ATTUNEMENTS TO GRACE IN THE WRITINGS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND MARILYNNE ROBINSON

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Does not wisdom call,
And understanding raise her voice?
On top of the heights along the way,
Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;
Beside the gate leading into the city,
At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:
'To you, people, I call,
And my voice is for mankind.
Listen, for I will speak noble things;
I open my lips to speak what is right.'
Proverbs 8:1-4,6

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> 'I believe one should try to read books as if one were writing them… Do not begin by being a critic; begin by being a writer. Try to understand what a writer is doing. Think of a book as a very dangerous and exciting game, which it takes two to play at.'[1]

Introduction

Theologian Karl Rahner describes the human person's direct presence to God by way of an 'unformed attunement [*Gestimmtheit*] which is the unembraceable ground of [one's] whole knowledge, the permanent condition of the possibility of all other knowledge, its law and gauge.'[2] The question this thesis addresses is how a (non-) believer can come to recognise and thematise this ground of knowledge, which is the 'law and gauge' of all other knowing. This is a theological question, I argue, that cannot be answered "at home" in theology without self-referential question-begging. An initial step is to recognise that theology "at home" is never done in a vacuum; theological discourse (like Scripture itself) is always-already borrowing language and concepts from ambient culture and other disciplines. Hence this thesis addresses how God's grace – i.e., God's abiding presence *to* and action *in* creation – can be found operative in the writer, writing, and reader of fiction.

Literary theorist Philip Davis suggests that great literature does not *give answers* but provides a context or space wherein the fringes of meaning are probed to show 'where [thoughts] have come from, what they are related to and summoned by.'[3] I propose further that great literature, even self-consciously non-religious literature, can serve as a propaedeutic to religious attention, attuning the reader of words to God's gracious presence in and through creation. I assess this by looking at the writers Virginia Woolf (an agnostic) and Marilynne Robinson (a confessional Christian). Great literature can serve as a field of 'play' (what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls *Spiel*) where an author helps her reader become conscious of the 'natural attitude' (Edmund Husserl) he brings to the world of objects and states of affairs in the text, and thereafter in the life-world around himself. To do so, I adapt Husserl's phenomenology of intentionality to propose a phenomenology of literature, which includes resurrecting the purportedly dead author. A text world unfolds from the creative vision of an author, appealing to and directing her

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[1] From a draft of Virginia Woolf's essay, 'How Should One Read a Book?'
[2] Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," in *Theological Investigations. Volume V* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 209.
[3] Philip Davis, *Reading and the Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

reader's intentional gaze. The text becomes an heuristic tool which helps in the formation [*Bildung*] of readers' interpretive attention: when a reader 'brackets' his natural attitude to the world and 'descends' into the text, the unseen author is able to train her reader's intentional gaze empathically, to see the pluralities in the text *as* the author has framed them. In response the reader can accept or reject the author's intentional framing, but he cannot ignore it. I draw out the theological analogies of this phenomenology with the help of Nicholas of Cusa and Jean-Louis Chrétien: creation *unfolds from* the creative call of the divine Author (*explicatio*), and the divine Author is therefore always-already *complicit with* all human creative activity (*complicatio*), whether or not authors recognise God's gracious presence.

The reader's intentional formation begins by 'descending' into a text-world which trains his attention to investigate what the author has put forth as intentional content. When the reader 'ascends' from the text-world back to the life-world around him, his intentionality has been inflected – however imperceptibly – by the intentional activity of the unseen author. I argue that this literary *descent-ascent* is patterned on the *exitus-reditus* of the Incarnate Word, which itself unfolds from the life of God to show the pathway back to the divine Author. The reading of fiction thus prepares the reader to become attuned to God's gracious call through the "text" of his-her life-world, so as to make a theological return (*reductio*) to the unseen God who authors the Word. This descent-ascent movement not only prepares the reader *of creation* to thematise his 'unformed attunement' (Rahner) to the divine Author; it also renders explicit the intersubjective communities (literary as well as historically religious) in which such attunement takes place.

The strength of this methodology – a theological engagement with literature grounded in intentionality – depends on William Lynch, who argues that a properly Christian literary imagination must descend into finite particulars *in order to* propel one up towards insight. To that end, I analyse the works of Woolf and Robinson, to test the merits of my proposed theological framework. Both writers deftly probe language and genre boundaries, disrupt uncritical acceptance (or rejection) of institutional faith, and engage in creative wondering and wandering. This type of theology Rowan Williams calls language 'playing away from home.'[4] Such fiction is thus a *locus theologicus*,

[4] Williams employs this provocative phrase in *Edge of Words*, about how language limns the ineffable. It both recognises the heuristic *Spiel* needed to understand words, and hints at the extramural procession of the Word in Christ.

where belief and unbelief interact, interrogate one another, and challenge the curious reader to deeper theological reflection. New aspects of characters, and competing voices within texts, move the reader's attention from parts to a sense of the whole, and back again. Hence Woolf and Robinson exercise, and cultivate in readers, what I term a *katholic imagination* (καθ' ὅλου, "regarding the whole" of reality).[5] Such an imagination fosters a psychological openness to growth; a willingness to take seriously unattended, unbidden, or unwelcome elements of reality, including the experience (or absence) of divine grace. God likewise plays 'away from home' by unfolding (*explicatio*) God's very self into finite creation (the Incarnation), so as to render creation's very enfoldedness (*complicatio*) conscious to creatures. Hence it is Christ – playing in ten thousand places – whose descent into created particularity attunes us to God's grace. This grace is operative beyond the usual registers and instrumentation of theological discourse, and so I conclude the attentive theologian must engage with literature, among other disciplines, to cultivate a more katholic interpretation of reality.

This thesis proceeds in three parts. Part I (chapters 1-3) establishes the theological, phenomenological, and literary methodologies for engaging Woolf and Robinson. Part II examines the novelists' lives, stated aims, and a sample of their fictional writings (chapters 4-5). On the basis of the previous methodology and literary analysis, Part III (chapters 6-7) constructs a descriptive model for the operation of the katholic imagination and anagogical *reductio* to God. Here the theological voices from earlier – Cusa, Chrétien, and Lynch – come to the fore to offer correctives to the phenomenological and literary voices discussed in part I.

Chapter one articulates the thesis's background, introducing the voices and methodological frameworks employed. I analyse Paul's speech on the Areopagus as a biblical precedent and model for drawing on "secular" authors to help thematise God's gracious presence, outside of traditional theological language. This thesis is not proposing a new way for reading Scripture or discerning religious allegories in secular fiction. Rather Paul demonstrates that the apparent "sacred-secular" exchange goes both ways; even avowedly agnostic or atheist writers are always-already responding to – and enfolded among – anterior writers, many of whom were traditionally religious. Hence an understanding of the influences and biographies of Woolf and Robinson will prove

[5] Hereafter *kath'holou.* By katholic imagination I do not mean a separate faculty of the imagination, but merely that searching, integrating activity of the human imagination. Simply put, the *katholic* imagination. I use the Greek 'k' to avoid confusion with the confessionally specific and yet slippery term 'Catholic imagination'.

helpful in deconstructing this "sacred-secular" distinction in favour of a more capacious – a more *katholic* – theological understanding through literature. Because chapter one addresses the impetus and scope of this thesis, and sketches out subsequent chapters, let us not tarry in the doorway, but cross the threshold into our theological expedition away from home.

PART I: METHODOLOGIES

Chapter I
Exitus: Grace Playing at the Horizons

I.0 Chapter Overview

The goal of this thesis is a theological engagement *through* literature. It is not theology *and* literature, nor a study of religion *in* literature. Nor, importantly, does it attempt a covert baptism of the fiction of agnostic or atheist writers. In this first chapter, divided in two halves, I first lay out the state of relevant theological questions; not to solve them, but to establish the theological backdrop of this thesis, and justifications for how I will proceed. In the substantive second half, I introduce the major themes and voices employed.

I begin in **I.1** with possible objections from either theologians or literary scholarship, to help delimit the scope of this project. I then offer a theological justification for this thesis based on St Paul's address on the Areopagus to learned Athenians. From there I analyse in **I.2** how language aspires to capture the relationship of the divine to creation, relying on helpful distinctions of *modus significandi* and *res significata* introduced by Thomas Aquinas. Theology relies heavily on analogical language to gesture towards what cannot be fully grasped. I suggest that literature is a place for imaginative wandering and wondering *around* theological questions, what I term *periphatic* speech and thinking. With that as a background, **I.3** considers how our question of reading fiction (to become attuned to the author) relates analogically to the theological question of "reading" nature to become attuned to God's gracious presence. I rely on Rahner's analogical language of *attunement* and *horizon* to do so. This section considers the challenges of thematising grace, from St Paul onward.

The last section of chapter one lays out the architectural "blueprints" and materials for the chapters ahead. In **I.4** I give an overview of major themes of the thesis by introducing William Lynch's definitions of imagination, faith, and how they relate to literature. I explain how Lynch's articulations lay the groundwork for a more capacious vision [*kath'holou*] of the attentional frames *within* which we operate, but *about* which we rarely inquire. In **I.5** I consider brief examples of Woolf and Robinson's writing as an entrée to how they engage questions of consciousness and theological reflection.

I.1 Theology, Culture, and "the Secular"

I.1.1. The project's remit and its objectors. By way of anticipation, I take up a two-pronged objection that disciplines should not stray beyond their boundaries. On the one hand, the sceptic *from the discipline of theology* might object, 'we cannot use literary fiction, especially by atheist or agnostic writers, to formulate theological arguments. It is the wrong domain and will yield no reliable knowledge of God.' I respond that theology is tasked with hearing the questions and cultural reference points of each age, and trying to find language from within the tradition to make a discerned theological response. St Paul demonstrated in his address to pagan Athenians on the Areopagus that Christian theological reflection has borne great fruit by judiciously weaving the cultural content and medium of each age into the fabric of tradition, such that what seemed "secular" in one moment is no longer deemed so. Consider, too, Melchior Cano's (1509-1560) topological taxonomy of *loci theologici*, which suggests ten sources of theological reflection.[6] While his taxonomy does not include literature explicitly, he does include the authority of *history*, of which culture, literature, and the human sciences are established elements. Paul's use of historical, pagan Athenian poets helped him to articulate truths of the faith: they served as an ancillary *locus theologicus*, enfolded into Scripture as a revelation of the divine. At every level of this thesis's analysis, history proves helpful: in the next chapter I consider the role of historical consciousness in literary interpretation, and chapters four and five begin by considering how much 19th-century religious thought influenced Woolf's and Robinson's projects as writers of fiction.

[6] The seven authoritative *loci* from which theology draws are sacred Scripture, Catholic tradition, Church councils, the authority of the Roman Church, patristics, the scholastics, and natural reason. Three additional *loci* serve as auxiliaries: philosophers, civil law doctors, and the authority of history.

On the other hand, the possible sceptic *from an English faculty* expresses concern of the encroachment of religious belief into the study of literature. Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti, for example, express concern of 'confessional biases' of certain literary scholars in Early Modern English studies.[7] One might respond, as I do in chapter two, that literary hermeneutics grew out of a learned devotion to Scripture, indicating (minimally) that confessional belief and critical scholarship are not incompatible. An objection more central to this thesis is the apparent encroachment of religious images and language into consciously *non-religious* literature itself. I respond that writers of fiction do not create *ex nihilo*; they are always first *readers*: they respond to the call of literary predecessors by conjuring, playing with, and perhaps rejecting the images and metaphors drawn from religious traditions. Hence, *religious literacy* is an inescapable element of literary studies. Yet, for Jackson and Marotti, scholarly integrity requires avoiding both a total dismissal of religion and a warm welcome of it. They propose a *methodological agnosticism*, 'an irreducible space between religion as anthropological residue and as something absolutely other.'[8] The scholar of literature, it seems, must strike a posture of neutrality with respect to the curious 'anthropological residue' of religious belief. I argue in the second chapter that this feint towards neutrality is not neutral, but already a denatured and *counter*theological reading.

I further respond that this thesis is theological engagement *through* literature, which is not simply a juxtaposition of "religion *and* literature". The early 2000s witnessed an explicit "theological turn" within literary studies, charted by the likes of Nathan Scott, Nicholas Boyle, Richard Kearney, Kevin Hart and Tiffany Eberle Kriner, for whom the turn came as good news.[9] Kriner highlights a 2007 seminar by the Modern Language Association (MLA) entitled, "The Turn to Religion in Literary Studies", which put out a call for plotting out interesting new territory for conversation:

> Seminar papers are invited that explore ways in which Christian scholars can participate in the 'turn to religion' [1] by strengthening a critical sensibility that weighs the delicate registers of belief and unbelief; [2] by developing more

[7] Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (2004): 170.
[8] Jackson and Marotti, 182.
[9] Nicholas Boyle's *Sacred and Secular Scriptures* (2005), Roger Lundin's *Beginning with the Word: Modern Literature and the Question of Belief* (2014), and Paul Lakeland's *The Wounded Angel* (2017) are but a few of many book-length treatments of the question of faith and literature. See also essays by Graham Ward, "Why Literature Can Never Be Entirely Secular," *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 21–27; Graham Ward, "How Literature Resists Secularity," *Literature and Theology* 24, no. 1 (2010): 73–88.

> vigorous theoretical paradigms that take religion seriously; and [3] by demonstrating that Christian commitments can lead to greater interpretive clarity.[10]

This thesis takes seriously each element of this challenge from literary studies. The first is to chart *the delicate registers of belief and unbelief* from a theological perspective, with the help of Karl Rahner's language of attunement [*Gestimmtheit*] to the divine and William Lynch's map of how religious faith and the imagination operate. Both of these 20th-century Jesuit thinkers are introduced in this chapter, and reappear throughout the thesis.

The second MLA challenge is to develop *vigorous theoretical paradigms that take religion seriously*. This I attempt in chapter two, through an uncommon (but not unprecedented) application of Husserl's phenomenology outside of its domain. I re-deploy Husserl's language of intentionality to consider how writers of fiction treat questions of religious belief and unbelief by placing before their readers the possibility of (no) God as an "intentional object" *etsi Deus (non) daretur*, as if God were (not) a given. Insodoing, writers like Robinson and Woolf – believers or not –are *de facto* taking religious belief/unbelief seriously. In the third chapter, I dig under the framework of phenomenological inquiry to thematise its theological underpinnings with the help of several 20th-century thinkers involved in the "theological turn" of phenomenology itself.

The third task from this 2007 MLA seminar is to *demonstrate that Christian commitments can lead to greater interpretative clarity*. After applying the methodologies from Part I to writers Woolf and Robinson (in Part II), Part III revisits earlier themes to demonstrate how a writer's or reader's openness to the questions of faith broadens hermeneutical horizons in general. Seeking to understand the author's history, style, and purposes helps the reader to form a more capacious vision concerning the whole [*kath'holou]* of a text-world, and subsequently, the whole of his or her life-world as well. The commitment to experience and discuss the tensions of belief and unbelief, especially in interpretive communities, contributes to a more *katholic* imagination. I draw on William Lynch and Nicholas of Cusa again, to help challenge the religious scepticism of hermeneut Hans-Georg Gadamer. This, in brief, is the remit of this thesis, and some of the voices treated herein.

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[10] Cited in Tiffany Eberle Kriner, "Our Turn Now? Imitation and the Theological Turn in Literary Studies," *Christianity and Literature* 58, no. 2 (2009): 266.

I.1.2. Paul's engagement with those 'bothered by God'. The history of theology, Jean-Yves Lacoste suggests, 'should be read as the *history of meaning* – of a will to interpret – bound up with a *capacity to speak*. Meaning exceeds what is said, in this domain more than any other'.[11] Lacoste's proposition rests on at least two theological fundaments: the first is that God's sustaining grace can operate in and through honest human inquiry and search for meaning, whether the inquirer recognises God's non-competitive operations. (This Rahnerian theme will be elaborated.) A second fundament, developed here, is that theological reflection is always-already drawing on extant language and images to articulate emerging understandings of the divine and humanity's relationship thereto. Consider, e.g., how early doctors of the Church drew on *inter alia* Platonic metaphysical categories. Thomas Aquinas sought to integrate the thought of Aristotle, adapting and responding to Abrahamic scholars Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), a Jew, and Avicenna (980–1037), a Muslim.[12]

In historical practice, spoliation has a long history in religious festivities, art and, architecture. Syncretism is woven into all things biological and cultural, and succeeds best when its stitch work goes unseen. The feast of the Chair of Peter christianized the pagan Roman feast of venerating the empty chair of a deceased *paterfamilias*. Secular Roman basilicas were adopted and adapted as places to hold Christian rituals. Biblical texts were not written in languages reserved only for sacred realities; biblical revelation is recorded in language particular to their scribes. Jean-Yves Lacoste suggests that 'it is therefore a work of piety – of theological critique – to analyse the non-theological implications carried by theological words and concepts.'[13] A fine task, but not for this thesis.[14] Rather this thesis in part suggests the converse: a critical study of *literature* ought to consider the *theological* implications carried by putatively *non-religious* literature and imagery.

Lacoste notes that the rich symbolism of the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2:1-13) 'shows that the "wonders of God" can be expressed in, or translated into, any language.'[15] Scripture itself enfolds this delicate dialogue with culture in Paul's

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[11] Jean-Yves Lacoste, ed., *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 182. *Emphasis added.*
[12] See David B Burrell, "Thomas Aquinas and Islam," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 1 (January 2004): 71–89.
[13] Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 182.
[14] Consider, for example, the origins and conflation of πρόσωπον and *persona*, in articulating a Trinitarian theology. For more on that see Kenneth L. Schmitz, *Person and Psyche* (Washington, D.C: CUA Press, 2009).
[15] Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 182.

discourse with Epicureans and Stoics in Acts 17:21ff. Paul is invited to speak on the Areopagus, where learned Athenians and foreign visitors spent their leisure time (’ευκαιρουν) *doing nothing other* (εἰς οὐδὲν ἕτερον) than saying and listening to novel ideas. Paul responds:

> Athenians, I see how very religious (δεισιδαιμονεστέρους) you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD’ [ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ].

Paul was convicted of the need for Christ’s grace as the path to salvation, yet he demonstrates a pragmatic interest in his interlocutors’ literature: he surveys the cultural landscape in order to find and thematise the ill-defined *cultus* of the learned. He characterizes the Athenians as δεισιδαιμονεστέροι, ranging in translation from ‘too superstitious’ (KJV) to ‘extremely religious’ (NRSV). Every translation is an interpretation, but at the root of this unusual adjective lies the coupling of multivalent verb and noun: δειδο (to dread, fear) and δαίμων (spirit, deity). I suggest at the outset that the fiction writers treated in this thesis, Virginia Woolf and Marilynne Robinson, are “bothered by God”, which falls within the semantic range of δεισιδαιμονεστέραι. However these semantic elements are co-translated, Paul recognises in the intellectual culture an ambivalent acknowledgement of the divine, such that they engage in some form of ‘privative worship’ (if we might coin a phrase) of an ἀ-γνώστος Θεός. Their worship is privative[16] in the sense of unthematised, formless, hidden or unacknowledged in quality; nevertheless this un-known God captures their mental and spiritual attention. Paul continues,

> What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.

Paul attempts to thematise the unknown by suggesting what the ἀγνώστος Θεός is, and is not; a dynamic of cataphatic and apophatic theology. He proclaims that their privative worship has a metaphysically real referent, a *creator* God, whose domain encompasses all that is visible and invisible. This God, further, is not constrained by human craft nor dependent on cultic attention. Rather, this God is the one who constrains and sustains all that is living and breathing:

> From one (ἐξ ἑνὸς) he made all nations in order for them to inhabit the whole earth, and he determined (ὁρίσας) the times of their existence and the boundaries

[16] I take “privative” from Greek’s alpha privative construction, found in a-gnostic, a-moral, a-theist, etc.

> (ὁροθεσίας) of the places where they would live, in order [for them] to search for God and perhaps grope/palpate (ψηλαφήσειαν) for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us.[17]

Here Paul succinctly treats the question of the whole and the parts. ἐξ ἑνὸς indicates a One from which this God fashioned (ἐποίησέν) the visible plurality of creation.[18] ποίησις (hereafter written *poiēsis*, "making" or "fashioning"), is both a divine and human activity, which I revisit and adapt with Husserlian phenomenology in the next chapter. The appointed limits of human life – finite lifespan, boundedness in a specific place – are determinations linked by the Greek ὁρίζω which gives us 'horizon'. Grammatically the text indicates a purpose to these created limits: humanity is meant *to inhabit* our spatiotemporal limitations, and *to probe* the horizons for the God who set them. Horizons are apparent limits that are forever receding; we grope and move towards them, without ever grasping; forays into cataphatic de-finition of the divine are always checked by apophatic modesty.

To search the horizon emphasizes that religious faith is always a questing hope that is never fully satisfied. The writer of Luke-Acts captures this hope by switching from purposive infinitives to the aorist optative, a tense and mood expressing a once-and-for-all hope: *If only they would feel around (*ψηλαφήσειαν*) for this God! And would that they should finally find (*εὕροιεν*) him!* Paul suggests that these Athenians do not worship an aloof, unknowable spirit; this God is not far from each of his creatures, though not reducible to human shrines or beholden to human craft. He suggests, in effect, that the Athenians are looking through the wrong end of the telescope: we are fashioned by the divine creator, not the other way around. And yet by probing our limits in space and time, we will come to recognise the creator's handiwork. So close is this God, in fact, that:

> 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.[19]

Paul effortlessly summons language from two non-Christian poets. Epimenides of Cnossos, whose complete ode to Zeus is lost, is adapted to show that it is *within* God (ἐν αὐτῷ - in, through, or by God) that we undertake all that comprises our existence. Aratus of Soli's ode to Zeus, the *Phaenomena*, is adapted to show our common identity as children of God. Paul concludes his address,

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[17] Acts 17:26-27
[18] The question of *creatio ex nihilo* is a related, but separate discussion.
[19] Acts 17:28

> Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think the deity (τὸ Θεῖον) to be like gold, or silver, or stone, as an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.[20]

Parentally close though God is, God remains other. Not only is God *not* something that we fashion by human art or imagination, but God is not even *like* (οὐκ… εἶναι ὅμοιον) any earthly substances. Paul on the Areopagus models theological engagement with those who may dread or fear religious worship, but who nevertheless use their words to probe what cannot, from their perspective, be named or known. With that in mind, on what grounds can Paul claim that 'we are God's offspring,' given the evident dissimilarity between creatures who are visible, and a God who is not? How does one dare to speak of what cannot be named? The next section considers Thomas Aquinas' explanation of how human modes of speaking of "God" relate to the referent God. What emerges is the importance of metaphorical precision and analogical thinking.

I.2 Analogical Language in Theology and Literature

The relationship of God to creation requires clarification of how human language is used. Rowan Williams' masterful *The Edge of Words* nests the difficulty of language about God in the broader strangeness of how humans use language in general. What happens when ordinary human language is sent off to 'play away from home,'[21] when it is pressed and pressured to represent realities that edge the ineffable? I take Paul's model, and Williams's suggestion to do our theological work "away from home," in conversation with literary fiction.

I.2.1. Theology and analogical language. There are precious few words reserved exclusively for theological reflection. Rather, ordinary words like *persona* (from the Etruscan *phersu* for "masked man") are borrowed, repurposed, and redeployed "away from home" in theology. The relationship of theological language ("God talk") to ordinary language is treated in the first part of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* (hereafter ST I). In ST I question 13, Aquinas picks up on the difference between speaking of God and creation: 'no name belongs to God in the same sense that it belongs to creatures.'[22] In other words, we cannot speak of God's reality and creatures' reality

[20] Acts 17:29
[21] Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 22 *et passim*.
[22] *ST* I 13.5 *sed contra*

univocally. They are so different, in fact, that 'God is more distant from creatures than any creatures are from each other.'[23] With Aquinas, we ask whether human language can be used to name the divine at all?

Andrew Davison notes that this problem of human language about God is not a problem exclusive to speculative theology. Even those who would reject Thomas' discursive approach to theology (e.g., Karl Barth's famous rejection of the *analogia entis*) lean on the *revealed* images found in Scripture, which speaks of God as "Creator" and "warrior". Why would Scripture speak of God thus, if the language bore no intelligible resemblance to a human creator or warrior? Aquinas responds that if Scripture refers to God as a "man of war" or "almighty" (Exodus 15:3), then there must be some intelligible, revelatory content to Scripture's use of "warrior", and "almighty", otherwise Scripture would not employ them.[24] Aquinas draws an important distinction between creaturely predications and their perfections. Whatever perfections we use to describe God or creatures – good, wise, powerful, etc. – are said first of God, and then of creatures only in light of God's eminence: 'God prepossesses (*praehabet*) in himself all the perfections of creatures, being himself simply and universally perfect. Therefore every creature represents (*repraesentat*) him and is like him, to the extent that it possesses some perfection.'[25] Whatever traces of perfections we find represented in creation are epistemic clues for understanding the excellences possessed by God.[26]

In ST I 13, article 3 Aquinas makes a clarification important for this thesis's theological methodology: he flags the vast difference between our creaturely mode of signifying divine perfections (*modus significandi*) and the reality (*res significata*) to which they point:

> As regards *what is signified* by these names, they belong properly to God and more properly than they belong to creatures, and are applied primarily to Him. But as regards their *mode of signification*, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification applies to creatures.[27]

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[23] Ibid.
[24] *ST* I 13.1 *passim*
[25] *ST* I 13.2 *respondeo*
[26] One of the debates, even with Aquinas, is whether analogy is simply about *language use* (a more nominalist approach) or has *ontological purchase* (participation, and a more realist approach). Andrew Davison reads this section in Thomas in terms of *participation* in God, where others see this as a grammatical, not ontological, distinction, since we have no conception of what it means for God to be good, wise, powerful. This intramural debate on Aquinas does not bear on the argument of this thesis. For a fuller treatment, see Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*.
[27] *ST* I 13.3 *respondeo.* For a treatment of antecedents to Thomas Aquinas on this, including Bonaventure and Albertus Magnus, see Fran O'Rourke, "The *Triplex Via* of Naming God," *The Review of Metaphysics* 69, no. 3 (March 2016): 533–34.

In other words, the referent of the word "God" exceeds linguistic attempts to approach the reality.[28] Aquinas continues in his reply,

> There are some names which signify these perfections flowing from God to creatures in such a way that the *imperfect way in which creatures receive the divine perfection is part of the very signification of the name itself,* as 'rock' signifies a material being, and names of this kind can be applied to God *only in a metaphorical sense*."[29]

For our inquiry, this means that when we speak of God as a rock (or warrior or author of creation), whatever limits in conceiving of God thus lie in the limits of our forever-groping speech, not in the reality to which such words point. Because an effect cannot exceed its cause in perfection, the language we muster to describe God (our *modus significandi*) is imperfect, as creatures are imperfect. This is not a plea to theological silence, but a reminder that our theological mode(s) of signifying can ever only point to the divine (i.e., to the *res significata*). The writers of fiction treated here attempt this through image and metaphor, as great writers often do. But what sets Woolf and Robinson apart is that they also speak about God *periphatically* in the sense of toeing *around* God's grace (Robinson) or at least around the lacuna that God once filled (Woolf).

I.2.2 Literature and analogical language. This analysis of Thomas opens us up to the central argument of this introductory chapter. One's *modus significandi* – of pointing to God's reality (*res significata*) that is itself beyond words – requires a properly attuned use of metaphors, images and indeed analogy. This attunement, William Lynch argues later in this chapter, is the shared domain of *literature* and *imagination*. Literature, like theology, pressures language to reach beyond the articulated, to (as Williams suggested) "play away from home." Marilynne Robinson writes, 'we live on a little island of the articulable, which we tend to mistake for reality itself. We can and do make small and tedious lives as we sail through the cosmos on our uncannily lovely little planet, and this is surely remarkable. But we do so much else

[28] Human's natural orientation, Karl Rahner later added, is towards absolute, ineffable mystery, and "God" is the last word before we fall wordless in worshipful silence and awe. See chapter two, "Man in the Presence of Absolute Mystery" in Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych, Milestones in Catholic Theology (New York: Crossroad, 1978).
[29] *ST* I 13.3. *responsum obj 1*, emphasis added.

besides… we make language.'[30] Robinson's essays and fiction alike press language to articulate what is not *yet* articulable.[31]

Robinson locates the human subject in the cosmos, both of which are further nested within God's providence. Woolf rejected language of divine presence in favour of "moments of being" which lifted her up beyond the quotidian. For Woolf these "moments of being" challenged the notion that 'we are sealed vessels afloat upon what is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality.'[32] The meaning of such moments, as with so much for Woolf, is 'just on the far side of language'.[33] Both Woolf and Robinson use language to push against the arbitrary walls of convention to see what, if anything, lies beyond the visible and not-yet-articulated. Great literature, I argue, probes the horizons of sensible reality and human interiority, to see where phenomena in the extramental world push back on us.

A final theo-linguistic question from Thomas: how do authors of fiction deploy language that connects creation to what lies beyond the 'island of the articulable'? In ST I 13.5, Aquinas speaks of creaturely likenesses to God *analogically*, which guards us against both univocal signification ('I am "good" in the same way and extent as God is "good"') and equivocal signification (utter dissimilarity between our goodness and God's). On the one hand, univocity fails to admit divine supereminence, collapsing the *res significata* into the *modus significandi* discussed above. On the other hand, equivocal language allows for the transcendent alterity of God, but it untethers humanity from any intelligible speech about God. As Davison deftly argues, 'If God cannot be spoken about in creaturely language, we are not far from saying that God has little bearing on our language about creatures.'[34] This separation of creator from creatures, he suggests, is the 'wellspring of a "secular" outlook. If the being of the world bears no analogy to the being of God, then the world exists and makes sense as an autonomous realm in thought,' without need for interrogating one's sensible limits further.[35]

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[30] Marilynne Robinson, "When I Was a Child I Read Books," in *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 21.
[31] Roger Scruton wittily suggested this was 'effing the ineffable'.
[32] From Woolf's *Moments of Being,* quoted in Julie Kane, "Varieties of Mystical Experience in the Writings of Virginia Woolf," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 4 (1995): 332.
[33] Virginia Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: 1925-1928*, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth, 1994), 45.
[34] Davison, *Participation in God*, 178.
[35] Davison, 178.

Hence Aquinas suggests analogical speech as our *modus significandi* for relating our reality to God's. Doing so avoids the flattening force of univocal predication which Paul cautions on the Areopagus: 'we ought not think that the divine is like (ὅμοιον)…an image formed by the art (τέχνης) and imagination (ἐνθυμήσεως) of mortals' (Acts 17:29). But it also avoids the untethering brought on by equivocal predication, whereby thinking about God leaves us totally mute. Paul reminded the Athenians, the ἀγνώστος Θεός they worship 'is not far from each one of us' (Acts 17:27), even though our descriptions limp. So, Paul implies, we do well to take seriously the different places in history and culture where the divine presence is calling out for an artistic, imaginative response. Attunement to the divine, this thesis will argue, involves understanding humanity's right relationship – ἀναλογία – to God. Such attunement is heuristic and elusive, and literary fiction emerges as a fruitful domain in which to gauge attunement over time.

