Christian Requisition and the Second World War

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Zuzana, and my two sons, Felix and Julian, who were born during its composition (and motivated me to complete it). I owe them more than I can say.

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Abstract

W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, and Muriel Spark converted or reverted to Anglo- or Roman Catholicism in the interwar period or just after the Second World War. In some of their most distinguished work, these writers widen the imaginative scope of their faith to wartime culture. This dissertation takes its theoretical cue from Eliot's April 1941 call on the BBC for the "conversion of social consciousness" of wartime Britain. For Eliot, the Second World War is a crucible of faith on a social scale. He points to exemplary "men who have not merely kept the faith through the dark age, but who have lived through the mind of the dark age, and got beyond it." Sheltering civilians in the London Underground resemble clandestine Christians in the catacombs of the Roman Empire. "Prophets," Eliot argues, can arise in the twentieth century as well as in the first fledgling centuries of the Church. They live and think *through* their time, however "dark" it is, rather than against it.

In keeping with Eliot's public call for "the conversion of social consciousness," this dissertation develops the idea of Christian requisition. In political terms, "requisition" defines the military conversion of peacetime infrastructure, as in the calling-up of fishing ships for the rescue of stranded soldiers at Dunkirk, the shift to tank production by General Motors, or the mobilization of physics faculties for the Manhattan Project. Under the conditions of total war, political conversion acts imaginatively as well as materially, causing citizens to think of themselves as "civilians" and of their society in terms of "the struggle" or "strategy." This dissertation substitutes "requisition" for "conversion" because its Catholic writers transfigure the secular infrastructure of wartime for the sake of what Spark calls "unselfconscious" theological intelligibility. "Requisition" captures the

sometimes surprising, sometimes deflating, but always ironic way in which these writers decommission the secular forms of war for Christian purposes. They view the secular world as spiritually unselfconscious, not atheistic, and inhabit mixed lifestyles and literary forms. In each chapter, I tie my close reading of poetry and fiction to a telling aspect of the forms of life of the secular world: espionage, the blackout of the Blitz, drug-use, air power. The liturgical and theological interests of these writers—Saint Augustine's *distensio animi*, omniscient narrative providence, Pentecost, the *Rule of Saint Benedict*—are always seen through a secular lens.

Christian conversion is typically personal in scope. According to the influential account of Saint Augustine, the Christian convert discards a dissolute (or secular) life and takes refuge in the plan of God for her regenerate future. While this dissertation acknowledges the relationship between conversion and literary form, as in Spark's claim that Catholicism enabled her novelistically to see life as a "whole rather than as a series of disconnected happenings," it prioritizes the literary imagination as an electric point of contact between Catholic practice and the secular wartime public. The lines of communication between *polis* and parish are frayed, but not cut, in wartime. The dissertation defines Christian requisition as a category of wartime religious literature that depends upon its historical circumstances but transfigures them with a literal remainder: conversions between the secular and sacred, this dissertation argues, are not an all-or-nothing matter.

Chapter 1 Introduction

When in 1940 Winston Churchill ordered the rescue of more than 336,000 British, French, and other Allied soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk, he did so by means of requisition. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines sense 4.b of "requisition" as "appropriation of goods or equipment, especially for military purposes."[1] The "Little Ships of Dunkirk" were a collection of roughly eight hundred private boats that were requisitioned by the British Ministry of Shipping to sail from England to France between 26 May and June 1940. These little ships were converted from their peacetime functions—fishing, barging, or leisure—into military transport vessels. Requisition helped to prevent the tactical failure of Dunkirk from spelling total defeat, since the soldiers cornered on its shores made up the bulk of the British Expeditionary Force. The Dunkirk evacuation, codenamed "Operation Dynamo," involved a mixture of involuntary seizure and voluntary patriotism. Some of the ship-owners were given advance notice of the order, while others were not notified when their vessels were pressed into service. The official BBC announcement on 14 May 1940 conveyed the "Order" of the Admiralty "requesting all owners of self-propelled pleasure craft between 30' and 100' in length" if they had not "already been offered or requisitioned."[2] The announcement distinguished between the voluntary sacrifice of a ship-owner's "[offering]" his vessel and the involuntary commandeering, or "requisition," of a little ship. Consented to or not, military requisition is metamorphic; peacetime infrastructure becomes something else entirely.

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[1] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "requisition (*n.*), sense 4.b.," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8032265852.
[2] "Operation Dynamo," The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships, accessed May 30, 2024, https://www.adls.org.uk/history-of-dunkirk.

A decisive event in the Gospels shares not only the maritime setting of Operation Dynamo but its action of requisition. In Matthew 4:18, Jesus "walked by the Sea of Galilee," where he "saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers."[3] In the next verse, Jesus proposes to convert the object, but not the *métier*, of their work: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."[4] As distinct from military requisition, the advent of discipleship is metaphorical, not metamorphic. "Fishers of people" is literally non-sensical but figuratively apt. Jesus pitches his rescue mission to the self-understanding of these ordinary laborers. Even as he repositions their field of action, calling them out of the maritime cycle of fishing—the perennial peril, as T. S. Eliot puts it, of "forever bailing, / Setting and hauling"—and channeling their efforts toward the kingdom-to-come, he empowers them to see the work of their hands in its spiritual aspect and its eternal meaning.[5] He transfigures rather than transforms their human vocation. According to the first recruitment of Jesus, Christian requisition is characterized not by "appropriation" but by fulfillment. Without erasing the particularity of private resources, Christian requisition mobilizes them for its public mission. It transfigures the secular world through, not against, its social imaginary.

"[Fishing] for people" is Jesus' way of respecting the unique gifts and grit of the first disciples, just as "kingdom" shares the secular vocabulary of the powers and principalities with which the Gospel will contend. As divine king, Jesus assumes the glory of an imperial ruler but sheds only his own blood. While his kingdom is ultimately "not of this world," its historical points of departure and arrival are now and the Sea of Galilee, now and the reign of Caesar Augustus, or

[3] Matt. 4:18.
[4] Matt. 4:19.
[5] T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, Vol. I: Collected and Uncollected Poems*, ed. Jim McCue and Christopher Ricks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 195.

"now and in England," as Eliot says in "Little Gidding."[6][7] And yet, as Eliot states in the same poem, Christian dual-citizenship paradoxically inhabits "England and nowhere."[8] Christianity is imaginatively distinguished by the transit of its mysteries between Ascension and Incarnation. The arguments of this dissertation take place at the intersection of wartime culture and the Christian imagination. It confronts air power with Pentecost, the mechanical with the numinous, blackout with the dark night of the soul.

Christianity is a rendezvous of the historical and the eternal. The incarnate *Logos* carries to fruition the restless human personality. In this affirmatively Incarnational sense, "fishers of people" expresses continuity between craft and charism, or the idea that the distinctive talent of a person—their rhetorical skill, their knack for getting things done, even their tax-collecting scrupulosity—shapes their evangelistic *savoir faire*. By characterizing their new role in the genitive case (fishers "of men"), Jesus enables Peter and Andrew to retain the pre-conversion profession of "fishers," whose crafts of casting and reeling in will be essential to the Apostles' spiritual haul.

The transfiguration of literal catches into spiritual ones reflects the way in which this dissertation pursues imaginative exchanges between Church and world without dissolving them into each other. It explores how Christian writers in and around the Second World War practice a culturally imaginative form of requisition, tailored to the evangelistic exigencies of historical crisis: the surprising or accidental ways in which social forms, political obligations, and emerging technologies can be seen involuntarily to refresh or to distort truths of orthodox Christianity. As opposed to the zero-sum game of military requisition, Christian requisition in wartime walks the political tightrope of spiritual, not literal, "combat." Christian requisition attempts to engage the specific anxieties of the exact historical moment without resolving them by political means. It

[6] Jn. 18:36.
[7] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 202.
[8] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 204.

calibrates the experiential passivity of the wartime civilian with the moral teaching, liturgical forms, and spiritual disciplines of the faith. Parallel to Churchill, and yet often at cross-purposes with the forceful requisition of the state, the Christian writers call up the public institutions and images of wartime for the sanctification of its suffering. They do not bless this suffering, but they do depend upon it as their imaginative repertoire.

In the middle of twentieth-century wartime, nearly two thousand years after the death of Christ, it is the kingdoms of this world that carry out requisition on a national or even imperial scale. The idea of "total war" is effectively theological in its comprehension and re-orientation of human identity, desire, and rhetoric: life becomes, in the words of W. H. Auden, "the struggle."[9] Total war entails the military infiltration of every sphere of ordinary life, including the Church, whose ontological and moral supremacy it has usurped. With the dawn of "terror bombing," which is indiscriminate in its targets, total war troubles a proper distinction between "soldiers" and "civilians," even though these terms arguably continue to express different degrees of direct engagement with violence.

Social differentiation in wartime has an ecclesial parallel: the vocational distinction between "lay" and "religious" Catholics. These terms are germane to this dissertation because the writers in it—W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Muriel Spark, and Graham Greene—were converts or reverts to forms of Christianity that had grown up with Christendom. Even though Auden and Eliot were technically Protestant, the elaborate rituals of their Anglo-Catholic faith matched or even exceeded those of its liturgical template, Roman Catholicism, of which Spark and Greene were converts.

The category of the "laity" refers to those whose faith is unconsecrated and outside the institutional confines of the priesthood or monastic life. One either keeps time liturgically by the Divine Office, a devotional form of marking the hours of the day, or by the nine-to-five schedule of

[9] W. H. Auden, "Spain," in *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 54.

the working world, fitting in Lauds, say, with the morning coffee and commute. Liturgical participation is limited, but not excluded, by life as a "secular" Catholic.

The degree of conformation of lifestyle to liturgy undergirds this ecclesial distinction between lay and religious life, just as the military Compline of a "Taps" coincides with, but exceeds, the civilian's obligatory blackout. The imaginative territory of this dissertation is in the conflicted middle of Church and state, "religious" and "secular," but it approaches the latter category primarily from a confessional perspective. Its goal is to explore what, in a phrase I use in the chapter on Muriel Spark, the "electric point of contact" between faith and the wartime world. This point of contact can be frayed, but it is never cut. While it always respects the orthodox theological formation of its writers, and therefore views the secular world from a critical perspective, it does not shy away from asking a neglected question: "Just what is the status of the 'secular' for the Anglo- or Roman-Catholic poet or novelist?"

Despite its simple ecclesial association with the distinction between lay and religious Catholics, the term "secular" tends to elicit triumphalism outside the Church and spur suspicion inside it. Within the Catholic purview, orthodoxy and tradition serve as bulwarks from the deterioration happening *out there*; inversely, the post-Reformation secular world considers itself liberated from theocratic incursions into the public square. Attempts on behalf of the twentieth-century Church, descendent of Christendom, to speak to the secular public are risky. "Secular" is a slur or a saving grace. This dissertation is distinguished by its thematic focus on requisition, which is a public form of conversion. It embraces the risks taken by Anglo- and Roman Catholic writers in cautiously reclaiming a Thomistic view of the analogy between creator and creation. It is eager to juxtapose military and Christian forms of requisition, since total war, by its comprehensive suffering and emergency-mandated suspension of hands-off statehood, impedes both private property and private faith.

It is important, then, to distinguish between the lay and civilian disposition of its individual writers, who live in and write about the secular home front, and the militarily or spiritually single-minded figures of the soldier and the monk, for whom there are no two ways about the rhythm and purpose of life. As institutional means of self-transformation, the military and the monastery strip people of distinguishing features and acquisitive habits. They initiate soldiers and monks into a communitarian *habitus* that stamps them with undifferentiated names—"private" or "brother" replace "Jack" and "Jill." Ideally speaking, a uniform or a habit makes a clean cut from the distracting intrigue of one-upmanship. On the home front or in the marketplace, however, non-combatants and lay persons retain their Christian names, minding the shop, assembling ball bearings, or taking care of children. In their intermediate vocations—they are not detached from war or liturgy but fit more loosely with them in terms of the regulation of their time—they resemble the transfigured "fishers of people" more than the metamorphosed private or brother. This dissertation does not engage the poetry and fiction of the battlefield or the parish *per se* because it prioritizes the sparks that fly when writers are caught between the political imperatives and imaginative resources of Church and state. The idea of requisition depends on something's not already being properly "military" or "religious," at least not according to the common sense of the public.

I argue that publicly minded Anglo- and Roman-Catholic writers at mid-century do not shy away from the political and bloody legacy of Christendom, which they nonetheless recuperate to confront the contemporary powers that have come to fill God's gap in the public square. The decreased influence of the Church at mid-century is a blessing in disguise, since it recalls the evangelistic conditions of the first few centuries of Christianity, when the pagan world was a crucible for its imaginative life. As an imaginative principle, Christian requisition is a socially compromised re-weaving of an analogical pattern of the world with the tattered threads of Christendom. Twentieth-century Christian requisition is distinguished from antique or medieval Christendom in its

characteristic rhetorical qualities of irony and bathos, which result from the tension between the way things literally, even if materialistically, are, and the bolder but more uncertain ways writers see them in transfiguration. I typically oppose the verb "transfigure" to the more absolute verbs "transform" or "metamorphose," which operate rhetorically in the ways that the army and the monastery operate existentially on the soldier and the monk.

To the extent that these writers can be said to be evangelistic, their witness is often more apophatic than cataphatic in its points of departure: God discloses himself in wartime when things break down, as opposed to when the gears of the world run smoothly. The mid-century writing of Auden, Eliot, Greene, and Spark illuminates their suspension, à la Saint Augustine, on a creative threshold between what Charles Taylor has called the "higher" time of single-minded, monastic spirituality and the down-to-earth, more linear time of political life.[10] In addition to her temporal difference from metamorphic and communitarian identities, the secular writer is concerned with the material concerns of warring nations, their technological progress, and of its lay citizens who, Christian or not, mix and match sources of identity and value.

As lay and civilian Catholics in a secular and modern wartime state, these writers confront the intersection of the timeless with time. The writers in this dissertation take imaginative cues from temporally claustrophobic "conditions / That seem unpropitious," as Eliot puts it.[11] At the same time, they yearn for eternity, desirable in its promise of stillness but intellectually stifling in its judgment of historical paltriness. As spiritual dual citizens, Christian writers weigh heavenly and earthly kingdoms in the balance, which does not stay still. Their eschatological stances lead them toward or away from political engagement or retirement; inform an expansive sense of the historical present and its relationship with timeless Christian revelation; and imagine the anything-but-

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[10] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[11] Eliot, "East Coker," 191.

guaranteed passage from theological doctrine to existential action and concrete facticity. For these converts and reverts, becoming Christian entails emplotting oneself on a different, divine timeline, even as the slip-ups on the road to Damascus or the garden at Ostia remain in the memory, latent reminders of the sin that has been cleansed by baptism but not, by the signs of the times, banished for good. In their mid-century poetry and fiction, they confront the secular world with Christianity and Christianity with the secular world.

In recent years, various excellent books have addressed, from a largely materialist or historicist perspective, the subject of temporality in wartime British literature. Paul Saint-Amour's *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic War* (2015) develops the fine phrase, "violence anticipated is violence already unleashed," which highlights the historically specific anxiety of Britons caught between two world wars and traces the passage from historical fact to subjective temporality.[12] Beryl Pong's *British Literature and Culture in Second World Wartime: for the Duration* (2020), from Oxford University Press' *Mid-Century Studies* series, registers the "muddled interplay between wartime's epochal and phenomenological understandings," its subjective and political senses of time.[13] Allan Hepburn's *A Grain of Faith: Religion in Mid-Century British Literature* (2018), another entry in this series, shares more of the Christian territory of this dissertation, and its formulation of "muzzy religion"—a vague alliance of patriotism and faith, sometime friends and sometime foes—highlights the blurred lines of political theology, with the first part of this compound term often overtaking the latter.[14] John Whittier-Ferguson's *Morality and Form in Late Modernist Literature* (2014) shows how the literary form of the later writing of Eliot, Woolf, and Stein was influenced by their own aging minds and bodies, confronting in real time the woeful repetitiveness of twentieth-century

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[12] Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13.
[13] Beryl Pong, *British Literature and Culture in Second World Wartime: For the Duration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1-2, 8.
[14] Allan Hepburn, *A Grain of Faith: Religion in Mid-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 45.

violence. Bryony Randall's *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (2011) guides us away from preconceptions about modernist "epiphany" and into the long hours of each passing day. In doing so, she shows how writers value and represent the more mundane aspects of labor and life and calls for a return to the ordinary in modernist studies. In *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (2016), Thomas Davis extends this ordinary turn to the responsibility of mid-century literature to its social world: "art must capture and reveal something about everyday life. It should neither assume a mimetic function nor drift into a self-contained world of endless experimentation."[15]

I build upon this recent work by exploring, from an affirmatively theological point of view, the unique literary forms in which writers concretely apprehend Christian ideas and situate them, however indirectly, in the public setting of the twentieth-century home front. In my attention to orthodox disposition and thought, I depart from Pericles Lewis' influential thesis in *Religious Experience and the Modern Novel* that modernist writers "[sublimate] religious experience into formal concerns."[16] Unlike the many modernists who, to be sure, dabble with religion in a playful, aestheticizing manner, harnessing its gestures but dispensing with its moral obligations and doctrinal content, the poets and novelists of this dissertation are intellectually thoroughgoing, if existentially conflicted, Catholics. They imagine alternatingly harmonious and discordant relationships between the temporal and the eternal, the everyday and the ecstatic, the historical and the holy, in their poetry and fiction. They do not sublimate Christianity, nor do they cede the territory of "literature" to materialists or humanists; their nearness and distance from each other is what counts.

While Eliot's speaker in "Burnt Norton" first asserts, "To be conscious is not to be in time," he quickly grants that, for most of us, "Only through time time is conquered."[17] At least when it comes to the secular Catholic, for Eliot, Greene, and even Spark, the total commitment to liturgical

[15] Thomas Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 39.
[16] Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18.
[17] Eliot, "Burnt Norton," 181.

self-regulation is fatal in that its atemporal narrative structure requires an exit from the human timeline or the novelistic plot. In their minute attention to how ideally atemporal truths are fleshed out, questioned, and apprehended in time and space, these lay writers—the not-quite-saintly "most of us"—acknowledge the fits and starts of faith.[18] As distinguished from the usual noun "conversion," which typically signifies a personal and absolute metamorphosis into religious observance ("there is no going back," it seems to say), "requisition" works through the public face of the Church, which takes its imaginative cues from wartime. The noun traces the orthodox fulfillment of involuntarily spiritual experiences in the Second World War.

The writers in this dissertation regard self-transformation as, on the one hand, a coercive effect of political ideology or crowds, and, on the other hand, as a voluntary decision on the part of the convert, who dies to herself in Christ. Self-transformation is Janus-faced, they argue, in that one can lose oneself in war, and therefore be relieved of the burden of human time, or one can be taken from oneself in war, and therefore lose one's distinctive personality, with diminishing hope of returning to it after the dark ecstasy subsides.

In *The End of the Affair* (1951), for example, the subject of the first chapter, Graham Greene aligns the unbidden amnesia of a Blitz episode with the ascetic impersonality of the *noche oscura* of Saint John of the Cross. The calculating omniscience of Bendrix, its narrator, is knocked out by a bomb. He is surprised to find himself in an atemporal state, freed from what I call his "novelistic identity" as a plotter of lives and a prisoner of his own narrative tableaux. The agnostic Bendrix finds himself swinging on a pendulum between voluntary faith and involuntary spiritual experiences (the latter is much easier to stomach). The novel alarmingly suggests a blurred line between violent self-erasure and more peaceful Christian mysticism. Greene requisitions a non-deadly Blitz event for the surprising purpose of Christian spirituality, but since Bendrix, miraculously preserved from the

[18] Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," 200.

weight of a fallen door, is suspended so precariously between death and life (how can one order on demand a bombed-out, yet non-fatal, dark night of the soul?), he suggests that such an involuntarily mystical experience must be disciplined by religious practice. Its ephemeral romanticism must be fulfilled by regular devotion. And yet, as Greene concludes the novel, Bendrix cannot make this leap into the Catholicism that counted Sarah Miles, his deceased lover, as its mortal convert. In *The End of the Affair*, Greene is a novelist of spiritual extremes and mystical, arguably anti-social, wartime.

I follow the chapter on Greene with a sustained close reading of *The Girls of Slender Means*, Muriel Spark's 1963 novel set at the May of Teck Club, a wartime boarding house for young women pursuing occupations in London. Like Greene, who worked for MI-6 during the War, Spark worked for Sefton Delmer's "black propaganda" unit. Greene supported his fellow Catholic novelist in her early career by sending her wine, cash, and salutations. This shared background in espionage is more than biographical, however. Greene and Spark associate novelistic and political "intelligence." In *The End of the Affair*, Henry Miles, Sarah's husband, hires a private detective to spy on her comings and goings. As a novelist, Bendrix peers into the lives of others. In *The Girls of Slender Means*, Nicholas Farringdon, a "misfit" anarchist intellectual who will eventually join the Jesuit order and be killed in Haiti, "[infiltrates]" the May of Teck Club to gather information about its intoxicating, proto-monastic qualities.[19]

I explore how Spark surveys the link between wartime experience and self-forgetting from a more political perspective than does Greene. I read the chapter through Spark's 1953 essay on Proust, which develops the idea of novelistic "sacramentality," an idea of invisible and eternal spiritual meaning that transcends what we literally see and linearly record on the mortal timeline. Spark employs what I call the vocational future-perfect tense to describe how the sacramental meaning of one's life is often not on time. Her narrative sense is at odds with a novelistic view of

[19] Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means* (London: The Folio Society, 2013), 49.

character in terms of material cause and effect, of one thing rationally and visibly following another. Characters do not always understand the effect of their actions on others or even know when they are lying to themselves. In the modern secular world, Christian sacramentality veers on voyeurism. It takes on the unshared aspect of sacramental espionage. With quiet violence, the novel juxtaposes the forceful self-forgetting of the crowd at V-E Day and V-J Day with the more benign, but equally metamorphic, visions of Nicholas. The celebrants at Buckingham Palace "[become] members of a wave of the sea"; in the all-dissolving imagination of Nicholas, one beautiful girl "might have been the same" as any other.[20] The title of the chapter derives from a comment of the narrator on Nicholas: that his is the "portrait of the martyr as a young man."[21] The phrase inverts the aesthetic telos of the lapsed Catholic Stephen Dedalus. Catholic conversion, suggests Spark, depends upon shedding aesthetic romanticism, and yet the narrator often and subtly colludes with the point of view of Nicholas. The novel questions, but indulges, the sacramental transfiguration of state-mandated austerity into voluntary Christian asceticism. Spark dwells on the similarities and differences between sacramental and political scale at the cusp, in 1945, of a "new order of things."[22]

W. H. Auden, the subject of the third chapter, shares with Spark a suspicion of crowds, a signature feature of twentieth-century wartime, and envisions intimate ecstasies of getting lost in one's daily work as countervailing forms of more dignified self-forgetting. *Horae Canonicae* (1949-55), based upon the Benedictine divine office, charts the crucial ethical step into history and out of the kinds of dreams that intoxicate Nicholas, characterizes Christianity as a religion of individual dignity and pulls the person out of the mass. Despite this auspicious retrieval of discrete personhood, however, the cycle foregrounds deadly crowds that share the self-annihilating force of Spark's. Auden characterizes the crucifying crowd of "Nones" as a social machine. By virtue of the

[20] Spark, *Slender Means*, 11.
[21] Ibid, 45.
[22] Ibid, 11.

mechanical and technological images scattered throughout Auden's self-professedly "secular" re-imagination of a sixth-century liturgical form, the chapter centers on Auden's career-long interest in the strange pair of "numinous" machines and high liturgy.

From 1938 to roughly 1958, the period that saw him revert to Anglo-Catholicism and conceive these poems, Auden had turned himself into a kind of machine: he took Benzedrine to wake up and Seconal to fall asleep. Auden was hardly unique in this legal and even socially celebrated form of pharmaceutical self-regulation. The mid-century faith in applied science—characterized by DuPont's slogan "Better Things, for Better Living, through Chemistry"—distorts but does not displace the temporal regulation that the Benedictine monastery had helped to inaugurate. Even as he habituates himself mechanically to artificially circadian rhythms, Auden reveals in *Horae Canonicae* how the ethos of the machine affords us convenient but self-forgetting forms of ditching our spiritual and ethical obligations and our need for self-composure in the morning and at night. When the human person has been fused with her technological or mechanical tools, moral accountability is sometimes hard to see. In *Horae Canonicae*, mechanical breakdown accompanies the lower-c crucifixion of his first- or twentieth-century Golgotha. By seizing upon a dominant image of the postwar world, Auden re-configures Benedictine liturgy for the times but also poses its original form of spiritual order as a challenge to applied scientific interlopers.

Auden's apophatic transfiguration of broken-down machines chimes with the transfiguration, but not blessing, of a German bomber in Eliot's "Little Gidding." Eliot was a Kensington fire-warden for the A.R.P. In "Little Gidding," he juxtaposes the "dark dove" of a German bomber in the second section of the poem with the Pentecostal "dove descending" of its fourth section. Critics tend to fuse these two images and take Eliot to task for his cruelty in "conflating" them. And yet, as I argue, the "dark dove" is mechanically and nationalistically nondescript, and the fact of its syntactic, stanzaic, metrical, and connotative differences from the

fourth section give us pause in our own suspicion of Eliot's "conflation" of Church and state. Eliot does not necessarily fuse the dark dove with the Holy Spirit, nor does he yoke it to the patriotic imperatives of one nation or another, Axis or Allied. And yet he views secular air power as an occasion for meditation on Descent of the Holy Spirit, whose political subtext of universal Trinitarian intelligibility has been ignored by critics. Christian purgation, Eliot implies, proceeds by spiritual self-immolation, just as bombs burn actual cities—London, Berlin, Tokyo—to the ground.

In this chapter, I explore the fine line between actual and "spiritual combat," which has a long tradition in Catholic spirituality. The notion of spiritual combat is rhetorically and really poised on the knife-edge of political bloodshed. The force of its purgative imperative can very easily slide into alliance with worldly fighting forces, but it allows the Christian to latch on to history. In the Blitz, Eliot imagines, the spiritual condition of the Christian is lit up for piercing instruction, not aesthetic spectacle, as civilizational and personal comforts turn to ashes. Their very loss can lead to regeneration. "To be redeemed from fire by fire" is Eliot's classically paradoxical Christian formula for the "intolerable shirt of flame" in which people inevitably find themselves, most vividly in a wartime experience such as the Blitz.[23]

As I reach the end of the introduction, I would like to explain more fully why I have chosen this historical period—the years roughly between 1939 and 1949—as the locus of my interest in the relationship between Catholic literature and the secular world. In his Autumn 1939 sermon preached to Oxford undergraduates, "Learning in Wartime," C. S. Lewis both associated and distinguished between military and Christian conversion. Christian practice, argues Lewis, is a voluntary confrontation with death, which, opposed to the illusion of immortality of peacetime (or "proxy war"), total war imposes, like it or not, on the civilian. In view of their shared death-mindedness, total war and Christian commitment would seem to impede the pursuit of the liberal arts. As the

[23] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 205.

body breaks down and the mind dulls, the Christian "must ask himself how it is right, or even psychologically possible, for creatures who are advancing either to heaven or to hell, to spend any fraction of the little time allowed them in this world on such comparative trivialities as literature or art, mathematics or biology."[24] As Hitler crosses over into Poland, the civilian realizes that, in fact, "Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice" and that, since anxieties beset all periods, even those "we think most tranquil, like the nineteenth century," "plausible reasons have never been lacking for putting off all merely cultural activities until some imminent danger has been averted or some crying injustice put right."[25]

In a time of total war, the fate of a nation or an empire, or, in a Christian sense, the posthumous destination of our soul, would seem to require us to halt our "merely cultural" works-in-progress. It is natural, then, for the Christian to ask, "How can you be so frivolous and selfish as to think of about anything but the salvation of human souls," and for the civilian to ask, "How can you be so frivolous and selfish as to think of anything but the war?"[26] As the combat veteran Lewis argues, however, the habits of military and Christian converts, even the most fervent ones, argue against this idea of single-minded devotion to the issue of one's salvation or the national war effort.

"Neither conversion nor enlistment in the army is really going to obliterate our human life," says Lewis.[27] The idea of Christian conversion not "[obliterating]" human life is crucial to this dissertation's preference for the language of "transfiguration" as opposed to "transformation" or "metamorphosis." In public terms, seen from a Christian point of view, the secular is not whisked away. Lewis draws upon his First World War experiences in the trenches to challenge the idea of a clean cut between peacetime and wartime, civilian and soldier. "Before I went to the last war," he

[24] C. S. Lewis, "Learning in Wartime," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 1949), 47.
[25] Ibid, 48.
[26] Ibid, 49.
[27] Ibid, 50.

observes, "I certainly expected that my life in the trenches would, in some mysterious sense, be all war."[28] As it happened, however, "the nearer you got to the front line the less everyone spoke and thought of the allied cause and the progress of the campaign."[29] Likewise, when it comes to Christianity, Lewis points out that he did not "fully [realize] that one's life, after conversion, would inevitably consist in doing most of the same things one had been doing before: one hopes, in a new spirit, but still the same things."[30] Lewis highlights a secular or a civilian remainder of Christian or military conversion. While, from the view outside the parish, it would appear that "our life can, and ought, to become explicitly religious," and, from the besieged view of Blitzed London, that life "ought to become exclusively national," Lewis opposes the mutual exclusivity of "sacred" and "secular" activities.[31] When you go to the source, that is, it turns out to be something like Christ's "fishers of people": a fulfillment rather than an obliteration.

Even as it recognizes the force of military requisition in converting automobile plants to tank factories and in coloring the imagination of a culture in camouflage, this dissertation shares Lewis' resistance to partitioning the life of a convert, and the theology of a culture, into "sacred" and "secular" domains. The Christian converts and reverts this dissertation explores did not take religious vows or fight in battle. The content of their poetry and fiction is often informed by Christian spiritual practices and its forms are often structured by liturgical rites, but their public intelligibility cannot be taken for granted. The secular home front they inhabit is characterized not by the banishment of religious questions but by their renewal, especially in the face of the political, intellectual, and cultural upheavals of wartime. War, too, restores social ties between erstwhile strangers and makes fresh, by its very threat to human life, the bypassed beauty of the ordinary

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, 49-50.

world. In Powell and Pressburger's 1944 film, *A Canterbury Tale*, for example, Sgt. Peter Gibbs, a Londoner stationed temporarily in Kent, admits that he'd "hardly realized there was a countryside before the war." His American companion, Sgt. Bob Johnson, replies, "Funny that, how the war can open your eyes to lots of things."[32]

This dissertation juxtaposes the imaginative requisition of Christian converts and reverts with the military requisition of the Second World War because faith is one of those "things" to which a crisis can "open your eyes." A crisis clarifies the life of a person and, more broadly, of her culture. In its character as a crucible, a crisis is "a point at which change must come, for better or worse," deriving from the Greek *krisis*, or "turning point in a disease."[33] It sometimes takes affliction, as Eliot sees it, to enact what he calls in a wartime essay the "conversion of social consciousness," which is not a bad way of paraphrasing my idea of Christian requisition. In our suffixes and prefixes, we continue to reflect on the Second World War as a crisis; we do not know for sure when the "postwar" starts and stops. In "Learning in Wartime," Lewis goes so far as to characterize historical crisis as an ally of Christian conversion, or at least of the kind of spiritual curiosity that prepares one for it: "War makes death real to us: and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past."[34] By virtue of megaphone or rubble, every citizen can understand the rhetoric and self-sacrificial entailments of total war; the same can hardly be said for the Church, the "marred foundations we forgot, / Of sanctuary and choir."[35] In cultural terms, then, the Christian writers of the Second World War work through the vocabulary and temporality of modern war in a different kind of falling Rome, the decadent British Empire, and

[32] *A Canterbury Tale*, directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1944; United Kingdom: Criterion Collection, 2006), Blu-Ray disc.
[33] *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "crisis (*n.*)," accessed May 29, 2024, https://www.etymonline.com/word/crisis#etymonline_v_361.
[34] Lewis, "Wartime," 58.
[35] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 203.

in face of a new claimant to the throne, the Third Reich. They recover the pacific tradition of "spiritual combat" for the militarily termed task at hand.

Still, the appeal to contemporary experience threatens to dilute the Christian message. Thinking about conversion alongside the political terms of "requisition" allows us to juxtapose the eye-opening spirituality of historical crisis with the shadowy allure of a new fusion of Church and state, or a *Panzerkirche*, as Eliot imagines, in the sense of sacrificing the spiritual authority of the Church to the materially and legally powerful wartime state.[36] This dissertation characterizes jingoism and Christian faith as two permeable forms of religion, not merely one form of "this worldly" commitment and another, "otherworldly" means of escape from it. This is the competing sense in which Spark's religious and military forms of "suicide," and other writers' political and theological valences of self-forgetting, run parallel to each other.

Since, in religious terms, both wartime states and churches seek to bind a citizenry by means of pageantry, liturgy, duty, and self-sacrifice, this dissertation emphasizes exchanges between the invisible movements of faith and the visible reality of wartime, as imagined in the poetry and fiction of its converts and reverts. It trawls the scientifically unverifiable, but therefore scientifically indisputable, line that extends from the literal to the spiritual. "Can these senses of the world exist together?" is the question always on its mind. The dissertation reclaims the Latin root of requisition, *requisitionem*, "examination, a searching," and its past-participle stem, *requiere*, "seek to know, ask, ask for," as a critical disposition suited to the fragile sacramentality of the committed Christian writers of the secular home front. In "Burnt Norton," for example, Eliot suggests that the "echoed [ecstasies]"

[36] In *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), the historian James Chappel asks how the Church both resisted and fell in with totalitarian states in the '30s and '40s.

of our worldly experience are "not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony / Of death and birth." Eliot's odd choice of participle—"requiring"— unites spiritual curiosity and historical crisis.[37]

Eliot's speaker reflects on the flowers in a garden, whose sensory impressions have been transfigured by poetic memory, long after their vital immediacy has faded from view and sense. Beauty arrests us, Eliot says, but we cannot linger too long in its incandescent presence: "Human kind / Cannot bear too much reality," he observes.[38] The spiritual meaning of their too-beautiful bloom often comes too late, as it does for Eliot's speaker, who weighs in the balance an old man's "bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit" and a beatific vision in which "the fire and the rose are one."[39] When it comes to the sharpening of one's spiritual sensibility, historical crisis can yield real or "shadow" fruit. It can nourish or embitter the suffering civilian. If any time challenges one's trust in an analogy of being, in the disclosure of the goodness of the creator in creation, it is total war.

