connecting this simplicity with comprehension (seeing clearly) shows, however, that More alludes to Augustine’s teaching too, which assumes that the simplicity of heavenly bodies occurs when they are united in their mutual charity and is determined by their transparency. Having reached such a condition, the spirits, inhabiting the Heavenly City of God, are able to see clearly into each other; no longer do the fallen human bodies obscure their vision.54

This process of connecting with the Divine, by abandoning the mortal flesh and turning to the spiritual and mental inner self, is accompanied by constant remorse for her sinful conduct, expressed by her tears. These tears allude to the figure of the Mary Magdalene who is mentioned in her volume, The Confessions Amantis: The Confessions of a Loving & Pious Soule to Allmighty God, on numerous occasions. The connection between More and Magdalene is established on fierce self-criticism of More’s corrupt nature by her saying that ‘I am not fit to plead for myself, my sinnes, indeed are so many and so great’ (p. 232). She, moreover, presents herself as a contemptible sinner who ‘will in silence sigh and weep both for my sinnes and for my defect in loving [and] from thy [Christ’s] feet […] will not depart till thou denounce to me; thy sins are forgiven thee’ (p. 233). This reflects the biblical story of Mary Magdalene who comes to Christ asking for forgiveness and in the act of remorse washes his feet with her tears, wipes them, kisses them, and anoints them.55 The title of her volume of prose also includes allusions to Magdalene. More ‘confesses’ her sins in a way Magdalene did in front of Christ. The theme of remorse is also in other writings such as Divine Lover, where she proclaims that ‘I have sinned, I have sinned, I am sorrie, I am sorrie, and repent from the bottome of my hart’ (p. 108). Not only do the tears become a physical

54 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 122.
55 Luke 7. 37-50 (The Douay-Rheims Bible): And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that he sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment. And standing behind at his feet, she began to wash his feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. And the Pharisee, who had invited him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were if a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said to him: Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. But he said: Master, say it. A certain creditor had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loveth him most? Simon answering, said: I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said to him: Thou hast judged rightly. And turning to the woman, he said unto Simon: Dost thou see this woman? I entered into thy house: thou gavest me no water for my feet. But she with tears hath washed my feet; and with her hairs hath wiped them. Thou gavest me no kiss. But she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint. But she with ointment hath anointed my feet. Wherefore, I say to thee: Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less. And he said to her: Thy sins are forgiven thee. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves: Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman: Thy faith hath made thee safe. Go in peace.
indication of her mental torment, but they also constitute a means of connecting with the Divine. The writer proclaims: ‘let my Tearse be my continual flood untill it be said unto mee behold thy God; until it be said unto my soul behold thy Bridegroome’ (p. 91). The sobs and tears are necessary for the soul’s nourishment (p. 91). This shows that, according to More, the road to heaven must be strewn with physical pain and mental suffering, since these exercise godly virtues and make one’s heart ‘quite and […] humble’, which turns into ‘the place where thou [God] delightest to dwell‘ (p. 133). Hence both are considered as a trigger or a means of establishing a relationship with the Almighty.

Whilst displaying her puritan piety and devotion throughout her volume, the author of The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America (1650), Anne Bradstreet, in a similar manner to More, links iniquities and corruption with earth, looking for the divine art within her. As a mother of eight children, she fulfilled the biblical verse of being ‘fruitful, and multiply [ing]’ (Genesis 22), her maternal body serving a godly purpose. Her motherhood was also a prompt for Bradstreet to explore the female body, since, as Tamara Harvey has shown, she was clearly familiar with medical treaties written by Helkiah Crook, Microcosmographia or the Description of the Body of Man, Together with the Controversies Thereto Belonging, which draws extensively on the medical thinking of Aristotle and Galen, and on Renaissance childbirth manuals. Even so, maternity is not a dominant subject of her volume of prose and poetry.

Not only does Bradstreet’s poetry become a means to exercise her ‘inner man’ (p. 278), but it also symbolizes both a way out of the vanity and iniquity of worldly existence and a cure for her ill body. Her speaker indicates that it is her body and mind which are her weaknesses, and thus she has ‘in this world no comfort’ (p. 291). Although in her case no reference is made to the sorts of chronic illness that were to dominate the writings of Collins, she does write of many serious ailments. In her ‘From Deliverance from a Fever’ (p. 270), the poet says:

My burning flesh in sweat did boil,
My aching head did break,
From side to side for ease I toil,
So faint I could not speak. (6-9)

56 All subsequent references are to Anne Bradstreet, The Works of Anne Bradstreet, ed. by Jeanine Hensley (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010).
57 Harvey, ‘Now Sisters... Impart Your Usefulness and Force’, p. 12.
However, this physical pain is attributed to God’s plan, the purpose of it being to direct her attention towards her soul. In puritan culture self-consciousness was highly promoted and valued. According to Bremer, ‘Self-examination, if recorded in the diary and communicated, could in turn assist others to discover grace’. 58 Hence, without question, the writer considers her ailments as a godly incentive to spiritual development. In her diary entry from ‘May 13, 1657’, Bradstreet asks herself:

> Who am I that I should repine at His pleasure, especially seeing it is for my spiritual advantage, for I hope my soul shall flourish while my body decays, and the weakness of this outward man shall be a means to strengthen my inner man. (p. 278)

Here the poet appears to be convinced that this weakness is also a sign of God’s favour, inasmuch as, in addition, she declares: ‘And if he knows that weakness and a frail body is the best to make me a vessel fit for His use why should I not bear it, not only willingly but joyfully?’ (p. 277). As Jean Marie Lutes points out, Bradstreet ‘took her illnesses as evidence of her need for punishment from God, as an indication that she was straying from the path to eternal glory’. 59 This is why, even though her outer man is considered weak, God has an unusual healing quality, and thus, according to Bradstreet’s diary entry from ‘May 11, 1661’, he ‘hath resorted, redeemed, recurred | From sickness, death, and pain’ (p. 182). This not only refers to her flesh, but also to her mind, which, as part of the body, is equally weak.

On the one hand, the mind is an instrument comprehending God, but, on the other, it questions his existence. In ‘To My Children’, Bradstreet promulgates: ‘I have argued thus with myself’ (p. 265). Although she felt the presence of God, she has been often ‘perplexed’, as she acknowledges that ‘Satan troubled me concerning the verity of the Scripture, many times by atheism how I could know whether there was a God’ (p. 265). Even so, her reason, by making ‘the wondrous works’ visible to her, told her that ‘there is God’ (p. 265). As a result, in her ‘Meditations when My Soul hath been Refreshed with the Consolation which the World Knows Not’, she convinces herself that she becomes a ‘member of His body (Christ)’ and Christ is her ‘head’ (p. 273). This statement reflects the biblical assumption that Jesus ‘is the head of the body’ (Colossians 1. 18). She offers herself for his service saying that ‘Lord grant that while I live I may do that service I am able in this frail body’ (p. 277). Her body is inhabited by the Divine and becomes, therefore, a temporary temple of God. This

conclusion is confirmed most succinctly in another poem, ‘In My Solitary Hours in My Dear Husband His Absence’ (p. 290), where Bradstreet says:

And thy [God’s] abode Thou’st made with me;  
With Thee my soul can talk;  
In secret places Thee I find  
Where I do kneel or walk. (11-14)

This mystical world is a spiritual creation that is perfection. However, as is explored in ‘The Flesh and the Spirit’ (p. 231), as long as the mystical world is connected with the physical world by flesh, its idyll is constantly disrupted by immortality, since the body has an ‘eye | On worldly wealth and vanity’ (6-7). The spirit thus becomes the body’s ‘slave’ (52). It cannot be free, unless the body dies. However, it can see things undetectable by bodily sight, since its ‘eyes doth pierce the heavens and see | What is invisible’ to the body (78-9). It is clear that the poet is drawing here on the ideas of Augustine, the forefather of Christianity, who maintains that ‘we need to see God with the eye of the soul’. 60

This way of seeing, however, is complicated, since the pure spirit is entrapped in a sinful body, and the complexity of this coexistence Bradstreet discusses in ‘The Flesh and the Spirit’ (p. 231). The poem is written in the form of a dialogue between the personified Flesh and Spirit, which talk about the everlasting conflict between them. Spirit nervously admonishes the conceited body by saying:

Be still thou unregenerate part,  
Disturb no more my settled heart,  
For I have vowed (and so will do)  
Thee as a foe still to pursue.  
And combat with thee will and must,  
Until I see thee laid in th’ dust.  
Sisters we are, yea, twins we be,  
Yet deadly feud ’twixt thee and me;  
For from one father are we not,  
Thou by old Adam wast begot,  
But my arise is from above,  
Whence my dear Father I do love. (38-49)

Not only does this reveal Bradstreet’s knowledge of the Bible, but also her familiarity with Pythagoras’s theory, which states, as Luchte explains, that

60 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, p. 19.
So long as it [the soul] is imprisoned in the bodily tomb it is impure, tainted by the evil substances of the body. Psychologically – in terms of actual experience – this means that the soul is profoundly conscious of an internal conflict of good and evil, the war in the members. This conflict dominates religious experience. In philosophical expression, it gives rise to the axiom of dualism: ‘In the world as in the soul there is a real conflict or two opposite powers – good and evil, light and darkness’.  

Bradstreet’s speaker displays her awareness of this conflict between her evil and dark body and good, light spirit, and links it to the fall of humanity, the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. Hence she repeats Augustine’s belief that

the fall serves to explain how souls came to be trapped in bodies in the first place [...] Before they ever came into bodies, the souls that later were human kept company with the gods in heaven, contemplating eternal Forms that lay outside the very bounds of the universe.  

The body corrupts the spirit’s innocence and purity. Nevertheless, when the body is ill, worldly pleasures are unreachable and this makes the body passive and the spirit active. Her illness, therefore, is viewed as a warning from the Almighty to withstand bodily temptation and to centre on the stimulation of her soul for the sake of salvation. As Lutes has declared, her ailments are perceived as ‘symbols of spiritual power, not physical illness’.  

The body initiates the journey Bradstreet’s speaker sets off on, in that without it spiritual enhancement would not be possible. Bradstreet, ‘As Weary Pilgrim’ (p. 321), sets off ‘on earth perplexed | With sins, with cares and sorrows vext’ (19-20) and believes that her ultimate destination is heaven, where her body united with her soul by the power of Christ will behold ‘lasting joys’ (41).

The physical suffering, spiritual anguish, and finally the conflict between her physicality and spirituality are expressed in Bradstreet’s writing by her feminine tears. In her ‘Upon Some Distemper of Body’ (p. 242) the speaking voice, ‘Bedrenched with tears that flowed from mournful head, | Till nature had exhausted all her store’ (5-6), reveals that worries caused by the physical ailments make her turn to ‘his throne on high’ (8) for consolation. The weeping, however, tends to be stopped, when relief comes, as it happens in her ‘Several Occasional Meditations’ (p. 268), where the speaker, unable to sleep, fervently ‘sought Him [God] […] With tears’ (8). After having found Him, her tears were put in ‘His bottle’ (12) and her ‘smarting wounds washed in His blood | And banished thence my doubts

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63 Lutes, ‘Negotiating Theology and Gynaecology’, p. 322.
and fears’ (13-14). Seventeenth-century society, following the belief of Aristotle that ‘woman is more compassionate than man, and has a greater propensity to tears’, considered weeping as a sign of weakness and linked them to the feminine body’s properties. However, in Bradstreet’s case tears also become a way of drawing God’s attention. The poet, therefore, astutely reverses the role of her weak and female body. No longer is its frailty perceived as a vice, but as an advantage, since it becomes a sign of election, while still she continues to consider herself as a sinner.

These tears of remorse also accompany Elizabeth Major’s preparation of her soul for the inhabitation by the Divine. Her spirit, similarly to Bradstreet’s, has been imprisoned in the corrupt flesh. Major indicates that ‘human nature is corrupt, that it will not leave sinning, nay, [a person will] hardly take notice he sins till the rod is on his back’ (p. 18). Therefore, her volume of prose and poetry, *Honey on the Rod: Or a Comfortable Contemplation for One in Affliction with Sundry Poems on Several Subjects*, is devoted to internal torment, caused by existence on earth. The poet desperately proclaims that ‘All my actions so sooted are with sin, and made by me but dirt and filth, and such as thy pure nature can no way admit of without rewarding them with the worst of punishment’ (p. 8). The author is not looking for a justification, yet by using her speaker as an example, she takes responsibility for her sins and, as other believers, shows remorse for her immoral deeds by her ‘repenting tears’ (p. 7). Major’s speaker announces: ‘O that mine head were full of waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for offending such a God of love’ (p. 39). It is advisable and good to show ‘a humble submission under the hand of a Father’ and to ‘weep even tears of blood’ (p. 30). However, these tears must be ‘accompanied with a truly humbled heart’ and with ‘prayers’ (p. 30). One is encouraged to ‘cry, sigh and groan; Fear not, for he [God] understands all the languages of a troubled soul’ (p. 30).

In some ways, Major’s case becomes emblematic, portraying herself as a typical representative of the human race, having similar dilemmas. For her the physical world is in thralldom with

No help [...] here below; alas, I must, I must to prison here: where Lord, thou knowest, some apprenticeships I have close prisoner been: my strength thou were

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65 All subsequent references are to Elizabeth Major, *Honey on the Rod: Or a Comfortable Contemplation for One in Affliction with Sundry Poems on Several Subjects*, ed. by Anne Lake Prescott and Betty S. Travitsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
pleased to melt away by secret, unseen ways, leaving me almost as helpless, as when I first entered this vale of tears: and to my debility many other afflictions thy wisdom sees it needful here to add; for scarce doth the day break in upon me, before a new cause of sorrow hath made a breach. (p. 8)

As Hobby has rightly observed, ‘In the author’s case, the suffering is not solely the conventional penitence of a believer seeking salvation and escape from the bondage of sin, but a particularly acute pain’. This physical pain is, however, acknowledged to be caused by ‘God that afflicted’ her and it is claimed that he ‘hath done it justly and wisely’ (p. 10). The poet presents an internal conflict as well as physical disposition. This is achieved in part through the fact that her text is presented in the form of a dialogue between the personified Consolation and Soul. The latter, having discerned its sinfulness, asks the former for directions on how to reconcile the corruption of the human body with the divinity of the soul. Consolation expounds:

Affliction to the soul, is like Physick to the body, and we see some bodies require a constant course of Physick, or else they are laid up with diseases: Some again expect it every Spring and Fall, or else it is supposed they are not able to continue: and some pass from the womb to the grave with a very small portion. (p. 136)

Major transfers her physical suffering onto her spiritual distress. Spiritual torment is necessary for the process of purification of her soul, just as illness is indispensible to cleanse the body. Both physical and spiritual sufferings are interpreted as a trigger for healing. However, the former helps to turn a believer to the inner self in order to find consolation through God’s corrections, alluding here to the title rod. Subsequently, Major’s Soul prays to the Almighty that when ‘the outward man should perish, yet O holy Father, renew daily the inward man’ (p. 61). She is convinced that ‘It is true, while there is a World, and a man in it, there will be sin; and it is true, that while there is sin, God will in mercy correct this’ (p. 21). Therefore, the soul is considered as a mediator between the Divine and the body. This indicates that Major is following the teaching of Augustine who claims that there is a hierarchy among

God, soul and bodies, with soul in the middle between the intelligible world (God) and the sensible world (bodies). For the soul is higher than bodies because of its intellectual capacity, but lower than God because it is mutable and created.67

66 Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, p. 64.
However, on the other hand, the human body was cursed at the fall and, as a result, it is prone to iniquities, and so is the mind, whose weakness is the inability to comprehend God. This causes doubts about the Divine’s righteousness. Having found herself in that situation, Major’s Consolation reprimands her Soul by saying:

reason was never given thee to dishonour God with, neither was thou made a rational Creature, that thou mightest with the more reason distrust thy Maker; though I confess, having no more than sense and reason, we shall never know God nor his truths with comfort, for it is far too low to reach so high things; yet reason being sanctified, a true saving faith imploy that reason is excellent, for assuredly, he believes best that knows best why he should believe. (p. 82)

Although reason makes a human being powerful, it is also a source of questioning the status of God. However, believers, even though they possess a divine art in the form of a soul, are not equipped with the capacity to fathom God’s mysterious ways. Instead, a human being is able to develop a ‘spiritual mind’, or, as Major puts it, a ‘sanctified’ mind that is characterised by deep faith and devotion to the Almighty. This also shows her awareness of the difference between a ‘carnal’ and ‘spiritual’ mind. In order to develop the latter, her speaking voice asks God to ‘be filled with the knowledge of his [Christ’s] will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding’ so that her ‘inner man’ will be strengthened by faith and due to this fortification, God will be able to ‘build a Tower [...] to dwell in, and to steer course of all things belonging to it’ (p. 160). This indicates that the poet views her soul as equipped with intelligence – a characteristic given to the spirit by Aristotle – and by exercising this divine knowledge, her body will become the sanctified temple, where ‘Christ may dwell’ (p. 62).

Nevertheless, even before the process of exercising the divine knowledge starts, she has to repent, following the exemplar of the biblical Mary Magdalene and

set all the parts and faculties on work; as the feet to carry, the eyes to weep tears to wash his [Jesus’s] feet, the hair to serve as a towel to wipe them, the lips to kiss them, the hands to wash, wipe, anoint them; and all this being done with great affection, is the thing eyed by Christ, and was by him accepted, commended, rewarded. (p. 141)

Magdalene’s remorse is not only expressed by her tears, but also by her deeds. The body, therefore, as well as the tears, is viewed as an indispensable part of transformation. This process of purification that Major goes through would not be then possible without her body, as not only does her physical suffering make her look for the divine art within her mind and
becomes a factor initiating it, but the body itself is also employed in God’s service to show her repentance.

The feminine body and tears, symbolising internal torment, are also prevalent in Richard Crashaw’s writing. The poet displays an unusual respect for women by numerous identifications with them in terms of spirit, mind, and body. His work is dominated by images of suffering women and Christ’s agonising body. As Paul Parrish has recently argued, ‘Crashaw, both in his poetry and in his life, aligns himself with the feminine and “feminine” perspectives, and he frequently challenges the hierarchy of masculine values’.68

Although Crashaw’s Carmen Deonostro (1652) does not discuss the relation between the body and soul, its author perceives his body as a bridge linking him with Jesus’s suffering on the cross.69 The speaker of ‘Sacred Santa Maria Dolorum’ (p. 186) exclaims:

O you, your own best darts
Dear, doleful hearts!
Hail; and strike home and make me see
That wounded bosoms their own weapons be.
Come wounds! come darts!
Nail’d hands! and pierced hearts!
Come your whole selves, Sorrow’s great Son and
Mother! (71-8)

Not only is it indicated that the speaker desires to experience physical agony, but also the mental torment of both Christ and his mother. This allows Crashaw to explore two types of psychological state: male and female. According to Showalter, in early-modern culture ‘male melancholy is seen as intellectual and creative, while its female counterpart is emotional and biological’.70 Consequently, not only is the author entitled to contemplative anguish, but also its emotional equivalent – despair.

This identification with feminine psychological torment allows Crashaw, as a man, to express his emotions with impunity. For him the agonising body of Christ is thus inseparable from the broken-heartedness of the Virgin Mary, since the speaker declares:

While Son and Mother
Discourse alternate wounds to one another!
Quick deaths that grow
And gather, as they come and go;
His nails write swords in Her; which soon Her heart
Pays back, […] still growing with His pain,
Turn SPEARES, and straight come home again. (23-36)

Mother and son are both united in pain, creating one entity. ‘Each wound of His, from every
Part, | All, more at home in her one heart’ (9-10), and this is the position the poet desires to
occupy, seeing that his speaker requests God to:

O, teach those wounds to bleed
In me; me, so to read
This book of loves, thus writ
In lines of death, my life may copy it
With loyal cares. (51-5)

The ‘wounds’ might be interpreted as physical or as mental suffering. By the former he
would position himself as suffering Christ, and by the latter as his despairing mother. The
speaker reveals further that both ways are highly desirable, since he wants to ‘bleed with him’
and ‘weep with her’ (91). Another perspective is plausible here too. His soul might be
wounded by earthly existence, in other words, the spiritual ache signifies the discomfort of
the soul imprisoned in the flesh. The concept of the body as a prison is also mentioned by the
poet in his ‘To the Infant Martyrs’, where the bodies are described as ‘cages’, confining souls
to the earthly world. Regardless of the interpretation, by this Crashaw shows that the first step
to developing this tender love, which only Christ was capable of, is to experience either
spiritual or physical anguish.71 Nevertheless, not only does the speaker aim to arouse such
love in himself, but also to become Christ-like. He wants his life to be a copy of the Lord’s,
to be an exemplar. The speaker of ‘Sancta Maria Dolorum’ asks God to teach his heart to find
the proper way to ‘study him [Christ] so, till we mix | Wounds; and become one crucifix’
(100-1). He wants to be joined with Jesus in his suffering in order to become an entity. Since
Christ suffers patiently and silently, these feminine attributes are desirable here too.

Parrish has argued that poetry was used as an artifice, thanks to which male grief
could be expressed publicly without a threat of being considered as excessively feminine.72

71 Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and others, eds., The Norton Anthology of Poetry, (London and New
72 Parrish, ‘Moderate Sorrow and Immoderate Tears’, p. 218.
Accordingly, Crashaw’s poetry is permeated with examples of women, expressing their devotional emotions. As Parish has further observed, ‘Crashaw most intimately and emotionally involved in grief expression, seeing and weeping for death through the eyes of two of the women whose lives and faith moved him most deeply’. One of them is the Virgin Mary, mentioned above and, the other, Mary Magdalene. The figure of ‘The Weeper’ is portrayed as both a mentally tormented witness to Chris’s crucifixion and as a sinner, expressing her remorse. Therefore, her tears might also be interpreted as either. In addition, her weeping becomes a means of connecting with the Divine. The speaker says to Magdalene: ‘Upwards thou dost weep. | Heavn’s bosome drinks the gentle stream’ (19-20). This stream of tears is ‘Still spending, never spent’ (5) so it is everlasting, and this is why it might be described as a sort of a marvel. The speaker portrays her as ‘Two walking baths; two weeping motions; | Portable, and compendious oceans’ (103-4). This imagery, emphasising the depth of the water, is commensurate with Magdalene’s regret, sorrow, and grief. Similarly to Major, then, Crashaw identifies with crying Magdalene, washing Christ’s feet with her tears, and hence his remorse as a sinner is also revealed. Due to these feminine tears, he is able express his outburst, or rather outpour, of emotions. Nonetheless, the suffering, displayed by the tears, would not be achievable without the body, which again becomes a primary factor in establishing the connection with the Divine, and even though the emotions expressed through weeping are male, the feminine body is used as a means to do that.

To conclude, although Christianity dominated the seventeenth century, such theories as those of Augustine, Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras constituted incontrovertible authority and were known not only to the educated and men, but also to the middling sort and women. Hence they had the power to influence all aspects of life and affect all social classes. With such a variety of voices, spirituality became a problematic matter, especially in the case of women. Since medicine perceived female bodies and minds as exceptionally vulnerable to illnesses as well as to iniquities, male dominated society associated femininity with inferiority, denying them also spiritual equality. However, the above women writers skilfully used these arguments to reverse the position of their bodies. By displaying knowledge of Greek thought and by associating their physical ailments and mental torment as a sign of the process of the body’s sanctification, Collins, Eliza, More, Bradstreet, and Major not only give a credible account of their spirituality, but they also present their feminine bodies and minds

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73 Parrish, ‘Moderate Sorrow and Immoderate Tears’, p. 234.
as God’s dwelling. This position appears to be even more tenable, when considered with Vaughan’s and Crashaw’s approaches to qualities of the body they use to connect with the Divine. Both weep feminine tears to show their remorse, alluding to the figure of the repenting Mary Magdalene. Accordingly, although femininity was linked to inferiority in seventeenth-century English society, this chapter has shown that, partly even in the eyes of the male audience, female bodies exemplified the Almighty’s involvement in their process of purification, establishing them as the metaphorical and yet exemplary temples of God.
3. Divine Encasement

Then clothe therewith mine understanding, will,
Affections, judgement, conscience, memory,
My words, and actions, that their shine may fill
My ways with glory and thee glorify.
Then mine apparel shall display before ye
That I am clothed in holy robes for glory. (13-18)¹

This chapter will discuss various, culturally and religiously determined symbols of clothing, underwear, wedding gowns, jewellery, and blood, as well as the opposite concept of nakedness, in relation to the selected female and male writers in seventeenth-century England. It will indicate whether celestial attire is valued as a sign of acceptance by God and might be considered, thus, not only as a wedding gown, but also as underwear, alluding to an intimate relationship between God and a believer. Furthermore, it will throw light on the implicit meanings of divine garments, including the idea of equality regardless of sex and social status for the wearer, as well as creating a sort of authority, on the one hand, and security or rather dependence, on the other. The bright encasement will be contrasted with the purple blood that is also a type of clothing, since it was commonly believed that it did not only stain, but also entirely covered the righteous souls. In the light of cultural norms, this chapter will seek to define whether celestial clothes are categorised in the same way that everyday clothing was and if similar patterns, biblical and cultural, occur in poetry of the seventeenth century. This discussion also aims to establish whether a book might be viewed as a kind of clothing for its author and if it can be ‘washed’ and ‘cleansed’ in order to become perfect. This chapter aims to explore the inner spiritual transformation that becomes externally visible and object-focused, as opposed to the internal change of believers’ perceptions. The clothing will be discussed as one of the factors that make such a visualisation conceivable, but it will also be argued that clothes, as a human invention, are perceived as an artificial covering for both the natural body and natural nakedness. This assumption is based on the events that took place in the biblical paradise, where Adam and Eve for the first time covered their natural naked bodies with leaves, creating an artificial vestment.

The discussion will, therefore, begin with establishing social attitudes towards clothing and nakedness, and how the Bible shaped people’s perception of them at the time. Then, I will go on to analysing selected writers who present their thinking on these matters. This will start with examining Anne Bradstreet and Thomas Traherne’s understanding of the body as a lustful encasement that needs to be removed before entering heaven and their contrasting approaches to the concept of spiritual nudity. This will be followed by an analysis of Eliza’s Babes and Honey on the Rod, both of whose authors portray their souls as attired in glittering wedding robes, making them God’s possessions as does Gertrude More, whose writings will be briefly discussed next. Then, the chapter will turn to Henry Vaughan and Richard Crashaw’s presentations of Christ’s bloody robes, informed by the symbolism of the Eucharist. The final part of the argument will be devoted to An Collins’s stained spiritual garment. The blood on her robes, however, is menstrual, as opposed to the robes stained by the noble blood of Jesus. Since this chapter includes representatives of various religious opinions, such as Puritans, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Anglicans, it will also highlight their different approaches to the process of spiritual transformation. This transformation will be shown to reflect the transfiguration of the biblical Zion, who also goes through a stage of temporary nakedness, which symbolizes her being inhabited by the sinful children, to being covered by a metaphorical ‘skirt’ (Ezekiel 16. 8) of God that signifies his offer of protection and guidance to her strayed children.

In seventeenth-century England, clothing was considered a significant factor in determining people’s lives. Susan Vincent has suggested that in fact clothes contributed to the formation of the early-modern society, as they are an expression of this culture. Clothing was foundational for an individual too, in that through it not only was self-image created, but clothes also shaped one’s authority, and, based on that, relationships with others were formed.\(^2\) The introduction of sumptuary laws caused even further changes in the code of dressing, interfering with people’s privacy.\(^3\) Indeed, as Vincent has outlined, since the introduction of such laws ‘apparel had a declared centrality to the realisation of power, wealth, status and gender. [...] Elite dress was guaranteed a cultural visibility’\(^4\). The wealthy part of society could afford adorned clothing, by which their status and affluence were demonstrated. On the other hand, the poor were also distinct, in that, as Jane Ashelford explains, those ‘at the bottom of the social scale wore correspondingly old and tattered

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\(^3\) Vincent, Dressing the Elite, p. 6.
\(^4\) Vincent, Dressing the Elite, p. 6.
versions of what had originally been fashionable garments, and if they did not have the means to replace them, these eventually disintegrated into rags. Not only was there a difference in the quality of fabric, but also in colours. Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson maintain that ‘the apparel and linens of the elite were made of richly coloured silks and satins, adorned with exquisite lace and cloth-of-gold, in contrast to the coarse grey and brown homespun of the labouring poor’. Clothing, therefore, drew visible boundaries between groups of people in everyday life.

The distinction between those who had money and those who did not was not the only category according to which the style of dressing was imposed. Guibbory differentiates between two attitudes that were present in seventeenth-century England. The ceremonialists, supporting Laud, insisted on the importance of the ceremonies and rites for the mass as well as aesthetic decoration of the churches. In Guibbory’s words, Laud was convinced that there is an ‘intimate correspondence between outer and inner, physical and spiritual in worship’ and a neglect of both the outer worship, using the body, and ceremony leads to destruction of the spiritual; the process can be, however, reversed in the same way. Puritans, on the other hand, stressed the significance of simplicity that symbolized chastity, whilst aestheticism, as well as colourful garments, was considered human invention that was associated with sin. Puritans then regarded magnificent temples to be an encouragement to idolatry. Guibbory explains that they believed that ‘To superstitiously adore a ceremony or image is to misread it, to divorce the sign from the signified, matter from spirit, to stop at the sensible representation without recognizing the spiritual meaning it conveys’. Puritans were often disgusted by richly ornamented dresses and especially opposed to cross-dressing practised in theatres, due to which the social roles of women and men could be reversed. As Crawford has pointed out, they ‘considered such a deception a dishonouring of God’. What they preferred instead was simple and humble clothing, expressing their piety, godliness, and docility towards God. They justified their choice of clothing as proper, as opposed to ‘the fantastic dress’ on which far too much money was spent, and, for them, such a situation appeared to

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7 Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton*, p. 15.
8 Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community*, p. 20.
9 Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community*, p. 17.
10 Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community*, p. 17.
‘threaten the social order’. What is meant by the social order is social status, sexuality, morality, and particularly gender, since ‘An ideology of gender difference was just as fundamental as that of class in securing the social order’. As opposed to Catholics, Puritans did not tolerate clerical garments either. As a human invention, they were considered as exceptionally abusive. Guibbory has noticed that ‘Wearing the surplice violated Christ’s teaching of the “priesthood of all believers”, since it represented a false hierarchical distinction between clergy and laity rather than the proper separation between the godly and ungodly. Other religious congregations also implemented these beliefs. For example, Quakers placed importance on the simplicity of garments too. They silently worshiped God and their inward illumination was prioritized over the biblical word. Catie Gill has observed that they assumed that

Vain women interested in clothes had a ‘whorish’ interest in entrapment and display, like the biblical whore of Babylon. By contrast, Friends increasingly used clothing as a symbol of their piety, adopting plain dress and reproving people who erred in matters of deportment.

These ideas were based on biblical teaching that was the main source of cultural and social establishments.

Nakedness (a term that included not only nudity, but also being dressed just in underclothes), on the other hand, was perceived as something private, and if displayed publicly, was regarded as promiscuity. Vincent explains that

[underclothes’] excellence lay in the attribute of whiteness, fineness of fabric or decoration, and the elaborate care required to keep them laundered, starched and shaped. Furthermore, these garments were found at the visual borders between body and clothing, thus helping to separate public from private space.

Nudity implied intimacy probably to a greater extent than underwear. Christ’s robes were strictly associated with whiteness and purity, and, like seventeenth-century underwear, invited an association with intimacy. On the other hand, the excessively ornamented gowns were usually to be admired publicly. Therefore, the former clothing evokes spiritual devotion,

14 Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community*, p. 20.
15 Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community*, p. 27.
17 Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, p. 53
and the latter a desire to impress. Nakedness, however, sometimes became a public matter, seeing that in the seventeenth century the punishment for minor crimes was public stripping, so that the offender could be ridiculed and also marginalised from society. As Vincent has pointed out, ‘The punishments meted out in early-modern England indicate that the inappropriate use of clothing – including nakedness – was a sign of stigma or social dysfunction. In the case of crime, this sartorial isolation was imposed on the wearer’.

In the Bible whiteness, cleanness, and clothing are in a close relationship. White and spotless clothes are thought to signify virtue and chastity. Blackness, by contrast, is linked with sin, corruption, and evil. The Bible also presents any skin colour other than white as a negative concept. The Lord compares the irremovability of the iniquitous nature to the unchangeability of skin colour, when he asks Jeremiah: ‘Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil’ (Jeremiah 13. 23). The matter of colour takes on a racial dimension here. Hence whiteness might be understood as colour of both clothing and skin. Early-modern society invoked such an approach to the whiteness and blackness binary. However, Kim F. Hall has further developed this argument by establishing that, ‘Frequently, “black” in Renaissance discourses is opposed not to “white” but to “beauty” or “fairness”, and these terms more often refer to the appearance or moral states of women’, and men, as she adds later. Slaves were usually portrayed as black, and since characterised by servitude, the colour of their skin conveyed the idea of inferiority too. They were usually portrayed as villains who acted under the influence of the evil powers. Accordingly, blackness, as opposed to whiteness, was associated with profanity and depravity, and this is why there are no allusions to this colour in the writings that this chapter discusses.

Nakedness, having similar connotations to blackness, was also thought to symbolize shame and sinfulness and was used in reference to the human soul. The metaphorical act of clothing oneself is a sign of spiritual transfiguration. The moment unbelievers return to the path of righteousness, they are dressed in celestial attire so that their nakedness (a transitory state of shame and remorse) can be covered. Christ preaches that these converts ‘shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy’ (Revelation 3. 4). Such a spiritual garment is a symbol of everlasting bliss in God’s mansion. This also means that such clothing would protect the spirit on Judgement Day. Yet before that happens, it is necessary to appear undressed in front

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18 Vincent, Dressing the Elite, p. 122.
of the Almighty. This means that either the earthly clothing, the body, needs to be abandoned, or that by their nakedness believers repent and display their shame for the sins they have committed; a process that is indispensable for the inner spiritual transfiguration to begin in the first place. The book of Job states that God is responsible for clothing the soul with ‘skin and flesh, and [...] bones and sinews [...], life and favour’, and by his constant visits the soul is motivated to wear this earthly clothing (Job 10. 11-12). However, on the way back to heaven, the spirit is required to abandon this garment, since Job reminds himself that ‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away’ (Job 1. 21). Religious groups in the seventeenth century, however, variously interpreted the biblical portrayal of nakedness. Quakers, for example, went naked as a sign, as this state stood for innocence. They manifested, thus, their rejection of the worldly corruption. Kristen Poole has pointed out that ‘The Quaker practice of “going naked as a sign” was [...] generally portrayed and perceived as reflecting the spiritual nakedness of a fallen world – at times it was also interpreted as a sign of the Quaker’s own Adamic perfection’. The Friends’ nakedness was an essential and righteous part of their system of beliefs.