I.2.3 Relationship of analogy to *periphasis.* The benefit of what I call periphatic theology – theological thinking done *around* traditional theological discourse – flows directly from the occupational hazards of speculative theology. Aquinas cautions against metaphorical language that verges on univocal description. To speak of God as a "rock" is unmistakably metaphorical; it points to God being strong and protective in a way analogous to, but clearly different from, the protection and strength of a rock. But to speak of God as a "warrior", as a person who slays enemies with calculated fury, risks mis-taking the metaphor for a veridical description of God. Drawing on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*, Aquinas argues that divine matters are better handed on (*tradantur*) when Scripture relies on cruder, rather than on nobler descriptions, in order to preserve our minds from falling into a univocal literalism *('God must be a sword-wielding warrior in the same way as we humans are!'*). Because our knowledge of God is manifestly limited, any attempt at description verges on a betrayal. Yet, Aquinas intimates, our language is on stabler epistemic ground when it wonders from a distance about God: 'similitudes drawn from things farther away from God (*elongantur a Deo*) form within us a truer estimate (*aestimationem*): that God is beyond (*supra*) anything we may say or think of Him.'[36] Aquinas' spatial language is instructive, even as it embodies the paradox of metaphor: speech about God does better

[36] *ST* I I.9 ad obj 3 as explicated in Williams, *The Edge of Words*, 149.

at a deliberate distance from God, so as to estimate correctly – *approximate, esteem* – our understanding of the God who is beyond our words, thinking, and reason. Hence "God talk" can never yield a perfect description but only estimative; theological language is "truer" to the extent that it honours the abyss between the *res significata* and our *modus significandi*.

Thomas's argument for honouring analogical distance – similarity nested in a greater dissimilarity – offers further justification for this thesis's theological 'wandering' into another domain. If the metaphors we use to describe God are more illuminative from a distance, then the second-order reflection we do about our "God talk" likewise benefits from critical distance from theology. I am positing *periphasis* as that speaking and thinking "away from home", at the fertile borderlands of apophatic and cataphatic theology. This is the type of exit-to-return reflection done by Paul on the Areopagus. Paul deftly conjures pagan poets to help thematise Athenian privative worship of their ἀγνώστος Θεός. This "play away from home" helps formulate more robust theological language, which can be synthesized and adopted upon returning home.

With Paul as precedent I argue in this thesis that literature emerges as a locus *par excellence* for periphatic speaking and thinking *around* the divine. Virginia Woolf in particular deploys *periphasis* at a conscious distance from religious communities and commitments. Quality literature, as Virginia Woolf suggests in chapter four, creates space for the reader to become a co-conspirator with the author in determining meaning. In an essay she speaks of how good writing 'must draw its curtain around us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out,' and writing becomes like a veil that half reveals and half conceals its writer.[37] This requires imaginative play between two unseen players. Here is where Gadamer's sense of play and Edmund Husserl's phenomenological *epochē* come together. I describe and adapt them for our investigation in chapter two, to help us in our theological reflection. The reader of faith brackets his default belief (or unbelief), to let the author's description of God emerge as strange, other, uncanny, *unheimlich* – "away from home," if you will.

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Thomas's famous observation, 'all that I have written is straw compared to what has now been revealed to me,' flags theological wordiness with an asterisk of modesty.

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[37] As recorded in Hermione Lee, "Virginia Woolf's Essays," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Sellers, 2nd ed., Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 105.

Thomas highlights that to *estimate* is linked to *esteeming* God, which requires honouring the chasm between our *modus significandi* of God and the *res significata*. This distance does not mean giving up on speaking and thinking about God, but ensuring our thinking is done at a sufficient analogical distance to avoid the gravitational pull of univocity. Aquinas has helped frame the theological problem of human language and the divine; but he also gives a theological warrant to push out beyond theology. For this reason we turn to the imaginative configurations of Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), whose multidisciplinary approach merits introduction.

I.2.4 Nicholas of Cusa on doxological signs and *docta ignorantia.*[38] Cusa is a curious figure in the history of the Catholic Church, but also in the field of international diplomacy, mathematics, and astronomy to name just a few. A century before Copernicus defended a heliocentric universe (in 1543), Cusa was arguing that the earth was round and that planets did not move around the sun in perfect circles. Finding a unity to knowledge across disciplines, he moved easily among the material sciences, mathematics, philosophy, and theology. But unity admits difference. For Cusa, human reason is based on our ability to make distinctions, separating *this* particular entity from *that*: I am not you, you are not a horse, a horse is not a cow, etc. Every definition is a delimitation, a separation between one object in the world and another. Yet God is unique in being the unlimited, absolute maximum; God is in-finite and therefore not de-finable, either in mathematical or theological terms. Any definitional thinking we attempt about God is asymptotic at best: we may come close as we approach God, but our finite attempts can never correspond to the infinite. Such is human language attempting to describe God.

But that does not make Cusa an agnostic; rather apprehension around the referent of the word "God" is restrained by pre-reflective modes of knowing that are, he reasons, easily and readily accessible. Johannes Hoff notes that Cusa's pre-reflective modes of thought are *doxological*, i.e., grounded in spontaneous awe and wonder that generate praise (δόξα).[39] Cusa distinguishes pre-reflective wonder and praise from after-the-fact[40]

[38]I draw on Johannes Hoff's reading of Cusa. For a good distillation and contemporary assessment of Cusa's thought, see Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

[39] δόξα here is not meant in Plato's sense of sophistry or unreasoned opinion, but δόξα in the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew word for glory (כבוד, *kavod*). Hoff explains in 'The Analogical Turn' that he began with the plan to title his book 'the *Doxological Imagination*'.

reasoned reflection. After-the-fact praise can never match one's pre-reflective experience of wonder and praise. Important for this thesis's phenomenological inquiry, Cusa notes that we do not perceive everything around us, but only "see" phenomena that manifest themselves *as* important. We attend, that is, to those *doxological* signs that disclose themselves to our attention.[41]

Outside a context of faith, divine self-revelation appears entirely ungrounded as a reliable category of knowledge. But even within theology, divine self-revelation remains a mystery of the faith: on what epistemic ground does one claim that God communicates? To the pre-modern mind, divine self-revelation was a mystery not because divine-revelation was beyond *our* explanatory power, but because – Cusa argues – God is definitionally beyond what can be defined and explained. Our not-being-able-to-grasp the mystery of God characterises God's otherness. This epistemic claim grounds Cusa's famed *docta ignorantia* – a wisdom that is humble before all that it does not, cannot, fathom. Hence our knowledge of God is rooted more in *nescientia* than *scientia* – a 'not knowing' rather than 'knowing'. This *docta ignorantia*, for Cusa, directly relates to what inspires in us awe and wonder: we do not praise what we can dominate intellectually. We only spontaneously praise what defies our explanatory capacities, e.g., the *je ne sais quoi* of a favourite painting, or the captivating beauty of a sunset. Realities that make a claim on our attention are praiseworthy – i.e., doxological – signs that are not easily articulated. They appeal to us, and our meaning-full relationship to them cannot be exhausted by, or reduced to, human rationality. In **III.2.7** I explore how Cusa speaks of all creation (and created beauty) as unfolding (*explicatio*) from God and enfolding (*complicatio*) God's presence. I nuance Cusa's schema with Chrétien, who argues that all human creativity (and words we use in creating) are but a *response* to God's initiatory Word, who is the Christ.

I.3 Attunement and Grace

I.3.1 Rahner and the horizon of God's grace. Theology, following Aquinas, relies on analogies to understand our relationship to God. In section **I.2.3** I made a case for analogical thinking done periphatically, at a distance from theology, through

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[40] I refrain from calling this *a posteriori* (given the term's philosophical specificity) and to avoid confusing Cusa's pre-reflective awe and wonder with *a priori* deductions, which they are not.

[41] These doxological signs align with what American psychologist James J. Gibson termed "affordances" which I take up in **II.3.1**.

literature. Wondering *around* or *about* God itself entails spatial language. The German theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984), in his own synthesis of Kant and Aquinas, argues that the human person is fundamentally orientated towards God, i.e., to that 'absolute mystery' which the mystery itself offers to humanity as the 'ground and content of [our] being'[42]. That the word "God" and its variants persist across cultures is a phenomenon Rahner wishes to consider. Even if the word "God" were to disappear without a trace from human vocabulary, he suggests that the question of absolute mystery would 'arise at a *completely new point* where what had earlier been the origin of this word would have to achieve presence *in a new way* and *with a new word*.'[43] But, he continues, the word "God" does exist, 'prolonged even by an atheist when [s]he says that there is no God, and that something like God has no specifiable meaning'.[44] "God" is a given word in the history of language, which we neither create nor destroy. For Rahner this word "God" is 'the final word before we become silent, the Word in which we are dealing with the totality which grounds them all.'[45] Elsewhere Rahner adopted elements of secular German thought that help frame our conversation both of how God relates to creation, and how the author relates to her work. Specifically he employs the terms "attunement" and "horizon" as a *modus significandi* of our relationship to the absolute mystery which is God:

> A direct presence to God belongs to the nature of a spiritual person, in the sense of an unsystematic attunement (*Gestimmtheit*) and an unreflected *horizon* which determines everything else and within which the whole spiritual life of this spirit is lived. This direct presence to God belongs to the nature of a spiritual person as the *ground* which, though not allowing us to grasp it completely in a reflex manner, is nevertheless the *permanent basis* for all other spiritual activities and which, on this account, is always more "there" and less objectively "there" than anything else. This presence belongs to the nature of a spiritual person as the tacit factor in self-awareness which orders and explains everything *but cannot be explained itself*.[46]

Gestimmtheit, long used in German thought as a translation of *harmonia* and *consonantia*, was employed before Rahner by Heidegger to describe *Dasein*'s relationship (*Beziehung*, *Bezug*) to the world.[47] *Gestimmtheit* has *Stimme* – the "voice"

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[42] Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 44.
[43] Rahner, 45. Emphasis added.
[44] Rahner, 45.
[45] Rahner, 46–47.
[46] Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," 209.
[47] Though in the neighbourhood of this domain of inquiry, Heidegger is not a central voice of this thesis. A principal reason for not engaging Heidegger is that his description of being lacks the theological grounding which Rahner – a disciple of Heidegger – offers in the latter's treatment of God. For the subtle difference in Heidegger's and Rahner's use of *Gestimmtheit*, see Coolman, "*Gestimmtheit*: Attunement as a Description of the Nature-Grace Relationship in Rahner's Theology," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 782–800.

of a person or an instrument – at its centre. From *Stimme* also comes *stimmen* ("to attune") and *Stimmung*, connoting a psychological mood. Boyd Taylor Coolman notes that *Stimmung* also conveys a unity between an observer and her environment, a proper sense of one's place in a landscape.[48] This is consistent with Rahner's description of our fundamental orientation as the "horizon" and "ground", which are important analogical concepts treated extensively throughout this thesis. The spiritual person, properly attuned to, and at home in, his life-world environment, has the opportunity for leisure: to read, to write, to reflect, and to give voice *[Stimme]* to consciousness in the midst of his life-world. I am arguing that one way to thematise and gauge one's *Stimmung* vis-à-vis one's life-world and God, is to engage in imaginative play through literature. Literature, in other words, can help the spiritual person understand better his ἀναλογία – "right relation", "correspondence", "proportion" – to God, which involves unpacking what is understood by *grace*.

I.3.2 Nature, grace and what this thesis is not. Rahner is responding to the fundamental theological question of the twentieth century, the relationship of nature to grace. Where indeed is God to be found, and how can we know? Insofar as this thesis is a theological exercise, it presumes a Christian metaphysical realism: God exists, God created and sustains the world, and God has been revealed God's self in Christ; we co-inhabit this objective world as rational subjects, and God's ongoing gift of self – God's *grace* – is on offer to, and sustaining of, all of creation which is fundamentally oriented towards, always-already attuned to God's grace. Rather than weigh the question of grace's mediation "at home" in theology, *this thesis is a theological reflection on the operation of grace in the inspiration, creation and readerly reception of works of literature.* Hence this thesis argues for an authorial realism as well: the writer exists (i.e., is not "dead"), has created her text-world, and reveals her "authorial intentionality" (defined in chapter two) through the text, which is her ongoing gift of self to the reader. Attunement – and the cluster of images Rahner relies on for understanding one's relationship to the divine – underpins all the phenomenological, theological, and literary reflection contained in this thesis.

[48] Coolman, 785.

This thesis does not reside neatly within the domain of literary studies either, hived off as a secular discipline with its own canon, tools, and jargon.[49] Hence I will not give a full review of critical theories in literature, nor do I settle in a particular school of literary theory. Rather this thesis lies at the frontiers, exploring through phenomenology what flora takes root at the borderlands of theological and literary attention. Graham Ward among others notes that literature can never truly be secular, since literature and religious narratives draw from the same preconscious cultural imaginary, from our shared primordial blend of religious and non-religious elements and patterns of meaning. What is more, Ward continues, they share a common horizon of attention: 'Literature, like religion, operates in accordance with the existential horizons of anticipation and expectation, fear and hope.'[50] Both literature and religions rely on narratives to convey meaning, grasping at the mystery of reality. The writer of fiction, like the shaman of yesteryear, summons the power of language to 'conjure the possibilities of transcendence', for conjurer and reader alike.[51] As Gaston Bachelard frames it, 'A particular cosmos forms around a particular image as soon as the poet, artist, child gives the image a "destiny of grandeur".'[52]

We shall see throughout how Woolf and Robinson treat the question of expressed belief as it relates to religious experience, and how both relate to theological wondering *around* God. To put it another way, this thesis does not hinge on whether writers explicitly *believe* in God (as Robinson does), but on how capaciously each treats the vexing questions and mysteries of religious experience that do not cease because one declares her atheism. Writer and reader alike bring questions to the text of mortality, meaning, and the individual's place in the order of sensible time and space. Virginia Woolf does not refer to Christian grace, but she does engage in the mystical and mythic language of "moments of being", irruptive flashes of fulness that elevate one's attention above the dull quotidian. Mircea Eliade suggests that for 'the great majority of individuals who do not participate in any authentic religious experience, the mythical attitude can be discerned in the distractions, as well as in their unconscious psychic activity (dreams, fantasies, nostalgias), etc.'[53] All of these – distraction fits, vivid

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[49] This thesis focuses attention on a handful of literary theorists and only two authors, Virginia Woolf and Marilynne Robinson, though future endeavours will include writers of different languages and backgrounds.
[50] Graham Ward, "Why Literature Can Never Be Entirely Secular," *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 2, 23.
[51] Ward, 26.
[52] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Beacon Press, 1994), 176.
[53] Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (London: Collins, 1968), 37.

dreams, fantasizing, nostalgic recollections – are recorded in Woolf's autobiographical writings and fiction, as we shall see. The probing of one's felt limits – mortality – does not disappear because one rejects religious belief. 'Here too,' Eliade writes, 'there is always the struggle against Time, the hope to be freed from the weight of "dead Time," of the Time that crushes and kills.'[54] Eliade provokes an important question at the outset of this thesis: need one claim a religion to have experiences of grace? By way of response, E.M. Cioran suggests a category of modern intellectuals who possess 'a religious mind…without religion'.[55] This thesis is not an attempt to "baptise" non-religious writers like Woolf, let alone the discipline of literary theory. Nor does it aim to decipher crypto-religious psychological "authorial intention". This thesis aims rather to see how God's grace is enfolded in the writing of those bothered by God, irrespective of their explicit stance towards religious belief or affiliation. Attunement to grace, *malgré lui.*

I.3.3 Is 'common grace' sufficient? If this thesis is not inclined to "baptise" non-religious writers life Woolf, what is its warrant for speaking of grace operative in, through, and for them as writers?

The theology of grace underpins or connects to every other theological consideration in Christianity. Because God's grace is ongoing, constant and universal, its "call" or "appeal" to creation may disappear in the background as a given; a theology of grace aims to thematise God's divine initiative over time. This thesis suggests that the doctrine of grace can be understood *narratively*. The story of grace is the relationship of the Creator to what the Creator fashions; it begins with the gratuity of God's initiative to create. The story continues with God's constant care of and presence to creation, in spite of human frailty, indifference, and self-destructive behaviour. The story culminates in the surprising incarnation of Christ, who descends into finite particulars, is rejected, killed, and thereby triumphs over death. God's Spirit is sent to remain with humanity until the end of time, empowering us to greater faith, hope, and love.

The Reformed Christian tradition upon which Robinson draws speaks of *universal common grace* as God's providential care of all creation, for the believer and unbeliever alike. Grace here is active (though unthematised) in the conscience of, for

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[54] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), 193.
[55] From Cioran's essay, 'Beginning of a Friendship' in the *Festschrift* for Mircea Eliade, *Myths and Symbols*. Quoted in David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 6.

example, the non-believing doctor or scientist who forges advancements in medicine and science that benefit all of creation. It stands to reason that this common grace operates, too, in the literary fiction that draws the reader's attention to greater empathy, self-knowledge, and awareness of his relationship to reality. Soul-knowledge is a joint project of great novels and religions, both of which place memories, peccadillos, and inner movements before one's attention for a probing consideration of characters' incongruities, as they mature, or backslide, over time.

At first glance, universal common grace looks something like what several Christian traditions call *enabling* or *prevenient grace*, which "primes the pump" for life in God before it is recognised as grace. What is different is that enabling or prevenient grace presumes a dramatic second act – the ineluctable conversion towards God – whose fingerprints could only be detected *ex post facto*: 'I once was lost but now am found/Was blind but now I see.' Common grace, in contrast, neither presumes nor prefigures such a conversion. It is the sustaining presence of God that may never be identified or understood for what it is, like the electric current that hums invisibly through the wires and walls of a house to make it a home. It is the grace on which one depends without knowing or naming it; the grace to which one is attuned without recognising it. The benefit of framing our discussion in these terms bears also its limitation: *universal common grace* is deliberately vague in specifics of operation, and thus hard to distinguish from secular notions of human spirit, everyday generosity, élan, etc. The woolliness of its operations makes it hard to recognise, or worse, an easy target of deracination from its origin in God. The semantic range of Greek Χάρις ("grace", "gift", "favour", "gratitude") is instructive here: a gift that bears no signs of a giver is *taken for granted*, i.e., taken *as a given* in the natural attitude. An unknown favour stirs no response of gratitude. The expletive construction in English ("there is____") – obscures what the German *es gibt* reveals: that there is a *giving* behind the apparent givenness of things (*data*), and through the giving, a giver.

Thematising this gracious giving, and the gracious giver, is the project of Robinson and her theological inspiration John Calvin. Robinson's theological worldview presumes a strong metaphysics, though she rejects 'theology as a grinding labour, engrossed in its own difficulty'.[56] Drawing on Calvin she maintains that theological investigation begins with attention to creation as the 'theatre of God's glory'

[56] "Theology for This Moment," in *What Are We Doing Here?: Essays*, by Marilynne Robinson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 41.

which reveals 'the vastness and the atmospheres of this matrix of Being'.[57] Theological reflection, she argues, 'is the great architecture of thought and wonder that makes religious experience a house of many mansions, open to the soul's explorations, indeed, made to invite and to accommodate them.'[58] Two mansions worthy of exploration are inhabited by Woolf and Robinson herself. The fiction of Woolf, I argue in chapter four, captures the fanciful, *utopian* tendency of the imagination (described below in **I.4.1**). Robinson articulates this utopian tendency as well, in the despair and existential dread of characters Jack and Lila. But Robinson also demonstrates the *constitutive* possibility of the imagination: her fiction also thematises God's grace for the reader, by ironically highlighting her characters' limited perception of that grace. Grace is recognised at a distance from God, often not by the characters themselves.

Early in his *Theological Investigations* Karl Rahner notes an important qualification: the 'possibility of experiencing grace, and the possibility of experiencing grace *as* grace, are not the same thing.'[59] Woolf's characters have quasi-mystical experience that look and sound like encounters with God's gracious presence, but nowhere does the author suggest it be thematised *as* grace. By the conclusion of this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that Robinson offers a more capacious vision concerning the whole (*kath'holou*) of reality than Woolf, and is thus a more fruitful theological interlocutor. This is not simply because Robinson is a confessional Christian, but because she trains her readers to see how belief and unbelief, hopes and disappointments, can sit alongside one another without either artificial resolution, or existential despair. For Robinson, grace operates through difficult relationships and situations, and Robinson trains her reader's intentionality to detect grace's operations *as* it moves into, and through, ordinary human experiences.

I.3.4 Partial visions and expressions of grace. The *katholic* imagination of faith, I argue, helps the reader move, part by part, through the particulars not only of a text, but of his very life; this imagination opens the observer to a dramatic "second act" – a redemptive lifting of the attentional gaze to the author, and perhaps to God. Grace's elusiveness defies easy description, operating in registers of language different from verifiable, one-to-one adequation. Like talk of "God", grace itself verges on the

[57] "Theology for This Moment," 40.
[58] "Theology for This Moment," 40.
[59] Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations. Volume I* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 300.

ineffable, and our language now can only limn theological concepts *in part*. St. Paul also offers us a helpful image of thinking how we move from partial attunements to grace towards the whole (*kath'holou*). 1 Corinthians draws attention to the limits of our speaking, thinking, and reasoning:

> For we know *in part* (ἐκ μέρους γινώσκομεν) and we prophesy *in part*, but when our completion (τὸ τέλειον) comes, the partial (τὸ ἐκ μέρους) will pass away. When I was a child (νήπιος), I used to speak *as* a child, think *as* a child, reason *as* a child; when I became a man, I put aside the things of a child. At present we see in obscurity (ἐν αἰνίγματι), as in a mirror, but then, face to face (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον). At present I know *in part*; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.[60]

For the time being, we know *in part* and prophesy *in part*. In the pericope Paul likens himself (and his audience) to children who speak, think, and reason *as* children. We lack understanding of the whole, and are left with parts until completion as adults. Spiritual adulthood brings to completeness (τὸ τέλειον) our childish non-speaking (from *nē-epos*, not speaking, akin to Latin *in-fans*). Paul likens the limits of language to partial vision: 'At present we see in obscurity as through a mirror; but later, face to face. At present I know (γινώσκω) in part; however then I shall know experientially (ἐπιγνώσομαι), as I am fully known.' The verbal shift in knowing from *ginosko* to *epi-gnōsomai* is crucial – from a confident I-subject using active voice, to the decentring personal-acquaintance that Greek encodes in grammatic middle-voice. The child who cannot speak, think, or reason fully may know, as well as one "knows" what he sees through a distorted reflection. But moving towards wholeness (τὸ τέλειον) requires an experiential knowledge of God, face to face, that cannot be described with our limited speech and blinkered understanding. And this face to face with God bestows one's full identity: 'By the grace of God,' Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:10, 'I am what I am, and [God's] grace was not empty for me.' Nevertheless such grace is not easily described, either; in 2 Cor 9:15, Paul expresses gratitude for what cannot be described: 'Thanks (Χάρις) be to God for His in-expressible (ἀνεκδιηγήτῳ) gift!' The in-expressible (ἀ-νεκδιήγητος) gift of grace, like the Athenians' ἀγνώστος Θεός, takes an alpha privative: a cautious bracketing of one's subjective capacity to define God's grace or delimit God's operations. The fruitful paradox is that the privative does not cancel the awe, wonder, and desire to speak about what one has seen: rather one expresses gratitude by describing its very inexpressibility ('I cannot thank you enough!'). Here Paul, Cusa, and Rahner come together: one comes to know God by recognising God as the unknowable mystery beyond words. In chapter

[60] 1 Cor 13:9-12

six, I revisit Hans-Georg Gadamer and Nicholas of Cusa to integrate these Pauline themes: of the part-to-the-whole, of the hermeneutical limits of a subject's vision, and of worship and awe for what cannot be fully known.[61]

A final observation ties together Paul's mission of explicating God with Aquinas' argument for theological engagement from a distance. Paul addresses the churches of Corinth from hundreds of miles to the north: 'Now, brethren, *we wish to make known to you the grace of God* which *has been given* in the churches *in Macedonia*' (2 Cor 8:1). Paul's pedagogy of grace is subtle but clear: in order to thematise for a faith community how God's grace is active, he speaks of grace's activity in a distant domain. Grace is not merely difficult to express; it also may not be evident *as grace* to those affected. Paul acknowledges in Galatians 2:9 that it was the "pillars of the Church" (James, Cephas and John) who first perceived the grace given to Paul, empowering him to go to the Gentiles. This exegesis of Paul suggests that the visible fruits of grace may remain elusive to those who bear them. Like humility, wisdom, and discernment, graciousness does not announce itself, and the one attuned to God is disinclined to draw attention to herself. But grace can be observed from afar, and one can press one's words to talk *about* God's gracious activity, periphatically.

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This thesis is not an extended biblical exegesis, but a point of departure. Paul gives both a biblical precedent and marching orders: the Christian ought to have the humility to recognise that we know, think, and speak only *in part*, not presuming to know, for now, the final word about God or God's gracious activity. Even for the believer, our vision *of the whole* is obscured until we see God person-to-person, where we will know our full identity, by the grace/gift/favour of God. This grace of God remains difficult to express, yet Paul recognises it at work "away from home", and thematises it for the church community. Paul also relies on the testimonies and fellowship of others, who first recognise grace at work in him, so that he, too, may be missioned to the gentiles to evangelize. One becomes attuned to a more capacious view of the whole – *kath'holou* -- that is, of God's presence to each and to all, in a foregrounding community of faith. Chapters six and seven explore this more in depth with the help of Nicholas of Cusa's exercise from *De Visione Dei*. But let us not rush too quickly to the theological conclusions without first entering the particulars. The

[61] Recall that Cusa argues that knowledge (*scientia*) of God is better thought of as not-knowing, *nescentia*, which echoes this privative construction.

second half of this chapter is a "blueprint" for future chapters, beginning with the tools and materials needed. I begin with what is, and what is not, meant by *imagination.*

I.4 Literature, Imagination, and Faith

I.4.1 The 'tendencies' of the imagination. Quality fiction, I argue later, does not enforce univocal meaning, but invites the reader into interpretative play with the writer. Such fiction begins with the active imagination of the author, who helps shape and expand the imagination of the reader without coercion. The formation of a more capacious imagination begins with readerly attunement to a text-world, noting its internal images and metaphors. The author prompts the reader to find analogical resonances – similarities-amidst-differences – between what she offers within her text-world and what appears *phenomenologically* in his life-world. The reader becomes attuned also to the *literary* creator of the text, which (I argue in the next chapter) is a *theological* reading of literature. Before treating the dynamics of this so-called katholic imagination (which illuminates literature, phenomenology and theology alike), let us clarify what is, and is not meant, by the imagination.

Centuries after Samuel Taylor Coleridge's fancy-vs-imagination distinction,[62] twentieth-century thinkers treat the imagination not only as a creative faculty, but also as an existential friend or foe. On the one hand, the imagination can flee in innocuous retreat from the world into fantasy, a conjuring of non-existent or absent objects. This tendency allows for a respite from boredom or pain, loneliness or existential tedium. Saulius Geniusas calls this the *utopian* tendency of the imagination, entertaining that which has no place (οὐ-τόπος) in the horizon of actuality.[63] On the other hand, the imagination can empower a subject not only to dream about escaping the boundaries of actuality, but to reconstitute her surrounding world so as to render dreams attainable. Insofar as it challenges the realities of time and place, such an imagination is 'by far not innocent': it carries a tremendous force of reshaping the world and one's place within it, for good or ill. This second faculty Geniusas calls the *constitutive* tendency of the imagination.

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[62] In **III.2.9** I take a considered look at Samuel Taylor Coleridge's (1772-1834) distinction of the creative faculties of the imagination from unbounded fancy.

[63] Saulius Geniusas, "Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Paul Ricœur's Philosophy of Imagination," *Human Studies* 38, no. 2 (2015): 225.

Are these two tendencies – utopian escape vs. shaping the future – compatible with one another? Geniusas' survey of 20th-century thinkers on the imagination reveals a divide in emphasis, highlighting one or the other tendency and neglecting the other. On the one hand, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Imagination and the Imaginary* treated the imagination as a spontaneous, self-determined flight from reality and the problems of one's condition; such an imagination leads to "bad faith" and the fleeing of facticity and responsibilities. On the other hand, Cornelius Castoriadis treats the imagination as the constitutive force underlying *all other human activities*. He distinguishes the "radical imagination" which creates, from a secondary imagination which imitates, reproduces, and combines images.[64] The radical imagination functions both individually (as, say, a creative artist's imagination) and as a collective social imaginary. The problem, Geniusas notes, is that thinkers tend to fall into one of these two camps. But what does it mean for the imagination to facilitate *both* utopian escape *and* constitutive creativity? How is one to resolve this "paradox of irreality"? Paul Ricœur suggests that these polarized capacities (to conjure present unrealities or to transform reality in the future) need not be artificially resolved, with one tendency outbidding the other: 'On the one hand, imagination entails the *epochē*, the suspension, of the direct reference of thought to the objects of our ordinary discourse. On the other hand, imagination provides models for *reading reality in a new way*.'[65]

Extending the thought of Ricœur, Geniusas concludes that the utopian tendency is the prerequisite negation (through *epochē*) of expectations. This is not, importantly, choosing fanciful unreality, but a conscious *bracketing* of one's natural attitude towards reality. Such remotion creates the space for the constitutive tendency to (re)constitute reality through imaginative play: 'Within such a bracketed framework, the subject of experience obtains the freedom not only to devise new metaphors, but also to try out new ideas and values.'[66] We will see in subsequent chapters how a bracketing of (un)belief in God in the literature of Woolf and Robinson – *epochē* – clears the space for theological wondering to occur. By playing away from home – bracketing one's natural attitude to view reality at a utopic distance – one can get a more capacious view of the whole and one's place in it. The imagination's countervailing faculties, of fancy and creation, of

[64] Castoriadis locates this distinction in Aristotle's *De Anima*. See Cornelius Castoriadis, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary," in *The Castoriadis Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 319–37.
[65] Ricœur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling" quoted in Geniusas, "Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," 228. Emphasis added.
[66] Geniusas, "Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," 233.

remotion and reformulation, provides clues to the transcendent character, and origins, of the imagination.

I.4.2 William Lynch's link of imagination and faith. Into this mild confusion enters Jesuit classicist and philosopher William Lynch (1908-1987), an important voice for distinguishing escapist fancy from both the literary imagination and religious faith. Escape from reality, Lynch argues in *Christ and Apollo* (1960), is the remit neither of imagination nor of faith. He offers an epistemic claim and two helpful definitions that underpin threads of this thesis's argument. The claim is that we do not experience a world of pure facts, observations or ideas to which we later bring interpretations, theories, imaginings, or beliefs; the world is *always-already* experienced as *meaning-full*. I use this term throughout the thesis to mean simply "full of meaning and thus meaningful". Lynch's epistemic claim, I will trace in the next chapter, is consistent with the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer as well as the starting point of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness.

The definitions Lynch offers help to ground our discussion of the imagination going forward. First, he defines the *imagination* not as a single faculty of the mind, but 'the total resources in us which go into the *making of our images* of the world.'[67] These include not only the senses (sight, hearing, touch, etc.) but one's history and education, feelings and wishes, love and hate, 'faith and unfaith', insofar as they contribute to how one *images* (verb) the world meaningfully. Our imagination, in short, is that basal resource necessary for making sense of the extramental world and our attuned relationship – ἀναλογία – to it.

Secondly, Lynch defines *faith* as a primal and broad force of 'belief, promise and fidelity, which – by its presence or absence, by its operation or collapse, by its goodness or fury, by its fidelities or treacheries – shapes (or misshapes) the welfare…the very existence, of men and women in life and society.'[68] Furthermore primal faith 'has' a body – indeed many bodies. Lynch notes that primal faith operates in political bodies as well as in relationships of love, friendships of loyalty, and partnerships of trust. Because primal faith is embodied, it is image-able: 'If I approach a man with the paradigms of faith,' Lynch writes, 'I compose his actions accordingly. The patterns and interpretation

[67] William F. Lynch, *Images of Faith: Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1974), 18. Emphasis added.
[68] Lynch, 10.

shift completely if I approach him without faith (as perhaps I should, for that matter). I compose the evidence in another way.'[69] Lynch's description of this posture of primal faith-unfaith describes the *attitudinal* qualities subjects bring to other people; but also to political and religious institutions, and ultimately to questions of God.[70] Lynch's faith-unfaith paradigm is an instructive warning to the lone subject. Just as my trust-distrust of another person constitutes my experience, I, in turn, am 'created and patterned by the faith of others'.[71] For Lynch, primal faith – embodied, interpersonal trust – is the implicit horizon upon which all trusting relationships with other subjects play out. One notices similarities, and differences, to Rahner's articulation of attunement in **I.3.1**.