The early Church practiced its own kind of requisition. It would draw upon Hellenic thought and on the civic planning, architecture, and bureaucratic order of Rome just as much as the pagan world would draw upon the Gospel. The Catholic "basilica," for instance, derives from the Ancient Roman architectural form of the same name, a large municipal structure in the heart of the *polis*. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains, the basilica was originally a "hall of justice handed over by Roman emperors and consecrated for religious use," and was applied later especially to the "seven principal churches founded by Constantine," the first Holy Roman Emperor.[40] The layout of the basilica, derived by the Romans from the basil plant, would take the Christian shape of a cross, looking back to how Christ makes use of the most formidable Roman instrument of capital punishment—the *crux immissa*—to undermine the proxy eternity of an Augustus and the culture and

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[37] Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in *Poems*, 185.
[38] Ibid, 184.
[39] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 205, 209.
[40] *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "basilica (*n.*), sense 2," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7527523026.

reality of death. The basilica stands as an infrastructural legacy of Christian requisition, a concrete conversion of secular property or ideas. The space of worship of the basilica reflects *a* crucifixion, a literally secular practice, that became The Crucifixion: its transfigured Christian form in which Christ was persecuted but also emerged victorious. The Christian transfiguration of secular crucifixion, like Christ's usage of the vocabulary of "kingdom" and his sense of the contribution of everyday professions to evangelization, argues for the secular as the necessary, if insufficient, grounds for redemption and literary transfiguration alike. The cross remains an instrument of torture, but its temporal power must face up to life after death.

In the Second World War, the Church and the state renew their religious character as binding forces: they call up privatized citizens for public duty and/or devotion, whether or not they would explicitly use these terms to describe this action. They take civilians and converts out of their ordinary roles and situate them in different contexts. As a guiding metaphor, "requisition" sets the conversions of states and Church side by side. In this sense, this dissertation strives to be more critical both about the secular circumstances of convert writers and about the would-be materialism of wartime states that demand the sacrifices of citizens and soldiers. War gives Christian writers a chance to pitch religious truths afresh to those who might listen to them for the first time, and it also tempts them into political-theological alliances in which the former part of this compound term, by means of its material resources and raw, death-dealing power, its power to kill with legality, tends to swallow up the latter.

This latter tendency, requisition as the conversion of the Church into a fighting force, continues to alarm secular critics of the Church. In his controversial August 2022 article in *The Atlantic*, "How Extremist Gun Culture Is Trying to Co-opt the Rosary," Daniel Panneton argues that right-wing American Catholics have begun to conflate the devotional practices of their faith, ideally apolitical in their eternal bearing, with Christian nationalism, tangible, historical, and near at

hand in the Year of Our Lord, 2022. "Just as the AR-15 rifle has become a sacred object for Christian nationalists in general," he writes, "the rosary has acquired a militaristic meaning for radical-traditional (or "rad trad") Catholics." These "armed radical traditionalists," he concludes, "have taken up a spiritual notion that the rosary can be a weapon in the fight against evil and turned it into something dangerously literal."[41] Panneton implies that the rosary ought to be an aide-memoire for private meditation on the evergreen mysteries of the life of Christ, not a set of symbolic "battle-beads" subservient to present-day political mobilization. Devotion is "spiritual" and ought to tread lightly on what is "dangerously literal." This is fair—with the Crusades in the rear-view mirror, how can one entertain the idea of the rosary as an actual weapon, or even the wrested accomplice of violence, against a human being?—but the public-private boundary Panneton enforces is the tacit one against which my idea of Christian requisition argues.

In literary terms, the "literal" tends to map onto what is "historical" or "political," just as "spiritual" connotes a quietist retreat from worldly obligation. This dissertation does not view the spiritual claims of the Church and its political situation as mutually exclusive, even though, with Panneton, it does not shy away from the tendency of a politically aspirational Church to cozy up to bloodthirsty dictators or merely self-involved prime ministers.

Overall, these poems and novels share an interest in disentangling theological virtues from their public distortions, which hold sway over a largely agnostic, if not atheistic, modern Britain. In the case of Greene, this means separating what I call "eschatological hope"—a Christian disposition of radical availability to the world in the moments of its unfolding, drawn from the novel's pivotal reference to John of the Cross—from a secular "expectation" of things to come, a fallen desire to master life. In the case of Spark, this means separating the private liturgy of self-help from the public

[41] Daniel Panneton, "How Extremist Gun-Culture is Trying to Co-opt the Rosary," *The Atlantic*, August 14, 2022. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/08/radical-traditionalist-catholic-christian-rosary-weapon/671122.

liturgy of the Psalms. In the case of Auden, middling citizens pray for a good, not Good, Friday, that the "machinery of [their] world will function without a hitch" and ensure a graceful end to the working week.[42] In Eliot, the patriotic imperative of a seemingly blessed and highly favored territory—"now and in England"—confronts the dual-citizenship of the Christian, the suspended state of being in "England and nowhere." These writers are eager, in the midst of wartime, to reclaim the essential strangeness of Christianity and to understand the suffering and tragedy of contemporary events in an eternal perspective. They seek to distance themselves from the socially authorized form of churchgoing in Britain, the comfortable kind of faith whose supreme sacrament was sometimes the Sunday roast after the humdrum service. As the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, influential on Greene, Auden, Eliot, and Spark alike, said in a letter to Jean Cocteau, Christianity is the "enemy of a stuffed order as much as disorder."[43] It is this middle ground between order and disorder, time and eternity, romanticism and sacramentality, that this dissertation seeks to explore and illuminate in the wartime imagination of committed but conflicted Christians.

[42] W. H. Auden, "Prime," in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 224.
[43] Jacques Maritain and Jean Cocteau, *Art and Faith* (Philosophical Library, 1951), 101.

Chapter 2 Narrative Blackout in *The End of the Affair*

In 1948, Graham Greene spoke to a French audience about the crisis of Christianity in postwar Europe. In this speech, later entitled "The Last Pope," Greene praised the palpably religious atmosphere of the French novel. "When a door opens in a novel by Mauriac," Greene stated, "even before one leaves the shadows to enter the well-lit room where the characters are assembled, one is aware of forces of Good and Evil that slide along the walls and press their fingers against the window-pane ready to crowd in." On the other hand, as Greene conceived it, the English novel had "become accustomed to bypass eternity . . . [and] always makes us live within time."[44] Greene criticized the English novel on temporal grounds, citing its mundane materialism; citing its sensitivity to the supernatural, he praised the French novel on figurative grounds. However, Greene may have bypassed the intersection of these two ways of thinking about how "eternity" impresses itself upon the world of the modern novel. Setting aside the greater or lesser association of a national culture with the supernatural, how might the novel confront eternity in a specifically formal, not just symbolic, mode? What is the theological capacity of modern novelistic form? I will argue that this critical tension, as it plays itself out within the narrative world of *The End of the Affair*, Greene's 1951 novel set in the Second World War, tackles a perennial problem of religious aesthetics, especially in a time of early deaths, upset routines, and divided allegiances: the compatibility of secular time with God's eternity.

[44] Graham Greene, *Reflections*, ed. Judith Adamson (London: Reinhardt, 1990), 113.

I define temporality in two historically and conceptually different ways. A modern, Kantian perspective, the one in which the English novel arguably flourished, understands temporality to be the subjective side of time. Temporality, the Kantian "form of inner sense,"[45] enables the self creatively to establish the conditions for the possibility of experience, which are never immediately given. Extending this Kantian idea to the sphere of human narratives, modern temporality shapes personal identity. While Kantian temporality channels the flux of human experience through the individual psyche, a medieval, Catholic perspective, the institutional source of Greene's faith, filters temporality through the hierarchy of the church. Charles Taylor argues for the ecclesial hierarchy's internal dyad of secular and divine time: "As well as secular time, the time of ordinary 'temporal' existence, in which things happen one after another in an even rhythm, there were higher times, modes of eternity."[46] Taylor distinguishes between the "even rhythm" of secular time, which prioritizes the workaday stability of the world of commerce but sacrifices a certain "higher," or ecstatic, sense of eternity, the special province of priestly and monastic life. Taylor claims that laity, clergy, monks, and nuns lived at different speeds set by their fixed religious and social identities; the more one was devoted to prayer and contemplation, the more time was molded into eternity. This medieval sense of hierarchical temporality, moreover, defied the secular notion of linear development: the celebration of Easter, for example, disrupted chronology by reenacting the original event, apparently lost to time, of Christ's resurrection. While modern temporality would become tied to an ideal of self-development or political nation-building,[47] the medieval view of the different speeds of lay and religious life extended to the Christian the impersonal gift, to be accepted or declined, of the experience of eternity on Earth. Christ could come again for the fervent devotee—if

[45] See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason.*
[46] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007), 96.
[47] See Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), for a particularly imaginative look at how modernist writers worked to subvert what he calls the "fiction of development."

he or she were in the right place and wore the right clothes. Such immanent transcendence was imbued with an alluring sense of the end of secular history by apocalyptic thinkers such as the Italian monastic theologian Joachim of Fiore.

In the secular modern world of *The End of the Affair*, marked not by monasteries and cathedrals but by war-torn flats and pubs, the medieval and the modern conceptions of temporality are troubled by a thoroughgoing skepticism about the reality of time itself. In the first paragraph of the novel, Maurice Bendrix, its unreliable narrator, observes, "[a] story has no beginning or end," and concludes, "arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead."[48] Bendrix, a gifted writer often praised for his "technical ability," questions the temporal cohesion and omniscient pretension of storytelling as he attempts to get his recently deceased lover, Sarah Miles, with whom he had "agreed so happily to eliminate God from [their] world, out of his system."[49] As he writes, it is 1946. Bit by bit, he hazily tries to piece together the episodes of his affair with Sarah, which began back in 1939. Late in the novel, Bendrix is surprised to learn—only by prying into Sarah's diary—that the real-world quandaries of the affair have led to her secret conversion to Catholicism. Faced with Sarah's concurrent conversion and death, Bendrix has grown weary of critics' praise of his craft; he often turns down particularly modernist accolades of aesthetic distinction, but he also clings to writing for its age-old promise of catharsis: the characteristically narrative ability to still, or at least to confront, fleeting time. The pained remembrance of the affair and its aftermath constitutes the central drama of the novel, which also carries its central theme, the ethical and existential ramifications of temporal narrative form.

Late in the novel, Father Crompton, a Catholic priest, paraphrases Saint Augustine's skepticism about time from book 11 of the *Confessions*. When the rationalistic Henry Miles, Sarah's

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[48] Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 1.
[49] Ibid, 1, 54.

husband, asks about her posthumous influence on the living, Crompton answers, "St. Augustine asked where time came from. He said it came out of the future which didn't exist yet, into the present that had no duration, and went into the past which ceased to exist. I don't know that we can understand time any better than a child."[50] Since it derives from the dissolute experiences of the pre-converted Augustine, not the theological confidence of the Tiber-crossed champion of the Church, this passage, which serves as the novel's understated conceptual hinge, troubles both the modern temporality of personal identity and the Catholic hierarchy of increasing devotional speeds. Crompton calls into question the legitimacy of tacit distinctions between supposedly self-sufficient "time" and supposedly distant "eternity." Augustine makes a mystery of time; Crompton takes his cue and opens the door for the deceased Sarah to re-enter the narrative frame of the novel, traditionally understood between the bookends of mortality, especially when it abides by the Enlightenment parameters of its original philosophical context. Sarah's death is not final, and eternity, it seems, can infuse time.

But Augustine's skepticism contributes more to the novel than an authorization for supernatural activity. The existential tone and narrative import of the *Confessions* have been disputed. A question about genre consistently surfaces: does Augustine's turn toward God entail an exclusive conversion from deceitful human drama and rhetoric to single-minded contemplation? Burcht Pranger has shown how some scholars, such as Peter Brown, have focused on the serenity Augustine finally attained through his conversion, an experience that resulted in unruffled conviction. Pranger, unwilling to accept this denouement, gives a reading of Augustine in which existential and spiritual strife persist after the conversion. Augustine's notion of the *distensio animi*—the soul stretched across and lost in time—still threatens to unwind eternal union with God.

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[50] Ibid, 144.

The *distensio animi*, the theoretical expression of the wandering Augustine's life in the *saeculum*, is echoed, Pranger argues, by the literary modernist turn toward temporal experimentation. Augustine's skepticism about time undergirds modernist literature's defiance of "traditional, linear narrativity based on the separateness and the 'real existence' of past, present, and future."[51] In drawing this formal isomorphism between the *distensio animi* of the pre-saintly Saint Augustine and the fractured temporality of literary modernism, Pranger argues that the inevitably finite narrative frame of the *Confessions*, no matter its mystical subject and fulcrum, cannot grant Augustine permanent bliss. Augustine cannot claim an eternal now, in line with God, for good. Pranger also rejects the hagiographic tradition, at home in "romantic evasions in the direction of eternity's wholesome though diffuse presence in the here and now," but he is careful in turn not to "make eternity so separate from time as to create, on temporality's part, an independent existential historicity without any relation to timelessness."[52] Augustine's ecstasy may have been evanescent, Pranger suggests, but it was there all the same. And by breaking open all-encompassing, linear form, the modernist gesture of Crompton opens the novel to the possibility, perhaps, of eternity.

In the first few paragraphs, the popular novelist Maurice Bendrix, an agnostic, joins Pranger in transposing Augustine's philosophical skepticism about time to the context of modern novelistic form. In his opening observation that "A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead," Bendrix points out the artificiality of ordered, linear plots. Crompton, for his part, cautions against distinctly modern imperviousness to the eternal soul. From the aesthetic side, Bendrix questions the technical mastery claimed by modern subjectivity; from the theological side, Crompton questions modern confidence in a radical here and now. While the two concur in their intellectual skepticism about modern strains

[51] Burcht Pranger, *Eternity's Ennui: Temporality, Perseverance, and Voice in Augustine and Western Literature* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 41.
[52] Ibid.

of thought, the agnostic Bendrix persists, like the pre-conversion Augustine, in philosophical wandering. Father Crompton, despite his theoretical espousal of Augustine's unreal view of time, follows Augustine into the faith and claims a spiritual serenity that Bendrix interprets as complacent or even inhuman. Bendrix perceives a cocksure priest in the same scene where Henry asks for counsel: "He had the answers too pat: the amateur could never hope to catch him out, he was like a conjuror who bores one by his very skill."[53] Crompton, Bendrix thinks, should believe a little less and be tempted a little more. He should practice the skepticism he preaches.

With this disputed Augustinian confluence of time and eternity in mind, I would like to demonstrate how characters in the novel attempt to traverse different levels of a literarily repurposed hierarchy of temporality—one without the fixed communitarian identities that the medieval church historically conferred. In this mixed sense, *The End of the Affair* is a novel of secular Catholic temporality at mid-century. At the lowest level of this hierarchy, characters skirt self-reflection. They live from day to day, generally unaware of the bearing of the Augustinian temporal modes of memory, or the present of the past, and expectation, or the present of the future, on their lives. The Heideggerean notion of inauthentic temporality helps to define this level. In inauthentic temporality, David Couzens-Hoy argues, we "think of time in terms of nows that are diachronically the same, and quantitatively identical." [54] Characters at this level lack a narrative intentionality that would, as Heidegger encouraged, creatively interrelate the tenses of past, present, and future. Narrative intentionality, more than an inauthentic here and now, attempts to deepen and enrich experience through stories. The last level, eternity, is a disconcertingly blank and nearly fatal one. Bendrix defines it as "not . . . an extension of time but an absence of time" that transcends, if not supersedes, both inauthentic temporality and narrative intentionality.[55] As I will go on to argue,

[53] Greene, *End of the Affair*, 146.
[54] David Couzens-Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 200.
[55] Greene, *End of the Affair*, 39.

Bendrix's association of wartime and mystical eternity is darkly borne out in the convergence of Catholic conversion and literal death to the world.

Smythe, a logical positivist and atheist pamphleteer, attempts to reduce temporality to his isolated present. Meeting Bendrix at his home, Smythe complains about the "trappings that are left over" from England's Christian inheritance. He fears that "people will be reminded even by conventional words—good-bye for instance."[56] When Smythe describes his desire to "sow a seed" of religious ignorance in children, Bendrix rejoins, "That comes out of the Gospels."[57] Bendrix defies, in effect, the viability of Smythe's ahistorical and metaphysically denuded project. Smythe sides with "[A.J.] Ayer and [Bernard] Russell," two prominent English philosophers and intellectual trend-setters whom Bendrix characterizes as "crusaders . . . not the detached."[58] For Smythe, Christianity, predicated on eternity, neglects the existential priority of the here and now.

However, Bendrix, perhaps more annoyed at this point with atheistic confidence than curious about Christianity, revises this commonplace conception of Christian temporality. Smythe's sister, describing postwar dejection in England, informs Bendrix that "People are longing for a message of hope," and Smythe develops this utopian messianism: "Can't you see what hope there'd be, if everybody in the world knew that there was nothing else but what we have here? No future compensation, rewards, punishments . . . then we'd begin to make this world like heaven."[59] In contrast to the isolated present that Smythe wants to establish, Bendrix spells out an experience of sudden hope out of his control. "I believe in nothing as it is. Except now and then," he counters to Smythe, who then jumps at the opportunity to evangelize the unaffiliated Bendrix: "It's the now and thens we have to deal with," Smythe replies.[60] For Bendrix, however, "The odd thing is that those

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[56] Ibid, 65.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid, 67.
[59] Ibid, 66.
[60] Ibid.

are the moments of hope . . . it happens suddenly, for no reason, a scent…"[61] Bendrix construes hope as an unpredictable release, however brief, from ordinary time. In this retelling of a transitory ecstasy, Bendrix, despite himself, moves in the direction of eternity—an eternity Augustine would find, also briefly, in the vision at Ostia that preceded his conversion.

Smythe denounces the self-interested and salvific hope for eternal life after death. He cannot, however, account for Bendrix's sudden hope, a phenomenological experience innocent of the idealistic expectation of a distant eternity. Bendrix homes in on hope as mystically eschatological rather than narratively apocalyptic, and he disturbs linear and typological readings of the Bible in which temporal lives await the end time. In his recent study of Heidegger's vacillating, career-long relationship with Saint Augustine, Ryan Coyne shows how, for Heidegger, the true and as-yet unrecognized "Christian eschatology" that seizes Bendrix "involves suppressing the sense of the future as consisting solely in datable events that have yet to occur."[62] In contrast to Smythe's narrow and defensive view of secular hope as a purgation of the Christian past, Bendrix's experience of sudden hope approaches the problem from a third position both inside and outside ordinary time. Bendrix critiques, as does Crompton, rigid distinctions between past, present, and future that rely upon willful ignorance. Smythe's isolated present, divorced from history and hermetically sealed off from the threat of the irrational, falls prey to such artificial distinctions; so does a conventional, but mistaken, Christian present separated from the events-to-come of the soul's salvation and its future union with God. Bendrix experiences sudden hope as the convergence of time and eternity. For just an instant, he is seized by what cannot be planned, what cannot be understood, and what, as he acknowledges in his humble reflection on his own artistic craft, cannot be arranged in the predictive and plotted frame of a beginning, middle, and end.

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ryan Coyne, *The Remains of Saint Augustine in Being and Time and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 42.

Smythe's materialism, confined to a selective epistemology of sensory presence and verifiable facts, marks the spot where mainstream English Christianity had arrived by the mid-twentieth century. In his discussion of the importance of Existential philosophy to a spiritually starved Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Paul Tillich singles out England as "the only European country in which the Existential problem of finding a new meaning for life had no significance, because there positivism and the religious tradition lived on side by side, united by a social conformism which prevented radical questions about the meaning of human 'Existence.'" Tillich continues, "It is important to note that the one country without an Existential philosophy [England] is that in which during the period from 1830 to 1930 the religious tradition remained strongest."[63] Such "positivism" would be disturbed by the less-than-rational events and political turbulence of the oncoming war. When Smythe criticizes the otherworldly hope of English Christianity, he betrays his over-long kinship in this existential and spiritual complacency, which depends on the idea of the world as a safe place to be and in which to make a sturdy home. Logical positivism and socially sanctioned Christianity—faiths, Bendrix interprets, devoted to different saviors—depend upon the stability of the historical infrastructure in which they pose their ostensibly self-evident positions. For both Christians and logical positivists, statements that bring in "hope" beg narrative assessments. Only Bendrix's sudden, eschatological hope, which derives from a mystical, not artificial, source, transcends the narrative conditions of both camps.

Bendrix's ecstatic moments of sudden hope are transitory, however. Bendrix's identity is Janus-faced; even though he creatively expands Smythe's isolated present through the narrative modes of memory and expectation, he often clings to them at the expense of peace. Waiting for Sarah at the Café Royal, Bendrix fears appearing as "one of those who by moving their heads up and down betray a foolish expectation." "What have we all got to expect," he reflects, "that we allow

[63] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 108.

ourselves to be so lined with disappointment?"[64] Bendrix supplants eschatological hope with narrative expectation in his affair with Sarah, an expectation impossible to be realized and finalized because it requires her constant presence to him—her guarantee, in other words, of the eternal now that Augustine exclusively reserves to God. When Bendrix hears Sarah's voice on the telephone, he finds "perfect peace again, until [he] [puts] the receiver down," when his novelist's imagination can go to work.[65] With "something to look forward to," Bendrix morally falters, but his inability to live in the present also drives the drama of the novel forward. To keep his life story interesting, Bendrix—at once an imperfect narrator and an imperfect character—has to keep eschatological hope at bay. Bliss has to give way to conflict.

If Bendrix finds peace in the unexpected event of eschatological hope, he also struggles with the phenomenology of narrative form. The temporal techniques of the novelist—lulls and rising action, deferrals of desire and satisfying climaxes—seep into Bendrix's personal experience of the world, sharpening his pain to a point. The "affair" itself, it is important to note, is a literary trope as well as a moral transgression. Bendrix mocks Henry for falling into the archetype of the unknowing cuckold, and by contrast, fashions himself as a romantic "Troilus."[66] In the role of a "jealous lover . . . supported by the weight of literature," Bendrix invokes a long romantic tradition whose plotted obstacles, in the form of so many arranged or convenient marriages, amp up passion and desire in their invitation to inaccessible trysts.[67] In an essay on the figure of the mistress in the fiction of Nancy Mitford, a contemporary of Greene, Allan Hepburn explains the temporality of such necessarily impossible pursuits. He claims that "Eros, to sustain itself, requires an endless deferral of

[64] Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 21.
[65] Ibid, 47.
[66] Ibid, 10.
[67] Ibid.

commitment and the illusion of attachment."[68] Similarly, Bendrix knows that if Sarah were to divorce Henry and marry him, then marital monotony might take the place of the furtive pleasures of forbidden love. As in the deferred commitment of Mitford's mistress, Bendrix keeps up, in his own words, the "illusion that love would last," and stays true only to a distended temporality that cannot grant him rest. It has, is now, and will be this way, it seems, and Bendrix, stuck in his own story, wishes to "strangle" his love, a "small creature caught in a trap," to "bring the future in now at the door, an unwanted and premature guest."[69]

For Bendrix, the personally relieving loss of his narrative identity coincides with the erasure of the narrative slate and the failure of the tools of storytelling. This erasure and failure engenders the experience of forgetting, the self-transcending flipside of expectation. When Bendrix first meets Mr. Parkis, assistant to the private detective he hires to watch over Sarah, he finds, "with amazement," that "for ten minutes [he] had not thought of Sarah or of [his] jealousy; [he] had become nearly human enough to think of another person's trouble."[70] Empathy unseats Bendrix from the burdensome epistemological privilege of the modern novelist, and moves him in the direction of an eternity unavailable to the plotter's narrative constructions. When Bendrix watches a poor film adaptation of one of his novels on an outing with Sarah, he is relieved to find that "suddenly and unexpectedly, for a few minutes only, the film came to life. I forgot that this was *my* story, and that for once this was *my* dialogue, and was genuinely moved by a small scene in a cheap restaurant."[71] This kind of forgetting is not willed, as it is with Smythe's forgetting of England's Christian inheritance, but instead descends on Bendrix from a mystical source; it unburdens him from his acute awareness of time and selfhood at once.

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[68] Allan Hepburn, "The Fate of the Modern Mistress: Nancy Mitford and the Comedy of Marriage," *Modern Fiction Studies* 45, no. 2 (1990): 341.
[69] Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 25, 44.
[70] Ibid, 31.
[71] Ibid, 32.

In his commentary on Saint John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*, Jean-Louis Chrétien reveals the link between Bendrix's lay and modern experience of forgetting and the saint's perennial struggle to overcome time. While Bendrix often clings to the novelistic mode of his "consciousness of time," in which "it is always last year or next week," the saint attempts to break free from such human temporal bounds. "The mystical theology of John of the Cross," Chrétien argues, "shows powerfully the bond of forgetting and hope understood in the highest sense. [John of the Cross] writes in *The Dark Night*: 'Hope empties and withdraws the memory from all creature possessions, for as Paul says, hope is for that which is not possessed.'"[72] In his worst moments, Bendrix wants to possess Sarah; his desire embodies the ethical consequence of his narrative identity. The correspondence between John of the Cross's bond between forgetting and hope and Bendrix's mystical moments is nearly one-to-one; without believing in Christianity, Bendrix takes a saintly shortcut and enjoys the fruits of asceticism of John of the Cross without the labor. Unlike John of the Cross, however, Bendrix lives and works in the modern *saeculum*, and his narrative identity—on par with the Catholic Church's frequent equation of temporality with sinfulness—gains the upper hand.

Bendrix explicitly refers to John of the Cross's *noche oscura* early in the novel, and ambivalently observes that the serenity it offers, like the Augustinian idea of the restless heart of the pre-converted seeker, overcomes the distension of secular selfhood. Bendrix considers that

> Happiness annihilates us: we lose our identity. The words of human love have been used by the saints to describe their vision of God, and so, I suppose, we might use the terms of prayer, meditation, contemplation to explain the intensity of the love we feel for a woman. We too surrender

[72] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For,* trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 76.

> memory, intellect, intelligence, and we too experience the deprivation, the *noche oscura*, and sometimes as a reward a kind of peace.[73]

For Bendrix—and for Ricoeur, working in the Kantian tradition—narratives consist in the artificial, but inevitable, emplotment of the transcendental real. The mystical *noche oscura* refuses such organization, however. The dark night is spiritually freeing, but it is also aesthetically dismantling; memory, intellect, and intelligence, tools of art and knowledge, are surrendered under its influence. The *noche oscura* sets up an extreme divide between the narrative modes of expectation and memory and mystical theology. Seen in this light, Augustine's threshold of identity—marked by the difference between the philosophical skepticism and worldly wandering of his youth and the desired union with God of his adulthood—suggests eternity's contempt, perhaps justified, for worldly time. As the concept of eschatological hope shows its self-annihilating face, the crossing of time and eternity looks more idealistic and less durable.

In *The End of the Affair*, the involuntary "deprivation" of the Second World War sets the stage for this kind of unbidden mystical experience. The novel's Blitz scene calls into question the narrative and worldly sustainability of mystical experience at the limit of the land of the living. After a Blitz bombing, a falling door pins Bendrix to the floor. Sarah, who finds him in this apparently deadly condition, makes a private vow of celibacy and devotion to God. Reflecting on this Blitz brush with death, Bendrix asks "whether eternity might not after all exist as the endless prolongation of the moment of death . . . the moment when it was impossible to quarrel because it was impossible to think."[74] The near death of the episode counterintuitively revitalizes Bendrix. After the engine of the V1 robot cuts out, Bendrix wakes "after five seconds or five minutes in a changed world."[75] He

[73] Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 36.
[74] Ibid, 55.
[75] Ibid, 56.

loses his sense of time, and his mind "for a few moments was clear of everything . . . [he] had no memory at all of Sarah and [he] was completely free from anxiety, jealousy, insecurity, hate."[76] He feels happy, because, as in his reflection on Saint John of the Cross, anxiety, jealousy, and insecurity define his narrative identity—and, ultimately, his secular selfhood as he experiences it with alternating love and hatred.

Greene paratactically associates the involuntary *tabula rasa* of the V1 bombing with the *noche oscura* that Saint John of the Cross approaches via the purgation of worldly concern. The Blitz pummels Bendrix into spiritual detachment. In her book on anxiety and the World War II novel, Lyndsey Stonebridge claims that "the point about a blitz . . . is that it marks the difficulty of catching 'the real thing' within the limits of whatever representational means are at hand."[77] A blitz, she states, "[destroys] the opposition between inside and outside (evacuating the subject) and thus attacking the ability to categorize or describe experience."[78] For Stonebridge, whose ambit is secular, wartime experiences such as the blitz first hamper, and later provoke, narrative activity. They transform habitually detached observers into passive witnesses saturated by a massive event and in need, therefore, of expressing the inexpressible. This confrontation with the "inexpressible" has mystical as well as narrative import. Stonebridge indirectly discusses the compatibility of infinite death, "measureless," Ryan Coyne says, "in the sense that it offers nothing to the imagination," with the inevitable measurements of finite, narrative temporality.[79] Bendrix, closer to Coyne than to Stonebridge, savors the blitz for its transcendence of narratives, not for its instilled desire to make recuperative sense of an overwhelming event. If, for Stonebridge, events like the blitz suspend the gap between subject and object, only to renew that safe distance in the form of deferred stories and

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 60.
[78] Ibid, 72.
[79] Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, 134.

histories, Bendrix wants out of them altogether. For Bendrix, and, by extension, for Greene, wartime mysticism is anti-cultural and asocial: it is God-by-bomb.

Bendrix ceases writing his novel about Henry, whom he had first "buttonholed . . . for the sake of [his] material," because life, like Stonebridge's Blitz, renders impossible the clean detachment of novelistic objectification.[80] Stonebridge, commenting elsewhere on mid-century English fiction's relationship with literary modernism, notes the "hermetic aesthetic transcendence" of the latter; Bendrix finds that he can claim no such elite distance from the so-called characters who, as art and life cross, eventually encroach on his territory. Bendrix becomes "aware that [his] love [for Sarah] was doomed: love had turned into a love-affair with a beginning and an end . . . And all the time I knew I was forcing the pace. I was pushing, pushing the only thing I loved out of my life." Bendrix watches the end of love "being worked out now, like a story: the pointed word that set her crying, that seemed to have come so spontaneously to the lips." His "novel lagged, but [his] love hurried like inspiration to the end."[81] Bendrix's novels are not pure products of artistic invention. They are impacted by Bendrix's ethical life, and Bendrix's ethical life is impacted by the novels he writes. Their supposedly self-contained dramas prefigure the early morning disagreements and hasty late-night phone calls of the novel. Bendrix experiences a plotted existence made in the image of art—an aestheticized theology disrupted only by his sudden moments of hope.

Sarah, the object of Bendrix's narrative and amorous pursuit, is distinguished by her standalone conversion to Catholicism, which coincides with her death and seems to reaffirm the idea that in Greene's mystical wartime, faith is fatal. The temporal significance of Sarah's conversion, moreover, remains to be discussed. As a kind of lay nun who extends and sustains Bendrix's sudden epiphanies, Sarah strives to achieve an intense personal devotion which exemplifies, as Michael

[80] Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 18.
[81] Ibid, 26.

Gorra has convincingly claimed, the nexus of otherworldly mysticism and modern interiority: hers is a "private and rather Protestant bargain with God."[82] Bendrix describes Sarah's "abandonment" during sex, which, it seems to him, "touched that strange mathematical point of endlessness, a point with no width, occupying no space. What did time matter?"[83] Bendrix balks at Sarah's ability to live wholly in the present, which, according to his Blitzed-out spiritual experiences, he may equate with death-in-life. He comes to associate her obliviousness to his romantic biography with this sense of saintly abandonment, which comes out on the other side as worldly desertion. Reflecting on the end of the affair, he notes that God, his "unknown successor," would have hurt him less "if [he] hadn't known how capable she was of abandonment."[84] According to Bendrix, Sarah miraculously stands in Augustine's eternal now, in an unbelievably godlike serenity free from the awareness of tenses. Sarah herself observes that "in the desert," the monastic space intentionally set apart from the world, "there's no time."[85] Apart from Bendrix, Sarah wonders in her diary if she "shouldn't escape from this desert if only for half an hour," and concludes that "it wouldn't be a desert if we were together."[86] But Sarah finds, ultimately, that she "wasn't afraid of the desert any longer because You [God] were there."[87] Her intimacy with God confounds the ordinary human love—and ordinary human temporality—that she shares with Bendrix.

In *Love and Saint Augustine*, Hannah Arendt, aware of the spiritual benefit and social cost of abandonment and desertion, argues: "Since only love can constitute [either this world or the world-to-come] as man's home, 'this world is for the faithful [who do not love the world] what the desert was for the people of Israel'—they live not in houses but in tents." Arendt concludes, uneasily,

[82] Michael Gorra, ed., *The End of the Affair* (New York: Penguin, 2004), xx.
[83] Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 39.
[84] Ibid, 55.
[85] Ibid, 74.
[86] Ibid, 78, 80.
[87] Ibid, 90.

"Would it not then be better to love the world in *cupiditas* and be at home? Why should we make a desert out of this world?"[88] For Arendt, the Augustinian inflection of eternity risks erasing individual particularity and history—in her words, "this 'being out of the world,' like death, makes everyone the same, because the disappearance of the world removes the possibility of boasting, which came precisely from the individual's worldliness in comparing himself with others."[89] Moreover, as Michel de Certeau states, the mystical saint always teeters on the edge of asocial oblivion. In terms identical to both Bendrix's Blitzed-out *noche oscura* and Sarah's removal from worldly concern, de Certeau argues, "The mystic will say that 'annihilation' of the soul is a saintly neglect and abandonment of self, such that neither by memory, nor affection, nor thought, does it worry about itself nor any creature, in order to be able to transform itself entirely into God."[90] The boasting Arendt describes (and nearly endorses), cancelled out by de Certeau's notion of the self-neglecting saint, makes up the interest of Bendrix as a character and, arguably, some of the most interesting characters in the history of the modern novel.

Absolute unity with God, which consists in the annihilation of worldly identity occasionally yearned for by Bendrix and finally claimed by Sarah, can be tranquil from the personal point of view of contemplative interiority. From the social point of view of the modern novel, Sarah's saintly abandonment and desertion appear ambivalent, if not dramatically unsustainable and ultimately shorn of narrative interest. Sarah, who catches a deathly cold as detectives trace her steps and Bendrix pries into her diary, knows the stakes of her turn to eternity. She is no naïve saint, and she has tasted the world's fruit. Hesitating, like Augustine, to give herself up to God, Sarah ponders, "If

[88] Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19.
[89] Ibid, 78.
[90] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 137.

I eliminate everything, how will I exist . . . Where would *I* be all that time?"[91] What would a truly mystical modern novel—or a truly mystical modern life—without the narrative trajectory of a plot or a biography, Sarah suggests, look like? How would it retain the worldly reader's interest without the common distension of worldly temporality? Even though both she and Bendrix crave the gift of "peace" that mystical self-forgetting or a Blitz bombing offers, they both express fear about taking the last, voluntary step toward eternity, which Arendt equates with the elimination of the worldly self. Sarah gives herself up to God, and she must die, at least according to Greene's narrative plan; Bendrix persists in Augustine's pre-conversion wandering, and he can still live, however painfully, in the world. Without much of a resolution, Greene rehearses the perennial dilemma of the religious modern novel: as in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, eternity could be an escape hatch or an easy panacea.

Whether the reader views this mystical death as a spiritual reward or as an existential defeat, Sarah ends up standing outside the temporal constraints of the novel. Her death, however painful to her friends and family and however unsatisfying for the modern reader, is required for Greene's construal of mystical temporality, concentrated in the intellectual and ethical "deprivation" of his Blitz scene, as inconceivable by the human mind. As Greene suggests in *The End of the Affair*, when wartime and religion abstract the human being from the sphere of her particular, if burdensome, concerns, obligations and even sins, they convert their suffering victims or adherents with inhuman force. Mystical eternity, as developed in *The End of the Affair*, confounds both the intended, isolated present of logical positivism and the selfish expectations of Bendrix's narrative identity—in a word, mysticism mints Sarah's sainthood and the supremacy of religion over literature at once. Late in the novel, Bendrix admits that characters like him merely support Sarah, a saint graced with a freedom from plots:

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[91] Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 81, 82.