Another perspective on the matter of clothing further complicates this image. Washing clothes might be considered a symbol of purging from sins, since this action leads to cleanliness. The Lord says to Moses and Aaron that in order to cleanse the ‘children of Israel’, they need to ‘Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean’ (Numbers 8. 7). The act of sprinkling water also represents baptism that is a sort of a conversion, as its aim is to cleanse sins in order to become Christ’s follower. Isaiah preaches that Christ will ‘sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider’ (Isaiah 52. 15). Baptism, therefore, might also be viewed as a spiritual enlightenment and a symbol of cleansing the clothing of the soul, the body. Nevertheless, clean or not, the clothing itself has a connotation of corrupted nature, connecting it back to the biblical garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve’s clothing is linked to their disobedience towards the Almighty, and their first sin which resulted in the fall of humanity. Whereas their clothing is, therefore, associated with corruption, their nakedness is associated with innocence and incorruptibility.

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The Bible also takes a definite stand on the matter of excessive wealth and material prosperity, including an over-attachment to clothing. The Gospel according to Matthew cautions:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment. (Matthew 6. 24-25)

This warning is directed at people whose money makes them powerful and, as a result, they desire to expand their wealth continually, at the same time neglecting their spiritual development. They focus on material possessions, their earthly possessions, which in the eyes of God are nothing but vanity. This makes them drift away from the Divine, insofar as they seek to experience sensual pleasures. Such inordinate wealth is symbolized in earthly clothing or a lavish wardrobe, and its increase might be a sign of wearing more and more sophisticated and gorgeously ornamented clothing. Such attire is considered as sinful and profane, and, finally, it gradually makes one indifferent to God. The book of Proverbs reminds believers that ‘A faithful man should abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent’ (Proverbs 28. 20).

The Bible further associates sumptuous clothes with the anthropomorphised image of the whore of Babylon, who, as the first chapter has discussed, becomes the antithesis of the biblical, virtuous Zion. In addition, the figure of Babylon is specified as a woman dressed ‘in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication’ (Revelation 17. 4). Babylon’s rich attire symbolizes both her corruption and her spiritual poverty. The colours, ‘purple’ and ‘scarlet’, are associated with nobility, and so suggest that she occupies the top of the hellish hierarchy, which reflects the position of Zion in the heavenly hierarchical ladder. Babylon is established as an emblematic figure of a sufferer whose misery is a consequence of her own iniquity and immorality, and who does not show any signs of repentance. God promises that on the Day of Judgement, her nakedness will be displayed and her shame will be made visible to everyone. As he declares further: ‘I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man’ (Isaiah 47. 3). This lecherous figure of Babylon is contrasted with the exemplary character of Zion, portrayed as a holy city that is described
as ‘new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven’ (Revelation 21. 2). Zion’s children will be able to follow her, provided that they are undressed by God, who will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their caul, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets and the mufflers, The bonnets and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel and, the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails. (Isaiah 3. 17-23)

This indicates that the children of Zion must be converted, starting from abandoning sumptuous dresses and accessories, symbolizing covetousness, and become naked; they have to show their shame for their iniquities and repent. Their nudity is also a symbol of nuptial intimacy with God, when establishing their relationship. By rejecting the ornamentation of clothing, the Bible implies that Zion’s metaphorical garment is simple and humble, and this is what is also expected from her daughters, inasmuch as simplicity of clothing corresponds to godliness. It is indicated, then, that the clothing should reflect on the character of a person, rather than their social status or wealth. The writers that this chapter discusses seem to be inspired by the humble image of the biblical Zion and also expect to don the metaphorical bright vestment.

Celestial clothing is not the main theme of Anne Bradstreet’s The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America (1650), but the book includes substantial references that reveal the poet’s perception of divine attire. Stephanie Merrim has positioned Bradstreet as a Puritan, and her spiritual autobiography as written by a ‘Puritan pen’. Bradstreet, affected by her religious leanings, implies that excessive wealth as well as well-being might result in believers going astray. One of her ‘Meditations Divine and Moral’ states that ‘Large endowments of honour, wealth, or a healthful body would quite overthrow some weak Christian; therefore God cuts their garments short to keep them in such a trim that they might run the ways of His commandments’ (p. 304). God plays the role of a fashion designer here, who adjusts the believers’ garments to the prevailing mode. However, this mode is to ensure that people will follow him. The clothing he offers, thus, is differentiated between individuals; each person will get what is necessary for them in order to modify their attitude.

21 Stephanie Merrim, Early Modern Women’s Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), p. 187.
towards religion and to keep them involved in their own spiritual development. His role might also be compared to that of a thoughtful parent, and specifically to ‘A prudent mother [who] will not cloth her little child with a long and cumbersome garment; she easily foresees what events it is likely to produce, at the best, but falls and bruises or perhaps somewhat worse’ (p. 304). God’s favours are rationed according to his children’s needs. He knows above all others what they need. These custom-made clothes are used in earthly life. In heaven, by contrast, all the souls are privileged to wear the same gorgeous robes of righteousness. This homely image of God that the author produces might reflect her position as the mother of eight children. Bradstreet appears to be using the language, coming from her direct maternal experience. This makes the figure of God more accessible to common housewives. She finds a way to relate to the Divine, since they both share similar qualities.

In ‘The Flesh and the Spirit’ (p. 231), which is written in the form of a dialogue between the Body and the Soul entrapped within it, the exemplary Soul displays her pride in her outfit by saying:

My garments are not silk nor gold,  
Nor such like trash which earth doth hold,  
But royal robes I shall have on,  
More glorious than the glist’ring sun  
My crown not diamonds, pearls, and gold,  
But such as angels’ heads enfold. (80-5)

The poet implies here that, firstly, all the treasures of the earth are vanity, and so are the body and the clothing covering it, and, secondly, the soul boasts about her own divine raiment, whose value cannot be equalled with anything produced on earth. By this Bradstreet also indicates that, for her, the simplicity of Christ’s robes matters, again revealing her puritan approach to the matter of clothing. She follows the conventional conviction about celestial robes being pictured as bright, as if they were made of light.

This clothing is to be worn by the righteous souls who inhabit God’s mansion. The Soul, thus, hopes to be invited there, where

The stately walls both high and strong,  
And made of precious jasper stone;  
The gates of pearl, both rich and clear,  
And angels are for porters there;  
The streets thereof transparent gold,  
Such as no eye did e’er behold. (88-93)
Heaven is portrayed as a sort of fortress, ornamented with splendour and richness. Although it appears to reflect earthly treasures, it is based on the book of Revelation written by John, who claims to have seen the holy Jerusalem, whose twelve gates were guarded by twelve angels. The apostle describes the great city’s walls as made of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass [...]. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. (Revelation 21. 18-23)

The Puritan heaven, with its precious stones and golden architecture, becomes a replica of the holy Jerusalem. Bradstreet’s vision also mirrors the idea of the heavenly light, since her speaker proclaims that

Of Life, there are the waters sure,
Which shall remain forever pure
Nor sun, nor moon, they have no need,
For glory doth from God proceed.
No candle there, nor yet torchlight,
For there shall be no darksome night. (96-101)

The steadiness and safety of this place is reflected in the iambic tetrameter that is regular throughout, and this shows Bradstreet’s poetical artistry. This eternal blissful city with life-giving celestial water is destined to accept only pure souls that are freed from their bodies. The city embodies the biblical Zion, and the spirits invited to her are her children. God is portrayed as the only provider of all indispensible things existing there. Consequently, the light, given out by the sun or the moon, is no use to souls. Already attired in Christ’s bright robes, the souls are capable of emanating light too. The pure river, on the other hand, might refer to Christ’s purifying action undertaken in order to redeem his people, as due to his mysterious resurrection, new life after death has been offered to those who follow him. The river might, thus, invite the souls to a restorative act of baptism.

God’s city is safe and it always welcomes all believers. By contrast, an earthly house could be easily destroyed. Bradstreet shows her awareness of this in her well-known ‘Upon the Burning of Our House’ (p. 319), which describes an emblematic dilemma between the
spiritual and material world a believer faces in the time of a crisis. As Allison Giffen points out, ‘Throughout “Upon the Burning of our House”, while the poet associates the home with carnality, she also represents it as a site of spirituality, thus offering contradictory representations that intricately fold in upon themselves’. 22 Within an instant Bradstreet loses all her possessions, when ‘flames consume my dwelling place’ (16). This might allude to Luke’s gospel, which alerts its readers to the unpredictability of Christ’s second coming. 23 It is important then to be able to leave all the earthly possessions behind and follow God. Bradstreet’s speaker might represent a person caught up in such a situation, seeing that although initially traumatized by this misfortune, she finally manages to find consolation in the religious conviction that earthly property is ‘vanity’ (40), and what really matters is heavenly existence. As Giffen has further observed, ‘the speaker is figured as the unregenerate soul, unprepared for the fiery advent’. 24

However, the realisation that she is not homeless, as she can inhabit God’s mansion, retrieves her hope. Bradstreet’s speaker thereby turns to God and reminds herself:

Thou hast an house on high erect,
Framed by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnished,
Stands permanent though this be fled.
It’s purchased and paid for too
By Him who hath enough to do. (47-52)

God is given the metaphorical role of an ‘Architect’ here. His building abilities are used to rebuild her trust in his manual skills and to restore her spiritual strength. Bradstreet uses the language of legality here, creating an image of a law-making God. This heavenly house was created as part of the transaction between God and Christ. The latter redeemed humanity from eternal damnation, and the former promised to prepare a mansion for the saved souls. Christ ‘paid’ the price of his own death for the house to be erected. Even so, all God’s actions are considered as legitimate and this means that the speaking voice is sure that she deserves to be placed in God’s house. This belief might be partially drawn from the Bible, and specifically from II Corinthians 5. 1-4, where it is stated that

22 Allison Giffen, ““Let No Man Know”: Negotiating the Gendered Discourse of Affliction in Anne Bradstreet’s “Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning of Our House, July 10th, 1666””, Legacy, 27 (2010), 1-22 (p. 11).
23 Luke 12 warns the disciples to be ready for the unpredictable second coming of Christ (‘son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not’ (Luke 12. 40)).
24 Christ says that on the Day of Judgement ‘I am come to send fire on the earth’ (Luke 12. 49). Here the fire might refer to the burning of Bradstreet’s house.
we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a
building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we
groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven: If
so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle
do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that
mortality might be swallowed up of life.

As long as there is trust in God, no one will be ever homeless for believers are promised
eternal life in heaven. Hence Bradstreet’s speaker, truthfully praying to God, is certain that
she will be heard. Assured in this way, she declares that ‘My hope and treasure lies above’
(58). Not only has Bradstreet devalued her earthly house, but by this act of burning she has,
in a way, also revealed her nakedness, as she was devastated or cleaned out. When standing
exposed to the Almighty, she asks Him to cover her nakedness. He offers her a shelter or
shield and consolation in her ‘distress’ (13). In this case her nakedness becomes a symbol of
hopelessness, eventually turning into a realisation that God is the only rescue. This nakedness
might also be viewed as a stimulus, making one turn to the Almighty, or as a kind of a test,
aiming to strengthen one’s faith. Since faith might be assumed to be metaphorical clothing
for the soul, the state of nudity might also represent the speaker’s moment of hesitation, when
in such a disastrous situation. Although the spiritual transformation Bradstreet goes through
is internal, it is visualised by focusing on the loss of her possessions. This is why the inner
transformation is reinforced by external events and it is object-focused.

Whereas Bradstreet defines the state of nakedness as transitory, Thomas Traherne
makes it the final goal. His interpretation of nudity is, therefore, radically different from
Bradstreet’s. Traherne presents Jesus’s clothing as ‘robes of glory and delight’ (11) that make
its wearer bright. However, the speaker forewarns that the new garment will not consist of
rich ornaments, but rather it will ‘display’ (14) nakedness. The speaker of ‘The Person’ (p.
66) says:

With robes of glory and delight
    I’ll make you bright.
Mistake me not, I do not mean to bring
    New robes, but to display the thing:
    Nor paint, nor clothe, nor crown, nor add a ray,
    But glorify by taking all away. (11-16)

The speaker turns to his body and tells his recent reflections. Both the regular iambic metre
and everyday language reflect his relaxed speech and joyous mood. His speech, however, is
restrained by semantically rhyming couplets that crystalize his plan. By stripping the body of glittering trinkets the author declines sumptuous clothes, and this could be evidence of his Puritan sympathies. Guibbory has pointed out that according to Puritans such clothes show excessive care for the body and simultaneous neglect of the soul. The ‘thing’ that is to be displayed is human flesh. This also indicates that the body in its natural state wears shining celestial clothes. An earthly garment needs to be removed in order that the body could go back to its original state. The clothes, then, are viewed as an artificial layer as opposed to the body being perceived as a natural cover for the soul. This is why the speaker of the poem assures that nakedness is ‘most sublime’ (18). ‘The Person’ promotes nakedness of the body rather than the soul, and this nakedness alludes to innocence of the first people God created. Adam and Eve first inhabited the world, and their natural nakedness reflected their innocence. However, when they disobeyed God by gaining the knowledge of good and evil, they became ashamed and ‘sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons’ to cover their naked bodies (Genesis 3. 7). This act of clothing symbolizes their corruption and becomes a visual metaphor for their process of degradation. This process of covering was double sided though, in that not only was their physical nakedness disguised, but also their purity was covered with sin. As a result, in the seventeenth century the act of attiring was considered to aim at hiding both physical and spiritual nakedness. Therefore, what Traherne implies here is that in order to bring human beings back to their innocent, natural state, they need to be undressed. Only then their purity will constitute an unblemished garment.

The poet promotes the idea that what people should do is to appreciate all parts of the body and reject the alluring beauty of the earthly jewellery, as they are nothing but ‘manacles’ (56). These artificial clothes are linked with the corruption of the human being. The body’s parts, on the other hand, as God’s gift, are the ‘most sacred treasures’ (34) that should be exposed and used to extol God. Whereas Traherne associates the body with ‘verity’ (49), the clothes, which are described as ‘metaphors conceal[ed]’ (25), are linked with deception. The clothing is envisaged as a sort of false ‘blazon’ (27). This unnatural shield is probably thought to hide their shame from the Almighty as the biblical couple did. God thereby wants it to be removed so that a human being can restore his authentic sacred state. Traherne’s speaker, having reached such a conclusion, proclaims:

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26 Vincent, *Dressing the Elite*, p. 123. Vincent has maintained that ‘Adam and Eve’s nakedness first become apparent to them because of their sin, and clothing was thus a sign of our moral imperfections; a result and daily reminder of spiritual weakness’.
Thy gifts, O God, alone I'II prize,
My tongue, my eyes,
My cheeks, my lips, my ears, my hands, my feet;
Their harmony is far more sweet;
Their beauty true. (59-63)

In this case the robes of glory refer to the sacred human body. The speaker emphasises both its significance by enumerating its parts and the fact that he is in possession of them by constant repetition of the possessive pronoun: ‘my’. The soul clothed in the body is a counterpart of God’s image, in that Genesis states that God created man and woman in his own image (Genesis 1. 27). The body encloses the invisible soul, and in ‘The Person’ it becomes a means of the heavenly attire’s visualisation.

Nonetheless, not only does the poet strip the body, but also the soul. When the spirit is deprived of the body, a bright reflection of divinity might be visible in it. This is why, in his other poem ‘Amendment’ (p. 80), the spirit can be compared with a ‘mirror that must shine’ (20). In its natural state the spirit is believed to be ‘A naked simple pure Intelligence’ (p. 16), as the speaker of ‘The Preparative’ (p. 15) describes it. Such a condition shows that the ‘pure and serene’ (66) soul is ‘prepared for all felicity’ (41). Traherne’s definition of nakedness is, therefore, significantly different from Bradstreet’s, in that for his speaker the nude state is synonymous with innocence, and what is meant here is the naked body deprived of clothing. The nakedness of the soul (as an entity existing without the body) is also praised, as then the spirit is considered as ‘undefiled, simple, naked, pure’ (19). This also corresponds to the state in which the soul is covered with ethereal clothing. The substitution of the old clothing for the new might symbolize a rebirth of the soul. When dressed in the earthly gown, the soul is dominated by iniquity and exists in what might be called a dormant state. Once it has been woken, it breaks free and is reborn. The two dissimilar approaches, Bradstreet and Traherne’s, might be conditioned by gender. A woman displaying her desire for nudity risked tarnishing her reputation. Philip C. Almond has demonstrated that a woman with uncovered shoulders or breasts exposed to public view was thought to be promiscuous, since such a code of dress aroused the male imagination and, therefore, satisfied women’s lust.27 By contrast, a man, presenting nakedness as the ultimate goal in the process of transformation, would be

justified by their identification with ‘higher’ aims. Such nakedness would be interpreted as related to the spirit and intellect rather than the body.

Traherne’s speaker of ‘The Preparative’ (p. 15) further explores the naked soul that is believed to be transformed into a ‘Court of Residence’ (68), which is inhabited by ‘beauty, excellence, | And pleasure’ (67). God’s mansion, heaven, is believed to be ‘that high place’ (8), expensively ornamented where ‘all the work of those high rooms | Doth shine with beams of gold!’ (11-12). As is further revealed in ‘Aspiration’ (p. 148), in this paradise ‘The season is not changed’ (13), but constantly:

Both sun and moon are Bright,  
The Lamb of this fair city is  
That clear immortal Light  
Whose presence makes eternal day  
Which never ends in night. (14-18)

The only season is the spring, during which the shining sun, embodying Christ, enlivens everything, bringing about ‘all Enjoyment’ and ‘true Felicity’ (15-21), as it is revealed in ‘Of Contentment’ (p. 166). The poet suggests that thoughts might be helpful in achieving this state of chastity and happiness. What they dress themselves in influences spiritual well-being. The speaking voice of ‘Thoughts III’ (p. 115) proclaims that

A thought can clothe itself with all the treasures  
Of God, and be the greatest of His pleasures […]  
’Tis capable of perfection here,  
Of all His love and joy and glory there.  
It is the only beauty that doth shine,  
Most great, transcendent, heavenly, and divine.  
The very best or worst of things it is,  
The basis of all misery or bliss. (49, 60)

The author might imply that through directing one’s mind towards God, the ideal state of bliss might be reachable. According to OED’s definition, a thought’s capacity to ‘clothe itself’ means that it is able to ‘invest with a religious habit’. Therefore, on the one hand, the thoughts a human being produces are a powerful tool in uniting them with the Divine. However, on the other hand, thoughts focused on vain aspirations might bring unhappiness, since they drive the soul away from God. Through this the author shows his understanding of the ‘spiritual’ and ‘carnal’ minds. In the former case, its development will lead a person to

being placed in ‘A world of innocence’, described also as ‘Paradise’ (48) (in his other poem ‘Silence’, p. 40), where it is possible to see the Lord. The speaker of ‘The Vision’ (p. 21) is convinced that

To see the fountain is a blessed thing,  
It is to see the King  
Of Glory face to face: but yet the end,  
The glorious, wondrous end is more;  
And yet the fountain there we comprehend,  
The spring we there adore:  
For in the end the fountain best is shewn,  
As by effects the cause is known. (41-8)

The fountain is believed to be a source of life after death. This might be a reference to Christ’s death on the cross and his promise of the Day of Judgment, after which new life is believed to begin. This fountain, thus, symbolizes a rebirth, and this rebirth might also be owed to the fountain’s healing qualities, and so it might be viewed as a source of purification from the corruption of the physical world. Therefore, only privileged naked souls that are brave to abandon their worldly vestment are able to see it.

Similarly to Traherne, the anonymous author of *Eliza’s Babes* appears to be preoccupied with renouncing earthly existence in exchange for the celestial boundlessness. Her earthly part, her body, is described as ‘robes of earth’ (6) or a ‘darke mantle’ (7) through which she is able to see God, but the godly majesty is not clear. Her soul needs to be naked in order to achieve a heavenly status. This sinful cloak has to be substituted with ‘Robes of glory’ (5), provided by Christ, as the speaker of ‘My Satisfaction’ (p. 97) states. In the interim the soul becomes dishonourably naked, and the speaker of ‘My Robes’ (p. 75) claims that in such a form comes to the Redeemer, who covers her ‘shame’ (4). Traherne’s speaker, on the other hand, does not experience such a stage in his process of transformation. This might be connected with the generally accepted social convention that men should not be ashamed of their nakedness, at least, not to the same extent as women. In Eliza’s case, nakedness might signify her admitting to sin, as well as the punishment for it. Seventeenth-century culture considered nakedness as one of the ways to punish criminals for their offences indeed. The poet, therefore, positions herself as a sort of offender. She knows that this state is transitory though, and showing her remorse will reward her.

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When the act of dressing is accomplished, Eliza’s soul will be presented ‘In his bright Robes’ (9), and, as this is further shown in her ‘On Eccles. 9. 7.’, ‘being cloath’d in those garments thou needst not fear thou sholdst ever be found naked or unseemly drest, for thou shalt be gloriously inhabited, because God will make thy righteousness in him as clear as the light’ (p. 121). In ‘My Robes’ (p. 75) her speaker reveals that due to this process, Christ’s ‘beauty doth on me reflect’ (15), and as she proclaims: ‘I’m beautifull to thee [God]’ (16). The poet recognised Christ’s ownership of the clothing offered to her, and even though she entitles her poem ‘My Robes’, she is not able to inherit his beauty, but to mirror it. By accepting his gift, the speaker denies her identity and acquires a new divine identity. This means that Eliza steps into the wedding tradition. Wearing the same bright garments signifies entering into a union with Christ. This unity might be considered as matrimonial, since, Jesus, her husband, dominates his wife, Eliza, by imposing his attire on her. This shows her subordinate position in this relationship common for early-modern cultural expectations. The moment of clothing, thus, becomes a celebration of the lovers’ everlasting union. This nuptial tradition draws on the Old Testament, where Isaiah announces:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61. 10)

What God promises to Isaiah here, and to all people, are forgiveness, salvation, and instant heavenly bliss. Milian Lauritz Andreasen has argued that, ‘As the father, in the parable of the prodigal son, threw his robe over his son, so God throws his robe of righteousness over repentant sinners. This is what is called imputed righteousness’. 30 It is imputed, in that God imputes faith and thereby righteousness to people. Although people are dressed in his robes of righteousness, the robes do not reflect their nature, but God’s. This suggests that the robes of Christ might be interpreted as a kind of artificial layer. They cover the soul with

30 Milian Lauritz Andreasen, Isaiah the Gospel Prophet: A Preacher of Righteousness (New York: Herald, 2001), p. 384. The covenant people enter into with God guarantees his forgiveness and ‘robes of salvation’, and these God imputes to his people. This means that even though people can be dressed in God’s righteousness, it is still God’s not theirs. However, they have to be devoted and committed in their faith and conduct. This might allude to the Book of Romans 4. 18-22, where Abraham expresses his ardent belief in God’s promise to make him a father, in spite of him and his wife being aged. Finally, his wife becomes pregnant: ‘Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness’. 
righteousness, but without them the soul is still imperfect, and this is illustrated in the above discussion of Eliza’s transformation.

The celestial clothing symbolizes a wedding garment and the act of entering into the divine marriage. More applications of this marriage metaphor will be seen in the next chapter, but here the focus is on the meaning of the act of dressing itself. Isaiah, as well as Eliza, becomes God’s spouse. On the other hand, however, having been ceremoniously attired in this symbolic coronation robe, Eliza might also aim at equaling her position with other writers, and maybe even at erasing gender boundaries. Celestial clothing is the same for all believers regardless of sex, education, or social status. This is why in her ‘The Royal Priesthood’ the poet proudly proclaims that God will make all people ‘as Kings and Priests, Kings are men, and men are Kings; And souls have no sex’ (p. 133). The poet rejects gender divisions, and also reverses her social position, escaping the social establishment of female inferiority. Erica Longfellow has rightly observed that through the act of covering with the white robes of righteousness, the author’s purpose is to ‘demonstrate that her entire nature – and accountability for her actions – has been swallowed up in the glory of Christ’ and, as she argues further, ‘Eliza thus positions herself so that any criticism of her devotional activity becomes a criticism of her “husband”’. It might be assumed then that the robes of righteousness are transferred onto her book, making it flawless in the eyes of God, so they might, indeed, be perceived as a form of shield against criticism.

God, as a groom, cannot reject Eliza’s soul, in that she is perfect. As it is explained in ‘My Satisfaction’ (p. 97), these robes are only to be worn by ‘pure refined souls […] Living in regions free from care’ (8-9). This state of purity and innocence is achieved in Eliza’s Babes through Christ becoming a man. In ‘The Soules Agitation’ the speaker compares this act of turning Jesus into a human being with enlightenment to her soul. She says:

I might now behold my self, as clothed with thy self, for thou were pleas’d to cloath thy divine nature with my mortality; that my mortal nature might be made immortal, by being joyned to thy divinity. [...] I see my self cloath’d with the bright white robes of thy pure innocence; for thy knowest no sin. I now look on mysef sacred, and on this flesh as immortal[.] (p. 111)

Being attired in the ‘white and glistening’ garments of righteousness (p. 121) is a sign of liberation from the fetters of sin. Celestial clothing reflects Christ’s immortal nature, and

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therefore to some extent the soul while wearing his attire becomes like him. The acceptance of Christ’s garments also symbolizes the believers’ union with God. Eliza bends the idea of the ‘imputed righteousness’ though. No longer does she mirror Christ’s immortality, but while self-reflecting, she constantly repeats the subject and reflexive pronouns: ‘I’ and ‘myself’, and, as a result, recognizes her body as ‘sacred’ and ‘immortal’, adopting Christ’s immortal and holy nature. The Prophet’s divine robes, then, become a natural cover for her soul. This also shows the poet’s self-love, as she aims for, or perhaps even achieves, perfection. She thereby strengthens her authority and it might even be speculated that she retains her identity, in spite of her initially subaltern position in the relationship with God.

This act of taking off sinful clothes and putting on divine ones corresponds to a preparation or even purgation, resulting in entering God’s mansion or the ‘true Elision fields’ (11), as the speaker of ‘The Renowned King’ (p. 79) portrays it. Once invited inside, the soul’s transformation can finally be accomplished by drinking ‘desired water’ from a ‘blessed fountain of life’ (p. 120). This, as the speaker proclaims, ‘purge[s] me clean from my actual and original pollutions so that my God accepts my works, and I goe with confidence to eat my bread and drinke my wine with a merry heart’ (p. 120). This feast might symbolize the act of Eucharist, which takes place in God’s city, Zion, where

The streets, are of the purest mold,
Exceeding farr, the brightest gold;
And from God’s glorious Throne doth spring
A river that sweet pleasures bring,
Adorn’d with many a goodly tree,
Which fresh and flourishing ever bee.
Nor fruitless doe their trees appear,
But pleasant fruit yield all the year.
No change, doth in this place appear,
No scorching heat, nor cold is here. (27,40)

‘The Triumph’ (p. 64) depicts heaven as the biblical paradise, Eden. It is somewhat different from the splendour of the Puritan heaven Bradstreet offers, since this place of perfect balance and lavishness is dominated by blooming nature, and the springtime lasts all year long. In order to emphasize the worth of this idyll offering a new life, the poet visualises ‘Saphire, Diamond, Ruby’ (19) and ‘other Gems’ (21) ornamenting it.

However, most importantly, when staying in the garden, the soul is elevated to the status of the Virgin Mary, whose image entails a detailed description of her garment. The Virgin is donned
In long white Robes, so pure and clear,
Like Orient Pearl she doth appear.
And on her head, a Crown more bright,
Than is the sun here in our sight.
The pure white Lilly, at her feet,
And pleasant rose there strive to meet;
For all their beauty and their grace,
Is from reflexion of her face.
These lovely flowers doe never fade,
But for eternity were made. (45-54)

Not only is the Virgin presented as a treasure of the garden, but also the source of exceptional spiritual beauty. She is compared to a precious and rare jewel; a queen who is positioned above all the mortals. Eliza shows interest in the aesthetic image of the Virgin, and therefore might support the ceremonialists’ approach to worship. By adding the lily to the image, the poet emphasises Mary’s chastity and innocence, and the ‘pleasant rose’ stresses her holiness as well as tameness and peacefulness. The image of the Virgin is everlasting and this becomes the ultimate aim for Eliza’s Babes too, which is a distinctive feature of her volume. The author reveals her desire to be immortalized not only by elevating her status to that of Christ’s mother, but also by her book constituting a permanent mark in literary history. Seeing that the sanctity of the Virgin Mary, as a religious figure, was devalued in Protestantism, Eliza’s presentation of her reveals the poet’s high church Anglican or possibly Catholic position. This extract also shows the author’s familiarity with the conventions of Petrarchan love poetry. Her purity and innocence are contrasted with the redness of the rose, which acts as a profane emblem. The perfection of the balanced image of the Virgin is reflected in the regular iambic tetrameter and ideally rhyming couplets. Whereas the ‘white robes’ signify the stainlessness of the soul, the red rose becomes a symbol of the act of consummation, spiritual intercourse, which immortalizes her soul (images also used in Petrarchan poetry). ³² This might refer to the idea of the mystical marriage Eliza is entering into with Christ, and specifically it might be alluding to the wedding night. The description of the garment of the Virgin might imply that the poet herself would like to be attired in such a spectacular gown.

In this blissful state Eliza’s ‘soul in fair bright Robes doth shine’ (7), and the poet is equipped with the ability to encourage the act of undressing and to offer clothing, in that when the speaking voice addresses her muse in her ‘The Invocation’, she says:

³² See, for example, William Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 130’.
Come Sacred Muse to mee this day,
And ever here, make you a stay
Within the closet of my brest;
For I with thee, do finde great rest. (1-4)

Her muse is to enliven devotional passion. The poet, therefore, offers her a room that is close to her heart, emphasising her passionate love towards God, who made her a ‘Prophet’ (5), as Eliza’s speaker claims in ‘My Second Part’ (p. 99). This means that her role is to give out her spiritual clothes to unbelievers. This muse, then, might be considered a divine means to immortality and everlastingness. It is different from the muse of Petrarchan sonnets, in that not only does it eternalize its authors’ names, but it also constitutes a link between the soul and the Divine.

The concepts of nakedness and wedding robes discussed in Eliza’s Babes have much in common with Elizabeth Major’s perception of them expressed in her Honey on the Rod. Similarly to Eliza’s speaker, Major’s Soul, one of the two interlocutors, yearns to be clothed in bright spiritual garments. Having got rid of its earthly clothing, the Soul comes naked to Christ begging him to

cloathe me with thy rich robes of righteousness, and to cleanse my blood that is not yet cleansed; and with thy sacred oyl to cleanse sins filthy rust, and to make fair that image of thine that is deformed, nay Lord, defaced through sin. (p. 55)

For Major to become worthy of divine clothing, the process of purgation needs to take place. Only when one is free from all iniquities does the image of God become clear and, to some extent, comprehensible. Similarly to Eliza and Bradstreet, Major’s speaker stands naked in front of God to indicate the rejection of earthly clothing and to show remorse for her sinful conduct. This is why the act of dressing becomes a metaphor not only for purity and readiness to accept God’s rules, but also a symbol of entering into divine union with him.

This process of transformation, beginning with the rejection of earthly clothing in order to become naked, and subsequently clothed in celestial robes, also signifies forgetting the past and beginning a new life. The time to come will be spent in the spiritual richness of God’s mansion, described as a ‘field laden with the blessing of God’ and ‘a garden richly deckt with natures beauty’ (p. 72), where the newly spotless soul will experience infinite and imperishable delight. Major explains:
for immediately great and innumerable fruits did spring up; divers pleasant fruits for
taste, and flowers unchangeable colour to delight the sight, and odours of a most
wonderful sweetness to refresh the smell: Neither the colour nor scent of earth is
either delightful and pleasing, yet to see that by the powers and wisdom of God it
should produce such variety of delightful and useful things, things so much differing
from their mother earth, both in beauty and sweetness, as is admirable to consider of
[...] What sweetness, what beauty, what glory is in his treasury, for those that love him
and keep his Commandments[.] (pp. 72-3)

The writer associates celestial bliss with the time of spring, when the sun makes flowers
bloom and nature is enlivened. This is why according to Major, God’s mansion is not situated
in an astounding castle decorated with splendour. She believes instead that God plants his
seeds in souls, which with a ‘root hid within the bowels of earth’, waits for ‘the appointment
time that it must break forth and flourish again; and yet these to have such sweetness, such
beautiful clothing [...] like one of the lilies of the field’ (p. 72). The poet’s Soul, therefore,
turns to God, saying:

O that these truths that you have gathered out of the Garden of holy Writ, and presen
ted to me, might be as so many selected Flowers, not carelessly perused, and the practice
not regarded, but bond up and tyed together with the golden chain of faith; Lord, plant
them in my heart, that barren soil: yet since my forfeiture of it, ’tis thy own by
purchase, and a plot on which thou hast bestowed much labor[.] (p. 159)

The Soul desires to be ‘fruitful’, not ‘barren’ (pp. 123-4), and hence it prays for the celestial
seed to be placed in it so that it can consider itself as a purchased good. When the time of
blooming comes it will flourish and, beautifully attired, be included in God’s garden. These
robes of righteousness, thus, are to be discovered and earned by the soul, provided that God
has allowed this, and this means that it is God who selects people in whom to plant his seeds
of salvation. The language of legality, such as ‘forfeiture’ and ‘purchase’, implies that God
acts justly and in accordance with the commonly recognised law. Through this thinking,
Major presents her belief in predestination and might be considered an adherent of Calvinism.

This idea of covering nakedness has its origin in the Old Testament, where it is stated
that God covered the nakedness of Jerusalem. 33 This act symbolizes Jerusalem entering into a
strict union with the Almighty, becoming his belonging. 34 In the same way Lord has covered
Major’s nakedness. However, Ezekiel’s chapter further reveals that after having obligated to

33 See chapter 1 in the thesis, p. 27.
34 Ezekiel 16. 8: Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I
spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea I sware unto thee, and entered into covenant with
thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becomes mine.
become God’s commodity, Jerusalem strayed into that path of iniquity and lasciviousness, and God witnessed this:

When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. (Joshua 7. 21)

This shows that the author associates immorality with excessive wealth and might be expressing her contempt of the rich. Nevertheless, Major is concerned about this occurring to her too. In her ‘The Author’s Beliefs’, although being equipped with will to sin, the poet implies that evil has an overwhelming power:

For I confess a will have, ’tis true,  
But ’tis for evil, no good that can do:  
When I would good, then evil shews his face,  
The good I leave, the evil I imbrace. (p. 198)

The poet personifies the ‘evil’ that is positioned as an instigator, occasionally managing to win her over. This temptation to sin is difficult to fight, but Major reminds herself repeatedly that the final reward, a celestial garment, is worth the effort. Consolation convinces her Soul that

Because his robes are partly-coloured too,  
Variety of grace make them appear,  
Like raiment of wrought-work the Queen did wear:  
I tell thee, O my soul, none can express  
The glorious beauty of this robe of his;  
How cure and cloth, and all from him is free;  
Believe and wait, is all that’s done by thee. (p. 198)

Such virtues as patience, commitment, and faith are the tools to become eternally clothed and wedded to the Almighty. Hence I agree with Patricia Demers who has argued that in Major’s case, ‘The apparel of grace releases an expressive sense of expectancy from the willing, patient, faithful recipient’.35 This also indicates that even though Major is associated with Puritanism, she might have supported the aesthetic approach to religious art. The apparel’s attractiveness and sophistication as well as its parity with the royal are used to seduce unbelievers. Its exceptionality is skilfully emphasised by alliteration, such as ‘cure and cloth’

35 Patricia Demers, “‘I Could Wish My Tongue Were as the Pen of a Ready Writer”: The Fragility of Hope in Elizabeth Major’s Honey on the Rod’, Bunyan Studies, 17 (1997), 38-48 (p. 44).
or ‘wrought-work’, and repetition of various sounds, as in ‘grace’ and ‘raiment’, and also sibilance: ‘soul’, ‘express’, ‘glorious’, ‘this’, and ‘his’. This royal ‘raiment of wrought-work’ refers to the gown of the Virgin Mary though, since Major alludes here to Psalm 45, presenting the Virgin as ‘the queen in gold Ophir’. As it is explained further, every daughter of God ‘is all glorious within: her clothing is all wrought gold’ (Psalm 45. 13). The author implicitly identifies every attired soul with the celestial queen. Although Major is considered to have Puritan affiliations, she indirectly alludes to the Virgin Mary. This might mean that she can be aligned with a general seventeenth-century Protestant trend that actively sought an alternative figure of the Virgin. Even though the Virgin Mary’s celestial garment has a spiritual dimension, its attractiveness appears to reflect the sparkling accessories of earthly clothes that were probably meant to appeal to the imagination of unbelievers.