But this faith is not merely with other people: it is the foundation of all conscious engagement with the extramental world, emergent from infancy. Lynch writes that when the infant mind 'leaves what seems paradise' when it first engages in 'real thought with the world'[72], the mind has to set aside its sense of omnipotence: 'the specific thought whereby, leaving *this* paradise, the mind wrestles with anything less than omnipotence has *faith carved into the very guts of this act* by which it lays hold of the precise density of any actual thing.'[73]

An infant begins with a mistaken 'first form of faith' that his instinctual wishes ('food, now!') are coextensive with reality. Without this desire and mistaken faith, Lynch suggests, the infant would not survive. This faith in his omnipotence is shattered by the dynamic of deprivation and unexpected reward; hunger and satiation. The infant goes on a 'great journey' as he is weaned from this mistaken faith-in-his-own-omnipotence. His caregivers, he comes to learn, govern the rhythms of gratification and deprivation, which helps to establish for the child knowledge of the world of separated objects. The infant enters this world, in thought and action, which demands a *primal trust* in those who tend him; without that trust he literally would die. Lynch sketches out an anthropology of this faith:

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[69] Lynch, 50.
[70] These attitudes, treated in **II.3.2**, are what Husserl calls the 'thetic qualities' of a *noema.* Gadamer, treated in **II.1.6,** calls these attitudes our inescapable 'prejudices' which condition interpretation of texts, events, etc.
[71] Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 51.
[72] Lynch, 60.
[73] Lynch, 60–61. The latter emphasis is added. Husserl's phenomenology, as we will see in the next chapter, describes how it is that human consciousness relates to extramental reality. Husserl proposes that one can eliminate from consideration what he thinks he already knows about any given phenomenon by 'bracketing' his natural attitude. Lynch is indirectly proposing that undergirding even this phenomenological reduction lies an implicit faith in the intelligibility and independence of an extramental world.

> most of the fundamental forms of faith are carved without words into the very structures of nature.… From earliest childhood faith becomes an increasingly active dialogue with promise. It is almost *a dance of gestures between the mother and the child, a dance of offer, response,* increasing complexity, testing, verification, misplacements, anticipations, over demands, joys, cries, screams, withdrawals, renewals.[74]

The life of faith is educated, he reasons, by testing the promises made, whether by one's mother, or the world, or by God: 'We have met the first victory…of objects and knowledge over omnipotence,' a victory (Lynch reasons), preceded and guided by faith.[75] Any rational knowledge, or scientific inquiry, implicitly relies on this initial embodied act of faith. Put differently, any human activity is a response made in faith, to a foregrounded call or appeal. This theme of call-and-response will emerge again in chapter three with the theological framework of Jean-Louis Chrétien.

I.4.3 Lynch on faith and artistic creation. Lynch extends this emergent anthropology of faith into the domain of arts and literature. Faith is crucial, for Lynch, in 'activating' the relationship between author and reader, who (together) co-imagine a work: 'in the case of the artist, not all the images [she] creates are her own work; they are as much the images she makes us form ourselves, and she is a better artist if she makes us thus active; if, that is, she makes us do half the work.'[76] Like a parent teaching her child the rhythms of care and withdrawal, a writer does not do the reader's work for him. If the artist over-determines meaning, the reader is rendered helpless. But the true artist, Lynch argues, 'being an active imaginer herself, wishes to make active imaginers out of us.'[77] This entails a creator/writer entrusting her work to the world; which may be read or ignored. She may have a psychological 'authorial intent' in writing, which may be investigated or ignored. A major question in the following chapters is what the precise relationship is between the writer and the reader, mediated by the text. For now, Lynch helps to ground that the relationship of author to reader as one of *primal faith* in another human subject, without which readerly investigation could not proceed.

I.4.4 Quality fiction and the 'whisper of conspiracy'. Lynch suggested that one's sense of faith begins with primal relationship to one's parents. The human subject comes to interpret his relationship to a text, or to his environment, in what Hans-Georg

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[74] Lynch, 125. Emphasis added.
[75] Lynch, 62.
[76] Lynch, 19. Gender changed throughout quotation.
[77] Lynch, 20.

Gadamer calls play (*Spiel*). Gadamer suggests that play is central to the reader's work of interpretation of a text. As readers of Woolf and Robinson, we too are playful in exploration of the questions central to this thesis: can an atheist writer be said to be a co-creator with God, even if she rejects belief? What does it mean for a reader to 'intend' consciously the attentional frame offered by the writer? How do writers of fiction "bothered by God" nevertheless engage with theological questions? What does their framing of our attention reveal about how God frames our attention in the natural world?

The playful essays and fiction of Robinson and Woolf discover as they go, toeing out from the known worlds of conventional ideas, or of how their characters are supposed to act. Readers, too stumble along through their texts, discover details as the characters do (or ironically do not). Literary critic James Wood – who writes insightfully about both authors – suggests that 'fiction should seem to offer itself to the reader's completion, not to the writer's. This whisper of conspiracy is one of fiction's necessary beauties.'[78] Wood suggests an evaluative criterion for quality fiction which this thesis adopts: it 'must not stroke the known but distress the undiscovered.'[79] This probing of the not-yet-expressed is the shared task of the imaginations of writer, characters, and reader alike. The protagonist in a story might turn over in her head different interpretations of life events, stimulating a similar imaginative activity in the reader.

Long before literary theory, Aquinas noted, 'when we wish to make someone understand something, we lay examples before him from which he can form phantasms for the purpose of understanding.'[80] An author, Aquinas might suggest, has a choice about what she places within her reader's attentional frame. The content she chooses to include in her novel (or film or painting) stimulates images – the imaginative act of understanding – *within* the reader's consciousness. The reader, I argue throughout this thesis, is engaged in interpretative play with the unseen author, in the shared game of a text. The author's creative text-world challenges, woos, and expands the reader's imagination. The reader's imagination becomes attuned, in other words, to the author *through* the shared horizon of the text.

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[78] James Wood, *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), 238.
[79] Wood, 238.
[80] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* I 84.7 *respondeo*.

I.5 Theological Engagement in Woolf and Robinson

I.5.1 Introduction of Woolf and Robinson. Lynch's parent-child dynamic of feeding-withdrawal relates to how an author cultivates both the attention and independence of her reader. I suggest that quality fiction which treats theological questions – like Woolf's and Robinson's – has merit because it draws the reader's attention to questions of religious belief, without force-feeding answers. A theological engagement through literature does not take God as another given, nor does it exclude the possibility of the divine. Woolf, herself agnostic, cannot bring herself to assent to religious belief. But she offers thoughtful protagonists who wrestle with adventitious (divine?) utterances that come when their attention slackens and they become attuned to "moments of being". Whether these experiences are "anthropological residue" of former belief, or actual encounters with a personal God, remains to be seen. Woolf speaks of 'the mysterious nosings about, feelings round, darts, dashes and sudden discoveries of that very shy and illusive spirit, the imagination.'[81] I call this her *periphatic theology*. For Robinson, herself a Christian, the natural world is the theatre of God's gracious presence, and the language she draws on is often biblical; yet her protagonists openly wrestle with belief, and often despair of God's providential care. But these exceptional writers only go so far; their fiction does not prescribe its own interpretation, but (as Wood suggests) leads readers to complete the 'bottom half of a discovery whose plaintive stalk the writer has merely uncovered.'[82] The next two sections introduce how each writer treats attention and consciousness, as a prelude to the phenomenology of intentionality I develop in chapter two.

I.5.2 A style of Woolf's own. Virginia Woolf's biographer Gillian Beer notes that in all her work, Woolf 'strained across genre, attempted to break through – or disturb – the limits of the essay, the novel, the biography, to touch realities denied by accepted forms.'[83] Like the theologian, the writer presses language and genre to express truths sensed but not yet articulated. Woolf's 1928 essay *A Room of One's Own*, comprised of a series of talks given in Cambridge, is an unconventional response to the question of women and fiction. In the first chapter, Woolf treats the question playfully, by having "Mary" go on an imaginative excursion to an Oxbridge college. Mary sits

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[81] Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).
[82] James Wood, *The Broken Estate* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), 238.
[83] Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1996), 48, 77.

down along the river concentrating on the water, which has anthropomorphic agency of its own:

> The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and burning tree, and when the undergraduate had oared his boat through the reflections they closed again, completely, as if he had never been. There one might have sat the clock round lost in thought. [84]

Woolf describes imaginatively how a thought quickens and is gently hauled in for consideration:

> Thought…had let its line down into the stream. It swayed, minute after minute, hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds, letting the water lift it and sink it until—you know the little tug—the sudden conglomeration of an idea at the end of one's line: and then the cautious hauling of it in, and the careful laying of it out? Alas, laid on the grass how small, how insignificant this thought of mine looked.[85]

Across genres Woolf experiments in the displacement of consciousness, imagining the "mind" of things that perdure apart from, and beyond, her own subjectivity. Her artistic attention to simple objects in the world reveals imaginative investment and empathy. The imagination fires strongly, but subtly: Mary, like a quiet river, possesses quiet depths that might be overlooked. Woolf characterizes ideas as elusive fish, hovering below the surface of consciousness. To catch them requires stillness and untrammelled thought. Mary casts the small idea back into the water 'that it may grow fatter and be one day worth cooking and eating.'[86] This ambiguity has the reader wonder, where do ideas reside? Externally, below the surface of the water, or interiorly, in the capacious depths of one's mind? Or is the conscious mind, in fact, 'one with' the river? All the while, the reader is reading Woolf's ideas on a page, but entertaining them interiorly.

Across genres, Woolf's writing plays at the fertile borderland between exterior and interior worlds. The wall of separation between a subject's consciousness and her extramental life-world is thin and porous, and the slightest disruptions in one will redound to the other. To think, pray, or probe the world for meaning, requires a blanket of inner quiet. To write out one's thoughts requires the spatiotemporal stillness of a room of one's own. Having stumbled upon these thoughts by the riverside, our narrator is shooed away by a college beadle. Mary is not a male student, but an unaccompanied woman (!) trespassing on grasses reserved for the college's fellows. As she returns forlorn to the designated confines of the gravel path, Mary ponders Oxbridge's history of

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[84] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Collins Classics, 2014), 3.
[85] Woolf, 3.
[86] Woolf, 3.

stones and manicured lawns. She imagines the forbidden fruits of centuries of 'streams of gold and silver', during the age of faith and later the age of reason, which remain just out of her reach. Her wandering thoughts are literally cut off as she is pushing physical boundaries, which ends her imaginative digression. Hermione Lee notes that Woolf's essays' tactics of 'apparently loose, spontaneous form, of interruptive open-endedness, have been found very alluring' and subversive for generations of anti-authoritarian readers.[87] *A Room of One's Own*'s reflections are subtly textured and performative; the reader experiences the narrator's wandering and wondering in stuffy libraries and college quads, as she presses the limits of her, and our, attentional frame.

In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf notes that 'books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately.'[88] Paul's speech on the Areopagus demonstrates that thinking is not done in a vacuum, but in conversation with thinkers past and present, canonical and forgotten to history. The Bible itself is not a book with a single author, but a hypertext linked through cross-references, buried allusions, and typological re-interpretations. Woolf captures this sense of interwoven perspectives in her experimental novel *The Waves* which gives fictional voice to the diverse temperaments in her circle of friends, set against the re-creation of the beginning of Genesis.[89] Woolf would likely approve of Robinson's later multi-perspectival series of *Gilead, Home, Lila,* and *Jack* (hereafter GHLJ) which treat roughly the same story elements from a range of protagonists. Woolf speaks of 'a spot the size of a shilling at the back of the head which one can never see for oneself,' and recognises that she, like any writer, has her limitations: it is good to have others who can 'describe that spot the size of a shilling at the back of the head.'[90] Robinson's GHLJ is a testament to the cognitive limits and misapprehensions between characters. Woolf speaks of the writer's capacious mind that is 'resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided.'[91] One must be creative, incandescent, and striving towards the whole to grasp realities outside one's head. As the Church pillars helped thematise God's gracious action in St Paul's work, so this thesis will investigate Woolf's and Robinson's writing in search of God's gracious activity.

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[87] Lee, "Virginia Woolf's Essays," 93.
[88] Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 79.
[89] Even while consciously setting aside religious belief, she draws on and refashions Biblical imagery.
[90] Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 89.
[91] Woolf, 97.

I.5.3 Robinson's theological attention through fiction. In his survey of literature and the Christian imagination, *Wounded Angel*, Paul Lakeland argues that reading literature can be a '*propaedeutic to faith*, in that it throws up innumerable possibilities of access to transcendence. Literature, one might say, warms up the human capacity for faith, but it does not cause it, still less does it command it.'[92] So how does literature exactly 'warm up' a reader for the capacity of faith?

Without demanding it, quality literature – like Scripture – offers the reader the possibility for an emotional connection to characters as the latter undergo experimental situations. Both Woolf and Robinson write characters whose consciousness is a record of *thinking*, not records of stable *thoughts*. In like measure, to say one believes in God is not the same thing as having beliefs *that* God exists. The former is an attestation over time, developed from what Lynch called the "primal faith" with which one approaches the world. The person of faith regularly entertains doubts, is surprised by glimpses of God's provident hand at work, only to feel abandoned, duped, and confused in the next moment.

When asked what role "faith in God" plays in her life, Marilynne Robinson offered, 'Frankly, I don't know what faith in God means. For me, the experience is much more a *sense* of God. Nothing could be more miraculous than the fact that we have a consciousness that makes the world intelligible to us and are moved by what is beautiful.'[93] The life of faith, for Robinson, is not adherence to a set of propositions, but a conscious attunement to beauty and grace embedded in, but not reducible to, creation.

Let us consider a brief passage from *Gilead* where Robinson employs simile and metaphor to think about life after death. She is careful to ground her metaphysics in terms familiar to the physical, sensory world. The narrator, pastor John Ames, imagines eternal life in language that even his young son would understand:

> I feel sometimes as if I were a child who opens its eyes on the world once and sees amazing things it will never know any names for and then has to close its eyes again. I know this is all mere apparition compared to what awaits us, but it is only lovelier for that. There is a human beauty in it. And I can't believe that, when we have all been changed and put on incorruptibility, we will forget our fantastic condition of mortality and impermanence, the great bright dream of procreating and perishing that meant the whole world to us.[94]

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[92] Paul Lakeland, *The Wounded Angel: Fiction and the Religious Imagination* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), 161.
[93] Interviewed by Sarah Fay, "Marilynne Robinson, *The Art of Fiction No. 198*," *Paris Review*, Fall 2008, https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5863/the-art-of-fiction-no-198-marilynne-robinson.
[94] Robinson, *Gilead*, 65-66.

This passage alludes to Paul's language of speaking, thinking, and seeing like a child (1 Cor 13), treated earlier. In *Gilead* Robinson conjures Pauline language but repurposes it for John Ames to express childlike awe at the world. Ames continues, 'In eternity this world will be Troy, I believe, and all that has passed here will be the epic of the universe, the ballad they sing in the streets. Because I don't imagine any reality putting this one in the shade entirely, and I think piety forbids me to try.'[95] In Ames's conception of the afterlife, the story of this world is retold in perpetuity as the "epic of the universe".

In an interview Robinson argues that analogy is 'the essential form of thinking' – the basis of all human cognition – because it 'integrates the *problems* of experience and the *ordering* of experience.'[96] The former treats what happens after death: how did I pass from life to death to eternal life? Who is singing this ballad of the world? The latter treats the sense-making of these experiences: what is the meaning of this ballad sung in the streets of eternity? The reader cannot help but question his own conception of eternity in considering John Ames' analogy, weighing its explanatory power and imaginative merits.

Aquinas' treatment of "God talk" above relates how our modes of signifying God relate analogically to the God of whom we speak. In like fashion, Marilynne Robinson offers a *literary analogy* for imagining how one's visible, finite life-world relates to whatever lies beyond the visible world. Our life-world is perhaps just a self-contained system that spontaneously came into being, and will decay, without reference to a Creator. Or perhaps, Robinson suggests, this world may be but an epic tale, told in the streets of eternity. If that is the case, then reality as we experience it here and now becomes, analogically, the meaning-full "literature" of eternal life.

This unassuming literary passage turns out to be a demanding thought experiment, peering at reality through the looking glass. The extended analogy demands self-displacement and thematising one's implicit presumptions of the universe; the reader must "bracket" his sense of reality and wonder with John Ames, 'what if we what we take to be reality is but a story we retell in eternity?' The narrator's imaginative play probes the limits of the text-world, and invite us to participate in the same decentring exercise in our life-world. It raises a further analogical mode for expressing theological points, which will be treated in chapter three: Creation is a story that unfolds from the

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[95] Robinson, *Gilead*, 66.

[96] Thomas Schaub and Marilynne Robinson. "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson," in Contemporary Literature 35.2 (1994), 244.

mind of God the author, a God who speaks creation into existence. Hence any stories writers tell are but sub-creations, enfolded into God's larger story of creation. To wonder about the reliability of literary analogy, I submit, is a prime example of a theological engagement through literature. *Gilead* and its subsequent instalments read like an extended fine-tuning of the right relationship – ἀναλογία – of nature to grace, and of creation to Creator.

I.6 Towards a *Katholic* Imagination

I.6.1 Looking ahead. Woolf and Robinson are examples of writers who treat the delicate register of belief and unbelief, which was the first task of the 2007 MLA Conference mentioned in **I.1.1**. After reading and assessing Woolf and Robinson's literature in light of our phenomenological and theological voices, I will suggest in Part III how the *katholic imagination* is a measure for evaluating the contribution of each writer.

Allow at the beginning a clarifying note about *Catholic* vs. *katholic* imaginations. The common understanding of the former term, per David Tracy and Andrew Greeley, is that a *Catholic* "analogical imagination" entails the use of analogical speech and sacramental symbols, whereas the *Protestant* "dialectical imagination" sees radical disunion between God and creation. For the Catholic imagination, Greeley writes, '[t]he world and all its events, objects, and people tend to be somewhat *like God*. The Protestant classics, on the other hand, assume a God who is radically absent from the world and who discloses Herself only on rare occasions (especially in Jesus Christ and Him Crucified). The world and all its events, objects, and people tend to be radically different from God.'[97] This thesis does not wish to define the Catholic imagination over and against a putatively Protestant vision, for two reasons. The first is that neither writer is Catholic, so the taxonomy does do not neatly fit. Secondly, the one who *is* a confessional Protestant, Robinson, draws extensively on John Calvin's sacramental theology, which – in her reading – aligns more with the analogical imagination that Greeley attributes to Catholicism.

To sidestep this terminological quagmire, this thesis speaks of the *katholic* imagination to distinguish it from the doctrinal specificities of Catholicism. I intend to

[97] Andrew Greeley, "Protestant and Catholic: Is the Analogical Imagination Extinct?," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 4 (August 1989): 486.

argue that Woolf (partially) and Robinson (more robustly) embody a katholic imagination by actively seeking a greater vision of the whole (*kath'holou*) in their fiction, which invites readers to do likewise.

Whether in theology or literature, writers deploy images and words to probe what has been previously out of grasp – our finite *modus significandi* attempts to locate and bear the infinite *res significata.* To do so we must probe the horizons of the finite as entry-points to the infinite; what is particular and perhaps unsettling can be the entry point to discerning God's grace at work. Woolf hints at one of these deeper insights in *A Room of One's Own*, when she is able to trespass the conventional limits of a garden towards a more capacious vision of reality, mottled by joy and sorrow:

> when for some reason the beauty of the world revealed and yet soon to perish (here I pushed into the garden, for, unwisely, the door was left open and no beadles seemed about), the beauty of the world which is so soon to perish, has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder.[98]

Touching beauty, like a delicate rose, reveals its very limits and fragility. The paradox of this katholic vision means that beauty can coexist with decay, and God's expansive grace can be discovered in the messiness of particularity and limitation. In a similarly stark passage from her novel *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson writes, 'There are two occasions when the sacred beauty of Creation becomes dazzlingly apparent, and they occur together. One is when we feel our mortal insufficiency to the world, and the other is when we feel the world's mortal insufficiency to us.'[99] This double insight is not a contradiction, but an awareness of the contrarieties and surprises that coexist in the human condition, which always evade our attempts to artificially resolve them.

Having reviewed major voices and themes of this project, let us venture forth from our theological home, to consider what hermeneutics, literary theory, and phenomenological have to offer for understanding the context for our theological engagement through literature.

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[98] Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 14.
[99] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 245–46.

Chapter II
Resurrecting the Intending Author

II.0 Chapter Overview

Setting out on a theological engagement through literature risks attempting to force two unrelated disciplines together, or treating each in turn, hoping that their collocation reveals family resemblances. My hope rather is to find the fertile ground where their edges touch, to weave an agreeable thread between them, and to show how each domain can illuminate the other. Theology treats God and our attempts at understanding the modes of God's self-disclosure to and through creation. Similarly the study of literature treats authors and their relationship to artistic creations. I argue in this chapter that for whatever else they are, literary texts are a locus wherein authors disclose whatever it is they *intend* to disclose; but what is disclosed to the reader is not limited strictly to what they may psychologically intend. The strength of this argument rests on initially clarifying what is meant by *intend* and *intention*, a concept problematized by those who avoid involving the author in textual interpretation.

I begin this chapter by critically assessing voices that straddle theology and the study of literature. Such assessment entails a cursory review of hermeneutics culminating in literary theorists who debate the merits of "authorial intention". Literary theory offers helpful terminology and frameworks for considering the tripartite relation of author-text-reader. Hermeneutics investigates where "meaning" (*sensu lato*) is located and investigable in this web of connections. I will demonstrate that literary theory and hermeneutics alone do not offer tools sufficient to the task of our theological engagement with literature. Since "authorial intention" (*sensu stricto*) remains highly contested, I propose turning to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological toolbox to analyse authorial *intentionality*, i.e., what appears to an author's attentional consciousness, such that the author chooses to record it and offer it for our readerly attention. Reading fiction, I will argue, helps train one's *attention*, which is crucial in the spiritual life for attunement to God's self-disclosure to humanity through creation. Hence a phenomenology of literary intentionality, and the attentional framing it cultivates for subjects, is a crucial tool for this theological engagement *with* and *through* literary fiction.

II.1 A Select History of Hermeneutics and Literary Theory[100]

II.1.1 A pre-modern conception. There is a curious history to the rejection of authorial intention, embedded in the larger history of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics begins by putting before us the question, what constitutes reliable knowledge? Ancient Greeks and Romans saw knowledge as a unified body of truths investigable across disciplines: math and logic, rhetoric and poetry, history and literature to name a few. This ancient hermeneutic relied on a striking claim: the λόγος (reason, word) of 'the universe speaks, in a sense, and *human words participate* in its universal grammar and are therefore a reliable vehicle for the discovery of universal truths'.[101] If the λόγος speaks, rational humans can interrogate, respond, and play with it through human language. The Hellenized Jew Philo of Alexandria (~20BCE-50CE) associated this cosmic λόγος with both the unifying, creative power of God and the rational human soul.[102] The λόγος inspires and operates in the humanly creation of new works of philosophy, religion, poetry and literature alike. This conception paved the way for the Christian articulation of Christ as the co-eternal Word of God (cf. John 1:1, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος), present at the world's creation (John 1:3), who became incarnate in creation in Jesus (John 1:14). The theological liaison of the Greeks' λόγος with Judeo-Christian monotheism associated human language (λόγοι) not only with rationality, but with the λόγος of the Creator God.

This Christian vision had several consequences. The first is that the pre-modern mind enjoyed an unproblematized continuity between the mind and world; the universal λόγος guaranteed the reliability of human λόγοι to excavate and understand the cosmos and our place therein.[103] It bestowed on the western mind the solicitous confidence of an apprentice working in his master's shop: writing out religious, literary, and scholarly texts as if with divine authority, and reworking non- or pre-Christian authors in light of Christ, the prefigured λόγος of God. Any fracture of continuity was attributable to sin:

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[100] My purpose is not a complete history of hermeneutics but a few salient movements which frame this discussion of theology and literature. For fuller treatments see David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*; or Jens Zimmermann, *Hermeneutics*, whose concise explanation I draw on here.

[101] Zimmermann, *Hermeneutics*, 20. Emphasis added.

[102] Philo, *De Profugis* §20: 'For there are, it seems, two temples of God: one being this world, in which the High Priest is the Divine Λόγος, His own first-born son; the other is the rational soul, the priest of which is the true man whose perceptible representations [he offers as prayers] … And the most ancient Λόγος of the living God is clothed by the world as with a garment, for the Λόγος of the living God is the bond of everything, holding all things together.' cited in Friedlander, *Hellenism and Christianity*, 114.

[103] Drawing on Augustine and Hugh of St Victor, St Bonaventure (1217-1274) argued that the seven *artes liberales* of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* naturally elevate the mind to theology by intellectual retracing (*reductio*). More on Bonaventure's *reductio* in **III.2.5**.

humanity forgetting or turning away from the λόγος (per Origen), instead turned in upon himself (per Augustine and later Luther). Secondly, the Author of creation also inspired Scripture: God's 'two books' offered distinct but non-competitive interpretative frameworks, both of which could be 'read' for meaning (cf., **III.2.5**).

II.1.2 Mind and world apart. Following the Copernican revolution, European exploration, and the fracturing of western Christianity, however, this orderly framework gradually came apart.[104] Which interpretation of knowledge held sway? Whose authority determined the truth of a claim? So began the foundationalism and methodological doubt of Descartes (1596-1650), which effectively cut off the mind from the outer world and – important to this thesis – one subject's mind from others'. Whereas for medieval theologians *objectivum* refers to the reliable appearance of an object in the mind, after Descartes *objective* knowledge meant rigorously interrogating one's sense perceptions. About a century later Kant set aside received wisdom in order to pursue reason critically, without appeals to authority or traditions. Enlightenment thinkers located reliable knowledge at the far end of the scientific method: dispassionate, objective, empirical.

Let us recall that antiquity presumed a universal intelligibility of texts across time: Aristotle was worthy and accessible in ancient Athens as much as in 13th-century Paris or 21st-century Harare. Zimmerman describes the implied hermeneutic: 'Past and present authors' insights about reality could be grasped by later readers *because all minds were linked beyond time or culture* by *participating in a meaningful universe*. With the separation of mind and world, however, the interpreter is now faced by a gulf between his own and the author's mind.'[105] Zimmerman's characterization expresses important elements of pre-Cartesian thought: the universe is meaning-full, and the rational reader is always-already equipped to access that meaning irrespective of time and culture, because writers' words – λόγοι – unfolded from, and participated in, the divine λόγος. But then Descartes' radical doubt puts the interpreter in a double bind:

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[104] Where Zimmermann locates the breakdown in the 14th century, Charles Taylor speaks of 1500 as the rough turning away from the pre-modern self. See Zimmerman, 21 or Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, *passim*. Identifying an exact year or set of events is tangential to this thesis; what I wish to highlight is that a separation did, in fact, take place.

[105] Zimmermann, *Hermeneutics*, 23.

How can I verify *any* perception of the extramental world? And in reading another's literary text, how can I verify *my* perception of what another has written?

II.1.3 Schleiermacher. The Enlightenment division of *philosophe* rationalists from religious-minded thinkers led to a countermovement attempting to repair the breach. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) sought an hermeneutical technique (*Kunstlehre*) that rose above disciplines; something that could be applied as much to sacred Scripture as to history; to law and to secular literature. He is rightly heralded as the hermeneut of the Romantic period, offering principles of interpretation to aid theology and literature alike. Schleiermacher marked the beginnings of historical ("higher") criticism, which aimed to reveal "the world behind the text," excavating the original historical and mental situations so that a reader and author could share understanding in the highest manner possible. This same Romantic period occasioned what literary critic Northrop Frye (1912-91) termed the rise of "secular scripture," where the divine Creator (whose existence was never seriously questioned) was supplanted by the genius of the author of poetry and literary texts.[106] Roland Barthes (1915-80) suggested succinctly that 'the author is a modern character, no doubt produced by our society as it emerged from the Middle Ages, inflected by English empiricism, French rationalism, and the personal faith of the Reformation, thereby discovering the prestige of the individual.'[107] Barthes maintained that prior to the Middle Ages, narrators of a story were praised for their performance and mastery at narration, but not for their genius *as authors*.

For Barthes, as we will soon see, attempts to discern an author's meaning is foolish, since it is the text itself that speaks.[108] Not so for Schleiermacher, who reasoned that hermeneutics has two achievable tasks: the first, drawing upon Enlightenment principles, he termed 'grammatical' or 'objective'. The interpreter must study the writer's original culture and language in order to understand the milieu within which the author constituted a text. The second task reflects the Romantic desire to grasp the

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[106] See also Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).
[107] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1986), 49–50.
[108] Ultimately (with Chrétien) I reject this apparent autonomy of language on theological grounds. Semantics and the philosophy of language are beyond the scope of this thesis. For more on this, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: vol 1, *Language*, (New Haven, 1953).

'technical' or 'psychological' intentions of the genius-author, so as to 'understand a writer as well as, and even better than, he had understood himself.'[109] Ricœur argues that for Schleiermacher, the 'real project of hermeneutics' lies primarily in this second technique of interpretation, a question of 'reaching the subjectivity of the one who speaks,' with language serving to express the author's individuality and life context.[110] Each author, the Romantics held, participated in the world-spirit (*Weltgeist*) which underpinned human creativity and nature alike. This quasi-religious *Geist,* captured well in Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, strengthens human understanding across time, place, and languages. The emerging philosophy of history and the *Weltgeist* effectively supplanted the Christian conception of a λόγος, evidenced by the conscious displacement of theology as the 'queen of the sciences', underway since the early modern period.[111] In like manner the Romantic notion of author-as-genius took the place of considerations of a divine Author. An author's works could be explored for meaning and feelings; quasi-religious experiences were described in terms of sublimity and transcendence without the trappings of religion. The goal of Romantic art was to put oneself in another's place to cultivate empathy. Schleiermacher remained confident that an interpreter could move back through the words of a text to the thoughts of an author, to reconstruct the author's intention from sensitivity to the language she used. This required attunement to the author *through* the text, a theme revisited later in this chapter.

II.1.4 Banishing the Author/author. As empirical psychology began to disentangle from philosophy in the latter decades of the 19th century, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud (whom Ricœur termed 'the Masters of Suspicion') were deeply sceptical of theological claims about God's reality and religious truths. They occasioned a shift instead to discourse on language, consciousness, and the psychological experiences of the human subject. This inflected early 20th-century literary theory, wherein the Nietzschean 'death of God' occasioned the death of the author in the study of literature. The noble literary quest to understand the author and her intentions for discerning a

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[109] From Schleiermacher's *Werke*, part 3, Vol. Ill, p. 362; quoted in Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 690. For Kantian influences on Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, see also Paul Ricœur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," *Philosophy Today* 17, no. 2 (1973): 114–16.
[110] Ricœur, 115.
[111] See the traces of this in science and philosophy in Avihu Zakai, "The Rise of Modern Science and the Decline of Theology as the 'Queen of Sciences' in the Early Modern Era," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 9, no. 2 (2007): 125–52.

text's meaning became a fool's errand. Authorial intention could not be divined, and even if it could, the author had no special claim on textual interpretation.