> The saints, one would suppose, in a sense create themselves. They come alive. They are capable of the surprising act or word. They stand outside the plot, unconditioned by it. But we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy of nonexistence. We are inextricably bound to the plot, and wearily God forces us, here and there, according to his intention, characters without poetry, without free will, whose only importance is that somewhere, at some time, we help to furnish the scene in which a living character moves and speaks, providing perhaps the saints with the opportunities for *their* free will.[92]

Indeed, Sarah's mystical death could be read from Arendt's ethical and existential stance, developed with her mentor, Heidegger, as an escape from the temporal tenses of the finite world. Given Bendrix's slippages from novelistic subjectivity to spiritual receptivity—from will to grace—throughout the novel, Sarah's death illustrates what it might mean to extend and sustain such mystical experience in a modern world which had made contemplation an individual affair. Sarah's fate speaks, also, to the difficulty of Greene's tense marriage of mid-century existentialism, all the rage in Europe, with the ancient Catholicism he accepted in his early adulthood. In *The End of the Affair*, Greene demonstrates the transfiguration of novelistic temporality into atemporal eternity, desirable but impossible to be endured forever in a world of beginnings and endings.

As characters pick up the pieces in the aftermath of Sarah's death, Smythe converts to Christianity because of Sarah's kiss on his cheek; Parkis' boy is healed by reading one of Sarah's childhood books; and both Henry and Bendrix find themselves at a loss for words, unsure whether to deem the final events coincidences or miracles. Bendrix, tired and resigned, returns to the hotel where he and Sarah made love for the first time, only to find it no longer standing. With the decay

[92] Ibid, 154.

of the postwar world before him, he confesses the poverty of the omniscience he once sought: "It needs a God *outside time* to remember when everything changes."[93] When Bendrix confesses that "I'm beginning to believe my realism has been at fault all these years, for nothing in life now ever seems to end," he asks about the extent to which an excessive eternity, glimpsed in fleeting moments, is fit for the temporal constraints of the finite, narrative form of human life. This question is never answered for good, just as the question of Augustine's certitude persists in theological and philosophical conversations to this day. In *The End of the Affair*, Greene suggests that the theologically minded novelist, shorn of the confidence of artistic technique and confronted with the ethical consequences of his craft, might shrug and look beyond the page.

[93] Ibid, 119.

Chapter 3 "The Portrait of the Martyr as a Young Man": *The Girls of Slender Means* and the Secular Circumstances of the Sacramental Novel

In late July 1962, Muriel Spark returned to Aylesford Priory, a Carmelite religious house in Kent, where she started the first two chapters of her 1963 novel, *The Girls of Slender Means.* Aylesford, an active monastery dating back to the thirteenth century, was also a contemporary refuge for troubled Catholic artists. In 1955, Spark, a fresh convert, had traveled there for the first time to complete five chapters of her first novel, *The Comforters*, and to recover from a debilitating bout of Dexedrine-induced hallucinations.[94] Before she departed from New York, where she had captivated the staff of the *New Yorker*, Spark got in touch with her literary agent, John Smith, whom she asked to research the details of wartime rationing in England.[95] She took a detour in her birthplace, Edinburgh, covered its Writer's Festival, and flew back to New York on 13 October 1962. On the advice of her *New Yorker* editor, Rachel MacKenzie, Spark leased a chic apartment at the Beaux Arts Hotel at 310 East 44th Street.[96] She worked each day at her *New Yorker* office from 10:00-4:00. At night, with Rockefeller Center's Time / Life sign flashing outside her window, she nearly finished *The Girls of Slender Means* within one month. "When it says 'Time,'" she told Shirley Hazzard, "I write. When it says "Life," I want to go out.'"[97]

In the autumn of 1962, when Spark was tucked away at Aylesford, the Second Vatican Council first convened at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, promulgated by Pope

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[94] These hallucinations became so severe that Spark believed T. S. Eliot to be sending her threatening messages in the form of "anagrams and cryptographic experiments." See Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 151.
[95] Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), 265.
[96] Ibid, 269.
[97] Ibid, 270.

Paul VI on 4 December 1963, was perhaps its most momentous document. It encouraged the adoption of the vernacular in the liturgy and sought to adapt "more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change."[98] While it was not always explicit about which or whose ecclesial institutions were "subject to change," and to what degree of secular accommodation, *Sancrosanctum Concilium* maintained an official boundary between *polis* and parish, the impetus of its outreach. The document nonetheless emphasized the mutual reinforcement of liturgy inside the sanctuary and lay evangelization outside it. "While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within [the Church] into a holy temple of the Lord," it held, "at the same time [the liturgy] marvelously strengthens [Catholics'] power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd."[99] Conceived at the infrastructural convergence of monastery, metropolis, and magazine, *The Girls of Slender Means* is sportive about the secular détente envisioned by the Second Vatican Council. Spark's narrator is a wry shepherd for scattered secular characters; with a pinch of Edinburgh Calvinism, she knows better than her flock. In the wartime world of *The Girls of Slender Means*, the "sign lifted up to the nations" is difficult to read.

For Spark, a poet-turned-novelist, literary and religious conversion reinforced each other. "I had written nothing for over a year," she reflected in 1962, "and in the meantime had entered the Roman Catholic Church—an important step for me, because from that time I began to see life as a whole rather than as a series of disconnected happenings." It was "this combination of circumstances," she explained, "which made it possible for me to attempt my first novel."[100] A

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[98] Second Vatican Council, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963," accessed online January 1, 2023. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Muriel Spark, *The Informed Air: Essays* (New York: New Directions, 2014), 45.

creative dry spell was solved, at least in part, by religious conversion. According to Spark, the Catholic Church and the novel share the formal quality of coherence. They work side by side to illuminate unseen patterns in a world that forsakes them; for all the talk about her postmodern trailblazing, Spark is no nihilist. As Spark reads it, the modern Catholic novel is an artistic agent of the ethos of the Second Vatican Council. In the bridge-building style of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the novelist is the secular emissary of the Church because she helps readers (and characters) to transfigure their apparently broken lives. Still, historical circumstances are double-edged; by virtue of their abrasive novelty, they can rebuff as well as redouble a religious sense of the "whole."[101] Spark's idea of the novel transcends mere "circumstances"—the bare fact of "disconnected happenings"—even as her converted Catholic imagination depends upon them for the objects of its praise or of its scorn.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sense I.2.a of "circumstances" as "The logical surroundings or 'adjuncts' of an action; the time, place, manner, cause, occasion, etc., amid which it takes place."[102] Circumstances imply that no decision stands alone; its ambience matters. The involuntary fact of being born in 1918, in Edinburgh, to a half-Jewish, half-Calvinist household, at the end of one world war and twenty years before another, prepares Spark's unique road to Rome. Her life conditions her conversion, whose gift of coherence derives from its retrospective transfiguration of the circumstances that first set it in motion. As an imaginative example of Spark's theory of the novel, *The Girls of Slender Means* emphasizes this give and take between secular circumstances and Catholic conversion.

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[101] In books such as *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (2012), and *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (2019), the Yale modernist Martin Hagglund equates the embrace of finitude with atheistic materialism.
[102] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "circumstances' in circumstance (*n.*), sense I.2.a," September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2488553073.

In her argument for the way in which religious commitment reinvigorates novelistic form, Spark stands out among her literary contemporaries. In modernist criticism, religious dogma is often fodder for the frisson of antinomian aestheticism.[103] Whether existential or silly in effect, agnosticism tends to be the dominant criterion for inclusion in the modernist "religious" canon: Woolf, Proust, Barnes, and Joyce enjoy the lion's share of critical attention. As distinct from the irreverence, however curious, of these secular novelists, Spark is happy to entertain orthodoxy and skepticism as friends. Paul Saint-Amour has recently called for "weak" theories of modernism. Applied to the relationship in Spark between the enduring secular and the transfiguring sacred, his idea helps us to reframe conversion as existentially reorienting rather than existentially conclusive, an ongoing turning-toward as opposed to a zero-sum revolution.[104] Spark maintains that faith helps her to perceive the depth of the secular ordinary. "As if," a metafictional trope of *The Girls of Slender Means*, is frayed, but not disconnected, at the electric point of contact between material sign and divine signified ("a sign lifted up to the nations").

Seven years after her conversion, Spark was happy to trade pious and pagan places. She would round out her intensive theological reading of John Henry Newman by taking catechetical cues from her style bible, *Vogue*. This chapter holds that these biographical circumstances are not trivial. They help us to understand the secular and sacred exchanges of the novel and to connect them with Spark's remarkably protean life as a Roman Catholic in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time of dramatic change for the Church. *The Girls of Slender Means* reflects Spark's enduring worldliness, the yearning for exuberance lit up by the "Life" side of the Rockefeller Center sign. The novel is set at the fictional "May of Teck Club," a low-cost hostel for "… the Pecuniary Convenience and Social Protection of Ladies of Slender Means below the age of Thirty Years, who

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[103] The most influential version of this thesis is Pericles Lewis's *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation.
[104] See Paul Saint-Amour, "Weak Theory, Weak Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 25, no. 3 (September 2018).

are obliged to reside apart from their Families in order to follow an Occupation in London."[105] Amid the sociopolitical circumstances of rationing in the summer of 1945, the young and socially ambitious members of the club aim personally to capitalize on their state-sanctioned diet. Self-image swallows up all other concerns. The sincere outpourings of piety of Joanna Childe, the only girl who practices Christianity, are merely "felt to add tone and style to the establishment."[106] This is a classic example of aestheticized faith, which Spark toys with throughout the novel. For most of the Second World War and up to the 1950s, Spark lived in a similar hostel in Kensington. Worn down by several decades of living paycheck-to-paycheck, she did not think that there was anything romantic about poverty, but the novel at least entertains the possibility of the transfiguration of secular austerity into monastic asceticism. At the threshold of the self-sacrifice of her characters, Spark gestures toward a scarcely legible City of God in waiting. Still, under the circumstantial pressure of the girls' penny-pinching self-interest, transfigurative potential tends to devolve into aestheticism, piety into pose, as in Joanna's appealingly rendered recitations from the Book of Common Prayer. Spark's narrator equates the jockeying of the girls with what are arguably the motivating factors of the plots of the post-Enlightenment and secular English novel: "Love and money were the vital themes in the dormitories."[107] In terms of its diegetic values and priorities, the novel coaxes its readers into a comedy of manners.

Up to its startling climax, a fire started by an undetected and belatedly exploding bomb, the novel situates everyday banality—materialistic repartee about love, money, and waist-size—within broader political and theological timescales. Meanwhile, the piecemeal news of the martyrdom of Nicholas Farringdon, S.J., one of its central characters and its only Catholic convert, confuses distracted callers on the telephone. They further boggle the missing details of his fate with their bad

[105] Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means* (London: The Folio Society, 2013), 5.
[106] Ibid, 6.
[107] Ibid, 18.

spiritual reception. The facts of the matter are compromised by blurred, half-remembered images and ellipses-ridden syntax, which neither character nor reader can resolve. These posthumous phone calls, which come to us in the narrative form of flashbacks and *in medias res*, are seemingly at odds with Spark's prose affirmation of a novelistic and Catholic "whole."

In the narrative present of 1945, innocent of what is to befall the Club and Nicholas Farringdon, the girls count calories to slink through a tiny casement in an upper-level bathroom, which offers access to the roof of the club, a heaven for sunbathers. Next door, Farringdon, an anarchist poet and Jesuit martyr-to-be, works in the American wing of the Foreign Office, which is wrapping up its wartime operations in a shuffle of papers. His confused political pamphlet *The Sabbath Notebooks* finds its way into the hands of the self-important busybody Jane Wright, whose disreputable and paranoid publisher tasks her with the psychological manipulation of this struggling artist. First under the wing of Jane, later on his own missionary volition, Nicholas makes a habit of soaking in the atmosphere of the Club and sleeping with the "extremely slim" Selina Redwood, who is characterized frequently in hyperbolic terms, suggesting his own impressionability.[108] As I will go on to explain, the line between Nicholas' romanticism and Spark's wry narrative voice is intermittently blurred. The girls make do with the state-mandated austerity of wartime rationing, a "temporary phase" that Nicholas beholds as "intoxicating" and they experience as imprisoning, a sense-stunting purgatory holding them back from postwar ambrosia.[109]

In his alternately voyeuristic and visionary gaze on the all-female May of Teck Club, Farringdon is a diegetic embodiment of the circumstantial Catholic novelist, at once metaphysically ambitious and prone to human bias and misjudgment. Jane first invites him to the Club in the role of disingenuous emissary of her insecure boss, George Johnson, whose "zest for plot-formation"

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[108] Ibid, 25.
[109] Ibid, 46.

drives him, in a metafictional nod to novelistic intelligence, to view authors as his "raw temperamental material." Nicholas, wise to the publisher's stock-in-trade of mutual manipulation, knows that "he [is] being worked on" like a character in a novel.[110] Characters treat each other as characters in their own novels. Nicholas begins to see the May of Teck Club as "a miniature version of a free society."[111] Its members unselfconsciously yield so many "details" that "pester" his imagination.[112] The "disconnected happenings" of the novelistically untreated lives of the girls arrange themselves into a vision of transcendent, if unbidden, poverty. They are "worked on" by a mystical force that simply "comes" to Nicholas the novelistic medium, who registers several different impressions at once:

> The twittering movements at other points in the room, Joanna's singular voice, the beautiful aspects of poverty and charm amongst these girls in the brown-papered drawing-room, Selina, furled like a long soft sash, in her chair, came to Nicholas in a gratuitous flow. Months of boredom had subdued him to intoxication by an experience which, at another time, might itself have bored him.[113]

Nicholas sees some girls as "singular," as unrepeatable, and others as "twittering" birds, an indistinct zoomorphism that the narrator will frequently and more coldly apply to them. His aesthetic sensibility is characterized by unlikely points of transfigurative departure: "brown-papered" walls, the strange idea of being "subdued to intoxication," as though boredom is a prelude to rapture. The narrator's droll regard for Nicholas's "intoxication"—the Club as last-ditch drug, daydreaming as reprieve from desk work—casts a wary glance at this kind of starry-eyed convent-gazing, but his ability to see more than meets the eye is hard to separate from what Spark's narrator has more

[110] Ibid, 28.
[111] Ibid, 66.
[112] Ibid, 49.
[113] Ibid, 46.

soberly to say about the girls. In attempting to perceive the Club as something other than itself, Nicholas acts on the aesthetic and spiritual cusp of transfiguration and the ethical cusp of violation. Just as Jane first "applies for information about him," the narrator describes his trips to the club as "infiltration," a word that smacks of illicit secrecy on behalf of a foreign office, whether the Vatican or MI-6 is the institution conducting espionage.[114]

In these crackling lines of communication between material fact and spiritual meaning, the involuntarily drab circumstances of a life and their "beautiful aspects," *The Girls of Slender Means* plays with what the sociologist David Martin has called "Christian double-entendre," a way of "enabl[ing] our senses to hear in more senses than one."[115] As examples of Christian double-entendre, Martin cites Christ's call for "The biological unity of the family . . . to be extended to become a universal spiritual family . . . [and] the temporal kingdoms of the world . . . to be made subject to an eternal king."[116] Double-entendre is a symptom of Christian dual-citizenship, under which "The kingdom comes, but it remains precarious, that is something to be prayed for and hoped for. Those who are awakened become citizens in this Kingdom, born again into a new society by spiritual adherence."[117] Christian double-entendre attempts to realize Christ's precept that "Man shall not live by bread alone," but its imaginative import for the Catholic novelist, as distinguished from its moral exhortation, is less than clear. "Man shall not imagine bread as only bread" may be one imaginative form of Christian double-entendre, according to which, in the case of Spark, calorie-counting may turn into self-sacrifice. And yet, as the foregoing passage implies, *who does* the transfiguring is an ethically loaded problem.

[114] Ibid, 49.
[115] David Martin, *The Breaking of the Image: A Christian Sociology of Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 127.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

As the philosopher Arthur Danto has argued, for instance, the "Artworld" "transfigures" ordinary objects.[118] We can extend Danto's logic to the urinal of Duchamp on the sanctifying wall of the modern museum. The exalted status of the urinal is guaranteed by an Artworld that is given creedal formulae by a rarefied academy and sponsored by a wealthy cadre of taste-making donors. Its transfiguration is by consensus. What is the limit of the Catholic transfiguration of the secular ordinary, and, in the absence of the *analogia entis* of the high-water mark of Christendom, according to what criteria? The case of Farringdon highlights the resistance of mere circumstance to being held up for contemplation. As distinct from Duchamp's transubstantiation of the inanimate, the novelistic transfiguration of human lives can look like a violation, or, more benignly, like a fanciful gesture, to the unconscious community of the novelistically transfigured.

In one of the few detailed and recent considerations of this novel, Kelly Rich argues that "[The title of *The Girls of Slender Means*] plays with the nexus between deprivation and deprivatization, a warfare-to-welfare logic that began with the Beveridge Report and ended with postwar consensus." The novel, Rich concludes, "raises the question of whether a society forged by war would likewise band together under the causes of social welfare."[119] Rich's "nexus" between personal "deprivation" and social "deprivatization" chimes with Spark's more directly theological focus on Christian double-entendre. This distinction seems to me to be accurate to the novel's shift between the personal and the public, but it also leaves room for questioning the Catholic novelistic legibility of these material wartime circumstances. For Spark the secular Catholic, the big question is not so much the novel's "skeptical engagement" with "Britain's postwar fantasy of repair, one that imagined that reconstruction—the gleaming schools, health centers, and housing flats of wartime propaganda—would result in new forms of social equality," but her ambivalent engagement with the

[118] Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 61, no. 19 (1964): 580.
[119] Kelly Rich, "Nowhere's Safe: Ruinous Reconstruction in *The Girls of Slender Means*," *ELH*, 83, No. 4 (2016): 1189.

possibilities and limits of the Catholic novelistic transfiguration of the mid-century ordinary.[120] What Rich's argument reaffirms, however, is the way in which the novel can be read, and the way in which its characters can think of the literal circumstances of their lives, in two ways at once. By theologically reading the novel alongside the properly secular mode of Rich's argument, we perceive the ambiguous threshold between indirect ("deprivation") and direct (ascetic) Catholicism in *The Girls of Slender Means*. In its language of involuntariness and unselfconsciousness and in its droll treatment of the transcendence that fallible artists wrest from their surroundings, the novel hinges between everyday and eternal scales of time.

Whether a wartime hostel can enable, even in part, the spiritual practices, as opposed to the "beautiful aspects," of an official convent, depends upon Spark's turning a ritual form to literary purposes: in effect, by secularizing it without stripping it of its Catholic substance. In a 1953 essay, "The Religion of an Agnostic: A Sacramental View of the World in the Writings of Proust," Spark develops a theory of novelistic "sacramentality." She begins by criticizing the contempt of the body of certain Christian contemporaries (she does not name names). As a corrective to their otherworldly flight from the body, Spark recommends the "sacramental view of life," defined simply as a "balanced regard for matter and spirit."[121] In a narrative sense, sacramentality rescues and redeems, in the novelistic "aspect of eternity," "so many monsters immersed in Time."[122]

Proust, a "truly pagan writer," is an exemplary sacramentalist who "writes always with the insight of a gifted religious and the fidelity of one devoted to a spiritual cause" and who echoes the "introspective enlightenment of a later St. Augustine."[123] Spark contends that the sacramental view of life has been lost to the modern social imaginary. While the case of Proust shows that

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[120] Ibid, 1190.
[121] Muriel Spark, "The Religion of an Agnostic: A Sacramental View of the World in the Writings of Proust," in *The Informed Air: Essays* (New York: New Directions, 2014), 256.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

sacramentality is individually recoverable, even or especially by the modernist pagan stumbling upon it afresh, Spark acknowledges how issues of cultural reception afflict equally the Christian and the agnostic sacramental novelist. While "the sacramental dispensation of Providence—the idea that the visible world is an active economy of outward signs embodying each an inward grace—is nothing new to the Church," what has been lost since the seventeenth century is "a sacramental conception of matter which is hierarchical (all material forms possessing an ultimate eternal light) and not evolutionary (one form replacing or usurping another eternally as in the temporal laws of change."[124] Spark reveals a tension between sacramental "dispensation," or its distribution in creation by "Providence," and a sacramental "conception of matter," which depends upon a "hierarchical" social structure.[125] If Spark's Catholicism is not only a personal assent to belief but also a sacramentally political relation of the "outward signs" of the visible world to an invisible spiritual order, the modern sacramental novelist is in a tough social spot. She might be an out-of-date Dante among Darwinians.

Spark does not pursue the ethical implications of this essay to the literary form she associates with her religious conversion, the omniscient novel of plan-foiling "Providence." As a personal record of auto-fictional, if "sacramental," memory, *Remembrance of Things Past* does not arrange lives and distribute fates, at least not on the political and theological scale of *The Girls of Slender Means*. Spark insists, moreover, on the difference in moral intention between novels written by agnostics and Christians. In Proust, mere matter becomes spiritual thanks to belated and unbidden epiphanies; the aesthete is fortunate, but not yet graced, in his lucky victory over the mortally linear timeline. Proust's act of dipping a Madeleine in a cup of tea sets the scene for, but does not intend, sense-apprehended sacramentality. Appetite, not prayer, redeems lost time. In this approximate but

[124] Ibid, 259.
[125] Ibid.

incomplete sense, while Proust "reminds us that there is a method of apprehending eternity through our senses," Spark is careful to point out that agnostic sacramentality is only "*analogous* to our sacramental understanding of eternity by faith."[126] Proust's sense-apprehension of eternity is an "involuntary act of remembrance," an insufficient if introductory "shadow" of what a "voluntary act of remembrance is to a Christian."[127] Spark does not explain what counts as "voluntary," what as "involuntary," nor does she specify the referent of "our." The meaning of an "involuntary act of remembrance" is the core, I argue, of Spark's Catholic novelistic engagement with the secular world, which I take up in this chapter.

This unanswered question constitutes the dilemma that Nicholas Farringdon faces in his sacramental "infiltration." In the close reading to come, I explore the untidy ways in which Spark artistically feels her way through this theory and its implications for the wartime Catholicism of its diegetic setting and the evangelistic emphasis of the Second Vatican Council, its historical circumstances, on "a sign lifted up to the nations." I draw on a homologous phrase of Geoffrey Hill, borrowed from the admittedly Protestant theologian William Tyndale: "that criticism [is] committed to examine 'the involuntariness at the very heart of the voluntary.'"[128] I read this phrase in two senses: as the artistic untidiness always in tension with abstract theories, and as the deeper, sacramental meanings of our lives that we do not, or will not, perceive in the present, supposedly "voluntary," tense of thought and action. In a way that remains unstated in Spark's essay on Proust, *The Girls of Slender Means* spells out the conflict between personal and sacramental scale, religious romanticism and religious practice. It wonders whether sacrament, a liturgical form originally structured and authorized by the Catholic Church, can be re-imagined and re-positioned by the modern Catholic novelist as publicly legible for a largely unbelieving secular world. This question lies

[126] Ibid, 259.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Geoffrey Hill, *Style and Faith* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2003), 24-25.

at the heart of the project of the modern Catholic novel. *The Girls of Slender Means*, whose ultimate center of gravity is the aesthete-turned-martyr Nicholas Farringdon, asks what it would mean for Prousts past and present to become modern Catholic converts, to confirm as Christian what, according to the modernist critical dogma, is "gratuitously" felt as beautifully—belletristically—non-binding.

Farringdon is an "anarchist and poet sort of thing" prone to in-betweenness.[129] The narrator observes that he "had been always undecided [before the war] whether to live in England or France, and whether he preferred men or women."[130] He wavers between forms of self-annihilation that the narrator subtly weaves together, never "[making] up his mind between suicide and an equally drastic course of action known as Father D'Arcy."[131] The latter "course of action" refers to the historical Martin D'Arcy, S.J., the Jesuit philosopher who, in the '30s and '40s, had, in the words of the narrator, the "monopoly for converting the English intellectuals."[132] The narrator attributes to Nicholas the metafictional description "The Portrait of the Martyr as a Young Man," which reflects his inversely Joycean trajectory from aestheticism to Catholic conversion.

Before his conversion, however, which remains non-diegetically postwar, Nicholas exemplifies Spark's "combination of circumstances" in his gathering-together (or muddling) of the discourses of religion, art, and politics. As an employee of Intelligence, an anarchist poet, a dabbler in political theology, a possible bisexual, and a budding Jesuit, it is hard for Nicholas to commit to anything, because any act, circumstantially speaking, is surrounded by its "adjuncts." The intimidating bounty of competing options, a distinctively modern dilemma, keeps self-possession at bay. Nicholas is arguably voluntary insofar as he surveys different life-paths; he is involuntary insofar

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[129] Spark, *Slender Means*, 45.
[130] Ibid, 39.
[131] Ibid, 39-40.
[132] D'Arcy, whose *The Mind and Heart of Love* was published in 1945 by T. S. Eliot at *Faber and Faber*, knew W. H. Auden, Dorothy Sayers, and Evelyn Waugh.

as these options loom over him and, by their very circumstantial parity—one action would be right, given this condition, another right given that one—preclude his "drastic course of action." According to the mortal denouement foreshadowed by "The Portrait of the Martyr," to carry this course through is to die to self. Like the circuitous consciousness of Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, it is hard for Nicholas to say exactly what he means, but it is not impossible, especially from a secular humanist point of view, to understand his hesitation. He is not ready to make a voluntary act of remembrance—to celebrate The Last Supper, say—on the order of what the narrator impishly connotes as Christian suicide.

In the wartime world of *The Girls of Slender Means*, it is difficult to be voluntary, in the sense of being in control, amid global conflict, of what one wants, wills, and can do. The daunting involuntariness of war, in fact, is a secular reflection of the helplessness of man before God. Even when they are personally felt to be voluntary, characters' intentions boomerang. In a way not unrelated to the Edinburgh Calvinism that Spark rejected, wartime circumstances seem to smother free will. In the V-E Day scene that opens the novel, which could have been adapted by a Leni Riefenstahl of the Allies, forty-odd members of the May of Teck Club head "like swift migrants" to Buckingham Palace, intent on "[expressing] themselves along with the rest of London on the victory in the war with Germany":

> They clung to each other in twos and threes, fearful of being trampled. When separated, they clung to, and were clung to by, the nearest person. They became members of a wave of the sea, they surged and sang until, at every half-hour interval, a light flooded the tiny distant balcony of the Palace . . . The huge organic murmur of the crowd, different from anything like the voice of animate matter but

> rather more a cataract or a geological disturbance, spread through the parks and along the Mall. Only the St John Ambulance men, watchful beside their vans, had any identity left.[133]

Little human voices are engulfed by the "huge organic murmur" of the crowd. Human fallibility is transformed into the "geological." According to this physical characterization, the crowd covers up the entropy of "[separate]" people. When the girls fear "being trampled," their reaction is not to run away but to "cling to each other," exacerbating the danger, since there is nowhere to flee to among thousands of other intoxicated or merely giddy "members of a wave of the sea." The scope of Spark's crowd grows exponentially, carried along by a "wave" whose alliterative "[surging] and [singing]" convey pure aural force. The oceanic verb "surged" builds up to a "flooding" that "spreads through" the urban landscape of landlocked London.

Shadowed by the narrator's sly slippage of the girls' voluntary self-expression into that of "the rest of London," this scene of mass celebration morphs into mass self-obliteration. While political authority is precisely and liturgically timed to the "half-hour interval" of the regular appearances of the royal family, individual agency is dwarfed by a "geological" vastness. We would expect the cinematic scene to be filmed in slow motion, the palace turning into a glacier. The narrator juxtaposes this unintentionally totalitarian mix of political regulation and social entropy with the apprehensive vigilance of the St. John's Ambulance Men, who stand alone in their watchful "identity." Indeed, in the V-J Day scene at the end of the novel, a parallel scene of violent self-forgetting, a sailor stabs his girlfriend, and her scream is inaudible in the din. When mass celebrations, Spark suggests, abstract people in this world-historical dimension, they are down-valued into "animate matter" and are seen in the inhuman and "geological" terms of modern atavism. This is certainly a kind of Dionysian spirituality—but certainly not an orthodox Catholic

[133] Spark, *Slender Means*, 11.

one, which, as Spark would insist, at least ideally retains human particularity. Since Spark leaves room for "agnostic" sacramentality, however, can we call this crowd one such example, however totalitarian its likeness?

"War," says the narrator on the first page of the novel, was "outside everybody's scope."[134] So is the crowd—and the scale of the sacramental itself. The scales of the secular crowd and of novelistic sacramentality shade into each other. The girls head "like swift migrants" to Buckingham Palace, "as the crow flies."[135] In the aforementioned rapture of Nicholas Farringdon, the girls are "twittering." At other points in the novel, they "chatter like a parliament of fowls" or "were like birds waking up instead of girls going to bed."[136] Sacramentality seems to work in two directions: down, as in the reduction of the human being to "organic matter," whether avian or geological in form, or up, as in the unlikely "beautiful aspects" of what would normally be banal or drab. Both the downgraded condition of "animate matter" and the upgraded condition of being "exceedingly beautiful" go beyond what we literally see. Both, then, are the fresh or rotten fruit of transfiguration. The sacramental ambivalence in the novel has to do with how much human persons must sacrifice for their lives to cohere in a "whole." The crowd wrests this "whole" out of its discrete members, who still require the political regulation of the appearance of the Royal Family; the novelist artistically disciplines the "temperamental raw material" of the flux of life.

Whether we are talking about celebrants in a crowd or characters in a novel, the involuntary characterizes the "material" that gives rise to the final product. While, according to Spark's Catholicism, the countervailing category of the "voluntary" might approach Pelagianism, Spark has decided to use the contemporary moral terms of consent and intention. To be sure, Spark is a novelist, not a theologian. Her definition of sacramentality is self-styled. The Catechism of the

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[134] Ibid, 3.
[135] Ibid, 10.
[136] Ibid, 20, 42.

Catholic Church defines "sacrament" as an "efficacious [sign] of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us."[137] The "visible rites by which the [sacrament is] celebrated," this official document states, "signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament." They "bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions."[138] There are seven official sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders. These sacraments were, as the theological definition has it, "instituted by Christ" at the founding of the Church. They are administered in the present by ordained priests. Their uses are never creative, only commemorative. Moreover, they are effective even when a priest is in a state of mortal sin. They are graced and not subject to the rectitude or whims of voluntary agents. The Catechism explains that "the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: 'by the very fact of the action's being performed') . . . the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God."[139] According to its dogmatic definition, a Catholic sacrament is blessedly non-circumstantial, since it works everywhere and every time, regardless of the fallibility of a given priest. Spark's sense of the sacramental honors its common denominator of spiritual meaning—the visible evidence of invisible grace—but sheds its ecclesial infrastructure and dogmatic reliability. Hers is a sacramental novel of secular, involuntary, circumstances, the wartime surroundings of the parish that may not approve, let alone recognize, the transcendent form into which they are being pressed.

Like Proust, Nicholas is an extra-ecclesial sacramentalist. On the basis of Spark's modernist use of Catholic dogma, sacramentality can be understood as a sacra-*mentality*, distinguished from the foregone conclusions of the seven concrete sacraments: an artistic impression as opposed to a

[137] John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2011), sec. 1131, accessed January 5, 2023, https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid, sec. 1128.

Christ-instituted fact. For the Catholic, there is no question about the spiritual reality of baptism, or the Eucharist, assented to on the kneeler as much as in the mind.[140] On the other hand, Nicholas, who trespasses the modern political boundary between sanctuary and public square, attempts to transfigure a secular community by solitary and mental means. *The Girls of Slender Means* ambivalently considers wartime London as a secular space fit for *re*-sacramentalization.

Despite the poetic license of her revision of dogmatic Catholic sacramentality, Spark was on guard against human approximations of God's omniscience. She preferred a world where character was semi-opaque in human eyes and transparent from God's point of view, and where people remained, like the St. John's Ambulance Men, dignified in their inviolable "identity." As the biographer Martin Stannard notes, "The only time [Spark] saw [the writer Michael Swan] smile was when she remarked that no one understood anyone else."[141] And Saint John Henry Newman, perhaps the foremost literary, spiritual, and theological influence on Spark, taught her that "… those who are genuinely pleasing in God's sight, only God knows. The disposition of every soul is a secret matter, not easily discernible."[142] It is one thing to experience, as Proust does on a subjective, autofictional scale, that the past is revivified in the present, re-shaping in turn the narrative of one life; it is another to expand such unexpected meaning to the third-person scale of the Catholic sacramental novel. This idea of the sacramental novel is charged with reining in the wayward aims of its characters and transfiguring them *sub specie aeternitatis,* which is also "the aspect of art." When it comes to the novelist's metaphysical collaboration with divine creativity, it is not hard to see how the novel can be both iconic and idolatrous; when it comes to the novelist's relation to her

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[140] See Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), for more on the Reformation transition of sacramentality from the *corpus mysticum* to the poetic mind.
[141] Stannard, *Muriel Spark,* 200.
[142] Spark, *The Informed Air*, 248.

characters, and by extension to others in the world, it is not hard to see how the novel can be cruel, vengeful, or merely foolish.

While on the one hand Spark seeks the sacramental scale of the "whole," on the other hand she resists the kind of self-transparency that is prerequisite to it. The novelist can reveal the intentions of others without having to disclose her own. Spark's sense of interpersonal mystery is Janus-faced. Being unknowable to others can safeguard human dignity ("only God knows") or hasten social atomization. In the latter sense, characters in *The Girls of Slender Means* fall under the spell of interpersonal *secrecy*, which, on an individual level, seems to grate against sacramentality. Obscurantism confers cachet even as it generates the gossip that others enjoy behind closed doors. Jane Wright, for instance, regards her "brain-work" with lonely hauteur.[143] It is a "mystery" to the Club because when anyone asks her about the nature of her work, "she [reels] off fast an explanation of extreme and alien detail about costing, printers, lists, manuscripts, galleys and contracts."[144] The less lofty pastimes of others annoy her. To block out their small-minded disputes about who gets to wear the Italian dress, or how many calories are in a piece of bread-and-butter pudding, Jane shuts the door to her room, where she cranks out fraudulent and lucrative sob stories to famous authors and writes poetry "of a strictly non-rational order."[145] "The exact nature of her brain-work was a mystery to the club," the narrator states, and Jane wants to keep it this way, because she desires the inaccessible prestige of the world of books.