Gertrude More, a catholic nun, offers a similar approach to the celestial raiment. Her soul also needs to transform in order to be admitted to God’s mansion. Her flesh, in a similar way to Major and other writers, is considered a prison for her soul, and only after abandoning it can she direct her efforts to gain the celestial raiment. In The Holy Exercises of a Divine Lover, composed of many devotions and meditations, she says: ‘my soule disporting, out of the Prison of my bodie, I may be vested with thy merits. Therefore, firstly the poet begs God: ‘Strippe my hart naked I beseech thee from all indecent cogitations’ (p. 163). The word ‘strip’ occurs in the Bible describing an act of violation in order to expose a given person. For instance, Hosea decides to punish his unfaithful wife by her public exposure: ‘Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that shee was borne, and make her as a wildernesse, and set her like a drie land, and slay her with thirst’ (Hosea 2. 3). This stage is, thus, to show her acknowledgement and shame of her sinful nature as well as humble acceptance of God’s will to abandon any earthly connections. It is to be accompanied by wailing through which deep remorse is expressed. More thereby turns to God asking him to ‘give to my head water, and to mine eyes a fountain of Tearse that I maye bewaile both day and night my sinnes and ingratitude towards God my creator’ (p. 56). This deep repentance alludes to the figure of Mary Magdalene (see chapter 2), who after confessing her sins was redeemed. This stage of

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36 Psalm 45 portrays God as a monarch and the Virgin Mary as a queen of the heavenly mansion; the attired inhabitants of their mansion are presented as their children: ‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever an ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is the right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrth, and aloes, and cassia, out of their ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. King’s daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold Ophir’ (Psalm 45. 6-9).


38 Other examples: 1 Samuel 31. 8, 1 Chronicles 10. 8, Isaiah 32. 11, and Ezekiel 16. 39.
metaphorical purification is associated with the act of Eucharist. As More’s *Confessiones Amantis* express, the author believes that if ‘one drop [...] had been sufficient to have redeemed a thousands worlds’, she can be forgiven as well.\(^{39}\) Hence when Christ sprinkles her with his ‘pretious blood’, she ‘shall be made cleane [...] be made whiter then snow’ (p. 56). The Eucharist thus conditions More’s entrance into God’s house, when she would be able to live ‘amongst the Lillies of the Chastitie’ (p. 61). This purity is demonstrated by the act of her donning the ‘robe of perfect brightness’ (p. 267). This robe symbolizes her entrance into matrimonial union with Christ. It does not, however, reflect her but Christ’s ‘merits’ (p. 267). Similarly to Eliza, More follows here the idea of imputed righteousness, which assumes that the soul cannot acquire divine qualities; it can only reflect them when wearing the celestial garment. This state allows the soul to appear dressed beautifully for the meeting with the Almighty. The poet says: ‘Simplify my soul that it may return to thee; adorn me with thine own merits, that I may not appear naked of good before thee, and supply my defect in prasing and loving thee’ (p. 182). For More, nakedness is associated with the state of shame rather than innocence.

Henry Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* also raises the issue of clothing, and, similarly to More and other writers, he differentiates between earthly clothes, nakedness, and celestial robes. In order to earn a noble, heavenly garment, Vaughan shows that one needs to get rid of earthly attire, since ‘Who will ascend, must be undrest’ (6). His ‘Ascension Hymn’ (p. 106) further reveals the author’s anti-materialistic approach, when his speaker refers to ‘Dust and Clay | Mans ancient wear!’ (1-2). This might be a biblical reference to the book of Genesis which reads: ‘For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’ (3. 19). On the other hand, this might also allude to the act of corruption that took place in the biblical garden, where, as a result of Adam and Eve’s shame that was caused by disobedience to God, the biblical couple clothed themselves to cover their nakedness, which was a symbol of their innocence and intimacy with the Almighty. As Jonathan F. S. Post argues, ‘clothing in Vaughan is explicitly associated with human mortality [...]’, and as such, it serves as a symbol for bodily corruption suffered by mankind after the fall’.\(^{40}\) Hence the only clothing that is praised and celebrated by the poet is a robe belonging to Christ. Vaughan understands the body as a corrupting factor for the soul rather than worshiping the body as God’s gift. It might thereby


be speculated that even though a human being, clothed in the body, might be considered to be in a natural state, the soul becomes defiled by the corrupting power of the flesh.

What is unconventional in Vaughan’s discussion of encasement are his allusions to the bloody clothing of Christ during the crucifixion. His speaker proclaims that earthly, filthy garments should be abandoned, in that they are ‘nothing worth’ (29), and are to be substituted by ethereal attire on Judgement Day. As ‘Ascension Hymn’ (p. 106) shows,

Then comes he!
Whose mighty light
Made his clothes be
Like Heav’n, all bright;
The fuller, whose pure blood did flow
To make stained man more white than snow. (31-6)

Vaughan’s imagination of Christ’s garment as shining robes made of celestial light is conventional as opposed to the unusual metaphor of giving away celestial clothing. Christ’s blood is pictured as staining the ordinary man. This paradox of staining, meaning offering the robes of righteousness, is a result of the noble colour of the blood (purple). The colour symbolizes chastity and purity and takes on connotations of whiteness. Nonetheless, Christ’s robes are portrayed as simple, white, and shining. This simplicity is associated with probity, sinlessness, and virtue. By contrast, elaborately ornamented clothing is connected with lecherousness, iniquity, lust, and excessive pride. ‘The Ornament’ (p. 134) describes detestable, vainglorious, greedy, and wealthy men, who are interested in the most recent fashions. They purchase clothes to show their supremacy and look attractive. The speaker accuses them that

Serious they seemed and bought up all
The last modes of pride and lust,
Although the first must surely fall,
And the last is most loathsome dust. (5-8)

Both the trinkets and the act of buying itself signify vanity. Vaughan might allude here to sumptuary legislation, because he appears to juxtapose two types of clothing. On the one hand, he promotes the idea of simple clothing as divinely aspired and, on the other, sumptuous gowns are considered to be profane. The semantically alternating rhyme emphasises the theme of doom. ‘All’ people, possessing innumerable earthly baubles, are destined to ‘fall’, and their ‘lust’ is no more valuable than ‘dust’. Post has argued that for the
poet ‘beauty is a matter of spiritual value only: the word appears most often in conjunction with the religious experience that left the deepest imprint on him – religious conversion or spiritual regeneration the “turned” life’. Consequently, Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* emphasises the importance of the simplicity of clothing, and by this the volume might reject the sumptuary laws; in the eyes of the heavenly majesty, the earthly code of dressing is disregarded, in that everybody, regardless of social status, is equally dressed. It might also be speculated that the author links the corruption of the church, as well as its believers, with spending money on expensive clothing. By contrast, those who dress humbly show that they are the most spiritually wealthy instead, and that cannot be compared with any earthly goods. This again might be modelled on the puritan rejection of ceremonies. A reversal of socially established convention takes place. No longer do the wealthy occupy the top of the ‘spiritual ladder’, but are pushed down to its bottom.

The act of clothing might also signify the journey the speaker has embarked on in order to reach God’s mansion, which is portrayed as a blooming garden. When the journey is accomplished, people are awarded the appellation of ‘Prophets, and friends of God’ (p. 8). As it is described in ‘Regeneration’ (p. 3), the speaker completed his journey and reached the spiritual abode, where

The unthrift sun shot vital gold
A thousand pieces,
And heaven its azure has unfold
Chequered with snowy fleeces,
The air was all in spice
And every bush
A garland wore; thus fed my Eyes
But all the ear lay hush. (41-8)

The author hyperbolizes the poetical vision of a picturesque heaven. This place of abundance arouses all his senses: smell, hearing, and sight. The final destination for the clothed soul appears to adapt the qualities of the biblical garden from Canticles. This is especially evident, when the speaker hears ‘A rushing wind’ (70), constantly increasing, but impossible to locate. Yet this garden also becomes a form of a spiritual haven, a kind of fortress, insofar as ‘There above noise, and a danger | Sweat peace fits crown’d with smiles’ (5-6), which brings ‘ease’ (16). The speaker of ‘Peace’ (p. 39), therefore, by personifying ‘Peace’ as the King of this garden, makes an allusion to Christ, and this is further confirmed by describing him as ‘The

41 Post, ‘Civil War Cleavage’, p. 34.
Rose that cannot wither’ (15). The place in this garden can be secured only by one, ‘who never changes, | Thy God thy life, thy Cure’ (19). Under the cover of a garden and a rose that needs to be protected by God, Vaughan is alluding here to the act of the crucifixion. According to the Bible, only the Almighty could prevent this bloodshed from happening and so Jesus had prayed to the Almighty in Gethsemane before the day of crucifixion: ‘O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt’ (Matthew 26. 39). This leads to a conclusion that Vaughan’s abode is to be inhabited by those also participating in the Eucharist.

Similarly to Major, as an inhabitant of the spiritual garden, Vaughan’s speaker uses simile to position himself as one of the flowers, blooming since the time of the transformation. The speaker of ‘Mount of Olives’ (p. 89) proclaims that

fed by thee (God), who dost all beings nourish,
My withered leafs again look green and flourish,
I shine and shelter underneath thy wing. (21-3)

By this the speaker expresses his affiliation with Christ. However, before this happens, he declares that he had been ‘bleak, bare in body as in mind, | And was blow’n through by ev’ry storm and wind’ (13-14). In this case, nakedness is linked with being disconnected from the Divine. This might indicate the middle stage of the transformation process, the purification. The speaker has got rid of the earthly mantle and is waiting naked to be accepted as an inhabitant of God’s mansion. Similarly to other poets discussed above, nudity, therefore, might signify his shame and remorse for his corrupted nature. On the other hand, however, by this state the speaking voice might also express his religious uncertainties that arose as a consequence of abandonment of his former system of beliefs, and his waiting might imply that it is God, who chooses to invite one into his garden. His transformation seems to be only partial at this stage, but his doubts will gradually be eroded. Silex Scintillans was indeed written after the author’s conversion to Anglicanism and doubts, concomitant of the process, are most likely reflected in the volume.

One more perspective might be drawn on ‘Vanity of Spirit’ (p. 26), which offers a description of the soul’s characteristics. Since the speaker says ‘I left my Cell’ (1), he might be identified as a naked spirit who is deprived of the body. The soul is very curious by nature and this curiosity motivates it to understand how the world functions so he decides to talk to nature about this. The speaker
summoned nature: pierced through all her store,
Broke up some seals, which none had touched before
   Her womb, her bosom, and her head
Where all her secrets lay a bed. (9-12)

By this Vaughan presents the soul as an uninvited inspector and impatient intruder. As West puts it, the soul ‘renounces as hubris the effort to peer into heaven’. However, the diction, such as ‘pierced’, ‘touched’, ‘womb’, ‘bosom’, and ‘bed’, implies a metaphorical rape. The spirit ruthlessly proceeds to penetrate the female nature, maybe even to torture her in order to obtain the answers. Not only is it driven by the desire of knowledge and comprehension of the world, but also by the need to understand the Divine. Although it gets very close to solving the ‘mystery’ (27), it does not succeed, as its light showing the way is put out. Finally, the desperate spirit wants to ‘disapparell, and to buy | But one half glaunce, most gladly dye’ (33-4). Even though the soul is already naked, as without the outer layer of flesh, the traces of the original sin prevent him from entering the garden; it is not feasible without the assistance of God. This situation reflects the biblical couple, Adam and Eve, who also acted out of curiosity and were punished with a lifetime of hardship. The only way back to paradise is to leave clothes behind and stand naked before the merciful Almighty, waiting for his sign of acceptance. The vain spirit, though free from the corruption of the body, might mirror the speaker’s state of doubts and hesitations. The soul is extremely determined to have a brief look at God, as then it can let the body die happily. If the soul is privileged to see the godly majesty, it might be able to earn salvation. In this case, the corrupted spirit is even inclined to ‘buy’ it, should the situation be favourable. Vaughan’s portrayal of the soul as an investigator significantly differs from women’s presentation of a passive spirit. Whereas Vaughan’s soul is inquisitive and wants to comprehend the idea of God, the women’s presentations of their souls imply their acceptance of the incomprehensibility of the Almighty without questioning his authority. The women writers, thus, adopt a passive approach towards God’s doctrine, whereas the male writers actively attempt to understand the complexity of God as entity. The two attitudes towards God might be a result of the gender conventions: men were considered as active, whereas women were naturally determined as passive.

Richard Crashaw echoes Vaughan’s allusions to the bloody garment of the crucified Christ. The images of clothing he offers become very graphic. Although *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652) does not offer a description of the speaker’s spiritual clothing, it details the author’s perception of Christ’s noble garment. This is associated with the act of crucifixion, during which the ‘naked’ Lord was pierced with a spear ‘Opening the purple wardrobe’ (p. 65). According to the speaker of ‘On our Crucified Lord, Naked and Bloody’, Christ’s blood symbolizes spiritual clothing (p. 30).\(^{43}\) Since the blood is considered to be noble, instead of red it is described as ‘purple’ (4). No clothing is worthy of Jesus other than his ‘own blood’ (6), as it is royal. Richard Rambuss has argued that ‘Crashaw directs us to envision Christ’s body as a “purple wardrobe”, a kind of royal clothes closet, one that has been thrown open for the removal of a viscid robe of blood’.\(^{44}\) There might be, however, another perspective on the matter of this noble blood. According to Crashaw’s speaker, the Lord wants to share it with his followers. As the speaker of ‘Prayer: An Ode, which Was Prefixed to a Little Prayer-Book Giuin to a Young Gentlewoman’ (p. 61) assures, through the act of Eucharist his ‘immortal dressing’ (42) is offered to the ‘worthy souls whose wise embraces | Store up themselves for HIM’ (43-4). This means that Christ offers himself (body and blood), in the form of a ‘purple’ garment, to his adherents. The clothing represents the faith he gives away to upright believers. By contrast, in the English translation of his Latin poem, ‘In vulnera Dei pendentis’ (‘On the Wounds of God Hanging’), Christ’s blood issuing from his ‘head, hands [and] feet’, is presented as ‘the purple fountain’, from which believers should drink the nectar of everlastingness.\(^{45}\) Crashaw’s speaker himself, intoxicated by the act of crucifixion, desires to drink Christ’s blood. ‘Sancta Maria Dolorum’ (p. 189) reads:

\begin{quote}
O let me suck the wine  
So long of this chaste vine  
Till drunk of the dear wounds, I be  
A lost Thin [ing] to the world, as it to me. (101-4)
\end{quote}

\(^{43}\) The title included in the 1652 version is as follows: ‘Upon the Body of Our Blessed Lord, Naked and Bloody’, in *Carmen Deonostro, The Decent Hymns Sacred Poems, Collected, Corrected, Augmented, Most Humbly Presented: To my Lady the Countesse of Denbigh by her Most Devoted Servant R. C. In Heaty Acknowledgement of his Immortall Obligation to her Goodness and Charity* (Paris: Peter Targa, 1652), p. 65.


\(^{45}\) Rambuss, *Closet of Devotions*, p. 31.
No more is blood imagined as a vestment, covering Jesus’s naked body, but as pure wine offered for drinking. This shows the Catholic belief in the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament, as opposed to the Calvinistic, symbolic approach.46

According to Rambuss, the image of the easily penetrable Christ, in which all wounds are considered orifices, is eroticised. He argues that the excessive number of orifices makes the body easily penetrable, and therefore invites others to penetrate them.47 However, on the other hand, Maureen Sabine has argued that Crashaw’s inspiration with rivers of blood, expecting sucking, comes from

the ascetic practices of late medieval women mystics and the men who wrote of their divine encounters. Their piety is replete with rituals that modern readers are likely to find as morbid as anything in Crashaw’s devotional verse. These women did not refrain from putting their mouths to purifying sores or sucking suppurating breasts, drinking pus and the scabby water with which lepers had been washed, eating lice, and using their effluvia as holy water to cleanse and heal others.48

Whereas this theory might be very probable, his yearning might also allude to the Eucharist, during which wine changes mystically into Christ’s blood. By sharing his blood with his followers, Christ offers immortality and imminent blessing. Regardless of the interpretation, Crashaw discusses the tragic occurrence of the Lord’s death in order to redeem people. This is why the metaphors of blood being both a garment and wine convey an explicit idea of Christ giving himself away. The metaphors are graphic, and so they help to visualise the act of Eucharist that is an invisible and mystical process. Hence, the bloody encasement becomes a means to envisage the believer’s concealed inner perceptions.

Nevertheless, the royal clothes are not always perceived as bloody. Similarly to Vaughan and other writers in this chapter, after the Resurrection, Crashaw imagines the divine clothing as a ‘glittering robe’ (p. 28), gorgeously ornamented with ‘gemmes’ (p. 18). The poet imagines that this image of ‘wealthy dresses’ (p. 18) suits Christ’s royal status, exposing his seductiveness in order to attract unbelievers. As it is explained further in ‘In

46 Guibbory, Ceremony and Community, p. 21.
47 In the first chapter of his Closet Devotions, Richard Rambuss discusses the body of the crucified Christ as eroticized by Crashaw and other poets (pp. 1-9).
Praise of Lessius’s Rule of Health’ (p. 127) the divine garment is for a man, whose ‘sober soul’ knows

How to wear her garment well.
Her garments, that upon her sit
As garments should doe, close and fit;
A well-clothed soul; that’s not oppres’d
Nor choked with what she should be dress’d.
A soul sheathed in a crystal shrine […]
Through which all her bright features shine? (20, 6)49

Unlike all the other devotional writers discussed so far, the author positions the soul as a woman in this poem. The woman cannot be suppressed, as she will not be able to display her virtues. The importance of this is emphasised by numerous instances of sibilance. As is later revealed, the female soul embodies ‘the blushing bride’ (30) of Christ, but, bearing in mind his eager support for pious women, Crashaw might also be showing his disregard of women’s suppression. Here that meant the social denial of them freely demonstrating their devotional passion by public preaching. This extract indicates that the true believing soul will not be surprised or discouraged by the consequences of following Christ. She will make sacrifices, such as rejecting lavish clothes, so reforming her immoral conduct, and will bear all inconveniences patiently, happily, and willingly, appreciating celestial bliss. Then her garment will be comparable with royal clothes, and her virtues will become glittering ornaments.

By contrast, An Collins’s interpretation of the divine gown reveals some irremovable stains on it. Divine Songs and Meditacions discuss the celestial attire rather implicitly. For An Collins beauty is an internal quality, relating to the spirit, which is created in the image of the Holy Trinity, and, as a consequence, described as ‘fair and bright’ (275). ‘The Discourse’ (p. 16) further highlights the appearance of the soul that like

Right Orient and Illustrious to appear,
To his omniscient eye and pure sight,
Who doth the inward Purity delight,
Lost all her beauty, once so excellent,
As soon as unto sin she did consent. (276-80)

49 The title from the 1652 edition is as follows: ‘Temperance: Of the Cheap Physitian upon the Translation of Lessivs’.
Initially the metaphorical attire of the soul was spotless. However, when in contact with sin, spiritual purity and beauty have been diminished. This corresponds to the celestial garments stained with the original sin. As the poet explains,

This is transgrest by lust, and mocion vain
Though we thereto give no consent at all,
As the rebellion of the flesh, or stain
And blot, we have by sinne Originall,
Corruption of our nature we it call[.] (470-4)

Collins’s speaker proclaims that just as the marks on the robes of righteousness are unavoidable and uncontrollable, so is the original sin. This is related to the lust of the body that constitutes the temptation to iniquity. In ‘Another Song’ (p. 59) Collins compares this corruption to a menstrual cloth:

Because the Rose a leafe or two hath lost,
And this the Weed of all his parts can boast;
Or else as if a monstrous Clout should be
Prefer’d before the purest Lawn to see,
Because the Lawn hath spots and this the Clout
Is equally polluted throughout. (19-24)

The simile that Collins offers conveys intense feelings of detestation, insofar as in the early-modern world ‘menstruation was considered a disease, a monthly sickness or illness’.50 Patricia Crawford elucidates the meanings of the noble and menstrual blood:

Blood had powerful symbolic meanings as both sacrifice and pollutant. When blood was shed, and crossed the margins of the body, its power depended on the context. The sacrificial blood that Christ shed on the cross could save. Similarly, the blood of Charles I shed on the scaffold was believed to have healing power, and many in the watching crowd struggled for drops of his blood on their handkerchiefs. [...] Although a woman’s monthly shedding of blood of her menstrual blood was widely believed to be necessary for her health, the blood itself could endanger men and children.51

These miscellaneous interpretations of blood were again based on the Bible. Leviticus warns against a menstruating woman who is considered unclean, profane, and defiled, thus, is to be kept separately from ‘the household, the tabernacle, and any holy thing’ for seven days (Leviticus 15. 20). This was partly the reason why women were perceived as inferior and subordinate, and that belief was widely practised by society.

This conviction was also supported by the physiology of women’s bodies. It was assumed that the monthly release of blood was caused by a ‘plethora’, in that women were unable to use all the blood produced by the food that they have digested. By contrast, men did not have such a problem. Their bodies were thought to be hotter and dryer, as opposed to the coldness and moistness of female bodies. This was a contributing factor to why men were believed to be dominant, and women inferior. This situation was a reason why Collins pictures sin as a ‘menstrual clout’. Sara Read has argued that

In dealing with her complicated feelings about her amenorrhea, Collins taps into the familiar biblical image linking menstrual blood with pollution and filth. Her dress (metaphorically, her conscience and soul) may have a few marks on it, because man’s fallen state means no one can be without sin, but this is no way as bad as the pollution on a menstrual cloth.

Collins’s illness (lack of menstrual blood) thereby positions her as innocent and also explains why she sides with masculine attitudes towards menstrual cloths. As Sarah Skwire has rightly observed, the poet draws attention to the fact that

\[
to\ \text{condemn\ a\ godly\ person,\ soul\ and\ all,\ because\ of\ an\ obvious\ physical\ defect\ is\ as\ senseless\ as\ preferring\ a\ perfect\ weed\ to\ a\ damaged\ rose\ or\ preferring\ a\ ‘monstrous\ Clout’\ that\ is\ stained\ all\ over\ to\ a\ patterned,\ but\ otherwise\ pure\ piece\ of\ fabric.}\]

It might be the case that Collins, considering herself a noble flower, a rose, finds comfort and consolation in the proclamation of her innocence during her struggle with the disease. This inverted position gives her the advantage of flawlessness.

The situation Collins puts herself in might be further speculated on in terms of female mediocrity. Seeing that menstruation was associated with the inferiority of women’s bodies and, as a result, with their subordination, Collins might have perceived its lack as a sign of her superiority over other women too. Crawford has indeed debated that

Menstruation served as a reminder of the axiom that women had inferior bodies – an axiom that did not change during the century. It was immaterial whether menstruation was a sign and consequence of their inferiority, or a cause of it. (p. 37)

Being aware of this relation, in ‘Another Song’ (p. 55) the poet declares that she is

52 Crawford, Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England, p. 22,
Apt to produce a fruit most rare,  
That is not common with every woman  
That fruitfull are. (28-30)

Collins proclaims that she is able to produce poetry that was of outstanding quality. Her supreme abilities are assigned to her amenorrhea. Accordingly, due to her illness, Collins both inverts her image to pious and innocent, and escapes her gender position, establishing herself above all other women.

However, the image of the ‘monstrous Clout’, which proves irrelevant to the poet’s situation, is not only used in reference to the original sin, blamed for ruining the perfection of the divine garment but also to greedy people,

Who no degree in worth can lower fall  
Prefer’d before the Verteous whom they taunt  
Onley because of some apparent want[.] (14-16)

The polluted outfit is linked with the wealthy, who are said to parade around the towns in expensive clothing. The Bible clearly indicates that excessive affluence leads to profanity, and one should ‘cast them away as a menstruous cloth’ (Isaiah 30. 22). The speaker of ‘The Song Demonstrating the Vanities of Earthly Things’ (p. 41) specifically condemns expensively ornamented clothing by saying:

They that delight in costly attire,  
If they can compass the thing they desire,  
Have only obtained, what sin first procured,  
And many to folly are thereby allure. (17-20)

Collins might be alluding here yet again to the original sin committed by the biblical couple in the Garden of Eden. It might be implied that not only can yearning for knowledge have disastrous consequences, but also a coveting of the forbidden or inaccessible would lead to straying from the path of righteousness. For the poet all the above are a sign of vanity that is linked with longing for earthly pleasures (associated with the flesh) and this, in turn, corresponds to the lack of spiritual development. Nonetheless, as a ‘blot’ and ‘stain’, resulting from the original sin and ruining the robes of righteousness, are assigned to both Adam and Eve equally; neither a woman nor a man is singled out for blame. ‘The Discourse’ (p. 16) reads that

As all men in the state of nature be,
And have been ever since mans wofull fall,
Who was created first, from bondage free,
Untill by sin he thrust himself in thrall;
By whose transgression we were stained all. (267-71)

All humanity suffers because of their disobedience to God. Her suffering, therefore, reflects on the state of others and as such becomes exemplary. By equalling her situation with that of others, Collins rebuilds her identity as a member of seventeenth-century society and also becomes a social mentor, in that she shows how to regain a respectable social position.

By demonstrating her disgust towards elaborately ornamented and costly garments, Collins shows her anti-materialistic approach, and also implies that simplicity of clothing is preferred, since it is associated with virtue. Her idea of this kind of garment might be derived from the Bible, where the apostle Timothy preaches that for praying, women should ‘adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array’ (Timothy 2. 8). Accordingly, what the speaking voice of ‘The Third Meditacion’ (p. 77) is proposing is to ‘put the Garment of Salvacion on, | With cheerfullnesse, Gods blessings entertain’ (59), and to forget about the earth and its vain pleasures. Then the soul can aim for perfection and becomes ‘as pure as the Sun’ (108). ‘With that great Blessedness, | Imputed Righteousness’ (110-11) the soul is positioned in a metaphorical divine garden, or rather it represents this garden. In ‘A Song Shewing the Mercies of God to His People, by Interlacing Cordiall Comforts with Fatherly Chastiments’ (p. 35) the speaking voice declares that

when the Son of Righteouenesse clear
Shall make Summer with us, our spirits to chear,
Warming our hearts with the sense of his favour,
Then must our flowers of piety favour,
And then the fruits of righteousness
We to the glory of God must expresse. (15-20)

This implies that the spiritual garden is able to bloom due to the soul’s piety. Nevertheless, in order to be able to experience these blissful surroundings, Christ needs to warm them with his celestial light, emanating from his robes of righteousness. Once he has released the ‘bright’ light, ‘Whose lively force continually doth lasts’ (193), and where ‘happinesse doth not decay | There Spring is eternall, and endless is day’ (69-70), the soul becomes fruitful. There is a

55 Collins, ‘A Song Expressing their Happinesse who Have Communion with Christ’, p. 34.
parallel between this image of the soul representing a spiritual garden and the image offered by Isaiah. He is convinced that ‘the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like spring water, whose waters fail not’ (Isaiah 58. 11). Instead of water, Collins implements the light as a life-giving power. Nonetheless, in both cases, continuous belief in God is perceived as a form of shield, protecting this spiritual dwelling.

Although Collins inhibited by her illness, is not capable of the menstruating flow, which in the seventeenth century was referred to as ‘flowers’, her soul is able to produce celestial flowers that compensate for her inability.57 As Skwire has noticed, ‘Inside this garden she is safe and enclosed, and, although she is unable to produce the expected fruit of children, she can produce the rare fruit of poetry’.58 By making herself spotless, the author also clothes her book in the spotless attire of righteousness. As a consequence, her social position can no longer be perceived as marginalised.

To conclude, the Bible has always played a pivotal role in the construction of society, as it has determined even the private sphere of individuals’ lives. Basing their attitudes on the Bible both the female and male writers present themselves as clothed in bright robes of righteousness, symbolising their spiritual union with the Almighty. It is possible that women’s celestial robes mirror the Virgin Mary’s garments, alluding to the tradition of a spiritual marriage with God. Whereas the women tend to associate their celestial robes with the Virgin’s garment, men tend to believe their spiritual attire turns into the garment of Christ himself. Even so, they step into the tradition of a divine union (see the next chapter). Nonetheless, the intensity of the image of the Virgin appears to be shaped by religion. High church Anglican or possibly Catholic Eliza directly comments on the Virgin Mary’s garment, whereas Major, as a Puritan, implicitly draws on her image. Following the belief in predestination, Major implies that it is God who nominates selected people for the process of conversion, and that an individual is powerless in the light of his decision. A comparable assumption is put forward by Bradstreet’s image of God, imagined as a judgemental parent, whose munificence is selective. By contrast, Eliza is convinced that the princely robes must be earned by the soul’s endeavour.

Nevertheless, regardless of their sex and religious congregation, before the souls are attired, they need to be unclothed by getting rid of their earthly attire, the body. Earthly

clothing is considered as unnatural covering, one that defiles natural bodily attire of the soul, as suggested by Traherne. Nakedness, as a natural stage in the creation of humanity, but also in the process of spiritual transformation, is a means of expressing remorse and repentance, which are what God demands from his adherents. In cases of these women writers, the souls might also be viewed as offenders, ready to admit to their crimes, but for the male writers, on the other hand, the bare state might be the final objective (physical and spiritual), as it is presented in Traherne’s writing. Although souls are not determined by gender, social conventions further condition the spiritual qualities of the female and male souls as passive and active. This is why Vaughan’s soul is shown by him to be inquisitive and actively searching for answers, and the female writers appear to be compliant with God’s will. What is significant is that Crashaw labels the soul as female, alluding to the mother of Christ, and the women writers avoid gendering their spirits. This might be linked with the general seventeenth-century trend that questioned whether women had souls in the first place. Men, by contrast, took for granted that their bodies were in possession of their souls.

The state of nudity might also reflect both women and men writers’ religious doubts and hesitations; a sort of vacuity or suspension between two words: physical and spiritual. When this process is finished, the souls, attired in bright clothes, are placed in the spiritual garden, or they turn into the garden. The process of giving out divine clothes symbolizes the moment of Eucharist with Christ. However, the symbol of the Eucharist appears to be mainly discussed by the male authors, as shown in this chapter. The women, on the other hand, mostly focus on the quality of the garment and the process of transfiguration from earthly mantle, through nakedness, to spiritual attire. The exception here is More who, as a Catholic, considers the Eucharist as an essential element of the transformation. The difference, therefore, might be determined not only by gender, but also by the variety of the writers’ religious beliefs. Crashaw, also a Catholic, emphasises the act of bread and wine mystically turning into Christ’s body and blood, as does Vaughan, as an adherent of Anglicanism. Major, Collins, and Traherne, on the other hand, avoid such a literal approach to the Eucharist, considering it as ‘sign and seal’ rather than literal process, which would position them on the side of Calvinistic sympathies.59 The anomalous image offered by Collins’s

59 Charles Partee, The Theology of John Calvin (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2008), p. 273. John Calvin claims that ‘The Lord’s supper is the sign and seal of our sanctification in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, and Baptism is the sign and seal of our justification before God in Christ. As he explains further, ‘If it is true that the invisible sign is shown to us to seal the gift of something invisible, we should accept the symbol of the body and assuredly trust that the body itself is no less given to us.'
volume might be a result of the clash of both religious and social factors, since her Calvinistic tendencies in a male-dominated society influenced the writer’s image of human corruption, comparing it to a menstrual cloth. The male writers, by contrast, follow the convention of the purple blood, symbolising Christ’s nobility.

The act of clothing might be interpreted in various ways. It might be considered liberation from the fetters of sin and acceptance of Christ’s faith to a new, everlasting life. Its whiteness can be viewed as innocence and symbolizes the intimate unity the believer enters into with God. As divine gowns are the same for everyone regardless of gender, social status, or wealth, it might also be a symbol of escape from the categories determined by society. For women especially it can mean freedom from male domination. Their clothing, thus, might be transferable onto their books and, as a result, it becomes a shield, strengthening women’s authority while being exposed to the public. By the simplicity of this clothing, the anti-materialistic approach is displayed. Even though simple, the glittering robes are presented as seductive. Its purpose is to persuade and evangelise the unbelievers. Their sparkling quality is assigned to the virtues that are their ornaments, instead of earthly trinkets. Therefore, the cultural conventions are interlaced with the biblical teachings. Nevertheless, regardless of the gender, religion, and social circumstances, by referring to clothing in the their spiritual transformation, these writers offer an external object-focused visualisation of the inner spiritual process. This visualisation implicitly draws on the transfiguration of the biblical figure of Zion, who becomes, therefore, an exemplar for both women and men writers.

The power of clothing thereby cannot be underestimated. As Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have pointed out, ‘Clothes give a nature to what previously had no nature; they take the existing nature and transnature it, turning the virtuous into the vicious, the strong into the weak, the male into the female, the godly into the satanic’.60 This chapter proves it to be the rule in seventeenth-century England.

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4. The Immaculate Conception

The female author of *Honey on the Rod* (1656) writes of conceiving a ‘beautiful babe’ through her connection to the Divine, perceived as a kind of sexual intimacy that results in the birth of poetry. The male writers, on the other hand, emphasise the ‘ravishing delights’, as I define it, offered by their spiritual relationship with God. This chapter will examine a female and male position in a mystical marriage, drawing attention to various reasons women and men might consider when announcing their becoming God and Christ’s spouses. The analysis will be informed by the fundamental biblical as well as St. Augustine’s teachings.