For Modernist poets like TS Eliot and Ezra Pound, the 'banishment of the author' (as critic E.D. Hirsch termed the shift) stemmed from a cherished literary doctrine: the best poetry enjoyed an afterlife *because* it was impersonal, objective, and autonomous of the author.[112] Hirsch is overstating Eliot's position, whose criticism was less a targeted *rejection* of authors, and more a celebration of timeless classics (versus second-rate poetasters):

> It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition – where a good tradition exists. It is part of [the critic's] business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it not as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time; to see the best work of our time and best work of twenty-five hundred years ago with the same eyes.[113]

Eliot argued that literary criticism (from Matthew Arnold until Eliot's writing in 1917), had lost the thread of its relationship to literature. Arnold, he reckoned, was a critic for the sake of criticism: easier to deconstruct another author's genius than to exercise one's own. In his famous essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot locates the creative author in the stream of poetic tradition, irrespective of whether she accepts or rejects the tradition. The author becomes absorbed by the tradition and depersonalized in it, but not *banished* as such.[114] Later in the century Roland Barthes rather more strongly insisted on treating any text as a free-standing entity, the meaning of which must be freed from appeals to author-ity. Barthes parlayed his truculent suspicion of authority into a suspicion of the *author*, all the while honouring the Masters of Suspicion not as authors themselves, but as 'founders of discursivity'.

The more conservative approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) suggested that a text's meaning is discernible in the merging of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) between a text and its reader; but the author's historical separation was impossible to overcome. Gadamer's disciple Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) later suggested that meaning is not a *thing* to be excavated, but an *event* emerging from the act of reading itself. In a similar strain, Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) held that a "world" unfolds around a text when it is attentively read, which the reader can come to inhabit. The world of the text

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[112] E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 1.
[113] T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1950), xv–xvi. Though Eliot refers in this quotation to "literature" the thrust of his argument is about the independence of poetic rather than literary texts.
[114] Available in Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*.

becomes *my* world, and I can understand myself better through reading the text: 'We understand ourselves only through the great detour of the signs of humanity deposited in the works of culture'.[115] For Ricœur's hermeneutics and the 'sciences of the text' which it treats, the author of the work must be set aside. The 'pathetic search for buried subjectivities' is abandoned in order to focus on meaning available *in* and *around* the text.

William K. Wimsatt (1907-1975) and Monroe Beardsley (1915-1985) led a third school, New Criticism, insisting that a definitive meaning could be determined, but only by weighing the "internal evidence" available within a text. One must reject appeals both to authorial intention and reader interpretation, which they termed *intentional* and *affective fallacies*, respectively.[116] A quasi-empirical preference emerged; the formalism of the New Critics attempted to elevate literary scholarship to a quasi-archaeological science, which took as self-evident that texts are perfectly preserved, self-disclosive artifacts of meaning. One detects echoes of Enlightenment confidence in this approach.

Despite variations in approaches, each school of literary theory excluded the author from consideration of textual meaning. After Schleiermacher's hermeneutical optimism it is difficult to overstate the impact of excluding the author from one's investigation, which (I am arguing) is *as much a theological act as an hermeneutical one.* Though he would not consider the author for interpretation, Gadamer recognised a natural affinity between theology and literature, and sought to re-equip the humanities with their own hermeneutical tools. To his hermeneutical frame we turn.

II.1.5 Gadamer and the human sciences. Why entertain Gadamer, especially if he rejects the author? I offer several reasons. First, Gadamer himself draws on Schleiermacher after the intellectual upheaval of 19th-century and early-20th century philosophy, with important correctives to offer. Second, Gadamer accounts for how the experience of art models how we come to interpret all human experiences. Gadamer asks how a literary text, a painting or a play can impart real knowledge of ourselves and the extramental world. Third, Gadamer (like Schleiermacher) seeks a hermeneutic at the service of both theology and literature. In both disciplines one cannot attempt

[115] Ricœur, "The Task of Hermeneutics." Quoted in Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 691.
[116] W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468–88.

'scientific' inquiry because the empirical tools of the material sciences are not fit for purpose to assess human sciences[117] such as theology or literature. Pushing against New Criticism, Gadamer observes that 'the particular research questions concerning tradition that we are interested in pursuing are motivated in a special way by the *present and its interests.* In the human sciences, the theme and object of research are actually constituted by the *motivation of the inquiry*."[118] In other words, Gadamer argues, there is no motivationally-neutral appraisal of a text because the present questions one brings precondition and reveal a subject's investigatory attention. Gadamer's methodology for the human sciences will be of use in later chapters as we review Woolf's and Robinson's different contexts and styles of treating their questions of religious belief. What Gadamer helps establish in this second chapter is that *the method of inquiring into human sciences* pre-conditions even the possibility of such an inquiry, since there is not an empirically verifiable object-of-inquiry as such. I note here a parallel in Gadamer's hermeneutics with Lynch's and Rahner's theological project: thematising the implicit first principles within particular disciplines, in order to give a more capacious understanding of one's broader relationship to extramental reality. Gadamer maintains that arts like literature share much with theology in having stipulated pre-conditions.

II.1.6 Gadamer's dilemma and Roland Barthes's counter-theology. I have said that we will investigate the biographies and writings of Woolf and Robinson to distil, as much as it is possible and helpful, what it is they *intend to do* as authors. I note again that Gadamer does not find much use for investigating authorial intention, as he is cautious about trying to cross the "yawning abyss" of time and space to reconstruct the subjective intentions of an historical author. This I call "Gadamer's dilemma", which I take up in subsequent chapters.

A stronger suspicion of authorial intention is one shared by many mid-century literary theorists. Seven years after Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, Roland Barthes applied the spirit of 1968 to hermeneutics. He wrote confidently of the death of the author: 'the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically

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[117] German *Wissenschaft* offers a more capacious understanding of 'science' as any domain of knowledge, compared to English's narrower designation of material sciences. I use 'human sciences' or *Wissenschaften* to convey this broader understanding.

[118] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 285. Emphasis added.

centred on the author… *explanation* of the work is still sought in the person of its producer, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always, ultimately, the voice of one and the same person, the *author,* which was transmitting his "confidences".'[119] Yet Barthes' fustian blurs imprecisions in his argument. He does not specify which tyrant he wishes to dethrone (the author? the high-handed critic? both?). His seminal essay further caricatures authorial intention as flattening the obvious plurality of character voices within a text to 'one and the same person, the author', whose despotic 'confidences' admit of only one interpretation. With the help of Nicholas of Cusa and Jean-Louis Chrétien in the next chapter, I will demonstrate how inquiring after authorial intention does not force the reader into a univocal interpretation (as if author, narrator, and protagonist were nested Russian tea dolls). On the contrary, I argue that the plurality of textual voices *unfolds* from the authorial voice, but this plurality is not *reducible* to a winner-take-all, univocal interpretation.

Barthes does not stop his critique with author intention: even the text-centred formalism (of Wimsatt and other New Critics) somehow 'consolidated' the power of the 'author's empire'.[120] Barthes does not explain how such consolidation occurs, since formalists studiously avoid external evidence (elements of the 'author's empire') in interpreting a text. Instead Barthes approvingly cites Mallarmé's claim that *c'est le langage* [*du texte*] *qui parle, ce n'est pas l'auteur*. One wonders whether we might attribute this insight to Mallarmé, to Barthes, or merely to the inky words mysteriously emerging from the page. Barthes responds that the '*modern scriptor'* – a title of lesser nobility to dethrone the author – 'is born at the same time as his text; he is not furnished with a being which precedes or exceeds his writing, he is not the subject of which his book would be the predicate; there is no time other than that of the speech-act, and every text is written eternally here and now.'[121] The text is a performance, and the *scriptor* has no claim to meaning-making because he is merely a hand detached from any voice, 'borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), [which] traces a field without origin' apart from the pool of language itself. [122] Barthes asserts without investigation that writing only ever echoes 'anterior writings', which is a valuable half-

[119] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 50.
[120] Barthes, 51.
[121] Barthes, 52.
[122] Barthes, 52.

step of etiological inquiry. But he does not inquire deep enough, into the source of the vast pool of language itself.

As we shall see with Jean-Louis Chrétien in the next chapter, the question of language's origins is central to the so-called 'theological turn' in phenomenology. Even Barthes begrudgingly acknowledges that his author-is-dead approach to a text is not the only interpretation; there remains a *theological* relationship of author-to-text that entails an act of Lynchian primal faith:

> The Author, *when we believe in him*, is always conceived as the past of his own book: book and author are voluntarily placed on one and the same line, distributed as a before and an after: the Author is supposed to feed the book, i.e., he lives before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it; *he has the same relation of anteriority with his work as a father sustaining his child*.'[123]

Barthes sets aside this parent-to-child analogy of author-to-text, on the grounds that it makes sense only 'when we believe in' the author. He scorns appealing to the author as a 'theological' decision, claiming his task instead is '*countertheological*, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law'.[124] Barthes admits that the banishment of the author is not a neutral stance within the domain of literary criticism. He recognises the theological implications of his claim; it is not a-theological but expressly *contre-théologique*. If the author is dead, it is because Barthes has killed him (or better, has disbarred him from play, to borrow from Bruno Latour[125]). Ironically Barthes has done more to *construct* this author-God than to banish it. Sean Burke notes that Barthes 'must create a king worthy of the killing,' yet he does not seem able to dispatch him.[126] Christian theology has learned much, and has much to learn still, from engaging its sharpest critics (Nietzsche, et al.). So too the theologian's engagement with literature; one learns much from the likes of Barthes, whose rejection of even the *possibility* of a literary author thematises the cultural horizon in which this investigation takes place.

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[123] Barthes, 52. *Emphasis added.* '*il est avec son œuvre dans le même rapport d'antécédence qu'un père entretient avec son enfant.*'
[124] Barthes, 54.
[125] '*Dieu debarré, hors jeu'* in Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*; quoted in Ward, "Secularism: The Golden Lie." 26.
[126] Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 26. Burke makes a trenchant, if occasionally overstated, case against Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida's treatment of 'the author'. For space I limit the argument to Barthes who explicitly wrote on the death of the author.

II.1.7 The limits of hermeneutics and literary theory. Barthes' countertheological thrust returns us to the main argument. This thesis attempts precisely what Barthes acknowledges as possible but rejects on principle: a *theological* treatment of the activities and interstitial horizons of author-text-reader. To do so, as Barthes suggests, minimally requires that we stipulate the existence of an author, whose craftwork may be discernible in investigating the work itself. Such an *as-if* stipulation – beginning with the principle that there is a purposive author – distinguishes a theological approach to literature from a compare-and-contrast "religion and literature" or "religion in literature" approach.[127] One could begin from the Barthesian countertheological stipulation, but Gadamer (no theologian himself) would remind us that there is not a *neutral* starting point of inquiry in the human sciences. As the analysis of Lynch suggested in chapter one, primal faith in others preconditions the possibility of future interrogation, much as primal *unfaith* forecloses and precludes such interrogations. To disbar the existence of an author – or Author – is an epistemic choice that forecloses further inquiry.

Like the author of a text, God need not be 'out of play', but after the hermeneutical turn, the author's/Author's purpose undergoes considerable scrutiny: too many players on the interpretive field, Barthes might say. Gadamer's argument (that we cannot reliably recreate the historical intent of an author) fails to acknowledge that many modern authors have commented, in their own historical situatedness, on their writing environs and processes. Even within literary theory, this move to disbar the author has not aged well, as old literary canons have fractured and new authors (particularly from cultural and gender minorities) claim their *authoritative* voice precisely *as authors* whose *authentic* experience *authenticates* their *authority*.[128] We are not yet explaining how an author, or God, might reveal themselves in their creations; so far we are arguing only that disbarring the possibility of a purposive author/Author is not an intellectually *neutral* starting point of inquiry in the human sciences.

By way of review, much of 20th-century secular literary theory has not, cannot offer a clear pathway into the mind of an author, let alone the psychological 'authorial intention' that may (not) be found baked into the text. Attempts to read an author's

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[127] For more on theology and literature's fraught relationship, see Kevin Hart, "'Religion and Literature'?," *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 2 (2009): 143–47.
[128] See, for example, Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

psychological intentions risks either canonizing an author's voice (Barthes' critique), or subtly imputing the interpreter's private interpretation to the author (Wimsatt's and later Hirsch's critique). As with most literary theorists keen to disbar the author, *intention* is understood by Barthes and Gadamer as a *psychological* state which, for obvious reasons, proves impossible to investigate. It seems that literary theory and hermeneutics alone cannot reliably bestow on 'authorial intent' any interpretative, authoritative pride of place.

II.2 From Literary Theory to Phenomenological Intentionality

II.2.0 Introducing Husserl and phenomenology. Hermeneutics took a different tack with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who returned 'to the things themselves' in order to determine the pre-linguistic meaning of objects as they appear to the observer's mind. Beginning with human consciousness, Husserl sought a reliable method for verifying the world beyond the mind, without resorting to what he disparaged as 'psychologism' or 'anthropologism'. Husserl's insights will lay the groundwork for a *phenomenology of literature*, a move that begins by evaluating an author's phenomenological *intentionality*, i.e., what it is the author *is conscious of* in her role as first observer and then writer. Drawing on Husserl, I next argue that the intentional content of 'authorial intentionality' is *itself shown forth* – revealed, disclosed – by what an author chooses to include (or exclude) in her writing for our readerly consideration. By way of a preview of chapter four: Virginia Woolf does not tell us anywhere her psychological, authorial intentions – e.g., 'when I say "lighthouse" I mean God' – nor does she bind her readers to such univocal interpretations. On the contrary, she is loath to delimit 'meaning'. But she does *create as* an author who puts before her readers a lighthouse that speaks *as if* it were conveying divine possibility. *Creating as* is another way of saying that Woolf shares the meaning-bearing content of her authorial intentionality. By putting such intentional content ('God?') in her fiction, if only to reject the extramental object (God) of her intentionality, Woolf induces her readers to consider the same possible content. Like a cinematographer choosing what does, and does not, belong in the frames of a film, an author's intentional content is disclosed to – indeed 'intended *for*' – our readerly attention.

II.2.1 Phenomenology's compatibility with artistic creation. In a letter to the Austrian novelist and poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Husserl finds common cause between phenomenology and the arts: 'The artist who "observes" the world in order to gain "knowledge" [*Kenntnis*] of nature and people for his own purposes, behaves similarly to the phenomenologist.'[129] For both philosopher and writer, he continues, the world [*Welt*] becomes a phenomenon to observe, whose existence both professions must treat with indifference [*ihre Existenz ist ihm gleichgiltig*]. This may come as a betrayal to philosophical purists who insist on the strict limits of Husserl's phenomenological project.[130] But his correspondence with Hofmannsthal demonstrates that before ever sitting down to write, a literary author is, like all subjects, an observing subject trying to make sense of the world in which she finds herself.

In what follows I identify key elements of Husserl's phenomenological schema (**II.2.2**), and illustrate them with the example of storytelling (**II.2.3**). From this I construct a tri-partite phenomenology of literature: first I chart out how a writer attends to objects and states of affair that disclose themselves to her authorial consciousness (**II.2.4**). I next adapt Husserl's phenomenological schema to explain an author's creative production and disclosure of an intentional object (the text), with its own horizon of possibilities and states of affairs (**II.2.5**). This disclosure then is offered to the

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[129] Edmund Husserl, *Briefwechsel*, vol. 3, *Husserliana Dokumente* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994). *·Der Künstler, der die Welt"beobachtet," um aus ihr für seine Zwecke Natur- und Menschen "kenntnis" zu gewinnen, verhält sich zu ihr ähnlich wie der Phänomenologe. [...]Ihm wird die Welt, in dem er sie betrachtet, zum Phänomen, ihre Existenz ist ihm gleichgiltig [*sic*], genauso wie dem Philosophen (in der Vernunftkritik)*

[130] I anticipate the objection that Husserl's phenomenological project is strictly intended as transcendental philosophy, articulated by many strict readers of Husserl (for a description of this objection, see Maria Villela-Petit, "Naturalistic and Personalistic Attitude," in *Phenomenology of Life from the Animal Soul to the Human Mind*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Analecta Husserliana (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2007), 205–18. The concern is of instrumentalizing phenomenology to pursue some *other* discipline's end, such as anthropology, neuroscience, or in this case, a theological engagement with literature. While respecting this concern (of 'naturalizing phenomenology') I note the long tradition of applying Husserlian thought outside the domain of phenomenology. Husserl's entire career revisited his epistemological and ontological foundations without providing many concrete examples; such silence opened the door for his disciples to extend his thought and find resonances across disciplines. The second chapter of Baring's excellent *Converts to the Real* charts the various adaptations made by Husserl's *protegées*. One example is Edith Stein, whose apprenticeship under Husserl convinced him in his later writings of the *embodiment* and *intersubjectivity* of ego-subjects. Another is Husserl's long-time friend Alfred Schutz (1899-1959), who applied Husserl's phenomenological schema to the social sciences, music and literature. Husserl, despite objecting in writing to 'anthropologism' and instrumentalization of his philosophy, considered Schutz an intellectual ally and asked him to come work as his assistant. These examples demonstrate Husserl's openness to see how his phenomenology engages other disciplines. For other cross-disciplinary applications of Husserl, see Alessandro Duranti, "Husserl, Intersubjectivity and Anthropology," *Anthropological Theory* 10, no. 1–2 (2010): 16–35. Or Tarek R. Dika, "*Auch Für Gott*: Finitude, Phenomenology, and Anthropology," and Henrik S. Wilberg, "*Absehen* – Disregarding Literature (Husserl / Hofmannsthal / Benjamin)," both in *Phenomenology to the Letter: Husserl and Literature*, ed. Philippe Haensler, Kristina Mendicino, and Rochelle Tobias, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 133–48.

phenomenological attention of the reader (**II.2.6**). To grasp better what *intending* and *intentionality* is all about, I analyse Husserl's description of intentional *act*, *horizon, content,* and *object* of consciousness. After this I turn to Husserl's *epochē* – bracketing of one's natural attitude and judgments – as a phenomenological tool for understanding how writers shape their readers' attentional frames (**II.2.7**).

II.2.2 Elements of Husserl's phenomenological schema. For Husserl, consciousness is characterized by intentionality, which is to say that a subject is always conscious *of* or *about* something. An intentional act (what he calls *noēsis*) is directed toward intentional objects or states of affairs that manifest themselves to the subject as *already meaning-full*. The world, Husserl says, is the sum-total of objects that present themselves through intentional experience. Consciousness thus exists within an *Umwelt*, a surrounding environment that is always-already there. What consciousness is intending or referring to at a given moment is the intentional *object*, and what is presented by this appearance to the subject is the *noēma*. A subject's 'I-pole' *noēsis* is the unrepeatable act of giving meaning to the *noēma* (the 'object-pole', also called the 'intentional *content'* or 'intentional *matter'*) of her thinking. For Husserl the sense of meaning given to the *noēma* is called the noematic *Sinn*.[131] *Sinn* belongs to the *noēma* insofar as it is the 'sense' *as intended* by the subject's act of *noēsis*.

Husserl employs the term 'horizon' as a basic feature of intentionality, introduced in *Ideas I* and developed in *Cartesian Meditations* and other later works. 'Horizon' appears in different domains throughout his corpus, such as the *perceptual* horizon, *temporal* horizon, and *world* horizon. The conceptual entry point for our purposes is one's perceptual, visual horizon:

> [e]very experience has an experience "horizon" ... – an intentional horizon of reference to potentialities of consciousness that belong to the experience itself. For example, there belongs to every external perception its reference from the "genuinely perceived" sides of the object of perception to the "co-intended" sides – [which are] not yet perceived, but only anticipated.[132]

[131] German *Sinn* can be translated as 'sense' or 'meaning' or "signification' but we leave it in German to denote Husserl's particular use of the equally multivalent German word. He distinguishes this pre-linguistic 'sense' from the subsequent expression of *Sinn* through language, *Bedeutung.* For a clear treatment of Husserl's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, see Dika, "*Auch Für Gott*: Finitude, Phenomenology, and Anthropology."
[132] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* §19, 44.

The horizon of experience, we might say, consists in the range of potentialities opened up in a given perceptual experience. His example of external perceptions illustrates that extramental visual objects (a cube, say) do not reveal themselves fully, but always have 'co-intended' dimensions that are possible (perhaps anticipated), yet remain hidden from perception at any given moment. By 'genuine' he means what is presented through sense-content, whereas 'non-genuine' appearances are those that present aspects not (or not *yet*) sensorially perceived. Husserl clarifies that 'non-genuine' does not imply they are impossibilities or 'imaginations'; intentional objects are only ever revealed as primal impressions in partial aspect, given at any moment 'from the front' or 'perspectivally foreshortened and projected'.[133] When I see at most three sides of a cube, my 'experience horizon' of cubes primes the anticipation of three unseen aspects (this anticipation Husserl calls *protention*). When I turn the cube over, a new aspect disclose itself which puts my earlier perception into the shadows (*Abschattungen*) of memory, without eliminating the first impression (this he calls *retention*). For phenomenological purposes, ordinary perception is composed of 'countless intentions, some purely perceptual, some merely imaginative,' yet 'as a total act' it 'grasps the object itself, even if only by way of an adumbration'.[134] This dynamic of *revealing* and *adumbrating* aspects of an intentional object, together, constitutes how an object is disclosed as meaning-full content (the *noēma*) to the intending subject. The perceptual horizon is 'fleshed out' in material space and time; it is related to, but not reducible to, the temporal horizon described above, which consists of the triad of retention-primal impressions-protention.

All of this intending is what we do unthinkingly when, for example, we look at a cube: it is the subject's 'natural standpoint' or 'attitude' (*die natürliche Einstellung*) to the world of objects and states of affairs (*Sache*). But what if we wish to consider the machinery of our own consciousness? When driving a car, we quite 'naturally' attend to the road ahead of us, unless or until something goes wrong with the car; suddenly the machinery itself presents itself as an *affordance*, something manifesting itself to our conscious attention. Now we are made to consider how the car's parts work together to make the car run "naturally". To investigate we "bracket" driving for a moment to "look under the bonnet". This "bracketing" lets the deeper structures of how a car works disclose themselves. The purpose of phenomenology is likewise to pause the natural

[133] Husserl, *Logical Investigations Volume 2*, §14, 220.
[134] Husserl, 221.

attitude of our perception, to "look under the bonnet" so as to understand how our consciousness relates to the world outside our heads. Put another way, the goal of consciousness is not merely to describe what one feels or thinks *as-if* naturally, but to see what the substructures of one's thought- and feeling-experiences can be reliably reduced to in their essence. This 'phenomenological reduction' requires *epochē* – suspending, bracketing, or 'putting out of play' natural attitudes and judgments about the world we encounter. Husserl writes,

> I do *not* then *deny* this "world", as though I were a sophist, *I do not doubt that it is there* as though I were a sceptic; but I use the "phenomenological" *epochē*, which *completely bars* me *from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence [*Dasein*]*.[135]

Epochē is a notably tricky concept in Husserlian interpretation. Eugen Fink, a student of Husserl, clarified that *epochē* is deployed not to *deny* extramental realities, but to help the subject become conscious of his or her belief-relations to them: 'abstention from belief can only be radical and universal when that which falls under disconnection by the *epochē* comes to be clearly seen precisely *as a belief-construct, as an acceptedness.*'[136] Important for our discussion on theism and writers of fiction, such *epochē* also brackets one's beliefs/sentiments/ judgments about *transcendent* and *absolute* realities, without making metaphysical claims about divine reality. Husserl writes in 'The Transcendence of God Suspended',

> What concerns us here, after merely indicating different groups of such rational grounds for "believing in" the existence of an extra-worldly "divine" being is that *this being would obviously transcend not merely the world but "absolute" consciousness*. It would therefore be an "absolute" in the sense *totally different from* that in which consciousness is an absolute, just as it would be something transcendent in a sense totally different from that in which the world is something transcendent.[137]

In other words, the question of God's existence is far beyond our judgments thereof, beyond even what is available to the transcendental consciousness which Husserl prescribes.[138] What the *epochē* allows one to do *theologically* is recognise one's prejudgments and feelings about the question of God's existence *as* belief-constructs,

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[135] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy [Ideas II]*, trans. Ted Klein and Pohl, William (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), sec. 32. Italics original.
[136] Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 41.
[137] Husserl, *Ideas I*, sec. 58. Italics original.
[138] Jean-Louis Chrétien, as we shall see, will refute this on the grounds that the absolute disproportion of divine 'call' to human 'response' does not prevent our coming to consciousness of the absolute's in-breaking call. More on this in chapter 3.

rather than as apodictic principles. And the literature we treat in this thesis, I will argue, does precisely this *epochē*.

II.2.3 The intentionality of storytelling. One may object, 'Why complicate this theological engagement through literature with abstract phenomenological terminology?' I respond that Husserl's terminology helps us schematise the "under the bonnet" activity of (1) how any subject relates to intentional objects or states of affairs, and subsequently (2) how these same subjects *narrate the fruit of their intentionality* to others. We are linguistic creatures who use words to communicate what eludes mere indexical pointing. Take, as an example, a friend of yours who has just lost her father. You ask how the funeral went. She recounts what it was like to see (*noēsis*) him lying in a black, shiny coffin (a particular *object* with its own *horizon* of meaning-full possibilities). She describes the unforgettable memory (*noēma*) of her father's calloused fingers and knobby knuckles clasping a rosary. Seeing him clasp the rosary softened something in her, she tells you, but she does not know how to articulate it in words (noematic *Sinn*). (You bite your tongue, since you think pieties are for simpletons and you suspect she does too.). Your friend is not merely listing a cool state of affairs or objects; she is disclosing to you the fruit of her intentional *noēsis*, available only through the *noēma* which she attempts to put into imperfect words as subsequent *content* for your consideration. (3) As her interlocutor, you are invited to imagine/empathically understand this *noēma*, but you can never replicate her singular act of *noēsis*, the act of *meaning-giving* that binds her uniquely to this meaning-full memory of her dead father. As Husserl scholars McIntyre and Smith succinctly explain,

> 'The *noēsis* of an act is an intrinsic part of the ("real") phenomenological content of that act itself, and the chief role of the *noēsis* is to "give meaning" to the act.'[139]

In this case, your friend has a meaning-full intentional relationship (noematic *Sinn*) to this *noēma*-memory of her father-with-rosary in a coffin; it can be empathically approached with your own imagination, but her *noēsis* cannot be replicated or exhausted by you who receive the story. You, as her interlocutor, have your own thoughts on this

[139] See Ronald McIntyre and David Woodruff Smith, "Theory of Intentionality," in *Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook*, ed. J.N. Mohanty and William R McKenna (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1989), 14ff. for a crystal-clear explanation of Husserl's distinction of *noesis*, noematic *Sinn*, and intentional object.

intentional content (coffin, death, rosary), which you bracket in order to attend empathically to a mourning friend.

This story of a father's coffin conveys the three-part *phenomenon of literature* I sketch here and elaborate below: (1) Subjectively, it demonstrates vividly how objects disclose themselves as meaning-full memories. Even for the subject telling a story there remains (what Ricœur aptly terms) a "surplus of meaning" to objects which cannot be exhausted by words. The mourning daughter highlights a meaningful memory, yet even as "author" of the story she does not claim to name or exhaust the meaning; rather she *speaks around* the meaning – what I have termed *periphasis* – by recounting the penumbral horizon of images and the feelings they stir up. (2) Inter-subjectively, this story demonstrates how storytelling is a medium not only for enumerating states of affairs (as a shopping list) but of drawing another's attention to the disclosive import of certain objects – and not others – for another subject's intentional consideration. (3) As the interlocutory 'reader' of your friend's story, you intend (audially) the new, worded object of intention she discloses. You aspire to empathize with her telling, which is a desire to understand the *noēma as presented* to you. Two subjects are joined by joint attention to a story's meaning-full content, with neither claiming a decisive interpretation. This is, I argue, how Husserl's phenomenological schema underpins all human storytelling, and literary writing in particular. In the following three sections, I elaborate this tripartite phenomenology of literature.

II.2.4 Authorial intentionality defined. Before ever creating, the author herself is an intending subject of her life-world, who receives what has appealed to her consciousness; she next responds *as* creator. There is, I am suggesting, a direct parallel between Husserl's *noēsis-noēma* relationship and that of authorial *poiēsis* (the irreplicable intentional act of creation) and *poiēma* (the intentional content of an artist's creative act, including characters, plot, states of affairs, etc.). Creativity reverses the direction of intentional consciousness, but not the basic dynamics. Both the thinker's act of thinking (*noēsis*), and the creator's act of creating (*poiēsis*), are intrinsically bound up with giving *Sinn* to their intentional content: one's irreplicable act of *noēsis* is bound up in meaning-giving with its *noēma*, just as the irreplicable act of artistic *poiēsis* is bound up in meaning-giving with its *poiēma*.

Consider a simple illustration of this argument: the intending subject Matthew Arnold is inextricably bound up with the intentional content of 'Dover Beach' in a way that Shakespeare –or you or I – are not. George Steiner describes the creative author's singular relation to her work thusly:

> More than ordinary men or women, the significant painter, sculptor, musician or poet relates the raw material, the anarchic prodigalities of consciousness and sub-consciousness to the latencies, often unperceived, untapped before him, of articulation. This translation out of the inarticulate and the private into the general matter of human recognition requires the utmost crystallization and investment of introspection and control.[140]

A writer chooses to make manifest certain details and exclude others in creating a *poiēma*; for Arnold, details include sea, moon, and window *and not* baptismal font or religious icon. What the artist creatively *intends* is presented as his or her *poiēma*. We might amend McIntyre and Smith's earlier characterization of *noēsis* thusly:

> 'the *poiēsis* of the artistic creation is an intrinsic part of the ("real") phenomenological content of that *poiēma* itself, and the chief role of the *poiēsis* is to "give meaning" to the creative activity.'

This meaning-full *Sinn*, I argue, is not immediately evident outside the intending poietic act; it may not even be perfectly clear to the author himself, even after he records his *poiēma* in words. There remains a mysterious "surplus of meaning" at the heart of authorial intentionality.

II.2.5 Text as intersubjective horizon of encounter. The only extramental record of the author's *poiēma* (i.e., meaning-bearing intentional *content*) is the text, which the author has deliberately rendered readable. This intra-mental intentional content has been deliberately disclosed to prospective readers as an intentional *object* for the reader's subsequent interpretive *noēsis*. The reader, in reading, intends the text as a now-crafted object within the reader's life-world; this object, with its own states of affairs and characters, I call the text-world.