In terms of the call-and-response of conversation, lines of communication are broken in the novel; while they pursue esoteric self-stylization on their terms, characters frequently talk past each other. They spin their lives into Hollywood myths but do not respond to the simplest of questions. Early in the novel, Jane first sees Nicholas in a café and listens in on his oracles about the "new

[143] Spark, *Slender Means*, 32.
[144] Ibid, 26.
[145] Ibid, 27.

future" of the imminent postwar era. Aiming to make his acquaintance, she asks, "Who wrote that?" "He did not reply," the narrator cuts off.[146] Nicholas's self-regard sinks into jaded elitism: "And [Nicholas] smiled, bored-like, but conscious that very few in all the great metropolis and its tributary provinces were as yet privy to the source of these lines."[147] Nicholas's political theories, which sketch out the right form of postwar community, should nonetheless remain inscrutable to others. Huy Throvis-Mew, Jane's boss, goes under the "private name" of George Johnson. He "half believed, in the twilight portion of his mind, that authors were sly enough to make themselves invisible and be always floating under the chairs of publishers' offices." He finds himself "torn between his attraction to a book he could not understand," Farringdon's *The Sabbath Notebooks*, and "his fear of its failure."[148] Ernest Claymore, eventual "mystical stockbroker of the 1960s," is an amateur poet who, three weekends each month, retires to his country cottage "where he ignore[s] his wife and, alone in his study, [writes] Thought."[149] Spark's narrator sardonically distinguishes between Claymore's exalted pursuit of "Thought" and his wife-wary solitude at a center of fraternal Christian community: he "[spends] one weekend a month in retreat at a monastery." Finally, in a comment that sums up the reinforcement of social prestige by the pursuit of interpersonal secrecy, Jane "felt she knew too much about Rudi [Bittesch, her friend in the 'world of books'] to respect him."[150] As a sacramental novel that is skeptical about its characters' own grand visions for themselves, *The Girls of Slender Means* looks at personal obscurantism in the light of day, and the results are less romantic than isolating.

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[146] Ibid, 13.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid, 30.
[149] Ibid, 48.
[150] Ibid, 45.

As Robert Pippin has argued, "No one, in the modern novel . . . simply knows or even feels what ought to be desired or pursued."[151] In the absence of absolute criteria for judgments about truth, goodness, and beauty, characters often embrace their private imaginative worlds. Before his conversion, Nicholas is a case in point. The vague motivations of modern characters, Pippin thinks, reflect "a fascination in modernism and ultimately in postmodern discussions with the radical particularity of existence, and so, in the general terms introduced above, a denial of the "dependence" of the intelligibility of objects or persons or moments on the universal categories or descriptions of science or philosophy or even language itself as originally understood."[152] In *The Girls of Slender Means*, the transformation of communal mystery and ceremony into privatized secrecy corresponds with Pippin's idea of "radical particularity," which he ties to the reactionary ineffability of modern art in the face of the totalizing domains of science, philosophy, and, we might add, theology. "The very existence of poetry or the arts," Pippin concludes, "particularly in modernity, implies a claim that the irreducible individuality and contingency of many of the most significant aspects of human life cannot be accounted for by the universalist and abstract language of philosophy and science."[153] In *The Girls of Slender Means*, a sacramental view-from-nowhere is qualified by a circumstantial view-from-somewhere. As a diegetic character and living embodiment of the sacramental novel, Nicholas attempts to be sacramental from a "contingent" or "particular" point of view. Pippin associates this view more generally with the post-Enlightenment arts, especially its anti-naturalistic and modernist forms.

Spark's sacramental novelist recovers what Thomas Aquinas calls the *analogia entis*, the perceptible disclosure of creator in creation. For the theologian Graham Ward, "Analogy as *ana-*

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[151] Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 35.
[152] Ibid, 31.
[153] Ibid, 43.

logical is theologically freighted."[154] It bears the weight of a "profound cosmological significance" because "creation is related to an uncreated creator, who not only inaugurates but maintains a world-order within which analogy is an index of participation."[155] In its theological sense, analogy suffuses the "world-order" and is universally legible. In a conclusion that expresses Nicholas's romantic aspiration, Ward states, "The world as such is not brutally given; it is an artefact resonant through all its parts with intelligibility."[156] "Intelligibility" is another way of defining the "whole" that for Spark is the lynchpin of the Catholic novel and Catholic conversion. The secularized circumstances of the novel are the precondition for their analogical retrieval. In the modernist imagination of her role, the visionary novelist is sometimes the only one who can refresh this re-alignment of creation and creator.

In *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the Joyce novel that Spark inverts in her future-perfect characterization of Nicholas as "martyr," Stephen Dedalus claims that the "artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."[157] Unsurprising for Stephen, who expounds upon the theological aesthetics of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Flaubert's loose analogy between modern artist and omniscient creator echoes the famous but anonymous twelfth-century definition of God from the *Book of Twenty-Four Philosophers*: "God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere."[158] Unlike the apophatic sense of God as non-circumstantial and outside epistemology itself, however, the modernist author is a flesh-and-blood human being subject to ignorance and mortality. As a sacramentalist who partakes in providence but does not control it,

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[154] Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), preface.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] James Joyce, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 233.
[158] Circumstantial revisions of this idea appear in the seventeenth-century Pascal, where "Nature is an infinite sphere," and in the twentieth-century Carl Jung, who thinks that "The Self (God) is a circle . . ."

Spark may set fictional lives in motion, but she remains a character within God's story. As a twentieth-century novelist under Pippin's philosophical circumstances of "contingency," she has the tall order of revealing communal transcendence by subjective means. The *analogia entis* can look more a matter of aspiration than revelation.

In the case of Nicholas, sacramentality implies a privately apprehended sense of the transcendent meaning of the lives of unknowing others. Spark describes her work in optical terms not unlike those of Dedalus. She prizes her "poet's synoptic vision." Spark's sense of the synoptic, a comprehensive mental vision, borders on the "panoptic," the term that Michel Foucault associates in *Discipline and Punish* with the political surveillance and manipulation of "docile bodies."[159] In *The Girls of Slender Means*, Nicholas is professionally as well as aesthetically associated with surveillance. He "still work[s] for one of those left-hand departments of the Foreign Office, the doings of which the right-hand [does] not know."[160] The department comes under the name, of course, of "Intelligence," another Sparkian double-entendre that stands for the secret gathering of information of espionage and novel alike. As a sacramental spy, Nicholas decodes the invisible meaning of the matter-of-fact lives of others. Graham Greene, Spark's literary benefactor, fellow Catholic, and (ineffectual) colleague at MI-6, notes a similar analogy between the modern novelist and the modern spy, shot through with furtiveness and invisibility: "I suppose too that every novelist has something in common with a spy: he watches, he overhears, he seeks motives and analyses character, and in his attempt to serve literature he is unscrupulous."[161] The modern novelist "[serves]" literature as a Christian serves God. She "overhears" rather than hears, so her intelligence depends upon secrecy, and her private, novelistic eye is sinful, or at least "unscrupulous," in the public eye of the world.

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[159] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Modern Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage Books, 1995).
[160] Spark, *Slender Means*, 45.
[161] Richard Greene, *The Unquiet Englishman: A Life of Graham Greene* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2020), 29.

Nicholas' job reflects Spark's own wartime occupation. Like Greene, Spark found the circumstances of her brief time at MI-6 to resonate with her latent vocation as novelist. As the biographer Martin Stannard notes, from 7 May to 2 October 1944, Spark was officially employed in the Newsroom of the Political Intelligence Department as Duty Secretary. She was surprisingly hired for this job when, spotting a copy of an Ivy Compton-Burnett novel, an interviewer at a wartime employment agency asked Spark about the book and was floored by her literary acumen, not the professional relevance of her resume. Novelistic expertise secured a job in Intelligence, a field that was not on Spark's radar but spoke to her as-yet-unarticulated interest in the link between modern sacramentality and secrecy. "When it came to the question of my job," Spark reflected, the interviewer "slid aside her card-index box and took another card out of a drawer, remarking that she imagined I was looking for an interesting job. I said, indeed I was. She asked, would I like to do secret work for the Foreign Office?" Spark later recalled that "we all had been warned 'not to know' about the movements of ships and troops, past and present."[162] Stannard argues that the black propaganda of MI-6, under the direction of Spark's boss, Sefton Delmer, exploited poetic metaphor for political intelligence. "The effect of the war on Muriel," he writes, "was to project her into a fantastic world which became an image of the instability of literal truth." Delmer's "notions of proof and significance were relative and unproveable. The war was both temporary and actual. Whatever might appear true during the war might not be true after it."[163] MI-6 would justify its relief of factual imperatives, or "literal truth," in the name of national defense. But we see the same ethical paradox faced by the sacramental spy: in a wartime world where knowledge is encoded and communally unavailable, the expert few justify their "unscrupulous" work by their protection of the unconscious many.

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[162] Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae: A Volume of Autobiography* (New York: New Directions, 2011), 141.
[163] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 69.

Nicholas's day job in Intelligence exemplifies a secular combination of circumstances akin to that of Spark herself. He is a poet, an employee of MI-6, and an eventual convert. Like the Scottish Spark, half-Jewish by birth, Roman Catholic by confirmation, decade-by-decade resident of London, New York, Rome, sometime anarchist, sometime monarchist, Nicholas is an exile, caught between the occasionally equivocal political allegiances of a dizzily globalized modern world.

When Spark's narrator describes the activity of his employer as "the doings of which the right-hand did not know," she subtly points us toward Matthew 6:3, a crucial passage for understanding the way in which Spark re-claims secularized ideas for their originally Christian purposes. "But when you give alms," Christ says, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret: and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, have have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.[164] Christ's insistence on "secret" charity rejects the world's demands for visibility and social climbing, while the Father alone "sees in secret." The passage establishes tension between the worldly concern for persona and the Christian concern for soul. Its sense of intentional self-opacity chimes with the essay in which Spark applauds John Henry Newman's cautionary description of the "secret matter, not easily discernible" of the human soul.

Spark applauds Newman's Catholic conversion and punitive exile from Oxford as a voluntary act of social suicide, all the more spiritually compelling for its defiance of the English bias that "God . . . had been educated at Rugby." The quietly idolatrous misreading of Christ as prophetic forerunner of the decency of the British Empire vexes Spark into the historical present.

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[164] Matt: 6:3-6.

"There is a moral outcry in our own times," she observed, "there is worse to come: ethical, germ-free citizens will be springing up all over the place to prosper more and more visibly in public reward for their virtues."[165] The rhetoric of "visibility" and "invisibility" suffuses Matthew's rendering of Christ's exhortation to undercover alms as well as Spark's defense of the exile-minded Newman. By virtue of the admittedly subtle link between the unseen charity of Matthew 6:3-6 and Nicholas' work in intelligence, Spark suggests that to be Christian is to act and be in secret, whereas to be worldly powerful is to act always in view of what others will see us to do and believe. But she also posits novelistic sacramentality as the vision of the world that characters do not see. This sacramental espionage is tailored to a modern world out of joint with the medieval *analogia entis*.

The exile-minded Spark suggests that Christian personality slips in and out of multiple secular identities because, as Allan Hepburn says of the figure of the twentieth-century spy, the Christian "belongs nowhere."[166] As a patristic prelude to Spark's modern observation, Saint John Chrysostym interprets Christ's instruction as a call to spiritually fruitful invisibility: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, is said as an extreme expression, as much as to say, if it were possible, that you should not know yourself, and that your very hands should be hid from your sight, that is what you should most strive after."[167] This interpretation of Matthew 6:3 compresses, in effect, the invisibility of Christian charity, the modern sacramental problem of unselfconscious transcendence from the outside ("the unbeliever should not see it"), and Newman's conversion-elicited sense of social estrangement from the civic religionists in England who insist that "it is the morals that count; Christianity can go."

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[165] Spark, *The Informed Air,* 247.
[166] Allan Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 11.
[167] Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed., *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels; collected out of the works of the Fathers.* Accessed February 5, 2023. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/catena1.ii.vi.html.

The "right hand, left hand" characterization of MI-6 in *The Girls of Slender Means* is a prime and playful example of Christian double-entendre because it holds in suspension sacred and secular ways of interpreting it. In spy narratives, Hepburn elaborates, "Characters, actions, numbers, and words . . . have to be translated into other representational systems and contexts before they yield meaning. The clever interpreter—whether an agent within the text or a reader outside the text—moves adeptly among metaphorical, literal, and numerical systems to read aright." Under these complex hermeneutical circumstances, "nothing is ever itself."[168] Spark's scriptural allusion calls for sacred reading between the secular lines. When we resituate Hepburn's definition within Spark's novel, we find that the secular is never "itself." In the words of the narrator, Nicholas the sacramental spy "discerns with irony the process of his own thoughts, how he [imposes] on the Club an image incomprehensible to itself."[169] The Christian must learn how to act without being aware of her acting—a humanly impossible task—and collapse the involuntary/voluntary distinction that Spark associates with Proust and with (possible) Christian writers. Seeing and not seeing; seeking your identity in Christ and becoming a mystery to yourself; voluntary will and involuntary grace; these antinomies suffuse Spark's double-edged view of Christianity as self-securing and self-transcending.

For Spark, the Christian idea of vocation provides one way of dealing with these antinomies. In a review of T. S. Eliot's "The Confidential Clerk," which the poet counted among the "one or two or three most intelligent reviews [he] had read," Spark called it a "play in which everyone's longings are fulfilled, as the prayers of faithful people are answered, in a way in which they would never have had the courage to foresee." [170] In narrative terms, vocation renounces the subjunctive ("I would have it…") and turns to a kind of proleptic, plan-foiling providence, as if to say, "In the

[168] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 49, 51.
[169] Spark, *Slender Means*, 55.
[170] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 145.

denouement of my life, I will have seen that thy will has been done, even though it may be at odds with what I imagine for myself at this moment." Vocational temporality conjoins acting in the present with praying for a God-willed future that cannot be seen and understood. Spark's formulation of vocation is paradoxical. It at once extols the nearly prophetic ability to "foresee" as virtuous ("courageous," Spark says) and dismisses it as hubristic and impossible (prayer necessarily fills in for such humanly doomed foresight). "The play gives renewed life to some points of Christian teaching which seem irrelevant to the modern world," she continues, "such as our calling to a specific station in life, the need for parents for the security of children as much as the other way around, our need for roots in God."[171] If providential prolepsis is the future-perfect tense of Christian vocation, prayer redeems present-tense suffering as analeptically sacramental. A long line of disappointments and failures is revisited and reclaimed as retrospective joy, like how Proust's Madeleine experience redeems lost time by transfiguring, in a secular sense, the scattershot moments that came before it. Vocational prayer looks forward to a deferred granting of wishes, a gift that finally satisfies but could not have been desired, narratively speaking, *in medias res.* And yet the diegetic temporality of *The Girls Slender Means* places, as a matter of narrative necessity, its characters in that secular middle of things.

The Girls of Slender Means is analeptically framed by its posthumous phone calls about the martyr's fate of Nicholas. Analepsis corresponds with this meta-narrative device of the flashback, which recurs in the novel to remind the reader, however caught up she may be in developments of linear plot, of the link between self-deferring sacramentality and mortality. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the literary critical sense of "analepsis" as "the narration of an event at a point later than its chronological place in a story," but also provides second, theological sense of the word, originally and still liturgically employed by the Eastern Orthodox Church: "ascension or assumption

[171] Spark, *The Informed Air*, 88.

into heaven."[172] As another form of Christian double-entendre, analepsis resonates with a sense of vocational sacramentality because it has to do with the satisfaction of a wish that one could not have imagined in the human present tense, however beautifully patterned it appears in the end. As Spark understands it, vocation is a flower that does not bloom on demand. As the analepsis of the apostles' earthly fellowship with Christ, the Ascension simultaneously astounds and saddens them, because his departure is the condition of the emergence of the Church at Pentecost. In its secularized sense, Spark, whose talent was always present but whose professional affirmation had to wait until the onset of middle age, this self-deferring idea of vocation would have been a satisfying way to explain her own literary transition to the novel, accompanied by a religious conversion that newly enabled her to see life as a whole. That this twin revelation did not come on time could have reaffirmed its hard-won status as the true vocational outcome of Spark's life.

In *The Girls of Slender Means*, vocational temporality, the sacramental way of thinking of the plot of one's life, frustrates the present-tense desires of characters. To be sacramental, the novel suggests, is to embrace vocational analepsis and reject self-determining prolepsis, and yet this quality is visible only to the godlike narrator. In the narrative present, Jane Wright wants to advance in the publishing world and be revered for her intellect. "Tyrannous about her brain-work," she does not miss a chance to remind others that the "world of books is essentially disinterested."[173] Spark's savage narrator picks apart the self-opacity behind her aim to control the path of her life. Jane tends, for instance, to correct grammatical miscues instead of refining the substance of what others write and say. Reviewing Nicholas's *Sabbath Notebooks* with Rudi Bittesch, she reads the following excerpt:

[172] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "analepsis (*n.*), senses 2 and 4," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8801730849.
[173] Spark, *Slender Means*, 26.

> There is a kind of truth in the popular idea of an anarchist as a wild man with a home-made bomb in his pocket. In modern times this bomb, fabricated in the back workshops of the imagination, can only take one effective form: Ridicule.[174]

She replies, steering clear of the substance of the brief argument, "'Only take' isn't grammatical, it should be 'take only.' I'll have to change that, Rudi.'"[175] The comedy arises from the misfit between puffed-up publishing persona and actual editorial craft and intellectual creativity. Jane only sees the literalistic surface of things. In a scene late in the novel, however, when Colonel Felix Dobbell, Selina Redwood's married lover, comes to visit the Club and take the girls out for a ride, Jane slips, beside herself, into her proper role. She slices through social conventions and sees into the underlying human desires they obfuscate. The verb Spark chooses recalls her approbation of Eliot's idea of vocation: "Jane, observing Selina's long glance of perfect balance and equanimity resting upon Nicholas, immediately *foresaw* that she would be disposed in the front seat with Felix while Selina stepped, with her arch-footed poise, into the back . . . and she foresaw that this arrangement would come about with effortless elegance."[176] Spark's providential narrator then doles out her final and unbidden vocation, which defies Jane's present-tense sense of self: "… she rather wanted to discuss personalities, which always provided her with more real pleasure than any impersonal talk, however light and fantastic, although she did not yet admit this fact in her aspiring brain. It was not till Jane had reached the apex of her career as a reporter and interviewer for the largest of women's journals that she found her right role in life."[177] About Nicholas, too, who by no means sets out to convert to Roman Catholicism, the narrator states that he was "not as yet known or at all likely to

[174] Ibid, 44.
[175] Ibid, 45.
[176] Ibid, 58. Emphasis added.
[177] Ibid.

be."[178] When it comes to the kind of worldliness that Spark herself carries with her into conversion, Christian vocation elicits ambivalence because it providentially puts secular identity, one's finding oneself with one's own powers, out of reach.

When a sacramental sense of vocation meets the secular world of the novel, the results are ironic. From a secular point of view, the eternity-mindedness of Christian vocation seems to be a waste of human time. From a Christian point of view, secular selfhood seems to be unrealistic in its expectation of self-fulfillment in the present. With this temporal conflict in mind, Spark's narrator contains human aspiration within a theological timescale, and vice versa. Early in the novel, the narrator observes that the girls, complaining about a prohibition against putting out cigarettes on the tiles of the entrance hall, did not hear "the ticking of the grandfather clock behind them."[179] By exceeding the club's age limit of thirty years old, the club's three spinsters are known "through the ages." Finally, on the morning after the V-E Day celebration, Greggie, an apparently clairvoyant spinster who foresees the explosion of the buried bomb, observes that the scene was "something between a wedding and a funeral on a world scale," and the narrator adds that "The next day everyone began to consider where they personally stood in the new order of things."[180]

As the first quote suggests, Spark's sacramental scale ("the aspect of eternity, which is also the aspect of art," as her essay on Proust puts it) threatens to be smothered by personal pettiness. Time immemorial is the unacknowledged background for a mere stamping-out of cigarette butts and the airing of grievances over the violation of house rules. In the second quote, violence breaks out at the intersection of personal and world scales, self and crowd, which the narrator suggests are mutually exclusive: "Many citizens felt the urge, which some began to indulge, to insult each other,

[178] Ibid, 13.
[179] Ibid, 8.
[180] Ibid, 11,

in order to prove something or to test their ground."[181] Acting-out in the face of an epochal revolution is mere indulgence, an "urge," like satisfying a bodily appetite. Here, violence is stimulated by something that one cannot control—as much a matter of being reduced to matter ("more like a cataract or a geological disturbance," we recall) as of remediable ignorance. As for the rubble of the Blitz in the Kensington environs of the Club, the ekphrastic impetus of the "new art-form" of the first paragraph of the novel, "There was absolutely no point in feeling depressed about the scene, it would have been like feeling depressed about the Grand Canyon or some event outside everybody's scope."[182] Wartime, aligned with the subpersonal temporality of a "cataract or a geological disturbance," is defined by events "outside everybody's scope," which pertains to the personal fatalism of the epochal future-perfect tense. While faith may be said to move mountains, certainly no one in this novel will be turning back the clock on the war machine. Sacramental and political scale, the novel implies, resemble each other even as they compete for metaphysical authority.

Just as the St. John's ambulance men retain their identity by remaining outside the crowd, it takes an exemplary outsider, with a temporal regulation of her own, to resist being engulfed by it. In *The Girls of Slender Means*, two influential members of the club take time into their hands, orienting themselves within this "new order of things" by means of secular and sacred liturgies alike. They aim to see their lives as a whole, practicing sacramental order on a personal scale. Like several other girls in the club, Joanna Childe is the daughter of a country rector. Unlike them, she takes faith seriously and practices its liturgies daily. She defends the Book of Common Prayer, which she has practically by heart, attends, before moving to the Club, her father's morning and evening services, and faithfully keeps up at the Club her father's Matins and Evensong recitations of the Psalms. "The

[181] Ibid, 11.
[182] Ibid, 3.

club was proud of Joanna Childe," the narrator observes. She is "the poetic essence of tall," and even though (or, perhaps, because) no one at the club "[knows] her precise history," it is "generally assumed to be something emotionally heroic."[183] Throughout the novel, Joanna's elocution lessons in poetry resound through the club. The beauty of her renderings of Marvell, Drinkwater, Shakespeare, and Hopkins stops Nicholas in his tracks and drives him to record her on tape, which is lost in the fire that kills her.

It would be glibly unofficial hagiography to portray Joanna as a conventional saint, even though her death might be viewed as a diegetic foreshadowing of Nicholas's off-stage Jesuit conversion and consequent missionary martyrdom in Haiti. No matter her moral exemplarity to the Club, Joanna misapplies one of Christ's self-sacrificial precepts. Early in the novel, Joanna falls in love with a curate, which comes to nothing. When she finds herself falling for a second curate, she clings to "the whole philosophy of Shakespeare's sonnet": "Once you admit that you can change the object of a strongly felt affection, you undermine the whole structure of love and marriage."[184] We are told that Joanna has picked up "distinctions and sub-distinctions of human and divine love," from the theologically erudite clerics who come to stay at her father's rectory. However, it is the sonnet-derived wisdom of William Shakespeare that forms her conscience and cloaks itself in divine language. The narrator describes how she "press[es] down her feelings for the second curate and worked them off in tennis and the war effort."[185] Like a saint, Joanna renounces—or sublimates, according to the more modern rhetoric of Spark's "pressed down"—her misdirected passion for the sake of a higher ideal.

The higher ideal is romantic and Shakespearean, not saintly and Pauline, in its spiritual regulation of the flesh. The second curate gives a sermon on Matthew 5:29, whose metaphorical

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183 Ibid, 15.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.

register resembles that of the narrator's description of Nicholas in the Foreign Office: "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."[186] Joanna listens in as the curate explains the meaning of the verse: "The right eye and the right hand . . . means that which we hold most precious . . . if anything we hold dear should prove an offence . . . "[187] Whereas this passage typically exhorts the Christian to give up whatever obstructs or competes for one's relationship with God, Joanna understands it to sanctify an impossible first love and bar it off from belated suitors. In this affective and spiritual void, poetry steps in to redeem her. In this scene, and in the narrator's subtle allusion to it in characterizing Nicholas's work in Intelligence, Matthew's metaphorical concentration on hands reminds us of the material/spiritual double-entendre that characterizes this novel of doubleness. Modern materialism and the sacramental view of the world, the kind of interpretive mode in which bodies are more than bodies—"Man cannot live by bread alone"—appear to be at odds with each other.

Still, despite the faint note of idolatry that lies behind the narrator's otherwise exemplary portrait, Joanna renounces the trappings of social climbing, a literal and metaphorical force that substitutes social for sacramental hierarchy. This social hierarchy is infrastructurally rendered in terms of the novel's interest in floors, rooms, and windows. In an chapter on Virginia Woolf and secularization, Vincent Pecora explores "the ways that certain infrastructures of collective life in the early twentieth century, from the family to the professional association to the hypostatized idea of society itself, might remain supersaturated with the religion in which the group's members say they disbelieve."[188] While Pecora is principally concerned with Woolf's agnostic novels, his idea of a

[186] Ibid, 15-16.
[187] Ibid, 16.
[188] Vincent Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 159.

persistent "infrastructure" of religion-rich "collective life" captures the secularizing way in which the May of Teck Club institutes, by means of its physical structure, its own hierarchy of social respectability. This is a translation from the sacred to the secular that, as I will later show, Nicholas attempts to harness and ultimately invert for sacramental purposes.

For her part, Joanna resists giving into the Club's obsessive habits of self-involved asceticism, which correspond infrastructurally with the higher-floor rooms of its most slender secular angels. She "did not take part in the argument between members and staff about the food, whether it contained too many fattening properties, even allowing for the necessities of war-time rationing."[189] In the novel, social cachet yields the ability to slink through a tiny casement to gain access to the Club's roof, where, freed from its moral constraints, its most glamorous girls enjoy sunbathing and sex. Residing on the Club's top floor, they count calories as a lucrative form of self-denial. They practice an opportunistic and personally tailored form of asceticism for the sake of sex appeal under state-imposed austerity.

Joanna's social prestige at the Club depends upon her exceptional, and perhaps transcendent, impersonality, the fruit of an adopted sense of Christian vocation that prioritizes ritual and craft over self-definition. The narrator frequently describes Joanna in the passive voice: "Once more, said Joanna's voice"; "And again, said Joanna's voice."[190] Joanna is the only character in the novel whose voice is detached from the "I." Simone Weil, whom Spark had read and admired before she wrote *The Girls of Slender Means*, states: "The sin in me says "I."[191] Among gigglers and boasters, Joanna is a vessel for the poetic and liturgical words of others. Even though Joanna's "voice" suggests self-forgetting submission to God, Spark's narrator, freely and indirectly describing the impression she makes on Nicholas, describes her "singular voice." The narrator, and Nicholas, prize the way in

[189] Spark, *Slender Means*, 18.
[190] Ibid, 43.
[191] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (Milton Park, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2002), 30.

which Joanna's voice detaches itself from her body and is incorporated into a broader chorus of spiritual and poetic significance. For Nicholas, Joanna's passive voice expresses her ecstatic union with poetry. "Joanna needs to know more life," he considers, before qualifying, "if she knew life she would not be proclaiming these words so sexually and matriarchally as if in the ecstatic act of suckling a child."[192] As with everything else in Spark's sense of Christian double-entendre, there are better and worse forms of the passive voice: the collective and involuntary "voice of the dormitory," on the one hand, and the voluntary self-transcendence of Joanna's union with literary and liturgical beauty, on the other.

In a novel where characters lose themselves in crowds or "[twitter] like a parliament of fowls," the "extremely slim" Selina Redwood maintains, in secular parallel to Joanna's sense of Christian vocation, an apparently inviolable sense of self that puts her above the Club's self- and socially-measuring members. Unlike the capacious Joanna, however, she does so by means of failure-proof and formulaic mantras. Twice a day, at 8:30 and 6:30, Selina repeats, "slowly and solemnly," the "Two Sentences," prescribed to her by the "Chief Instructress" of a Poise Course. This course, Spark's narrator says, "believed strongly in auto-suggestion and had advised, for the maintenance of poise in the working woman," the repetition of this liturgical formula:

> Poise is perfect balance, an equanimity of body and mind, complete composure whatever the social scene. Elegant dress, immaculate grooming, and perfect deportment all contribute to the attainment of self-confidence.[193]

[192] Ibid, 67.
[193] Ibid, 37.

Just as Joanna's elocutions serve as refrains, asking other characters and the reader to listen and respond to them in turn, Selina's self-talk influentially resounds throughout the novel. Joanna and Selina juxtapose two forms of liturgy as lifestyle.

In "Muriel Spark and Self-Help," Marina MacKay explores the role of such Selina-like maxims throughout Spark's ouevre. These nuggets of worldly wisdom, MacKay argues, challenge single-mindedly Catholic interpretations of Spark's work: "In fact, and perhaps even in self-conscious acknowledgement of the contemporary critical tendency to read Spark primarily as a Roman Catholic writer, her semi-autobiographical Fleur Talbot [of *Loitering With Intent*] reflects on the relationship between secular and spiritual wisdom."[194] Everyday sayings such as "All is Not Gold that Glisters" may "lack the grandeur of the Ten Commandments," but, being more accessible and immediately practical, they are "more to the point."[195] By highlighting the "self-help heroine[s]" in Spark's novels, MacKay tracks the "comic contrast between the utility of ordinary social wisdom and the comparative irrelevance of Mosaic injunctions." For MacKay, Spark's no-nonsense fiction "shows a more everyday concern with practical wisdom."[196] While MacKay's turn toward common sense helps to chasten the moralizing tendencies of devotional criticism of Spark's Catholic fiction, her opposition between "Mosaic injunctions" and "ordinary social wisdom" bypasses the rich exchanges between sacred and secular that characterize *The Girls of Slender Means*. It is the very proximity of "secular and spiritual wisdom" that, as evidenced in Selina's individualistic rite, reveals the latent liturgical sensibility of even its most worldly characters.

By juxtaposing Joanna with Selina, we are better equipped to see Selina's Two Sentences as a translation, however diminished, of Catholic liturgy. When the Club goes down in flames, Selina does not miss a beat. She recites the Two Sentences just before the building collapses at 6:30, just

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[194] Marina MacKay, "Muriel Spark and Self-Help," *Textual Practice* 32, No. 9 (2018), 1564.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.

around the proper liturgical time for Vespers. Joanna recites the Psalms at the same time. Their liturgies converge at the point of death. For the reader, it is not so much a choice between secular and sacred forms of exemplarity and vocation as it is a difference in kind between objects of devotion. Selina's Two Sentences elevate the self and regulate time in an opportunistic and individualistic re-interpretation of the ancient and communal liturgical tradition of the Divine Office. For her part, Joanna's individual recitation of Psalms and poetry impresses the other members, but they are unable to join in liturgically with her. The pre- or perhaps post-theological infrastructure of the Club does not necessarily support the sacramental intention of Joanna to unite its members in praise. In a milieu defined by the "ethos of war," by which girls are "capable of accommodating quick happenings and reversals, rapid formations of intimate friendships, and a range of lost and discovered loves that in later life and in peace would take years to happen, grow, and fade," Joanna and Selina remain uniquely steady in their pursuit of the end-goal.[197] The principal difference between them lies in the fact that Joanna's liturgies dissolve the boundary between the buffered modern self and traditional sources of wisdom; in view of Stoic impermeability, Selina's Two Sentences shore up the threatening gap between abstract self-image and concrete conversation. Selina "[steps] ahead of [Nicholas] into the evening light like a racer into the paddock, with a high disregard of all surrounding noises."[198]

As I have argued, Nicholas is a self-aware artist within a Catholic novel about the sacramental potential and bathetic facts of novelistic activity at mid-century. His seemingly one-way insistence on Christian double-entendre does, in fact, occasionally approach dialogic and sacramental exchange between gifted artist and ecstatic subject: in a narratorial nod to the title of the novel, we read how "Nicholas touched lightly on the imagination of the girls of slender means, and they on

[197] Spark, *Slender Means*,
[198] Ibid, 71.

his."[199] On the cusp of the Church, he reflects Spark's skepticism about, and inextricable need for, narrative order. He attempts to practice the sacramental sense that the world is more than it appears to be. Spark shared this ambivalence toward novelistic transcendence with her friend and supporter Frank Kermode, who argues that "The critical issue, given the perpetual assumption of crisis, is no less than the justification of ideas of order." Amid the secular circumstances of the modern novel, they "have to be justified in terms of what survives, and also in terms of what we can accept as valid in a world different from that out of which they come, resembling the earlier world only in that there is biological and cultural continuity of some kind." Our order, our form, writes Kermode, "is necessary; our skepticism as to fictions requires that it shall not be spurious."[200] In their circumstantial spiritual sight and in their call for people to be, in essence, what they think they are in existence, Nicholas's visions reflect, and even exacerbate, the problem of involuntary self-loss that we elsewhere see in the novel. As Kermode continually wonders, Nicholas is torn between an impulse toward artistic transcendence and a voice inside him that repeats: "you're lying to yourself."

His visions seem to reduce religion to romanticism. Self-loss in the novel similarly results in amoral unaccountability. We see it manifest in world-political terms, as in the V-E Day scenes ("members of a wave of the sea"), in the lighter, more benign community of the young ("the voice of the dormitory . . . a twittering outburst" and its "corporate laughter"), or in the V-J Day scene's moment of unheeded violence, when the cry of a stabbed woman "[fades] in the general pandemonium" that covers up the culpability of the soldier-perpetrator.[201] Nicholas's "intoxication" verges on Durkheim's secularized notion of collective effervescence, which, alongside William James and other critics of religious dogma, informs Pericles Lewis's influential sense of "sublimated

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[199] Ibid, 45.
[200] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in a Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 129.
[201] Spark, *Slender Means*, 112.

religious feeling" in literary modernism. In the blur of his intoxicated spirituality, the girls blend into each other. We are reminded of the V-E Day scene. In one scene, Nicholas delights in Selina "[floating] down the staircase" just as Pauline Fox does moments before. "It might have been the same girl," as the narrator freely, indirectly, and sardonically discourses.[202] As Nicholas "[woos]" Selina and at the same time "[cultivates]" Jane and others, "The sounds and sights impinging on him from the hall of the club intensified themselves, whenever he called, into one sensation, *as if with a will of their own*."[203] His ecstatic beholding requires the involuntary ek-stasis of the bodies of individual girls. This sensation reminds Nicholas of the lines, "Let us roll all our strength, and all / Our sweetness up into one ball." He subconsciously associates this impression with Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," a metaphysical lyric poem which itself delights in the amorous redirection of sacred discourse. "I would / Love you ten years before the Flood: / And you should if you please refuse / Till the Conversion of the Jews," Marvell's speaker analogizes.[204] Just as in Joanna poetic and spiritual vocation mix with each other, in Nicholas artistic vision attains its all-devouring satisfaction by means of the dissolution of individual will. "Sounds and sights" detach themselves from the bodies of the girls and are assimilated into Nicholas's sacramental, if private and somewhat forlorn, imagination.

As Spark's narrator suggests, *The Girls of Slender Means* could receive the alternative title, "The Portrait of the Martyr as a Young Man." The trajectory of Nicholas's life reverses that of Stephen Dedalus. Nicholas goes from involuntary rapture, the agnostic spectatorship of Pericles Lewis's "churchgoers," to Christian vocation, which, nonetheless, continues ambivalently in *The Girls of Slender Means* to stupefy a commonsense understanding of voluntary selfhood ("not as yet known, or

[202] Ibid, 70.
[203] Ibid, 66.
[204] Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," Poetry Foundation, accessed January 10, 2023, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44688/to-his-coy-mistress.

at all likely to be"). As Anthony Domestico explains, "Scholars of modernism have followed Stephen [Dedalus's] lead in translating the religious into aesthetic terms ever since. The narrative here is familiar. God/metaphysics dies and the modernist artist steps into the breach, giving meaning to existence through the well-wrought urn or the aesthetic object or through the aesthetic mode itself. God isn't so much killed off as replaced by something else."[205] In a similar vein, Craig Woelfel takes issue with what he calls "loss/surrogate theories" in modernist approaches to religion.[206] Still, as I have been arguing, it is equally true that when we deal with the literature of converts and reverts, we also deal with the afterlife of the natural self within the regenerate writer. While it is too simple to sideline religion altogether, the case of Spark calls for renewed attention to the secular circumstances of Christian conversion.