The reasons for women writers entering into mystical marriage with Christ have been extensively explored by a number of critics. According to Longfellow, such a mystical relationship works as ‘a protective metaphor, due to which women are able to link their “private” and “public” activity under the unimpeachable authority of a divine husband’, and as she explains further, the poet obtains a public voice due to her Prince’s assurance of her private spiritual relationship with him.² This creates a paradoxical situation of a devotional writer who denies the desire for fame by making the voice of the divine husband dominant, but who, on the other hand, modestly draws attention to herself as the author of her text. Such a display of their self-denunciation becomes a way of implicitly responding to the feared criticism of the seventeenth-century male-dominated society. As Willen argues, ‘in godliness [there was] an ideology of sorts which [...] inherently mixed public and private: they could be saints and affect the state in that capacity long before they were to become citizens’.³ Rex presents another perspective on the matter of mystical unity, claiming that its purpose is to create ‘a new personal world out of the confusion of the physical world in the hopes of achieving stability’, given the chaos of the socio-political situation of the civil wars.⁴

However, Hobby notices that this relationship ‘becomes a justification of female celibacy and a celebration of women’s writing’, especially for women who did not enter into

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³ Willen, ‘Religion and the Construction of the Feminine’, p. 36.
⁴ Rex, ‘Eyes on the Prize’, p. 206.
earthly matrimony. Also, as Sharon Achinstein further declares, it becomes a form of ‘resistance to the sexual economy of patriarchalism – turning away from an earthly husband, and a refusal of an ethos of traditional female generative sexuality (“Be fruitful and multiply”). Nevertheless, the institution of mystical marriage, initiated by God, also makes women writers members of God’s elect, who come from being sinful to being sinless. The achievement of this ideal state of purity and piety allows them to begin the process of the immaculate conception – a metaphorical act of impregnation by the Holy Ghost, followed by the birth of their texts that are described by them as their divine ‘babes’ (the term ‘the immaculate conception’ will be used in this chapter to reflect only some aspects of the actual Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, but should not be considered as a literal act). In so doing devotional women writers, even though claiming to have a spiritual intercourse with God, preserve their virginity, chastity, and irreproachability. Moreover, this spiritual intercourse, as I term it, might also be considered as either a substitution for unsatisfactory sexual intercourse or as an alternative for women who are not experiencing it because of the lack of a physical partner or because of infertility. It is of relevance here that the status of a woman in seventeenth-century culture was defined by her marital status. Thomas Edgar, in his book *The Lawes Resolutions of Women Rights* (1632), emphasises a common cultural view on matrimony and the influence it has on a woman:

> It is true that man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner. When a small brook or little river incorporateth with Rhodanus, Humber or the Thames, the poor rivulet loseth her name; it is carried and recarried with the new associate; it beareth no sway; it possesseth nothing during coverture. A woman as soon as she is married is called ‘covert’; she hath lost her stream. I may more truly, far away, say to a married woman, her new self is her superior, her companion, her master…

> All women are understood wither married, or to be married, and their desires are subjects to their husbands; I know not remedy, yet some can shift it well enough. The common law here shaketh hand with divinity.

Marriage thus enables a woman to be perceived differently or even acknowledge her social membership. A ‘femme covert’ – a married woman – was most likely given respect by society. Thus, the mystical unity might be considered a necessity for old maids and unmarried

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5 Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, p. 249.
women, or a preference over earthly marriage too. Since the status and identity of a woman changes when she becomes wedded to her husband, the mystical marriage might analogously reflect the process of spiritual transformation a spouse undergoes. This process corresponds to the transformation of the biblical Zion, who also needs to be purified from corruption before she can represent God’s spouse and become Christ’s metaphorical Church in order to take care of her children. The women writers of the chapter can be then implicitly identified with the figure of Zion.

Critics have variously discussed also men’s place in mystical matrimony with Christ. Yet none of them answers the question of why male writers would wish to enter into this divine relationship and be placed in the submissive position of a spiritual bride. Looking at men’s poetry through the themes roused by women’s spiritual unity with God, I argue that men sought inclusion within the biblical tradition of believers representing the metaphorical church of Christ. Such mystical unity is based on biblical precedent, which authorizes the position of the male as a bride. Isaiah announces that ‘as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee’ (Isaiah 62. 5). Moreover, they also draw on the religious authority of Augustine. As a preacher, he promoted an apostolic simplicity of life and ‘unceasing prayer’, and as a legal authority over all bishops in Britain, Augustine by no means neglected the material consolidation of his churches. Finally, it is believed that ‘the miraculous element played no small part in his missionary methods’.¹⁸ Seventeenth-century scholars considered writings of such a powerful figure exemplary and reliable sources of information on devotional issues. In The Meditation Soliloquia, and the Manual of the Glorious Doctor S. Augustine (1631), Augustine claims that Christ invites everybody, regardless of their sex, to spiritual union. After leaving its body, the soul is believed to hear Christ saying: ‘Come my elected, my immaculate, my Spouse, Come, and I will place my throne in thee, because I have had a greedy desire of thy beauty’.⁹ In his assessment the seemingly problematic matter of sex does not exist, and all people are told that they should not silence their ardent spiritual feelings for God. Augustine manifests such deep spiritual devotion by announcing:

God I love thee, I love thee, and faine would I love thee yet more, and more. Grant to me, O Lord my God, o thou beautifull beyond the sonnes of men, that I may desire

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thee and that I may love thee […], thou oughtest to be beloved […], kindle me, with all that fire of thine; with thy love, with thy liking, with thy sweetness, with thy desire, with thy Charity, with thy joy and exultation, with thy piety and suauity, with thy pleasure, and with thy ardent desire of thee, which is holy, and good, and chaste, and cleane. [...] I may love thee, my most sweet, and most beautiful Lord, with my whole heart, with my whole soul, with my whole strength, and with all the application of my mind [...] and trembling love.¹⁰

This exemplary agape should be expressed and well-balanced between the body, the mind, and the spirit. Such a combination makes it ideal. This might be the reason why Augustine, aside from the spiritual language, applies a semantic field, which utilizes sexual innuendo. Such terms as ‘ardent desire’, ‘sweetness’, or ‘pleasure’ refer to carnal desires. Following both authorities – the Bible and Augustine’s manual – male writers are authorized to occupy the position of a mystical bride (as Christ occupies the position of ‘the beloved’), and, at the same time, to become subordinate to their heavenly husband by developing the sexual metaphors. Classifying this position as homosexual is not accurate, since OED clarifies that this term was not used until the end of the nineteenth century. However, a total dismissal of the presence of eroticism in the male devotional writing, and the promotion of the idea that what is found in these texts is clear spiritual passion towards God instead, is not accurate and acceptable either.

In this chapter I will discuss the idea of mystical marriage, a spiritual unity between a believer and God, and the benefits it offers. What needs to be considered here are the similarities and differences between the female and male approaches to divine ecstasy, and most importantly whether the latter are able to achieve and maintain the exceptional chastity that prepares them for the act of the immaculate conception. Although the entrance into a nuptial relationship with Christ has its source in the Old Testament, specifically in the Song of Songs, the intensity of this unity as well as its reasons need to be analysed individually, because there is great variety in how writers represent differences; some being determined by gender, but also by other factors, such as the writers’ social position and personal circumstances.

The discussion, based on selected works by male and female poets, will begin with writings by Richard Crashaw, who defines the position of a woman saint in mystical marriage, implicitly identifying with that position himself. Then the argument will turn to two women writers, Gertrude More and Elizabeth Major, who write that they have been

impregnated by piercing, godly power. In the case of the latter, this results in her writing that has been immaculately conceived – an interpretation that has much in common with Thomas Traherne’s presentation of his impregnation by penetrating divine powers, which will be discussed next. This analysis will be followed by An Collins’s *Divine Songs and Meditacions* (1653), which positions the poet as Christ’s bride, and show her mind to be as fruitful as the Virgin Mary’s womb. Thereafter, the examination of *Eliza’s Babes* (1652) – an offspring of the mystical union between the author and God – will be considered. After that, the chapter will explore John Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* (1633), where the speaker is presented as being battered by the Almighty as a punishment for his adulterous nature, and Henry Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* (1655), whose author is sick with love towards his divine spouse, and therefore yearns for his heart to be penetrated by celestial potency, so that it can be reborn and made ready for renovation. Following this, George Herbert’s *The Temple* (1633) will be next discussed. His poetry shows a reversed position in the divine marriage, where God becomes the beloved from Canticles. In the closing argument I will explore Anne Bradstreet’s perception of the mystical union that is informed by an often-used model of seventeenth-century marriage. Although Herbert’s and Donne’s works were published long before the 1650s, the analysis of the women’s writings in the context of these canonical texts will reveal similarities between women’s and men’s perceptions on the concept of mystical marriage that might be a result of the women’s familiarity with them. However, the disparity that arises from this discussion will show how women established their authorial identity and how they individualized a distinctive writing tradition.

Richard Crashaw in his *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652) offers an unusual perspective on the matter of the mystical marriage. His volume is devoted to women and their relationship with the Divine. Such poems as ‘To the Noblest and Best of Ladyes, the Countess of Denbigh’, ‘To the Queen’s Majesty’, ‘Santa Maria Dolorum […]’, ‘Sainte Mary Magdalene […]’, or ‘A Hymn to […] Sainte Teresa’, suggest that women played a special role in the poet’s life. Recent criticism, as Susana Mintz has pointed out, has labelled Crashaw as a feminist writer, and, indeed, he valorises women in his writings and stresses their importance to Catholicism. However, his portrayal of the admirable female saints described in his

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writings is also problematic, as Mintz has argued that ‘the wilder elements of Crashaw’s depictions of mothers and femaleness tend to be domesticated, and the thematics of gender too easily contained and simplified within the parameters of Catholicism’.\(^\text{12}\) Whereas the fundamentality of domesticated metaphors cannot be dismissed when analysing Crashaw’s perspective on femininity, there is also another aspect that informs his thinking. The female figures acquire associatively masculine qualities and become exemplifications of devotional passion, and this might be a sign of the poet’s sympathy towards women. However, instead of simply praising femininity, Crashaw bends the concept by enforcing masculinity associatively on these pious women.

In these poems, the poet describes and emphasises the nature of the true relationship between women and God. Crashaw encourages women to become Christ’s brides by allowing him access to their hearts. In his ‘To the Noblest and Best of Ladies’ (p. 146), dedicated to the Countess of Denbigh, Susan Feilding, the celestial love is described as a

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\text{decisive dart} \\
\text{Which has the Key of this close heart} \\
\text{Knowes all the corners of’t, and can control} \\
\text{The self-shutt cabinet of an unsearcht soul. (33-6)}
\]

This intrusive love has penetrating powers, reaching even the untouched places. The diction, such as ‘closed’, ‘self-shutt’, and ‘unsearcht’, indicates that the Countess’s heart is pristine and that she is a religious ‘virgin’, or possibly a new convert to Catholicism. Thomas Healy notes that the Countess was a Roman Catholic convert indeed.\(^\text{13}\) Each rhyming couplet here conveys part of the general message. When the ‘dart’ pierces her heart, her ‘soul’ will be ‘control[led]’. The poem, then, might be considered as an attempt at conversion rather than simply persuasion. The title itself specifically orders the Countess to ‘render herself without further delay into the Communion of the Catholic Church’ (p. 146). The rejection of procrastination is a first sign of carpe diem convention. The suggested act of transformation begins violently by implementing ‘wounds’ on unbelievers’ hearts. Crashaw, however, views this violent act as necessary for the process of transformation. The eroticised image of ‘the healing shaft’ (47) entering hearts implies that the mystical union is sexual. The metaphor the poet offers here is that of a virgin, waiting to become a wife, and so the piercing ‘shaft’ alludes to the wedding night. Once it has entered the soul, it is able to control it by making

\(^{12}\) Mintz, ‘Crashavian Mother’, p. 112.
the soul ‘Unfold at length, unfold fair flower’ (43). The simile the poet uses comes from the cupid mythology. This indicates moving away from classical Christian connotations of a dart. The consummation metaphor is also embedded in the *carpe diem* tradition, insofar as the last line of the poem warns that she is ‘undone’ (68), unless she seizes the opportunity and ‘let[s] life in’ (64). The ‘healing shaft’ might also allude to the act of planting God’s seeds in one’s souls. Christ’s love is, therefore, perceived as a life-giving shower that refreshes the unbelievers’ spirits.

A similar image is described in his other poem, ‘The Weeper’ (p. 1) whose subject matter is an exemplary conversion of Mary Magdalene, who in the beginning stands for a sinner, but develops ardent zeal that makes her a committed follower of Christ. Magdalene’s countenance brightens as a result of celestial forces acting on her heart. As a consequence, the speaker recognises ‘May’ in her ‘cheeks’ (69), and ‘April’ in her ‘eyes’ (71) that have never been before more abundant in ‘kinder showers’ (74 and ‘fruitful flowers’ (73). Her soul is not barren any more; it is capable of producing metaphorical celestial flowers symbolising her devotional passion. This romanticised image of a garden alludes to the biblical garden from the Song of Songs and slips a sexual innuendo into Magdalene’s relationship with Christ, the beloved.

Nonetheless, Mary Magdalene’s regretful tears are a sign of Christ’s wounding her with a ‘well-pointed dart’ (93). The tears symbolize her realisation of her sinfulness that caused Christ’s absence, and perhaps also her longing for his presence. This metaphor illustrates the sensitivity of the eye and heart to each other. The eye reflects the state of Magdalene’s heart, as it was assumed in the seventeenth century, and so her weeping expresses her sadness, shame, and repentance. In stanza 18 this dart, Crashaw’s speaker explains, ‘digg’d these wells […] And taught the wounded heart | The way into these weeping Eyn’ (94-5). The poet portrays Christ as a cupid, whose sharp arrow causes a change of Magdalene’s heart. The act of piercing thereby has again a sexual dimension. It suggests that Magdalene’s heart is penetrated by divine power and this act is life-changing for her. This is also the moment when Magdalene expresses her repentance, as if she was enlightened. There is again a strong interrelation between the organs of the body. The Weeper ‘blushes’ (54) in stanza 11, and that might be considered as a sign of her being overwhelmed by Christ’s love. The act of blushing thus takes on erotic content. It might also symbolize her shame for her former detachment from God’s doctrine. The act of weeping, then, might be considered as paradoxical. On the one hand, it refers to water (tears of repentance), but, on
the other, it also alludes to fire (her desire for Christ and the sexual attraction makes her blush). The author establishes the binary opposites. The figure of the Weeper thereby might be representative of every convert who has to experience both emotions: grief and ardent agape. These are achievable thanks to the metaphorical act of violent piercing that is foundational for establishing a relationship with the Almighty.

Crashaw also develops the image of the biblical lovers situated in the garden in order to encourage women to become Christ’s spouses. In his poem ‘On a Prayer-Book Sent to MRS. M. R.’ (p. 61), which is devoted to convincing an unnamed gentlewoman to become a Christian, the poet, by using the example of the dove from the Song of Songs, instructs the lady to

Make hast to meet her morning spouse
And close with his immortal kisses.
Happy indeed, who never misses
To improve that precious hour. (102-5)

She is to follow the steps of the biblical love who has been waiting for her lover. Being vigilant, always prepared, and calmly awaiting Christ’s coming are fundamental for meeting the spouse. Therefore, Crashaw advises that women should ‘Store up themselves for HIM, who is alone | the SPOUSE of Virgins and the Virgin’s son’ (46-7), because only then Christ can become their ‘lover’ (122). This encourages women to occupy the feminized position of Christ’s spouse.

On the other hand, however, in his ‘A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Sainte Teresa’ (p. 67) Crashaw expresses his praise for Teresa’s ‘Masculine courage of performance’, and describes her as ‘More than a Woman’ (p. 67). The poet seems to have an unnamed recipient in mind, while telling the story of St. Teresa, and the celebratory tone is used to emphasise her incredible deeds. As a child, Teresa decided to convert the ‘Moores’ (64) to Christianity, and became a martyr, murdered with a ‘barbarous knife’ (70). Her martyrdom is viewed as a consequence of her love towards Christ, her ‘fair Spouse’ (65). Teresa, thus, is pictured as a mystical wife of Christ. Since she is said to have died while on a mission of converting people (performing a similar role to Christ), she might also be viewed as a metaphorical church. Her soul is claimed to be kept in her ‘Brest’s chaste cabinet’ (72) that has also been stricken by Christ’s ‘DART’ that ‘thrice dipp’d in that rich flame’ (81). The reference to the flame could conceivably convey a sense of desire, and adds
a sexual aspect to Teresa’s mystical marriage. This becomes particularly evident when the speaker of the poem addresses Teresa:

How kindly will thy gentle heart,
Kiss the sweetly-killing dart!
And close in his embraces keep
Those delicious wounds, that weep
Balsam to heal themselves[.] (105-9)

Such diction as ‘kiss’ and ‘embrace’ emphasises the lovers’ desire and passion. However, these words are contrasted with ‘killing’, ‘Wounds’, and ‘weep’ that imply suffering and impose a destructive quality on the personified love. Crashaw’s oxymorons such as ‘sweetly killing dart’ and ‘delicious Wounds’, indicate that divine love, even though pleasurable, makes Teresa a martyr. She is being gradually annihilated by ‘numerous’ deaths that ‘shall all at last dy into one, | And melt thy soul sweet mansion’ (110, 102). This might represent her failure to convert some unbelievers as well as opposition towards her divine mission. It also shows her persistence and bravery while fulfilling her duty. Fabry, however, has argued that in these multiple deaths, Teresa’s experience of multiple orgasms is encoded. He explains:

‘die’ [is used] as a code word for sexual orgasm evolved out of the literature of religious mysticism and secular Platonism. Its successive transformations from a metaphor of that ecstasy experienced upon being visited by God, to a metaphor of the ennobling rapture experienced by Platonic lovers upon exchanging souls through the medium of either lips or eyes, to a metaphor for the sexual act, and, finally, to its mocking use in ribald parodies of the neo-Platonic tradition.14

However, Teresa’s continuous deaths and then revivals of the soul are not wilful, as Fabry has claimed. They occur due to her soul’s consciousness of constantly piercing darts.15 This is why love and suffering are interrelated in Teresa’s case, and cannot exist separately, which makes the saint’s devotional affection extraordinary.

Although Crashaw does not include any male martyrs in his volume (apart from Jesus Christ), Teresa’s exemplary martyrdom is recognised as a masculine act. She becomes, then,

14 Frank Fabry, ‘Richard Crashaw and the Art of Allusion: Pastoral in “A Hymn to ... Sainte Teresa”’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), 373-82 (p. 377). In this article Fabry explains that the neo-Platonic tradition is linked to Guarini and Dryden, and can also be traced back to Nicolas Perella’s *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretative History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1970). These provide numerous instances of ‘the mystic-religious lover “dying”, both in descriptions of him in theoretical treaties and in attempts to express religious rapture in poetry’ (p. 377).

15 Fabry uses Teresa’s autobiography, *The Interior Castle* (6. 2. 2), and clarifies that the unwilful revivals are conditioned by her soul that is ‘conscious of having received a delicious wound […] and hopes the hurt will never heal’ (p. 377).
a fusion of feminine and masculine qualities, and this becomes a means of authorization of her writings. Mintz has pointed out that indeed

recent scholars have argued not only that Crashaw’s poetry consistently valorises women as either loci of or threshold to spiritual power, but also, more provocatively, that a kind of spiritual androgyny results from Crashaw’s poetic transgression of traditional gender categories.\(^\text{16}\)

Crashaw puts a ‘pen’ (20), a phallic instrument, in her hand, and gives her control over the ‘fiery DART’ (35). The speaker of ‘The Flaming Heart’ instructs ‘most poor-spirited of men’ to ‘kiss her Pen’ (20). According to Crashaw, those who still perceive Teresa as ‘Some weak, inferior, woman saint’ are wrong, as this exemplary catholic nun has become ‘seraphical’ (30). Not only is she above all the women, but also above all the mortal men. As Lowell Gallagher has pointed out, ‘Teresa’s heart is indeed more than “seraphical”’, because it is both a recipient and channel of the fullest expression of divine love in Christian thought: the incarnation and redemptive suffering of God’s son’.\(^\text{17}\) She becomes hence an example for women as well as men to follow.

Even though Crashaw discusses the act of piercing as a metaphor for spiritual intercourse, he does not present himself as penetrated by divine power. He rather explores the position of women in their relationship with God and the way they should become accessible to their heavenly spouse. He addresses women when giving advice and reprimands men for thinking too little of the female sex. It is women’s mystical marriage with God that is set as an example to follow, not men’s.

Gertrude More, a catholic nun in exile in Douai, seems to fit in with Crashaw’s model of mystical marriage.\(^\text{18}\) According to Dorothy L. Latz, *The Holy Practises of a Divine Lover or the Sainctly Ideors Devotions*, written by More in 1657, is a book designed to offer spiritual teaching that continually emphasises the interior life of contemplation and illumination by God.\(^\text{19}\) It promotes free conscience and simplicity as well as total devotion of

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\(^{16}\) Mintz, ‘Crashavian Mother’, p. 112.


\(^{19}\) All references are to Gertrude More, *The Holy Practises of a Divine Lover or the Sainctly Ideors Devotions* (Paris: Lewis De La Fosee, 1657).
the agape. In her volume of prose and poetry, the writer repeatedly portrays her soul as female, and claims that she is ‘espoused unto Him [Christ] by Faith, endowed with the Holy Ghost, adorned with virtues, esteemed equal with the Angells’ (p. 120). Nobody else can equal to this divine ecstasy, since her ‘Hart longeth after thee [God], and with none but thee Alone can it be satisfied’ (p. 152). Proclaiming the indivisibility of her heart and faithfulness to her spiritual husband, More is eagerly awaiting the pleasure of the spiritual act of love, asking questions such as ‘When shall I be inflamed with thy love? When shall I be one with thee according to thy harts desire?’ (p. 153). This idea of divine union likely reflects Augustine’s thinking. He maintains that ‘Love maketh that two spirits grow to be one’. Indeed, More declares that Augustine was her ‘Patron’ who ‘has been always ready to assist’ her with religious matters (p. 300-1). The poet displays a similar longing for her lover – Christ – and further develops her view on their becoming an entity by enquiring:

158. When shall the flames of thy love wholie consume mee?
159. When shall I be altogether melted and pearsed through with the wonderfull efficacie of thy sweetness? [...] 
161. When wilt thou take mee hence by force, downe mee, transport mee, and hide mee in thy selfe, where I maye never more be seene?
162. When wilt thou free mee from all these impediments, and distractions, and make mee one Spirit with thee, that I maye not any more depart from thee? [...] 
164. O sweetness of my heart? (p. 155)

In the Bible flames and fire represent various symbols. For example, they might either embody God, Christ, or the Holy Ghost. The angels, playing the role of God’s ministers and quick executioners of his will, are also described as a burning fire. The Bible illustrates many instances of fire that falls down on the people favoured by God as a sign of his approval and presence. Through the use of the ‘burning fire’, an image that is often used to illustrate God’s working on the soul of the elect, the writer portrays herself as God’s elect.

Furthermore, not only does she yearn for being penetrated by infinite sweetness, but also for Christ’s forceful embrace. While anticipating the moment, she is depicted as a

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20 Latz, ‘Glow-Warm Light’, p. 24. Latz argues that More’s writing is similar to literary works by St. John of the Cross as well as St. Teresa of Avila in terms of the symbols of ‘light and darkness, splendour and fire’ (p. 35). These symbols are also implemented in Richard Crashaw’s poetry. Since all of them are Catholics, it is the faith that might be the reason for this similarity.

21 Augustine, The Meditation Soilloqua, p. 391. Augustine claims that ‘Where love entreth in, it draweth & captiueh all other affections of the mind, to the dominion therof. Love alone, is sufficient, & is pleasing of itself, and for itself. Love is the merit, it is the reward, it is the cause, it is the fruit, it is also the use of the fruit; for by love, we are conioyned to God. Love maketh that two spirits grow to be one’.

victim, forcefully imprisoned by the Divine. This places her in subordination to her spiritual 
husband, who clears her heart from all doubts so that ‘a chosen vineyard all true seed’ (p. 47) 
can be planted. Her ‘Lover’, who ‘is the fountain from whence thy love floweth’ (p. 120), 
cares for the seed by metaphorically watering it; this stimulates her spirit. Hence her heart is 
presented as a garden from the Song of Songs, which first needs to be emptied and purged by 
fire so that the godly grain can be planted. This act corresponds to the act of impregnation by 
the Holy Spirit. However, before this happens, More’s soul has to be chastised so that the 
foundation for the immaculate conception is prepared, and the metaphorical act of ferocious 
burning is a way to achieve it. Her soul needs to be reborn and begin anew. The writer, 
‘Desiring to be inflamed, and burned with the Fyre of thy most sweete love’, wants her heart 
to be ‘Striped […] naked’, and then she can ‘patiently suffer the scourges of thy Fatherly 
correction’ (p. 263). This might allude to the brutalised body of Christ that signifies her 
willingness to suffer for God’s sake. On the other hand, More portrays herself as a naughty 
child, who needs to be undressed and then punished by a heavenly rod for her misbehaviour. 
By transforming her position in a mystical marriage from being Christ’s bride to becoming 
God’s child, she indicates that God is her father and Jesus her betrothed. Her divine spouse, 
Christ, is equated with a god of love – a cupid – who is able to ‘wound the most inward part 
of my soule with the darts of thy [Christ’s] Love’ (p. 154). Since she depicts herself as 
immature and focuses on her inner part, her soul, the sensual aspect of the agape is dismissed. 
By asking Christ to ‘Mortifie in mee whatsoever displeaseth thy sight’ (p. 154), More might 
allude to her body that instigates sin. This shows that the writer associates immaturity with 
platonic love, and the experience of first love becomes an overwhelming feeling, driving her 
to carve her name next to her love in the bark of trees. This image seems to mock her younger 
and inexperienced self, one who is not able to comprehend all aspects of her agape. The 
speaking voice announces that

And as one that is sick with love  
Engraves on every Tree  
The Name and Praise of him she loves  
So shall it be with me. (7-16)²³

The immaturity, resulting in lack of control over ardent zeal, is demonstrated by the 
irregularity in the iambic metre: anapaestic feet start the first line, but this state is only 
temporary.

Her love of Christ is gradually maturing and, by an explicit use of images from Canticles, More shows her desire for a spiritual intercourse once again, wooing her divine spouse:

Come thou my beloved, come. [...] My beloved is white and rudie; chosen out of thousands. [...] Let him kiss mee, with a kiss of his mouth. [...] Cause me to hear thy voice. [...] Draw mee after thee, wee shall run in the odour of thine ointments. (p. 144-45)

The writer explicitly identifies with the biblical bride, since the colours, voice, the smell of the beloved and the above situation correspond to those in the biblical passage that reads:

Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth: for thy breasts are better than wine, Smelling sweet of the best ointments. Draw me: we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments […] remembering thy breasts more than wine[.] (Song of Songs 1. 1-4, The Douay-Rheims Bible)

Moreover, similarly to the bride from the Song of Songs, who says, ‘I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek him [Christ] whom my soul loveth: I south him, and I found him not’ (Song of Songs 3. 2, The Douay-Rheims Bible), More also searches for her beloved in the city:

I have sought for him whom my soul loveth; I have sought for him, and have not found him. [...] I will rise, and goe about the city in all the streets, and lanes; I will seek after Him whom my soul loveth. (p. 146)

Both brides welcome their respective beloveds by opening their doors and both are speechless when they hear his voice. More can hear ‘The voice of my beloved knocking, open to mee my sister, my love, my dove, my immaculate’ and she ‘opened the barre of my door to my beloved. […] My soule melted, as hee spoke to mee’ (p. 147). The act of opening the door becomes a symbol of the brides’ desire to reveal themselves and submit to him. This means that they not only long for the platonic dimension of a relationship between a woman and a man, but also for the sexual aspect of Christ’s charity. They are ready for the beloved’s entering of them in order for their soul to ‘Feed, and satisfy […] with thy [Christ’s] grace, and presence’ (p. 151) (see chapter 2). Thus, they anticipate spiritual intercourse.

In like manner, Elizabeth Major desires to become the biblical dove, whose heart and soul are waiting for God’s penetration and revival. Her *Honey on the Rod* (1656) positions the author as Christ’s wife, and this marriage reflects the spiritual union between Christ and his church, with Major being identified with the latter. Major therefore appeals to God: ‘not
only as thou art Lord of the purchase, but also as thou art husbandman to thy own purchased seed, beseeching thee to break up this fallow ground of my heart’ (p. 159). The writer, presenting herself as a commodity (good seed), bought by God for the purpose of cultivation, reveals her submissive position in this marriage, and as a ‘seed’, the author looks forward to God’s refreshment, so that he will ‘make fruitful her dry and barren soul’ (p. 50). God has purchased her in order to plant his mystical garden within her. David Carr has argued that in the Bible ‘gardens (and vineyards) symbolize both the female lover and the place of lovemaking’. Major is presented as God’s spouse, and the image of the garden eroticises their relationship. Her infertile soul, meanwhile, is stimulated by God’s actions causing her mental torment and physical suffering, since the poet declares that ‘her afflictions come not forth of the dust, but from a wise and just God’ (p. 11). She interprets them as signs of God’s purging her soul and probably the body from all iniquity. Her father, the Almighty, shows his care for his child by constantly whipping her soul with a rod in order that ‘it could fly to heaven’ (p. 18). The act of whipping is considered as the process of purification of her soul from sin. Consolation, one of the interlocutors, exclaims: ‘Oh happy are those wounds, by which issues the purified corruption of sins, and by which enters perfect and sound health!’ (p. 36). Betty Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott identify Major’s religious leanings as moderate Puritanism. Hence the purifying action can be interpreted as evidence of intervening God’s grace in her soul (p. xi). This also shows that it was God’s initiative to marry her to Christ, who ‘often stood at the door of her heart, and knock[ed]’ (p. 25), but she would neither hear nor open it to him.

Major’s sinful nature undergoes a process of transformation when she enters into this divine union. The completion of this transformation from sinful to sinless is manifested by the immaculate conception of her child, her volume. It is her divine spouse’s seed, thanks to which she is able to conceive and give birth to her writings. The writer admits that ‘For though I was not ambitious of a beautiful babe, yet I confess I would gladly have had it appear comely’ (H3°). Although she did not intend to fill her volume with artistry, she is a proud mother, in that her babe, her devotional writing, appears to be ‘comely’. Most certainly


the writer refers here to Canticles where the male beloved complements the ‘comely’
countenance and ‘sweet’ voice of his love (Song of Songs 2. 14) and then continues his
expression of admiration by saying: ‘Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is
comely’ (Song of Songs 4. 3). What the writer emphasises here is that the woman’s speech,
comparable with Major’s text, is valuable for its audience, however imperfect its form might
be, having been composed by what she views as an inferior female intellect. For her as its
mother, as well as for those who will appreciate the moral purpose of this text, it will be fair
and serviceable. By alluding to this biblical trope, Major presents herself as modest and hence
utilises the social convention of women’s intellectual inferiority in order to publish her work.

Whereas Major’s metaphorical impregnation by God’s seed results in the immaculate
conception of her writing, in Thomas Traherne’s case the same impregnation evokes deep
spiritual commitment to the Almighty. His talent was not appreciated until the twentieth
century, when his manuscripts were rediscovered. His religious writing, according to Julia
Smith, ‘recreates both the innocence of his infancy [...] and his fall’;26 adulthood is the time
of the latter. Denise Inge sees this Anglican deacon and priest as passionate for his created
world in which the ‘infinity of God’ constitutes his pleasure and enjoyment.27 In his Poems,
Centuries and Three Thanksgivings (1966), the subject of ardent affection towards God is
very often discussed. His complete commitment to the Almighty is especially palpable in his
four-stanza poem ‘Love’, in which the poet describes the experience of divine delights as ‘O
nectar! O delicious stream! | O ravishing and only pleasure!’ (1-2).28 These feelings of
ecstasy and divine intoxication are emphasised by numerous exclamation marks. Due to his
divine passion, the speaker is able to drink the heavenly ‘nectar’ and experience the
penetrating power of God’s love, which becomes everything he has ever dreamt of:

O mine of rarities! O Kingdom wide!
O more! O cause of all! O glorious Bride!
O God! O Bride of God! O King!
O soul and crown of everything! (7-10)

The ‘Bride of God’ that stands for the church reinforces this penetrating love. All his senses
are satisfied: the ‘Queen of sights’ delights his eyes (6), his tongue is inspired with ‘joys’, and

xix.
28 All subsequent references are to Thomas Traherne, ‘Love’, in Thomas Traherne: Poems, Centuries and Three
its speech is pleasant for his ‘ear’! (4). The speaker is evidently overwhelmed by this intensity of feeling and what it might represent. After enumerating, rather vehemently, the charms and pleasures of spiritual bliss, Traherne concludes that God is ‘The fountain-head of everything!’ (20), and this fountain causes ‘Joys’ to ‘shower [...] down from Heaven’ upon his head (27). However, by describing this shower as ‘golden rain’ (25), the author refers to a story from Greek Mythology about Danae, one of the daughters of King Acrisius. It was prophesised that Danae would give birth to a son who would kill her father. Acrisius imprisoned his child in a brazen tower, but Jupiter was nonetheless able to impregnate her by turning himself into a shower of gold and, as a result, Perseus was born.\(^{29}\) This reference might indicate that Traherne desires to be permeated, or possibly impregnated by ravishing divine pleasures so that the seed of God’s love would grow in him. Hence the speaker figure is feminized. In his poem, Traherne also alludes to ‘Ganymede’ (31), the mythical figure, who was abducted by Zeus and made immortal cupbearer of the gods in Mount Olympus as well as Zeus’ lover.\(^{30}\) There is ambiguity here: in seventeenth-century slang, Ganymede is used in reference towards ‘any boy, loved for carnal abuse, or hired to be used contrary to Nature to commit the detestable sin of Sodomy’.\(^{31}\) As Rambuss has maintained, the figure can also stand for ‘an emblem of the soul’s ecstatic ascent to God and its triumph over the temptations of the world’.\(^{32}\) The former would display the speaker’s carnal thoughts and his corruption by earthly life, and the latter, most probably intended by the author, would reveal his disregard for this earthy world and his desire for freedom from its depravity. The speaking voice embodies God’s Ganymede, ‘His boy’ (33), who can ‘fill, and taste, and give, and drink the cup’ (34), and who is, therefore, better than those who are not capable of ardent devotional passion, in that these ways of devotion are:


Only Acrisius, Abas’ son,
Of the same lineage, barred him from his city,
Argos, by force of arms, and still denied
Jove was his father, just as he denied
Perseus could be Jove’s son, whom Danae
Conceived in that gold shower. (607-12)


\(^{32}\) Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, p. 54.
Too short and small,
Too weak and feeble pictures to express
The true mysterious depths of Blessedness. (35-8)

Traherne introduces a classical figure of Ganymede both to illustrate his spiritual position in a divine relationship and to establish a master-servant relationship with the Almighty, which also implies that the speaker is being instructed and taught by God. The poet, due to his commitment, becomes God’s ‘image, and His friend, | His son, bride, glory, temple, end’ (39-40). Christianity allows him to enjoy the complete union with the Almighty, as opposed to the meanspirited. Rambuss has rightly observed that

From pleasure of imagining himself drenched and impregnated with Christ’s ‘sweet [...] stream’, like both the mythological Greek maiden Danae and the biblical ‘bride of God’ (line 9), Traherne shifts his metaphors across genders, across eroticism in the poem’s final stanza. There he offers himself to Jesus as ‘His Ganymede! His life! His joy!’