Let us dwell on this crucial second stage for a moment, unpacking a later Husserlian insight, *intersubjectivity*. Husserl's treatment of intersubjectivity is an important element in seeing how a storyteller entrusts her intentional content to a reader, and how the reader comes to recognise the author *through* the text-world. At root Husserl wishes to account for human subjects other than the monadic self, a topic his

[140] George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 12.

interlocutors (fittingly!) led him to develop throughout his later writing and lectures.[141] Assistants like Edith Stein helped Husserl recognise that human subjects are 'personalistic', i.e., more than psychophysical ego-subjects coolly investigating their 'naturalistic' place in the material world.[142] Recall that each ego-subject finds herself in an *Umwelt*, a surrounding environment, populated by beings that look and behave similar to herself. For Husserl these similar-but-different beings instil in the ego-subject an expectation that they *also* perceive things intentionally, from their own egocentric viewpoints, as she might if she were in their place. In *Ideas II* §34, Husserl explains that:

> the apprehension in which the human being is given to us in the human Body [*Leib*, 'living body']… as a person who lives, acts, and undergoes, and of whom we are conscious as a real person who behaves under the circumstances of his personal life now in this way and now in that way, seems to contain a *surplus* which does not present itself as a mere complex of constitutive moments.'[143]

Husserl continues that the ego-subject ('I') finds myself in a life-world on which I depend. My body stands in a 'thingly nexus' of objects with the same psychophysical correlates that I do. This state of affairs enters into my apprehension, Husserl reasons, 'meaningfully'.[144] This so-called *personalistic attitude* is 'the attitude we are always in when we live with one another, talk to one another, shake hands with one another in greeting, or are related to one another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse and discussion'.[145] When I apprehend another human being concretely, what is disclosed to me 'is the human person, who has his spiritual individuality, his intellectual and practical abilities and skills, his character, his sensibility.'[146] Despite the fact that I see objects in my life-world with a different clarity and point of view from another's – and thus those objects disclose a different physical impression – I come to trust that we share the same objective world. My Body (*Leib*), Husserl continues, is the 'bearer of the zero point of orientation, the bearer of the here and now… it is clear that

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[141] We need not get lost in the debated history of whether Husserl himself overcame the problem of the Transcendental Ego as it relates to communities of selves. For a brief survey see Duranti, "Husserl, Intersubjectivity and Anthropology," 25. For a fuller history see Baring, *Converts to the Real*.
[142] Husserl is, once again, notably tricky in his use of language. This latter attitude, which underpins the material sciences, Husserl calls the '*naturalistic* attitude' (not to be confused with the earlier '*natural* attitude' which is interchangeable with '*personalistic* attitude' in later Husserl). For a careful treatment of this distinction, see Villela-Petit, "Naturalistic and Personalistic Attitude." 207ff.
[143] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy [Ideas II]*, trans. Ted Klein and Pohl, William (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 147.
[144] Husserl, 147.
[145] *Ideas II* was edited and rewritten over years, likely being completed in 1928, though not published until 1958, twenty years after Husserl's death. Husserl, *Husserliana* IV, 183 in '*Gegensatz zwischen der naturalistischen und personalistischen Welt'* (173-210).
[146] Husserl, *Ideas II*, 147.

the apprehension of the Body plays a special role for the intersubjectivity in which all objects are apprehended "Objectively" as things in the one Objective time and one Objective space of the one Objective world.'[147]

For Husserl, our common world is achieved through empathy (*Einfühlung*) which is the primordial experience of participating in the actions and feelings of another without *becoming* the other.[148] Intersubjectivity, then, is a necessary condition for helping an ego-subject become aware of similarity amidst difference, even before any communication with other subjects takes place. As such, intersubjectivity does not require that another person be physically proximate or seen to trust the existence of the other, let alone to share an empathic vision of the objective world. *Intersubjectivity thus emerges as a crucial element in the phenomenology of literature*: an author writes her text-world for unseen readers, and readers read the work of unseen authors who becomes, through the act of reading, the reader's attentional guide. But their physical separation does not therefore banish them from each other's consciousness as meaning-full interlocutors. Husserl, it seems, is extrapolating beyond his earlier description of 'genuine' primal appearances (what appears to my intentionality at a given moment) and moving into the domain of *retention* and *protention* (the distinction described above in **II.2.2**), which presupposes a transtemporal metaphysics beyond what is phenomenologically accessible in any given instance.

George Steiner's entire book *Real Presences* echoes this intersubjective trust in what is not now seen, wagering 'on the potential of insight and response when one human voice addresses another, when we come face to face with the text and work of art, which is to say when we *encounter the other* in its condition of freedom… [This wager] is a wager on *transcendence*.'[149] We will return to the transcendent outworkings of Husserl's intersubjectivity in the coming chapters. For now, let us refocus on how a reader comes to recognise the author, when only the text is present. Though the author is not physically present – indeed she may well be long dead – the reader can recognise the author *as another intending subject* with a bit of imagination and reason. Alfred Schutz describes Husserlian intersubjectivity thusly:

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[147] Husserl, 61. Emphasis and capitalizations original.
[148] For a full treatment of this, see Duranti, "Husserl, Intersubjectivity and Anthropology," or Husserl's student Edith Stein's later elaboration, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Waltraut Stein, 2nd ed. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970).
[149] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 4. Emphasis added.

> . . . even in the natural standpoint, a man experiences his neighbours even when the latter are not at all present in the bodily sense. . . He finds himself surrounded by objects which tell him plainly that they were produced by other people; these are not only material objects but all kinds of linguistic and other sign systems, in short, artifacts in the broadest sense.[150]

Artifacts (art, poetry, crafts, fiction) remain that point beyond themselves. An authors' remnant artifacts – written texts, for example – are investigable objects for readers' intentional consideration which clearly reflect the conscious activity of their creators. The physical absence of the author as an intersubjective interlocutor does not, therefore, justify elimination of the author from consideration. The unseenness of an author prompts the beginning, not the conclusion, of inquiry. If the text is "all we have" to investigate, then the text is the locus *par excellence* of intersubjective inquiry, the lone field of Gadamerian *Spiel* where reader and writer interact. Husserl's intersubjectivity helps us push Gadamer's thought a step further: the 'fusion of horizons' is not simply between a *text* and a reader; it is between the author and reader who detects the craftsperson *through* the craft.

By 1935 Husserl would acknowledge that the focus of the 'humanistic sciences' like literature 'is directed exclusively to human beings as persons, to their personal life and activity, as also correlatively to the concrete results of this activity. *To live as a person is to live in a social framework*, wherein *I and we live together* in community and have the community as a horizon.'[151] The writer is always already embedded in social frameworks with their own shared horizons. The writer draws upon *inter alia* a common language, cultural references, allusions, and artifacts. Before she ever writes, she is first in community with fellow readers of literature. And as she is writing, she is the first reader of her literature. As its first reader, she intends her poietic object (the emerging text) to see what surprising meanings (*Sinn*) the text might disclose. She is also embedded in the narrower community of fellow writers whose chosen vocation is to fashion intentional objects (text-worlds) for other readers' consideration. She makes decisions and guides the writing, knowing that the text will be handed over for other subjects' assessment and valuations. To this third movement we turn.

II.2.6 The reader's intentionality. When a reader approaches a text as an intentional *object*, he brackets natural judgments of his life-world as he knows it to

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[150] Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 109. Quoted in Duranti, "Husserl, Intersubjectivity and Anthropology," 25.
[151] Edmund Husserl, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man," in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer (Harper Torchbooks, 1965). *Emphasis added.*

explore another's intentional *content*, which enfolds the author's noematic *Sinn*. Access is not through direct in-person conversation between subjects (as, e.g., your conversation with the mourning friend), but as a subject *reading* what has been singularly created by an unseen creator. How the reader receives and interprets the author's content is, of course, prey to the limits of human cognition and separation in time. A shared text does not require shared interpretation, enjoyment or agreement on meaning. I note again the irony of Roland Barthes et al. banishing the author from consideration: even a stern rejection of the author's text is an implicit response to the author's appeal. We will revisit the reader's appropriation of the text more later. Before so, let us address possible objections.

II.2.7 Anticipating objections to this phenomenon of literature. This application of Husserl's thought raises possible objections. One possible objection is that Husserl's transcendental philosophy treats the ego-subjects relation to actual extramental objects, whereas literary "fiction" deals in simulacra of reality. In response, Husserl offers that the intentional content (the *noēma*) is not dependent on the existence-independence of its intentional *object*. For example I can conjure the intentional *content* of 'unicorn', or of 'God', without making claims about the existence of such extra-mental realities. Similarly, the artist's *poiēma* is not bound to existence-independent realities beyond the text, though the *poiēma* aims to present intentional content that bears enough marks of "lifeness"[152] such that the reader recognises intelligible, *as if* veridical objects and states of affairs. In this respect, literary fiction is compatible within Husserl's phenomenological schema.

A second objection deals with where we locate the notably elusive "meaning" of the text. How can Husserl's thought speak to our question of where we locate the meaning of a text, and when we do, how do we excavate it? Recall that as a subject I can only ever approach another's intentional content (*noēma* or *poiēma*), from my own subjectivity as an I-pole. While I can never perfectly replicate another's originating act of *noēsis/poiēsis*, I consider the intentional content (i.e., another's *noēma*/*poiēma*) as the

[152] See James Wood's description of "lifeness": 'I think of details as nothing less than bits of life sticking out of the frieze of form, imploring us to touch them. Details are not, of course, just *bits of life*: they represent that magical fusion, wherein the maximum amount of literary artifice (the writer's genius for selection and imaginative creation) produces a simulacrum of the maximum amount of non-literary or actual life, a process whereby artifice is then indeed *converted into (fictional, which is to say, new) life*. Details are not lifelike but irreducible: things-in-themselves, what I would call lifeness itself.' in James Wood, *The Nearest Thing to Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), 36. Emphasis original.

primary *locus* for understanding the noematic *Sinn*. The literary corollary to noematic *Sinn* I term the *poiematic Sinn*, that is, the author-given "sense" or "meaning" embedded in the intentional content, presented through the act of *poiēsis*.[153] The author's intentionality is, let us say, *enfolded* into her poietic creation, which is the primary *locus* of the author's revelation of poiematic *Sinn*. While this *Sinn* is enfolded in the *poiēma*, it is not coextensive with or reducible to the recorded words of the text, which is why a "surplus of meaning" remains. As such the poiematic *Sinn* – the author's meaning-full, intentional relationship with her text – is not perfectly transparent to readers, given our natural cognitive limitations. Nor – as writers like Robinson and Woolf freely admit – is the poiematic *Sinn* of their meaning-full content transparent to them as authors and first readers of the text. There remains an ineluctable element of mystery – a humbling opacity – to the poiematic *Sinn* of a text creation, as indeed there is to God's meaning-full relation to creation. We can agree with Gadamer (and others sceptical of appeals to the author) that psychological 'authorial intent' remains elusive given historical separation. So too does the question of locating a text's meaning; this we take up in the following section. But we have at least established that 'authorial intentional content' – the chosen, recorded elements of the text – is patently available to us as an intentional *object* for our readerly *noēsis*.

II.2.8 Hirsch, meaning, significance: literary theory revisited. Adapting Husserl's phenomenology of intentionality returns us to the problem of locating *meaning* in the triad of author-text-reader. Husserl leads us to a final voice from literary theory, E.D. Hirsch (b.1928). A student of Wimsatt and intellectual adversary of Gadamer, Hirsch pushes back against the strains of authorial agnosticism detailed earlier in this chapter. Drawing on Husserl, Hirsch argues that meaning is an affair of conscious intending, and not merely of parsing assembled words in a text. A text is the *locus* where exploring meaning is made possible, but the meaning is not perforce recorded *by* the text (*pace* Wimsatt). An example illustrates Hirsch's point: consider a philosophy student who must explain Aristotelian friendship in a written exam essay. The student is expected to 'explain Aristotle', rather than memorizing and writing out every word of *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VIII. The student endeavours to convey what Aristotle

[153] Where I depart from Husserl, crucially, is in arguing that the *poiematic Sinn* of a text can only ever be communicated through language, whereas for Husserl the noematic *Sinn* is not language-dependent, but *may* be expressed linguistically.

means *in her own words*, and she will be evaluated on the accuracy of her conveying the author's intended meaning. Copying out Aristotle's words does little to demonstrate active understanding of the text's meaning; a word-for-word parroting, ironically, may be evidence of her incomprehension. The language is a tool to convey meaning, not an end in itself. She might later employ Aristotle's typologies of friendship in an essay (or in assessing her own life choices), but that is a matter of *application*, not explication.

This example clarifies Hirsch's distinction between an author-imparted *meaning* of the text, and the text's *significance* for the reader. If literary theorists – or theologians engaging with literature – hope to discuss anything normative and valid for all who read a text to discuss, they must investigate an author's meaning, i.e., what the author wants to say, and not its plurality of possible significances for sundry readers.[154] Hirsch calls the author's *meaning* 'stable'[155] and embedded within the text (though not coextensive with the text's words, as the Aristotle exam example illustrates). At first Hirsch appears to be overstating his case in attributing *stability* to meaning in a text, which would result in the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. An author's meaning remains normative and heuristic in the text, but is not another *fixed* object buried in the text; rather it is the poiematic *Sinn*, i.e., that-which-binds-a-writer-to-her-text. Hirsch clarifies this, however, in asserting that there is 'no magic land of meanings beyond the whole extent of human consciousness, past, present and future'.[156] The reader's search for textual meaning is a search for another consciousness enfolded therein.

Hirsch's literary theory implicitly draws on Husserl's phenomenological schema, whereby an author's meaning (*Sinn*) is given in the very act of intentionality (*noēsis*) towards an extramental object. Recall that *noēsis* is an irreproducible act of meaning-giving to the *noēma*. The fruit of meaning-giving is the so-called noematic *Sinn*; it is the component of intentionality that determines/encodes the subject's intentional relation to its extramental intentional object. The noematic *Sinn* – what I have subsequently termed the *poiematic Sinn* in relation to a literary text – is what Hirsch means by 'meaning', which is the author's alone. This helps Hirsch to further distinguish *meaning* from

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[154] We might explore this difference by looking at how other languages disambiguate *meaning* and *significance*. The verb 'to mean' (like German *meinen*) does not readily convey the subject of the verb's volitional intention. But Romance languages claim to express the grammatical subject's psychological state in, e.g., *querer decir, vouloir dire, volere dire*, 'to want to say'. E.g., *Quiero decir* que…– "I want to say that'/ 'I mean that…' We compare this to the same languages' alternate, quasi-objective verbs of *signification*, i.e., *significar, signifier, and significare.*

[155] Hirsch, E.D., "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (December 1, 1984): 202.

[156] Hirsch, 202.

significance. Hirsch argues that texts admit of manifold *significances* which are forever open to change, as evident in the philosophy student's application of Aristotle to her own life. Inquiring after an author's *meaning* does nothing to prevent the reader from finding personal significance in the text; but a normative meaning might inform, disturb, or inflect the significance for a reader as she herself changes over time. The *significance* to the reader may well be the 'more valuable object of interpretation' because something appears significant to the extent that it excites readerly attention in the present, as she is reading. Indeed, Hirsch implies, this may explain the self-authenticating appeal of 'reader-response' theory as the focus of interest in contemporary literary theory, promoted by e.g., Wolfgang Iser.

Yet Hirsch maintains that in the domain of academic literary inquiry, 'the significance and use of a text ought to be rooted in its fixed meaning, since *otherwise criticism would lack a stable object of inquiry and would merely float on tides of preference*.'[157] I note again that 'stable object' may be the wrong phrasing in describing the poiematic *Sinn*, where 'normative if elusive' would be more appropriate.

Drawing a line between a text's *meaning* and *significance* is no easy task, happening somewhere on the field of play of the text in question. But, Hirsch maintains, 'the self-identity of *any* object depends upon our being able to distinguish between what belongs to the object and what does not; we require a boundary of some kind that discriminates between what is part of it and what is not.'[158] The self-identity of meaning, Hirsch argues, depends on having such a boundary between the author's intended meaning (which singularly relates the author to the intentional content) *and everything else* (e.g., the subsequent words on a page, or a text's significance to the reader). Even anti-authorial theorists such as Barthes would object, *'That's not what I meant!'* if someone were to misconstrue the words they put down on paper, and would defend themselves against erroneous interpretations. Such an objection suggests that Hirsch's claim that one's written texts (recordings of their *poiēmata*) convey a proprietary meaning (poiematic *Sinn*) across time, the guarantor of which is the self-same author. Hence for Hirsch, investigating the authorial meaning – the poiematic *Sinn* – is of value as the only 'stable object of inquiry' which implies that historical knowledge is, in fact, a possibility.

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[157] Hirsch, 203. Emphasis added.
[158] Hirsch, 204.

This has practical and ethical implications outside literature as well. Appealing to Gadamer's valuing of respecting one's dialogue partner, Hirsch argues that the only way to *honour the otherness* of another is to try to glean their *intended* meaning by asking questions for clarification, where possible. Let us say, as an author of an essay, I use the word **oomveld*. You, as a learned reader, become curiously suspicious. Out of respect, you entertain possible explanations: 'Did Joe simply misspell*, Umwelt* unaware of German capitalization and orthography*?* Or is he introducing a new concept entirely?' This line of interrogation is a tacit response to the author; you might investigate further by reviewing my other work, to see whether I define **oomveld* elsewhere. If I am alive and willing to talk, you might ask me for a clarification. If I am not – which is more often the case when investigating scholarly work – you reasonably conclude that **oomveld* is an error of mine, or perhaps an error of a typesetter. In any case, the question of *possible* intended meaning begins with an interrogation of an author's text, and then his adjacent texts, as 'stable objects of inquiry' – much as you, kind reader of this DPhil, are at this moment investigating what it is that I, the writer, intend to convey.

II.2.9 Concluding thoughts. Let us bring this phenomenological schema of literature to a close by recalling the authors we treat and a possible objection to this methodology. A predictable objection to Hirsch's thinking is that an author may literally be dead (e.g., Virginia Woolf), or she may be alive but disinclined to delimit "what she means" by her characters (e.g., Marilynne Robinson). How, therefore how can we presume to explore the poiematic *Sinn* accurately beyond how the text discloses itself to any given reader? Should we not simply agree (with Gadamer or Iser) that the reader and text are all we have? Hirsch's point is not that the author's poietic act of meaning-giving is perfectly transparent to others' understanding. Rather, as my extension of Husserl has aimed to show, the noematic/ poiematic *Sinn* exists *as* that irreplicable relationship between the noetic/poetic subject and the intentional object*,* the only evidence of which is enfolded in the *noēma/poiēma*. To read literary fiction is to be made conscious not merely of a stated list of affairs and objects, but of the creative fruit of another's conscious intentionality. In fiction that shared world is the playful domain of the text – where the reader comes to recognise the author as another meaning-constituting conscious subject.

Intersubjectivity, Husserl adds, is the self-disclosive guarantor of a shared world of objects and states of affairs, some of which are artifacts that are manifestly not self-

created. The challenge of describing an author's meaning-full relationship (poiematic *Sinn*) to her text is epistemological; but that difficulty is not *de facto* evidence of its non-existence. Recognising the author is rather a reasonable task for the reader's empathic imagination, a way of honouring another subject. In Husserl's terms, banishing the author is ignoring the 'personalistic attitude' in favour of a 'naturalistic' one that does not admit of other ego-subjects, only the 'internal evidence' of a text. Using these same terms, Barthes acknowledges that a personalistic attitude is possible, but it is a *theological* reading of the relationship of author-to-text. Allow me to suggest that the *recognition of the author as person* is precisely what is required if we are to do a *theology* of literature, rather than a study of religion and literature.[159] But an *a priori* denial of the meaning-full liaison of author-to-text is not a neutral claim – it is, Barthes freely admitted, countertheological.

II.3 From Authorial Intentionality to Theological Reflection

II.3.0 Clarifying Husserl and wagering possibilities 'as such'. Let us focus the question sharper: What happens when intending subjects are engaging not with other (unseen) human subjects, but with the possibility of an unseen God, as Woolf and Robinson are? We have seen from our discussion of Husserl that their remains a gap between the domain of phenomenology (how we explain what we become conscious of) and the verifiability of extramental realities (i.e., what exists beyond one's consciousness). This is complicated slightly by the confusing language Husserl employs, but his distinction is ultimately helpful.

In *Ideas I* Husserl refers to the *noēma* and noematic *Sinn* as 'the intended *as such*' (i.e., '*as* intended') and the *noēma*/noematic *Sinn* of memory as 'the remembered *as such*' (i.e., '*as* remembered'). Adding *as such* seems to blur the line between *noēmata* and the extramental objects they attempt to constitute. What exactly *is* "intended" or "remembered": the *noēma* or the extramental object? Husserl scholars McIntyre and Smith clarify that the *as such* must refer to the *noēma* and not the extramental object of intentionality. The noematic *Sinn* is what allows the intending subject to have a "sense" of an object; important for this discussion, one can still have a

[159] In the next chapter (3) we will trace this argument further with Cusa who explains how God's singular, sustaining act of creation (*poiēsis*) is enfolded in creation.

"sense" of an object *without there being an existing extramental referent*. This is the case with hallucinations, or imagining a unicorn (think of the objection treated above in **II.2.7**). Husserl deploys 'perceived *as such*' (or inverted commas) to indicate both the *noēma* and its accompanying noematic *Sinn*, indicating an inextricability joining the intentional content to the meaning it bears. The 'as such' (or inverted commas) are deployed as a way of distinguishing the *noēma*/noematic *Sinn* unit, from the extramental object. Hence what is intended or remembered is the meaning-full *noēma*/noematic *Sinn*: the unicorn *as such* or simply 'unicorn' in inverted commas. McIntyre and Smith explain that Husserl's 'as such' terminology is introduced to resolve this ambiguity: "Husserl calls the [extramental] object of a perception 'the perceived', 'the perceived object', or sometimes 'the object *simpliciter'*; and he calls the *noēma* or *Sinn* 'the perceived as such'.[160]

Despite the gap between the phenomenological (i.e., personalistic) and naturalistic (i.e., non-subjective) attitudes towards the world of objects, there remains an important epistemological 'wager' connecting *noēmata* to their (possible) extramental objects. As Husserl writes, 'Questions about *actuality* enter into *all* cognitions *as* cognitions, even in our phenomenological cognitions bearing upon the possible *constitution* of objects: they all have, indeed, their correlates in "objects" which are meant as "actually existing".'[161] By 'constitution of objects', Husserl does not mean extramental objects are magically generated by or composed of our *noēmata*. Rather, whenever a noetic subject relates to a natural object (like an apple or the person sitting opposite me), the *noēma* constitutes for the subject his or her noematic *Sinn* (sense) of some object or state of affairs. This is Husserl's way of saying that the subject is in an intentional relation with a *presumed-to-be-extant* object in the world. And – important for our discussion – regardless of whether the object exists extra-mentally, the intending subject can form a noematic *Sinn as if* the *noēmata* corresponded to an existing object. Put differently, as conscious subjects intending objects in the world, we are always-already attempting to form meaning-full connections with what manifests itself to us, even when our intentional activity may be incomplete or in error. Hence 'an object – "whether or not it is actual" – is "constituted" – in certain concatenations of consciousness' *as if it existed*, within the intentional noematic structure.[162]

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[160] McIntyre and Smith, "Theory of Intentionality," 164.
[161] Husserl, *Ideas I*, sec. 135. Emphasis added.
[162] Husserl, sec. 135.

II.3.1 Intentionality of possibilities. What is going on here? Is Husserl giving license to engage in fanciful unreality? On the contrary this imaginative play is not a mark of naivete or foolishness, but in fact primes the intending subject's horizon of consciousness, to notice possible threats or rewards of the extramental existence of objects. We are everyday surrounded by objects that do not present themselves as *meaning-full* and do not catch our attention; against this backdrop are affordances that manifest themselves as meaning-full.

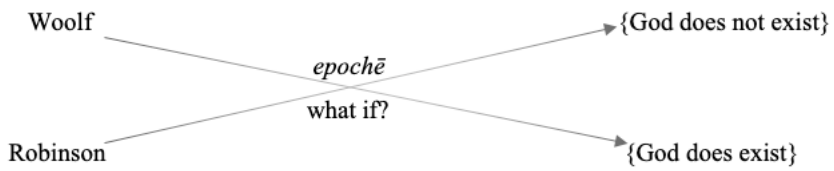
As we saw earlier, Husserl's latter-day phenomenology recognised that this priming of attention takes place in our living Body. Consider, for example, a hiker lost in the forest as the sun begins to set. She imagines possible threats and rewards that lie in wait in the dark environs of a forest; she treads cautiously *as if* there were snakes or bears, and her attitudinal attention to their possibility ('danger – tread carefully!') primes her to receive possibly life-saving information for how to navigate the unknown. Recall that for Husserl the body is the 'bearer of the zero point of orientation, the bearer of the here and now'.[163] This embodied consciousness is reinforced by what we know from the science of the human body: when a possible threat emerges, the sympathetic nervous system mutes normal activities (e.g., food digestion or body temperature) in favour of directing hormones that boost sensory alertness and increase oxygen flow to the brain and blood to the muscles. In this way perception and agility are sharpened to preserve life, independent of rationality or volition. And when the possibility of threats fades, the nervous system resumes normal autonomic operations attentive again to what sustains normal life (breathing, digestion, temperature regulation). Part of that return is the body's re-directing the hiker's attention to the possibility of reward; she intends the world *as if* there were ripe fruit and fresh water nearby. Her natural, embodied feelings (of hunger, thirst) direct her intentionality to seek out meaningfully salutary affordances. These examples from embodied consciousness reinforce scientifically this phenomenological premise: the *as-if* possibility of objects and states of affairs always-already appeal to a subject's attention as meaning-full, whether that meaning be a threat or a reward.

What phenomenology does, as I have been arguing, is *thematise* these pre-rational natural attitudes and activities for the intending subject. And our study of

[163] Husserl, *Ideas II*, 61.

literature allows us to consider many such possibilities, including the possibilities of the divine.

II.3.2 Intentionality *etsi Deus daretur.* Recall that Husserl argues that a subject's intentionality forms *noēmata as if* they correspond to extramental realities. I am arguing that this is a phenomenological outworking of Lynch's conception of primal faith from chapter one. I cannot investigate whether a human relationship is trustworthy without stipulating a minimal faith in the other, *as if* that other is worthy of trust. Put into Husserl's terms, I must stipulate God's actual existence (God *simpliciter*) in order to form a *noēma* and noematic *Sinn* (a 'sense' of 'God as such'). It is this *as-if* stipulation – *noēsis as if* an intentional object exists in order to investigate its possible *Sinn* for the intending subject – that our writers bothered by God intentionally entertain in their fiction. Let us call such an as-if intentional relation the *etsi Deus daretur* stipulation.[164] Husserl notes that intentional content – the *noēma* – bears the mark both of 'hylic matter' and a 'thetic quality'. Hylic matter is the *whatness* of that which is intended (e.g., 'God'). The thetic quality is the sentiments or feelings around that hylic matter. This is helpful for our inquiry in that we can distinguish 'God' (the matter of divine possibility) from Woolf's attitudinal distaste for considering 'God'. In brief: in fiction Woolf brackets her attitudinal judgments (i.e., '*I am glad* there is no God'), in order to investigate the poiematic *Sinn* of 'God' as a possibility. In order to do this she writes sections of her fiction *etsi Deus daretur*, i.e., as if there were an extramental God *simpliciter*. And Robinson does the inverse of Woolf, bracketing her theism through certain characters, so as to 'intend' the cosmos *as if* they were unauthored and unpurposive, *etsi Deus* ***non*** *daretur*.



[164] This expression is an inversion of the scholastics' formula going back to the 14th century, *etsi Deus non daretur*, which speculated on whether moral reasoning would exist for humanity by natural reason alone, even if God did not exist. See Alexey Appolonov, "*Etsi Deus Non Daretur* ('As If God Does Not Exist'): Hugo Grotius and Scholastic Theology," *St. Tikhon's University Review* 77 (June 30, 2018): 63–71. Dietrich Bonhoeffer also used the expression in a 1944 letter to Eberhard Bethge, arguing that one must fight for justice as if God were not a given.

We pause to entertain two objections. The first can be formulated as a question: would Husserl permit his phenomenology to extrapolate on religious experiences? Husserl's tentative answer is that God's transcendence is of a scale that even the 'absolute consciousness' of the transcendent ego is incommensurate to the absolute transcendence of the divine. He argues in *Ideas* §51 (introduced in **II.2.2**) that a divine 'extra-worldly reality' 'would therefore be an "absolute" in the sense totally different from that in which consciousness is an absolute, just as it would be something transcendent in a sense totally different from that in which the world is something transcendent.'[165] I note here, as I did earlier, that the vast disproportion between the infinite and the finite does not negate the possibility of God's self-manifestation. Recall from *Cartesian Meditations* that

> "'[e]very experience has an experience "horizon" ... – an intentional horizon of reference to potentialities of consciousness that belong to the experience itself. For example, there belongs to every external perception its reference from the "genuinely perceived" sides of the object of perception to *the "co-intended" sides – [which are] not yet perceived, but only anticipated*.'[166]

The *etsi daretur* stipulation treats the question of the divine as a 'co-intended' possibility, since God is not a sensible 'object' in the same sense that a cube is. Would one recognise God's self-disclosure, if God did in fact manifest God's presence? The poetic *epochē* in the fiction we treat does not prove/disprove God's existence; rather it allows each reader to recognise his 'natural attitude' to this nest of questions. In the next chapter, Jean-Louis Chrétien explains that the *major dissimilitudo* between God and creation actually helps us recognise that our rational tools are not fit to fathom the infinite, but we can create the *horizon of possibilities* within which to hear the questions addressed to us.

Recall that I am not deploying a universal *epochē* for the purposes of a phenomenological reduction. This phenomenological exercise, rather, employs Husserlian *epochē* as a 'free imaginative variation' through literature, around the localized question of divine (un)reality. It is, simply put, theological inquiry 'played out' through *as-if* fictional worlds. For the author of such fiction, *epochē* involves recognising one's default judgments regarding God's extramental reality (*Deus simpliciter*) and nevertheless entertaining 'God as such' as a hypothetical for her attitudinal/qualitative consideration. For Woolf, poietic *epochē* is simply a suspension of

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[165] Husserl, *Ideas I*, sec. 58. Italics original.
[166] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* §19, 44. Emphasis added.

her attitudinal *dis*belief in the divine. This conjuring of the supernatural is what Coleridge meant by poetic faith in his *Biographia Literaria*:

> It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a *semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief* for the moment, which constitutes *poetic faith*.[167]

For Robinson, poetic *epochē* entails a willing suspension of *belief*, a bracketing of her confessional judgments about God's reality, so as to present intentional content (a godless cosmos) sympathetic to some of her characters' atheism, *etsi Deus non daretur*. Both writers' poetic *epochēs* – despite being theological inversions of one another – require an empathic imagination and an act of faith in their readers. They trust their 'away-from-home' intentional content will be intelligible and credible enough to hold their readers' attention.

II.3.3 Objection to poetic *epochē* and a response. Some may object that this phenomenological application is nonsense, playing with schemas that do not map onto the domain of literature. I respond that poetic *epochē* is employed in several ways. The first way, simply, is *internal* to the text. A plurality of characters, who offer competing interpretations of shared events, reflect the 'free imaginative variation' evident within a text-world. The sheer plurality within the text challenges the authority of any one 'natural attitude': dialogic disagreement between characters, conflicts of will, and third-person omniscient narration all unfold from the *author's* wide-ranging intentionality, which is not reducible to any one character or narratival voice. Some aspects of a state-of-affairs are revealed at one moment; in the next they are adumbrated as a different aspect is revealed through another character. Indeed, surprise, ambiguity, and discovery form the backbone of quality storytelling; the reader is left to hold together (through retention, successive impressions, and anticipatory protention) aspects in a transtemporal horizon of possibilities, which is available throughout text.

A second way of investigating poetic *epochē* requires *extra-textual* research. Curious readers investigate an author's 'natural attitudes' by reading interviews, diaries, or essays. When readers encounter a contrasting attitude voiced within her fiction, their expectations have been disrupted, which merits phenomenological investigation. Here again surprise, ambiguity, and discovery lead readers to investigate not only the text for

[167] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Bell and Daldy, 1817), chap. XIV. Emphasis added.

answers, but extra-textual resources. Chapters four and five will investigate both internal and external examples of the poetic *epochē*.

II.3.4 Chapter summary and a path forward. Let us pause to review how this phenomenology of literature leads to a theological engagement through literature. The conflicting plurality of characters and perspectives in an author's corpus renders discovering 'authorial intention' nearly impossible. But our phenomenological investigation thus far has demonstrated that:

(a) the author has a singular relation to her intentional object (an extramental object or state of affairs) through her act of *poiēsis*. This relation is constituted by the poiematic *Sinn*, which is enfolded within her *poiēma* (her intentional content/creative output).

(b) the record of authorial *intentionality* can be investigated by considering what the author discloses in the *poiēma*, which becomes an intentional *object* for subsequent readers' intentionality.

(c) The reader cannot access the author's noetic act of *poiēsis*, but can explore the *poiēma* (the text record of the author's intentionality) to see what it *might* reveal of the poiematic *Sinn.*

(d) Poetic *epochē* – a bracketing of attitudes about possibly actual matters – is discernible in the free imaginative variation within a text, and between an author's stated views and what intentional content she includes/excludes in her *poiēma*.