The Girls of Slender Means illustrates how the mid-century moment may be seen by turns to reflect or to distort orthodox ideas and ways of life. Spark suggests that when political, social, or aesthetic ecstasies stop short of religious conversion, or of their artistic counterpart, the sacramental transfiguration of the commonplace, we get involuntary self-loss. When ecstatic impressions are carried through to conversion, we get voluntary self-forgetting, or something approaching, but not yet resolved as, a "voluntary act of remembrance." Either way, the course of action will be drastic, because what is required is one or other form of death to self. "You are what you worship," is another way of putting it. The idea may be borne out by a brief comment Spark made, in a review of the theologian Michael Mason's *The Legacy*, in 1953 (the same year she wrote her essay on Proust):

[205] Anthony Domestico, *Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 14.
[206] Craig Woelfel, *Varieties of Aesthetic Experience: Literary Modernism and the Dissociation of Belief* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 8.

> [There is a distinction between] that widely-held notion of 'Christian resignation' and the actual experience of surrender (or what is theologically termed 'disaffection'). This surrender is shown as an act of will, not a reluctant consent forced upon an exhausted spirit.[207]

This passage exemplifies the internal tension between the "experience" of surrender and the "act" of will. In the modernist story about religion, aesthetic experience displaces dogma and sacramental participation capitulates to spectatorial play. For Spark, the Christian will consists in consenting to surrender. The wholehearted experience of Christian truth, or sacramental beauty under its auspices, is built upon the foundation of voluntary self-denial. One's proper role in life comes about by denying one's ability to predict it. The belated redemption of lost time in Proust is a shadow of the intentionally belated, because impossible to "foresee," discovery of vocation in Spark's conception of the Christian self.

Still, Jane Wright poses a matter-of-fact challenge to Nicholas's transcendence-gathering "infiltration" and his surprise at the spiritual beauty of wartime infrastructure and state-imposed rationing. At a party filled with aspiring poets, Jane curtly stifles his curiosity about the unselfconscious religiosity of the club. Nicholas draws Jane aside "to inquire into the mysterious life of the May of Teck Club." She replies, "It's just a girls' hostel . . . that's all it boils down to."[208] Far from training Jane in voluntary self-denial, the "beautiful heedless poverty of a Golden Age did not come into the shilling meter life which any sane girl would regard only as a temporary one until better opportunities occurred."[209] The material facts of her wartime existence—her "shilling meter life"—are not about to be transfigured by Nicholas.

[207] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 147.
[208] Ibid, 48.
[209] Ibid, 49.

This is sacramental bathos, the signature tone of Spark's Catholic novel of secular circumstances. When Selina visits Nicholas's "austere bed-sitting room," which she distastefully likens to a "cell" (but which suits Nicholas just fine), he encourages her to "accept and exploit the outlines of poverty in her life."[210] In a crucial moment a few lines later, the narrator satirizes the limit of Spark's own theory of the sacramental novel, where matter and spirit should inform each other:

> He wanted Selina to be an ideal society personified amongst her bones, he wanted her beautiful limbs to obey her mind and heart like intelligent men and women, and for these to possess the same grace and beauty as her body. Whereas Selina's desires where comparatively humble, she only wanted, at that particular moment, a packet of hair-grips which had just then disappeared from the shops for a few weeks . . . It was incredible to him that she should not share with him an understanding of the lovely attributes of dispossession and poverty, her body was so austere and economically furnished.[211]

In Nicholas's sacramental mind, Selina is a political-theological synecdoche. As in Matthew's vision of the Christian body politic, where the parts of the individual body represent the parts of the organic Church community, Selina becomes a romantic temple for Nicholas, in which matter ("beautiful limbs") and form ("dispossession and poverty") are beautifully aligned. The one stands for the many. As Selina's deflating materialism seems to reaffirm, however, sacramentality is a one-way street.

As Allan Hepburn has elsewhere pointed out, Spark's working notes for the novel focused on the ethos of dispossession of the early Christian Church: "[Nicholas] saw [the girls of slender means] as he saw the nation. Poor, reduced to nothing. A hope for innocence. His austere mind saw

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210 Ibid, 72.
211 Ibid, 73.

the possibility of a new social order. He rejoiced as rationing became stricter. Anarchism. MI5 incurious while concentrating on Commies & Fascists. Perhaps the most dangerous of all, because the most reliant upon individual goodness, which is enough to undermine any state. It held something of the menace of early Christianity."[212] On this excised basis, Hepburn argues that "Spark explicitly links anarchism, as an opportunity for an improved social order, with a version of statehood guided by individual goodness and spiritual values, rather like early Christianity."[213] And as in the precarious exponents of early Christianity, Nicholas is a clumsy apostle from the far-flung imperial provinces who, unsupported by a future Christendom, must translate the Gospels into the life-world of a Roman aristocrat. Before his conversion, Nicholas imitates the aristocratic languor of Selina, earlier described as "the only woman who could afford to loll." Nicholas in turn "[lolls] on the unmade bed" at the party he attends with Jane.[214]

In *The Girls of Slender Means*, religious conversion accompanies the death of such one-sided and aestheticized metaphysical love affairs. While Nicholas goes to bed with Selina with "the aim of converting her soul," the climax of the novel brutally shows Nicholas that there are more important conversions than this.[215] As the May of Teck Club goes down in flames, the girls hurry through the skylight opened, at the last minute, by firemen. As death becomes imminent, "The question of time [opens] . . . as a large thing in the lives of the eleven listeners" who huddle around Joanna and envelop themselves in her Psalmic safety blanket.[216] Nicholas witnesses Selina, a "wounded roe deer . . . in her white petticoat and bare feet," escape, only to slip back in to rescue what he first thinks is an injured body. When Selina lands on the rooftop, she asks Nicholas, "Is it safe out here?'" and at

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[212] Allan Hepburn, "Interventions: Haiti, Humanitarianism, and *The Girls of Slender Means*," in *Around 1945: Literature, Citizenship, Rights*, ed. Allan Hepburn (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016), 138.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Spark, *Slender Means*, 50.
[215] Ibid, 73.
[216] Ibid, 96.

the same time "inspect[s] the condition of her salvaged item."[217] As the liturgically regular time of 6:30 approaches, the narrator blankly intones, "Poise is perfect balance. It was the Schiaparelli dress. The coat-hanger dangled from the dress like a headless neck and shoulders."[218] The sacramental Nicholas wants to transfigure the May of Teck Club into a convent in Kensington. The Italian dress, holy relic of their champagne austerity, is spirit harnessed to haute couture, animated only by its social power. As a symbol of vicious self-interest, it is an instructive sacrament for Nicholas. Nicholas's conversion, prompted by the "vision of evil" of Selina's act of death-defying materialism, is described in the very terms in which Spark sets out her inchoate conclusion about the sacramental novel: "Later, reflecting on this lightning scene, he could not trust his memory as to whether he then involuntarily signed himself with the cross. It seemed to him, in recollection, that he did."[219] In the extended timespan of Spark's sacramental novel, where individual intentions are swept away by political waves of the sea or entrusted to plan-foiling providence, what was unconscious and without narrative patterning becomes only belatedly intelligible.

After Nicholas's shock at Selina's act, the narrator listens in on Joanna, "mechanically reciting the evening psalter of Day 27."[220] It is nearly 6:30, the time when Selina unfalteringly recites the Two Sentences, and when, this night, the May of Teck Club is destined to collapse. In this moment, the points of view of Nicholas and narrator blend. "Nicholas climb[s] up to the window," where he views the girls in distressed supplication and Joanna in unswerving prayer:

> *As if* hypnotized, they surrounded Joanna, and she herself stood *as* one hypnotized into the strange utterances of Day 27 in the Anglican order, held to be applicable to all sorts and conditions of human life in the world at that particular moment, when in London homing workers plodded across

[217] Ibid, 99.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid, 100.

> the park, observing with curiosity the fire-engines in the distance, when Rudi Bittesch was sitting in his flat at St John's Wood trying, without success, to telephone to Jane at the club to speak to her privately, the Labour Government was new-born, and elsewhere on the face of the globe people slept, queued for liberation-rations, beat the tom-toms, took shelter from the bombers, or went for a ride on a dodgem at the fun-fair.[221]

The "geological" scale of the V-E Day scene becomes lower-c catholic, a universal community defined neither by Jew nor by Greek. In liturgical parataxis, the narrator surveys the global addressees of the Psalms, who are unconscious of their sacramental, higher-order union as characters in a novel or as creatures of God. The images could be recorded by a foreign and hostile plane on a reconnaissance mission; they could be the work of a sacramental novelist in exile, flying to the next place where God may be seen, despite all literal appearances, to dwell. The historical relevance of the Psalms are, of course, left in question—"held to be applicable," as the arch narrator conditionally puts it—but there is room for orthodox as well as agnostic wonder. "In fact," the narrator insists, meeting the reader's skepticism with a shrugging permission of Nicholas' pre-theological sacramentality, "it was not an unjust notion that [The May of Teck Club] was a community held together by the graceful attributes of a common poverty."[222] Soaring over the suffering or the insouciant globe, we pass from the bathos of the pre-conversion Nicholas to the litotes ("not an unjust notion") of the unsentimentally sacramental narrator. The disappointed hopes of religion-tinged romanticism mature into the patient readiness of orthodox commitment. Seen through the sacred and secular apertures of Aylesford Priory and New York City, the London of the last summer of the war holds out ambivalent potential for sacramental transfiguration.

[221] Ibid, emphasis added.
[222] Ibid, 66.

"Poverty differs vastly from want," Nicholas reflects, as does austerity from asceticism, involuntary from voluntary acts of remembrance, in Spark's not-quite-convent in Kensington.[223] In the sacramental scale of *The Girls of Slender Means*, which posits a link between novelistic and divine providence, characters "have a meaning, even though [they have] no meaningful intention."[224] That meaning may be qualified by metafictional acknowledgments, as Spark does in the last sentence of the novel: "Nicholas marveled at [Jane's] stamina, recalling her in this image years later in the country of his death—how she stood, sturdy and bare-legged on the dark grass, occupied with her hair—as if this was an image of all the May of Teck establishment in its meek, unselfconscious attitudes of poverty, long ago in 1945."[225] The "unselfconscious attitudes" of these characters furnish the involuntary material for Nicholas Farringdon, an unauthorized agent of the *analogia entis,* who infiltrates and transfigures the secular world by the same ethically ambivalent stroke.

[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid, 68.
[225] Ibid, 113.

Chapter 4 Better Living through Liturgy: W. H. Auden, Applied Science, and the Form(ulas) of Devotion

As soon as he set foot in New York, the English-born poet W. H. Auden took pills to keep pace with The City That Never Sleeps. As the biographer Humphrey Carpenter observes, Auden and his traveling companion Christopher Isherwood "acquired, during their first visit to New York in July 1938, a taste for Benzedrine first thing in the morning, as an 'upper' to give them energy to start the day, and for Seconal or some other sleeping-pill last thing at night as a 'downer.'" Upon his expatriation in 1939, Auden had "resumed this routine, and was indeed to continue it for the next twenty years or so. He called it 'the chemical life.'"[226]

While Auden's "chemical life" was a quirk, it was also a tongue-in-cheek sign of the times. In 1935, three years before Auden adopted his routine, DuPont de Nemours, Inc., an American multinational chemical company, coined the slogan "Better Things for Better Living, Through Chemistry," a technocratic creed that would come to encapsulate the faith in applied science of mid-century America. Before it took over the postwar social imaginary, however, this ethos had first to be tested on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific.[227] As standard issue, both the American and British armies supplied Benzedrine to soldiers. Its civilian popularity followed fast on the heels of its decommissioning. As Nicholas Rasmussen points out, by the end of the Second World War, less than a decade after amphetamine tablets were introduced to medicine, "over half a million civilians

[226] Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 256.
[227] I derive the idea of a "social imaginary" from Charles Taylor, who in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) defines it as "the ways we are able to think or imagine the whole of society," or "the way we collectively imagine, even pre-theoretically, our social life in the contemporary Western world."

were using the drug psychiatrically or for weight loss" and the consumption rate in the United States "was greater than two tablets per person per year on a total-population (all ages) basis." By habituating themselves to Benzedrine use during the Second World War, sixteen million American soldiers helped to "normalize and disseminate nonmedical amphetamine use" in its booming aftermath.[228]

Concurrent with his chemical life (1939-1958), Auden would revert in 1941 to the Anglo-Catholicism of his youth and write what are arguably his most ambitious poems, collected in the cycle *Horae Canonicae* (1949-1955). While Arthur Kirsch, for one, has highlighted the convergence of Auden's move to America and his renewed churchgoing, his abiding chemical life has neither been squared with his Anglo-Catholic practice nor viewed as a valid or even noteworthy lens on his obliquely Anglo-Catholic poetry.[229] To be sure, it is not immediately apparent that pharmaceutical self-regulation would have anything to do with Auden's lofty model for his postwar cycle, the sixth-century *Rule of Saint Benedict*. After all, the poems of *Horae Canonicae* bear august Latin names identical to those of their official liturgical template: "Prime," "Terce," "Sext," "Nones," "Vespers," "Compline," and "Lauds." Auden defers to liturgical history in his descriptive title ("horae canonicae" remains, once translated, "canonical hours"). He does not bother, moreover, to translate the Latin epigraph he appends to it, *Immolatus Vicerit* ("sacrificed, he will be victorious"). The august structure and nomenclature of this cycle could not, it seems, be more distant from the kind of mechanized self-optimization that the poet had begun to practice in his daily life.

While unadulterated Latin, especially in the immediate postwar era, would suggest a reactionary attitude toward modern progress, Auden planned a "secular" revision of the strictly devotional content of Benedictine liturgy. In a letter to Ursula Niebhur, dated 16 July 1947, Auden

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[228] Nicholas Rasmussen, "America's First Amphetamine Epidemic 1929-1971," *American Journal of Public Health* 98, no. 6 (June 2008): 2.
[229] See Arthur Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity* (2005), for the most theologically comprehensive monograph on Auden.

shared "a possible scheme in mind for a series of secular poems based on the Offices," which would become *Horae Canonicae*.[230] The phrase "based on" conveys Auden's attempt to fuse immutable liturgical form—praying monks do not enjoy poetic liberty—with the kinds of mid-century content, such as pills and machines, that do not supply made-to-measure material for devotional poetry. As I will argue, Auden exploits this tension between liturgical form and secular content to illuminate how the wires between the sacred and the secular remain crossed, but not disconnected, at mid-century. In its ironic inversion of the DuPont creed, "Better Living through Liturgy," the title of this chapter, highlights how faith in applied science distorts, rather than displaces, the kind of temporal regulation that, according to Giorgio Agamben, Benedictine liturgy had inaugurated.[231] The poetic challenge that Auden takes on—re-fusing Benedictine form with contemporarily mechanical content—is as difficult, at times, for the poet as it is for his intended audience. While this chapter builds up to *Horae Canonicae*, the crowning achievement of Auden's postwar career, it explores a wide range of poems that, by their shared curiosity about the intersection of liturgy, machines, and applied science, justify the biographical juxtaposition I introduce into the critical conversation.

In "You" (1963), for example, a short poem addressed to his body, Auden's fatigued speaker flips between spiritual and positivistic dispositions. "Must I, born for / Sacred play," he asks, "Turn base mechanic / So you may worship / Your secular bread?"[232] He nonetheless concludes by wishing that human emotion and metaphysical inquiry could be put under a microscope: "Why is loneliness not / A chemical discomfort, / Nor Being a smell?"[233] In keeping with this incommensurable relationship between ineffable "Being" and the scrutable senses ("smell"), Auden

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230 Edward Mendelson, ed. *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Poems, Volume II: 1940-1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), 965.
231 See Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).
232 W. H. Auden, "You," in *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 254.
233 Ibid, 255.

was suspicious about poetic attempts to speak about God. This was another reason, perhaps, for the self-effacing caveat of merely "secular poems" in his letter to Ursula Niebhur. Alan Jacobs has argued that Auden "found especially useful [Kierkegaard's] notion of "indirect communication," which requires the indirect thinker paradoxically to refuse "Christian answers" for the "questions with which Christianity is most concerned." This apophatic technique, says Jacobs, "is just what leads the reader toward the Christian faith that alone can provide what we need." Kierkegaard holds that "An illusion can never be destroyed directly . . . and only by indirect means can it be radically removed."[234] On Jacobs' Kierkegaardian reading, Auden's category of "secular poems" stems from his idea that Christian poetry, *qua* poetry, is inherently "indirect" in its reflection of creator in creation. Indeed, as Humphrey Carpenter has shown, Auden "said he believed that all art was secular, and was not therefore really a fit vehicle for Christian belief."[235]

Nothing could be more theologically direct, however, than Benedictine liturgy. How can a Christian poet employ a Benedictine model without speaking directly about God? As I argue in this chapter, Auden's postwar poetry thinks of Christian requisition in infrastructural terms. He perceives God indirectly at work in the most unlikely forms, such as broken-down machines, bathrooms, and airports. He attempts to address the frustration that the speaker of "You" feels toward intractable spiritual problems that, according to the technological attitude of his time, clamor for chemical solutions. Theological indirection is a technique of communicating with a secular world that does not comprehend theological content but still feels its liturgical pulse. In "Compline," for example, the usual time for the examination of conscience of the Benedictine monk, Auden's speaker states, "Nothing is with me now but a sound, / A heart's rhythm, a sense of stars / Leisurely walking

[234] Alan Jacobs, "Auden and the Limits of Poetry," *First Things*, August 1, 2001. https://www.firstthings.com/article/2001/08/auden-and-the-limits-of-poetry.
[235] Carpenter, *Auden*, 320.

around, and both / Talk a language of motion / I can measure but not read."[236] Auden's speaker puts his finger on a physiologically rendered "rhythm" that is theologically naked but full of liturgical yearning. By the end of the poem, the speaker resigns himself to the "rhythm / Past measure or comprehending." Davidic praise, which supplies the lion's share of content for the canonical hours, takes the form of a "dance / As it moves in perichoresis," or the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity to one another.

In dialectical engagement with its historical context, the circadian praise of Auden's Benedictine model competes with the propulsive rhythms of the nonstop and nervous world of postwar industry, as in the Wren steeples scattered among—or smothered by—the skyscrapers of the City of London. The world of business had imprinted itself on Auden's sensibility. "The poet must look like a stockbroker" was the sartorial creed of his Oxford days, when he would stroll down its most idyllic industrial route, the "dingiest part of the river towpath."[237] Later, in 1957, during performances of his narrative verse drama, *The Book of Daniel*, Auden would dress in the costume of a monk.[238] This chapter takes these playful gestures seriously. While, on the other side of reversion to Anglo-Catholicism, he would substitute a mock habit for a mock suit, Auden continues to address and even sympathize with postwar citizens who, in their nine-to-five lives, only indirectly feel the pull toward liturgical *kairos*. As in Muriel Spark's attempt to convert state-mandated austerity into voluntary Christian asceticism, this chapter meets the frayed wires between Benedictine and Benzedrine temporality. For Auden the Christian poet, secularization requires a careful re-tracing of steps back to the forgotten religious sources of nominally secular habits and institutions.

Perhaps because faith and pharmaceutical dependence are taken to be mutually exclusive—reversion entails renunciation, in other words—the most theologically learned and authoritative

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[236] Auden, "Compline," in *Selected Poems*, 238.
[237] Carpenter, *W. H. Auden*, 58.
[238] Ibid, 390.

critics of Auden tend to dwell on the poet's salutary turn to an Incarnational ethos. Jacobs, for example, is not wrong to highlight the poet's "increasingly strong sense that ordinary, everyday Catholic religious practice is more deeply connected to [truths of the goodness of the human body]," a sense borne out by Auden's choice of the *Rule* as his poetic model. But in his citation of Auden's 1944 book review of Charles Norris Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture*, Jacobs passes by a striking pharmaceutical analogy:

> Our period is not so unlike the age of Augustine: the planned society, Caesarism of thugs or bureaucracies, paideia, scientia, religious persecution, are all with us. Nor is there even lacking the possibility of a new Constantinism; letters have already begun to appear in the press, recommending religious instruction in schools as a cure for juvenile delinquency; Mr. Cochrane's terrifying description of the 'Christian' empire under Theodosius should discourage such hopes of *using Christianity as a spiritual Benzedrine for the earthly city.*[239]

Auden's admonishment against a "new Constantinism" reflects his secular and modern disposition toward the relationship between Church and state. Despite his liturgical affinity for Roman Catholic rites, his politics, by this reading, are Protestant. By using "spiritual Benzedrine" as a cautionary metaphor for politically instrumental Christianity, Auden criticizes the idea of the Church as a quick fix for the social ills of the moment. The Church is not a "cure" for juvenile delinquency in the technocratic way that the state, or clerics, would like it to be. While the Church may support and nourish habitual progress toward civic virtue, it is more than a chemically repeatable formula for civilizational stability, delivered in the form of a pharmaceutical cure-all. "Spiritual Benzedrine" is an oxymoron that is nonetheless desired by the new Constantines of the time, whether secular or

[239] Alan Jacobs, "Auden's Theology," in *Auden in Context*, ed. Tony Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 174. Emphasis added.

sacred in name. Auden implies that Christianity does not "work" in the way that other forms of applied science or applied ideology do. As revealed by this analogical slip, Benzedrine is on Auden's mind as well as in his body. Still, even when Benzedrine seems to serve him as an analytical tool, and despite its pejorative valence in this essay, Auden remains physically dependent on drugs for what Carpenter calls their "instant activity when awake and instant sleep when in bed."[240]

Along with Alan Jacobs, Edward Mendelson, Auden's preeminent critic and the editor of his collected poetry and prose, lauds the poet as "unique among twentieth-century writers in the sanity and depth of his sense of the body and its significance," but his disciplinary regime of uppers and downers—a sign of bodily recalcitrance—is nowhere to be found. While his attention to corporeality avoids vaporizing Auden's Anglo-Catholicism into notional propositions, a pitfall of literary criticism that abstracts doctrinal commitments from their existential and poetic contexts, Mendelson's emphasis on the poet's "meditations on the body's indifference" and its "unconscious, saving powers" ignores the fact that Auden willfully takes pills to make his body do what it naturally should, hardly a sign of trust in the good, if mortal, body.[241] Mendelson goes so far as to view the body as "sacred in itself" and to isolate in it Auden's "promise of salvation," a hale claim that skips the fleshly strife of the poet's chemical life. The idea of the human body as self-sufficiently "sacred" ignores how the bodily redemption of the Resurrection has the bodily scourging of Good Friday, the oblique subject of *Horae Canonicae*, as its Lenten prerequisite.

The crack-of-dawn overture of *Horae Canonicae*, "Prime," wrestles with the instrumentalization of the body. Over a cup of coffee or tea, Auden's solitary speaker cherishes the prelapsarian unity that is recovered every lazily immaculate morning. "Holy this moment, wholly in the right," he exclaims, but he cannot get out of his mind the forestalled fracturing of the body into

[240] Carpenter, *Auden*, 256.
[241] Edward Mendelson, "The Body," in *Auden in Context*, 195, 196, 201.

a set of manipulable tools: "the will has still to claim / This adjacent arm as my own, / The memory to name me, resume / Its routine of praise and blame."[242] The speaker equates his entrance into civic life and time itself with the will's ownership of the body, which is no longer "intact" but a "[thing] to hand," an alienated object to be used, not contemplated. The homophonic pair of "holy / wholly" suggests that it is only by remaining separate from the world, a fantasy in itself, that the self enjoys integration between body and soul as a given. Life in the secular marketplace, the civic *felix culpa*, causes us to "claim" this and that as our "own," including the daily estranged parts of our own body.

In 1 Corinthians 12:14, Saint Paul thanks the body politic of Christ for the unity-within-difference of "the body . . . not [consisting] of one member but of many":

> If the foot would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.[243]

Auden's speaker feels the burden of the "arrangement" of the body being torn apart in everyday life. Saint Paul likens the distinct parts of the body to the unique charisms of the distinct members of the body of Christ, who compose a witnessing whole; the speaker confronts the agonistic reality of self-regulation as a consequence of falling into the working day. We strive to be "put together," as the colloquial saying goes, or to be "self-possessed." This aspiration depends upon our natural state of being in disrepair. Auden's speaker secularizes the prelapsarian state of being "wholly in the right,"

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[242] Auden, "Prime," 225.
[243] 1 Cor. 12-18.

soon to be challenged by the obligations, conversations, and work of the day to come, as self-integration.

In the ephemeral peace of "Prime," whose title implies the conjunction of the perfect and the preliminary, wholeness is the inevitable sacrifice of secular temporality. While Benedictine monks aim to restore this wholeness by institutionally structured prayer, according to a liturgical rubric and within the spiritually single-minded space of the sanctuary, Auden's secular speaker both desires separation from the world and knows that, as an intermediate secular citizen, he cannot have it. When it comes to the border between the sacred and the profane, the separate is coterminous with the holy. The first definition of "holy" in *The Oxford English Dictionary* is "kept or regarded as inviolate from ordinary use and appropriated or set apart for religious use or observance; consecrated, dedicated, sacred."[244] This sense of "holy" grants God the prerogative of the dual possession of wholeness and holiness. His self-sufficient qualities are laudable but inimitable, since God is the only one in whom, as Paul Tillich argues, essence and existence blissfully coincide.[245] Everyone else, "Prime" implies, is subject to a gap between self-image and civic fact, atemporal relaxation and productive strain, greedy or needy selves and obliging or resisting others.

Toward the end of the poem, the speaker characterizes "this ready flesh," prone to be manipulated by the fallen will, as "No honest equal, but my accomplice now / my assassin to be."[246] As he approaches the oncoming day, Auden's speaker assumes the more directly theological persona of whom he would elsewhere call "our first dad," Adam: "And I, the Adam sinless in our beginning / Adam, still previous to any act."[247] The speaker's condition of being "still" defines the tension between contemplative inertia and business momentum of "Prime," whose atemporal self-

[244] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "holy (*adj.*), sense 1," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7738199966.
[245] See Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).
[246] Auden, "Prime," 225.
[247] Ibid.

portraiture ("still") seizes upon a frozen moment of personal sanctity and yet prepares to come to terms with the ethical immaturity of the isolated self.

"My assassin to be" foreshadows the speaker's body as a useful accessory in the "good Friday" murder to come, infinitely manipulable according to the infinitive "to be." In light of this deadly narrative momentum, the speaker enjambs the shadowy afterthought that the body, once mobilized, is one's own imminent assassin ("assassin [in the near future]"). Our approach toward our own bodies and those of others as "things to hand" is surely to be checked by an anthropomorphized "assassin" with a will of its own. In the possessive case, Auden's speaker imagines his body as his effective agent; as the direct object of its action, the speaker experiences his body as the assassin *of* himself. In either case, as Auden puts it in a 1954 essay, he "make[s] the relation to Nature one of contest, the goal of which is human victory."[248] Despite the "instant results" of Auden's drug routine, "Prime" is concerned with the spiritual implications of self-regulation via applied science. While Benzedrine does not make an explicit appearance in "Prime," its quality as pharmaceutical cure-all responds to the anxiety expressed by Auden's speaker. We feel with the speaker the exhaustion of getting up and resuming the quiet strain of daily life.

In "After Reading a Child's Guide to Modern Physics" (1962), Auden's speaker finds himself preferring the personable trials of marriage, which is "rarely bliss," to the potential moral relief of cosmic insignificance. The speaker views people in their physical aspect as puny "particles to pelt / At thousands of miles per sec / About a universe / Wherein a lover's kiss / Would either not be felt / Or break the loved one's neck."[249] Auden describes a similarly absurd kind of inhuman propulsion in "On the Circuit" (1965), a droll reflection on his late-career lecture tours of the United States. "An airborne instrument I sit, / Predestined nightly to fulfill / Columbia-Giesen-Management's /

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[248] Edward Mendelson, ed. *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose, Vol. III:* 1949-1955 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 396.
[249] Auden, "After Reading a Child's Guide to Modern Physics," in *Selected Poems*, 257.

Unfathomable will," observes the jet-lagged speaker.[250] This occasional poem takes off where the more technologically indirect "Prime" leaves off: as an "airborne instrument," Auden's speaker merges with the mid-century machine that could be either his "accomplice" or his "assassin."

The poem is an example of Auden's theology of infrastructure. The poem satirizes its postwar subject—the new normal of continental air travel—to quietly surreal effect. "Justified" by the "election" of a management firm, Auden's speaker is the chosen instrument of a Calvinist corporate God. The speaker observes the "pelagian travelers" in his midst, the chic members of the jet-set who are really "Lost on their lewd conceited way / To Massachusetts, Michigan / Miami or L.A." Once airborne, Auden's "jet-or-prop-propelled" speaker "[shifts] so frequently, so fast, / [he] cannot now say where [he] was / The evening before last." While it promises control over global space, the unsettling speed of continental air travel makes it hard to distinguish between weeks, let alone days, let alone hours. Seen from the elusive geometrical perspectives of the sky, little cities, like the "particles" of "Child's Guide," vanish before they have time to stamp themselves on the human consciousness as the discrete places, "Miami or L.A."

He is "jet-propelled" because the airplane is his "accomplice" and his "assassin," his useful tool and the threat of his own objectification. Due to its compression of space, continental air travel requires travelers to pop pills or quaff caffeine when they find their biological clocks unwound by the time-zone transcendence of the jet plane. In "On the Circuit," the timelessness of modern travel is oddly analogous to the helpless grace of Calvinist theology. Unlike the driver behind the wheel, the air traveler puts faith in the pilot's instruments. This absence of agency leaves a vacuum to be filled by the time-management of C. G. M., who plot, in calculating recompense, the speaker's every meal and move. He characterizes his intractable schedule, the overpowering opposite of airborne amnesia, with sardonic tautology: "And daily, seven days a week," he is swept along by the 24/7

[250] Auden, "On the Circuit," in *Selected Poems*, 258.

cycle of the lecture circuit, which does not spare a moment for the Sabbath.[251] The noun "circuit" itself implies that while air travel makes passengers feel that they are going somewhere better than where they are at present, they lose the distinctions between places that take time--on foot, on horseback, or even by car--to reach. The idea of incremental spiritual progress, the motivation behind "Prime," becomes hard to fathom. In its spatial shortcuts, civil aviation approximates God's eternity: pseudo-angelic air travelers mock the finite limitations that ground the pilgrimages of old, such as darkness, a lack of maps, or weary joints. The scrupulous schedule of the Giesen plan dictates an efficient routine, turning one's life into a machine that cannot break down, or else important meetings will be missed.

In "On the Circuit," Auden's speaker redeems his predestination by a management firm by embracing "blessed encounters" mercifully "unscheduled on the Giesen Plan," such as when he finds himself in the sometimes ridiculous, but always "[joyful]," company of "an addict of Tolkien" or a "Charles Williams fan."[252] Despite its apparently farcical rhymed quatrains and its typification of Auden the crotchet ("A sulky fifty-six, he finds / A change of mealtime utter hell"), "On the Circuit" concentrates the tension in Auden's postwar thought between mechanical and liturgical time.

Unscheduled joys notwithstanding, Auden was as meticulous in his work routine as he imagines Columbia-Giesen-Management to be in its itineraries. No matter the disheveled artists who tried to distract him in the Bohemian living rooms of Ann Arbor, New York, Ischia, or Kirchstetten, where he made his postwar homes, Auden lived by the clock. As Carpenter notes, Auden was

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[251] Ibid, 259.
[252] Ibid.

> [. . .] obsessive about his timetable. Certain hours were fixed for writing, certain hours for reading, certain points of the day for eating, and certain times for receiving his friends or going out. Interruptions of this schedule were treated with ill-concealed irritation, and friends quickly learnt not to bother him except at the permitted hours.[253]

Auden used abstract timetables not only to discipline his work but also to stifle the clamoring appetites of the body. While Auden practiced ascetic timekeeping, it was the "the clock [that] governed him," says Carpenter, "rather than his natural appetites." On one occasion, "when a joker set [a clock's] hands back two hours [Auden] worked through his lunch-time without being at all aware of hunger." Auden moralized time, going so far as to claim, "Only the Hitlers of the world work at night; no honest artist does.'"[254]

We can understand this kind of mechanical self-optimization as a way of capitalizing on liturgical *kairos*. This intersection between machines and liturgy was at the center of Auden's formative years. His boyhood was inspired by creaky Yorkshire industry and "smells and bells" Anglo-Catholicism. As Carpenter observes, Auden "[remembered] the smells and pipes and huge gasometers which rose and fell. The gasworks was the first place that seemed to him (he said) 'numinous,' arousing a feeling of wonder and awe."[255] On the next page of the biography, Carpenter states that "At the age of six, Wystan acted as a 'boat boy' at Anglo-Catholic liturgies." Auden would be "dressed in a red cassock and white linen cotta," writes Carpenter, and "learnt to serve at the altar, carrying the boat-shaped container that held the incense-grains." In hindsight, Auden "felt it had been a thoroughly good thing that his first encounter with religion was aesthetic rather than intellectual." He remembered his "first religious memories" as "exciting magical rites."[256] Carpenter

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[253] Carpenter, *W. H. Auden*, 279.
[254] Emphasis added.
[255] Ibid, 5, emphasis added.
[256] Ibid, 6.

does not synthesize these two formative experiences, but the "numinous" or "magical" quality they share cannot be ignored. "Smells and pipes" could easily become "smells and bells," although the incense haze of the Anglo-Catholic rite, the apophatic sign of faith in Christian mysteries, would seem to conflict with the engine steam of the factory floor, the cataphatic sign of confidence in the machine. And yet, at least from the impressionable point of view of a boy, there is only *holy smoke*. As the "first place" of "wonder and awe," the gasworks furnish the secular material that Auden will convert into the central pedagogical image of his secular liturgical poetry, the machine, which I will discuss in depth in the poems to come of *Horae Canonicae*.

Just as his tongue-in-cheek endorsement of the "chemical life" blends with the technocratic ethos of postwar American culture, Auden's career-long but critically ignored obsession with smoke blends with that of British wartime culture, even though the poet raises it to a uniquely religious or "numinous" pitch. In *Listen to Britain* (1942), the poetic work of propaganda beloved by Susan Sontag and Mike Leigh, Humphrey Jennings uses smoke both as a metaphor for the common breath of socioeconomically stratified citizens and as a palpable emblem of national might. Its composition positions horse-drawn carriages against a background of towering smokestacks, converting organic to industrial "horsepower."[257] The regular chugging and whistling of the train is its propulsive leitmotif, blending different regions of Britain in its industrial progress across the wartime nation. Civilians, soldiers, and royals alike—Queen Elizabeth II makes a striking appearance—take in Myra Hess's lunchtime performances of classical standards as the camera records the ceaseless smoke from their cigarettes. Just as incense serves as a sacramental sign of the Christian body politic, its unavoidable smell a transcendent intoxicant for parishioners, smoke and steam square factory workers with their bosses and, through the secularized and modern mystery play of the train,

[257] *Listen to Britain: And Other Films by Humphrey Jennings*, directed by Humphrey Jennings (Flicker Alley, 2002).

evangelize Britain to itself. The smoking subjects of the Mass Observation campaign breathe in and out the spirit of Britain.

In Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1944 film *A Canterbury Tale*, another work that blurs lines between poetry and propaganda, German expressionist cinematography lingers on the mystifying train steam that surrounds the first meeting of its geographically and professionally distinct characters at the station of the fictional village "Chilingbourne": Alison, a land girl from London, Peter Gibbs, a British sargeant stationed nearby, and Bob Johnson, an American sargeant on leave. Later, the camera pointedly zooms in on a "smoking permitted" sign at the lecture of the local magistrate (and de-facto squire), Thomas Colpeper, who evangelizes ancestrally oblivious soldiers about the present past of the "pilgrims' road." Colpeper, a conservationist and cultural custodian in charge of the town museum and a quasi-monastic celibate who lives with his mother, works his pedagogical magic on Alison, causing her to close her eyes and, later, when she walks to the high point on the road where Canterbury Cathedral is visible, to have a mystical vision of Chaucer's fourteenth-century pilgrims. Breathing in heady fumes, Alison is intoxicated by this evocative blackout, politically mandated by the state and technically required by Colpeper's projection equipment, which can send Britons back into the national heritage made fresh by the threat of War.[258]

In dialogue with this cultural focus on smoke and as a formally disciplined version of his childhood fascination with incense and steam, Auden mines the potentially religious significance of the machine, a socially shared reality of the mid-century world. Auden, of course, was a living chimney, and his face, especially in old age, was as craggy as the northern England he loved, pockmarked by mines in various states of disrepair.

[258] *A Canterbury Tale*, directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (Criterion Collection, 2006).

Several years before the Second World War broke out and he reverted to Anglo-Catholicism, Auden employed the train as the dominant symbol and its chugging as the dominant rhythm of his poetic setting of the GPO film *Night Mail* (1936), directed and produced by Harry Watt and Basil Wright and orchestrated by Benjamin Britten. In *Night Mail*, Auden pairs terse dactyllic dimeter with Britten's atavistic toms—"*This* is the night mail *cross*ing the Border, / *Bring*ing the cheque and the *post*al order, / *Lett*ers for the rich, *lett*ers for the poor, / The *shop* at the corner, the *girl* next door"—to stress the unstoppable progress of the train across the hills and through the valleys of the English landscape.[259] Like the mantra of *The Little Engine That Could*, "I think I can, I think I can," Auden's dactyls metrically generate locomotive momentum. In *Night Mail*, the train is the engine of national morale and steam is its egalitarian exhalation. Auden and Britten's collaboration—drumskins and shunting train in tandem—synthesizes body and machine, by which, to answer the positivist-spiritualist of "You," the myth of the nation is made sensible.

Indeed, Auden's speaker-spokesman personifies the train. "Shoveling white steam over her shoulder," she "[snorts] noisily as she passes / Silent miles of wind-bent grasses."[260] In prewar anticipation of the postwar conclusion of *Horae Canonicae*'s "Nones," written almost twenty years later, the speaker observes "Birds [turning] their heads as she approaches, / [Staring] from bushes at her blank-faced coaches."[261] In "Nones," the speaker takes stock of "all the creatures / Now watching" the dead "spot" of an anonymous Calvary, "like the hawk looking down / Without blinking . . . Or the deer who shyly from afar / Peer through chinks in the forest."[262] Whereas, in *Night Mail*, creatures make way for coal-powered machines, in "Nones," the natural world is indifferent to the hackwork of the crucifying crowd, which, as we will see, Auden imagines in a

[259] Auden, "Night Mail," in *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (London: The Folio Society, 2016), 82.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Auden, "Nones," in *Selected Poems*, 234.

particularly mechanical way. Still, in *Night Mail*, the speaker juxtaposes the momentum of the train with the helpless "Sheep-dogs [that] cannot turn her course," a hint of the inhumanly technological power ("blank-faced coaches") that will turn infernal in "Nones."[263] As a zoomorphized "snorting" train zips by oxymoronic "fields of apparatus," the speaker animates a romantically industrial landscape of "furnaces / Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen."[264] Retaining the ethos of industrial progress, Auden's poetic setting also strains to convey an industrial *numen*, if ever there were one, but it does not yet draw specifically religious implications from it. Like Nicholas Farringdon's romantic visions in *The Girls of Slender Means*, the train is mythopoetic, numinous for the sake of the British state, but pre-theological. Later, in his 1965 elegy for Louis MacNeice, "The Cave of Making," Auden's chummy speaker reflects that the two poets were born into an Edwardian England where "locomotives were still named after knights in Malory," and where "science was known as 'stinks.'"[265] In *Night Mail*, Auden the propagandist is torn between the political and industrial utility of the train and, once freed from this function, its anthropomorphic value as a modern latecomer to the storehouse of images of the Western literary tradition.

"Terce," the nine-o'clock poem of professional preparation of *Horae Canonicae*, sets the secular content of machines within liturgical form. Its logistical prelude to crucifixion ends with the archly answered prayer that "the machinery of our world will function / Without a hitch."[266] By building up to this spiritual understanding of the "machinery of our world," "Terce" watches a distinctively wartime shadow fall over the "fresh and sunny still" arcadia of "Prime," the poem that precedes it. In the beginning of the poem, Auden's speaker vignettes the anonymous human agents of an unnamed crucifixion event, brought down to earth by his humanist focus on the little details

[263] Auden, "Night Mail," 82.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Auden, "The Cave of Making," in *Selected Poems*, 267.
[266] Auden, "Terce," 226.

of their morning routines: hangman, judge, and poet. The speaker highlights the theme of professional hesitation, the kind of self-doubt that precedes the step into what "Prime" calls "our living task, the dying / Which the coming day will ask." We meet a zoomorphized hangman who, "After shaking paws with his dog . . . sets off briskly over the heath."[267] Deprived of the kind of atemporal self-assurance that "Prime" desires and forsakes, the hangman "does not know yet who will be provided / To the high works of Justice with." Auden's speaker then cuts to the judge, who, "gently closing the door of his wife's bedroom / (Today she has one of her headaches)," lets out a "sigh" and "descends his marble stair." The judge, sturdy embodiment of the legal last word, "does not know by what sentence / He will apply on earth the Law that rules the stars." We finally listen in on the poet's "breather / Round his garden before starting his eclogue."[268] Auden's speaker implicitly likens himself to a Virgil writing bucolic poetry amid Roman civil war. The Virgilian poet is an aesthetic guarantor of the order of the state. And yet he must come to grips with the fact that he "does not know whose truth he will tell." While "Prime" does not divulge any details of war, "Terce" starts to associate human uncertainty with historical crisis.

In each of these three brief yet vivid portraits, Auden's speaker juxtaposes transcendental responsibility (Justice, Law, Truth) with the intimate physiology of its human embodiments: panting (the "paws" of the hangman), sighing (the judge taking note of his wife's headache and descending his stair), and "taking a breather" (the poet's need to exercise his body before seizing his Muse). In the still-secular poem "September 1, 1939," Auden's speaker would ironically capitalize the grand values of "Democracy," "Collective Man," and "Authority."[269] In *Horae Canonicae*, which zooms in on the fallible infrastructure and fried nerves of Roman-rendered contemporaries, he uncovers the human beings beneath the mythic marble, but he does not sneer at them. We sympathize with these

[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Auden, "September 1, 1939," in *Selected Poems*, 95-97.

down-to-earth figures, these newly breathing effigies, even though, thanks to our readerly hindsight, we know that they will have been the ones to carry out the crucifixion to come in "Sext" and "Nones."

We sympathize with the hangman, judge, and poet because they are functionaries, not mobilizers. In terms of political power, Auden's speaker ranks them below the resolute "Big Ones / Who can annihilate a city" and "cannot be bothered with this moment" of self-assessment at the breakfast table or in front of the bathroom mirror. The speaker switches to the first-person plural for the petitions of "Terce," which tie together the insecurities of various men in the middle. Auden's speaker observes how "we are left, / Each to his secret cult; now each of us / Prays to an image of an image of himself:"

> Let me get through this coming day
> Without a dressing down from a superior,
> Being worsted in a repartee,
> Or behaving like an ass in front of the girls;
> Let something exciting happen,
> Let me find a lucky coin on a sidewalk,
> Let me hear a new funny story.[270]

While the expressed addressee of the self-helping prayers of one's "secret cult," "an image of an image of [oneself]," is something like a Platonic nightmare, the verbal phrase of permission, "Let me," calls out to a parent who knows more than the pleading child. "Let" implies an intuition of moral authority beyond the self; in other words, the verb suggests, "What I want may not be right

[270] Ibid.

for me." Despite the initial narcissism of these petitions, Auden's middling citizens stray from wish-fulfillment—they do not say, in the imperative mode, "give me"—and begin to ask what they should do and value. They may not yet be on the doorstep of the Church, but they have not given in to the pseudo-divinity of the "Big Ones / Who can annihilate a city." Auden's in-between citizens, "dog[s]" as they are, feel their way for providence in the dark.

Still, "each to his secret cult" is a near contradiction in terms, since *cultus*, in the Roman sense with which Auden was surely familiar, had to do with public worship.[271] This non-sensical phrase expresses the cultural difficulty of Auden's aim to reshape secular wishes in the liturgical form of worship. Dietrich von Hildebrand has summed up liturgy as "communion-prayer."[272] For his part, in his 1956 contribution to the invited essay collection *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims: And Why They Chose the Episcopal Church*, Auden argued that "the correct notion of worship . . . is first and foremost a community in action, a thing done together, and only secondarily a matter of individual feeling or thinking."[273] In the secular absence of a shared liturgical grammar, Auden's speaker searches for petitions of shared existential insecurity. As typified by "Terce," the secular liturgy of *Horae Canonicae* works by breaking things down and, as technological developments feed our hubris and exacerbate our dislocation, pausing on moments of personal, professional, and moral hesitation.

In the next stanza, Auden's speaker contrasts the mundane time-trials of "each [in] his secret cult" with the *Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani* of Christ, whom he secularly expresses by the common noun "our victim." Ground down by the daily need to start their moral engines, Auden's middling citizens find consolation in the fact that they "might be anyone," even after a track record of personal failure has set in, but it is only

[271] See Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009).
[272] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Liturgy and Personality* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2016), 59.
[273] Mendelson, *Complete Works*, 573.

> Our victim who is without a wish,
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> Who knows already (that is what
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> We can never forgive. If he knows the answers,
>
> Then why are we here, why is there even dust?),
>
> Knows already that, in fact, our prayers are heard,
>
> That not one of us will slip up,
>
> That the machinery of our world will function
>
> Without a hitch . . .

Auden's speaker shifts from the humanizing vignettes of spouses with headaches and elixirs against bosses to bloody business as usual. Oddly enough, it is "we" who "can never forgive" God's inscrutable eternity, not God who can never forgive the creatures who thank him by murdering his son. The burden of time, "Terce" implies, is a primary source of human resentment toward the omniscient God, who knows all things in advance; on this basis, Auden's speaker imagines an absurd contest of who-is-allowed-to-forgive-what, since forgiveness requires mercy, a grievance-dispelling capacity that fallen creatures may be able to practice with their equals in sin but certainly not with their immaculate creator.

As he does with the panting and sighing of the judge, hangman, and poet, Auden's speaker often surrounds puffed-up people with bathetic parentheses, which put into perspective their apparently lofty tasks or their well-warranted complaints. In "Compline," for example, Auden's speaker asks, concerning eminent men of letters, "Can poets (can men in television) / Be saved?"[274] Auden once remarked that he believed in Christ because, of all the divinities of the major world religions, he was the only one who could provoke the poet to yell, "Crucify Him!" In light of

[274] Auden, "Compline," in *Selected Poems*, 238.

Auden's exacting drive for mechanical precision in his personal life, we can read his speaker's parenthetical complaint in "Terce" ("that is what / we can never forgive") as a frustrated attempt to come to terms with the maintenance-amid-decay that feels breezily automatic once it has become second nature but which also serves as a mundane *memento mori* of the fact that, without our daily routine, our teeth will rot, bacteria will thrive, and, neglected at last, we will break down.

And yet, it is this creaking sense of breakdown, the personal weakness behind the commonweal, that *Horae Canonicae* identifies as the approximate liturgy of the strident postwar world. As dark thanks for their time-trials, Auden's speaker comforts his audience and himself with the fact that "our prayers are heard, / That not one of us will slip up." Befitting the secular character of these poems, Auden does not specify "God," with a proper noun, as the answerer, because doctrinal reference would spell existential deflection, perhaps taking the contemporary edge off an endless cycle of brutal crucifixions (which is not to say that Auden dislikes theological argument, only that he has secular context in mind). Oiled by the mundane and misdirected prayers of "Terce," the "machinery of our world will function / Without a hitch." Worldly "machinery," or the tried-and-true maintenance of civic order, ensures that "We shall have had a good Friday," whose lowercase g translates the Christian proper noun of "Good Friday" into the secular common noun of "good Friday." Auden's speaker implies an odd causal relationship between secular petition and divine providence. We pray for our personal success and are promised, on the one hand, a "good" end to the working week, ego "intact," as "Prime" puts it, and, on the other hand, play an involuntary narrative role in a spellbinding and unselfconscious "Good Friday." As I have argued in this dissertation, Christian writers at mid-century teeter on the threshold between the involuntary secular experiences of wartime and the voluntary spiritual practices they make intelligible, if not guarantee. Here, Auden plays with how life will simply churn out mortifications, like it or not, the kinds of opportunities for penitential suffering that prayer attempts humbly to accept, if not elicit.

Be careful what you pray for, Auden's speaker implies, since God, who knows what is right for you, may allow you to get what you errantly want—and twist the ending you had in mind. In "Terce," Auden's speaker reaffirms the Christian-proximate suffering of the secular world as a future perfect spirituality: it "shall have had" a proper Good Friday, even though it does not recognize it at first. Providence acts always but its human recognition is deferred, as we will see especially in "Nones."

In *Letters from Lake Como* (1924), the theologian and social critic Romano Guardini defines the machine as "an iron formula that directs the material to the desired end."[275] Once the machine comes to express the self-understanding of a society, it loses a "feeling for what is organically possible or tolerable in any living sense."[276] Guardini's distinction between the "living sense" of organic life and the "iron formula" of the machine helps us better to understand the spiritual meaning of the well-oiled "machinery of our world" overseen by the "Big Ones" who do not think twice before "[annihilating] a city." The machinery of our world is supposed to work without ceasing and regardless of organic limitations like light and dark, its functionaries outputting the failsafe input of its confident operators. Guardini's sense of the "iron formula" of the machine also gives us a critical lens to read Auden's poetry against the habits of his chemical life, and to gather the themes of drug-use and machinery under the same rubric.

As a routine, not an occasional remedy, taking pills to wake up and fall asleep turns one into a machine, since settling into the morning and giving in to the night require the hardly guaranteed kind of spiritual readiness or calm that lie behind the hesitant postures of "Prime" and "Terce." While drug-taking promises liberation from the human struggle, as Sabbi Lall has argued, "Habits and addictions are, in a way, the extreme pushing of this flexible system in the other direction,

[275] Romano Guardini, *Letters from Lake Como*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 46.
[276] Ibid, emphasis added.

toward the rigid and repetitive."[277] R. Christopher Pierce and Louk J.M.J. Vanderschuren add that "certain aspects of drug seeking and taking become automatic processes (often triggered by drug-associated stimuli) that to a great extent are beyond the individual's control."[278] Lall's and Pierce and Vanderschuren's characterizations of the "automatic" transformation undergone by addicts could be applied to Reformation criticisms of liturgical prayer as mechanical and repetitive, and yet in Auden's case, it is pharmaceutical addiction that supplants the automatic counting of beads on a rosary. Pills entail reliance on the pharmaceutical activation or blocking of certain receptors by an external agent. If prayer does not result in sleep, it is not necessarily a failure, since praise, not practicality, is the point; if pills fail, they are just bad pills, since their efficacy is an all-or-nothing matter.

Writing six years after the First World War and fifteen years before the Second, Guardini articulates an Audenesque link between mechanical and pharmaceutical ethos. "Medical thinking and action today," argues Guardini, "so often move only in the pharmaceutical and mechanical sphere of formulas, preparations and prescriptions." "We have broken free," says Guardini, pointing us to their liturgical consequences, from the "living order of times: morning and evening, day and night, weekday and Sunday, changes of the moon and seasons." In the post-industrial West, we live in an "order of time that is our own making, fixed by clocks, work, and pastimes," not the liturgical *kairos* of the medieval canonical hours, which, as John Harthan argues in his introduction to *The Book of Hours*, arose "before time-keeping became mechanized."[279] The canonical hours align diurnal and

[277] Sabbi Lall, "Explaining repetitive behavior linked to amphetamine use," *MIT McGovern Institute*, January 15, 2020. https://mcgovern.mit.edu/2020/01/15/explaining-repetitive-behavior-associated-with-amphetamine-use.
[278] R. Christopher Pierce and Louk J.M.J. Vanderschuren, "Kicking the habit: The neural basis of ingrained behaviors in cocaine addiction," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 35, no. 2 (2010): 212.
[279] John Harthan, ed., *The Book of Hours* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 11.

divine rhythms. Since it is not an "iron formula that directs the material to the desired end," however, the Benedictine rite does not guarantee a good night's rest or a good day's work.[280]

The Catholic Guardini could not have given a more incisive diagnosis of the competing rhythms of industry and devotion in Auden's postwar poetry and life. For his hardly Catholic part, the British Marxist historian E. P. Thompson defines the "industrial way of life" as being "concerned simultaneously with time-sense in its technological conditioning, and with time-measurement as a means of labour exploitation."[281] Coming at the problem of technocratic temporality from the ideologically opposed camps of dialectical materialism and foundational Catholicism, Guardini and Thompson reach a philosophical detente in their approbation of what Guardini calls "living sense" and what Thompson calls the "characteristic irregularity" of organically adjusted "task-orientation," which shirks the rigorism of abstract work schedules.[282] While liturgy, as an institutionally and culturally formed expression of devotion, is subject to the "technological conditioning" of Auden's mid-century moment, the Benedictine canonical hours care less about clockwork than conforming oneself to Christ.

On a theoretical level, Auden understands how the machine is an ethos as well as a tool, the dehumanizing assassin of an exhausted public as well as the accomplice of its innovation and productive momentum. Moving close to home, Auden associates resistance to poetry with the ethos and labor time of the machine. In a 1954 book review of David G. Hoffman's *An Armada of Thirty Wales*, Auden observes how "the way of life which the machine imposes on us, replacing the rhythmical recurrences of Nature by mathematically identical "soulless" repetitions, has developed in us a horror of all recurrence and a corresponding obsession with novelty."[283] As Auden sees it,

[280] Ibid, 17.
[281] E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38, no. 38 (December 1967): 80.
[282] Ibid, 6, 71.
[283] Mendelson, *Complete Works*, 396.

novelty is not merely an economic priority but a spiritual "idolatry." In reaction to the "soulless" repetition of modern labor time, the very idea of rule—poetic, as in meter, or liturgical, as in the devotional *kairos* of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*—becomes the target of therapeutic free verse. "The resistance of most people to poetry," Auden continues, "the lack of interest displayed by many contemporary poets in the art of "numbers," is due, I believe, to their association of repeated pattern with all that is boring and disagreeable in their lives." After a long day at the desk or on the factory floor, mid-century people seek relief from temporal order.

The machine has imaginative as well as temporal effects on the social reception of poetry at mid-century. Technology strips discrete civil authorities of personality and "[transfers] power from nature to the social collectivity."[284] Poetic praise in the postwar world is hampered because even when this "social collectivity" is "beneficent, showering on us some unequivocal blessing like the refrigerator," poetry "cannot thank it as it might thank a king who made wine flow in the streets; and when it does harm it cannot be attacked, for it is faceless and makes no conscious choices." Auden offers a refreshingly sympathetic reading of avant-garde tendencies in the poetry and liturgy of his time, about which he was nonetheless suspicious; they eke out spontaneity not just in response to the dead weight of poetic and religious traditions but as a rebellion against the iron formulas of the machine.

While the courtly obligation to praise or entertain a secular king is not identical with the spiritual desire to praise the creator, Auden argues that the rise of the machine in daily life entails liturgical collateral damage. The modern loss of the great chain of being stalks the analysis of Auden, a political democrat and liturgical traditionalist. In his contribution to *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims,* Auden notes how "In ages typified by personal rule and social hierarchies, it was natural to express awe and admiration by honorific titles like *King of Kings*, and to think of performing such

[284] Ibid.

extraordinary acts as that proposed in the hymn "Crown him with many crowns." Imaginatively speaking, these "ages" enjoyed a fit between the praiseworthy subjects of secular and divine kingship. However, once rulers become "constitutional officials" and their "real power" is transferred to "the lifeless machine," modern secular citizens tend to find that "even the title *Lord* is excessive."[285] Auden suggests that the leveled-out and faceless "way of life" that the machine "imposes on us" is an important obstacle to liturgical intelligibility. Auden and most of his 1950s contemporaries live in cities. He claims, on the one hand, that "the *Lamb of God*, in a culture, mainly urban, to which the notion of animal sacrifice is totally strange, is liable to evoke ridiculous images," while, on the other hand, "the *Agnus Dei* at least "has the attraction of a magical and musical spell."[286] The "magical" and the "musical," aesthetic qualities that Auden attributed both to the "numinous" industry of his youth and the "exciting magical rites" of his service as Anglo-Catholic boat boy, work to repair mechanical damage to the contemplative and poetic sensibility of the age. Auden concludes that "Whatever drawbacks it may have, a liturgy in a dead language, like Latin, which the average worshipper does not understand or to which, at least, he has no personal relation, has one great advantage over a vernacular liturgy: it cannot strike him as comic."

The "magical and musical" appeal of non-vernacular liturgy brings us back to the unadulterated Latin titles of *Horae Canonicae*. The metaphysical power of liturgy stems from its less-than-conscious means of persuasion. This reading of Auden disagrees with the prevailing idea of his "ethical" view of Christianity, which a representative critic such as Mendelson has exploited to separate him from his supposedly "mystical" Anglo-Catholic counterpart, T. S. Eliot. While Eliot, Mendelson says, characterized religion as "inaccessible, perfect, and eternal," and sought in it a salve for the "sordid transience of human life," Auden affirmed as the training ground of Christians the

[285] Mendelson, *Complete Works*, 573.
[286] Ibid.

"inescapable reality of this world, not a visionary, inaccessible world that might not exist somewhere else."[287] The ethical and the incantatory, however, are not mutually exclusive. Due to the notional illegibility of Anglo-Catholic doctrine in the postwar world, the orthodox Auden can only think of Christendom as a means of applied theology, a "spiritual Benzedrine" administered to an unbelieving postwar culture. Since he suspects that praise, whether of pagan heroes or of heavenly beings, has been stifled by the rise of the lifeless machine, Auden approaches liturgy in terms of a deep-down rhythm whose promised sense of integration and *kairos* has been displaced by strenuous labor time.

Horae Canonicae comes to grips with the ethos of the machine without capitulating to it. These poems seek to understand the compelling social power of machine thinking before grinding it to a halt and pausing on the spiritual implications of its breakdown. In other words, Auden pursues the covertly Christian meaning of what happens when the "machinery of our world" *ceases* to function "without a hitch." This aim chimes with what Rene Girard has characterized as the "indirect acknowledgment" of Christian revelation by modern societies, such as how "our concern for victims is a secular mask of Christian love."[288]

That said, Auden's postwar poetry wavers between cozy kudos to modern conveniences and criticism of what happens when technological innovation is elevated to the status of panacea. *The Shield of Achilles*, the collection in which *Horae Canonicae* was first published in full, also includes Auden's off-kilter cycle of Virgilian pastorals, *Bucolics*, which the poet would recite, before *Horae Canonicae*, in a 1955 reading at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. In "Winds" (1953), the opening poem of this cycle, Auden's speaker searches for his "image / For our Authentic City."[289] He settles

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[287] Edward Mendelson, "Auden and God," *The New York Review of Books*. December 6, 2007, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2007/12/06/auden-and-god.
[288] Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 157.
[289] Auden, "Winds," in *Selected Poems*, 211.

on "old men in hallways / Tapping their barometers, / Or a lawn over which, / The first thing after breakfast / A paterfamilias / Hurries to inspect his rain-gauge."[290] Auden's City of God is characterized by the mincing precision of its scientifically minded citizens. In "The Common Life," his 1963 poem dedicated to Chester Kallman, Auden's speaker insists that "every home should be a fortress, / equipped with all the very latest engines / for keeping Nature at bay."[291] "Orthodoxy," observes Auden's speaker in "The Geography of the House" (1964), should "bless our modern plumbing," since "Swift and St. Augustine / Lived in centuries / When a stench of stewage / Ever in the nostrils / Made a strong debating / Point for Manichees." Modern homes protect us from threatening "Nature" and modern toilets flush down heresies. The "engines" of the modern world reaffirm, however indirectly, the infrastructural persistence of theology. According to these playful moments, Auden is subtle in his view of machines. They are benign insofar as they are treated with a dose of camp, which frequently attends Auden's imagination of the place of theological thought in the postwar world.

What Auden would elsewhere call his "Eden climes" allow him to frame an ideal *polis* in terms of the role that machines play in it. In "Vespers," the evening prayer of *Horae Canonicae*, Auden's "Arcadian" speaker populates the landscape of his "Eden" with belletristic, not bellicose, machines, since they are delightfully out of order or out of date and removed from their originally efficient functions: "a few beam engines, saddle-tank locomotives, overshot waterwheels and other beautiful pieces of obsolete machinery to play with."[292] The foil to Auden's Arcadian, an anonymous "Utopian" who longs for the legalistically administered justice of a "New Jersualem," dreams of a functionalist world in which, in yet another Audenesque compression of the organic and the technological, "even chefs will be cucumber-cool machine minders," and where people who dislike

[290] Ibid, 212.
[291] Auden, "The Common Life," 287.
[292] Auden, "Vespers," 236.

work are "very sorry [they] were born."[293] As these competing examples show us, Auden struggles to come down, one way or the other, on whether machines can be relieved of technocratic function and therefore poetically or even sacramentally redeemed as a "numinous" new beauty of a democratic liberal society. Auden's social realism holds that, in such a society, kings and Petrarchan Lauras are in short supply. He suggests, however, that once machines are de-coupled from the idolatry human beings pour into them, they re-emerge as an imaginatively charged occasion for liturgical communication, a surprisingly sanctifying blend of incense and smoke. In other words, Auden uncovers the numinous quality of machines once they have stopped working *as machines*.

In "Sext," the noontime prayer of *Horae Canonicae*, Auden posits a machine-like "social collectivity" on par with the one he describes in his prose. He identifies its rallying point as Golgotha. The "faceless" crowd in "Sext" will crucify its "victim" by distinctively mechanical means. At first, he praises cooks, surgeons, and clerks for "forgetting themselves in a function," the secular noun that he substitutes for the more properly Christian "vocation." In non-rhymed and trimetrical couplets, Auden's restrained speaker tips his hat to the everyday laborers who all "wear the same rapt expression" but channel appetite toward the perfection of the task at hand.[294] "How beautiful it is, / That eye-on-the-object look," Auden observes:

> To ignore the appetitive goddesses,
> to desert the formidable shrines
>
> of Rhea, Aphrodite, Demeter, Diana,
> to pray instead to St. Phocas,

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[293] Ibid, 235.
[294] Auden, "Sext," 227.

St. Barbara, San Saturnino,

or whoever one's patron is,

that one may be worthy of their mystery,

what a prodigious step to have taken.[295]

Auden's speaker argues that all human effort is devoted to one god, saint, or another, whether pagan or Christian in name. During the period when he conceived the plan for *Horae Canonicae*, Auden was drawing analogies between postwar Europe and the late Roman Empire, such as in the 1947 poem, "The Fall of Rome," and in his 1952 book review of Eleanor Clark's *Rome and a Villa*. In this review, he would draw a direct line between the civic religion of Rome, patronized by its surefire gods, and the supposedly godless technocratic "imperium" of the twentieth century:

> To Miss Clark and to all of us, I believe, in the middle of the twentieth century, the Roman Empire is like a mirror in which we see reflected the brutal, vulgar, powerful yet despairing image of our own technological civilization, an imperium which now covers the entire globe, for all nations, capitalist, socialist and communist, are united in their worship of mass, technique and temporal power.[296]

In "Sext," honest-to-goodness "function" serves the statecraft of the "technological imperium." Auden's speaker is sneaky about his allusions to the specific patron saints that sanctify the labor of these "unknown heroes," whose dignified work would seem to redeem the bureaucratic self-

[295] Ibid, 227-228.
[296] Mendelson, *Complete Works,* 321.

effacement of "The Unknown Citizen" (1939). In this ironic paean, those who "[work] in a factory and never got fired" become, "in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word . . . [saints]."[297]

"Sext" carries out a similar secularization of sainthood for political and even military purposes. Barbara is the patron saint of artillerymen, military engineers, miners, and others who work with explosives; Saint Saturnin ("San Saturnino") is the patron saint of bullfighters; and, more pacifically, Saint Phocas is the patron saint of gardeners. What is more, Saint Barbara has been suggested as the namesake for "barbiturates," the pharmaceutical category under which Auden's nighttime Seconal falls.[298] While this specific allusion would seem to be farfetched, Auden's earlier use of Benzedrine as a political- theological metaphor does not put it out of the question. Auden's speaker associates bellicose and organic occupations (fighter and gardener). He syntactically links them by a long series of commas. Auden aligns individual "function," the secular transposition of the theological idea of "vocation," with an ascetic sublimation of "[rapture]" for the postwar state, whether the citizen grows flowers or manufactures bombs. One is reminded of Rebecca West's obsessive preoccupation at the Nuremberg Trials with a one-legged German gardener, a recent casualty of the War, in the town outside the courtroom. The gardener's frenzied diligence proves, in her mind, the endurance, judicial reckoning be damned, of the war machine.[299]

In this sense of military function, the "first flaker of flints / who forgot his dinner" sublimates appetite for the ascetic development of tools of war. This is an ethos that, while incomparably more deadly than Auden's meal-forgetting clockwork, is not different in body-denying kind. Auden's speaker nonetheless respects the indebtedness of Western civilization, as he does in

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[297] Auden, "The Unknown Citizen," 93.
[298] Francisco Lopez-Munoz, Ronaldo Ucha-Udabe, and Cecilio Alamo, "The history of barbiturates a century after their clinical introduction," in *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 1 no. 4 (2005): 329-343.
[299] See Rebecca West, "Greenhouse with Cyclamens, Part One," in *A Train of Powder* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000).

his campy endorsement of barometers, homes, and toilets, to these functionaries of the state. In their renunciation of appetite, they practice a secular form of infrastructural asceticism.

As a whole, the poem is defined by its ambivalent mood toward the dignity of civilizational progress, the technological momentum that Benedictine liturgical regulation arguably kickstarts. "Where should we be but for them?" asks Auden's speaker, "Feral still, un-housetrained, still / wandering through forests without / a consonant to our names."[300] Auden continues to hold up the toilet as an icon of Western civilization. The condition of being "un-housetrained" is couched between two instances of "still," which reminds us of the "fresh and sunny still" quality of the impossible idyll of "Prime." This implies that both "feral" licentiousness and static contentment do not help a society to build its Nature-defying houses. Several lines later, at the end of section one of the poem, the speaker coolly acknowledges the important part these functionaries will have to play in the Calvary scene to come: "and, at this noon, for this death, / there would be no agents." In its quiet alliance of civilization and brutality, "Sext" looks forward to the conclusion of "Vespers," which argues, using a image of modern infrastructure for its religious claim, "For without a cement of blood (it must be human, it must be innocent) no secular wall will safely stand."[301]

In the third and final section of "Sext," the speaker turns his attention to the crowd that gathers at his contemporary Golgotha. Auden's speaker suggests that this event could happen anywhere under the sun. His addressee is open-ended and his spatial non-specificity resembles Eliot's politically ambiguous recognition in "Little Gidding" of "the place you would be likely to come from." Auden's speaker positions us "anywhere [we] like, somewhere / on broad-chested life-giving Earth, / anywhere between her thirstlands / and undrinkable Ocean."[302] The appetitive language of "broad-chested" and "undrinkable" suggests that the crowd seeks a cure for its thirst.

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300 Auden, "Sext," 228.
301 Auden, "Vespers," 237.
302 Auden, "Sext," 229.

Throughout this section, Auden's physiological rhetoric echoes that of John Donne in the theologically direct *Holy Sonnets*, who approaches the ecstatic apex of devotion from the sensual and nearly synesthesiac perspective of self-devouring appetite: "A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet."[303] From his more loosely anthropological perspective, Auden's speaker zooms in on the dry mouths of citizens desperate to whet their whistle by whatever means necessary. As in Donne, thirst stands not only for the physiological satisfaction of bodily appetite but for deep existential craving. Auden's speaker records the parched conditions for biblical or contemporary crucifixions. Along with Donne, we pick up on an echo of Coleridge: "Water, water, everywhere, nor any a drop to drink!"[304] The crowd, Auden's speaker observes, "stands perfectly still." The reappearance of "still" draws an analogy between the "slaves of Dame Kind," or Mother Nature, of the first section of the poem, who are "feral still." The discrete members of the crowd hope to pulverize the burdens that nature imposes on them. Auden imaginatively posits the crowd as a totalitarian form of secularized asceticism. Christian devotion and modern crowds respond to the same physiologically figured need for spiritual satisfaction.

Whereas Auden's speaker initially observes that you "have only to watch [the] eyes" of someone to know whether what they are doing is their "vocation," and extols the "eye-on-the-object-look" of the mundane worker, the crowd's "eyes (which seem one) and its mouths / (which seem infinitely many)" form a composite face that is "expressionless, perfectly blank." We recall the "blank-faced coaches" of the train in *Night Mail*. The crowd disturbs Auden's speaker because of its ironclad protection from human distraction. Inured to the visible cause-and-effect of violent acts,

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303 John Donne, "Since she whom I lov'd hath paid her last debt," Poetry Foundation, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44111/holy-sonnets-since-she-whom-i-lovd-hath-paid-her-last-debt.
304 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Poetry Foundation, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834.

and deprived of the fallible sense of "Terce" that things could have been different than they are, the social collectivity

> does not see (what everyone sees)
> a boxing match, a train wreck,
>
> a battleship being launched,
> does not wonder (as everyone wonders)
>
> who will win, what flag she will fly,
> how many will be burned alive,
>
> is never distracted
> (as everyone is always distracted)
>
> by a barking dog, a smell of fish,
> a mosquito on a bald head:
>
> the crowd sees only one thing
> (which only the crowd can see),
> an epiphany of that
> which does whatever is done.[305]

[305] Auden, "Sext," 229-230.

This is a negative paean to the virtue, or at least to the prerequisite *to* cultivable virtue, of non-mechanical human distraction. The five senses throw a spanner in the works of an "iron formula." This is another secularized reference, which has not been pointed out by critics, to Donne's devotional thought. In "At the Funeral of Sir William Cokayne," the poet-preacher reflects on a scene of distracted prayer. "I throw myself down in my chamber," Donne states, "and I call in, and invite God, and his Angels thither, and when they are there, I neglect God and his Angels, for the noise of a fly, for the rattling of a coach, for the whining of a door."[306] Auden's crowd, the mechanically answered prayer of the middling citizens in "Terce," engulfs the petty, unproductive hindrances of sight, sound, and smell: "mosquitoes on bald heads," "barking dogs," "the smell of fish."