All the roles he undertakes, though, are typified by passivity in waiting for God’s action and total subordination to him. They are, thus, characterised by femininity. This shows that Traherne has achieved the level of divine ecstasy that is comparable with female devotional passion, and this is indispensable for the immaculate conception to occur. Even so, his pregnancy, unlike Major’s, does not result in the birth of his writing, but rather in turning him into God’s dwelling place, his servant, and his lover (see chapter 2). What Traherne and Major have in common, however, is being God’s instrument, whose tongue is inspired by heavenly joys. Both also occupy the position of the biblical bride, yearning for spiritual ravishment, and both are characterized by their submissiveness to God’s penetrating powers as well as by patient anticipation of the beloved’s appearance. The male writer, therefore, displays the calmness and passivity that are considered feminine virtues in the seventeenth century. This means that by positioning himself as the bride in a mystical marriage, a male figure can become effeminized. Although the crossing of gender boundaries seems to be problematic, the mystical marriage authorizes the male writers’ acquisition of feminine traits when positioned as God’s brides. This authorization occurs without any threat of being received by society as an attempt at identifying with a female. However, the classical metaphors Traherne uses to occupy the position of God’s bride might be considered as controversial, as detached from the biblical teaching.

33 Rambuss, Closet Devotions, p. 54
Similarly to Traherne and Major, An Collins becomes the Almighty’s agent too, since her mind has also been impregnated by divine ideas. In her case, however, due to this impregnation, the poet gives birth to her *Divine Songs and Meditacions* (1653), which begin with the author’s explanation that her chronic illness ‘restrained me from bodily employments’ and ‘enforced me to a retired course of life’. Nonetheless, as a possible follower of Calvinism, she does not perceive her physical infirmity as a sign of damnation, but rather as a sign of God’s glory, and as an invitation to a relationship with him. The poet believes that ‘it pleased God to give me such inlargednesse of mind and activity of spirit, so that this seemingly desolate condicion proved to me most delightful’ (p. 1). But for the disease, Collins would not have become ‘affected to Poetry’ (p. 1). Later in her volume, ‘Another Song’ (p. 55) further specifies her illness by revealing its dry qualities:

> But in my Spring [...]  
> No delight flowers grew to please the eye,  
> No hopeful bud, no fruitfull bough,  
> No moderat showers which causeth flowers  
> To spring and grow. (11, 15)

In this reflection on her adolescence, the poet seems to indicate that during that time there was something missing in the physiology of her body, insofar as her ‘Aprill was exceeding dry, therefore unkind’ (16). As Price assumes, the poet does not experience ‘the menstrual flow that might enable her to have children’. This disability makes her infertile, preventing her from fulfilling her expected biological and social function as a woman. This, if not positioning Collins completely as an outsider of her society, undoubtedly excludes her from the group of maidens waiting for a matrimonial opportunity, and it probably leads her to enter into a mystical marriage with God instead.

Yet this divine relationship seems to exceed its purely spiritual dimension, insofar the speaker of ‘A Song Expressing Their Happinesse who Have Communion with Christ’ (p. 31) not only is convinced that Christ ‘Hath ravished my soul’, but also imagines Jesus inviting her to experience spiritual intimacy. He asks her to:

> Open to me my Love,  
> My Sister, and my Dove,  
> My Locks with dew wet are,

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Yet she remissive grew,  
Till he himself with-drew  
Before she was aware.  

But tasting once how sweet he is.  
And smelling his perfumes  
Long can she not his presence misse[.] (59-69)

Similarly to More, this eroticized image of physical closeness that the author emphasises by sibilance, if not a metaphor for sexual intercourse of lovers, is borrowed from the Song of Solomon where the beloved says to his love:

Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. [...] I opened to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my Beloved had withdrawn himself[.] (Song of Solomon 5. 2-6)

The resemblance is undeniable. It becomes thereby an evidence of Collins’s longing for sexual intimacy with Christ. Due to spiritual intercourse, she can experience ‘The firm fruition, | Of his [Christ’s] Sweet presence’ (81-2). This description echoes George Herbert’s ‘The Odour’ and ‘Deniall’. As Wilcox has suggested, it is similar ‘in the physicality of the devotional experience, the plainly expressed closeness to Christ and the range of moods encountered even within a poem’.36 As a result of the act of love, offspring in the form of outstanding ‘flowers’ are produced by the writer’s mind that is said to embody a ‘garden’ (26) of ‘Another Song’ (p. 55). By comparing this garden with her mind, Collins identifies with the love from Solomon’s garden, which is also described as ‘A garden inclosed [...] a spring shut up, a fountain sealed’ (Song of Songs 4. 12). As Clarke states, the image of this garden might also refer to the biblical context of ‘hortus conclusus’, alluding to the Virgin Mary’s womb.37 In this way, according to Wilcox, Collins’s mind is meant to be perceived as chaste.38 This purity signifies the writer’s readiness for the immaculate conception of her writing – a fruit of her relationship with Christ. The Song of Solomon, presenting the lovers as Jesus and his Church, authorizes the entrance of devotional women writers into a spiritual,

even sexual, relationship with Jesus, since, as Clarke has rightly observed, it constitutes ‘a link between female sexuality and a state of holiness, and the dominant speaking voice’.*39 For Collins, however, it seems the only chance to be in a marriage.

Wooed by the enchanting qualities of her divine lover, in her collection of poems Eliza’s Babes: Or the Virgin’s Offerings (1652), Eliza uses the same authorization as Collins, similarly comparing her mind to the Virgin Mary’s womb. However, the anonymous writer, being wedded to an earthly spouse, offers a somewhat different reason for entering into mystical marriage with Christ. Unlike Collins, Eliza considers existence on earth thraldom, and her relationship with Christ gives her freedom. In her poem ‘The Bride’ (p. 83) the speaker says:

Sith you me ask, why born was I?
I’le tell you; twas to heaven to fly,
Not here to live a slavish life,
By being to the world a wife. (1-4)40

Eliza’s devotional passion is stretched to the degree where the poet denies loving anything and anybody linked with earth. In her poem ‘What I Love’ (p. 87), she reveals her indifference towards ‘those that grovel here belowe’ (3), saying: ‘What! I love them? I’le not do so’ (4). Her ‘high born soul’ (8) does not allow her to be attached to her earthly life. Eliza, thus, ‘must condemn base earthly things’ (6). ‘My Descent’ (p. 94) presents the poet as a daughter of ‘the King of Kings’ (5) who married her ‘To heaven’s great Prince’ (7). This exhibits a full understanding of her position in the spiritual dimension of her life, where she is a spouse to Jesus and a daughter to God. Being affianced to a spiritual husband, Eliza disregards earthly marriage, and ‘Not a Husband, Though Never So Excelling in Goodness to Us, Must Detaine Our Desires from Heaven’ (p. 94) blithely explains her reason:

To heavens great prince I must away,
No love on earth here must me stay,
He lent me but awhile to you,
And now I must bid you adieu. (13-16)


40 All subsequent references are to [Anon.], Eliza, Eliza’s Babes: Or the Virgin’s Offering, ed. by Liam Semler (London: Associated University Press, 2001), p. 31.
Apart from having Eliza only temporarily, the earthly spouse has got her ‘earthly part’, her body, since her heart belongs to Christ. This revelation shows the poet’s radicalism that her heart cannot be divided between earthly and spiritual lovers. Splitting it, as Longfellow has remarked, is a sort of adultery, and due to her insistence that the position of a bride of Christ ‘precedes her status as an earthly woman and wife’, Eliza becomes herself God’s ‘Kingdome’ (18), and so a metaphorical church. This is again an allusion to the biblical relationship between the beloved, Jesus Christ, and his love, his Church. Her beloved is described as charming and irresistible, like the one from the picturesque biblical garden. The speaker of her ‘The Renowned King’ (p. 78) says:

He’s like a Rose in Sharon fields,
   Pleasant to sight, and sweetnesse yeelds,
With sweet and faire, from his bright face,
The Lilly and the Rose get grace[]. (17-20)

The skilful and intense sibilance offered here emphasises the pleasure derived from the divine union. Nevertheless, the delight Christ makes available to Eliza ravishes her ‘senses’ (p. 80), her ‘soul is wounded with a deep affection towards’ him (p. 129), and her heart is ‘penetrated’ by ‘infinite mercies’ (p. 115) and wounded by ‘heav’ns dart’ (p. 75). This violent language (traditional also in non-devotional love poetry) is used to describe Christ’s love towards the speaker. However, a paradox is created when it is combined with this delightful and luscious image of Christ. This paradox is no coincidence, insofar as, on the one hand, its aim is to place Eliza in subordination to Jesus – her husband – and on the other, this image assumes that the writer experiences spiritual intercourse with Christ. As Achinstein maintains, ‘wounding is a common enough image for being sexually penetrated’.

This spiritual act of love is far more significant than sexual intercourse would be. Eliza very clearly undermines the sense of the latter, firstly, by both refusing to love her earthly husband and by offering only her body to him, and secondly, by praying to make her children divine. The speaker of ‘On Marriage’ (p. 92) pleads to Jesus:

And if my heart thou dost incline
   Children to have, Lord make them thine
Or never let be said they’r mine.
   I shall not like what’s not divine. (4-7)

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Her offspring were ‘born with ease and pleasure’ (p. 58), but she portrays herself as their deliverer only – fatherhood is assigned to Christ. This indicates Eliza’s belief in Aristotle’s theory of conception in which it is assumed that the woman provides the place for the baby to grow as well as the physical matter from which it is made, whereas the baby’s spirit and shaping force is delivered in the father’s semen.43 ‘To My Sisters’ (p. 57) asks the addresses to:

Look on these Babes as none of mine,
For they were but brought forth by me,
But look on them, as they are Divine,
Proceeding from Divinity. (1-4)

‘An act of utmost intimacy’, as Longfellow describes it, has caused the birth of those ‘Babes’.44 According to Semler, they are ‘springing from a chaste and heavenly marriage, from moments of pure relation to her God, come forth regenerate, praising, sinless, healing’, and this ideal state of chastity proves that the conception of her babes was immaculate.45 By this miraculous conception Eliza indirectly identifies with the Virgin Mary, but in her poem ‘The Virgin’s Offering’ (p. 62) the poet explicitly elevates her gift (her book) to that of the Virgin. The speaker explains to Mary:

With thee, blest Virgin, I would bring
An offering, to please my King.
Two Turtle Doves, thou didst present,
Can there be better by me sent. (1-4)

Luke’s gospel states that the Virgin Mary brought her gifts to the temple as her gratitude towards God after the birth of her son (Luke 2. 24), and that is what Eliza says she is doing after giving birth to her volume. Due to the poet’s ability to offer as important and valuable a gift as the Virgin Mary does, her purity and piety are elevated to that of Mary, who is a Catholic and high church Anglican example for women to follow. Having positioned herself as the Virgin Mary, not only in the text, but also in the title of her volume (The Virgin’s

Offering), Eliza displays her religious affiliation with either of the above religious doctrines, becoming such an example herself.

Although John Donne does not occupy the position of the Virgin Mary in his *Holy Sonnets* (1633), both an exemplary chastity achieved by Eliza and the freedom offered by the mystical marriage become attainable for him too. Donne, as a poet and a Church of England clergyman, influenced by Catholicism, is ravished by penetrating celestial power, and this ravishment resembles Eliza’s. He deliberately uses a form of a sonnet, popular in love poetry, to express his agape to God. A sonnet also becomes, for him, a means of connecting with the Almighty.

By using inventive, deliberately obtuse, and figurative language, Donne portrays his relationship with God as far more violent than Eliza, and himself as a victim. His speaker demands his ‘three person’d God’ (1) not only to ‘Batter my heart’ (1), but also to ‘breake, blowe, burn and make me new’ (4). The alliteration of the hard consonant makes the image even more ferocious. Such a violent cure, implemented by increased force of the three entities in one being, allows the speaker to be reborn, becoming a brand new commodity, or a state of innocence ready to be shaped or rebuilt by the abusive spouse who God becomes. Donne’s speaker is depicted as an adulterous wife from the book of Hosea, who is condemned, humiliated, and ferociously punished. This process is to facilitate her recovery so that she can begin anew. According to the poet through such a rebirth the ‘knot’ (11) that ties every human being to evil – original sin – can be broken and a believer can experience divine bliss. The relationship with the Devil develops a marital dimension in that Donne demands to be

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47 Hosea 2. 6-13: Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.
‘Divorce[d]’ (11) from evil powers. However, even then the seemingly free speaker yearns for God’s imprisonment, because this captivity appears delightful to him. He admits that ‘Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free, | Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me’ (13-14). The word ‘ravish’ mirrors in opposition ‘chaste’, as part of a chiasmus of ‘enthrall’ and ‘free’, and creates a deliberate dramatic tension to the poem’s tone. Although this divine rape is considered symbolic and most probably refers to the speaker’s soul, the image becomes vague. The speaking voice pleads with God to ‘ravish’ him specifically, not his soul. *OED* defines the act of ravishment as a transportation of a person (mind, body, and spirit) from earth to heaven, ‘with the strength of some emotion’. It also means to ‘fill with ecstasy, intense delight, or sensuous pleasure; to entrance, captivate, or enrapture’.48 Donne’s ravishment is, then, open to interpretations. It can be both symbolical and literal. By being held in thrall, the poet subordinates himself to God and by begging to be ‘ravished’, he positions not only his soul, but also himself as a bride.

This purposefully ambiguous word also emphasises the violent action that God performs in order to separate him from the Devil. Rambuss puts forward a theory that if one is to assume that ‘the ravisher (God) is male, then the would-be ravished (Donne) must be seen as “female”.’49 As he further elaborates, ‘Satan is the one who has made a “woman” of him, a rectifiable situation if only God would himself “rise” [...] and finally take him as his own, ravish him, make more of a man of him’.50 The act of ‘ravishing’ is thereby interpreted as a process of regaining masculinity. However, Donne gains freedom and purity after this act of violation, since he is clearly convinced that he ‘never shall be free, | Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me’ (13-14). His speaker is characterized by feminine traits of purity and, similarly to women writers in this chapter, is also both ravished and chaste simultaneously. Accordingly, the metaphors Donne uses in order to illustrate his position in the mystical marriage effeminize his speaker.

Further evidence in favour of the poet’s identification with the bride is Tina Skouen’s observation concerning the location of feelings towards God. She explains:

The opening line ‘Batter my heart’ points directly to the place in the body where the passions of the mind were thought to be residing, and when the speaker is begging for

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49 Rambus, *Closet Devotions*, p. 52.
50 Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, p. 52.
God to break into his heart, he is not asking for all passions to be extinguished, but is rather hoping God will take up the place that is unrightfully occupied by Satan.\textsuperscript{51} The speaker presents himself as a helpless woman, waiting for her hero to save her from Satan, and so occupies an authorized submissive female position in his mystical marriage with God. Nevertheless, this bride is not innocent, as the fact that she needs to be freed from a nuptial relationship with Satan reveals her adulterous nature. This infidelity originates in sinfulness that made her enter into a relationship with the Devil in the first place.

The issue of adultery is further developed in ‘Sonnet XVII’ (p. 207), written by Donne after the death of his wife.\textsuperscript{52} The sonnet, also known for its first line: ‘Since she whome I lovd’, indicates that his wife’s mind sparked an inspiration for the poet’s interest in divine matters, as the speaking voice declares: ‘Here the admiring her mind did whet | To seek thee, God; so streams do show the head’ (5-6). According to Johnson:

\begin{quote}
In this announcement, the speaker’s urge to piety and his tendency toward amorous substitution are inseparable, as the transfer of affections from earthly love to divine Love anticipates the sonnet’s first rivalry, which pits God against the dead beloved.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

On the other hand, however, Johnson fails to notice that this rivalry also occurs between earthly love and divine love, love of a woman and love of the Almighty, and the possible problem of prioritizing one over the other. It seems that Donne still longs for the earthly passion, since he expresses his dissatisfaction with God’s wooing, when he writes:

\begin{quote}
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.
But why should I beg more love, whenas thou
Dost woo my soul, for hers offering all thine[.](7-10)
\end{quote}

This inability to offer satisfactory consolation to Donne might be evidence of the speaker missing the sexual aspect of divine love, and this makes him turn to the earthly spouse instead. The speaker reveals here the corrupting power of his lustful body. Realisation of this becomes a reason for God’s ‘tender jealousy’ (12). This sense of jealousy, combined with ferocious behaviour, reflects the biblical portrayal of the Divine. For instance, Deuteronomy warns people against ‘the LORD thy God [who] is a consuming fire, even a jealous God’

\textsuperscript{52} All subsequent references are to John Donne, \textit{John Donne: Selected Poetry}, ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
(Deuteronomy 4. 24.). If God is portrayed as a jealous lover, seeking the speaker’s favours, the relationship to which the speaker is invited takes on a nuptial form. I agree with Johnson who claims that ‘God’s “tender jealousy”’ at the poem’s climax ensures that we understand God no longer as suitor but as a spouse, and the inconstant soul no longer as coquette or capricious lover but as adulteress’. Nevertheless, where Johnson recognises adultery as the soul’s inconstancy, causing God’s fear of substituting the speaker’s love for him with his ‘love to saints and angels, things divine’ (12), I decode adultery either as Donne’s struggle to divide his love between the human and the divine, or his sinful nature that spurs him into the Devil’s arms. This is what arouses God’s ‘tender jealousy’ as well as his doubts that, ‘the world, flesh, yea, devil put thee [God] out’ (13-14). What is dangerous for the believer is the temptation of earthly devilish things. When absorbed by such carnal pleasures, the Divine gradually becomes marginalised in their life, until finally forgotten.

Both Eliza and Donne enter into mystical marriage and experience spiritual intercourse, in the form of ‘ravishing delights’, that makes them chaste and worthy of the status of God’s bride. Nevertheless, even though Eliza is aware of her sinful human nature, she does not consider herself as adulterous, whereas Donne does. The former, convinced of her flawlessness, is able to immaculately conceive her writings. On the other hand, although purified by God, Donne does not conceive his literary works; instead he becomes rather an imperfect or unworthy temple for the Divine (see chapter 2). His spiritual relationship is, therefore, more complicated, in that his nature makes him struggle with loving the human and the divine simultaneously. This, at times, might corrupt the usual hierarchies by turning to the earthly world. His speaker cannot be engaged in earthly and heavenly relationships without making God jealous. The uncontrollable passion for a woman and for God becomes a problematic matter for him. Eliza, by contrast, disregards earthly life announcing her undivided heart and her full commitment to her existence in heaven. This might also be a reason for their different portrayals of God’s affection. In Eliza’s case the ‘God of Love’ (2) acts as an amorous cupid, piercing her ‘blest heart’ (4), as she asks him to ‘Shoot from a above [...] heaven’s dart’ (1, 3). Donne’s God, on the other hand, as Craig Payen has noticed, ‘builds up as he tears down, possesses as he frees, is as honourable as passionate – that is, in him all paradoxes find their supra-rational resolution’. The Almighty is imagined as a

destructive torturer and a jealous lover. The disparity here might also result from gender position. If Eliza, as a woman, had announced that her adulterous nature made her unworthy of mystical marriage, she would have risked tarnishing her reputation and may have experienced unfavourable reactions to her text. A male writer, on the other hand, using such an argument in a religious context would avoid the criticism of the male-dominated society.

Similarly to Donne, Henry Vaughan in his *Silex Scintillans Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1655) envisages God as a destroyer, but Vaughan’s God is simultaneously portrayed as a builder. The writer yearns for his heart to be penetrated by divine potency, so that it can be reborn and be made ready for renovation. The intensity of Vaughan’s longing for God’s affection is described in his ‘Love-sick’ (p. 118), where the speaker desperately begs Jesus to

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make these mountains flow,
These mountains of cold Ice in me! Thou art
Refining fire, O then refine my heart,
My soul, soul heart! (11-14)
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His heart urgently desires to be inhabited by Christ who would, firstly, destroy its icy interior and then introduce improvements, making it perfect. The speaker thereby asks God to ‘warm it, till it beat, | So beat for thee’ (15-16). He wants to develop an ardent passion, bringing about a complete commitment to the Lord.

Yet there is also a sexual aspect to Vaughan’s devotion, especially palpable in his ‘Dressing’ (p. 66), where the speaker longs for Jesus to melt his hardened heart and occupy it with divine passion. He pleads to Jesus:

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touch with one Coal
My frozen heart; and with thy secret key
Open my desolate rooms[.] (3-5)
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This might be interpreted as an invitation to be penetrated, since the speaker is willing to ‘open’ himself, to give in, and to be subject to godly powers. The word ‘secret’ alludes to his intimate parts. The gospel of Isaiah states that God will discover the ‘secret parts’ of Zion’s followers (3. 17). This already eroticized violation is strengthened by images of destructive fire, wreaking havoc, in that the speaking voice begs Jesus to annihiliate all uncertainties:

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57 All subsequent references are to *Henry Vaughan*, ed. by Louis L. Martz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
my gloomie Brest
With thy clear fire refine, burning to dust
These dark Confusions, that within me nest,
And soil thy Temple with sinful rust. (3-8)

Vaughan, in a similar way to Donne, believes that the ideal state of purity is achievable by
rebirth. The alternating semantic rhyme emphasises the image of annihilation. The content of
his ‘Brest’ that is a ‘nest’ of doubts and uncertainties, which are considered as disease-like
‘rust’, must be converted into ‘dust’. Only then the rebuilt entity becomes worthy of godly
status. Although he realises that his humane tendency to sin makes him the ‘wretched one’,
the hope for heavenly life is displayed by the speaker’s appeal to ‘Give me, my God! Thy
grace, | The Beams, and brightness of thy face’ (31-32). This description, on the other hand,
also reveals the subordinate position the writer assumes in his nuptial relationship with
Christ. This metaphor of a bride, who ‘seedst among the Lilies’ (2), awaiting her groom to
open her with ‘secret key’ in order to perform a violent penetrational act inflaming her heart
is inflamed with passion, imposes unmanly characteristics on Vaughan, such as passivity,
patience, and subordination.

As a devout Anglican, Vaughan further amplifies his erotically charged relationship
with Christ. His search for Christ, which always takes place during the night time that reflects
the biblical love’s attempts to seek her bridegroom. The biblical bride admits that ‘By night
on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth’ (Song of Songs 3. 1), and in ‘The Night’ (p.
149) Vaughan’s speaker exclaims: ‘O for that night! Where I in him | Might live invisible and
dim’ (53-4). As R. V. Young has noticed, Vaughan’s speaker also claims that he needs to
rush to ‘the dark, hidden place where God awaits those who seek Him’.58 According to
Geoffrey Hills, darkness is one of ‘the magnetic points of contact with the Divine Grace’.59
This is why darkness as the night time symbolizes the lovers’ intimacy and privacy; the time
when they can fully express their feelings and become an entity. Hence Vaughan’s image of
Christ also takes on an erotic dimension. The night is the time,

When my Lord’s head is filled with dew, and all
His locks are wet with the clear drops of night;
    His still, soft call;
    His knocking time; the souls dumb watch,
When spirits their fair kinred catch. (32-6)

This description resembles the image from the Song of Solomon and indicates that Vaughan’s speaker, like the women writers, longs for his lover’s presence so that their spirits can become one. In his ‘Mount of Olives’ (p. 89) the speaking voice proclaims that he can feel the physical closeness of the Lord in ‘a rich air of sweets, as Evening showers’, in the ‘Odours, and Myrth, and balm on one rich flood | O’r-ran my heart, and spirited my blood’ (7-8). All his senses are alerted by the lover’s presence. By using this eroticized image, which is authorized by the Song of Solomon, the poet positions himself as the subordinate biblical bride, and takes on feminine traits; he is emasculated. As Christ’s spouse, he is purified and ready for the act of immaculate conception, and the spiritual intercourse that Vaughan metaphorically experiences results in the birth of his volume. His speaker proclaims:

I shine and shelter underneath thy wing  
Where sick with love I strive thy name to sing,  
Thy glorious name! which grant I am so do  
That these may be thy Praise, and my Joy too. (23-6)

The poetry he vigorously endeavours to write is a fruit of his union with God, and not only is its purpose to eulogize the Divine, but also to gratify the creator. Vaughan’s speaker, in the same way as the women writers, is portrayed as a fruitful bride, who produces offspring in the form of a devotional writing.

So far I have discussed female and male writers who, when entering into a nuptial relationship with God, placed themselves in subordination to their spiritual husband. Even so, that does not constitute a rule. George Herbert manages to maintain his masculinity by reversing the roles in his mystical marriage with the Divine. Although many critics question the presence of eroticism in Herbert’s relationship with God in his The Temple, Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations (1633), even when using the Song of Solomon to decode its meaning, I believe it is certainly present. The fact that his religious position has been variously discussed, ‘from pro-Catholic via moderate Anglican to extreme Calvinist’, is not helpful in establishing erotically charged feelings towards the Almighty.60 Lisa Beauchamp explains that

It is through the traditional allegory of the Song of Songs that The Temple may figure the incarnated body of the divine in Christ, the beloved/Church as a building, the

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Church as a communal embodiment of beloved souls, or the individual soul that is a member of the Church’s body.\textsuperscript{61}  

Even so, eroticism is one of the elements concomitant to the poet’s writing.  

One of his works permeated with such a theme is the controversial poem entitled ‘Love’ (III).\textsuperscript{62} This poem, having narrative qualities, is written in the form of a dialogue between Love, who is identified either with God as a father or as a creator, and the sinful child who God welcomes into his arms. It might also be associated with the love expressed in the Song of Songs, who ‘opened to my [her] beloved; but my [her] beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone’ (Song of Songs 5. 6). Chana Bloch is convinced that even though the Song of Solomon gave Herbert a warrant, an associative predisposition, to visualize the love of man and God in terms of an erotic relationship between a man and a woman... it is unlikely that he would have intended an explicitly sexual scene in ‘Love’ (III) and other poems.\textsuperscript{63}  

Nevertheless, when considering ‘Love’ as a meeting of biblical lovers, the sexually charged situation cannot be dismissed. Firstly, the excited lover is welcomed by his love. Being aware of his sinful nature, he hesitates and steps back, in Herbert’s words, ‘grow[s] slack’ (3), so either shows ‘remissness or lack of energy’, or ‘Lacking cohesiveness or solidity; not compact or firm; crumbling, loose; soft’, as the \textit{OED} defines that word.\textsuperscript{64} According to Augustine’s theory, the fall of humanity had an impact not only on the sensual aspect of human life, causing intemperance, but also the carnal being, bringing about sexual impotency. He states that ‘Sometimes the impulse is an unwanted intruder, sometimes it abandons the eager lover, and desire cools off in the body while it is at boiling heat in the mind’, and this might be exactly what has happened to the beloved from Herbert’s poem.\textsuperscript{65} After noticing his withdrawal, Love tries to attract him to herself or maybe even seduce him, as she ‘Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning | If I lack’d anything’ (5-6). Love’s stimulation might be interpreted as both an encouragement to the social meeting and an encouragement to sensual activity, but the beloved is confident that his sinful nature should

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{62}All subsequent references are to George Herbert, \textit{The English Poems of George Herbert}, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 661.
  \item \textsuperscript{63}Chana Bloch, \textit{Spelling the Word: George Herbert and the Bible} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 111.
  \item \textsuperscript{64}‘grow slack’, in \textit{OED} <http://dictionary.oed.com/> [accessed 13 February 2010].
  \item \textsuperscript{65}Augustine, \textit{Of the City of God with the Learned Comments of Lodovicvs Vives} (London: G. Eld and M. Flesher, 1620), p. 577.
\end{itemize}
not be rewarded in such a way. Therefore, he protests by explaining that he is just ‘A guest [...], the unkind, the ungrateful’ (8, 9). Love once again insists on his presence and takes the initiative by taking his hand. This gesture reveals Love’s masculine traits of being active. Love is further presented as the Lord creator, who asks: ‘Who made the eyes but I?’ (12). This indicates that the beloved belongs to her, even though he feels shame to ‘have marr’d’ (13) and so ‘damaged or ruined’ his eyes with sin, as Wilcox explains this context.66

Regardless of the beloved’s corruption, Love offered herself to him. She served food in the form of her ‘meat’ (17) and the beloved ‘did sit and eat’ (18). This is when the act of consummation took place and this can be understood as participation in a communion with Christ, the end of the earthly pilgrimage, or the biblical banquet of lovers from the Song of Songs. It might reflect the advice of Augustine, who encourages tasting the sweetness of God’s charity:

For there is nothing so beautifull, and so delightfull, as with the sharpe sight of the minde, and the eager desire of the heart, to contemplate this God himself alone, and after a wonderfull manner invisibly to behold him who is invisible, and so to taste, not the sweetness of this world, but of another.67

This sweetness, however, might also symbolize the consummation of the lovers’ affections. No longer is their love platonic, but it is celebrated with a spiritual intercourse. As Liew has rightly observed, Herbert’s poetics were influenced by Augustine’s beliefs who argued that original love consummated in the Garden would have combined sensual ecstasy and spiritual purity. While the Fall marked the primal conception of ‘carnal knowledge’ and lust, all prelapsarian sexual activity was otherwise conscious expression of worship coupling human sensual experience with heavenly love.68

This supports the idea that Herbert experiences spiritual intercourse with God, but in the position of a groom rather than a bride, as opposed to what was previously presented by Donne, Vaughan, and Traherne. In Herbert’s poem it is Love who becomes the biblical bride, and the poet identifies with the beloved. In so reversing these roles, Herbert, while maintaining his masculinity, imposes womanly traits on the figure of Love. Even though the writer enters into matrimonial unity with Christ, he considers himself unworthy of this

honour. He, in a similar way to Vaughan, comes to Christ, but then becomes acquiescent, as it is Love who convinces him to join her. Herbert, like contemporary female writers, is invited to the mystical union with God, but, unlike them, becomes a groom who is ashamed of his sinful nature. This nature is revealed not only by his thoughts, but also by his indecent deeds.

These sinful deeds are described in another of Herbert’s poems, which has been deemed controversial by modern scholars. ‘Sinnes Round’ (p. 430) begins with the speaker’s apology for his continual and circulatory insults to God:

Sorie I am, my God, sorie I am,  
That my offences course it in a ring,  
My thoughts are working like a busie flame[.] (1-3)

The speaker repeatedly apologizes for his irreligious conduct. This reflects the circulatory nature of his misbehaviour, linking with the title of the poem. Herbert’s thoughts are constantly being polluted by iniquity and wrongdoing and, as a consequence, they produce a ‘cockatrice’ (4), symbolizing ‘A serpent, fabulously said to kill by its mere glance, and to be hatched from a cock’s egg’, or meaning ‘A name of reproach for a woman: prostitute, whore’. Either way, this output represents anti-religiousness. Herbert’s thoughts have the power to corrupt his speech, since the speaker admits that ‘My words take a fire from my inflamed thoughts’ (6). Not only are these thoughts very powerful, but also abundant, in that they ‘spit it [the speech] forth like the Sicilian hill’ (8). Herbert personifies his thoughts by equipping them with ‘breathing’ (10) abilities, and the sin here becomes a euphemism for an infectious illness spreading through the air. The speaker explains that his thoughts ‘vent the wares, and passe them with their faults, | And by their breathing ventilate the ill’ (9-10). This disease, described as ‘lewd intentions’, is transferred onto his deeds, and so his ‘hands do joyn to finish the inventions’ (12). As critics suggest, these deeds might be interpreted as a masturbatory action, and so Herbert engages his body in the process of sinning. The act of joining his hands suggests touching, and the significance of the physical action is emphasised by repeating line 12 twice. Michael Schoenfeldt notices that, ‘self-involved writing and

69 ‘cockatrice’, in OED <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index.jsp> [accessed 17 September 2010]. The idea of the serpent might also be related to the early-modern belief that hair of a menstruating woman, when placed in the fertile earth, can turn into a serpent. The author of Secrets of Women, Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, advises to take the ‘hairs of a menstruating woman and place them in the fertile earth under manure during the winter, then in spring or summer when they are heated by the sun a long, stout serpent will be generated, and he will generate another of the same species through seed’ [De Secretis Mulierum (On the Secrets of Women), trans. by Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany: New York State University, 1992), p. 96].
masturbatory desire are so intertwined in “Sinnes Round” that it is difficult to tell whether writing functions as a metaphor for masturbation, or masturbation a metaphor for writing’.70 Either way, the poet considers this deed as sinful.

As a result of this contagious malady, the speaker’s ‘sinnes ascend three stories high’ (14). This means that his sinning embraces three levels. It begins with his thoughts, which affect his speech, and ends in his wicked acts that are performed on his body by using his hands. The process is circulatory, because ‘ill deeds loyter not: for they supply | New thoughts of sinning’ (16-17). This endless production continually increases his ‘shame’ (17). By comparing this process to the time of building of a biblical Babel ‘before there were dissensions’ (15), the poet indicates that there is an ideal harmony between all the elements of his corruption (thoughts, speech, and deeds). Guibbory has suggested that the word Babel is a sign of ‘idolatrous ceremonial worship’.

Since this pejorative term describes Herbert’s so human creation, his product takes on negative connotations. The poet realises that this arrogant and offensive behaviour is doomed, inasmuch as God will annihilate his sinful nature, as exemplified by the story of Babel. Even so, Herbert continues his indecent conduct, expressing his remorse by finishing his poem with saying ‘Sorie I am, my god, sorie I am’ (18). The repeated message again reflects the circulatory nature of the process. Liew comments that

The metaphor of linguistic onanism insinuates itself in the intercourse between the speaker’s ‘inflamed thought’, his ‘hands’ ‘inventions’, and his ‘words’ ejaculatory fires: ‘My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts, | Which spit it forth like the Sicilian hill’. As the tower’s erect pride images the errant pen and erring penis, so the speaker laments, ‘words suffice not, where are lewd intentions’.72

Through these images the urge to write, for Herbert, becomes overpowering. Unable to stop his iniquitous practices, the poet might indicate that the vicious circle is unavoidable when attempting to produce devotional writing.73 He might be considered, then, as unable to successfully write religious verse, and his egocentrism might constitute an obstacle here.

71 Guibbory, Ceremony and Community, p. 63.
72 Liew, ‘Reading the Erotic’, p. 43.
Accordingly, there is an ambiguity available in the title of his volume – *Private Ejaculations* – as the latter word might be a reference either to his spiritual ecstasy caused by ‘a spontaneous experience of God’s dwelling in the subject’, as Stephen Murphy explains, or, as Clarke argues, it means ‘darted’, describing ‘the prayer style of the Desert Fathers, when they had no time to use formal set prayers: very brief and sudden’.74 This might also allude to the poet’s perceived-to-be disgraceful act of masturbation, symbolising the act of creating self-involved works. These definitions indicate that the piercing power of God stimulates Herbert to manifest his devotional passion. He is not able to express it properly, though, since his sinful nature stops him. By implementing this metaphor of masturbation, Herbert’s poem uncovers the poet’s sexual desire present in his mystical marriage with God, where, unlike other male poets discussed in this chapter, his position as a groom is reiterated. Although yearning to become a worthy agent of God, Herbert fails to achieve the state of chastity and plainness. The women writers, by contrast, are pure and ready for the immaculate conception at this point.