This series of insights on authorial intentionality and poetic *epochē* introduce, for the reader, a *pedagogical heuristic* for how the author directs the reader to intend the text itself. Having observed the author suspending her own (dis)beliefs, the reader learns that he must bracket his default judgments in his life-world, so as to enter the text-world and attend to the intentional content disclosed by the author. The *epochē* reveals again the importance of intersubjectivity, highlighted by Alfred Schutz in his sociological application of Husserl: "The possibility of reflection on the self, discovery of the ego, capacity for performing any *epochē*, and the possibility of all communication and of establishing a communicative surrounding world as well, are founded on the primal experience of the *we-relationship*."[168] The author writes for an unseen other – her

[168] Alfred Schutz, "The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl," in *Collected Papers III: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy*, ed. Alfred Schutz and I. Schutz, Phaenomenologica (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1970), 82. Emphasis added.

reader. And the reader recognises that the text did not magically appear, but was written and disclosed by *someone* who is calling out for empathic attunement. (For who writes a novel or essay wishing to be misunderstood?) To read a text, then, is the pedagogical path towards thematising the intersubjective 'we-relationship' between unseen author and unseen readers. And so the initial act of entrusting a text to the reader – the author's *poetic* faith – finds generous response in the reader entrusting her attention to the author's creation.

Recall Barthes' banishment of author as the final arbiter of meaning: 'Thereby, literature (it would be better, from now on, to say *writing),* by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world-as-text) a "secret," i.e., an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity we may call countertheological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to *refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law*.'[169] Clearly an author of quality fiction does not prescribe a univocal meaning on a text. But Husserl has helped establish that an author does enjoy a unique, meaning-full liaison with her text. And Hirsch has helped us grasp this meaning-full relationship to the *significances* discovered by subsequent readers. If we can agree that the author's psychological 'intention' or purposes remain elusive and thus not the final determinant of meaning, perhaps literary theory can admit that the author minimally *is* the source of the text that calls her readers into the field of interpretive play.

In the next chapter, we will see how the author's call and reader's response is always-already grounded not only in intersubjective human relationships, but in the language of God, the Λόγος itself.

[169] Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 54.

Chapter III
Creations of God and of the Writer

III.0 Chapter Overview

Having moved outside of theology to consider voices from literary theory, hermeneutics, and phenomenology in chapter two, chapter three considers the theological implications of their work. The first section of this chapter discusses, in depth, how several mid-20th-century phenomenologists respond to Heidegger's developments on Husserl, and Dominique Janicaud's fear of the "theological turn" in the field of phenomenology. As a poet and phenomenologist, Jean-Louis Chrétien stands out as a voice particularly helpful to guide this conversation.

In the second section, Chrétien shifts this call-response dynamic into a decidedly theological register, tracing the historical understanding of divine creation and human creativity. Platonic language of participation helped thinkers such as St Augustine articulate how human artists participate in the work of the Creator God. The metaphor yielded a double-exchange of predications: God becomes the *divine Artist*, and human artists become *creators* in their own right. Chrétien charts this development through Nicholas of Cusa, identifying the attendant benefits and dangers of the flattening of these analogical predications. Cusa offers helpful language – *explicatio*/*complicatio* – that allows human finite creation to *unfold* from God's creative act, and for God to remain *enfolded* into every act of creation without losing God's infinitude. This section concludes by revisiting Coleridge and introducing George MacDonald, who together lay the groundwork for a literary and theological imagination.

In the third section, William Lynch recapitulates many of the chapter's themes: how the human mind is to understand finitude in relation to the transcendence; the use of language to point beyond itself; the dangers of ignoring one's finitude while grasping for the infinite; the role of the author as nested sub-creator; and most important for the following two chapters on Woolf and Robinson, the value of a robust literary imagination for exploring theological questions, so as to become attuned to God's grace active in creation.

III.1 Jean-Louis Chrétien and the "Theological Turn"

III.1.0 Edith Stein tells a story. Edith Stein emerged in the last chapter as a sympathetic challenge to Husserl's transcendental ego, introducing intersubjectivity and embodiment as the given realities in which all consciousness and phenomenological intending take place. The 'transcendental ego' is always already embedded in a life-world which is made evident by the encounter with others who manifest themselves as other ego-centres. In Stein's 1929 contribution to her mentor Husserl's 70th birthday *Festschrift*, she endeavoured to demonstrate these philosophical insights through an imaginative dialog, told as a story. Her initial draft, 'What Is Philosophy? A Conversation Between Edmund Husserl and Thomas Aquinas,' began by imagining Husserl sitting alone one night, restless in his study, wishing for a philosophical conversation to get his mind back on track. Suddenly a knock comes at the door – an adventitious surprise and apparent response to his desire. Husserl gets up and opens the door to find Thomas Aquinas in the flesh, eager to have a conversation with Husserl. And so Husserl responds with pleasure to an unexpected *call* at night that was, at the same time, a *response* to a desire. Commenting on this curious scene, Anne Davenport notes, 'the impossibility of assigning a first beginning to the encounter radically marks the exchange. Prior to hearing Thomas's formal challenge to the egocentricity implied by transcendental reduction, Husserl has already listened to a fault line within himself along which the unexpected might speak and shatter his self-sufficiency.'[170] Ironically, Husserl's student Heidegger (who organized the *Festschrift*) asked Stein to rework the dialogue's points into a more standard philosophical genre, stripping the work of the narrative structure that was so central to it: a phenomenology of *call* and *response*. This dynamic of call and response is Chrétien's theological approach to phenomenology.

III.1.1 An introduction to the theological turn. The 1990s saw a debate emerge in Paris within the domain of phenomenology, between what Anne Davenport terms the "minimalist" tradition and proponents of a more "radicalized" vision. Both sides recognised Jean-Louis Chrétien's work as being at the heart of this radicalized school. Critics such as Dominique Janicaud (1937-2002) found in Chrétien's thought a subversive "theological turn," which seemingly betrayed the field of phenomenology as

[170] From Davenport's elucidating introduction to Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (Fordham University Press, 2004), xviii ff.

such.[171] The debate centred around a question: does Chrétien expropriate phenomenological tools for an alien discipline, or does he more fundamentally ground phenomenology in the call-response dynamic he proposes? Janicaud suggests that 'phenomenology and theology make two'.[172] Chretien scholar Joshua Davis notes that Janicaud implicitly acknowledges the priority of theology, since (for Janicaud) only theological discourse can properly adjudicate the phenomenological *status of transcendence* as perceived by radical phenomenology.[173] Commenting on this debate, Paul Ricœur notes that the sheer disproportion between call and response means that an authentic phenomenology of religion must unveil and explore the yawning abyss between divine call and human response, a disproportion which is apparently inarticulable.[174] Chrétien recognised this disparity and endeavoured in his book of essays *L'appel et la Réponse* to articulate this abyssal distance by associating the disproportion with infinity itself: 'From the finite to the infinite, continuity as such is shattered [*se brise*] by an ever-stronger discontinuity, so that every similitude blossoms [*fleurit*] into an ever more intensely luminous dissimilitude.'[175] Chrétien expresses phenomenologically Lateran VI's theological argument of the *major dissimilitudo* in the analogy of being between God and all things in creation.[176] Chrétien continues, 'the contact with the infinite is necessarily of another order than with what is finite.'[177]

In what way does the finite 'contact' or 'touch' the infinite? Chrétien's fellow traveller Emmanuel Levinas answers this question in terms of the radical *alterity* of the infinite in *Totalité et Infini*, wherein 'absolute experience is not disclosure but

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[171] See, for example, Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn"* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). Joshua Davis frames this debate along Blondel-Bergsonian and Husserl-Heideggerian lines; see Davis, "The Call of Grace: Henri de Lubac, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and the Theological Conditions of Christian Radical Phenomenology," in *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (Fordham University Press, 2010), 181ff.
[172] Janicaud, *Theological Turn*, 99–103.
[173] Davis, "The Call of Grace," 183.
[174] Ricœur also argues that we cannot presume the 'call-response' dynamic is universal to all religions, and should limit one's scope to the hermeneutics of one religion, presumably Christianity. See Paul Ricœur, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn,"* by Dominique Janicaud, n.d., 127–46.
[175] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse* (Editions de Minuit, 1992), 151–52. '*Du fini à la infini, certes, toute continuité se brise d'une discontinuité toujours plus fort, et toute ressemblance fleurit en une dissemblance plus lumineuse encore.*' My translation. In general quotations come from Davenport's translation, *The Call and the Response*, Fordham University Press, 2004.
[176] 'For between Creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.' Pope Innocent III, "Canon §2. On the Error of Abbot Joachim," in *Fourth Lateran Council*, 1215, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm.
[177] Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse*, 152.

revelation'.[178] This replacing of Being's self-manifestation with the self-revelation of Alterity is precisely where Janicaud locates the flaw in the theological turn, a slippage in the very principles that undergird phenomenology. 'The dice are loaded and choices made; faith rises majestically in the background,' Janicaud warns of their project.[179] Chrétien's argument is slightly different to Levinas's, and requires a few careful steps of explanation to respond to Janicaud.

III.1.2 Chrétien and the paradox of prayer. *Pace* Levinasian Alterity, Chrétien retains the language of infinity, with the caveat that infinity only presents itself in the domain of a religious phenomenon, through paradox. Chrétien argues that prayer is the preeminent religious phenomenon, such that the religious dimension of life 'appears and disappears with prayer'.[180] Common to all forms of prayer, for Chrétien, is that it is a *speech act* employing pre-given signs, i.e., words. Vocal prayer harnesses our finite vocal cords to reverberate these signs *as if* addressing an invisible other, as one asks 'is anyone there?' in a dark basement. In prayer one must *stipulate the existence* of the unseen other in order to investigate the possibility of its existence. But speech need not be vocalized to be verbalized. We shall see in the next chapter how mental prayer paradoxically arises in the consciousness of Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, to her surprise and dismay. Such verbalization is not self-talk, but self-exposure to the possibility of another; all prayer, Chrétien writes, 'dispossesses us of our egocentrism' much like someone knocking at night.[181] The religious phenomenon gives itself in paradox, as (what Jean-Luc Marion calls) 'an impossible phenomenon, or at least one that marks the limit starting from which the phenomenon in general is no longer possible.'[182] Chrétien explains how one comes to recognise this paradox of apparent impossibility: only by attempting prayer does one realize that one does not know how to pray; but the desire itself is a prayer grounded in a light that comes from elsewhere.[183] Over the course of its four essays, *The Call and the Response* gradually demonstrates that 'sight, voice, and finally touch are wrenched from the proud mystery of the autarchic

[178] Janicaud, *Theological Turn*, 36–43. Cited in Anne Davenport's preface to *Call and Response*, xiii. Emphasis added.
[179] Janicaud, 27.
[180] Anne Davenport's preface in Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, xiv.
[181] Jean-Louis Chrétien, "The Wounded Word," in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud (New York: Fordham Press, 2000), 153.
[182] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon" in Janicaud, *Theological Turn*, 176.
[183] Chrétien, "The Wounded Word," 157.

self to be deployed as irreducibly hymnal and choral' in response to God's grounding call of love.[184] Like Husserl's latter-day recognition of intersubjectivity, such call and response is necessarily embodied in a foregrounding community of subjects; to this we will return later.

III.1.3 Wounded finitude. Chrétien's essay '*La parole blessée*' ('The Wounded Word' in English) addresses the limits of speech (*la parole*) involved in prayer:

> the shortcomings of speech open only in speaking. This is the circularity of prayer: the one praying prays in order to know how to pray, and first of all to learn that he does not know how, and he offers thanks for his prayer as a gift from God. One can be turned to God only in praying, and one can pray only by being turned toward God. Only a leap makes us enter into this circle.[185]

This circle of prayer, Chrétien continues, is preceded and surpassed by the one whom the prayer addresses; any attempt at speech is always already a response. Like the one asking, 'is anyone there?' in a darkened basement, the first words of inquiry are a vulnerable *response* to an intuition of an other who may prove to be a welcome stranger – or a threat.[186] Our words, Chrétien argues, are vulnerable, laid bare, before the God who foregrounds our speech. The woundedness, i.e., finitude of human mortality, is made evident in the disclosive revelation of 'infinite love' – that is, in Christ. Nor can it be otherwise: 'Revelation must shatter [*briser*] something in us in order to be heard. It reaches us only by wounding us.'[187] God's initiatory action is adventitious and disruptive, and may thus be surprising and unwelcome. Scripture speaks of divine love as a figure who knocks at night, appealing to the soul in response to the soul's call out into the deep for aid. Consider, again Stein's imagined conversation: Husserl's desire for intellectual companionship is rewarded by an unexpected knock at the door, which Husserl in turn answers. Therein lies the paradox; one cannot easily trace back to the first step in the appeal-response dynamic, yet (Chrétien argues) to wonder about prayer is to have found oneself always-already in the relationship with the infinite Word.

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[184] Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, xv.
[185] Chrétien, "The Wounded Word," 157.
[186] Much of this plays on the ambiguity of Latin *hostis* ("guest" *or* "enemy"), deftly treated in Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*.
[187] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Lueur du secret* (Paris: L'Herne, 1985), 22. Translation by Anne A. Davenport in Chrétien, C*all and Response*, xxiii.

III.1.4 Limited correspondence. Anne Davenport notes in her assessment of *The Call and the Response* that Chrétien entertains Heidegger's theory of correspondence (*Entsprechung*) but refutes him by demonstrating the *major dissimilitudo* that challenges such a correspondence. Chrétien agrees with Heidegger that language speaks, and we humans speak insofar as we correspond to language. Furthermore, the two agree that the call is not recognisable apart from the response; but Chrétien parts ways with Heidegger in suggesting that the response can *never* fully correspond to the originating call. This vast disproportion of finite to infinite requires grounding Heidegger's phenomenology of speech in something deeper, something infinitely *other*. In his own writings, Jean-Luc Marion refers to phenomena of this sort as 'saturated' in line with Heidegger's purest definition of a phenomenon as 'what appears as itself, of itself, and from itself'.[188] Such a saturated phenomenon, Marion argues, is pure self-gift, 'because it appears alone without the limits of a horizon or reduction to an *ego*, but constituting itself by itself, to the point of giving itself as *a self*'.[189] Janicaud raises the objection that "saturated" slides into the infinite and is thus a distortion. But, as Anne Davenport argues by way of rescuing Marion, "saturated" 'possesses an intuitive superabundance that is incommensurable with the finite intentions that aim for it', and so is, in effect, infinitely intuitive and inaugmentable.[190] Marion underscores this by updating St Anselm's ontological argument to argue that a saturated phenomenon is *id quo nihil manifestius donari potest*. For Chrétien and Marion, human finitude is our only avenue of encountering the infinite (for Marion, the 'most saturated excess'), to which we can never respond in proportion. This insight – human finitude as the prime locus of encountering divine infinity – will come up later as we consider Lynch's treatment of the finite and infinite in reading literature.

In response to Janicaud's dismissal of the theological turn of phenomenology, Marion argues that the field of phenomenology is philosophy's attempt to thematise its very outer boundaries from within. Marion's conception of the saturated phenomenon explains how the perceiving subject, treating her ego as an object for phenomenological investigation, bursts horizons and thereby transcends them. In other words, the revelation of *phenomenology's limits* reorients the subject's attentional frame beyond

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[188] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), sec. 7.
[189] Jean-Luc Marion, *Etant donné: essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*, Epiméthée (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), 305. '*puisque lui seul apparaît sans les limites d'un horizon, ni la reduction à un* Je *et se constitue lui-même, au point de se donner comme un* soi'.
[190] Davenport in the preface to Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, xxiv.

what phenomenological inquiry alone can give. As Ricœur says in his response to Janicaud's objection, there are many 'religious' feelings and dispositions that emerge *from within* phenomenology:

> the feeling of absolute dependence (Schleiermacher); the feeling of utter confidence, in spite of everything, in spite of suffering and evil (Barth and Bultmann); the feeling of ultimate concern (Paul Tillich); the feeling of belonging to an economy of the gift, with its logic of overabundance, irreducible to the logic of equivalence…the feeling of being preceded in the order of speech, love, and existence (Rosenzweig).[191]

Such 'religious' feelings, Ricœur argues, can 'transgress the sway of representation and, in this sense, mark the subject's being overthrown from its ascendancy in the realm of meaning.'[192] The revelation of my finitude comes adventitiously, as what I cannot reveal or bestow unto myself (like consciousness itself). Phenomenological revelation displaces the subject's egocentricity with the absolute alterity of infinity, whose centre is – as Cusa observed centuries earlier – paradoxically at once everywhere and nowhere. Ricœur alternately terms religious feelings '"ab-solute", in the sense of *detached from the relation by which the subject would preserve its mastery over the object called "religious"*, i.e., over the meaning of the presumed object.'[193] Such a revelation chastens both the autarchic ego-subject and the discipline of phenomenology by drawing attention to methodological limits. Ricœur trenchantly argues that 'religious' feelings 'are test cases that bear witness to phenomenology's inability to open the intentionality of consciousness onto something completely other.'[194] Yet he admits that a phenomenology of religion faces challenges, especially the claim that 'one cannot locate anywhere the *universality* of the religious phenomenon'.[195] Two immediate objections come to mind, the first from Ricœur's earlier comments: the cluster of uncanny, shared human feelings (of abundance, gratitude, ultimate concern, belonging) are, by Ricœur's own definition, 'religious' and elude phenomenological domestication. These shared sentiments bind (*re-ligare*) humanity together across cultures, even if the uncanny feelings themselves are not easily bound by a *common description*. The second objection to Ricœur's concern comes from Chrétien's thought. Chrétien's reply would be related but distinct: these uncanny 'religious' calls are always-already present, but not always *recognisable* because of the incommensurable nature of the originating call.

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[191] Ricœur, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," 127.
[192] Ricœur, 127.
[193] Ricœur, 128.
[194] Ricœur, 128.
[195] Ricœur, 130. Emphasis added.

When phenomenology is confronted with its own horizonal limits, the conscious subject must become at-tentionally and in-tentionally attuned to 'hear' an adventitious call, on the latter's terms or not at all. The work of Jean-Louis Chrétien explains how this occurs in our embodiedness, most clearly in *The Call and the Response*.

Having reviewed relevant voices and challenges to the 'theological turn' in phenomenology, I turn to how Chrétien advances how the 'infinite call' of God the Creator relates to the 'finite response' of human artists, and how Christian theologians have understood this liaison through participation and analogy.

III.2 God the Artist & the Human Creator

III.2.1 Recalling the call of beauty. As both a poet and a phenomenologist in his own right, Jean-Louis Chrétien frames the question of the finite and infinite in terms of beauty, artistry and creation. In *The Call and the Response*, Chrétien traces the etymology of the Greek τὸ καλόν – the beautiful – back to the verb καλεῖν– to call – in Plato's dialogues the *Cratylus* and the *Phaedrus*. Therein Socrates argues that crafts are named after their crafters: e.g., a work of art takes its name from the artist who caused it. Thought, Socrates suggested, is the cause of bestowing names, whereby everything has been called (κληθηναι). And thus 'that which calls' (τὸ καλούν) and bestows names produces beautiful things (τὰ καλά). Hence *thought* is the origin of beautiful things, which are but responses to an originary calling from most eminent *beauty* itself. Socrates concludes, then, that τὸ καλόν is not one etymology among others, but the origin of language, the 'name of naming' itself.

From this Chrétien further notes that καλεῖν – like *appeler* or *call* – has a double meaning: to bestow a name, but also to call out, summon, or hail. 'The whole question' Chrétien provocatively asks, 'is whether this meaning is really double: it is quite possible, indeed, that naming something is nothing else than calling out to what is being named.'[196] Chrétien cites Platonists like Hermias of Alexandria who argued that beauty 'is like a light sent from the source of intelligibles all the way to this world, calling to itself and uniting lovers to what they love, so that beauty is that through which the ascent takes place.'[197] Commenting on Hermias, Chrétien writes with customary flourish, 'the expanding diastole of beauty, in its radiant effusion, is also systole – its exodus is what

[196] Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 7.
[197] Hermeias of Alexandria, *In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, 177, cited in Chrétien, 9.

allows our return.'[198] This Platonic insight – beauty as the originating *exitus* that prompts our admiring *reditus* – is the movement that this chapter is mapping out theologically, and which emerges in chapter four's analysis of Woolf's Neo-Platonism.

By giving its name to beauty, the call designates the very mode of its manifestation: beauty [τὸ καλόν] is that which calls [τὸ καλούν]. Chrétien argues that this is no mere contingent feature – though superficially it may look like clever word games. Beauty's calling is an essential feature of beauty: 'the in-itself [of beauty] is to be for-the-other, aimed at gathering the other back to itself.'[199] To put this in the phenomenological idiom, beauty is the intentional object that calls out to the intending subject by manifesting itself as itself, and manifests itself by 'calling out' visually. Chrétien explores this audio-visual manifestation in spatial terms of *outward-facing invitation* and *responsive return*:

> To draw us to itself as such, to put is in motion toward it, to move us, to come and find us where we are so that we will seek it – such is beauty's call and such is our vocation… does it not follow that even the silent beauty of the visible, and the furtive but also defining passage of light over shapes, raising them to an excess of incandescence, are destined not to mute contemplation, but rather to an act of listening? Can we think of this call otherwise than as a verb that comes to grip us [*nous saisir*] and request us? Where springs the call, there burns speech.[200]

Beautiful things 'call out audibly in the visible', with Chrétien citing Paul Claudel's gnomic book of essays, *L'œil écoute*, 'the eye listens'. And this phenomenological call of beauty invites our responsive re-call [*rappeler*], a remembrance [*rappel*] of one's origins which have subsequently been forgotten. The forgetting of our finitude – understood in both senses – erases the call's footprints such that our *re*-calling seems like it was the first action, *sua sponte.* Yet beauty re-calls us to beauty's initial call: 'We can only beckon to ourselves what has already turned itself toward us, already manifest itself to us – what calls upon us to call: the full daylight of language is thus already well advanced before the dawn of any call.'[201] This dynamic schema – of language and beauty, sound and vision, forgetting and recollection – has immense implications for our theological engagement with writers bothered by God. As we shall see in the next section, this Platonic vision of origins, with Christian modifications, would suffer its own forgetting and analogical breakdown, recasting the Creator God as the divine Artist, and human artists as quasi-divine creators.

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[198] Chrétien, 9.
[199] Chrétien, 9. '*Son en soi est d'être pour l'autre, afin de le recueillir.*'
[200] Chrétien, 9. '*Où surgit l'appel, brûle la parole.*'
[201] Chrétien, 5.

III.2.2 God the Artist, human creators. In his masterful essay 'From God the Artist to Man the Creator,' Chrétien charts a double exchange of identities: first, God as creator takes on the human characteristic of the artist; secondly, the human artist is elevated to the godly role of creator, with considerable consequences for the history of western thought, art and literature. That contemporary aesthetics use "creator" and "artist" interchangeably attracts Chrétien's interest, given the question of human correspondence to God.

Chrétien charts out the history of analogizing these terms, an investigation into humanity's heuristic attunement to the divine. Beginning with Greek antiquity up to the present, Chrétien traces the origins of the claim that God the Father is the foregrounding artist, and that the Word – the second person of the Trinity – is the organizing skill, the 'art' of God. St Augustine was seminal in articulating God's relation to both creation and artists involved in producing works of art.[202] In his conception, any human artistry is a Platonic participation in the creative activity of the Trinity. For Augustine, the spectator of works of art is to appreciate the beauty of these outworkings in such a way as to make a return to the artist him or herself, and from there, to the Source of all artistry. Not to make a spectatorial 'return' entails a wilful – which for Augustine is sinful – turn away from the artist. *De libero arbitrio* addresses the dangers of lingering in the works and choosing not to make the intellectual ascent from works to the *ars divina* of the Creator, which is God's wisdom itself:

> Woe to those who abandon Your leading [*Te ducem*] and who stray in Your footprints [*vestigiis*], who love the signs/nods [*nutus*] which You show but not Yourself, who forget what You intend [*quid innuas*], O wisdom, most sweet light of a purified mind! You never cease to hint at [*innuere*] Your works and Your greatness. Every excellence in a creature is a sign [*nutus*] of Your [excellence]. By the very beauty of his work, the artist hints [*innuit*], as it were, to his admirer not to get totally stuck there, but rather to run his eyes [*percurrat oculis*] over the produced work in such a way that he return with affection [*recurrat affectu*] to the artist who produced it.[203]

We notice here a few important semantic elements that carry theological import for Chrétien and this thesis's argument. First, Augustine addresses God's initiative [*te ducem*], and the works of creation which are God's traces [*vestigiis*]. His use of *nutus* and *innuere* connote a semantic range that includes "hint", "nod", "signal", "intimation",

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[202] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Corps à corps: à l'écoute de l'œuvre d'art* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1997). The work was translated by Stephen Lewis with the English title *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 94–129. I cite the English translation.

[203] Augustine of Hippo, *De libero arbitrio*, bk. II.16.42. My translation.

or "command" that conveys the intentions of a leader. Augustine moves seamlessly from God's *nutus* to the artist's. The artist directs her observer not to dwell on her work, but run his eyes over [*percurrat oculis*] its beauty in order to run back with fondness [*recurrat affectu*] to the artist herself. Augustine employs subjunctives of purpose: the artist produces beauty for people to behold *in order to* return to the artist. The spectator's attention ought not fixate on aesthetic beauty, but *investigate these sense impressions as hints.*

We can see the roots of phenomenology emerging much earlier than Husserl; what is more, Augustine grounds intentionality in the dynamic relationship with the artist. Important for this understanding is what might prevent such a movement. Augustine describes those who fail to make the return to the artist:

> Those who love Your works instead of Yourself are like those who hear a wise and eloquent speaker, who listen too eagerly to the charm of his voice [*suavitatem vocis]* and the careful structures of his uttered syllables, but lose the principal source of the thoughts [*amittunt sententiarum principatum*], whose words are spoken only as signs. Woe to those who turn away from Your light and linger sweetly in their own shadows![204]

For Augustine this lingering in beautiful prose or works of art is a free-will choice for the shadows (death, unreality), a wilful turning away from the light (life, reality) of the artistic source. In the previous chapter I explained Barthes's countertheological exclusion of the 'dead' artist in favour of *la parole vivante*. Augustine's Christian vision radically inverts Barthes's conception of what is living and what is dead. Augustine – like Barthes – is not yet speaking of the *ars divina* of the divine Author, but of human artistry. Commenting on these passages, Chrétien notes, 'it is thus remarkable that Saint Augustine considers it self-evident that, even in *human* art, it is necessary to love the author more than the work. The consequences of such a decision are without measure: the power to make a work is more than the work, the clarity of the work is not inaugural, but only reflected and lunar; it comes from elsewhere and leads us elsewhere, towards the mind of the artist."[205] For Augustine the *artist* possesses more life and light than any works of art, and (as we shall next see) is thus closer in reality to the eternal *ars divina*.

What is the relationship of these human artists to God the creator, then? Chrétien approvingly cites Augustine's treatment of the difference in how God creates and how humans produce, in Augustine's reply to a question of pagan sculptures and idols:

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[204] Augustine of Hippo, *De libero arbitrio*, bk. II.16.43. My translation.
[205] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 2003, 105–6.

> That supreme art [*suprema ars*] of the omnipotent God through which all things have been made from nothing, which is also called his Wisdom, also works through artists to produce things of beauty and proportion, although they do not produce from nothing but from a given material.[206]

Where God creates *ex nihilo*, the artist finds herself doubly dependent: both on God's supreme art/Wisdom to guide and inspire her artistic production, and on the extant materials of creation that her creative energies employ. For Augustine the *suprema ars* of God 'works through artists': it is God's activity, mediated through the artist. In Chrétien's schematic, the artist is not creating, so much as creatively *responding* to God's initiatory *creatio ex nihilo*. Important to note is that Augustine is mounting this argument not to denigrate human artistry, but to challenge the spectator's idolatry of artistic productions. The observer ought to run her eyes [*percurrat oculis*] over the beauty of a work of art, not with a fixed gaze, but as the start of directed movement. God works through artists to lead the spectator upwards, to return to the artist with fondness [*recurrat affectu*], and thence to the *suprema ars* of God.

III.2.3 In the beginning was the Word. Augustine's *ars divina* begins not with visual outworkings of beauty, but with the invisible ordering skill of the Λόγος. It is the divine Word which foregrounds and inspires all subsequent artistic creation. This ordering Λόγος, who is the second person of the Trinity, is God's *ars divina.* Chretien notes that 'the divine art, which is the Word, possesses in himself the being and the life of all that which is created. In him, in their source, things are eternally safe, from the beginning… *Everything is said in the Word before being expressed or uttered outside.* In art, being is this immemorial promise that always already sustains us.'[207] Herein lies the major contribution of Chrétien to this chapter and thesis: all artistic creation – indeed all being and words – are pre-uttered within the Eternal, living Word. All writers are grounded, the claim goes, not in *la langue* of humanity, but in *le Verbe* who always already sustains human thought, speech, and artistry.

Chrétien draws on Augustine's exegesis of John 1:3-5, 'all things came into being through [the Word] (πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο), and apart from [the Word] not even one thing came into being' to understand divine, and human craft. In *In Evangelium*

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[206] Augustine of Hippo, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Fathers of the Church v.70 (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), chap. 78, accessed online at http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=3134884. Emphasis added.
[207] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, *Fulcrum.Org* (Fordham University Press, n.d.), 106–7. Emphasis added.

Ioannis Tractatus, Augustine describes how a craftsman (*faber*) goes about imagining and creating a chest (*arca*).[208] This passage (Latin footnoted below) bears extended exegesis, for reasons I articulate in the next section. A chest exists first *in arte* – in design, the organizing form he has of *arca* in mind. This mental *arca in arte* is rendered extramental as a visible production, the *arca in opere.* And where the *arca in opere* decays with time, the mental *arca in arte* remains. And so, Augustine suggests, 'pay attention (*attendite*) to the chest in art, and the chest as a work' as a way of comparing their relative realities. The soul of the artist (*anima artificis*), Augustine concludes, is where all objects are found before they are produced externally, because the soul of the artist is living. Art, and life, are not located principally in the material work, but in the ordering mind of the living artist.

Eventually, the chest decays, and so do human artists. Where the chest-maker – or writer – does indeed die, the soul of the artist remains living because it is enfolded in, and unfolds from, the initiatory *ars divina* which is Christ, the ordering wisdom of God. And so, Chrétien deftly argues, a work of art (e.g., an *arca in opere*) is the outworking of the artist's invisible *arca in arte*, which itself is foregrounded in the initiatory *ars divina*. The *arca in opere* may rot and decay but exist in the *arca in arte* of the craftsman's mind, yet the craftsman too will materially die; but her artist soul lives on in the *ars divina,* the Supreme Wisdom of God, who is Christ. The risk of creating beauty *in opere* is that the spectator grows fixated more on the finite signifier, than on the eternal reality – *ars divina* – upon which the chest – and its craftsman – ultimate depend.