Auden's crowd is "still," like Eliot's "still point of the turning world," because it secularizes eternity. In its orthodox Christian sense, capital-E "Epiphany" stands for the manifestation of Christ to the world, the Incarnation of eternity in time. Just as he secularizes "vocation" into "function," Auden's speaker secularizes Epiphany into "epiphany" and collapses the distinction between gods and men. Grammatically speaking, Auden's speaker imagines the crowd in the inhuman infinitive, without specific subject, specific verb, or specific tense: it is "An epiphany of that / Which does whatever is done."[307] Divinity is annihilated at the self-same moment of its manifestation in the totalitarian crowd, which is less "collectively effervescent," to borrow Durkheim's terms, than collectively and helplessly ascetic in the inhuman extreme. In this sense, it resembles the "geological" crowd of Muriel Spark's V-E Day scene. Reduced to this common and secular sense, "epiphany" is a bare "thing" that everyone, but not each person, witnesses as doing something to something. This is

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[306] *Oxford Essential Quotations*, 4th ed., s.v. "John Donne," accessed March 4, 2024, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00008610
[307] Auden, "Sext," 230.

the manifestation of the cancellation of the human need for anything to manifest itself—of spiritual longing altogether.

Monastic liturgy abides by a human calendar because, as human beings, the monks long for the presence of God. This creaturely need dictates what Tom Duggett has called, in explicit reference to the monastic progenitors of *Horae Canonicae* and in unintended reference to Auden's chemical life, "perpetual wakefulness."[308] Human temporality, suggests Duggett, is the condition for the possibility of the spiritual life and communal liturgical practice. "Sext" presents the crowd's mechanical and atemporal answer to unquenchable appetite and restless desire, which annihilates this characteristically human need. Saint Augustine's theological expression, "our hearts are restless, until they rest in You," is answered not by conversion but by the ecstasy of mass violence.

As Auden's speaker suggests, the crowd is where people go to lose themselves because this collective belonging, as distinguished from the humble honor of the everyday workman, is the lowest common denominator of the human race. Gathering at Golgotha is the "only thing all men can do." We find in "Sext" that "Whatever god a person believes in, / in whatever way he believes / (no two are exactly alike), / as one of the crowd he believes / and only believes in that / in which there is only one way of believing." Modern belief happens despite the competing options of religious pluralism and temporal challenges to faith, whether on the scale of the mundane or of a whole life. As one of the crowd, a person gives up on belief because, as a self-annihilated cog in the totalitarian machine, she is relieved to put out her lamp and embrace a secular dark night illuminated only by the floodlights of Nuremberg.

"Nones," the three-o'clock Good Friday poem of *Horae Canonicae*, turns more explicitly to the machine as an anti-sacrament that devalues the human condition of being "run-down" and

[308] Tom Duggett, "In Solitude, for Company: The City in W. H. Auden's *Horae Canonicae*," *English* 54 No. 210 (2005): 197.

soothes the fear in "Terce" of "[slipping] up." The crucifixion happens too fast for the analytical intellect and its technological means of representation: it "comes to pass / Before we realize it."[309] We only feel the dull pulse of its aftermath, which show up on the spiritual EKG of its participants. The poem begins *in medias res*, figuring the violence that has just taken place with incantatory internal rhyme, assonance, and alliteration. Even though we "know," on a notional level, this kind of brutality to be "not possible," its motivation is conjured, not cogitated. Reminding us of Auden's endorsement of the magical and musical quality of liturgy, the speaker anthropologically posits that the crucifying tendency is "revealed to a child in some chance rhyme / Like *will* and *kill*."[310] The speaker implicates himself and his readers in the crowd, since it is "we," not "they," who are "surprised / At the ease and speed of our deed." The murder exceeds the sensory parameters of heat, light, and duration: "we are not prepared / For silence so sudden and so soon; / The day is too hot, too bright, too ever."[311] We come to terms with the primordial predictions of the "wild hermits" our rationalism has left behind, of "shaman and sybil / Gibbering in their trances." The speaker grants them nearly oracular, trans-historical foresight. Its "time after time foretold" quality verges on pagan cyclicality. On these grounds, the biblical crowd at Golgotha would probably have been swept away in parallel to the Nazi rally at Nuremberg. As in the Christian double-entendre of the "machinery of our world," Auden's speaker suggests that the postwar emphasis on speed may amplify this universal tendency, since its march into progress can whisk away the suffering of "our victim," who "must be human, must be innocent."

Auden dwelled on the speed of modern life. In a 1951 review of Nicholas Nabokov's *Old Friends and New Music*, he argued that "From the artist's point of view, the worst feature of this age is

[309] Auden, "Nones," 231.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.

not its horrors—every age has been full of them—but the acceleration of its historical tempo."[312] Because efficient machines obediently carry out their functions, they do not allow their human operators to pause for reflection on what they are, to say nothing of how they affect us. In the crucial aftermath of "Nones," however, machines break down and make their operators aware of the ways in which they offload their moral concern. Auden's Golgotha scene is littered with derelict tools and machines. "Pile-driver, concrete-mixer, / Crane and pickaxe wait to be used again," records Auden's speaker, "But how can we repeat this?"

> Outliving our act, we stand where we are,
>
> As disregarded as some
>
> Discarded artifact of our own,
>
> Like torn gloves, rusted kettles,
>
> Abandoned branch-lines, worn lop-sided
>
> Grindstones buried in nettles.[313]

"Keep your nose to the grindstone" is the industrious idiom that lies behind this imagery. Here, the grindstone, a device for sharpening metal tools, is overtaken by nettles, whose generic name *Urtica* derives from the Latin for "sting." Nature bites back at its more efficient imitators. In the lines that precede this survey of littered tools and machines, Auden's speaker lists several Our Ladies, including the "Madonna with the green woodpecker," the "Madonna of the fig-tree," and, most pointedly, the "Madonna beside the yellow dam," who "turn their kind faces from us / And our projects under construction, / Look only in one direction, / Fix their gaze on our completed

[312] Mendelson, *Complete Works*, 240.
[313] Auden, "Nones," 232.

work."[314] Auden presents Our Lady of Nature (green woodpecker), Our Lady of the Fine Arts (the Marian iconography of the "fig-tree"), and Our Lady of Public Works ("the yellow dam"). Since the very idea of a "Madonna" is made possible by the end-result of the Gospels, and is unthinkable at the moment of the Crucifixion, the speaker's allusion to Marian patronage suggests that we are dealing with a contemporary rather than a biblical scene, or *a* Calvary as opposed to *the* Calvary.

Under the contemporary ethos of machines that work without stopping, we want to keep going on our technological march into secular progress—our mythified "projects under construction"—but find ourselves tossed aside with our tools, our *spiritual* work defined by the clock-stopping fact of Christ's corpse. Auden's speaker links in assonant series "are," "disreg*ard*ed," "disc*ard*ed," "*art*ifact," and "our," which, by linking first-person plural possession ("our") and spiritual dispossession ("discarded"), reaffirms the rebarbative artifice of the fallout of Calvary.[315] Auden argues that the murderous technology of the Second World War—suggested and prepared by "Prime," "Terce," and "Sext"—bounds back, in "Nones," on postwar citizens seduced by refrigerators and atomic bombs alike.

Tellingly, in Psalm 31, King David sums up spiritual dejection and social disgrace as the objection of oneself as a "worn-out tool."[316] Since the *Rule of Saint Benedict* is based upon the Psalms, it is not inconceivable that Auden, voracious reader as he was, would have been thinking of this characterization. Granting this allusive potential, we glimpse the most lucid way in which Auden can secularize the Psalmic foundation of the canonical hours without dispensing with its heavenly orientation. He seizes upon technological exhaustion as a potential prelude to the devotional life. "Worn-out by work," he might say, "our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." As Auden's postwar poems and essays suggest, the spiritual outcome of faith in applied science is not human

[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ps. 31.

mastery over the created world but the reign of the anonymous "social collectivity," as the poetically laudable power of the past is swallowed up by the popular infrastructural dictum, "form follows function."

Auden's speaker first employs a series of phrasal verbs that characterize the appetites for destruction dressed up in our "projects under construction." The prayer in "Terce" takes the form of a phrasal verb: "Not one of us will *slip up*." As a scene-setting for the crucifixion in "Nones," we behold the "faceless many" that "[wrecks] any world," which is "blown up, burnt down, cracked open, / Felled, sawn in two, hacked through, torn apart."[317] As the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, a phrasal verb works by compounding a verb and "another element (typically an adverb or proposition) which together function as a single syntactical unit."[318] These phrasal verbs describe, on the one hand, how tools sever things in general, cleaving them in two, and, on the other hand, how this act of separation is bound up with the auspicious Good Friday account of Matthew 27:51-53: "And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised."[319] Just as "Terce" foreshadows with paradoxical hope, the ordinary citizens who join the crowd take part in a technological theodicy. "Good Friday" is, of course, a theological paradox, since the death of Christ enables the Resurrection. As a symbol for brutal technocracy, Auden implements the crowd to show, in an especially postwar way, how evil can ultimately vindicate the good, even in an era that idolizes its own innovations.

Of course, the aftermath of Auden's crucifixion presents these tools in a state of disrepair; they have been done in by the hackwork of Golgotha. By breaking down, Auden's machines teach a particularly Benedictine spiritual lesson about the necessary interrelation of action and

[317] Ibid.
[318] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "phrasal (*adj.*), sense 1," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1114018426.
[319] Matt. 27:51-53.

contemplation. In the Benedictine tradition, "Ora et Labora" (work and prayer) expresses this harmony in liturgical terms.[320] Auden attempts to reclaim this equilibrium in secular terms. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines the material condition of "ready-to-hand" as the habitual and unnoticeable usefulness of an object.[321] When, according to this attitude, we take a hammer for granted, we do not see it as a composite of metal and wood but as an automatic technological extension, or, to borrow Auden's terms in "Prime," an unthinking "accomplice," of our will. When a hammer or any other tool or machine breaks down, however, we begin to see it as "present-at-hand," or in a more theoretical or scientific manner.

In "Nones," Auden aims not to see tools in the theoretical manner that Heidegger describes, but rather to teach us something about our own proclivity to forget about sin through the tools we use. Technology, Auden implies, tends to outsource our spiritual life. When the machinery of our world ceases to "function without a hitch," however, we come into contact with what "Prime" calls the Adam "still previous to any act," a human being not yet severed between flesh and spirit. Technological breakdown is both uniquely appropriate to the twentieth century and reflective of an age-old strife between work and contemplation. In Genesis, for instance, the Fall entails the "struggle to scratch a living" from labor.[322] To be sure, Auden is too aware of temporal frailty to hope for a total utopian restoration of the prelapsarian state of man. The temporal structure of the canonical hours gives him the tools to think about the waxing and waning of work and contemplation on a mundane scale. "A writer today may believe," says Auden, "if he is a Christian like T. S. Eliot or Graham Greene, that the temporal world is an analogue of the eternal, or, if he is a Platonist, that it is a parody, but it is very difficult for him to imagine what he believes, to portray,

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[320] "Ora and Labora," The Monastery of Christ in the Desert. accessed June 12, 2024, http://www.christdesert.org/about/prayer-and-work.
[321] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY University Press, 2010).
[322] Gen. 3:17.

for instance a temporal relationship like marriage as anything but sordid and corrupting."[323] Without being too starry-eyed about the social intelligibility of Benedictine liturgy in the postwar world, which would amount to a diluted and mid-century chain of being, "Nones" helps us to revise DuPont's technocratic creed for Christian purposes: "Broken-down things, for better living, through liturgy."

Our "wronged flesh," observes Auden's speaker, takes care of us while we are "thus away," even though we have injured it in our deadly daydreams at Golgotha. Dead to the world, our unconsciousness

> May work undisturbed, restoring
> The order we try to destroy, the rhythm
> We spoil out of spite: valves close
> And open exactly, glands secrete,
> Vessels contract and expand
> At the right moment, essential fluids
> Flow to renew exhausted cells,
> Not knowing quite what has happened, but awed
> By death . . .[324]

The mechanical model of the engine imitates the human model of physiology. "Valve," for instance, derives from the Latin *valva*, or the moving part of a door, and gives rise to both mechanical and physiological models that express inflows and outflows. As "essential fluids," blood or oil flow through the body or the engine. In Hayao Miyazaki's 2013 film *The Wind Rises*, for example, the

[323] Mendelson, *Complete Works*, 396.
[324] Auden, "Nones," 234.

Japanese aeronautical engineer Jiro Horikoshi, who designed the Zero fighter, praises the mackerel bone as an aviational prototype: "Beautiful, isn't it? Look at that wonderful curve."[325] "Aviation" itself derives from the French *avis*, or bird; this transition between the organic and the mechanical is dramatized by the opening scene of *A Canterbury Tale*, where a fourteenth-century falconer releases his bird, which returns, in the modern and mechanical form of a Spitfire, to a British soldier bearing an identical mien. This visionary sequence, which inspired Stanley Kubrick's cut from bone to orbiting spaceship in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, characterizes the kind of technological supersession of organic life that the breakdown of "Nones" attempts to redress. Good liturgy, Auden suggests, recovers the living sense of human order manhandled by the ironclad momentum of the "machinery of our world" and its diabolically "still" social forms. In tandem with the mechanical register of *Horae Canonicae* and the broader social imaginary of total war, this closing passage shows how the unconscious human body can be read as resistant to mechanical murder or as its "accomplice," given our injuring view of ourselves as machines. The pulse of the human body is respected by liturgy, he implies, but smothered by the "technological imperium" and its abstract labor time.

"What we discover in the Gospels," says Rene Girard, "in the death of Jesus as well as the death of John the Baptist, is a cyclic process of disorder and reestablishment of order that reaches its high point and ends in a mechanism of victimary unanimity." Girard strikingly settles upon the word "mechanism" to "signify the automatic nature of the process and its results, as well as the incomprehension and even the unconscious obedience of the participants."[326] The passage could not be more Audenesque, which argues for the poet's imaginative discovery of the anthropological truth that Girard had famously revealed, decades later, via his study of the Christian exception to the scapegoat "mechanism." Christ, argues, Girard, announces himself as the first blatantly innocent

[325] *The Wind Rises*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki (2013; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2013), Blu-Ray disc.
[326] Girard, *I See Satan*, 28.

scapegoat in the history of the world. In "Sext," the crowd gives up moral responsibility and time-keeping altogether; in "Nones," if we were to apply Girard's finding to the poem, we would shudder at how the "unconscious" crowd "cannot remember a thing / Between noon and three."

In the postwar poetry and thought of W. H. Auden, liturgical forms remain infused both by incense and smokestacks. Auden's creative secularity brings high-minded spirituality down to earth and, in turn, watches steam drift up into the heavens. His "numinous" view of industry is a Christian requisition of modern functionalism. It has to do with the re-constitution of the links between professions and imaginative dispositions that the modern "division of labor" and its sociological theories of secularization like to separate.

In one of his latest poems, "The Cave of Nakedness," written in praise of the soporific rites of bedtime, Auden again blends Benedictine liturgical order with the chemical life that attended his composition of *Horae Canonicae*. Auden's speaker gives thanks for how, "As a rule, with pills to help them, the Holy Four / exempt [his] nights from nuisance, and even wake [him] / When [he] would be woken."[327] He invokes the aid of the Holy Four Marshals, four saints venerated in the Rhineland, who would have looked kindly on Auden's bedtime routines at Kirchstetten in Austria. They were invoked against diseases and epidemics in more overtly Christian eras, such as smallpox, epilepsy, and the plague. For Auden, who has one foot in the ancient Church and another on the factory floor, even the intercession of saints can be boosted by "pills." In our own contemporary world of self-help mantras and meditation apps, which appeal to our desire for freedom from human limitation, we can appreciate his foresight even as we scratch our heads at his delightful contradictions. The popular "Calm" app, for example, cites as its several ways of "[improving] your health and happiness": "Improve sleep quality"; "Improve focus"; "Self-improvement"; and, most

[327] Auden, "The Cave of Nakedness," in *Selected Poems*, 285.

amusingly, "Bring Calm to my organization," a double meaning urging its utility for management consultants.

Whereas, as Dietrich von Hildebrand defines it, liturgy is essentially "communion-prayer," self-centered and opportunistic distortions of its heavenly orientation, which, modern as they are, take the machine as their secular sacrament:

> In other forms of piety, a military and hence *mechanical* discipline imposed on life divides the day into innumerable acts of the will and into a succession of deliberate emotions. Through a series of separate acts from without, having, as it were, a kind of auto-suggestive character, our life is transformed according to this discipline. The Liturgy, on the contrary, places uppermost the fundamental attitude to God and the enduring being of man; and it is from this fundamental attitude that the separate acts must grow organically. Certain forms of asceticism regard the blossoming of the supernatural as conditioned by a forced crushing of nature, by the application of a stoic indifference to all earthly goods. On the contrary, the Liturgy is organically linked to our nature, and leads us by organic degrees of transformation toward the supernatural.[328]

In *Horae Canonicae* and in the other Christian poems of Auden's postwar career, theology is a Queen of the Sciences in exile. By juxtaposing unadulterated Latin titles with a lowercase g "good Friday," as he pointedly puts it in "Terce," Auden augurs the confusion of spiritual exercises and chemical fixes that has come to the fore of our distracted and desperate contemporary world, but his apophatic interest in mechanical breakdown draws upon them as the inspiration for his secular liturgical imagination. In his postwar thought and poetry, W. H. Auden carefully traces how easily

[328] von Hildebrand, *Liturgy and Personality*, 107. Emphasis added.

faith can slip into function and how opportunistically a rule of prayer can degrade into technocratic self-regulation, for the self or for its society.

Chapter 5 Eliot's Dove-Bomber: Tactical Transfiguration in "Little Gidding"

In a letter to his fellow Moot member, J. H. Oldham, dated 27 August 1943, T. S. Eliot observed:

> We all tend much more to employ military terms and metaphors nowadays: but I wonder whether there is too much a suggestion of wiliness for material ends about the word 'strategy.' Incidentally, I think that there is a moderation to be observed in the use of military figures: the Church Militant should not become the *Panzerkirche*.[329]

Eliot's neologism, "*Panzerkirche*," reflected the German origin of two of the most influential members of this discussion group. As Eliot biographer Robert Crawford describes, The Moot, convened by Oldham, was founded by two professors, Adolf von Lowe and Karl Mannheim, who were dismissed from the University of Frankfurt am Main in 1933 under Nazi laws against "non-Aryans." They would join Eliot, pacifist John Middleton Murry, Catholic sociologist Christopher Dawson, German Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich, and several other ecumenical thinkers in "[focusing] on relations between Christianity and social organisation."[330] Moot members pinpointed a "crisis" involving "increasing divorce between the life of the Church and the life of the community."[331] Alert to the tendency of the "Church Militant,"[332] the non-combatant community of

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[329] Jim McCue and Christopher Ricks, eds. *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, Vol. I: Collected and Uncollected Poems* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 1053.
[330] Robert Crawford, *Eliot After the Waste Land* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022), 283.
[331] Ibid.
[332] From its first appearances in English (c. 1425), the *Oxford English Dictionary* associates the "Church Militant" with the visible Church on earth, as opposed to the "Church Triumphant," the "community of Christian souls in heaven."

living Christians, to become a worldly fighting force, Eliot cautioned against "a Christian totalitarian state" and advocated the bottom-up approach of a "local community within a nation and having wider relationships."[333]

Panzerkirche, a military-ecclesial compound noun, shadows Eliot's thinking about the public responsibility of the Church in wartime. Syntactically, Eliot leads with the negative idea of the Church as what is "not" totalitarian, just as he argues that the Church Militant should not capitulate to Hitler as a nouveau Constantine with a Nazi, not a Nicene, creed. The Nazi Party had conjured the begrudging or greedy support of certain German Lutherans and Catholics in the interwar years and during the Occupation. Given the understandable desire of the wartime state to call up every force at its disposal, including the Church, to fight fire with fire, the "not … but" syntax of Eliot's statements acknowledges the magnetic pull of political opportunism but also declines quietism as a reactionary form of self-preservation. Eliot points out the double-edged responsibility of Christians in historical crisis. They are in the world, speaking to its concerns in the intelligible terms of total war, but not of it. They are called to be the salt of the earth without losing their savor.

As a German compound noun, *Panzerkirche*, or "Panzer Church," holds the secular and the sacred in suspension. As an absurd conflation of the brutal tread of a tank and the heavenward gesture of a steeple, *Panzerkirche* is amusing and alarming in equal measure. Unsurprisingly, the neologism is limited to Eliot's usage: it did not become a buzzword, nor did it enjoy Shakespearean staying power.[334] It is unclear what new noun is catalyzed by the reaction of Church to military force—or vice-versa. Beyond a paratactic juxtaposition of ill-fitting things, what does *Panzerkirche* signify as a compound term? As opposed to the English noun "bread," for example, the

[333] Ibid.
[334] There is the relatively insignificant exception of the Danish death metal band, "Panzerchrist," formed in 1993, which has "Metal Church" as one of its song titles. Taken from Wikipedia article, accessed 17 May 2024. http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panzerchrist.

transformed result of baking a mixture of flour, water, salt, and yeast, *Panzerkirche* does not hide the remaining ingredients of Eliot's ambiguous transfiguration of the ideally peaceful "Church Militant." Like *blitzkrieg*, which yokes "lightning" and "war," *Panzerkirche* harnesses spiritual force for military shock-value, but it does not let us take political-theological conflation for granted. Despite the relative obscurity of his neologism, Eliot demonstrates tactical intelligence. I argue in this chapter that Eliot thinks both with and against the political-theological imagination of the '40s—in the idolatrous exegesis of Goring, for example, the "baptism of fire" (*Feuertaufe*)—which was pressed into provident secular service. With *Panzerkirche*, Eliot spotlights the stark parataxis of German compound nouns to undermine the self-evidence of imaginative air superiority. By fusing God's favor with their sliver of history and field of action, wartime states assume control of the skies.

"Little Gidding" (1942), published one full year before Eliot's admonitory letter, boasts its own military-ecclesial compound figure, this time in English and from the beleaguered point of view of the London Blitz. Rather than setting its ingredients side by side, however, the poem splits the parts of this compound figure in distinct sections, which cohere in another, "transfigured" pattern, the "[renewing]" Christian faith that equips Eliot with spiritual sight of brutally literal things.[335] The image of the "dove" appears twice in "Little Gidding." In section II, Eliot's speaker reflects on the Blitz aftermath of the "dark dove with the flickering tongue" which "had passed below the horizon of his homing / While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin."[336] Given the transfiguration of natural "leaves" into metallic "tin," it is hard to interpret the "dark dove" as anything but a Heinkel, however non-dove-like such a heavy bomber would have appeared and sounded in the nighttime skies over London. In section IV, however, whose structural role in the *Quartets* John Whittier-

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[335] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Vol. I, ed, Jim McCue and Christopher Ricks* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press), 206.
[336] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 203.

Ferguson has characterized as "obdurately Christian," impermeable to a "secularizing of the text,"[337] the dove is without the qualifying adjective "dark," an infernal inversion of the lucidity of the Holy Spirit which, by taking the physical form of a beautiful bird, transfigures it for spiritual purposes, just as temptation permanently sullies the physical form of a snake.

Described in theologically self-sufficient terms and arguably independent of Eliot-the-poet's own transfiguring work, the dove of section IV is a plain statement of biblical fact, not necessarily tied to immediate features of the London landscape or the *Luftwaffe*:

> The dove descending breaks the air
> With flame of incandescent terror
> Of which the tongues declare
> The one discharge from sin and error.
> The only hope, or else despair
>   Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
>   To be redeemed from fire by fire.[338]

Without the figurative compression of *Panzerkirche*, the military register of the second and scriptural "dove descending" is only implicit; its articulation with the first "dark dove" is up in the air. Eliot's two doves share alliterative momentum (dark dove, dove descending) and physical substance, but they are not isomorphic. In the first case, the adjective "dark," in the wartime poetic mode of requisition, converts a harbinger of peace into a Heinkel. The neatly bookended vowels of the phrase "horizon of his homing" convey the scientific exactitude of a surefire "homing device," but

[337] John Whittier-Ferguson, *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 61.
[338] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 207.

the "flickering tongue" of the dark dove suggests a blurred line between technological precision and technological malfunction, like ambiguous static between distinct stations; tactical bombing, which aims for just one target, slips into indiscriminate "terror bombing."[339] We think also of the natural know-how of a "homing pigeon," which always flies back to its loft, or what the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls the "faculty possessed by animals" of "returning home from a distance."[340] The dove dons a metallic frame, an adjective, "dark," as a figurative encasing, but it has not been entirely transformed, which is why an adjective, not a new noun, is appropriate.

In the second case, the dove lacks an adjective. The gerund "descending" conveys, with scriptural fidelity, the pure action of the Christian mystery of the Descent of the Holy Spirit: this is the theologically unadulterated sense in which Whittier-Ferguson speaks of the resistance of section IV to a "secularizing of the text." That said, the approximate rhyme royal scheme Eliot uses is hardly straightforward. It blurs, as if breathlessly, what should be its distinctive "A" and "B" rhyming pairs. "Air" and "declare" form the "A" pair, while "terror" and "error" form the "B." Sonically speaking, "air" and "terror" are hardly distinguishable, save the hard consonant "t" of "terror" and the additional syllable. The same can be said for "declare" and "error," which, said in alternation with the "A" pair, make for a formidable tongue twister. They generate a cyclonic whirl. While this first of the two stanzas of section IV troubles absolutely distinct articulation, its near-but-not-identical rhymes also insist upon the categorical differences, however wobbly, between military and ecclesial things. Metaphor wants to transform them into something new—"Juliet *is* the sun," for example—but Eliot teeters on the edge of absorption in total war. By teasing us with the specter of everything blending into everything else, Eliot formally enacts the magnetic pull of the first "dark dove"

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339 See Richard Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1980), for an extended discussion of this unfortunate development, which, before the war, even Hitler and Goring had sought to avoid at all costs.
340 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "home (*v.*), sense 4.a," December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9563186841.

passage upon the Church itself, understood traditionally to be founded at the Pentecost event that section IV describes.

This stanza is in iambic tetrameter, with the notable exception of the third line, "Of which the tongues declare," whose clipped trimeter adds metrical trip-ups to the bargain—and reminds us of the intermittence of the "flickering tongue" of section II. Eliot aligns, in parallel, both the basic subject of the two sections ("dove") and their distinctive property ("tongue"). Again, however, in the case of the more theologically strict section IV, the tongue of the dove is just a tongue of fire, true to its figurative inheritance from the Acts of the Apostles; it is not "flickering" or qualified by any poetic act of requisition. Thanks to its largely scriptural, not experiential, context, the dove of section IV *is* the Holy Spirit in a way that the "dark" dove is not. Thanks to this fine line between theological deference and poetic daring, these two sections tempt us to view them perpendicularly as opposed to in parallel: do we see one German bomber in two different ways, or do these two separate sections describe two categorically different things? Can the bomber remain a bomber and bear a pneumatic significance for the Blitzed civilian or Eliot the fire-warden?

Despite the pretense of grammatical precision of "of which"—the preposition seems to be more at home in Eliot's occasionally mincing prose—it lacks a clear referent. Does Eliot enjamb, with syntactical fluidity, "terror / Of which the tongues declare," or does he mean "of which" to refer to "the dove descending" or to "flame"?[341] Two preceding and competing prepositions—"with," "of"—scramble the source of the purgative "discharge" of our "sin and error." To what extent are these elements swallowed up by the "incandescent" flame, which heats and refines its crude historical materials into pure, radiant, and timeless form? Eliot's speaker suggests that "of which" can be read as either separating these materials or combining them, just as the compound form of *Panzerkirche* weighs military and ecclesial authority in the balance, suggesting but not

[341] Ibid.

dictating an emergent third reality, transfiguring but not necessarily transforming its ingredient nouns.

The cyclonic whirl of the stanza is felt in the "CC" rhyme of the closing couplet, too, where Eliot pairs "pyre" and "fire." These nouns are substantially identical and just barely sonically distinguishable, with the puncturing "p" the only heard difference between them. The semantic effect is tautological, bolstered by the non-choice of "pyre or pyre" and the self-same redemption "from fire by fire." And yet, as we saw with the qualifying adjective "dark" of the pre-theological bomber of section II, a funeral pyre is a ceremonial fire, a human harnessing of formless, natural force, just as birds furnish aeronautical prototypes. Eliot's non-choice is between burning involuntarily and burning voluntarily, of dying *in* the Blitz or dying *to* oneself. "Little Gidding" implies that these two forms of dying are not identical, but also not mutually exclusive. A bomber may put the fear of God into its victim, but it does not guarantee spiritual conversion; such an act depends upon a turning-toward, not unwilled horror. Still, at least once the general fact of mortality comes to qualify the immediate threat of the Blitz, there is no choice between safe and unsafe places, nor can one opt out of "fire" in the purgative sense in which it is presented here. One can deal with fire ceremonially, harnessing it for the rite of a "pyre" or simply perishing in the unfeeling flames. In his 1929 essay on Dante, Eliot would argue that "The souls in purgatory suffer because they *wish to suffer*, for purgation."[342] The suffering of civilians in the Blitz is more a curse conjured than a wish granted. In either case, violence—whether bound up with physical or spiritual combat—is inevitable. In "Little Gidding," Eliot aims not to bless the bomber directly but to see in it, as in all the death-dealing instruments of the ages, a special opportunity for spiritual decisiveness.

[342] T. S. Eliot, "Dante," in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, *Vol. 3: Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929*, ed. Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 713.

Since section IV pays more disciplined homage to its scriptural source in the Acts of the Apostles, it is important to consider the starkly different political subtexts of German and Christian doves. The biblical account does not shy away from ecclesial politics, which is bound up with the polyglot effect of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, by which the Apostles find themselves miraculously able to speak and understand the many languages of their time. It is helpful in this regard to turn to the inarticulate foil to this pneumatic universality, Louis MacNeice's portrayal of German bombers in "The Trolls." In this April 1941 poem, "written after an air-raid," MacNeice envisions the "blank smirk" on the faces of German bombers, which "don't know what they are doing."[343] MacNeice replaces Eliot's hints of technological precision with the clumsy verbs and nouns "stutter and lurch," "congurgitation," and "stumble and shamble." The *Luftwaffe* ends by "grinding [its hobnails] . . . into the domed / Head where the organ music lingers." Rather than dressing itself up in sacred apparel, MacNeice's bomber gulps up, "in clodhopping boots that crunch the stars," the very idea of spiritual ascent. By virtue of his reference to the "domed / Head" of a bombed church, MacNeice positions the *Luftwaffe*, and other national air forces, at the apex of a new and limited horizon of imagination and consideration, as in the sidereal perspective, the cosmic view from the common skies, that they "crunch." The disjunction between the heavy-handedness of the bombers—"clodhopping boots"—and their impossible aerial targets (how does one "crunch" the stars?) brings a monoglot empire down to earth.[344]

In the account of Pentecost from Acts 2, however, mutual understanding is the blessed consequence of the tongues of fire coming to rest on the Apostles. "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven," Luke writes of this diverse assembly of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. "When they heard this sound [of the Holy Spirit], a crowd

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[343] Louis MacNeice, "The Trolls," in *Springboard: Poems 1941-1944* (New York: Random House, 1945), 19.
[344] Ibid.

came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken."[345] In Luke's account, Pentecost shapes the nascent Church as universal, in the sense that it establishes an international community grounded in Trinitarian intelligibility, a unity within difference. In MacNeice's account of the Blitz, the bomber more closely approximates the confusion and private languages of the Tower of Babel. Against the reduction of the cosmic perspective to the stars on a flag, this is the redemptive political context of Pentecost, the Christian citizenship Eliot characterizes by the idea of "a local community within a nation and having wider relationships," that most of the poet's critics tend to ignore in their distaste of his political-theological imagination.

Despite the subtle differences between the two doves of "Little Gidding," critics have generally criticized Eliot of the kind of political-theological fusion that the poet associates with the figure of the *Panzerkirche*. They tend intuitively to collapse sections II and IV into each other. Michael North, for example, argues that the "resolving paradoxes" of the poem "seem inhumanly cold next to the reality of fire, and the alarming conflation of German bombers and pentecostal dove at the beginning of [section IV] seems too boldly cruel." According to North, Eliot "gambles everything on a stylistic stunt, on the hope that by calling death and salvation by the same name he can surprise his readers into sensing their paradoxical union." But the "very extremity of the rhetoric here," North concludes, "shows how far Eliot has still to go, how much the whole gamble of *Four Quartets* remains up in the air."[346] The verbs and nouns North uses—"resolving," "conflation," "union"—suggest a suspicion of glib rhetoric, of Eliot's facile alchemy in "calling death and salvation by the same name."

North implies that Eliot's "extreme" rhetoric sanctifies wartime violence. "Calling death and salvation by the same name," however, is not an inaccurate characterization of (willfully) self-

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[345] Acts 2:4-6.
[346] Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126.

sacrificial Christianity, since, as Saint Paul says, "our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body of sin might be destroyed."[347] But if what North targets is the act of "blessing, in the name of the Holy Spirit, a German bomber," as in the contemporary photographs of Russian Orthodox bishops blessing fighter jets, then his reservations are understandable. The charge of "[cruelty]" hinges upon whether Eliot singles out the bomber as bloodily providential or merely views it as a test, like any other bloody installment in the theodical record, of Christian faith. What is less convincing is North's own interpretive "conflation" of the two doves of "Little Gidding," whose distinct forms and connotations deserve more careful consideration. Why would Eliot paratactically juxtapose two kinds of dove instead of giving us one transformed noun, the "alarming conflation of German bombers and Pentecostal dove at the beginning of [section IV]" that North assumes self-evidentially to be the case?

While he is more sympathetic to the Dantean allegories of *Four Quartets*, Sebastian Knowles surveys the critical reception of North's "stylistic stunt" in similar terms. North writes in 2009, Knowles in 1990: the twenty-year gap between them, and their isomorphic terms, demonstrates the enduring distastefulness, or outright cruelty, of Eliot's dove-bomber. Setting aside his misidentification of a Messerschmitt rather than a Heinkel or a Junkers, Knowles observes how "Eliot's use of a Nazi fighter-plane as the vehicle for the Holy Ghost has disturbed many critics, some of whom dismiss the conjunction as puerile and perverse." "Conjunction" is more fitting than "conflation," since it at least retains the idea of an "and" that qualifies a fusion, but Knowles moves ahead with the "conflation" of these two images. They are a "welcome medievalism" for twentieth-century Londoners, since the unchosen flames are actually "heaven-sent," and Knowles reads the conflation of Eliot's doves as a seventeenth-century gesture to Donne and company: "The two

[347] Rom. 6:6.

conflicting images are yoked by violence together in the best tradition of metaphysical poetry."[348] With a nod to Samuel Johnson's infamous critique of the forced conceits of metaphysical poetry, the lyrical act itself, the "[yoking]" of disparate images, represents a poetic "violence."