Anne Bradstreet, in a similar way to Herbert, alludes to the biblical lovers. However, certain aspects of the mystical marriage image she offers are radically different from both female and male writers discussed in this chapter. In the poems dedicated to her husband, the poet proclaims to long for the warmth of her lover. Otherwise she has to bear the coldness caused by the lack of his presence. Not only is her husband believed to have these warming qualities, but, as Sara Eaton has pointed out, ‘Bradstreet also sees the shifting season as indicative of her spiritual state’.75 Although many critics consider her letters to her husband to be literally addressed to her earthly spouse, I would like to examine some ambiguities that might indicate their spiritual addressee.

The letters convey numerous metaphors that situate Bradstreet’s speaker as the biblical bride of Christ. For example, ‘A Letter to Her Husband, Absent upon Public Employment’ (1678) expresses the chilling absence of the poet’s lover, as she sadly proclaims that

My sun is gone so far in’s zodiac,  
Whom whilst I ’joined, nor storms, nor frost I felt,  
His warmth such frigid colds did cause to melt.

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My chilled limbs now numbed lie forlorn;
Return, return, sweet Sol, from Capricorn[.] (8-16)\textsuperscript{76}

The heavenly bridegroom is encoded in the image of a sun or ‘Sol’, meaning the personified sun, as \textit{OED} explains.\textsuperscript{77} The book of Psalms indeed states that ‘The Lord God is a sun and shield’ (Psalm 84. 11). She, by contrast, embodies ‘the Earth’ that without the sun ‘mourns in black’ (7) and is unable to bear fruit. Her husband is capable of heating her body and arousing her senses by ‘burn[ing] | Within the Cancer of my glowing breasts’ (20-21). The astrological elements describe the hemispherical space between the lovers and reflect the physical distance that separates them. This space, however, can also illustrate religious doubts that keep her away from her spiritual bridegroom. The sexual metaphors Bradstreet offers are centred on the diction such as the ‘glowing breast’ that might indicate sexual awakening and the ‘chilled limbs’ that, on the other hand, might represents its lack. Bradstreet transfers the norms of her earthly marriage onto her mystical marriage. The language of sexuality implies that the poet promotes the convention of spiritual intercourse, and the act of love awakens her religious zeal.

Since her lover is far away, his warmth and sweet touch cannot awaken her senses anymore and they become inactive. The speaker enters into a phase of anticipation of her bridegroom, which is depicted as wintery time that brings about a sort of hibernation. Seeing that this period of time is ‘weary’ and ‘tedious’ (18), she considers her husband her ‘dearest guest’ (22). Without him, the speaker reaches a dormant state, and, as she says,

\begin{quote}
In this dead time, alas, what can I more
Than view those fruits which through thy heat I bore?
Which sweet contentment yield me for a space,
True living pictures of their father’s face. (13-16)
\end{quote}

The reminiscence of the heat and the offspring, being born as a result of the act of love is the only consolation for Bradstreet. As Eaton suggests, the heat Bradstreet emphasises in her poems reflects the early-modern assumption that reciprocal heat was needed for conception to take place.\textsuperscript{78} The word ‘fruits’ not only refers to her numerous children, but also, and most likely, relates to her devotional verses that reflect the Almighty’s countenance, implying that she has been devotionally inspired. This is explicitly declared in her ‘From Another Sore Fit’

\textsuperscript{76} All subsequent references are to Anne Bradstreet, \textit{The Works of Anne Bradstreet}, ed. by Jeanine Hensley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 246.
\textsuperscript{78} Eaton, ‘Anne Bradstreet’s “Personal” Protestant Poetics’, p. 63.
(p. 271), where, similarly to other female and male writers, Bradstreet cultivates the tradition of portraying her volume as her divine offspring. She gives her heart to the Lord and asks him to ‘make it fruitful’ and ‘faithful’ so that her life can be dedicated to ‘praise in thought, in deed, in word’ (21), and she celebrates this agape by bringing to the world her devotional writing.

The romanticised image of the escaping lover that echoes the Song of Songs is also included in Bradstreet’s her ‘Contemplations’ (p. 221), whose addressee is the heavenly ‘bridegroom’, as he leaves her ‘chambers’ (30) in the ‘morn’ (32), and the night spent with him brings about ‘smiles’ and ‘blushes’ (32). Such a meeting of lovers emanating ‘heat’ (35) is nourishing and reviving for the speaker’s soul, in that

The Earth reflects her glances in thy face.  
Birds, insects, animals with vegative,  
Thy heat from death and dullness doth revive,  
And in the darksome womb of fruitful nature dive. (30-36)

The Earth and the Sun are interrelated: without the sunshine the Earth cannot produce crops, and without the Earth the sun is unable to become part of the bearing process. This reflects the two prevalent models of conception in the seventeenth century. One assumes that the woman provides the place and the nutrients for the baby to grow, as opposed to the man’s task, which is to provide the semen to make the conception occur. Alexander Read, a seventeenth-century doctor, uses a metaphor of a ‘patient’ and ‘agent’. The former relates to a woman who adds the matter, and latter to a man who provides the spirit.79 The opposite of the Aristotelian model is Galen’s in which the conception takes place when a woman experiences pleasure during an intercourse and as a result produces seed. In this subversive approach, a woman provides both the nutrients and the seed. A man’s role was then to stimulate his lover and also to provide semen to finalise the act of conception.80

According to Suzanne Shimek these lines do not ‘imply that the feminine partner in the interaction is devoid of power: the sun is reliant on “fruitful nature” to bring animals, birds, and insects to life. Feminine nature has as much productive power as the masculine sun’. 81 This interpretation assumes the equality of the partners, but Bradstreet portrays the

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81 Suzanne Shimek, ‘The Tenth Muses Lately Sprung Up in Americas: The Borders of the Female Subject in Sor Juana’s First Dream and Anne Bradstreet’s “Contemplations”’, *Legacy*, 17 (2000), 1-17 (p. 9).
womb as ‘darksome’, imposing blackness that is associated with melancholy and passivity. The Earth has to anticipate the sun to stimulate her for the process of bearing. It is the Earth, then, that uses the energy provided by the sun, not the other way round. The concept of equality must be, therefore, excluded. This also invalidates Shimek’s further assumption that the sun is associated ‘with insects and animals, creatures who dive into nature’s “darksome”, motherly womb for safety’, and so ‘nature could actually be seen as more powerful than the sun, a force that can encompass and shelter masculine energy’. Bradstreet’s shelter, by contrast to Shimek’s assertions, is dull and dead. Its inactive and melancholic image rather implies the absence of protecting powers.

Since Bradstreet uses her earthly marriage to depict the heavenly relationship in ‘A Letter to her Husband’, the literal language conveys the seventeenth-century conventions of the women’s marital position. Firstly, she uses the Genesis story of Eve’s creation by saying that she is ‘Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone’ (25). Secondly, in one of her ‘Meditations’, after proclaiming that ‘thy maker is thy husband’, the poet describes her divine husband as her ‘head’, and herself as his ‘body’ (p. 273). On the one hand, this shows her subordination to her husband who is able to direct her. On the other, however, the poet also establishes an analogue of her divine marriage, in that as Christ’s body, Bradstreet might be positioned as his metaphorical church. The reflection of earthly marriage in the spiritual relationship is problematic, since the seventeenth-century norms were established on the basis of the Bible. It might be assumed, therefore, that what in fact Bradstreet is doing is either reinforcing an abstract divine union set by God on her earthly marriage.

The poet’s witty use of language produces metaphors that have double meanings. Whilst addressing her earthly husband, she praises the irreplaceable qualities of her spiritual bridegroom. The poet puts aside the tradition of piercing darts and transfers her actual marital situation on her mystical marriage. For her, the status of Christ’s bride becomes a destination. She begins her journey, or rather her ‘pilgrimage’ (p. 321), in a wintery and stormy earthly weather that represents her isolation from the divine lover, or possibly the lack of divine passion, and reaches a sunny place, where the earth bears fruit and the flowers flourish (see chapter 2). These show her nourished soul that is in an established matrimonial relationship with Christ, ready to produce heavenly offspring. This pilgrimage, then, can be viewed as her spiritual transfiguration.

By way of conclusion, when focusing on a comparison between solely female devotional writers, as the earlier part of this chapter has done, although they claim to enter into the same mystical marriage with Christ, its intensity varies, which sometimes might be conditioned by their religious leanings. Major, as a Puritan, presents herself as a sinful commodity of God that starts her process of transformation from sinfulness to sinlessness, and her success is manifested by her entrance into a spiritual matrimony with Christ and celebrated with their offspring. Bradstreet, even though also considered as an adherent of Puritanism, establishes a model of a mystical union that reflects her earthly marriage, whilst Collins, as a follower of Calvinism, possibly deprived by her chronic illness of the opportunity of physical intimacy, perceives this as a sign of God’s grace. She positions herself as a spouse and a mother, finding comfort in a spiritual union with Christ and, by giving birth to ‘rare flowers’, she regains social and biological stability. Meanwhile, the Catholic More and the Catholic or high church Anglican Eliza, disregarding her earthly life, are overwhelmed by the ‘ravishing delights’ that Christ, their divine husband, offers them. According to them, the experience of a spiritual intercourse, as well as of the birth of divine babes, is above all a physical pleasure.

By contrast, male poets enter into the mystical unity with Christ in order to demonstrate their Christian devotional passion. They either present their souls as feminine or position themselves as Christ’s bride, waiting for an initiation of spiritual intercourse, which by Traherne is portrayed as penetrating power of God’s love, having fertilizing abilities. Donne, on the other hand, explicitly pleads for being ravished, while Vaughan is ‘Love-sick’ and opened only to God, who has the right key to unlock him. Male figures, characterized by submissiveness, subordination, and passivity, are effeminized, whilst performing the role of a bride. Both biblical and Augustine’s teachings authorize these unmanly traits. Herbert, however, manages to maintain his masculine subject position by identifying with the beloved from the Song of Songs. The spiritual intercourse is still plausible, while the act of consummation is taking place.

Both the female and male writers, which this chapter discusses, use the same idea of a bride of Christ, symbolizing his church. Their mystical marriage, therefore, becomes eroticized, usually by images of ‘ravishing delights’ and heavenly darts that are piercing hearts. The sexual intercourse, then, is transferred on the divine unity and reflected by spiritual ravishment. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in their attitude towards themselves as believers, their position in the mystical unity, and towards the idea of God’s
love. Firstly, the women writers appear to place themselves in a mystical marriage unambiguously as Christ’s spouses and children of God, and it is always the Almighty who saves them from damnation by purifying their sinful nature, in order to make them ready for the spiritual matrimony with his son. The male poets, however, need to find their spiritual lover first, as it happens in cases of Herbert and Vaughan, and then wait for God to commence the act of penetration. Due to this action, they are reborn and attain the ideal state of chastity, which allows them to become worthy of God’s love. Whereas the purity of the women gives them a chance for the immaculate conception of their writings, the men rejoice in the divine delights offered by God such as ‘drinking’, ‘tasting’, and ‘eating’.

Furthermore, there are two perspectives on the matter of sinfulness. Unlike the male writers, women do not consider themselves as adulterous: for them, a sin is not the result of infidelity, but rather a weak human nature. Thus, the female writers declare the indivisibility of their hearts. What they can offer to an earthly spouse is only their body, seeing that their souls and hearts are reserved for God. While, according to the women, the adultery is committed in a situation when heart is divided between earthly and spiritual lovers, as Eliza and Major explain, the men add to it another level. They define their human nature as already equipped with the capacity to infidelity itself. Although having experienced a spiritual arousal, dissatisfaction or even disappointment with divine pleasure are the final feelings. These are caused by the exclusion of the sexual aspect of intercourse from divine love. Such male adulterous nature that yearns for physicality prevents, for instance Donne, from feeling complete ecstasy.

Nonetheless, thanks to the mystical marriage, even whilst experiencing spiritual intercourse, women maintain their spiritual virginity and irreproachability (also achieved by Donne). Hence feeling confident about the righteousness and usefulness of their writings, through which they establish a public voice in a male-dominated society, they make themselves authoritative exemplars of devotional passion. The religious women writers, announcing themselves as Christ’s spouses, create a threat of independence, as without becoming a ‘femme covert’, they gain respect and power to speak. Christ offers everything to them so that they can fulfil all the roles that seventeenth-century society assigns to them, avoiding the requirement of subordination to an earthly spouse.

The divine marriage, for the men, is perhaps a sort of an escape from earthly mortality. These writers also desire to represent the metaphorical church of Christ, and so the feminine figure of Zion. In order to gain this recognition, they have to be presented as God’s
spouses, automatically absorbing traits of femininity that are established not only by the Bible, but also cultivated by a male-dominated society, unless they find a method of maintaining their masculine characteristics, as Herbert does.
5. Authorial Identity

Most Glorious God I Humbly Beg of thee
Accept this Sacrifice Offered by Mee
Unto thy Majestie for Helpe I Flie
To be Accepted off by the Most High
Oh Let My Soule for Ever Blesse the Lord
While I have Being and Can Speake A Word
Let Me on Earth Sing Praises to His Name
The Glorious Saints in Heaven Doe the Same
Lord by thy Holy Spirit Show Me the Beauty
Of Holinesse and that Praise is My Duty[.] (1-10)¹

This chapter will discuss selected female writers who claim to perform the service of God’s agents in the context of male agents. It will point out the possible reasons why these women present themselves as God’s servants, when publicizing their writings. This will also highlight the qualities of female godly agents and the qualities of the service they perform as opposed to the male agents of God. It will argue that the female authors included in this chapter represent ideal godly servants, whereas the men are presented as unable to deliver service of equal quality. This is why the male writers were labelled as ‘crooked’ (a term used by Herbert in reference to his human nature) agents of God. As a result, the chapter will also draw attention to the redefinition of femininity and how the male writers implicitly contribute to it, while establishing connections and contrasts between female and male attitudes towards the act of writing religious verse. The discussion will reveal that these particular women writers’ voices can be identified with various biblical figures who were considered representative of popular associations of virtues. It is possible that the authors use them to withdraw their private, personalized voice from their literary works. Since the roles of women’s public voices were to reprimand and guide their audience, my argument will also show how this voice is similar to that of Zion. Before the chapter turns to analysing individual female and male texts, I will provide a general insight into the situation of women, who faced the dilemma of exposing their voice to the male-dominated society.

Margaret Ezell terms this society as patriarchal and explains that ‘Scholars have used the term “patriarchal” freely to describe any social environment that is perceived as hostile to independent activities of women in spheres other than traditional domestic, nurturing roles’.²

² Ezell, The Patriarch’s Wife, p. 3.
This environment produced the paradoxical situation of self-denial and self-promotion. This means that these female writers build a complex portrait of virtuous female Christians who deny their desire for fame, but nevertheless attract attention to their figures as the authors of their texts. By engaging in manuscript circulation and print, the women writers also contributed to redefining the notion of femininity, indicating its constant changeability.

The discussion will begin with scrutinising An Collins’s piety, demonstrated in her *Divine Songs and Meditations*, next moving on to Elizabeth Major’s inner battle between her desire to become a renowned writer and her obligation to silence in her *Honey on the Rod*. After that, my argument will turn to George Herbert and his godly agency. His offering, even though skilfully crafted, is said by the poet to be imperfect, since it is corrupted by his faulty nature. This will be compared with the exemplary gift offered in *Eliza’s Babes*, whose anonymous author assigns the volume’s fatherhood to God, but simultaneously claims her own authorship. Henry Vaughan’s offering, *Silex Scintillans*, will be explored next. By contrast to Eliza’s, Vaughan’s gift is not ideal, because it is created by corrupted human nature. This will be followed by Andrew Marvell’s poetry, which is also considered as a present. While producing it, the poet realises that his treacherous nature prevents him from offering a worthy gift to God. The discussion will be concluded by an analysis of Anne Bradstreet’s complex impression of *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650) that is caught in, yet liberated from, the fetters of male-dominated society. The analysis will enumerate differences between male and female devotional writings and it will also highlight the ways in which, despite the limitations, women won and empowered their public voice, altering the notion of femininity.

An Collins, the author of *Divine Songs and Meditations*, presents herself as a devotional writer. Her poetry is a result of ‘the manifestation of Divine Truth, or rather the Truth itself’, which, as the poet explains, ‘reduced my mind to peaceful temper, and spiritual calmnesse taking up my thoughts for Theological employments’ (p. 1). This ‘Divine Truth’ comes from the Almighty, since the Bible portrays him as ‘a God of Truth and without iniquity, just and right’ (Deuteronomy 32. 4). As it is shown in ‘The Preface’ (p. 3), the poet considers her ‘employments’ as her everyday practice, her ‘morning exercise’, which allows ‘the fruits of intellectuals to vent’ (9). She, therefore, actively engages her mind in the process of writing poetry, whose aim is to present reliably godly truth. Collins indeed proclaims that Christ has supervised her process of writing. In ‘The Preface’, the poet declares that she trusts...
that the only Sov’rain Power
Which in this work alwaie assisted mee,
Will still remain its firme defensive Tower,
From spite of enemies the same to free
And make it useful in some sort to bee,
That Rock I trust on whom I doe depend,
Will his and all their works for him defend. (127-33)

Here Collins counts on the Divine’s power to protect her work as well as its creator from any unfavourable audience. Not only is God illustrated as a solid foundation that guarantees strength and support, but he also plays a role of a defender. The idea of God as her ‘Rock’ is emphasised in the volume on several occasions and, especially, in ‘This Song that God is the Strength of his People, whence They Have Support and Comfort’ (p. 53). The song announces that ‘God is the Rock of his elect’ (11). The poet hence ensures her close relationship and her place among the elect. She positions herself as God’s messenger, passing on divine doctrine to people and this resembles the position of the biblical Zion, whose voice is also destined to educate her inhabitants.

However, her writing talent, given by God, is not initially meant to be used for public ends, but is solely for private benefit, as she proclaims in ‘The Discourse’ (p. 8) that

Unto the public view of every one
I did not purpose these my lines to send,
Which for my private use were made alone:
Or as I said, if any pious friend
Will once vouchsafe to read them to the end:
Let such conceive if error here they find,
’Twas want of Art, not true intent of mind. (16-21)

Collins denies her desire to publicize her volume and shows that she relied on manuscript circulation, so her work was intended to be available only for her family and friends. ‘Want of Art’ implies her ‘lack of Art’, and so she also explains that any errors that could occur in this volume result from her lack of skills, but what is important here is that her mind intended to convey divine truth. Although Collins denies an intention of publicizing her work, not only does her volume appear to perform a public service by passing on divine truth and offering guidance, but ‘Verses on the Twelvth (sic) Chapter of Ecclesiastes’ (p. 85) demonstrate that there is a specific purpose of her writings. It is ‘to stir up youth their God to mind, | Before effects of evill days they find’ (77-8). She appoints herself as a spiritual mentor, guide, and also an upholder of God’s doctrine, whose duty is to prevent evil from spreading – she
becomes God’s agent. According to the Bible, this job involves publicity, insomuch as ‘no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost’ (II Peter 1. 20-21), and in ‘To the Reader’ (p. 1), the poet proclaims that her work is written ‘for the benefit, and comfort of others, Chiefly for those Christians who are of disconsolate Spirits, who may perceive herein, the Faithfullnesse, Love, and tender Compassionatnesse of God to his People’ (p. 1). Collins becomes a spiritual healer, who is sent by the Divine. By designating herself this role, the poet implicitly identifies with Christ’s apostles, or perhaps even Christ himself, who performed the same function, when prophesying on earth.

Nevertheless, in Collins’s case, passing on God’s truth in the written form also becomes a means of fighting her chronic illness as well as a means of positioning herself as a writer. In ‘The Preface’ (p. 3) the author says:

Being through weakness to the house confin’d,
My mentall powers seeming long to sleep,
Were summond up, by want of wakeing mind
Their wonted course of exercise to keep.[.] (1-4)

Considering it as a cure, she is required to announce its soothing effect, as it was done by all biblical figures that had been miraculously cured by Jesus, who tells them to ‘Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee’ (Luke 8. 39). The poet, aligning her transformation with such an event, yet again displays her obligation to speak publicly. This necessity to write is also determined by her talent that, as the Bible teaches, must not be wasted. The gospel according to Matthew records one of the Christ’s parables, which ends with a moral that those hiding their talents in private are not considered worthy servants and will not benefit themselves. Collins thereby follows the conviction that ‘they

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3 Matthew 25. 14- 30: For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast
have no excuse, | Which of ability will make no use’ (41-2). This adds to the urgency to abandon the private sphere of her home and display her talent to write to the public. She positions herself as a reliable servant, who brings profit to her master. Even so, by stressing the source of her writings, her mind, she draws attention to her figure as an author of her poetry:

Concerning these, the offspring of my mind,
Who though here appeare in homly dresse
And as they are my works, I do not find
But ranked with others, they may go behind,
Yet for theyr matter, I suppose they bee
Not worthless quite, whilst they with truth agree. (80-4)

Having compared her literary works with other writers’, the poet positions herself among them. Although she seems to be disappointed with the form of her work, in that she describes its attire as ‘homely’, the content makes it significant and worthwhile. The word ‘homely’ might refer either to the imperfections of her writings, or to the fact that she created her work at her home. This ‘homely dresse’, however, is well trimmed. All stanzas of ‘The Preface’ (p. 3) have a regular rhyming pattern of ABABCC that is repeated with each stanza, apart from the one above. The rhyme scheme here is ABAACC. The fact that rhyme B – ‘homely dresse’ – is not repeated in the stanza makes the message exceptionally significant. The poet expresses her awareness of possible mistakes in her volume, but those

cannot prevail to hinder me
From publishing those Truths I do intend,
As strong perfume will not concealed be,
Tell what God still for my Soule hath wrought. (92, 99)

Her volume is destined for publicizing. The poet portrays herself as a reliable servant of God, who is able to deliver God’s unaltered truth, even though its form is unsatisfactory, since it has been filtered through her inferior, feminine intellect.

In order to empower her voice, Collins identifies with multiple voices that are carefully selected and all come from the biblical figures. ‘A Song Composed in the Time of

that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

the Civil Warr’ (p. 60) begins by denying any connections with ‘Parnassus’ Virgins Nine’ (3), but then the speaker identifies with Deborah’s voice. Collins consciously illustrates her voice as detached from the culture of the classics and presents it instead as biblical. According to the Bible, Deborah was a prophet and ‘the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time’ (Judges 4. 4). Michele Osherow maintains that in Elizabethan England, Deborah was considered as a very significant female figure, who was very often referred to in sermons and pageant displays. On the one hand, Deborah was illustrated as a leader and a commander whose army fought against Israel’s enemies. On the other, as a judge who was ‘divinely raised’, she gave guidance to the chosen nation (Judges 4. 5). By identifying with Deborah, Collins’s voice acquires for itself her symbolic qualities, making her volume a prophetic guidance for the elect. Her position shifts to that of a leader, as she recognises the nation’s iniquities and shows how to eliminate them; she attempts to save the nation. Deborah’s role also involves giving hope, and this is what Collins offers in her writings too. She explicitly shows this in ‘The Fifth Meditation’ (p. 81), where her role is compared to that of ‘Noah’s Dove’ (4), which returns to her saviour with good news. She becomes the messenger who announces a new beginning and a new life. Collins’s willingness to publicise her work thereby corresponds not only to the leading role she undertakes in her volume, but also to that of a messenger, bringing hope in the difficult time of the civil wars. The poet chooses Deborah most probably because she succeeded, and this made her authority incontrovertible.

By both performing the role as God’s agent and identifying with Deborah’s voice, Collins authorizes her voice to give public testimony, concerning the political crisis in mid-seventeenth-century England. Although there are no details as to what position she might be aligned with, there are general conclusions that might be drawn on the basis of a few clues encoded in her poetry. As a bearer of God’s truth, Collins eagerly promotes Revolution. ‘Another Song’ (p. 63) announces that ‘the Course of Prophanacion’ has to be stopped in order to ‘make way for Reformacion’ (13-14). Since the volume dates from the 1640s, this

5 Ovid, Metamorphoses, pp. 106-9. In Metamorphoses, the nine muses were goddesses and patronesses of the arts. Parnassus is a mountain near Delhi, sacred to Apollo and the Muses.
7 Osherow, Biblical Women’s Voices in Early-Modern England, p. 77. Osherow has positioned Deborah as a judge, who has been raised by God in order to save ‘the Children of Israel from their plunderers’. King Jabin of Canaan is said to be their oppressor. He is a military captain who is identified as Sisera (p. 79). Osherow further elaborates on how the figure of Elizabeth I can be identified with that of Deborah: ‘Deborah symbolizes hope and restoration. Her success is her people’s success; the Israelites were united in victory and rewarded in peace’. The depiction of Elizabeth as Deborah is an extension of early-modern England’s identification with the Israelite nation’ (p. 85).
8 Genesis 8. 11: ‘And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth’.
declaration indicates that she is not a royalist. In the poem’s title: ‘A Song Composed in the Time of the Civill Warr, When the Wicked Did Much Insult over the Godly’ (p. 60), the poet implies that the war was the Devil’s conspiracy against the godly order of England. She associates those opposing the Parliamentarians with evil, since they are against the truth:

See how the Foes of Truth devise
Her followers to defame.
First by Aspersions False and Lies
To kill them in good Name. (25-8)

Collins reviles the corruption, immorality, and falsity of the objectors to the Reformation. The critique is emphasised by the semantic alternate rhyme. The enemies ‘devise’ ‘Lies’ that damage (‘defame’) the reputation of the Parliamentarians (‘Name’). She foresees that they will take on ‘Sathans course’ (30) and ‘Spoyle their Goods and Wealth increase’ (31), implementing a prophetic element in her volume. They are criticised for living in a ‘blockish ignorance’, as her speaker puts it in ‘Another Song’ (p. 60). Not only does she attack wealthy people, assigning their well-being to evil powers, but by identifying such opposition with ‘Satan’, Collins also associates the Revolution with godly order. Her public act involves reprimanding unbelievers, who instead of developing spiritually, decide to focus on carnal pleasures and disrupt this order too. Collins’s speaker describes them as ‘Enemies | To Lady Verity’ who ‘venture Life and State’ (49-50). They risk their life, names, and the well-being of the country by their ignorance. Another aspect that makes her poetry prophetic is her foreseeing of the future. The poet deeply believes that the truth will survive, since it will be vindicated by ‘a holy Seed’ (69) that ‘will the wronged Right regain | And Order Elevate’ (71-2). This assurance of the right order being restored in the future reflects her piety and her religious approach towards the civil situation in England. However, by both commenting on the situation in the form of public testimony and not engaging in its details, Collins makes her position unassailable.

Although Howard argues that ‘the transition from private to public speech was often intractable for female writers because the public realm was culturally constructed as a male domain; the private as a female’, by becoming published writers women successfully made this transition and redefined femininity.9 Sidney Gottlieb maintains that Collins ‘not only writes, but writes publicly about matters from which women at this time were typically

excluded, matters of ultimate concern to the godly’. Even so, the poet’s voice, similarly to Zion’s, is constantly shielded by God: ‘The Discourse’ reads: ‘Next unto God, myself I sought to know, | A thing not so facile, as some suppose’ (46-7). This statement challenges the reader’s perception of her figure as a writer and as member of Christian community; it is purposefully provocative. Although her poetry is ‘the image of her mind’, the poet emphasises God’s favour towards her. She identifies with one of his servants, to whom ‘God doth Grace bestow […] though he keeps them low’ (55, 56). Despite announcing her complex nature and a possible belief in her valuable personality, her incontrovertible authority as a woman writer is continuously strengthened by her pious image as a godly agent, whose devotional writing is to teach and guide. Longfellow has drawn attention to the fact that ‘women were more free to write in private forms, such as devotional meditation, and that the perceived privacy of these forms justified their entrance into the public medium of print’. On the other hand, however, devotional writing becomes a means of redefining the notion of femininity. Collins’s writing allows her to break free from the privacy of her home, to announce publicly her stand and assess the contemporary political and social situation. She, moreover, abandons the feminine passivity and takes on an active role of a nation’s guide, thanks to gaining confidence in her interpretative skills.

Elizabeth Major’s volume, in a similar fashion to Collins’s, also becomes a tool to redefine femininity. In her Honey on the Rod, Major proclaims that the Almighty ‘called upon me, and I will hear him: I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and glorify him’. She establishes herself as a mediator between God and the people by saying that

As is said, Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in a way, It is made good to you, O my soul, for his Scholar I hope you are, and by his power I desire you may act, I wish daily increase of his teaching, and a holy improvement of his mercy, so shall you be able to comfort others, which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith you are comforted of God. (p. 63)

The purpose of Major’s writings is to influence people’s hearts and minds as well as to help free them from the socio-political instability of seventeenth-century England. She must perform this service, since she has received ‘a drop from his [God’s] Ocean’ (A4), and by the act of writing she would like to reciprocate this gift. The ‘drop’ is a symbol God’s acceptance

12 All the references are to Elizabeth Major, Honey on the Rod: Or a Comfortable Contemplation for One in Affliction with Sundry Poems on Several Subjects, ed. by Anne Lake Prescott and Betty S. Travitsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 4.
of her among the elect that also makes her a godly servant. This image contributes to the necessity of Major’s creating her volume.

In the introductory part of her book, Joseph Caryl, a moderate Puritan clergyman, minister, and for a time the government’s licenser of religious works, assures the reader that Major, as a mystical spouse of Christ, indeed performs her godly mission (see chapter 4).\textsuperscript{13} By this positioning, Major might seem to be denied her desire for fame. Nonetheless, the fact that a male licenser places his opinion in a book of female authorship helps to diminish any potential hostility from a male-dominated audience. Caryl puts a pen in Major’s hand that empowers her authority. Her pen ‘drops honey into thy [the reader’s] soul’, so encourages to ‘take but a little of it (the All is not much) and taste it’ (a\textsuperscript{V}). This authorizes Major’s voice, but whilst encouraging the audience to have a look at Major’s writing, Caryl also diminishes its remedial qualities. He implies that it is not really fulfilling in offering divine doctrine and guidance. The reader, thus, cannot rely on her volume being the only necessary source of information; the poet is granted permission to use her pen because of its soothing effect and because her creation agrees with God’s teachings. He compares Major’s service to that of biblical Jonathan who found honey in the forest and ‘he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened’.\textsuperscript{14} Jonathan was unaware of his father’s objection to eating anything on that day, but people follow his act, as they recognised a sign from the Divine in his brightened face. Through this association with the biblical story, Major is positioned as an innocent and unaware servant that follows God’s will. Hence her book is presented a means of connecting with the Almighty.

Caryl also emphasises Major’s condition as indicative of her experiencing God’s grace. He says that ‘the School of the Crosse, is the School of Light; or, that the Lord gives

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\textsuperscript{14} 1 Samuel 14. 24-30: And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, ‘Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies’. So none of the people tasted food. Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened. Then one of the people said, ‘Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, “Cursed is the man who eats food this day”’. And the people were faint. But Jonathan said, ‘My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?’
instruction with correction. It is a strong Argument, that they have received Light or Instruction who readily give it’ (a5v). The poet’s ailment is interpreted as a sign of godly qualities, and when combined with her enthusiasm to share her wisdom, Major cannot be denied a voice. According to Hobby, by ‘reminding herself repeatedly that her disability is God’s judgement on her as a sinner [...], she presents herself to the reader as a particular exemplar of the state of sin; and, as the text proceeds, as sinner saved’.15 This yet again stresses the poet’s necessity to make her voice renowned. By such presentation of Major’s position, Caryl creates a sense of urgency for Major to write and to make her writings public. The author appears to realise that her volume will be published eventually, since she writes that

for the making it publique, know, the kind acceptance I knew it would finde from some, and the good it might do to others, prevented my looking upon it as waste Paper, choosing rather to adventure it abroad upon these hopes, then out of fear, dreading the censures of others conceal it. (A7)

She realises that her volume will cause some inimical reactions. This again displays her fear of being censured and perhaps misunderstood too.

In ‘To the Reader’, Major introduces herself as a humble woman writer, who is afraid of social judgement. She addresses her audience:

Courteous Readers,
You that will not judge, nor condemn before you read & consider, nor value so much from whence it came, as what it is that is come to your view; to you I say, that Nature and Grace hath made tender in judging. (A3)

Her fear can be classified as womanish, since its source is identified with her sex. This fear escalates when the author’s creation (produced in the safety of her privacy) is being exposed to the public. Major clearly asks not to be upbraided for making her voice public. This fear also determines her presentation of her writings that she considers as ‘poor worthless Lines’ (A4). She explains that ‘what is faulty is mine’ (A4). Her voice, therefore, is classified as imperfect, but what is God’s in her creation is ideal and this is the essence that deserves attention. While the content of her writing is considered as beautiful, the lines are described as ‘poor and undrest’, since there was no ‘hand to help me to put it into a better dress then what it brought with it’ (h3V). The poet proceeds to explain that in the school of the Lord,

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15 Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, p. 66.
O how uncapable of learning the trade driven in heaven am I! Not a secret in it I understand without a knock, though I confess done with much tenderness; so he was pleased to own me as one of the poor Scholars in the School, of the lowest Form, and according to my weakness he dealt with me[.] (A5)

This is a very literal image of a student who represents the lower standard. Not only does the author display her modesty here, but also her imperfect nature as a woman is revealed. According to OED the word ‘tenderness’ was used to describe a ‘weak and feeble’ brain and ‘compassionate and forgiving temper’ but in its biblical context, it implies godly qualities that give hope for survival. The book of Job teaches that ‘there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease’ (Job 14. 7). This ‘tenderness’ in Major’s case thereby indicates the writer’s deep belief that she is the elect. This also shows that the poet depicts herself as a dependable godly agent, whose writings convey an unaltered divine truth, even though it is filtered by an inferior, feminine intellect.

Accordingly, the writer does not deny her satisfaction with her creation, but by making her works divine, Major denies her authorship and puts God in charge of them, repeatedly negating her desire for fame. This complicity of the image that Major creates might be a result of her inner battle between her two contradictory drives: her wish to become a renowned writer, with a representative female voice, and the necessity to follow the social norms, forbidding this public voice. As Major’s editors, Betty S. Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott, have argued,

Major contributes a woman’s voice to the devotional literature dominated by men in the seventeenth century, creating a paradoxical identity of self-denial and self-assertion. This contradictory voice is utterly submissive to her Lord but defiant and angry in denouncing sin, fragile in her exposure to affliction but resilient in her determination to speak, and self-abasing in her religious confession, but self-promoting in her choice of poetic genre.

There is undoubtedly a self-promotion in Major’s writing. Had she been privileged with the freedom to write, the poetic genre might not have been her choice. Major positions herself as a godly interpreter who produces a public voice from the enclosure of her home.