III.2.4 Augustine's theology of creative intentionality. With Augustine's extended analogy, Chrétien establishes the theological underpinnings to the authorial and readerly intentionality I developed in chapter two. The artist – let us say, an author – produces a fiction novel, but not *ex nihilo*; she draws from the well of words and images that she has encountered before. The fictional work she 'has in mind' is like the

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[208] Augustine's *In Evangelium Iohannis Tractatus*, I, 17, cited in Chrétien, 107. Augustine's Latin text: *Quomodo possum, dicam Caritati vestrae. Faber facit arcam. Primo in arte habet arcam: si enim in arte arcam non haberet, unde illam fabricando proferret? Sed arca sic est in arte, ut non ipsa arca sit quae videtur oculis. In arte invisibiliter est, in opere visibiliter erit. Ecce facta est in opere; numquid destitit esse in arte? Et illa in opere facta est, et illa manet quae in arte est: nam potest illa arca putrescere, et iterum ex illa quae in arte est, alia fabricari. Attendite ergo arcam in arte, et arcam in opere. Arca in opere non est vita, arca in arte vita est; quia vivit anima artificis, ubi sunt ista omnia antequam proferantur. Sic ergo, fratres carissimi, quia Sapientia Dei, per quam facta sunt omnia, secundum artem continet omnia, antequam fabricet omnia; hinc quae fiunt per ipsam artem, non continuo vita sunt, sed quidquid factum est, vita in illo est.*

invisible *arca in arte* of the chestmaker. We cannot see the *arca in arte*, any more than we can see what the book's author has in mind (her *poiēma*) that she wishes to record extramentally. But her *poiēma* is rendered extramental as a new intentional object, a physical book (*arca in opere*), in the world for her readers' intentional gaze.

Note above that Augustine suggests that observers pay attention to **both** the unseen design and the seen artifact (*attendite ergo arcam in arte et arcam in opere*). How does one do so? Augustine's earlier quotation from *De libero arbitrio* offers an answer: the way one attends to the invisible is by beginning with the visible – the *arca in opere*, and from there running with fondness [*recurrat affectu*] to the mind of the author, wherein lies the *arca in arte.* This parallels the readerly intentionality of an author's work (the book *in opere*), which raises the reader's attention to what *might be* the author's intentionality (the book *in arte*, or the *poiēma*), elusive and unseen though it be. This theological chapter, with the help of Augustine and Chrétien, reveals that all artistic work, indeed all life, is always-already grounded in the eternal Word, *ars divina*. And by extension, all authorial and readerly intentionality are foregrounded in the divine intentionality – God's divine gaze – which we will return to with Nicholas of Cusa in chapter six, after having considered the fiction of Woolf and Robinson.

III.2.5 *Ars divina* and creation after Augustine. Augustine's thoughts on divine art as it relates to human art would find champions in the Middle Ages. John Scotus Eriugena argued in the ninth century that in the life of the Trinity, if the Son is the *ars divina*, then God the Father is properly considered the *artifex*, who generated the art. And so the all-powerful artist is in relation to the art as Father is to Son – a theological relationship as Roland Barthes acknowledges. Together then, for Eriugena, God is both the artist and art; God the Father's first creative act as artist is not a work external to God, but the eternal generation of *ars divina* within the Trinity itself. This raises the question, if God is in no need of extra-Trinitarian "works" of art, why bother creating external works, if their beauty is but shadows of the perfect divine art? The question of artistic creation maps analogically onto the question of 'Why Creation?' more broadly. St Bonaventure addresses this question in the thirteenth century by another artistic image, involving writing: the "book" of the created world and the book of Scripture, whose shared author is God. These books (of creation and Scripture) are *libri foris scripti* – books written outwardly, "outside" of the divine art, for the sake of humanity's *reductio in Deum* – our ascending, anagogical reading of "words" to return to the divine

Word. Bonaventure draws on Augustine's conception that the *ars divina*, to argue that the Wisdom – the Word – of God is first interior: this he calls the *liber intus scriptus*. The *Incarnation* of the Word, then, is the perfect union of God's inwardly and outwardly written books: in Jesus the *art* and the *work* come together in a singular way.[209] In Christ, we might say, the *liber in arte* and *liber in opere* are one. For the rest of humanity, too, the external and internal books meet, without merging. The beauty of "works" outside of divine art are designed for humanity in order to be "read", in order to lead one back up anagogically to the originating Word itself, the *reductio mentis in Deum.*

Eriugena's elaboration of Augustine's thought is important for this thesis in grounding *theologically* the authorial intentionality I introduced in the previous chapter. The Word of God, written interiorly and eternally within the life of God, is the *liber intus scriptus*, and by extension of Augustine's thought, the *Deus in arte*. God the artist chooses to render visible, physical, temporal this *ars divina* as an object in the *liber foris scriptus* of the world. How does God wish to present God's self in creation? Through the Christ, the Word of God. And as Eriugena notes, Christ is the singular union of the art and outworking of God's art in creation.

III.2.6 Proper attunement of analogy. Chrétien addresses a risk in deploying analogical language of God's creative activity and our artistic creation. For Aristotle, he notes, art was a preeminent site of human greatness and ingenuity, but such a comparison would not be worthy of the divine. For Aristotle, the knowing that helps humanity consider God is not the same as human know-how, the τέχνη (*ars*) of how to focus human energy to manipulate tools to produce objects in the world. Thus art, Chrétien writes, 'can only become a site for divinization if God first enters into art, and becomes an artist,' an idea introduced by Christian Platonists such as Augustine.[210] God, then, chooses to reveal God's self as artist (the Father), employs *ars divina* (the Son) in creating the world, much as an artist employs her artistic skills in creating a work of art. The danger of this analogy, Chrétien suggests, is that 'little by little, the dissimilar character of this analogy fades, indeed is doomed to fade, at the same time as its

[209] Bonaventura, *Breviloquium* II.11.2, cited in Chrétien, 114–15.
[210] Chrétien, 120.

Christological keystone, which recalls this dissimilarity.'[211] Chrétien reiterates Aquinas's caution about the gravitational pull of univocal thought articulated in **I.2.1.**

Chrétien traces this move – of transforming God the creator into God the artist – from Augustine through to Nicholas of Cusa, who speaks of the world as an *artificium*, a work of divine art. And from that, Cusa writes, 'all human arts are "images" of the infinite divine art' which leads to the conclusion that, 'all finite art derives from the infinite art. And so it will be necessary that the infinite art be the model of all the arts, *the principle, the medium, the end, the measure, the truth, and the precision and the perfection* of all arts.'[212] Such an analogy is properly attuned so long as *ars divina* remains in focus as the highest model, beyond any human artistry. But the analogy risks collapsing into univocity by elevating the human artist to the status of creator: 'Consider that Hermes Trismegiste says that man is a *second God*. For, just as God is the creator of real beings and of natural forms, so too man is the creator of artificial beings and forms…This is how man possesses an intellect that is a likeness to the divine intellect: in the creative act (*in creando*).'[213] For Cusa, there was no question of the *major dissimilitudo* between the infinite creator and finite 'creators' whose secondary works and intellects were dependent likenesses of the divine. But much of modernity, Chrétien notes, relies '*not by rhetorical hyperbole* but rather *according to rigorous theological determinations* that man has become for himself a creator and can name himself as such. From the moment this title is conferred upon him, man does not relinquish it easily.'[214] Once Prometheus has stolen the fire from the gods, he has no need to return for further illumination.

A wordsmithing 'creator' like a writer or poet does not imagine he requires any independent materials, unlike a chestmaker who necessarily relies on raw physical materials. Chrétien concludes that this second analogical movement – of the elevation of human artist to 'creator' and 'second God' – is the source of misunderstanding the relationship of the finite to the infinite, resulting in the 'inflation of "creations" and of "creators" throughout the course of modernity and beyond it.'[215] Ironically, the theological move to ground human creativity in the creative life of God resulted not in *participation with* but *displacement of* the creator. Augustine, as we noted earlier, saw

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[211] Chrétien, 120.
[212] Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de Mente*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: A.J. Banning Press, 1996), chap. II. Cited in *Hand to Hand*, 121. My translation.
[213] Cusa, *De Beryllo* VI cited in Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 122. Emphasis added.
[214] Chrétien, 123. *Emphasis added.*
[215] Chrétien, 123.

this as a free will choice to turn in upon himself, which is sin: *homo creator in se incurvatus* – with no pressing need to acknowledge one's creative dependence on *ars divina*.

III.2.7 Cusa's metaphysics of *explicatio/complicatio*. We need not give a complete history of this analogy of divine to human creation, though it is helpful to note that one task of scholasticism was to understand the *major dissimilitudo* between God and creatures while preserving the framework of uniform rationality. Thomas Aquinas approached this problem through the doctrine of analogy, arguing that a predication known through creation has an analogically similar but not identical meaning in reference to God the Creator.[216] John Duns Scotus rejected this doctrine of analogy, in favour of univocal predication that applied equally to God and creation: God is the cause of creation in the same sense as human artists cause a work of art, for example. In this schema, God is taken to be the maximally excellent first agent, with a univocal concept of causality describing the relationship of Creator to creation.[217] In Cusa's view, God cannot be spoken of in the same way as with created beings and still remain God. The concept of causation from the unknowably infinite to the investigable finite relies rather on dependent, metaphorical uses rather than on univocal predication. This necessity of the metaphorical language separates Cusa from Duns Scotus (and William Ockham), whose univocity risked flattening the ever-greater difference between God as creator and human creators.

Cusa recommends the Platonic idea of participation in order to explain the relation of the infinite to the finite, with the adapted terminology of *complicatio* ("enfolding") and *explicatio* ("unfolding"). Insofar as the finite participates in the infinite, God's oneness/indefinability is *explicated* by all finite entities. Cusa refers to this as *contractio* as well: God's oneness is contracted in matter without thus losing its indefinability. A complementary articulation is that God's being is *enfolded* or *complicit* in every element of creation: there can be no finite entity, real or possibly so, which is not always-already enfolded in the infinite God who is the foregrounding *ens entium.*

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[216] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Thomas Gilby, vol. 3 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Ia.13, 5.
[217] On Scotus, see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus*, Great Medieval Thinkers (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16–30. See also Knut Alfsvåg, "*Explicatio* and *Complicatio*: On the Understanding of the Relationship between God and the World in the Work of Nicholas Cusanus," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 3 (2012): 296.

Put succinctly, 'God is the enfolding of all things in that all things are in Him; and He is the unfolding of all things in that He is in all things.'[218] For Cusa, entities can only exist as distinct, unfolded entities, which reflects a sympathy with Aristotelians who maintain that forms only exist in particulars. Yet Cusa insists on the logical priority of the forms, reflecting an equal commitment to the Platonic perspective.[219] Cusa's schema reflects Plato's caution of not rushing too quickly from the many to the one, lest we (finite creatures) artificially collapse the greater dissimilitude with God (infinite Creator), risking pantheism and self-idolatry.

III.2.8 Towards a literary, theological imagination. Scottish novelist and Calvinist preacher George MacDonald (1824-1905) offers a helpful formula for relating the creative imagination of the artist to the creative work of God. *Imago* simply means "likeness," and *imaginatio* is the process of rendering such a likeness. The imagination, for MacDonald, is the faculty

> which gives form to thought—not necessarily uttered form, but form capable of being uttered in shape or in sound, or in any mode upon which the senses can lay hold. It is, therefore, that faculty in man which is likest to the prime operation of the power of God, and has, therefore, been called the creative faculty, and its exercise creation.[220]

Just as humankind is made *in imagine Dei*, so too all functions of the human intellect are patterned on the intellect of God. Thus MacDonald concludes that the imagination of humans is made 'in the image of the imagination of God.'[221] But this is no mere analogy, but a metaphysical claim resonating with Cusa's language of *unfolding* and of Platonic participation: 'Everything of man must have been of God first; and it will help much towards our understanding of the imagination and its functions in man if we first succeed in regarding aright the imagination of God, in which the imagination of man lives and moves and has its being.'[222] But MacDonald also develops an analogy of proportion: what God's *creative act* is to creation, so the artist's *imagination* is to her painting, fiction, or poetry. Just as the playwright writes characters, setting, plot and chorus, so God creates 'actors' (humans) on a stage (the world) to act (live the drama of

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[218] Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: AJBenning Press, 1981), bk. II.3.107.
[219] Cusa, bk. II.9.142–7.
[220] George MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture," in *A Dish of Orts* (London: S. Low, Marston, 1893), http://www.george-macdonald.com/etexts/the_imagination.html.
[221] MacDonald.
[222] MacDonald.

life) with a chorus (birds and such) providing aesthetic accompaniment. 'As the thoughts move in the mind of a man, so move the worlds of men and women in the mind of God, and make no confusion there, for there they had their birth, the offspring of his imagination. Man is but a thought of God.'[223] Calvinist Marilynne Robinson may have had MacDonald in mind when she wrote in *Gilead*:

> Calvin says somewhere that each of us is an actor on a stage and God is the audience. That metaphor has always interested me, because it makes us artists of our behaviour, and the reaction of God to us might be thought of as aesthetic rather than morally judgmental in the ordinary sense. …[I]t suggests how God might actually enjoy us. I believe we think about that far too little. It would be a way into understanding essential things, since presumably the world exists for God's enjoyment.[224]

The goal of a properly Christian imagination, for MacDonald, is to create beautiful things that raise the mind from *creata* to *creator*: 'To do this, the man must watch its signs, its manifestations. He must contemplate what the Hebrew poets call the works of His hands.'[225] Concerted attention to natural effects is the path by which we reason – or imagine – our way back to the creative cause. Reminiscent of Augustine on beauty, Robinson concludes that 'given that beauty is…the signature of the divine in creation, that the aesthetic should be an aspect of human nature that reveals our affinity to God simply follows.'[226] We are created not only to *behold* beauty, but to ponder its aesthetic origins and participate in the creative act ourselves through our imagination.

III.2.9 God's creation and nested artistic creation revisited. In this second section of the chapter, I have been arguing that Cusa's *explicatio/complicatio* dynamic improves on the Platonic language of *exitus-reditus*. God's creative Word, Christ, unfolds from the Creator, making explicit God's creative imagination. And all of creation – being, speech, artwork, artists – likewise unfold from this Creator. God the Creator is simultaneously *enfolded in* (i.e., God's presence is available to and within) the world of creation while remaining distinct from it. Cusa preserves Platonic participation without disparaging materiality: God is enfolded/contracted in God's creation in such a way that preserves God's autonomy and creation's particularities. And Christ, I have been arguing with Eriugena and Augustine, joins together in a singular way God's

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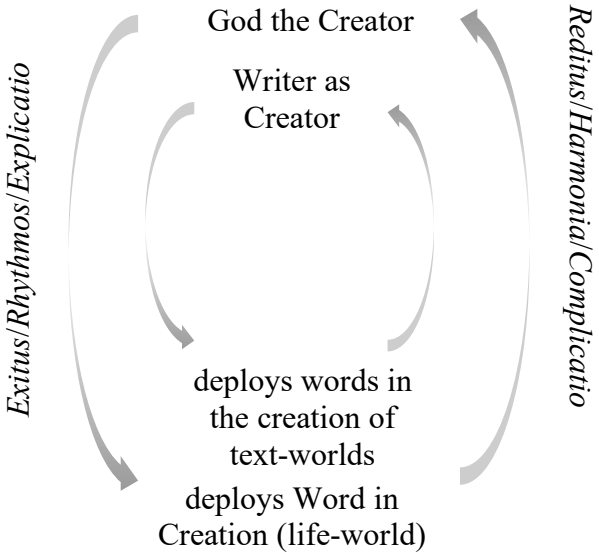
[223] MacDonald.
[224] Robinson, *Gilead*, 124.
[225] MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture."
[226] Matthew Sitman, "Saving Calvin from Clichés: An Interview with Marilynne Robinson," *Commonweal Magazine*, October 20, 2017, 19, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/saving-calvin.

artistry (interior life of the Trinity) and God's work in creation, *Deus in arte et in opere.* Christ, Eriugena argued, makes visible the Author's *liber intus scriptus* for humanity to 'read'.

By analogy a writer's creative words – the text – unfold from the artistic creator, making explicit his or her creative imagination. All of the text/world – its existence and characters, its words and images – unfold from this creator who is simultaneously enfolded in (i.e., his authorial presence is available to and within) the text world while remaining distinct from it. Cusa's language preserves authorial presence without disparaging readerly interpretation.

This is not merely an analogy of proportion (Creator:creation::author:text), though that is part of it. Cusa's language also demonstrates a nested metaphysics of sub-creation: the fiction writer's creative activity unfolds from the act of divine creation, and thus the writer's imagination *is complicit with* God's divine imagination, whether or not the writer acknowledges it. Just as the human person is created in *imago Dei*, so too the writer's imagination is created in the image of the imagination of God (as we saw later developed by Coleridge and George MacDonald). The writer (or any artistic creator) *co-labours* in God's initiatory act of creation and sustaining creation, represented by two cyclic, inscribed relations:



Alfsvåg highlights the place Cusa makes for divine providence as it relates to human free will:

> God unfolds as the world and the world enfolds in God. What happens is thus enclosed in God's providence, but in a way that entails human freedom; it is at the same time necessary and contingent. The unfolded presence of God in the world allows for worship and praise as long as the unfolding is not conflated with God's uncontracted reality, an error that lands the worshipper in the twin errors of pantheism and idolatry. God is present in all there is, but [God's] eternal presence is still not identical with anything definable.[227]

Such an observation can likewise apply to the question of how an author is present to – and discernible in –a text world. The author creates purposefully, making this choice and not that – yet the author does not assign a univocal meaning to her text world or the characters who inhabit it. The writer conjures worlds and gives life to a plurality of characters whose voices enjoying something of 'free will' independence of the author's or protagonist's voice. The plurality of textual voices *unfolds* from the authorial voice, but this plurality is not *reducible* to a winner-take-all, univocal interpretation. The author of literature – at least literature that allows for theological engagement – does not insert herself in the text in a way that precludes the reader's interpretations. A reader brings her own experience in reading the text/world, and chooses whether she wishes to 'return to' the author with fondness, or reject the text/world before her. To put aside a literary text is to choose to no longer intend it as a meaningful object worthy of readerly consciousness.

We have also highlighted the greater dissimilarity in the Creator-creator analogy is also preserved: when an artist produces finite works of art, even worlds of texts, she does not create *ex nihilo*. Instead the writer draws from the communal well of words and images to re-present reality. For this reason, such worlds-creation can never be strictly secular, in the sense of a free-standing, immanent domains. Rather all literary world-creating always-already draws from the wellsprings of past images, words, and stories to fashion a literary present (even ones intent on rejecting the past). All speech, indeed all reality, is grounded first in the Word, the *ars divina* of the creator God. If a writer is always-already enfolded by/*complicit* with the divine Creator, then Paul's speech discussed in our first chapter demonstrates that Christians can read even consciously 'secular' fiction for resonances with the Christian vision, since Paul himself drew upon pagan poets. An expansive interest in the whole (*kath'holou*) of human experience trains the Christian reader to discern how humanity's 'unformed attunement' to the divine is operative, even where it is not intended by the author.

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[227] Alfsvåg, "*Explicatio* and *Complicatio*," 305.

As we shall see in considering William Lynch next, it does not lessen human art to recall it to its perpetual condition of finitude: indeed, the felt pressures of a text's finitude are *the* way we make our readerly return to the divine. A student of Plato himself, Lynch's literary project assesses how this finite-infinite relationship is treated, and mis-treated through literature. The best literature, he argues, begins and ends with the infinite, but it must take seriously the finitude of humanity, as Christ does in the Incarnation. Hence the movement of *exitus* and *reditus* is constitutive of the Christian imagination in literature.

III.3 William Lynch and the Christian Literary Imagination

III.3.1 William Lynch's metaphysics of literature. William Lynch's masterful work *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* distinguishes works of literature that honour finite particularities from those that dismiss or side-step particulars out of a desire to remain "timeless". For Lynch "timeless" does not imply enduring or classic literature, but the writing that aspires to reflect a pure, angelic authorial intellect that stands outside the flow of time, 'having a quality of eternity and immobility about it because it need not enter in the confusing pattern of concrete time.'[228] This mentality, Lynch maintains, bears the marks of romantic enthusiasm with its 'apparent greatness of soul, imagination, and ambition,'[229] like Caspar David Friedrich's mountaineer staring down at the fogged valley below. This romantic mindset attempts to immobilize time, freezing an instant of peace or illumination into a permanent state. Lynch calls this desire an affliction, a 'disease of the feelings and a collapse of the true metaphysical mind' that fraudulently apes the religious conception of eternity.[230] Woolf

[228] William F. Lynch, *Christ and Apollo: Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2004), 50.
[229] Lynch, 51.
[230] Lynch, 65.

speaks of "moments of being" that rise above the normal order of time; I will consider in the following chapter whether her fiction reflects this feeble attempt at timelessness that Lynch critiques.

Lynch argues that the writer who acknowledges finitude and respects the concrete as a means of accessing beauty may be maligned (by the 'modern mind') as unimaginative, plodding and of limited intelligence. This path of insight through finitude, I will argue in chapter five, is discernible in Marilynne Robinson's fiction. Robinson's *Gilead* quartet takes characters' felt constraints seriously, including the limits of faith, hope, and love.

In constructing the argument of *Christ and Apollo*, Lynch takes the visible, physical world as the starting point for his pedagogical attunement to God. Lynch agrees that knowledge of God begins with sense experience, but (unlike others in the natural theology tradition) locates knowledge of God not in a rational ascent, but in the active workings of the imagination with particular images. The archetypal image is Christ's descent into human form, a movement that trains the human imagination to attend to one's own embodied condition.

Christ as typology helps Lynch to frame the broader question of the finite and infinite: 'How can the literal and the transcendent be brought together in anything resembling a harmony?' such that one does not overtake the other.[231] He answers by suggesting that an ideal solution would be that the 'literal' world should 'signify' the transcendent without becoming less actual in doing so. Hence he suggests attending to finite signifiers in the world (and in textual worlds) that are capable of lifting the imagination, while letting them keep 'all the tang and density of that actuality into which the imagination descends.'[232] Lynch wishes to retain Platonic participation without eliminating the 'tang' of Aristotelian metaphysics. To do so Lynch explicitly draws on Nicholas of Cusa's analysis of Biblical exegesis to explicate a metaphysical map of text-worlds, and the transcendent domain beyond. In one materialist misreading of a fiction text-world, figures or images are taken only as a finite thing itself (*ut res*$_1$[233]) without any

[231] Lynch, 30.
[232] Lynch, 30.
[233] *res*$_1$ here is understood in a very limited sense, along the lines of Augustine's first definition of *res* as 'that which is not used to signify something else' (*quae non ad significandum aliquid adhibentur*, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book I.II. 2). Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Jackson notes that Augustine himself is confusing in his use of *res* vis-à-vis *signum*. See Belford Darrell Jackson, "Semantics and Hermeneutics in Saint Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1967).

reference beyond the text-world. In another misreading, these finite figures or images *merely* signify some extra-textual reality ($res_{2)}$ beyond themselves (*ut signum*). Cusa, in language helpful to Lynch's project, suggests that we not collapse this double vision, but recognise that the not-finite (res_2) is enfolded (*complicatus*) and contracted in the finite (res_1) without being reducible to it. Yet the infinite only unfolds/is made explicit (*explicatus*) to finite creatures *through* the finite signs. And so textual elements function as finite realities res_1 that point our attention to reality res_2 beyond themselves (*ut res et signum*).[234]

In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine makes a helpful corollary in support of the argument for keeping the author in mind. There are two types of signs, *signa naturalia* and *signa data. Signa naturalia* like animal tracks are those which 'without any intention or desire of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, as smoke signifies fire. It does this without any will or any appetite for signifying.'[235] The relation of dependence is principally between the sign and signified object. In contrast the second type of signs are purposive and designed to move the reader from signs to what is signified. Augustine argues that *signa data* are

> those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of demonstrating [*viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos*]… the motions of their spirits [*motus animi sui*] or something which they have sensed or understood. Nor is there any other reason for signifying, that is, for giving signs [*significandi, id est signi dandi*], except for bringing forth and transferring into another's mind [*ad traiciendum in alterius animum*] what is conceived in the mind of the person who gives the sign.[236]

B. Darrell Jackson argues compellingly that Augustine distinguishes *signa data* from *signa naturalia* in order to demonstrate the presence (or absence) of authorial intention.[237] *Signa data* are signs given *explicitly* for the purpose of lifting the mind beyond the signs, to convey what is conceived in the mind of an author. They are, as R.A. Markus points out, dependent more on the subject *giving* the signs than on the object *signified* by them.[238] We need not here rehearse the previous chapter's considerations of authorial intent. I note Augustine's distinction here only to highlight that any image or element deployed in fictional texts or work of art is not a 'naturally

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[234] Let us call it res_2 drawing on Augustine's secondary definition of *res* as those 'realities [that] are learned through signs' (*res per signa discuntur*, *De Doctrina Christiana,* Book I II. 2, 1f.).
[235] '*sine uoluntate atque ullo appetitu significandi .... Non…uolens significare*'. Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, bk. II.2, 12-15. Cited in Jackson, "Semantics and Hermeneutics in Saint Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," 13.
[236] Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, bk. II.2.3.
[237] Jackson, "Semantics and Hermeneutics in Saint Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," 14ff.
[238] R.A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs," *Phronesis* 2, no. 1 (1957): 60–83.

occurring' sign, as it would be in the natural world. Textual images, words, etc. are always already 'given' in two senses: first *given to* the author/artist by foregrounding images and linguistic communities who have some agreement and consensus about the signs' meanings.[239] But these *signa data* are subsequently chosen and *given by* the author in a text or work of art, in order to convey something beyond their chosen words.

We return to the thrust of this section: Lynch levels a deft critique of the extremes of treating textual elements only literally (*ut res1*) or only as transcendent signs (*ut signum*). Lynch challenges first the aesthetic mind that would fixate only on the created beauty of the text/world; he echoes Augustine's warning of a spectator being fixed in created beauty. (I return to this critique of aesthetic experience in chapter six.). And at the other extreme, the world-wearied 'religious mind' risks hoping that 'Christianity may, please God, have nothing to do with the temporal,' which reduces Christian belief 'to a set of non-temporal "doctrines"—to purely intellectual statements in the Cartesian sense' that do not bear on the human condition as experienced in time.[240] A robust Christian metaphysics rests on belief in a God that, having 'created' time, chose to embrace the narrow straits of finitude, rather than float outside time. The infinite God, Cusa wrote, is contracted/enfolded into the finite in the person of Christ who is the absolute contracted maximum. Hence any attempts to pit the unalloyed human condition (*ut res*$_1$) against a religious denial of the world's reality (*ut signum*) is a false distinction, inconsistent with a Christian metaphysic. Rather, Lynch argues, 'the order of belief called Christology is a belief in the capacity of the *human actual* [sic], if we imagine and live through it, *to lead somewhere*.'[241] And so the division Lynch notes is between (a) 'universal chameleons' who wish to take on without commitment the forms of *all* things and *all* times, and (b) those who accept the straitened insight that only time and human limitation can produce an ascending movement of the imagination.

Lynch's *Christ and Apollo* explains how transcendent insights are achieved only through encountering limitation. Every intellectual investigation reveals our limited understanding amidst an ever greater field of the unknown. How can one take in what is beyond comprehension? One metaphor Lynch employs is of a fish that must breathe its

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[239] '*non natura, sed placito et consensione significandi'* in Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, bk. II.37, 10-12.
[240] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 68–69.
[241] Lynch, 'Theology and the Imagination II: The Evocative Symbol,' *Thought*, Volume 29, No. 115 (Winter, 1954-1955), 529-554, page 54 in Cited in Francesca A. Murphy, "On Finding the Whole Within the Part: A Reassessment of William F. Lynch, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*.," *Literature and Theology* 3, no. 2 (1989): 242–50, 244.

air (the infinite) through the water in which it swims and lives (the finite). Trying to pursue its goal more directly by leaping out of the water results in agony and death. Lynch considers this further in terms of theatre: how tragedies and comedies have treated finitude and infinity over time. He imagines the infinite by analogy to the theatrical stage: depicting all the world's possibilities of being and situations, through the finite personalities and wills of human actors upon a fixed stage. All situations remain possibilities, but they are not all compossible: actors, and the characters they depict, are bounded by particulars of time and space. Greek and Elizabethan tragedies depicted protagonists foiled by their flaws (*hamartia*) and their attempts to outrun inexorable fate.[242] Gadamer notes that tragedians like Aeschylus teach learning by having tragic characters suffer (πάθει μάθος) the natural consequences of their decisions and indecisions. What the audience is to learn through tragic suffering 'is not this or that particular thing, but *insight into the limitations of humanity*, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine. *It is ultimately a religious insight*.'[243] What makes it religious is that the finite protagonist is inexorably bounded by unbounded forces pressing in upon himself. Even Virginia Woolf, despite her modernist perspective, praised the Greeks for not sidestepping 'the sadness at the back of life which they do not attempt to mitigate. Entirely aware of their own standing in the shadow, and yet alive to every tremor and gleam of existence, there they endure.'[244]

This tragic imagination would not hold. According to Lynch, the 'modern imaginary' (beginning in the late 19th-century) reversed polarities; the 'new tragedy' pitted the pristine, unbounded human spirit against a limited, limiting world. Modern dramatists came to consider social environments as 'the great enemy, corrupted and corrupting, thoughtless, small, machine-like, contemptible, and in every case the origin of the tragic fact.'[245] Reading the likes of Ibsen, Zola and Sartre, Lynch asks, how often 'have we seen the tragic protagonist who is cursed by the necessity of walking, victim and innocent, through an insane world?'[246] This 'new tragedy' rehabilitates one of two heresies, Lynch reasons. The first is Manichaeism, steeling those disillusioned by lies to

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[242] For more on this, see chapter 1 of Roger Roger Lundin, *Beginning with the Word: Modern Literature and the Question of Belief* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2014).
[243] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 365. Emphasis added.
[244] Virginia Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek," in *Collected Essays*, vol. I (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), 13. She preferred Greek stoicism to what she saw as the unsatisfactory Christian approach: 'it is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations, of our own age.'
[245] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 107.
[246] Lynch, 108.

become courageous facers-of-facts (good) in a hostile, meaningless universe (bad).[247] The other strain of 'new tragedy' renews Pelagianism by investing the human will with infinite power. Where Ancient and Elizabethan tragedies succeeded by showing the insufficiency of human pride to alter the world, the new tragedians introduced a 'new type of third act, the third act of power and the exclamation point' brought about entirely by human grit and spirit.[248] We note echoes of Chrétien's critique of inflating humanity to *creator* status: both the author and characters in this 'modern imaginary' consider themselves as unbounded by conventions, limitations, or history. One need only steal fire from the gods once to dispense with their assistance. Lynch's critique of this modern imaginary lays the groundwork for his Christian literary imagination, which passes *through the narrow straits of tragedy* so as to return anagogically towards insight.

III.3.2 Descent into the levels of life. The movement through tragedy, as we shall see, reveals the possibility of Christian faith as a response to an initiatory call. Lynch offers a framework of the three existential levels on which humans can live. First is the surface level: above pain and problems, a superficial existence to which technological nations aspire. Both tragic minds, ancient and modern, find this level of existence insufficient. The second level is 'the human situation' where pain and chaos rear their heads and must be confronted. Here, Lynch suggests, a certain artistic sensibility cultivates a morbid attraction to chaos, resentment, and the absurdity of life; here modern tragedy resides and is most at home. Lynch suggests there is a still deeper level of human existence, where the human spirit dies in helplessness and abandonment. This is the truly tragic level for the soul, he reasons, and the one 'into which Christianity descends to operate its unique effects.'[249] Only at this third level, Lynch reasons, can faith, hope, and love appear as viable options – only here can one make a response to God.