As a verb that does a lot of work for critics of "Little Gidding," "conflate" requires a closer look. The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates its first appearances from the late sixteenth century (not so surprisingly, just decades before the rise of the metaphysical poets), where it means "to blow or fuse together; to bring together and make up from various sources or various elements."[349] The military force of the verb suits the claim that Eliot means to bless the German bomber. It is important to note, however, that conflation, in its third, more current sense, is a function of interpretation: "to combine or fuse two variant readings of a text into a composite reading; to form a composite reading or text by such fusion."[350] A conflated reading is not simply *there,* on the page, in the form of a single transformed image or noun. It depends upon "various elements," or separate things, the impossibly potent poetry that critics refine, but also reduce, in their readings. The point is not that North and Knowles are wrong to conflate Eliot's two doves, since critics cannot help but draw associations and conclusions; only that, in my view, Eliot deserves a more nuanced treatment of the up-in-the-air quality of these images' union. The stakes are high. Either we are talking about the literal transformation, à la "fusing" or "[blowing]," of a Heinkel bomber into the Holy Spirit, or a less theologically bold and more poetically ambiguous maneuver of *seeing-as*. Transfiguration, as it operates in each of these chapters, differs from transformation in that the matter being transfigured remains what it is: one person on the ground may a see bomber, and nothing else, and Eliot, informed by his theological imagination, may perceive a contemporary echo of a biblical episode: in

[348] Sebastian D. G. Knowles, *A Purgatorial Flame: Seven British Writers in the Second World War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 111.
[349] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "conflate (*v.*), sense 1," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3447657516.
[350] Ibid, sense 3.

either case, the bomber remains a bomber. The idea of a "remainder," what is left behind but not obliterated, undergirds the difference between absolute transformation and poetic transfiguration.

If critics conflate the two doves in a way that misses Eliot's own ambivalence, the propagandists behind the *Luftwaffe* had no scruples about conflating Holy Spirit with air power, about yoking deadly and divine descent. As the air war historian Richard Overy points out, "When Hitler caused the film of *Luftwaffe* experience in Poland, 'The Baptism of Fire,' to be shown in the embassies of neutral countries in 1940 and 1941, the object was to complete the myth that German air power was invincible, and was in itself the cause of Axis victories."[351] By virtue of the title of this film, Nazi propagandists secularized and de-humanized John the Baptist into a bomber announcing a new covenant with lethal force.

In Matthew 3:11, we read that John the Baptist will "indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."[352] Several verses earlier, the proclamation of John the Baptist begins with a call to "repent," or to turn one's life away from sin. When the Pharisees and Sadducees come for baptism, he rejects them because they claim a patrilineal, or Abrahamic, right to do so. John the Baptist asks for a change of heart, not an authorization of cultural or ethnic legitimacy. By appropriating this episode in the Gospels, the Nazis pitch air superiority to the still-nominally-Christian "neutral countries" as a ritualistic initiation into a new kind of totalitarian religion. This time, however, there is no decision to be made, only fear to be felt in the face of raw force, which will burn its victims into its image. The phrase "baptism of fire," like Muriel Spark's "the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing," or the lower-case-e "epiphany" of W. H. Auden's Golgotha crowd, enacts what the theologian William Cavanaugh calls

[351] Richard Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1980), 206.
[352] Matt. 3:11.

the "transfer of care for the holy from the church to state."[353] Indeed, in the present day, "baptism of fire" has been secularized for military purposes. Sense 2.b of "baptism" in the *OED* characterizes "baptism of fire" as a soldier's "first experience 'under fire' in battle."[354] The phrase also implies "martyrdom, especially by fire."[355] In its military and martyrdom senses, "baptism of fire" implies an experience that no one can prepare for. In its appropriation by the Nazis, "baptism of fire" instills fear as a tactic of political intimidation, of involuntary conversion by military force.

Indeed, beyond *Baptism of Fire*, the idea of air power was frequently bound up with ideas of God, whether Axis or Allied in form. As David Pascoe has recently pointed out, in the "dazzling account of *War and Cinema*" of Paul Virilio, the French philosopher "was struck by the fact that, immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, aviation 'was becoming one way, or perhaps even the ultimate way, of *seeing*'; in effect, the Air Force emerged out of the art of reconnaissance."[356] Richard Overy defines the military-cultural ambience of the '30s and '40s as one of "air-mindedness"[357]; Mark Rawlinson points to the "iconography and mythology of military technology" that ponders the "awful sublimity of new weapon systems."[358] According to Charles Williams' *Descent of the Dove* (1939), likely one of the most important factors in Eliot's decision to employ the dove as a symbol, the first few centuries of the early church were defined by their own kind of air-mindedness, the expectation for the *parousia*.[359]As it became apparent that Christ was not likely to return in this way, Williams, argues the Church, founded on the Pentecostal event cited by "Little

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[353] William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 2.

[354] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "'baptism of fire' in baptism (*n.*), sense 2.b," December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3766427416.

[355] Ibid.

[356] David Pascoe, "Warplane," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature*, ed. Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 368.

[357] Overy, *The Air War*, 207.

[358] Mark Rawlinson, "Introduction: Technology," in *The Edinburgh Companion,* 352.

[359] Robert Crawford demonstrates the impact of this book, which Eliot reviewed, on the poet. "Tom's involvement [with Bruce Richmond's planned anthology, *The Pattern of Freedom*]," writes Crawford, "encouraged the inclusion of Paul Elmer More's work, and he acclaimed Charles Williams's survey of Christian history, *The Descent of the Dove*, which emphasised the 'difficulty' of trying to 'know and endure' the 'Descent of the Dove' of the Holy Spirit."

Gidding," began to "accommodate [itself] to time." The Second Coming of Christ was supposed to end the secular world; it trickled, instead, into the intermediary institutions of Christendom, and had begun to flicker out by the time in which Eliot was thinking and writing. In "Little Gidding," the Holy Spirit announces itself in terms of human and historical crisis—of the unavoidable existential decision—rather than outright apocalypse.

Christopher Nolan's recent film *Oppenheimer* amplifies the way in which J. Robert Oppenheimer drew upon the devotional language of John Donne for his own kind of affirmation of the terrible beauty of the bomb, if not its implicit association with Christian purgation. A soft, barely intelligible voiceover of the opening line of Donne's poem of forceful juxtaposition between burning, breaking, battering, and devotional submission, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God," can be heard just before the test detonation in the desert. Oppenheimer used "Trinity" as a code name for the project, which styled itself according to a secularized physical mystery of three-in-one.[360] At least in the '30s and '40s, air power did not shy away from divinity. The poem "High Flight" by the American pilot John Magee, Jr., who was killed in a mid-air collision over England in 1941, describes the pilot going "up, up the long delirious, burning blue" and "[trodding] / The high untrespassed sanctity of space." He "[puts] out [his] hand, and [touches] the face of God."[361] David Pascoe uses an apophatic and ecstatic vocabulary to describe how poet-pilots "were . . . ever free to explain the thrill of it all; and even then, their powers of description were waning and wanting."[362] In his reading of Yeats' "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," Pascoe imagines the pilot again, in an apophatic mode, as a kind of modern mystic, who is carried by his state-of-the-art machine "into the turbulent clouds of unknowing."[363] In Rex Warner's 1940 allegorical novel *The Aerodrome*, a fascist air force

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[360] *Oppenheimer*, dir. Christopher Nolan (2023; Universal City, CA, Universal Pictures).
[361] John Magee, Jr., "High Flight," Poetry Foundation, accessed 4 May 2024. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/157986/high-flight-627d3cfb1e9b7.
[362] Pascoe, "Warplane," 369.
[363] Ibid.

embeds itself into the terrain of rural England and supplants its civic and parochial life. The "Flight-Lieutenant" indecorously officiates the funeral of the squire of the village, where he announces himself as its "new vicar." "I've just been transferred to the religious department," he says, configuring its faith in bureaucratic terms, and "when we occupy the village I'm going to be the padre."[364] Each Sunday, he "[reads] the appropriate services," but he "[appears] always in his Air Force uniform.[365] As in the *Luftwaffe*'s appropriation of Christian language for ambiguously sacred or secular effect, Warner reaffirms just how often the air power of wartime secular states was donning sacred apparel.

Given the frequent citation and appropriation of religious thought in the wartime military imagination, Eliot's conjunction of plane and Pentecost was a way for him to perceive the public implications of his private devotional life and to externalize them in a new, albeit difficult, allegory. The poster of *Baptism of Fire* (*Feuertaufe*) features a Junkers Ju 87 "Stuka" dive-bomber, which was decisive in the early months of the war. Several critics of Eliot, including Knowles, conflate the "dark dove" of the Blitz with a Stuka, which is anachronistic, given that its uses were tactical (in support of ground troops), and largely confined to the Spanish Civil War and incursions into Poland and France in 1939 and 1940. As an instrument of the kind of strategic, long-range bombing required by the Blitz, the Stuka would have been ineffective, given its limited fuel capacity and vulnerability both to defending British fighters and to anti-aircraft guns. It would have been far more likely for Eliot, who was an Air Raid Warden in Kensington, to have witnessed the Heinkel He 111 or the Junkers Ju 88, both of which were medium-weight bombers. The Stuka was officially withdrawn from the Blitz in August of 1940, since it depended upon air superiority for its efficacy, and the Battle of Britain was fought to determine the very outcome of that air superiority. Given this

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364 Rex Warner, *The Aerodrome* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 132.
365 Ibid, 133.

contradiction between matter and symbol—and it is no small one, since dive- and medium-weight bombers are visually and starkly distinguished by payload, speed, and proximity to the ground—we can see Eliot taking poetic liberties with the cold facts of war. As fire-warden, Eliot would have known in his bones that medium-weight bombers did not resemble doves. As opposed to the *Luftwaffe*, which conflates the air power of the temporal state with the eternal Holy Spirit, Eliot shirks such political-theological fusion. Historical war is not ultimate for Eliot; the bomber does not announce the Third Reich as a Second Coming, no matter how much the Nazis would like it to do, nor does air power, by means of Heinkel, Stuka, or Spitfire, arrogate the Descent of the Holy Spirit. Christianity remains the allegorical zenith of "Little Gidding." The point of Eliot's aeronautical infidelity is that he does not attempt to sanctify immediate historical data; he associates, but does not fuse, dove and bomber.

For its part, the Stuka bore a device that alluded to a military episode in the Book of Joshua. In Spain and Poland, observes Stuka historian Peter C. Smith, "The morale of troops when subjected to dive-bombing was found to be very low and to increase this effect [Ernst Udet, the originator of the Stuka] had the idea of increasing the natural howling of the power dive by the addition of a siren on the leg of the landing gear." This siren came to be known as the "Trumpet of Jericho." This simple device, Smith says, "*had an effect quite out of proportion to its value*—and not only in Spain. Combined with the roaring engines and the thud of exploding bombs, and added to the fact that a dive-bomber in a power-dive always appears to be aiming specifically at you, many troops broke and fled in the French and British armies."[366]

It is not surprising that Eliot may have had the Stuka in mind as a secularized *memento mori* device, given Smith's characterization of its harrowingly personal point of impact ("a dive-bomber in a power-dive always appears to be aiming specifically at you"). So long as it does not kill, the

[366] Peter C. Smith, *The Stuka at War* (London: Ian Allan, 1971), 15. Emphasis added.

individually addressed force of the Stuka may be harnessed for properly Christian baptisms of fire. An involuntary military threat may be turned, or transfigured into, a force of religious conversion. In the occasional verse poem "A Note on War Poetry," published the same year as "Little Gidding," Eliot does not shy away from the inherent violence of wartime transfiguration: "Where is the point at which the merely individual / Explosion breaks / In the path of an action merely typical / To create the universal, originate a symbol / Out of the impact?"[367] Although the poetic "universal" represents the conflating "impact" of "individual / Explosion" and "typical" action, Eliot spotlights its separate elements. His intermittently terse meter ("Explosion breaks") and line-breaks "Merely individual / Explosion breaks . . . meeting / On which we attend" suggest the discrete components of a poetic symbol, not just its transformation-without-remainder. He acknowledges the kinds of critiques that North and Knowles make of the bloodless violence of metaphysically minded poetry, which "breaks" or "yokes" private and human suffering into "typical" or "universal" symbols, like the hybrid warbird they perceive in "Little Gidding."

Eliot highlights poetry's ability to abstract human immediacy into an enduring, because posthumous, "pattern," by which the accumulated images and affections of all our first impressions resolve themselves, once we are long gone, into final coherence. In "Little Gidding," he will take "from the defeated" a "symbol perfected in death."[368] In "The Dry Salvages," Eliot characterizes the Incarnation in philosophical terms ("The point of intersection of the timeless / With time") that share the "point" of "A Note on War Poetry." Symbols, Eliot thinks, require human casualties, willed or unwilled. In "Little Gidding," "the "point of intersection" can also be a bullet-point, which "breaks" human life into the "path of an action merely typical."

[367] Eliot, "A Note on War Poetry," in *Poems*, 215.
[368] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 207.

Anthony Domestico has recently proposed an alternative theological model for Eliot, one that makes us re-think the debts he paid to the Thomistic tradition in his public prose. Domestico highlights Eliot's editorship at *The Criterion* of Karl Barth's work. As Domestico puts it, a "disjuncture exists between Eliot the religious critic and Eliot the religious poet." As a critic and a High-Church Anglican, argues Domestico, "Eliot was associated with French neo-Thomism, a theological movement that emphasized the *analogia entis*, stressing that nature was not destroyed but perfected by grace and that Creator and creation could live in harmonious order." As a poet, however, Domestico claims that "Eliot was more aligned with the Barthian position, which focused not on the analogy between Creator and creation but on the absolute gap between them," since, by his critical reckoning, "*Four Quartets* is structured around a series of epiphanies—the moment in the rose garden, the flashing of "winter lightning," the "Midwinter spring" when "the short day is brightest, with frost and fire"—that derive their intensity from all the nonepiphanic time and language that precede and follow them."[369] Domestico distinguishes between prosaic "assertion" and poetic "enactment" of Thomistic sacramentality. Against the idea that *Four Quartets* is auspiciously Incarnational, and dwells in the harmony of creation and creator, Domestico argues that "Eliot's poetry generally, and *Four Quartets* specifically, explores not a world charged with the grandeur of God, but a fallen world occasionally and violently intersected by transcendence."[370] What is distinctive about Domestico's vocabulary, and the reason for its appearance in this chapter, is his emphasis on the interdependence of the rhetoric of violence and Eliot's theology. The vocabulary is even more unsettling when Domestico turns to excerpts from Barth's work that Eliot would have read and edited.

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[369] Anthony Domestico, *Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 42.
[370] Ibid.

"The imagery of a bombed-out earth," says Domestico, "the refusal to settle into one metaphorical description of the law, the yoking of God and violence—all are typical of the Barthian style (and, it hardly needs to be said, of modernist style as well)."[371] Note Domestico's characterization of Barth's "yoking," which seems to play into the hands of Knowles' resistance to "aestheticizing the *Luftwaffe*," which he ties back to the "[yoking]" of the Metaphysical poets. Domestico cites Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, which "provides an array of apocalyptic, often militaristic images: the word of God is figured as "dynamite [that] is prepared and ready to explode," revelation as a stroke of lightning that "purifies . . . carbonizes . . . consumes and destroys," the gap between God and man as "the crevasse, the polar zone, the desert barrier."[372] For Barth, the intersection of time and eternity is "the crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell."[373]

Whether or not Karl Barth is really Eliot's Aquinas, we should not run away from the compound of Christianity and violence in "Little Gidding," which, "ephemeral" beauties aside, at least juxtaposes the elemental force of the tongues of "fire" of Pentecost with the "flickering tongue" of a German bomber. Indeed, despite the resistance he expresses to the wartime ubiquity of "military metaphors," Eliot does not hesitate to use them in occasional moments of unwittingly Churchillian rhetoric.[374] In a paper that was circulated among the Moot Society before its late-December 1941 meeting, "Revival of Christian Imagination," Eliot posits the Church as a (spiritual) fighting force:

> It may be that some situations of anti-religion, religious deterioration, competing religion, etc., may be favorable to the birth and growth of the Christian Imagination, in various ways of stimulation,

[371] Ibid, 47.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid.
[374] See Crawford, *Eliot After the Waste Land*, where the author examines Eliot's love-hate relationship with political language.

> irritation and degeneration, while other situations are not. We have to allow for the possibility that our historical position is unique, and that the forces against which we fight, both in ourselves and in our environment, differ in some ways both in purpose, armament, and tactics from those of any historical parallel.[375]

In this paper, which reflects the public aim of the Moot to reconcile "Christianity and social organisation," Eliot sees the bright side of "stimulation, irritation and degeneration" and frames the issue with the agonistic rhetoric of "armament" and "tactics," which apply both inside and outside the Church. Despite his typical hedging ("may be," "in some ways"), he suggests that the Second World War sets the stage for an unprecedented kind of spiritual battle ("differ from those of any historical parallel"). In his 2 April 1941 BBC broadcast, "Towards a Christian Britain," Eliot characterizes the idea of "Christian Britain" as "[implying] not merely converts, but the conversion of social consciousness."[376] Part of that "conversion of social consciousness" is routed through the military imagination and besieged self-understanding of a citizenry in a time of total war. Conversion is a public as well as a private principle. What kind of "armament" and "tactics," then, does Eliot's fighting faith have as its countervailing force? When it comes to imaginative Christian responses to warfare, can the force of violence be de-coupled from its lethality, the compelling from compulsion?

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau provides terms that help us to understand how we can think of a Christian use of terms such as "strategy" and "tactics," which Eliot puts on in public but tiptoes around in private letters and exchanges, such as the interaction with Oldham that frames this chapter. De Certeau posits an originally "military" distinction between strategies and tactics. He defines strategy as "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes

[375] *Complete Prose: Vol. 6*, 241.
[376] Ibid, 166.

possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated."[377] Strategists enjoy a "panoptic" view of the enemy, a "mastery of places through sight."[378] They impose the "syntax" on the area over which they exercise that mastery, in both verbal and visual terms. The strategized enemy is unable to think in terms other than those of its oppressor, who defines, to borrow Eliot's term in section II of "Little Gidding," the "horizon" of its intellectual and imaginative life. "Tactics," on the other hand, is, as de Certeau quotes Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*, "an art of the weak."[379] Tactics must "play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision," as von Bulow put it, and within enemy territory."[380] If the air power strategist attacks from above and enjoys the panoptic vision of the map and the bombsight, Eliot the (Christian) tactician disabuses this illusion of total control. Like it or not, the Christian Eliot works within the syntax of total war—its force and rhetoric of violence—to resist the political-theological transformations of the nominally secular wartime state.

It would be reductive, however, to equate strategist with Axis and tactician with Allied and rejoice in the victory of David over Goliath. Part of what makes "Little Gidding" so politically creative is its focus on literal-spiritual conjunctions rather than political-theological transformation or "conflation." Just as his two doves are not *necessarily* fused into one providential dove-bomber, but maintain their categorical differences in the face of interpretive conflation, what Eliot calls the wartime "field of action" is grounded in, but not limited to, English patriotism.[381] For all the

[377] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 35.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Eliot, "Little Gidding," 206.

justifiable talk about Eliot's Anglophilia, the undeniable fact of his expatriation, and the tendentious wartime circumstances of the writing of "Little Gidding," Eliot the Christian poet is remarkably detached from the political heat of the moment. The argument of the poem is that God does not take sides, even in a war as Manichaean as this one.

He begins the poem by charting, in a way not unlike the political universalism of Pentecost, the many paths to the one site of prayer: "If you came this way, / Taking the route you would be likely to take / From the place you would be likely to come from," he states, "It would be the same at the end of the journey."[382] Just as he inverts Chaucer's seasonal affinity at the start of *The Waste Land* ("April is the cruelest month"), he distances himself here from a pilgrimage in which national and devotional itineraries are fused. In fact, Eliot had originally entitled the cycle *Kensington Quartets*: the change to *Four Quartets* demonstrates his care and caution about the priority of place. He does not sever nation and devotion, however; after all, we arrive at Nicholas Ferrar's Little Gidding, almost as much a cultural heritage site as a refuge for religious freedom and an embodiment of the enduring traditions of Eliot's faith. The point here, and, as I have argued, in the two doves of the poem, is that the "both/and" quality of conjunction and the spiritual vision of transfiguration suffuses his images and ideas of the relationship between Christian faith and politics. Eliot's itinerary is personally addressed and diverse in its points of departure ("if," "would be likely"). Moreover, the seasonal ambience of the pilgrimage is out of time, out of joint with the human calendar. The poem opens amid the impossible union of two different seasons, in fact: we find ourselves in "Midwinter spring," which is "not in time's covenant."[383] If wartime politics demands urgent attention to the now, "Little Gidding" replies, "love of a country / Begins as attachment to our own field of action /

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[382] Ibid, 201.
[383] Ibid.

And comes to find that action of little importance / Though never indifferent."[384] History itself is conditionally presented in terms of conjunction. It "may be servitude," it "may be freedom."

For Eliot, the poetic gift of the Christian Incarnation is the ability to think on two different timescales and planes of reality. On the one hand, when we think of the physical grounds on which Nicholas Ferrar's community prayed, slept, cooked, toiled, raised families, and paid taxes to the Crown, and think of our mortal bodies on pilgrimage to this sacred but earthly place, our "field of action" is "Now and in England," since it is "nearest, in place and time." This place is not necessarily more propitious to spiritual life than any other, but it remains *the* territory for which one is still responsible and called to action. When Eliot turns his attention to the self-effacing act of kneeling in prayer in the chapel, where we "have to put off / Sense and notion," "the intersection of the timeless moment / Is England and nowhere." For the citizen at prayer, these two phrases—"Now and in England," "England and nowhere"—condition national obligations but do not abolish them. The conjunctive structure of both phrases gives us pause about whether Eliot means to fuse their two ideas or to hold them in suspension, as he does with *Panzerkirche*. Considering Eliot's recognition of the many paths taken to the site of prayer and ceremony, however, we could substitute "France," "the United States," or even "Germany" or "Japan" for "England." When Eliot thinks transfiguratively, with spiritual sight, he sees not a bomber but an open door for stepping outside the confines of the national and even nuclear family, which is a surprisingly radical form (for the conservative Eliot!) of Christian *patria*. When, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is told, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you," he replies, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."[385] As a "both/and" horizon of our wartime "field of action," "England and nowhere" frames imaginative Christian engagement with historical crisis on two

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[384] Ibid, 206.
[385] Mk. 3:32, 35.

hierarchical planes: the Kingdom of God conditions the kingdoms of this world, which are not worthless, but part of the "waste sad time" that hangs over *Four Quartets* altogether.[386]

Eliot does not bless England, the nation drawn on maps by territorial lines, nor does he dwell too much on the historical or political associations of the bomber, which does not bear any aesthetic characteristics that would identify it as uniquely German. From the perspective of Dresden, we could read into the mechanically nondescript "dark dove" a B-17, or from that of Hiroshima, a B-29. Eliot's tactical sense of transfiguration makes do with where one finds oneself, the "place you would be likely to come from." As a corrective to the concern Eliot elsewhere expresses about breaking individual suffering in a universalizing direction, the patriotic restraint of "Little Gidding" allows the poem to address its spiritual messages to a worldwide community of real or potential Christians. In what is an otherwise uniformly sociopolitical reading of the critique of "gerontocracy" of *Four Quartets*, Marina MacKay defines a "potentially situational dimension to Eliot's thinking, a tendency to make virtues out of necessities."[387] This kind of situational thinking "makes a spiritual virtue out of an inescapable circumstance." MacKay's concerns could not be more different than those of this chapter, but her lucid phrase captures the making-do of Eliot's tactical transfiguration. In the terms of this chapter, we can read MacKay's idea of "situational thinking" in a more theologically particular sense as "a way of transfiguring what happens to oneself without annihilating the suffering that gave rise to the lessons learned." By juxtaposing, not fusing, his two doves, Eliot pays heed to literal suffering but leaves room for its Christian transfiguration. He respects the ambivalently human prelude to the recognition of Providence: we can alternately read history as a dead record of meaningless suffering. By standing on its own, as it were, in section IV, the Pentecostal dove does not do this work for us. Our articulation (not conflation) of sections II and

[386] Eliot, "Burnt Norton," 184.
[387] Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81.

IV is a way of reading the literal through the spiritual, not of annihilating, via direct metaphorical transformation, what happens in wartime or in other historical crises.

As a Christian, Eliot is not alone in his habit of seeing spiritual realities amid human misery and woe. There is a long tradition in the Church, and in the scriptures that it interprets, of using military language for spiritual purposes. In his *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, Henri de Lubac addresses the religious skeptic's objection to the alternately ridiculous or savage acts of the Old Testament:

> We have, for example, the wars that fill the books of Joshua and Judges. The scandal is not that these wars took place: men are naturally bellicose and cruel, and we know very well that there is a lot of evil on earth. But the scandal would be if the Holy Spirit had positively willed to transmit this account of them to us without any other end. Would that be worthy of him? And from then on, could we believe such books to be holy, inspired books? The scandal ceases in order to give way to edification if there is an ulterior interpretation, thanks to which a mystical or moral lesson is drawn from the events. The heretics, "not wanting to understand these wars as the dignity of the Holy Spirit requires, deviated from the faith and engaged in innumerable impieties"; but if it is true that "these carnal wars bear the figure of spiritual wars," I understand why they are recounted to me, and even the objection I could make against their historicity disappears.[388]

The notion of "carnal wars [bearing] the figure of spiritual wars" is the heart of the hermeneutic matter. Critics of Origen's "spiritual" fulfillment of the "literal" or the "historical" look a lot like the skeptical humanist critics of Eliot's transfigurative tactics writing nearly two thousand years later. For example, De Lubac shows how, according to Cardinal du Perron, a representative example of

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[388] Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 122.

this tendency, "Origen's furnace . . . distills and overrefines all Religion into allegories"; "by the fallacy of his allegories, he corrupts the truth of history," never ceasing to "melt and dissolve the whole solidity of Scripture into dreams and reveries," to convert its whole substance "into vanities and illusions," and, by this abolition of the literal sense, to "reduce the principal articles of the Creed to smoke."[389] Du Perron's language of "[melting]" and "[dissolving]," which denies the priority of concrete, literal history, resembles the blowing and fusing of the interpretive act of conflation. While de Lubac is concerned with intra-biblical exegesis, not the twentieth-century literary issue of the spiritual aspect of cutting-edge and deadly technologies, the "literal sense" is what is at stake in "Little Gidding" and, more generally, in how Christians imaginatively treat the perennial wars that fill not just the books of the Bible but the newsfeeds of the twenty-first century. As Eliot wonders in his letter to Oldham and in "A Note on War Poetry," when a Christian poet "breaks" the "merely individual [explosions]" of human beings in sacramental directions, she must not lose a sense of the awful reality of the suffering that gives rise to poetic transfiguration, of the fires that become pyres.

De Lubac later argues that "If there is a traditional theme in Christian morality and asceticism, [it is] . . . "spiritual combat." It is also to Origen, de Lubac argues, that "we owe [the symbolism of spiritual combat], which is "wholly biblical." Through his "spiritual interpretation," writes de Lubac, "Origen *transposes* the history of Israel's wars, its captivities, its deliverances, its victories, in order to apply them to the Christian life. All of Scripture is for him the book of the Lord's combats."[390] For Origen, the "spiritual" sense of scripture, beyond the indisputably bloody record of the Old Testament or the visceral Crucifixion, is what allows a community to internalize, with respect to its own historical circumstances and social imaginary, eternal truths of Christian revelation. The military combat of wars is not to be sanctified, since, after all, these wars are cyclical

[389] Ibid, 18.
[390] Ibid, 214. Emphasis added.

and, most recently in the First World War, pit European Christian against European Christian. The "spiritual combat" they inspire, however, can remind us of how our national allegiances—to the Nazi or the British state ("England and nowhere," we recall)—are temporal, not ultimate, causes. The Origenian tradition of spiritual combat roots in patristic tradition Eliot's wartime tactic of internalizing, and thereby "transposing" into a different register, the literal violence outside the study. The problem of theodicy, in other words, is nothing new. Human beings will continue to carry out needless wars. Eliot does not "aestheticize" this violence or conflate it with what is, after all, the politically undivided community of the Church, set into motion at the Pentecost event that serves as the original, scriptural setting of his dove descending. He does see in it, however, a special opportunity to come to terms with what one has forgotten in more comfortable circumstances.

Christ saves the world through the imperial ritual of torture that he appropriates as one of his names, the "crucified one." The *crux immissa*, or the T-shaped cross familiar to Christian tradition, is, in the literal sense, merely two perpendicular blocks of wood nailed together. Indeed, "Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Ivdaeorvm," or "INRI," the words that Pontius Pilate had written on the cross and over the head of Christ, mocks the transfigurative pretension of a would-be king, an imperial impostor who is, according to literal sight, wasting away on a post. After the death of Christ, however, the Church founded at Pentecost requisitions these long blocks of wood for the symbol of the faith and the architectural plan of its sanctuaries, which take shape according to a transfigured instrument of violence. At the Pentecostal dawn of the Church that gives rise to Eliot's own transfiguration of the implements of torture of the twentieth century, a cross is still a cross. It does not suddenly shed its bloody history. But the Christian imagination allows the early Church, and Eliot, to proclaim that the faith works through, not apart from, the reliably deadly circumstances of this world.

Eliot is not a pacifistic poet in that he does not hold out hope for the abolition of violence, at least on this side of paradise. But his Christian sense of *patria* in "Little Gidding" is historically radical in its insistence that, despite the ancestrally English community that lends its title to the poem, God does not so obviously take sides in war. In war, we find ourselves somewhere, perhaps in the bombsight of a Heinkel or a Stuka, and "nowhere," perennially destined, whether in the twentieth or the first century, for mortality. Eliot repeats, with an obvious difference of degree of spiritual authority and historical context, Christ's transfiguration of the literal violence at Golgotha. The *Luftwaffe* had already beaten ploughshares into swords: it had appropriated "baptism of fire" for its own affective power and homogenizing aims. As a publicly minded Christian citizen of two kingdoms, Eliot enacts a requisition in reverse. He recalls the politically unlimited horizon of Pentecost, which inaugurates a reality in which there is "neither Jew nor Greek." In "Little Gidding," transfiguration is "both/and" as opposed to "either/or." It does not transform the objects of its spiritual sight so much as hold in suspension their secular circumstances and their sacred significance. In its conjunctive suggestiveness but also in its paratactic resistance to the zero-sum game of political-theological appropriation or interpretive conflation, "Little Gidding" is the surprising work of an imaginative dual citizen.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

As these chapters have demonstrated, Christian requisition works transfiguratively rather than metamorphically: on the other side of imaginative conversion, Christian writers continue to inhabit the literal infrastructure that gives rise to their visions. A wartime boarding house may take on the aspect of a convent; a Blitz episode may resemble the dark night; and a bomber may be turned to purgative purposes, but Christian writers hold in suspension both the literal and the spiritual aspects of the wartime world. Requisition, whether military or Christian in form, leaves a remainder. In wartime, the lines between Church and state are often blurred, since the states of emergency of the soul and the nation resemble each other more than they do in peacetime. These Christian writers do not call the wartime world out of its suffering and concerns, but they attempt to see them in a new light, through the very terms and images that serve as the literary points of departure for the Christian writer. These writers transfigure the wartime world without withdrawing from the field of action.

As this dissertation has argued, however, when these writers think in the mode of Christian requisition, they draw upon their own lifestyles and professions as well as the general experiences of the wartime public. They are secular insiders as well as Catholic outsiders. The value of requisition, as I have shown, is that it allows us to think about the Catholic sensibilities of these writers just as much as their Catholic dogma. Their Catholicism is bound up with, and even filtered by, their roles in secular institutions. The dissertation has argued that each writer interprets the relationship between liturgy and life in vividly different ways. Greene, for example, demonstrates a romantic Catholicism that explodes the constraints of the everyday. It thrives upon the limit-experiences of

war. Greene seizes upon the mystical resources of Saint John of the Cross to align wartime and eternity.

In her confidence in life as a meaningful "whole," Spark is a less ecstatic Catholic than Greene. Even though she shared with him a wartime role at MI-6, she views contemporary Catholic artists as furtive visionaries, not fugitives from human time or concern. She views the Church as a guarantor of both literary and liturgical form, of the temporal and epistemological integrity of past, present, and future. For Spark, the Catholic novel is a kind of secret information-gathering, an "infiltration." She carries with her the ambient Calvinism of her Edinburgh childhood, which influences her to posit narrators as providential spies. Depraved human beings do not have enough information to know what they should do and value; they cannot hope to discover the meaning of their lives in the present tense. The exclusive access to providence of Spark's narrator in *The Girls of Slender Means* can turn cruel, a quality that courses through its undercurrent of espionage. Spark's secular wartime occupation in Intelligence influences the collusion of narrator and Nicholas Farringdon, who shares her line of work. Spark's novel represents the intersection, and even the blurred lines, of political espionage and Catholic transfiguration.

Auden enjoys the punctual precedent set by the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. His approach to work is influenced by the monastic rule. Auden is another example of how Christian ideas infuse the secular infrastructure of the workaday world, as I highlighted in his theological interest in toilets and airport terminals alike. This everyday sphere is another way I think about the infrastructural ambit of the "secular" in which Auden and other writers in this dissertation live and work. I argued that Auden's boyhood fascination with numinous industry, and its link with numinous liturgy, never really goes away, even in his most mature and ambitious poetry of the postwar years. Auden thanks Catholicism for regulating time, but also for hemming in human attempts at going forward without looking back. He populates *Horae Canonicae* with machines, which he connotes in a double-edged manner. They

can be playful, productive, or deadly according to the circumstances. Auden's industrious citizens are noble in their self-sacrifice for everyday craft; his crowd, however, resembles a machine in its annihilation of human distraction and concern. For Auden, machines are not just tools; they structure human *telos*, for good and bad. Benedictine punctuality is in Auden's veins, thanks to his twenty-year-long drug habit, which coincided with his interest in Catholic liturgy. In his punctual Catholic sensibility, which takes refuge in being on time for the off-kilter ordinary world, Auden could not be further from Greene's mystical desire for atemporality.

Eliot prizes the ability of the Catholic to think on two planes at once. Eliot may adopt mystical flourishes in "Little Gidding," but the paratactic patriotism of "England and nowhere" resonates with the Pentecostal political thinking I underline in the chapter. Eliot's juxtaposition, separated between sections, of the "dark dove" of a bomber and the "dove descending" of the Holy Spirit, teases us with the possibility of "conflation," a term that often surfaces in criticism of this poetic maneuver. As I argued, this is not *necessarily* false, but it is not *necessarily* true, either. Conflation, a largely pejorative term when applied to Eliot, is an *ex-post-facto* fruit of critical interpretation, not a given fact of *Four Quartets* or of any other of the mixtures of the sacred and the secular on display in this dissertation. Eliot's mechanically nondescript bomber could be applied to a foe facing any other nation, whether Axis or Allied in form.

Eliot's unwillingness to specify the nationality of this bomber, or any other, reflects his dissatisfaction with a reduction of Christian *patria* to this state, that one, or any other under the sun. The historical and political pliability of Eliot's imagery and the distance--syntactic, metrical, and theological--between his two doves aligns paratactic technique and the dual-citizenship of the Christian in wartime. Wherever and whenever the Christian finds oneself, whether in England, Germany, Japan, the United States, Judea, or Rome, whether in 33 A.D. or 1942, he remains aware of the two kingdoms, like the two doves, that intermingle but remain distinct, on two planes of

prayer and imagination. By thinking in the mode of Christian requisition, and from an affirmatively ecclesial point of view, these writers nonetheless help us to re-frame the "secular" as the infrastructural and existential crucible in which Catholic sensibilities are forged.

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