The division of her work is also significant in understanding her authorial identity. She separates her work into, honey, wax, and dross, and explains that

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17 Major, Honey on the Rod, p. xiv.
the honey (Divine part) I recommend to thee, and the wax (the moral part) being clarified from the dross (that is, the faults & failings through weakness) is useful in its place; nay, the faults and failings are not to be past over without making some use of them, for they may make thee double watch upon all occasions, knowing that if but a service of our hearts lie open, sin stands ready to enter. (A3^V-A4)

Even though Major stresses her unassuming attitude in the introductory part of her volume, denying the usefulness of her contribution, this shows the opposite. She dominates her writing, since the ‘wax’ and ‘dross’ are assigned to her voice, and what comes from the Divine is the ‘honey’. As she emphasises, her contribution is beneficial for readers in all respects; even her faults and failures can be considered a lesson to learn. This positions her as a knowledgeable guide with an extensive expertise, who is able to tell what to do and warn against unexpected wrongdoings. Indeed, she proclaims that she speaks from her experience as a sinner:

I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thine; for which (O righteous Father) of thy Commandments have I not wilfully broken: I confess, I should have given unto thee the true God, an undivided heart, but alas it hath been divided[.](p. 41)

In a way, the writer stigmatizes her figure of a sinner by the constant repetition of the pronoun ‘I’. Her heart must, then, be completely devoted to the Almighty to make up for her corrupted nature. The feeling of obligation for her heart to be undivided (to love God wholeheartedly and nobody else) and her inability to meet this requirement makes her an unfaithful sinner. Her state of sin is a reflection of social spiritual iniquity, and her recovery makes her an example to follow. Thus, Major’s realisation of her corrupted nature neither influences her trust in her right and qualities to perform the job of God’s messenger with all due respect, nor her writing to be a fruit of her relationship with him. She announces that there are people saying that

There are sins named, that your blushing Sex should want confidence to mention. To this I answer, Sure I am, that fewer ever writ against them, then committed them: O I fear, I fear there is no sin under the Sun, but some one or other of my Sex have been stained with the guilt of it [and] therefore I desire to put on a holy confidence, and not to blush to declare the hatred of my soul against any of them. (h3)

This shows that if women have committed various sins, so have men. Thus, ‘blushing’, a sign of shame, even though originally associated with femininity, should be also referred to men.
Consequently, Major refuses to blush when performing godly service, as the Divine shields her. The act of blushing might also refer to her writing and to publicizing her literary work. She refuses to be ashamed and to feel guilty for becoming a devotional writer. The writer depicts her writing as ‘Pleasing or agreeable to the moral sense’ as well as ‘Befitting the purpose’. This emphasises both the practicality and divine teaching of her volume.

Major’s voice also engages in criticising politicians. This critique might be considered as a public act that she owes to God as his servant. In the part of the book devoted to ‘Sin and Mercy Briefly Discovered’, the author’s moralizing poem, ‘On Pride Caused by Wisdom’ (p. 172), points out that political wisdom might be connected with devilish powers. It asks:

What will our rich, wise Politicians say,
When all their Hell-fetch’d wisdom faileth, nay,
Shall never fail to tice them still along,
To hear their doom, Depart from me, be gone,
I know you not you fools, my love I say
You sold, for naught, depart, depart away? (p. 172)

The poet uses strong language to ridicule the political tactics that usually fail the nation, and she represents this nation here. Major criticises their pride in their human, worthless power that blinds them, and, as a result, they are not able to feel ‘the true fear of God’ that is the only accountable wisdom (p. 172). This is the only place the poet airs her views on politics, but it shows her awareness of the political situation. Although she avoids providing specific details, in a familiar fashion to other female writers in this chapter, she entitles herself to sarcastic comments about the way politicians deal with state’s affairs and the consequences it has on the people supporting them. What is intriguing and striking is that this critique comes from her voice, instead of the Divine’s, since the commentary about the political situation is included in the moral part of her volume. It might be speculated, therefore, that this skilful manipulation allows Major’s voice reach the public as an independent woman’s voice. Due to this Major redefines the notions of femininity and this process resembles that of Collins’s. She similarly escapes the enclosure of privacy and publicizes her reflections regarding the civil situation of her country. She erases the gender distinction by representing every sinner and establishes herself as an example to follow. This puts her on the side of being active rather than passive and alters the perception of femininity.

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Such an independent voice is most certainly presented by male writers, who even though presenting themselves as God’s instruments, confidently display their individualized voice, as separated from that of the Divine. George Herbert, for instance, a master of poetic language and form, similarly to Major and Collins discussed earlier, portrays himself as performing a holy service in *The Temple*. However, his service differs from what the female writers do, in that his everyday job was indeed serving at the altar. The printer of *The Temple*, Roger Daniel, describes him as ‘a pattern or more for the age he lived’ and portrays him, in ‘The Printer to the Reader’, as God’s ‘instrument for reedifying of the Church’. As such, Herbert informs his poetry with teaching and guidance that is directed not only at the English church, but also at the nation. Herbert totally offers himself to the service of the Almighty. ‘The Thanksgiving’ (p. 112) shows that earthly marriage, for him, is only a matter of obligation rather than an act of personal will. The speaker pronounces: ‘I will not marry; or, if she be mine, | She and her children shall be thine’ (23-4). The poet presents his complete devotion and allows God’s ownership of all aspects of his life. What he commits himself to is the performance of God’s service in praising his excellency and conveying his teaching, with his writing as one of the means to do that. In ‘The Quidditie’ (p. 253), his speaker says that ‘a verse’ (1) is ‘that which while I use | I am with thee [God], and Most take all’ (11-12). The ‘all’ probably refers to the essence of what he really needs: the connection with the Divine and writing poetry allows him to do that. The things, such as ‘dance’ (5), ‘art’, ‘news’ (9), or ‘banquet’ (3), enumerated earlier in his poem are of secondary status, and these represent everyday life and entertainment. However, in order to create valuable poetry that guarantees a permanent connection with God, and to become a worthy instrument of God, the poet has to change his corrupted nature, and his well-known poem, ‘A Wreath’ (p. 645), shows whether such an achievement is possible. This is why I will discuss it in detail.

‘A Wreath’ is a metaphor ‘justified by Biblical images of Christ, and of the Christian seeking salvation [...] usages which encourage seeing wreath or crown as a metaphor for spiritual victory, in a Christian context’. Herbert uses his poetical talent, a gift from God, in order to create such a garland (a synonym for his poetry), as a repayment for Christ’s redemption. However, ‘his crooked winding ways’ (4) worry him, since these might be a

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20 All subsequent references are to George Herbert, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
reason for the wreath’s corruption. This crookedness of his character either implies ‘the
twisting of human behaviour even at its spiritual best’, or it alludes to the nature of Leviathan –
Satan, who is ‘the great enemy of God’.\textsuperscript{22} The Bible describes him as ‘the piercing serpent’
and ‘crooked serpent’ (Isaiah 1. 1). Therefore, Herbert’s speaker appears to consider himself
as influenced by evil to some extent, or of evil nature. The word ‘winding’ is associated with
the biblical serpent, who beguiled Eve to eat a fruit from the forbidden tree, resulting in the
fall of humanity, further connecting the character of the speaker with serpent. On the other
hand, the speaker might be identifying himself with the couple from the Garden of Eden, who
failed to follow God’s order. He might hence present himself as a typical representative of
humanity. The omniscient God ‘observes all his ways and deceits’, as Judy Z. Kronenfeld has
pointed out, and is aware of the speaker’s faults.\textsuperscript{23} These flaws of human nature introduce
confusion in Herbert’s ‘A Wreath’, and so the speaker wonders whether it is possible to exist
with them:

\begin{quote}
My crooked winding wayes, wherein I live,
Wherein I die, not live: for life is straight,
Straight as a line and ever tends to theef.] (4-6)
\end{quote}

The repetition of words corresponds to the circular shape of the wreath. Each line conveys an
idea from the previous, creating a sense of enclosure. Godly life is described as ‘straight’. By
contrast, the poet portrays his life as complicated by his sinful nature. The speaking voice
indicates that without knowing God, life does not really continue, insofar as the soul is not
allowed to develop. Instead it is stuck on the corrupted earth and denied its natural function
that is cooperation with God. According to the Bible, there is still hope even for a stray sheep,
for God ‘can make that straight, which he hath made crooked’ (Ecclesiastes 7. 13). This
simplicity is identified with spiritual happiness:

\begin{quote}
For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly
sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our
conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you ward. (II Corinthians 1. 12)
\end{quote}

The biblical teaching emphasises the fact that ‘fleshly wisdom’ does not bring felicity. Only
thanks to human spiritual delight can bliss be attainable, as it makes a believer’s life straight
and simple. The speaker, therefore, while pursuing happiness, prays to God:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23} Kronenfeld, “‘A Wreath” and Devotional Aesthetics’, p. 292.
Give me simplicity, that I may live,
so live and like, that I may know thy wayes,
know them and practise them. (9-11)

This simplicity embraces both a comprehension of God’s acts and a passionate devotion to him.

However, the creator of this wreath reveals a worrying inability to apprehend God’s ways, and this prevents him from obtaining a blissful state. In order to be able to practise religion, one has to understand it, otherwise doubt in the form of incomprehension will bring about questioning its foundation. Herbert’s speaker asks God to help him comprehend the mysterious ways, just as the biblical Job did:

By his spirit he [God] hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent. Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? But the thunder of his power who can understand. (Job 26. 13-14)

Here Job, using a rational approach, seems to struggle with embracing the concept of God and his purposeful deeds. The Almighty appears as a controversial figure whose actions are contradictory. On the one hand, he created heaven, but, on the other, he gave life to a ‘crooked serpent’ that corrupts the godly order of his creation. Nonetheless, the main knowledge of God that is available to believers is of his unlimited power which the Almighty claims to use always in a just and reasonable way. Therefore, Job’s inner dilemma and frustration is akin to the one that the wreath’s creator feels. Kronenfeld has pointed out that in ‘A Wreath’:

On the one hand, the speaker blames himself for his sins which will damn him, asserting the discrepancy between the ‘crooked winding ways’ in which he dies eternally, and the straight life. On the other hand, he asserts that life always ‘tends’ to God in a straight line, even though he clearly feels himself caught in ‘crooked winding ways’. God is felt to be easy and impossible to get to at the same time; the speaker is imploring help.24

This plea embraces a complete acceptance and understanding of God’s word as well as a deep belief in the righteousness of his rules. However, being caught in the middle of that process of transition between doubt and full comprehension makes him fear that he is an incompetent religious writer. This lack of understanding, on the other hand, might also result

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from Herbert’s awareness that while attempting to create the perfect wreath, he is thinking about the reward, and this, according to Calvinistic doctrine, is what leads him to doom.

Despite him showing artistic skills by constructing an intriguing form of the poem that both reflects the act of weaving the garland and creates ‘poem’s musical structure’, as Rick Barot has observed, Herbert’s wreath is considered as ‘poore’ (12) at the moment. The speaker appears to be suspended between ‘deceit’ and ‘simplicity’ and, thus, he might be defined as ‘intellectually caught between any effort and culpability, and between his own working and his desire for God to work on him’, as Kronenfeld maintains. However, once he has mastered his faith and he has completely devoted himself to God, his qualities will allow him to offer ‘a crown of praise’ (12). Herbert hopes to become worthy of God’s service, and the poem asks whether this is achievable in an earthly life, while his spirit is trapped in a lustful body that is very often tempted to sin. This body distracts him from shaping his perfect creation. His ‘carnal mind’ is able to produce only humanly invented words and these are inherently fleshy. Kronenfeld has offered her interpretation that assumes that ‘there is no possibility of perfected work of perfected praise in this life; there is only the possibility of being open to God’s grace’. The only option is to develop devotional zeal and use it for perpetual improvement of commitment to God, which might result in a believer’s reward in the form of a crown of eternity, meaning life after death in heaven, but thinking about the reward dooms the speaker. This is why the circulatory nature of the inner conflict Herbert experiences inhibits him from completing his task.

In contrast to the female writers discussed in this chapter, Herbert portrays himself as a corrupted messenger of God. He is not perfect and he will never be, whereas female agents of the Divine position themselves as fully authorized and capable of performing God’s service. Even though they realise their imperfections (or display the socially imposed humility) and acknowledge their corrupted nature that has been flawed by original sin, they assure their readers that they are worthy messengers of God’s truth. Herbert, by contrast, depicts his speaker as unable to deliver a perfect service. Try as he may, he will always be influenced by his corrupted, human nature. This nature also corrupts his process of filtration of the divine truth, altering its outcome. Herbert therefore presents himself as a ‘crooked’ agent of God as opposed to the women writers, who become the exemplary servants.

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26 Kronenfeld, ‘“A Wreath” and Devotional Aesthetics’, p. 297.
27 Kronenfeld, ‘“A Wreath” and Devotional Aesthetics’, p. 303.
The female author of *Eliza’s Babes* is another example of such an agent. Unlike Herbert, she deeply believes that as a worthy instrument of God, she is able to perform her divine mission on earth with the help of her exceptional offering. The first sentence in ‘To the Reader’ explains that ‘When first the motion came into my mind, that these Babes of mine should be sent into the world; I would faine supprest that motion’.28 The poet manifests her thoughts about publishing her volume that are immediately rejected. However, writing becomes her irrevocable duty, since later she proclaims that

I being his must do, as he will have mee: and me thinks, hee directs me to tell you, that you shall never bee happy on Earth, nor Glorious in heaven, if you doe not love him, above all earthly things. (p. 57)

While creating this image of necessity and of the inevitability of the act of writing on God’s behalf, Eliza explains that ‘it was suggested to my consideration, that those desires [to write Devotions] were not given me, to be kept in private, to my self, but for the good of others’ (p. 57). By articulating that it was not her idea, or initiative, to publicize her volume of prose and poetry, the poet situates herself as a passive advocate of God’s wishes. This also shows that her volume is purposefully useful in conveying God’s truth.

Eliza skilfully creates a necessity to ditch the enclosure of her privacy and finds a connection with the public, which contributes to altering the idea of femininity and to building her individual authorial identity. She justifies her actions repeatedly by her ‘strict union [which] is there betwixt my deare God and me’ (p. 57). This union is a privilege and a means of obtaining a public voice. As Longfellow has argued, ‘Eliza’s Prince intervenes for her in the public “world” and then claims a private relationship with her, a relationship that is right by virtue of the “public favours” he has bestowed’.29 Therefore, in ‘The Invocation’ (p. 59) the writer pleads for a ‘Sacred Muse’ (1) to come so that she can be inspired by divine powers. Eliza addresses her mind saying: ‘Apire, aspire, my minde aspire, | From earthly things unto the higher’ (9-10). This makes her fruitful and results in the birth of her babes (see chapter 4). By this metaphor of making God the father of her ‘Babes’, not only does Eliza imply their innocence and righteousness, but also assigns the authorship of her works to God, at the same time, disavowing herself as an author.

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28 All subsequent references are to Eliza, *Eliza’s Babes: Or the Virgin’s Offering*, ed. by Liam Semler (London: Associated University, 2001), p. 57.

29 Longfellow, ‘*Eliza’s Babes*’, p. 254.
However, while the imperfections of her ‘Babes’ are being discussed, Eliza assigns them to herself and, thus, positions herself as their creator. This emphasises her contribution to the volume. She personifies her writings while criticizing them for not being ‘curiously dressed, or more finely shaped’ (p. 58), and this, as the poet claims, was the reason why she sent them to ‘wits, to form you to a more curious shape; and tyre you in a more inticing dress’ (p. 58). The poet portrays herself as a carrying mother, who is about to send her children to strangers, so that they look appropriately in public. This also aims to show her dissatisfaction with the initial form of her creation and exonerates her from taking responsibility for possible mistakes in her volume. On the other hand, however, it draws attention to her being responsible for delivering of her writings. She says that they

were obtained by virtue […], and will live to my content and felicity. And so Adieu: But Stay! Something you may truly say for your own imperfections, and your Mothers excuse, that some of you were borne, when herself was but a child[.](p. 58)

Here Eliza is presented as a very young mother, still a child herself. This might indicate the stage in her process of transformation. Realising the defects of her ‘Babes’, who are being sent into the world, she gives them guidance. This is why it constitutes tangible evidence against Semler’s theory that ‘her children need no guidance inasmuch as they represent the perfect, regenerate life of the elect: they need no model, for they are models’. 30 The seventeenth-century woman writer is obliged to display her weakness and imperfection and hence the weaknesses and imperfections of her creation.

Although Eliza is successful in obtaining a public voice, the act of publicizing is presented as God’s prerogative; he speaks through her. Becoming God’s mouthpiece resembles the situation of the biblical Zion. This allows her to avoid the anticipated social hostility towards a woman writer. Nonetheless, the writer appears to attract the readers’ attention to her own desire of being published. This is repeatedly emphasised by the presence of the personal pronouns, such as ‘I’ and ‘me’:

I must send out my Babes, to doe it with mee, and for mee: And if any shall say, others may be as thankefull as thee, though they talk not so much of it. Let them know that if they did rightly apprehend the infinite mercies of God to them, they could not be silent: And of they do not thinke the mercies of God worth not publique thanks; I doe, and therefore I will not be ashamed, to be that one in ten that returned, to acknowledge himself a cleansed Leaper. (p. 58)

Here this desire, however, is transformed into a debt, which she owes to Christ, rather than her attempt to be recognised as a woman writer. Eliza identifies with a ‘cleansed Leaper’ (p. 58) from Luke 17. 11-19 who gives public thanks to Jesus for his salvation. In ‘To my Doves’ (p. 63), the poet sarcastically comments on such public thanks that can be only possible during earthly life, since ‘When we are dead, we cannot give, | Our offerings must be while we live’ (7-8). What is striking in her statements is that she rejects silence as a sign of feminine virtue and gives it new connotations such as cowardice, ungratefulness, and also considers it a failure to acknowledge Christ’s redemption of humanity. This rejection also gives her a public voice and becomes a fundamental element of every Christian’s life, and so the notion of femininity is once again reshaped.

Her assurance of indifference to fame is also manifested in the title of her volume: *Eliza’s Babes: Or the Virgin’s Offerings. Being Divine Poems and Meditations. Written by a Lady who Only Desires to Advance the Glory of God, and Not her Own.* According to Wilcox:

This title is in itself a vivid emblem of the paradoxical situation of a woman devotional poet as other and virgin […] properly desiring no glory as a Christian and a lady but drawing attention to herself even by such a complex denial.31

By presenting herself as a ‘Virgin’, Eliza emphasises her chastity and a perfect state for entering the mystical marriage with Christ (see chapter 4), in that this word might be used to refer to her maiden state or to the fact that she is young, excluding the matter of whether she has kept her virginity or not.32 This part of seventeenth-century femininity becomes unaltered and the portrayal of her figure as an exemplary Christian, who works as God’s agent, yet again authorizes her writings.

Seeing that it was easier for a woman writer to publish devotional works rather than personal reflections, Eliza enters this comfortable sphere of avoiding criticism, as this one would have to be directed to the father of her ‘Babes’. Nevertheless, the controversy of her position among writers and her official denial of her voice, substituting it with God’s, escalates, when Eliza announces that ‘I am not ashamed of their [my Babes] birth’ (p. 57). The poet elevates the experience of giving birth to her metaphorical babes over the real physical experience of bearing babies and then bringing them up. In ‘To a Lady that Bragg’s

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32 Cruden, *Cruden’s Complete Concordance*, p. 723.
her Children’ (p. 101), the speaker points out that the addressee’s children ‘proceed from a sinful race’ (3) and hers, on the other hand, from ‘the heavenly dew of grace’ (4). She positions physicality on the negative end of the spectrum, and intellectual activity on the opposite. Whereas Eliza’s poetry brings her pleasure and joy, the other woman’s experience of birth caused her pain, and then ‘dreadful care’ (10) while her children were growing up. By contrast, the poet’s ‘Babes’ are well-behaved, as they ‘praise heav’ns King’ (8). This displays her pride in her works and elevates them above all other women’s usual achievement – a family.

The poet also draws attention to herself as the deliverer of her volume. This role is emphasised even further by her asking if ‘was so great a Prince, not ashamed to avow so great affection and love to mee, and shall I be ashamed to returne him publique thanks, for such infinite and publique favours?’ (p. 58). Publicity for Eliza is a matter of honour and inner compulsion. Otherwise God, as well as her, would consider her as an ungrateful coward, and so she warns her readers to ‘mistake not a Divine affection, for a Poeticall fancy; for I affect not to express my fancy, but I would have my fancy express my affection’ (p. 59). This aims at sensitizing her audience about her text being a consequence of her affections; her mystical marriage with God that inspires her poetical talent. She acknowledges her affection in her writings, which puts her in a position of an author. Semler has noticed that ‘Eliza is not just participating in the renovation of poetry, but also of the world, for as Jesus sends out his apostles, she sends out her babes that they may assists her in the work of spreading God’s praises’. This implicit identification with Christ takes her role to another level. She becomes a kind of a prophet. This status is again used when the poet compares her voice to that of an angel by saying that ‘With you best Angels, I must sing, | That brought the news of heav’ns great King’ (1-2). ‘Christ’s Kingdom’ (p. 72) is, therefore, another poem, which situates its speaker as God’s messenger. This messenger is also compared to a singing bird in ‘Upon Hearing the Bird Sing’ (p. 75). The simile of a bird has connotations of freedom, and only the Almighty recognises this freedom. This is confirmed by the speaking voice of ‘To my Doves’ (p. 63), who announces that ‘To him [God], I doe present, as free’ (15). The metaphors Eliza uses to portray her voice are associated with freedom, cheerfulness, innocence, chastity, and connected with the Divine. Whereas innocence and chastity are characteristic of femininity, the image of her female voice being liberated from the constraints of silence reshapes this notion.

From this position the poet becomes defensive about her devotional creation. ‘Of Poetry’ (p. 76) negates non-devotional writers, who waste time on begging the ‘Muses Nine’ (6) for inspiration and favours those, for whom God is an incentive to write.\(^{34}\) The speaking voice pours scorn on the former by saying that

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{No wonder though such fools are poor,} \\
\text{That goe for Alms to a wrong door,} \\
\text{They seek to them to get their wealth,} \\
\text{Who have too little for their selfe. (7-10)}
\end{align*}
\]

Poverty is a symbol of the small-minded. Eliza suggests that they should go to God for remuneration, as this is the only place they can be fairly paid with spiritual enhancement. The audience they usually turn to is too impoverished and too meanspirited. The poet also sarcastically manifests her indifference towards those who were unable to appreciate her effort and the godly purpose of her poetry. ‘Psalme 56. Vers. 10’ (p. 59) states that

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{All you that goodness doe disdaine,} \\
\text{Goe; read not here:} \\
\text{And if you doe; I tell you plaine,} \\
\text{I doe not care.} \\
\text{For why? Above your reach my soul is plac’st,} \\
\text{And your odd words shall not my minde distaste. (5-10)}
\end{align*}
\]

Although this message seems to come from a confident voice, it shows the author’s fear of social hostility and perhaps of being misunderstood too. Here again Eliza points out that her inviolability is guaranteed by her status of being God’s agent. Such protection is also described in ‘The Pavilion’ (p. 70) that illustrates a sort of a shelter. She can freely sing there and stay intact, because this is the place, where God ‘will not let me wounded be’ (12).

The fear Eliza expresses is palpable on several occasions in her volume. It becomes also explicit in ‘The Request’ (p. 59), where the speaking voice turns to the Holy Spirit for protection:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Come sweet Spirit expell my fear,} \\
\text{Assure me that thou hast a care} \\
\text{Of me, and of my giddy youth,} \\
\text{Assure me of it, still for Truth,} \\
\text{That thy Spirit shall me direct,} \\
\text{And that thy power shall me protect. (1-6)}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{34}\) Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, pp. 106-9. In *Metamorphoses*, the nine muses were goddesses and patronesses of the arts.
The speaker’s fear might be connected with her inexperience, and her youthful attitude. Her request is thereby to be guided in performing God’s service. This might relate to her considering herself as a young mother, which has been mentioned earlier. On the other hand, this fear is classified as womanish. In the short meditation entitled ‘The Acknowledgement’ Eliza proclaims that ‘I must not regard the censure of the world’ (p. 117). She demonstrates the nature of a warrior who is to fight the condemnatory judgement that she anticipates from the public. This shows the concerns of female writers who decided to abandon the privacy of their homes in order to enter the public arena. This entrance, therefore, is done from the position of a godly servant, who is equipped with ‘impenetrable weapons and armour’ (p. 118) in order to be able to defend herself, as Eliza puts it in ‘The Invincible Soldier’ (p. 118). The poet says that she wears ‘the Girdle of Truth’ and a ‘breast-plate of thy [Christ’s] Righteousness’ (p. 118), so that she does not have to be afraid of ‘the fiery darts of the assailing enemies’ (p. 118). The simile that is offered here makes her a member of the godly army, where God is illustrated as its commander and defender. She is, thus, to fulfil his orders unconditionally. This portrayal allows her to acquire masculine qualities of being active, becoming a soldier, performing a public job, and so reshapes the concept of femininity. On the other hand, however, this image shows her constant struggle with her fear of entering the public, and possible contemporary objections to her poetry.

On the pretext of a public act, Eliza has the audacity to criticise the laws and the political system in mid-seventeenth-century England. ‘To the King (1644)’ (p. 76) is directed to King Charles I to request an acceptance of her ‘Babes’ (2). Her speaker says that ‘For methinks tis in thy power, To make them smile, or let them lower’ (4). This is immediately followed by an explanation that her volume has been created by divine inspiration, and thus the poems are ‘children to that Prince of might’ (5). Then the poet offers a political advice or rather a prophetic guidance by telling the king to ‘Be not too rigit, dear King yeeld’ (10) and to accept the proposed parliamentarian reforms. She does not want him to leave the kingdom, ‘But rather three reform’d receive’ (16) and ‘Let us in peace, your presence view’ (18). On the one hand, this shows her pro-royalist attitude, on the other, however, it indicates that Eliza was aware of the unfavourable royal politics and the necessity of flexibility that would avoid further conflicts. In Semler’s words, ‘the poem is respectful toward the king and by no means in essence antimonarchical’.35 Her poem, ‘To Generall Cromwell’ (p. 101), even

further complicates her political stance. It questions Oliver Cromwell’s political skills, and begins with the speaker’s general wondering of ‘Why doe I, complain of thee [Cromwell]?’ (3). This expresses Eliza’s dissatisfaction with the subject’s actions. As Rex has argued though, Eliza seems to give some credit to the Lord Protector on condition that ‘thou’rt vertuous as ’tis sed, | Thou’rt [Cromwell] have the glory when thou’rt dead’ (8-9).36 She demands from him stability of the civil situation and freedom from unfair laws, which, as she proclaims, ‘By Tyrants heads […] were made’ (15). If Cromwell, who according to Eliza has got the king’s authority, is not able to fulfil the nation’s requirements, he will be burdened with unavoidable consequences. His failure will be considered evidence that his ‘head is pale, | But still the sting lives in the tail’ (19-20). This prophecy alludes to the figure of the Antichrist who was imagined to be a beast with many heads and a tail. Hill has explained that indeed in mid-seventeenth-century England, it was believed that ‘Oliver Cromwell had turned out to be the Little Horn of the beast’ and, as John Canne has pointed out, London became ‘the seat of the second beast’.37 By suspecting Cromwell of having something in common with the beast, Eliza challenges an influential male figure of authority, who eventually becomes a candidate, with large support, for the English crown.

Eliza’s audacity to critique the political situation and to question Cromwell’s authority to ‘scourgeth’ people with a ‘rod’ (4), so far viewed as a public testimony, might be encouraged by her connections with somebody in the court. ‘To a friend at Court’ (p. 72) ends with a moral, saying that ‘We envy none, but pity Kings’ (6). This indicates that the responsibilities of a king are nothing to be jealous about and it might be a reflection of her witnessing the complicated nature of the leader’s role, when befriended with somebody from that circle. The poet also mentions her acquaintances with a wider political circle, possibly somebody from abroad. Her probable visit at The Hague is succinctly discussed in her other poem, ‘To the Queen of Bohemia’ (p. 77). Eliza’s speaker claims to have seen Princess Elizabeth, but there is no indication, or evidence, as to them meeting. The poet praises the exemplary queen for both her ‘minde so great’ (11) and her ‘spirit high’ (13), and is certain that there is a place for her in heaven. Eliza’s possible socializing with such well-established people might encourage her to build her authority on the audacity to criticise the civil situation in England, to speak on behalf of her community, and to articulate her community’s demands. Another possibility is her role as God’s mouthpiece that is ordered to give

36 Rex, ‘Eyes on the Prize’, p. 228.
messages. Either way her determined, yet pious, voice becomes publicized, and she contributes to the establishment of the act of writing as a necessary virtue of femininity.

By contrast to Eliza, Henry Vaughan situates himself as an implicit messenger of God, but who, similarly to Eliza, also prepares his gift for God. The poet begins his *Silex Scintillans: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1650) by ‘The Dedication’ (p. 3) that reads: ‘My God, thou that didst dye for me, | These thy deaths fruits I offer thee’ (1-2). This is an articulation of his gratitude for the incredible gift of his son’s life in order to save humanity from sin. Therefore, Vaughan condemns all poets who contribute to a promotion of ‘impure thoughts and scurrilous conceits’ (B). They are accused of squandering their time on writing ‘idle verse’. The poet proclaims:

That this kingdom hath abounded with those ingenious persons, which in the late notion are termed *Wits*, is too well known. Many of them having cast away all their fair portion of time, in no better employments, then a deliberate search, or excogitation of *idle words*, and a most vain, insatiable desire to be reputed *Poets*.[p. 97]

Here Vaughan might refer to the writers who either disrespect his religion or who desire recognition by writing. The gospel of Matthew warns that

All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in his world, neither in a world to come. (Matthew 12. 31-32)

As the biblical teaching assumes, such writer’s ‘idle words’ shall be ‘give[n] account thereof in the day of judgment’ (Matthew 12. 36). His time is wasted on sinning and this will take place even after his death, in that he ‘makes for himself another body, in which he always lives’ (p. 99). These fame-driven ‘vipers’, as Vaughan refers to them, are epidemics which

infect whole generations, corrupting always and unhallowing the best gifted *Souls*, and the most capable Vessels: for whose sanctification and well-fare, the glorious Son of God laid down his life, and suffered the precious blood of his blessed and innocent heart to be poured out. (p. 99)

The term ‘vipers’ implies a corrupted nature as well as an evil spirit. The New Testament assumes that ‘O generation of vipers, how can ya, being evil, speak good things? For out of
the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh’ (Matthew 12. 34). This reveals Vaughan’s hostile attitude towards authors of non-devotional writings. Their work ‘is a wilful despising of God’s sacred Exhortations’ (p. 98), as the poet puts it. The corrupting impact the non-devotional writers have on the nation makes them responsible for encouraging people to sin, and, as a result, the ‘Composer is immediately a cause of my ill [...] , because I am corrupted by his bad example, which he left behind him’ (p. 99). Vaughan identifies with such a victim, fortunately cured, since he proclaims that ‘it is no long time since I have recovered’ (p. 99).

As a consequence of this recovery, the poet considers his writings as a gift for God, and while emphasising their educative role, he presents the Church with them:

I have begged leave to communicate this my poor Talent to the Church, under the protection and conduct of their glorious Head; who (if he will vouchsafe to own it, and go along with it) can make it as useful now in the public, as it hath been to me in private. (p. 101)

His poetry plays a role of a public service. It is to offer guidance and to teach. Similarly to the female writers discussed in this chapter, Vaughan believes he can be useful to humanity by becoming an agent. Having described his talent as ‘poor’, the poet displays his modesty that is recognised as a feminine quality. However, it is different to the female writers, because what is meant is not his low standard among other writers, but his talent that is classified as not worthy of God’s majesty. Even so, he presents his writing as worthwhile and valuable because of its religious content. The poet believes that ‘the God of the spirit and flesh, hath granted me with a further use of mine’ (p. 101). Thus, the poet expresses his conviction about having a sacred mission. The task he declares to perform is, however, influenced by his human nature, and this reveals some imperfections. One of his poems, ‘The Wreath’ (p. 168), shows this interrelation and, therefore, I will explore it in greater detail.

While attempting to create ‘The Wreath’, Vaughan’s speaker expresses a sense of helplessness, sadly asking God:

Since I in storms us’d most to be
And seldom yielded flowers,
How shall I get a wreath for thee
From those rude, barren hours? (1-4)

Having admitted to being ‘in storms’, the speaker reveals that he brought about God’s anger. The Bible depicts God as ‘a destroying storm’ (Isaiah 28. 2) indeed. There was a predominance of this anger in his life, because most of his lifetime was most likely wasted on
being away from God and, this is why, the speaker classifies this time as ‘barren’. This infertility is presented in a similar way to the tropes used in women’s writing. It is also caused by his sinful nature. Vaughan did manage to produce ‘flowers’, pleasing the Omnipotent, but very few of them. The word ‘yield’ can also be found in the book of Romans that instructs how to be devoted to God. It states that ‘Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God’ (Romans 6. 13). The Almighty wants believers ‘To surrender, give way, submit’ in an immaterial way to Him, employing all members of the body in prayer and in his service.\(^\text{39}\) Even when a soul seems to be too far from God, it can be still reborn, once it has acknowledged a total devotion to him. Nonetheless, Vaughan’s garland cannot be enriched with ‘the softer dressing of the Spring | Or Summers later store’ (5-6) for its unavoidable imperfection is caused by the writer’s pen, which is directed by his corrupted sinful nature.

Eventually, the poet manages to produce a garland neither composed of ‘thorns’ nor ‘roses’ (8). This might indicate that the speaker does not consider his iniquities as a contribution to the ‘crown of thorns’. However, ‘roses’ are not included in the structure either, which implies that the speaker is in a state of conversion, or perhaps at the very beginning of it. Vaughan announces that his coronet is made of:

\begin{quote}
Grief and praise,

Praise soil’d with tears, and tears again

Shining with joy, like dewy days,

This day I bring for all thy pain,

Thy causless pain! (9-13)
\end{quote}

The repetition of certain words is starting to occur at this point. This might correspond to the speaker’s recurring belief that the construction of the wreath might be possible. Therefore, it shows the mood swing from ‘tears’ to ‘joy’ that the speaker experiences while endeavouring to produce a worthy chaplet. Here the poet alludes to the day of Christ’s crucifixion, ‘When they [soldiers] had platted a crown | Of thorns, they put it upon his head’ (Matthew 27. 29). This grief might be a result of his realisation that there was no devotional passion in his life, despite the fact that Christ sacrificed his life for redemption of humanity. This admirable act of love imposes unconditioned willingness to suffer on the believer, even when this suffering is not justified. The Bible teaches that ‘For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience

towards God endures grief, suffering wrongfully’ (1 Peter 2. 19). On the other hand, however, the speaker’s grief might also be an allusion to his regret about spending too much time on gaining knowledge instead of praying. The Bible condemns such conduct as well. The book of Ecclesiastes maintains that ‘For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow’ (Ecclesiastes 1. 18). Vaughan, as a prolific writer, translator of devotional works, and a medical practitioner, is considered to be a knowledgeable man, who, as Alan Rudrum puts it, might be suffering from too ‘much wisdom’. 40

In the structure of Vaughan’s garland, a ‘Praise soiled with tears’ (10) is also included. These tears might symbolize his joy because of his conversion as well as the arrival of days filled with devotional passion, but the ‘sadness’ (14), mentioned immediately after ‘joy’ (11), seems to dominate the tone of the poem. 41 This might be viewed as a lack of gratitude for Christ’s sacrificed life. The speaker is convinced that ‘sadness breeds in the most vain’ (14), which causes ‘emptiness, fruitlessness, or worthlessness’ of a human soul. 42 The speaker’s misery then is not brought about by thinking about Christ’s crucifixion, but by his neglected relationship with the Almighty. He appears to have achieved a state of emotional chaos, when exclaiming: ‘O not in Vain!’ (15). On the other hand, this exclamation might refer to Christ’s death, whose significance is sometimes obscured by corrupted human nature. Even so, one should be persistent in fighting for the spiritual blissfulness in the way that Christ did. The speaking voice reminds that the reward is in heaven:

Thy quickening breath, which gladly bears
Through saddest clouds to that glad place,
Where cloudless Quires sing without tears,
Sing thy just praise, and see thy face. (15-19)

‘Thy quickening breath’ might be considered either as a metaphor for the soul leaving earth and flying to God’s mansion or an act of simulation of ‘the spirit, which was deadened’. 43 Thence the poet might refer either to his stray soul or to the image of Christ’s crucifixion and his last breath before he died. Another interpretation might refer to the speaker’s identification with Christ’s soul, ascending to heaven, and the vision of these ‘cloudless

42 Cruden, Cruden’s Complete Concordance, p. 719.
43 Cruden, Cruden’s Complete Concordance, p. 525.
Quires’ singing ‘praise’ become a motivation to complete the process of conversion and to celebrate his achievement of total devotional passion.

One more stimulation for the speaker, presented in ‘The Garland’ (p. 117), might also be his belief in the possibility of compensation for his ‘yielded flowers’, which are accumulated on earth for this wreath. They appear to be of paramount importance, as each of them contributes to the opening of the door of heavenly life:

Flowers gather’d here in this world, die here; if thou
Wouldst have a wreath that fades not, let them grow,
And grow for thee; who spares them here, shall find
A Garland, where comes neither rain, nor wind. (33-6)

Despite the flowers’ mortality, Vaughan promotes persistence in collecting them and in attempting to weave this outstanding wreath for God that is based on immortal spiritual devotion. These flowers might also represent good deeds, or offering, showing that Vaughan is trying to find a symbol for his devotion. Such a wreath guarantees a place in heaven, ‘where comes neither rain, nor wind’, but spiritual happiness.

As opposed to the female writers in this chapter, Vaughan displays his modesty in front of the Divine; it is not used as a factor facilitating the publicizing process. Although he positions himself as God’s agent, it is implied that his offerings, in the form of his volume, are corrupted by his sinful nature. The women poets, on the other hand, tend to differentiate between the imperfect form of their writings that is caused by their alleged inferior intellect and their exemplary content that comes from the Divine. Finally, Vaughan, even though he becomes God’s servant, emphasises his corrupted humanity, whereas the female writers fight their sinful nature and present themselves as model agents of God. This makes Vaughan a ‘crooked’ agent of God who is unable to deliver a worthy service, and the women, by contrast, become reliable upholders of the divine truth. They adjust the notion of femininity by making it fit the category of virtuous writers performing a godly service. Ironically Vaughan’s writings are zealously promoting that category.

The position Andrew Marvell represents is very complicated. Despite much critical work on his religiosity, he is a figure who resists precise classification and seems not to fit a category of God’s agent. The devotional passion he expresses to the Almighty is certainly present, though, and encoded in the images of nature. In ‘The Garden’, Marvell’s speaker envisages the perfect harmony between his soul and the green garden that is described as
opposed to the social places that tend to be busy with people. The poet proclaims that ‘Society is all but rude | To this delicious solitude’ (15-16). The garden becomes, therefore, the most desirable place, even more appealing than female beauty, as the speaker explains that ‘No white nor red was even seen | So amorous as this lovely green’ (17-18). The reference to a woman is encoded in white and red. These colours were habitually used to portray beauty of a woman in love poetry. Stanley Steward has pointed out that ‘The trees (emblems of divine love and of its productive effects) represent the spiritual potentialities of man, which are more beautiful than the features of any woman’. Far away from the crowds of people, his soul finds an idyll:

My soul into the boughs does glide:
There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
Then whets and combs its silver wings;
And, till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light. (52-56)

The simile Marvell offers gets to the essence of the spiritual happiness that is associated with freedom and carelessness of a bird. In a similar fashion to Eliza’s portrayal, in this image the spirit engages in self-preparation for a long journey, possibly to meet the Divine. The soul’s exaltation is reflected in its various, rainbow-like colours. In order to reciprocate for being able to experience such a joyous connection with God, the poet endeavours to offer a worthy gift in the form of his devotional verse. One of his poems, ‘The Coronet’, describes the qualities of the poet’s offering in detail.

The story Marvell’s speaker tells in ‘The Coronet’ echoes the content of Vaughan’s ‘The Wreath’ and Herbert’s ‘A Wreath’. It surprises with an unexpected turning point, though. The poem starts with a sense of guilt expressed by the male speaker who ‘long, too long’ (2) has been acting against Jesus making for him a metaphorical crown ‘With many a piercing wound’ (2). The speaker alludes here to the allegorical Christ’s crown made of thorns on the day of his crucifixion. Positioned as the offender, who collected all his talents

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and experience of writing, the poet is ready to create something valuable and truly unique, which would constitute a perfect offering, rectifying his wrongdoing towards Christ – ‘The Coronet’. In order to create this gift, the speaker ‘gather[s] flowers (my fruits are only flowers)’ (6), looking for them ‘Through every garden, every mead’ (5), even ‘Dismantling all the fragrant towers | That once adorned my [his] shepherdess’s head’ (7-8). Marvell proclaims that he prefers the spiritual affection to earthly love of a woman. These flowers might function as ‘a metaphor for the arts of language’ as well as speech. On the other hand, however, it might also be a reference to the Garden of Eden that is pictured as a paradise, which is abundant in flowers and fruits. This place has negative connotations of a betrayal, though, as this is where Eve ate a fruit from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad and persuaded Adam to taste it as well. This betrayal of God resulted in their banishment from the garden. In the story the woman is blamed for eating the fruit first and, therefore, for the initiation of the fall of humanity. From this perspective in ‘The Coronet’, the act of deprivation of the speaker’s lover of her garland is a consequence of his turning away from her weak nature. The fact that the wreath is offered to Jesus might mean both the speaker’s readiness to give up his earthly love, changing this for the spiritual love, and a complete commitment to Christ.

Marvell’s speaker is hoping to create a perfect wreath, and so he says: ‘Thinking (so I my self deceive) | So rich a chaplet thence to weave’ (10-11). It turns out, however, that his offering will not be worthy of God. The act of ‘thinking’ might also allude to the way the couple from Eden reasoned that God would not notice the fact that they broke his rules of not eating from the Tree of Knowledge and would be able to live as if nothing happened. They are characterised by self-deception, and so is the speaker of ‘The Coronet’. While using his pen, he realises that the act of writing makes a writer famous. Hence it cannot be considered as an innocent and selfless gift to Jesus. Here the shift in the poem’s tone takes place, from narrative to dramatic or ‘from nominative to vocative’, insofar as the exclamation marks begin to appear. A reader is able to enter the speaker’s mind, when he expostulates with disappointment:

Alas! I find the serpent old,
That, twining in his speckled breast,
About the flowers disguised, does fold

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48 Patterson, “‘Bermudas’ and the ‘Coronet’”, p. 491.
49 Patterson, “‘Bermudas’ and the ‘Coronet’”, p. 491.
With wreaths of fame and interest. (13-16)

As Annabel Patterson has argued, ‘The more assiduously the poet strives to perfect his praise of God, to surpass the devotional efforts of others by producing something “never yet” offered, the more secretly he desires his own praise and admires his works’.50 ‘The Serpent’, hidden among flowers, is an emblem of the serpent from the paradise. That one was also pictured as curling among the fruits and flowers of the forbidden tree. His arrival in the poem is accompanied with sibilance: ‘Alas! I find the Serpent’ with ‘speckled breast […] And about the flowers does fold’ (13-15). This sibilance makes an impression of a hiss produced by the snake and gives a sense of upcoming danger as well as revealing the speaker’s anxiety. ‘The Serpent’ has a negative influence on the speaker’s intentions by making them impure, which in effect corrupts his project. This is probably again an allusion to the innocence of the paradisiacal couple before they ate the fruit from the tree. Their intentions were harmless too, and their corruption is also blamed on the serpent. However, the couple is punished by God who made them leave the Garden of Eden. Marvell’s speaker is punished too, as he loses hope to be capable of presenting God with a perfect and worthy gift. From that moment he realises that ‘The Serpent’, as an intruder discovered in the gorgeous chaplet, brings ‘wreaths of fame and interest’ (16). This shows his self-interested intentions of becoming a renowned writer and the treacherous potential of poetry-writing. Having brought the ‘wreaths of fame’, the snake yet again is able to form an obstacle between humanity and God, which, in ‘The Coronet’, is human pride.

Despite the greatest effort put in the process of weaving, ‘The Coronet’ is not worthy of Christ’s head, and its creator becomes a ‘foolish man, that would’st debase with them | And mortal glory, Heaven’s diadem!’ (17-18). Marvell’s speaker is tempted and deceived in a similar way to the couple from the paradisiacal garden. According to Barbara Lewalski, the poet realises that ‘his special problem as a Christian poet results directly and inevitably from his situation as a fallen man corrupted by the serpent’.51 The ‘mortal glory’, a desire to become renowned, is hidden in the wreath and gradually elapses, since it does not matter in life after death. The phrase, therefore, captures the transitory nature and a lack of significance of human pride, caused by the earthly achievement, in comparison to spiritual afterlife.

50 Patterson, ““Bermudas” and the “Coronet””, p. 491.
However, there is hope for this wreath, inasmuch as Christ has got the power to tame the serpent:

   Either his slippery knots at once untie,  
   And disentangle all his winding snare,  
   Or shatter too with him my curious frame[.] (19-22)

The sense of enclosed trap is achieved by diction that emphasises what action is required to free the speaker, such as ‘untie’, ‘disentangle’, but also by words that have direct connotations of enclosure such as ‘snare’ and ‘frame’. The image of divine violence seems to constitute a turning point in the poem, and is necessary to obtain freedom. It is a reflection of the speaker’s anger about his useless effort mixed with a sense of helplessness. The Serpent’s metaphorical trap is described here as ‘winding snare’. The former word of this phrase reflects the shape of this trap that is of ‘circular or twining pattern, ornament’ (which refers to the shape of the wreath), and its character is ‘devious or intricate, tortuous or crooked ways or dealings’ with the victim. By this the author perfectly combines the treacherous nature of the serpent with its ability to curl around his victim, creating a trap. The structure of this trap is built from ‘slipp’ry knots’ that is made of ‘Unstable, uncertain, and insecure’ ‘ropes, cords, or strips’ or ‘a bow of ribbon’. The word ‘knot’ might allude to the knot in a halter for hanging, representing the ruthless intentions of the Tempter. ‘The Serpent’, thus, becomes a symbol of a traitor. The speaker, however, aware of this, wants to fight the evil, and by his plea to ‘disentangle all his winding snare’, reveals his desire for his nature to become unimpeachable so that he can be innocent again. He is even ready for Christ to completely destroy ‘his curious frame [...] so that he may die’ (22-23) in order to release its creator. Nevertheless, either way (altering the structure of the poem or its total destruction), the wreath ‘May crown Thy feet, that could not crown Thy head’ (26). This might mean that a human being is not capable of creating anything deserving Jesus’s head. His foot is as far as the gift can reach and this can be attained only thanks to Christ’s will of defeating evil and making the gift flawless so acceptable. By the repetition of the word ‘crown’ in this last line of the poem, the author comes back to the technique of weaving used in the initial 8 verses, perhaps implying that his wreath is not yet finished or a new one, more humble, is planned to be created. Lewalski has further argued that

As Christ’s crown of thorns was transmuted into a glorious heavenly diadem truly fit for the King of Glory, so the final line of Marvell’s poem suggests that a poetic crown, produced in some paradoxical way from flowers detached from the curious frame and by the agency of Christ’s treading rather than his own curious setting out, might become a humble crown for Christ’s feet.\(^5^4\)

The book of Isaiah in the Old Testament might have triggered this concept for it announces that ‘The crown of pride [...] shall be trodden under feet’ (Isaiah 28. 1-5). Moreover, it differentiates between ‘the crown of pride’, ‘a crown of glory’, and ‘a diadem of beauty’. These expressions are used in the poem too. ‘The Coronet’ is described here as a ‘curious frame’. The former word describes an excellent piece of art in terms of its form and language. As Patterson has noticed, it might also have been taken from Psalm 139. 15: ‘I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth’.\(^5^5\) The latter might refer to the nature of the creator of the wreath, or even the nature of the wreath itself. Marvell’s speaker announces that ‘For he [God] knoweth our frame; he remembers that we are dust’ (Psalm 103. 14). People were created from dust and will return to it. The same is happening with ‘The Coronet’. Since created by a weak human being, it has to be destroyed by God or at least altered to become acceptable. Marvell’s chaplet, therefore, is two-dimensional. It describes the literal (the poetic form) and the figurative (the metaphorical images).

By not being able to offer a worthy gift, Marvell, as an artist, displays his modesty. Even so, this modesty is directed to God rather than to other writers. It is not to say that his work is imperfect in comparison to theirs. The writer portrays himself as a confident poet, believing in his ability to create significant and worthwhile poetry. Nevertheless, his literary works do not aim to teach. This is why one could say that his poetry might be precious because of the form, perhaps the content, yet the author’s intention is not to teach God’s word to the audience. Such a wreath, through exposure to the audience, might then only bring fame to its creator. By leaving the end of the poem open, its author might imply that the complicity of this problem constitutes an insurmountable obstacle for a human mind to overcome while on the way of finding its solution.

What Anne Bradstreet offers to God is her ‘thyme or parsley wreath’ (48), as the author describes her work in ‘The Prologue’ (p. 15). Her modest abilities constrain her to perform on the level of ‘bay’ laurels (48) and so, unlike Vaughan, she implies that her work

\(^{5^4}\) Lewalski, ‘Marvell as Religious Poet’, p. 257.

\(^{5^5}\) Patterson, “‘Bermudas’ and the ‘Coronet’”, p. 492.
in no way can be considered as a worthwhile coronet.\textsuperscript{56} Bradstreet cannot be classified strictly as a devotional writer, though, since her \textit{The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America} (1650) contains a variety of occasional poems and letters, representing her personal Puritan life as well as entering a political stage, next to a few spiritual and moral meditations. Her poetry was first circulated in the form of a manuscript copy among her family members.\textsuperscript{57} In the preface to her volume many writers express their admiration of her poetical talent and writing skills, discussing their effect on readers. For example, John Woodbridge, a pastor of the church at Andover, local politician, and minister in America, says that

\begin{quote}
I doubt not that the reader will quickly find more than I can say, and the worst effect of his reading will be unbelief, which will make him question whether it be a woman’s work, and ask, is it possible? \textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

However patriarchal this implication is, questioning the authorship of this volume, and however ludicrous it is to a modern reader, in the seventeenth century it was perceived as a compliment. Woodbridge is praising Bradstreet for her achievement, and aiming at facilitating the entrance of a text of female authorship into the public world.

Even so, Bradstreet considers her personalised works as imperfect and faulty. In ‘The Author to her Book’ (p. 238) she refers to them as her ‘irksome’ children, who even after ‘I washed thy face, but more defects I saw, | And rubbing off a spot still made a flaw’ (14-15). These children, according to Bethany Reid, are ‘malformed, therefore, sheltered, but already walking and talking, capable of being imperfectly schooled by its mother’.\textsuperscript{59} This unsatisfactory result is allegedly caused by the speaker’s intellectual inability. Her speaker also addresses the children, calling them

\begin{quote}
Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth didst by my side remain,
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,
Made thee in rags, halting to th’ press to trudge
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} Bradstreet, ‘The Prologue’, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{57} Bethany Reid, ‘“Unfit for Light”: Anne Bradstreet Monstrous Birth’, \textit{The New England Quarterly}, 71 (1998), 517-42 (p. 523). Reid explains that there has been a disagreement between scholars as to what extent Bradstreet knew about the upcoming publication of \textit{The Tenth Muse}. On the basis of ‘The Author to Her Book’ Reid establishes that the poet, even if knew about such a possibility, was indeed surprised by its appearance.
\textsuperscript{59} Reid, ‘Unfit for Light’, p. 539.
Where errors were not lessened (all may judge). (1-5)

In spite of these imperfections, Bradstreet’s friends decided to publish her works seemingly against the author’s will, exposing them to critical judgement, whilst the poet’s aim was to leave them as a gift to her children. The writer thereby enters the public as an exemplary Puritan wife and mother, who instructs her children. In ‘To My Dear Children’, Bradstreet proclaims that her volume has been written for her children so that they ‘may gain some spiritual advantage by my experience’ (p. 263). The poet uses the mother’s legacy to prevent her becoming a renowned writer through making its readership see it after her death. She ensures this by saying that

This book by any yet unread,  
I leave for you when I am dead,  
That being gone, here you may find  
What was your living mother’s mind.  
Make use of what I leave in love  
And God shall bless you from above. (1-6)

Her volume has not been read by anyone yet, but the possibility of it being exposed to the public is not excluded. What is significant is that her writing mirrors her mind. Although it is disguised as the mother’s legacy, her engagement with her poetry is emphasised by drawing attention to her mind.

Bradstreet introduces contradictory statements in her volume. On the one hand, she claims that her book was publicized or exposed to a certain audience against her will, but on the other, nobody is said to have an insight into it. This is why the argument of unintentional publication cannot be dismissed totally, especially when the writer suggests in ‘The Author to her Book’ (p. 238) that she produced her volume on the pretext for earning some money:

If for thy father asked, say thou hadst none;  
And for thy mother, she alas poor,  
Which caused her thus to send thee out of door. (22-24)

Here, as Reid has pointed out, ‘Bradstreet constructs her poetic persona as a fallen woman choosing to disassociate herself, for whatever reason, from the man who fathered her child’. 60 She portrays her volume as illegitimate, emphasising her self-reliance, while producing it. This promotes her independence and strength and reflects the lack of any assistance during this process. On the other hand, however, having stressed this self-reliance, the poet puts

60 Reid, ‘Unfit for Light’, p. 539.
forward an image of an independent woman writer. In order to keep a balance, though, she
denies her spiritual advancement, her mental abilities as well as her writing skills by calling
herself ‘poor’.

The poet shows a socially imposed modesty and takes on a self-effacing demeanour in
her writings. This is especially present in ‘The Prologue’ (p. 15) to her works, where her
speaker announces that

To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings’
Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,
For my mean pen are too superior things:
Or how they all, or each their dates have run
Let poets and historians set these forth,
My obscure lines shall not so dim their worth. (1-6)

Nevertheless, due to her ‘imbecility’ (p. 206), ‘lowly pen’, and ‘humble hand’ (p. 13), a three
hundred-page volume of poetry and prose was written. By writing ‘The Four Monarchies’, ‘A
Dialogue between Old England and New’, ‘In Honour of Du Bartas’, or ‘In Honour of Queen
Elizabeth’ Bradstreet displays her great knowledge and shows her writing talent as a poet and
a historian, who eventually becomes officially recognised as the first American woman poet.

At that time, however, ‘a pen’ was not a suitable instrument for her:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue,
Who says my hand a needle better fits.
A Poet’s Pen all scorne, I should thus wrong;
For such despight they cast on female wits:
If what I do prove well, it wo’n’t advance,
They’ll say its stol’n, or else, it was by chance. (25-30)

The seventeenth-century meaning of ‘obnoxious’ is ‘liable or exposed to harm’ and as Reid
has argued, ‘In defence of this persona, Bradstreet deploys “A Poet’s Pen” – a phallic
instrument to which she, a woman, can have no claim – to ward off accusations of criminal
behaviour’ (she has already committed a crime by comparing her poetry to a bastard). 61

However, what is also important here, according to Carrie Galloway Blackstock, is that
‘After making the requisite self-denunciation, Bradstreet gives herself leave to speak directly
as an “I”, stating outright her deviation from acceptable feminine avocation’. 62 It would be

Early American Literature, 32 (1997), 222-48 (p. 224).
better for her, as a virtuous woman, to use a ‘needle’ instead of a ‘pen’, since the latter is
directed by her faulty inspiration anyway:

My foolish, broken, blemish Muse so sings,
And this to mend, alas, no art is able,
Cause nature made it so irreparable. (16-18)

Having expressed her alleged helplessness and pointlessness in any attempts of restoring, or
rather improving her skills, Bradstreet positions herself as a typical seventeenth-century
woman. Her speaker is on her own in the struggle with her imperfections. Therefore, in her
‘Contemplations’ (p. 222), the speaking voice proclaims that

Silent alone, where none or saw, or heard,
In pathless paths I lead my wand’ring feet,
My humble eyes to lofty skies I reared
To sing some song, my mazed Muse thought meet.
My great Creator I would magnify,
That nature had thus decked liberally;
But Ah, and ah, again, my imbecility! (51-57)

The oxymoronic phrase, ‘pathless paths’, gives a sense of the unknown and undiscovered. It
signifies the virginal routes she is to explore. Since presented as a virtuous woman, her
personified ‘Muse’ is ‘silent’, while trying to figure out what way leads to the Almighty. She
follows the biblical teaching of the necessity of women’s silence in churches ‘for it is not
permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith
the law’ (I Corinthians 14. 34), and possibly Timothy’s dictate that women ought to ‘learn in
silence with all subjection’ (I Timothy 2. 11). Her ‘Muse’ is confused and feels bereft, while
attempting to find divine inspiration, in order to be able to offer a worthy praise to God.
Eventually, she realises that it might be impossible to achieve it, because of her supposed
folly and debilitating feminine nature. By this, the poet shows the socially imposed self-
effacement, and with a self-denunciating attitude she faces the public.

Nevertheless, at the same time Bradstreet stresses her dissatisfaction, misery, and
bitterness about this position. The poet announces that men are the best, yet still want more,
and emphasises the awareness of this among women. What hurts her the most is that men do
not appreciate any female efforts, and their egocentrism, as well as their belief in their self-
righteousness, blunts their ability to notice women’s significance. The speaking voice bitterly
announces:
Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are
Men have precedence and still excel,
It is vain unjustly to wage war;
Men can do best, and women know it well.
Preeminence in all and each is yours;
Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours. (37-42)

The poet uses semantically charged words including the ‘w’ sound in order to emphasise the subject matter of the poem that is women. Words such as ‘women’, ‘wage’, ‘war’, ‘know’, ‘well’, and ‘acknowledgement’ are used in reference to the position of women in the male-dominated society. By this Bradstreet aims to rebalance this position. As Reid has aptly noticed the poet ‘needles her male audience while patronizing their insecurities’.63 The poet requires the acknowledgment of women being perfectly suitable for the writing environment. According to Backstock, Bradstreet belongs to ‘women who stepped beyond their domestic confines through literature – by reading or writing – were considered dangerous to themselves and society. [...] Puritans expressed considerable scorn for women who wrote or published’.64 Her complex Puritan voice is seen as ‘the site of binary tensions between a “public” voice and a “personal” one upon both the development of agency – the feminine subject – social spaces can be superimposed’, as Eaton has established.65

The poet goes even further by implying that the female sex ought to be considered as superior to the male. She provides the example of a woman being able to function as a man and to shoulder manly responsibilities. This is conveyed by her poem that eulogizes the queen Elizabeth I. Not only does her ‘In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth’ (p. 209) emphasise the mental and spiritual equality between men and women, but it also implies the superiority of the female brain over men’s. The speaker proclaims that

Now say, have women worth? Or have they none?
Or had they some, but with our Queen is’t gone?
Nay masculines, you have thus taxed us long,
But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong.
Let such as say our Sex is void of Reason,
Know tis a Slander now, but once was Treason.
Here lyes the pride of queens, pattern of kings. (100, 124)

63 Reid, ‘Unfit for Light’, p. 521.
65 Sara Eaton, ‘Anne Bradstreet’s “Personal” Protestant Poetics’, p. 60.
The poet skilfully encodes her message in the semantically charged rhyming couplets, which indicate that men have erred for a ‘long’ time by denying women’s intellectual abilities. For women this depreciation of female ‘Reason’ becomes ‘Treason’. Bradstreet’s speaker indicates that the Queen is an example to follow not only for women, but also for men. It can, therefore, be debated that it is the female sex that turns out to be superior to male, even though not appreciated by the male-dominated society. It is particularly interesting to note here Bradstreet’s use of the phrase ‘pattern of kings’ (124). A ‘pattern’ is an example to be followed by others, and those others, according to the poet, are the masculine-gendered monarchs. As opposed to the other women writers discussed in this chapter, Bradstreet explicitly demands a redefinition of femininity, and she has already begun this process by displaying her writing skills and so her authorial identity to the public, but now she goes even further and proposes a radical reversal of the gender position, where women overpower men.

Bradstreet’s engagement in politics is not only limited to history, but also to critique of the contemporary political situation. In ‘A Dialogue between the Old England and New: Concerning their Present Troubles, Anno, 1642’ (p. 191), the poet points to the political errors as well as the unfavorable religious circumstances that are revealed in the conversation of the two speakers: Old England and New England. The latter begins the exchange by expressing her concern over her mother’s ‘wailing tone’ (11). The former acknowledges that her ‘fainting weak’ned body’ (19) needs a cure. The act of wailing and the metaphor of the ill body position Old England as the biblical Zion whose body is composed of sinning Christians, causing sickness. Old England is claimed to have many diseases beginning with the ‘tempestuous’ (36) Civil Wars, through ‘Rome’s whore’ (243) constant besetting, to ‘Idolatry’ (97), folly, and iniquity. The poet fiercely criticises not only the politics, but also the English nation, becoming a representative of the ‘female wits’ (31), and that writing authority is strengthened by her image of an appreciative believer, who is obliged to announce the godly truths. She announces: ‘I have not studied in this you read to show my skill, but to declare the truth, not to set forth myself, but the glory of God’ (p. 263). The poet portrays herself as a trustworthy deliverer of the divine truth, even though the form of the medium is not perfect. Her text does not allegedly aim to show her skill, but to deliver the truth. The display of her gratitude is her writing that extols God. What is striking in her image of a writer is that her criticizing and also praising voice can be explicitly associated with that of the author, and only implicitly linked to that of God. The poet, therefore, is detached from the tradition of becoming God’s instrument in order to be able to engage in public issues, as
the other female writers in this chapter are shown to do. This manoeuvre again contributes to reshaping the concept of femininity.

To sum up, the male wreaths, composed of exquisite flowers, have outstanding form, yet their content is doomed, since it is influenced by their human sinful nature. The male writers are equipped with the best possible skills to convey godly truth, but they blame their corrupted nature for the inability to perform on the godly level that is said to be desirable by God. They portray their endeavours as constant failures. Self-deceiving male writers, then, realise the flaws of the act of devotional writing, which is fame, preventing them from offering pure, innocent, and perfect gift to God. Their ‘curious frame’ can reach only Jesus’s feet. Hence instead of becoming ideal agents of God, they are depicted as the ‘crooked’. Despite the impossibility of creating the perfection, they seem to promote tenacity in attempting to achieve it. Herbert urges Christians onto zealous commitment to God and Vaughan on assembling good deeds. This makes their poetry educative. The problematic matter appears to be Marvell’s approach to writing, seeing that, unlike the male writers’, his works lack godly teaching. He might thereby be identified with those writers who deliberately seek fame, and cannot fall into the category of God’s agent. Marvell also seems to expose his writing, leaving many options of interpretation to consider for his readers and, thus, not limiting them by any guidance. The audience must rely on their intellectual experience. Nevertheless, the fact that the male writers perceive their wreaths as imperfect gifts is partly caused by their freedom to write and the right to aim at publicity. They already dominate the writing sphere, as opposed to the female writers. The recognition, in their case, becomes natural and free from scorn. Consequently, their humbleness, presented in their writings, does not refer to their skills, but to their sinfulness, making them unworthy of becoming God’s advocates. Even so, they deeply believe in the value and usefulness of their works, which are performing a public service; they contribute to the conversion of disbelievers. Presenting themselves as flawed bearers of God’s truth, however, eliminates them from the circle of worthy servants and the women skilfully fill this gap.

The female writers of devotional verse, on the other hand, are able to offer their ‘thyme or parsley wreath’, as Bradstreet describes it, in that their inferior nature constrains their intellect. Even so, they present themselves as God’s messengers, spreading his word with the purpose of saving people from sins and of converting stray sheep. They are convinced that this act is an obligation or duty, which has to be fulfilled. Neither fame nor their sinful nature is an obstacle to become worthy of God’s service. They establish the act of
publishing as yet another feminine virtue. The act of spreading God’s word constitutes a way to speak publicly about a variety of issues, including politics, which would normally be discussed privately at homes. Thence female writers are proud of their imperfectly shaped ‘babes’ and send them into the world, but with a concern of being wrongfully judged. Women found a tiny gap in the tightly male-dominated world, enabling them to come into existence in the form of a public voice and to redefine the notion of femininity. The image of a female writer is characterised by lack of interest in fame, but she is made to perform God’s service publicly, as otherwise she would be perceived as an ungrateful coward. She is portrayed as a trustworthy and ideal bearer of the ‘Divine truth’. The form it is presented in might be reshaped and imperfect, but the essence is preserved and unaltered. This complicated portrait reveals women’s inner battles between unstoppable determination to become noticed, as well as to be appreciated writers, and the social denial of their abilities to achieve this. Hence women express their awareness of the rules of modest behaviour by referring to the low level of their skills and intellect, and an inability to use a pen. They even deny their authorship, making their writings divine, and this is why women’s voice, as Wall has noticed, is a result of ‘a carefully formed re-presentation of that problematic position, a crafted self-portrait through which women rhetorically recast their riven subjectivity’.66 Women’s passion, determination, ‘Inlargednesse of mind and activity of spirit’

redefined the rhetorical codes and literary forms used to present authorship in print, and in doing so, women proved that they could dance in the textual and cultural nets threatened to confine them.67

The consequence of this dance is the empowerment of the female public voice through authorization of women’s ‘public thanks’, amounting to yet another necessary feminine virtue. However, their exploitation of some emblematic qualities of the biblical Zion allowed women to cross the border of ‘public thanks’ and to authorize the idealized voice of God’s agent. This feminine voice offers the ultimate, truthful guidance and its essence is claimed to exceed the voice of the male writers. This shows that women constantly modified the nature of femininity. Could women have been really leading this dance, then?

66 Wall, The Imprint of Gender, p. 286.
Conclusion

The metaphorical transformation that this thesis offers matters especially to women writers, due to the way in which feminine minds, bodies, and spirits are empowered, allowing women to gain confidence in their literary creations. Collins, for instance, announces her intention to publish her work by saying: ‘now I have delivered unto you what I intended, only it remains that I tell you, That with my Labours, you have my prayers to God through Jesus Christ; whose I am, and in him’ \((A2^v)\). As God’s agent, influenced by ‘the Holy Ghost’ \((A^v)\), the poet is obliged to publicize her words. Her ‘womanish fear’ of being censured and perhaps misunderstood too is gradually diminished. No longer is it an obstacle in performing God’s service. Publishing, in the case of women writers, manifests their defeat of this fear. This victory demonstrates their pro-women attitude and encourages others to follow their example.

This thesis therefore shows that women indeed led the ‘dance’ in terms of being able to skilfully manipulate their social position and negotiate their authorial identity. Their deep conviction about their ‘inlargendess of mind and activity of spirit’ was their motivation and also their excuse to enter the public domain, in the disguise of exemplary agents of God. Their ‘sanctified minds’ connect with the Divine and become perfectly intelligible. Intelligently performing God’s service, the women impeccably convey the truth of God and reveal how their bodies become his temple. While performing this service, the women acquire some masculine qualities; they become publicly active leaders and guides for their audience. Male writers included in the thesis, on the other hand, even though claiming to be intellectually and spiritually stimulated by the Almighty, are not capable of the same ‘inlargednesse of mind and activity of spirit’ as the women are, in that their corrupt nature inhibits them from achieving this level of engagement in devotional writing. Because of their inability to fight their corrupt human nature, the men present themselves as imperfect and therefore unworthy instruments of God. While negotiating their position as brides in a mystical marriage with Christ, they become feminised by subordinating themselves to their divine spouse; they are characterised by weakness and passivity, in using the female body and feminine tears to establish a connection with God. This shows their belief that female bodies exemplify the Almighty’s involvement in their process of purification, establishing them as the metaphorical and yet exemplary temples of God. Thus, feminine qualities dominated spiritual and metaphorical worlds, a woman being the spiritual guide. This cross-
gender phenomenon or a reversal of positions also indicates that femininity was redefined and demonstrates that the gender boundaries become very flexible on a metaphorical level. As Price notices, for example, ‘Collins’s femininity is employed as a metaphor for the general state of humanity trapped in sin’.68 This shows that part of the authorial identity the women writers create, is a translation of the notion of femininity into a generic and universal term that can also be applied to men.

The metaphorical narrative this thesis offers indicates that the process of transfiguration, which is analogous to the transformation of the biblical Zion, had the same stages for both women and men, and the flexible use of the various metaphors, despite different socio-political situations, encourages rethinking the idea of a precise definition of gender boundaries. Similarly labelling religious congregations in precise ways should also be avoided, because their members applied the biblical images of Zion and Babylon interchangeably, so revealing that distinct definitions of such groupings are not easily made. Feminizing both biblical allegories and then applying them to various political and religious figures (female as well as male), or publicly identifying with them, constitutes further evidence in support of the gradual blurring of these boundaries, especially in the spiritual and metaphorical worlds.

The border between private and public also becomes subject to changes, especially when considering the women writers’ use of mystical marriage; they reveal their private and intimate relationship with Christ to establish a reputation as writers. This relationship also authorizes them to speak publicly about nakedness and the ‘ravishing delights’ they experience. Therefore, the transfiguration they describe becomes externalized and object-focused. Although I insist that the phenomenon of crossing the border exists only in a metaphorical dimension, the writers utilize its various elements in concrete situations; they use it pragmatically in their everyday lives when their writings leave the enclosure of their homes and enter the public domain, crossing the physical and social borders. This double authorial identity of a seventeenth-century woman becomes a mixture of the metaphorical and physical. Both constantly depended on each other and sometimes even intermingled in their writings. The act of becoming the metaphorical temple of God provides protection for a woman writer when entering public life; the divine encasement is considered as a cover for their books, and mystical marriage offers social acceptance, chastity, and irreproachability. This is why the metaphorical ‘inlargednesse of mind and activity of spirit’ that women

writers claim to experience is utilised pragmatically, allowing them to extend various boundaries and so lead the ‘dance’.
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