Faith begins only where human intelligence and free will admit their finitude: 'there is a point to which the mind must come where it realizes it is no match for the full mystery of existence, where, therefore, it suffers a death; it is only at this point that it will consent to put on the mind of God.'[250] Death and life touch at this level: one can

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[247] This new tragic scheme extends beyond the world of literature. Bertrand Russell, one of those heroic 'facers of facts', will be treated in chapter three on Virginia Woolf.
[248] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 109.
[249] Lynch, 110.
[250] Lynch, 110.

only rise to a higher knowledge and insight by acknowledging the finality of death. In Christianity death is no mere intellectual exercise: life has tragic finitude at its very core. And yet unlike the second-tier modern tragic imagination, the third level of life is also the place of **hope**. Striking at the core of one's finitude and helplessness pushes open a 'permanent gate' to the infinite, 'not to be discarded in the name of some fraudulent and cheap leaping out of the skin of our helplessness into the arms of God.'[251] Where the modern tragic mind requires one to steel one's nerves and will against a cold universe, the Christian seeks (perhaps with less courage than the Romantic!) for help beyond one's own vulnerated limits. And in great tragedies, when a soul reaches out to a fellow person (or perhaps even to God) for help, a response of **love** – attending to the good of another – becomes possible.

Lynch maintains that faith, hope, and love are not possible when modern tragic writers settle for the second chaotic level of experience. At this half-measured level, the results are two-fold: first, their protagonists will need to muster courage to face their very real finite strictures, but they cannot, will not, admit of their limits. The results are disgust, resentment, or other 'gestures of the soul' that are not suitable for a tragic hero. Second, Lynch suggests, any forgery or *deus ex machina* discovery of the infinite will likely result in a tenuous, unreal dream without roots on earth. This jump to the infinite is an escapist fabrication, a charge often accurately leveled at certain strains of Christian theology. Lynch admits that certain "Christian writers" engage too easily in this escapist leap to the infinite; in this respect their subject matter may be outwardly religious, but such writing not follow the credible movement through the narrow straits of tragedy that Lynch describes as the seedbed of Christian faith, hope, and love. One recalls Chrétien's observation that 'revelation must shatter [*briser*] something in us in order to be heard. It reaches us only by wounding us.'[252]

III.3.3 Chapter review. As both poet and philosopher in the phenomenological tradition, I began this chapter by examining Jean-Louis Chrétien's place in the phenomenological tradition, and how he (and fellow travellers) sought to root phenomenology in what is ultimately beyond the domain of phenomenology. Chrétien argued that all human activity – our being, speaking, writing, loving, etc. – is our finite *réponse* to the initiatory, infinite (*appel*) of God. The disproportion of the finite to

[251] Lynch, 110.
[252] Chrétien, *Lueur du secret*, 22. Translation by Anne A. Davenport in Chrétien, C*all and Response*, xxiii.

infinite is impossible for humans to fathom, so some choose simply to exclude the prospect of the infinite (a move similar to Barthes' banishment of the author). Yet the infinite Creator does not abandon us in the yawning abyss of our unknowing, but chooses to become finite to help us respond, i.e., how to recognise God's infinite call.

One way of reasoning about this relationship is the Augustinian way of thinking of God as divine artist, whose *ars divina* (Christ the Incarnate Word) guides and grounds all human artistry. Christian Platonism suggests that God as Creator sends forth the Incarnate Word (*exitus*), whose mission (with the Holy Spirit) is to draw all of creation back to God (*reditus*). This *exitus-reditus* movement reveals something of the inner life of the Trinity, and of God's desire for humanity. I developed this traditional theological position by showing how Nicholas of Cusa's *explicatio/complicatio* (unfolding/enfolding) language helps us to understand the *exitus/reditus* dynamic. Cusa helps us both (a) retain the *major dissimilitudo* between God as Creator and human creators, without thereby (b) disparaging finitude and concrete particularity. Cusa, with the help of MacDonald, helps us understand the relationship of God's imagination to humanity's imagination: a writer (like any artisan) *co-labours* with God in the act of sub-creation, represented by cyclic, inscribed relations (see diagram above). I argued that the fiction writer's act of literary creation is enfolded in, and thus unfolds from, the act of divine creation. Just as the human person is created in *imago Dei*, so too the writer's imagination is created in the image of the imagination of God.

Finally in the third section we saw how William Lynch laid out how the Christian literary imagination starts with our finite human experience so as to consider the transcendent. For Lynch, attempts to retreat to the life of the mind, apart from serious engagement with the concrete realities of existence, yield not insight but *sickness*: "We pay a terrible price if we try to remain children in the literal temporal sense; in fact, we grow old before our time because of all the stresses and strains of the fight against time."[253] Lynch's insights dovetail with our discussion on the relationship of nature and grace in chapter one. For Lynch, we do not come to insight about ourselves, others, or God, apart from careful attention to the finite. Karl Rahner argues that God's grace is to be discovered not in the heavens but in the concrete experiences of our interiority:

> When the longing for the *absolute nearness of God,* the longing, incomprehensible in itself…looks for where this nearness came—not in the postulates of the spirit, but *in the flesh and in the housings of the earth*, then no resting-place can be found

[253] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 59.

> except in Jesus of Nazareth, over whom the star of God stands, before whom alone one has the courage to bend the knee and weeping happily to pray: 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'."[254]

Rahner and Lynch remind us that if God should choose to strictures of human finitude, then all earnest inquiries into the divine should begin with probing the particulars that our singular life has to offer.

For our discussion of theology and literature, MacDonald has offered some helpful insights as well. Just as God's infinite act of creative imagination yields the sensible world, so the finite imagination can produce a finite text-world which invites multiple layered, and even competing, interpretations. Creation, like the best of fiction, invites wonder and scrutiny of possible 'A/authorial' intentions; but they elude exhaustive explanation and invite readerly curiosity. Such curiosity is what drives us forward to the two following chapters.

III.3.4 Looking ahead. The writers we will treat in the following two chapters consider the *question of theism* itself – whether God exists – and if so, how might we know? This very question is itself always-already enfolded in, and unfolds from, God's intelligence which is God's being. To raise the question "does God exist?" presumes the notional intelligibility of both verb [exist] and noun [God], even if the English word [God] serves as a bracketed placeholder for that beyond which our language cannot grasp but strives to limn from our limited deictic centre. To wonder whether God exists presumes the intelligibility of the question itself; asking "does God exist?" is to stipulate, however tentatively, *that* [God] exists: it is casting out one's sensorial receptors, wandering around intellectual space, seeking understanding. *Entertaining* the divine is striving to understand the horizon beyond the sensible and temporal, submitting to be held (*tentus*) between (*inter*) what is known and what is unknown. This is another way of suggesting the *etsi Deus daretur* 'bracketing' mentioned in the previous chapter, now with the weight of Christian metaphysics and a theological vocabulary underpinning our conversation.

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Theology is a discourse about God, which negotiates the tensive contrarieties of cataphatic and apophatic speech. The claim of this thesis is that the literature presented

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[254] Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV (Helicon Press, 1961), 120.

here can be read as *periphatic theology*, writing *about* God, as in, attempting to write *around* God. In the following chapter I argue that Virginia Woolf limns the edges of belief, or at least the lacuna that the word [God] demarcates. Her characters often feel the suasive pulls of what William Lynch calls the 'double vacuum'[255] of earth and heaven, alternating between disgust and attraction at both. Great literature, like nature, abhors a vacuum. But Woolf does not permit her characters to submit to despair in their finitude, nor escape into the heavens. Rather she crafts characters stuck in the concrete particulars of their finite existence, in definite places and times, who nevertheless play with interpretations of their life situations. The felt constraints (of Victorian religiosity, of lack of stature as a woman, etc.) are the precise stimuli for interrogating theism, "playing away from home" by considering God's possibility.

[255] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 19.

PART II: LITERARY ANALYSIS

Chapter IV
Virginia Woolf's Periphatic Theology

IV.0 Chapter Overview

This thesis has been moving around the human sciences, from theology to literary theory and hermeneutics, and from phenomenology back to theology. The following chapters deploy the tools and test the theories I have thus far presented. A theological engagement with literature heeds the call fiction writers put to theology, whether or not they believe in God. In this chapter I argue that Virginia Woolf engages theological questions through exploration of intentionality and consciousness. This chapter proceeds in three sections: Woolf's background, her method, and an analysis of her fiction. I begin with a brief biographical sketch of Virginia Stephen's early life and influences which shed light on her later writing. In the second section, I consider Woolf's short metafiction 'An Unwritten Novel' which tests the phenomenology of authorial intentionality I proposed in chapter two. Her essays 'How Should One Read?' and 'On Re-reading a Novel' further articulate her methods and goals as an author. What emerges between author and reader is a quasi-theological liaison – an empathic response to the call of the unseen author, mediated through text. Woolf's method, I argue, is a powerful corrective to Gadamer and Barthes, and a literary outworking of the theological framework of Augustine and Chrétien.

In light of Woolf's personal history and stated goals as a writer, in the third section of this chapter I analyse her fiction by focusing on quasi-mystical passages from her nearly autobiographical novel *To the Lighthouse*. I offer two extended analyses of characters' consciousness: Mrs Ramsay grappling with apparently divine utterances, and Lily Briscoe searching the source of artistic illumination. Despite Woolf's double agnosticism (of religious sentimentality and cool rationalism) I argue that her writing stretches out for readers an imaginative canvas on which (A) theological, (B) aesthetic, and (C) philosophical questions are thematised and treated seriously. I revisit Karl Rahner's 'transcendental horizon' as a framework for rendering explicit the metaphysical underpinnings of Woolf's fiction, without presuming to 'baptise' her project.

From within her fictional writing itself, questions of the narrative's metaphysical underpinnings and horizon emerge, inviting a readerly response to an authorial call. She draws the reader's phenomenological attention back to the authorial source, through the fictional text. Her writing is haunted by a transcendence – a surplus of meaning, and perhaps the divine – that the literature cannot itself contain. She engages theological questions periphatically without committing to belief. Nevertheless, as Rahner notes, to wonder about one's limits and horizon, one's origins and destiny, is always-already to be searching for God: 'We seem to know God, the "object" of metaphysics, only as the necessary horizon of the experience of world which is possible only in this way.'[256] This, I argue, constitutes Woolf's theological contribution through literature.

IV.1 Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman

IV.1.1 Background and a select biography. A small library has been written on the intellectual influences and contemporaries of Virginia Woolf (née Stephen, 1882-1941), which we will not replicated in toto here. Her nephew Quentin Bell wrote a probing biography in 1972 of Woolf's life, including the trauma of sexual abuse by her half-brother George. What it lacks is a treatment of her fiction. Hermione Lee's 1996 biography is the well-regarded account of 'life-writing,' a term Lee adopted from Woolf to weave into one tapestry autobiography, biography, letters, memoirs, and diaries alike; this method was different to the Victorian biography, which Woolf dismissed as a cold listing of facts, dominated by the idea of the goodness of its subject.[257]

Woolf's unconventional essays and fiction experiment with time, shifting consciousness, artistic inspiration, and quasi-mystical visions. In recent years Woolf scholarship has taken a curious interest in her complicated relationship with belief and institutional religion.[258] The purpose of this introduction is not to recapitulate or distill the ample scholarship on Woolf, but to highlight elements of Woolf's biography and education that contextualize her theological engagement in and through fiction.

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[256] Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994), 407.
[257] Hermione Lee, *Body Parts: Essays in Life-Writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005), 3.
[258] See Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Laura Marcus, "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf," in *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Sellers, Susan (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 142–79; Kristina K. Groover, *Religion, Secularism, and the Spiritual Paths of Virginia Woolf* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Stephanie Paulsell, *Religion Around Virginia Woolf* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021). A notable exception to this is Susan Seller's *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2010), apart from Marcus' chapter on feminism.

While young Virginia Stephen's brothers went off for schooling and university, Virginia and her sisters' education was largely homebound. Their mother Julia tutored them in Latin, French and history. Their agnostic father, Leslie Stephen, was a famous literary critic and historian who taught his daughters mathematics and gave them unfettered access to the family's vast library.[259] Young Virginia, with siblings Vanessa, Adrian, and Thoby, would retell and adapt stories about their time at the family home at 22 Hyde Park and on vacation at Talland House, in St Ives. We will see later how childhood memories from Cornwall clearly shaped *To the Lighthouse*. Analysing her fiction in light of her biography offers a more capacious understanding of Woolf's personal wonderings on questions of the divine.

Young Virginia's grandparents were faithful members of the evangelical Clapham Sect, though her father renounced Christian belief as a young man.[260] Her mother Julia, who was married with three children at 24 when she lost her first husband, had 'flung aside her religion, and became, as I have heard, the most positive of disbelievers'.[261] Between ages 13 and 24, Virginia herself unexpectedly lost her mother, half-sister, father, and brother, which brought about several mental breakdowns. Reflecting on this before her own suicide, Woolf wondered why a teenager should be forced to deal with the premature death of her kin; did it mean 'that the gods (as I used to phrase it) were taking one seriously?'[262] Untimely deaths steeled her from the consolations of religion: 'if there is any good (I doubt it) in this mutilation of natural feelings, it is that it sensitizes—if to be aware of the insecurity of life; to remember something gone.'[263] Woolf never felt drawn to institutional Christianity, given her stated 'obstacle of not believing.'[264] The scorn she had for her friend T.S. Eliot's conversion ('I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God.') bleeds into her fiction, as we find *To the Lighthouse*'s Mrs Ramsay sitting by the fire ruminating about just that question. And in her essay *A Room of One's Own*, she

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[259] For more on the Stephen family's childhood reading, see Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster, *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 42–47.
[260] It seems Leslie Stephen was an Anglican priest who abjured his sacred orders. Florence Emily Hardy records Thomas Hardy witnessing the 'unpriesting' of the young man Leslie Stephen, with a subsequent conversation on agnosticism. See *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 105-6.
[261] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Chatto & Windus for Sussex University Press, 1976), 32. For more on Woolf's familial background around Christianity, see Groover, *Religion, Secularism, and the Spiritual Paths of Virginia Woolf*, 1ff.
[262] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 118.
[263] Woolf, 117.
[264] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume III: 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Oliver Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 181. Quoted in Paulsell, *Religion Around Virginia Woolf*, 4.

speaks of the need for women writers to escape from 'Milton's bogey' – a reference not only to John Milton and her father, but which 'also conjures Milton's portrait of God, the ultimate patriarch.'[265] While Woolf remained fascinated by the religious impulse, her curiosity did not result in a conversion to Anglo-Catholicism similar to Eliot's; nor did it result in the strident attacks on religion typical of her atheist father. As a teenager she refused to kneel at her half-sister's church wedding. But at the same time, around age fifteen, she was contemplating 'writing a long picturesque essay upon the Christian religion…called *Religio Laici*, I believe, proving that man has need of a God; but God was described in the process of change.'[266]

The "process of change" she treated was not limited to her theological musings. In a 1924 paper on fiction, Woolf celebrated a change in 1910, a year on or around which much of society had changed: 'All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.'[267] Much of that shift came from greater independence for English women. Yet Laura Marcus carefully argues that Woolf expressed ambivalence about early-20th century feminist movements, around the suffragette movement, pacifism during World War I, and whether what women needed was the same or different to what men had.[268] At times, Woolf campaigned for women to have an education and experiences that were radically different from men's.[269] But in other contexts, Woolf argued that writers should not be celebrated or scorned based on their sex, as when she criticized (in 1918) the emerging tendency to champion 'women writers' who no longer took male pseudonyms.[270] The tendency to essentialize 'women novelists' was for Woolf

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[265] Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, 142.
[266] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III*, 271. Quoted in Lewis, 142.
[267] Virginia Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," in *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, Hogarth Essays 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 4. Woolf did not specify what events she had in mind, but it may have been referring to the death of King Edward VII, the post-impressionist exhibition, and the campaign for votes for women. Hermione Lee notes that it may also refer to the *Dreadnought* Hoax wherein Woolf and three fellow pranksters pretended to be Abyssinian princes who requested, and received, a tour of the navy ship HMS *Dreadnought*.
[268] Marcus, "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf."
[269] In 1920, in response to a male friend's book review, she laid out what would later be a principal argument in *A Room of One's Own*: "it is not education only that is needed. It is that women should have liberty of experience; that they should differ from men without fear and express their differences openly (for I do not agree…that men and women are alike.)" Quoted in Marcus, 146.
[270] "The women who wished to be taken for men in what they wrote were certainly common enough; and if they have given place to the women who wish to be taken for women the change is hardly for the better, since any emphasis, either of pride or of shame, laid consciously upon the sex of a writer is not only irritating but superfluous." From Woolf's review of R Brimley Johnson's *"The Women Novelists"* in The

unhelpful, since the 'difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine… [U]psetting though it is, women are apt to differ.'[271]

One element that accounts for Woolf's ambivalence around feminism is the so-called 'angel of the house,' which forever haunted her own parents' generation and their late 19th-century conventions. Every Victorian home had an 'angel of the house,' the internal voice that kept women like her mother back from expressing themselves, creating art, or otherwise challenging conventions. In a subtle allusion to Luther's battle with the devil, Woolf was keen to send this angel packing:

> whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her. She died hard. *Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her.*[272]

The attempt to exorcise the angel of the house ironically conjures it anew: conjured by Woolf to herself, and secondarily, to those who read her. Raised by Victorians, the spectre of women's domesticity and femininity was hard for Virginia to define, let alone dispatch: 'What is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do not believe that anyone can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill.'[273]

What emerges is the difficulty of pinning down Woolf's thoughts on feminism, and her place in successive waves of feminism. Woolf herself noted that the two central facts of her life were that she was a woman, and that she was a writer: indeed, women writers 'think back' through their mothers.[274] These identities did not always sit easily alongside one another, but their interplay has borne creative fruit. For the necessarily focused purposes of this thesis, our interest in Woolf lies in how she treated the question of religious belief in her writing, which is inflected by, but not identical to, the question of the place of women in early 20th century England.[275]

Times Literary Supplement, 17 October 1918, found in Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Women's Press, 1979), 70.

[271] Woolf, 70.

[272] Woolf, "Professions for Women." Emphasis added.

[273] Woolf.

[274] Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 88.

[275] An abiding question for literary scholarship is how to treat an author's work in relation to her biography. So far this chapter appears to be literary biography, locating the source of Woolf's fiction primarily in her own life. A formalist approach (Wimsatt et al.) would suggest taking Woolf's works of fiction as artifacts unto themselves, apart from engagement with the author's intention or reader's affective response. A third option is the reader-response approach, focusing primarily on reception of Woolf's fiction by her audience(s) as the hermeneutical key of meaning. What I am suggesting here, and arguing throughout the thesis, is that a *katholic* imagination must resist the temptation to settle for any one of these

IV.1.2 Intellectual influences and adversaries. Faith, like advanced education, proved an elusive curiosity for women like young Virginia Stephen. From 1897-1901, she studied in the Ladies' Division at King's College London, where she encountered women reformers in higher education. She would regularly travel to Cambridge to visit her aunt Caroline, who had left the Church of England for the less dogmatic Quakers. Marcus argues that it would be more accurate to say that Woolf thought back not through her mother, but through her anti-institutional Quaker aunt Caroline.[276] The two enjoyed long conversations on Caroline's porch about religious experience. Caroline suggested that God communicates intermittently, like a lighthouse, which remains an important image throughout Woolf's fiction.

In Cambridge, Virginia would also visit her brothers during their studies, mixing with the intellectual circles that gathered in smoky parlours and at The Orchard, a sprawling tea garden downriver in Grantchester. This motley crowd of misfits included poets and philosophers, economists and painters. There Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Maynard Keynes gathered with Rupert Brooke, Augustus John and the clever Stephen siblings. From this group emerged the latter-day Bloomsbury group in London, among whom were novelist E.M. Forster, Virginia, and her future husband Leonard Woolf. Among the Cambridge influences on the emerging Bloomsbury circle were G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, both central to the developing field of analytic philosophy. Russell's interests ranged from mathematics to history, social critique to pacifism. In his essay 'Mysticism and Logic,' Russell laid out the (apparently) competing claims of religious experience and science:

> Metaphysics, or the attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought, has been developed, from the first, by the union and conflict of two very different human impulses, the one urging men[277] towards mysticism, the other urging them towards science. Some men have achieved greatness through one of these impulses alone, others through the other alone…But the greatest men who have been philosophers have felt the need both of science and of mysticism: the attempt to harmonise the two was what made their life, and what always must, for all its arduous uncertainty, make philosophy, to some minds, a greater thing than either science or religion.[278]

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hermeneutical lenses, but take them all into account if one is keen to read Woolf (or Robinson) theologically.

[276] Marcus, "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf," 168.

[277] To avoid rendering the quotation clunky, I am preserving Russell's original masculine, though the sense seems to be of the 'human person'.

[278] Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1917).

Woolf greatly admired Russell's mind, if not his personal character: 'This luminous, vigorous mind seems to be attached to a flimsy little car… Nevertheless I should like the run of his headpiece.'[279] Woolf's literature, I will argue, is a partial response to Russell's challenge: navigating the rational and the religious, the logical and the mystical, without prescribing reductive answers.

The literary members of Bloomsbury wrestled with these competing pulls of rationalism and artistic vision, as evident in works like Forster's *A Passage to India* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Some in the group were committed Platonists, finding solace in a metaphysics stripped of Christian accretions and Victorian moralizing. A journal entry from 1934 of Woolf reveals her plan to read Plotinus; although the entry postdates the writing of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, a Neo-Platonic framing of unity across material difference flows throughout her novelistic work. While contempt for matter and the visible realm are often associated with Neo-Platonists, Plotinus himself opposed the Gnostic contempt for the world, instead praising the work of the *nous* and world-soul which give order to an eternal and unified creation, bound together in a harmony of parts.

Woolf shares Plotinus' appreciation of creation; in her 1939 autobiographical essay 'A Sketch of the Past,' she imagines 'the whole world as a work of art' of which each human person plays a part.[280] If the world is indeed a work of art, Woolf inadvertently raises the question of what sort of creator there may be: human or divine? The Renaissance *Homo faber* of one's own destiny, or a *Deus faber*? Is this the Christian creator God of Augustine's *ars divina* or an impersonal, Plotinian Oneness? And what role does a writer play in creation? I return to these questions in the final section of this chapter, where I analyse how Woolf continually wrote about God periphatically. Her wondering *etsi Deus daretur* draws the question of God's reality invariably into the reader's intentional frame. Before getting to that, let us consider Woolf as both a critic and innovator of literary fiction.

IV.2 Woolf the Critic, Writer, and Reader

[279] Quoted in Rosenbaum, "Bertrand Russell in Bloomsbury." For a discussion of Moore and Russell's influence on Bloomsbury, see S. P. Rosenbaum, "Bertrand Russell in Bloomsbury," *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 4, no. 1 (1984): 11–29.
[280] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 72.

IV.2.0 Review and overview. In chapter two I argued that Husserl's phenomenological toolbox could be repurposed to describe 'authorial intentionality', i.e., how an author intends her own life-world in such a way that she forms a *poiēma*, which she records as a text-world for her readers' subsequent intentionality. An objection from literary criticism was also treated in chapter two: 'is the author a worthy source of information in one's investigation of a text'? Inclusion of Woolf's biography above only makes sense if the answer is 'yes'. This section attempts a further affirmation of the importance of considering the author. We begin with Woolf's short story 'An Unwritten Novel', which is an explicit self-reflection on what goes through the mind of an author as she intends the world and forms a *poiēma-poiematic Sinn* of her intentional object. This story models a phenomenology of authorial intentionality in action, the value of which I will explore. Then I will consider two of Woolf's essays that propose how a reader might 'intend' an author's text-world.

IV.2.1 'Intending' an Unwritten Novel. At the same time as Edmund Husserl was philosophically mapping out the ego's relationship to the objective world, members of the Bloomsbury group fancied themselves revolutionaries of perception across multiple disciplines. In fiction, E.M. Forster and Woolf attempted new ways of challenging and subverting the naïve realism of an omniscient narrator. In the first decades of the 20th century, Woolf was reading and reviewing emerging modernist writers – Joseph Conrad, Henry James, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Marcel Proust – who were experimenting with narrative. In her short story 'An Unwritten Novel' (1920), Woolf satirizes a writer's presumptive grasp of reality, exposing how even the keenest observer can misapprehend a state of affairs. Adam Noland notes that Woolf's commentary on art and the novel is 'embedded in the text itself: hers is not a direct commentary; instead, she takes the path of inference.' Other literary scholars consider 'An Unwritten Novel' to be a work of metafiction: a "behind the scenes" narratival tour of how a writer goes about generating characters and the narratives they inhabit.[281] The critic Robert Scholes terms this genre 'fabulation', that is, fiction written as if conscious of itself. Laura Rodriguez suggests that fabulation is the distinctly modernist reaction to two antecedent genres of storytelling. The first is the *allegorical fable*, which contains 'ethics of a controlled phantasy' that nevertheless treat the human condition, as in Aesop

[281] For more on 'metafiction' as a genre, see Laura María Lojo Rodríguez, "Parody and Metafiction: Virginia Woolf's 'An Unwritten Novel,'" *Links & Letters*, no. 8 (2001): 71–81.

or the Brothers Grimm.[282] The second is *novelistic realism*, which offers itself as critically distant and thus objective in recording states of affairs. Patricia Waugh notes that the novelistic position of classic fiction – with either a first- or third-person omniscient narrator – introduced a 'monologic' discourse that flattens the 'dialogic' interactions of our everyday human communication.[283] The young Virginia Woolf's earliest writings were not novels but reviews and essays that critiqued the naïve realism of Victorian and Edwardian novels, which reflected (by her lights) an exceedingly male approach to writing.[284] Hence 'An Unwritten Novel' serves as a critique of the genre, as a practicing novel-writer herself.[285] In 18 short pages, Woolf presents an author-observer who is herself intending a fellow train-traveller, 'Minnie'.[286] What I am suggesting as that through this narratival reflection on authorial intentionality, Woolf innovates the craft of fiction, borrowing conventions of naïve realism only to subvert and refine them.

Before analysing Woolf's methodology, I offer a brief synopsis. An observant narrator –eagerly looking for her next novel – sits on a train, sizing up the five people in the coach around her. One woman in particular bears an expression of unhappiness, which 'was enough by itself to make one's eyes slide above the paper's edge to the poor woman's face.'[287] 'Life', the narrator continues, is 'what you see in people's eyes'. After a brief exchange about the forlorn woman's sister-in-law, the narrator watches her rub at a spot on the windowpane and twitch. Suddenly 'something impelled' the narrator to mirror this behaviour in her own seat. The observed woman in turn 'saw me [the narrator]. A smile of infinite irony, infinite sorrow, flitted and faded from her face. But she had communicated, shared her secret, passed her poison; she would speak no more.'[288] After this exchange of recognition, the narrator continues forming a *poiematic Sinn*, a 'sense' for this travel companion: 'I read her message, deciphered her secret,

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[282] Lojo Rodríguez, 71.
[283] For a full treatment of this, see Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2003).
[284] One example is Woolf's critique of Hemingway's 'display of self-conscious virility' in his short fiction, in her 'An Essay in Criticism' available in Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: 1925-1928*, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth, 1994), 449-56. Quotation from 454. Others critiqued were D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce.
[285] Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915, and *Night and Day* arrived in 1919.
[286] I frame it here in terms of a phenomenological intentionality of literature, which I introduced and defined in chapter two.
[287] Virginia Woolf, "An Unwritten Novel," in *Monday or Tuesday: Virginia Woolf* (Richmond, Surrey: Alma Classics, 2016), 31.
[288] Woolf, 34.

reading it beneath her gaze.'[289] The narrator bestows on her a disparaging nickname ('Minnie Marsh') and the backstory of a lonely neurotic, travelling by train to visit the family of her sister-in-law (*poiēma*). The narrator constructs a world around Minnie; some details the narrator attends to and fleshes out, while other elements 'we'll skip' as irrelevant background. Imagining forlorn Minnie in a spartan guest bedroom, the narrator wonders, 'what might sad Minnie be thinking about at three o'clock in the afternoon: her health, money, her God?' The narrator speculates on Minnie's religious belief:

> Yes, sitting on the very edge of the chair looking over the roofs of Eastbourne, Minnie Marsh prays to God. That's all very well; and she may rub the pane too, as though to see God better, but what God does she see? Who's the God of Minnie Marsh… I, too, see roofs, I see sky; but oh, dear – this seeing of Gods!...I can manage a cloud or two for him to sit on.[290]

Surely a sad woman like Minnie would be the sort of pious rube to 'see God' perched atop a cloud. The narrator next entertains the idea that Minnie has been the victim (or perpetrator?) of some heinous crime that cries to heaven; in this imaginative scenario, Minnie resorts to the hard pews of a church for explanation (or perhaps expiation). Next Minnie walks along a beach wondering, is there anyone else in the world 'who thinks of God?' The narrator suddenly interrogates the *poiematic Sinn* she is forming about Minnie: 'Have I read you right? But the human face…holds more, withholds more [than a full sheet of newspaper].'[291] The narrator wonders whether she hasn't boxed poor Minnie in: 'The eyes of others [are] our prisons; their thoughts our cages.'[292]

By the end of the story, the *poiēma* of lonely rube Minnie Marsh crumbles as the train stops in Eastbourne and 'Minnie' cheerfully meets her son, who helps her off the train. And the narrator admits the limits of her perception: 'What's the joke? Off they go, down the road, side by side...' [293] The state of affairs poses a challenge to her natural attitude, which prompts critical reflection on the reliability of her perception: 'Well, my world's done for! What do I stand on? What do I know?' The narrator takes a 'last look of them' that 'brims [her] with wonder – floods [her] anew. Mysterious figures…Who are you?'[294] If the observant narrator is wrong about Minnie's backstory, is she also wrong about the religious impulse? Does she have any objective grasp of reality? The

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[289] Woolf, 34.
[290] Woolf, 36.
[291] Woolf, 39.
[292] Woolf, 40.
[293] Woolf, 47.
[294] Woolf, 47.

surplus of meaning is what confounds and entrances her: 'Wherever I go, mysterious figures, I see you, turning the corner, mothers and sons; you, you, you.' At the end of this chapter I will analyse three dimensions of this story: the question of A) religious belief, B) artistic inspiration, and C) phenomenological reflection that calls the reader to attend to the author. For now, suffice it to say that the narrator weaves together theological and artistic questions, leading her finally to interrogate her 'natural attitude' about both religious belief and the craft of writing. The authorial intentionality of the observant narrator, in turn, trains readers to wrestle with the same questions.

For the narrator, the mystery worthy of her phenomenological intentionality is not the invisible divine – whom she dare not entertain – but the inscrutable, visible human subject: 'If I fall on my knees, if I go through the ritual, the ancient antics, it's you, unknown figures, you I adore; if I open my arms, it's you I embrace, you I draw to me – adorable world!'[295] Similar observations redound through the essays and diaries of Virginia Woolf. Her imaginative essay, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', for example, treats how different writers might 'intend' an unknown woman ('Mrs Brown') sitting opposite them on a train: 'Here is a character imposing itself upon another person. Here is Mrs Brown making someone begin almost automatically to write a novel about her. I believe that all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite.'[296] After suggesting how an English, French and Russian writer would form a different *poiematic Sinn* of Mrs Brown, Woolf concludes,

> there is the writer's temperament to be considered. You see one thing in character, and I another. You say it means this, and I that. And when it comes to writing each makes a further selection on principles of his own. Thus Mrs Brown can be treated in an infinite variety of ways, according to the age, country, and temperament of the writer.[297]

By Woolf's own account, an author's background ineluctably shapes her intentionality and the poietic fruit it bears. Gadamer might object here; the author's historical situatedness thus disbar her from a reader's interpretative interest! To this I refer to an argument developed throughout chapter two. There, I acknowledged that the author alone is not the lone interpreter of her text's meaning. Yet I also argued that to exclude the author from interpretation is not a neutral hermeneutical stance. Woolf's two works set on a train ('An Unwritten Novel' and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown') demonstrate that reflection on authorial intentionality is not about enforcing a dictatorial deference to the

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[295] Woolf, 48.
[296] Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," 9.
[297] Woolf, 10.

author. Rather Woolf's stories cultivate an awareness *through the text-worlds* of how writers attune their attention to the life-worlds they themselves inhabit.

These insights are consistent with Woolf's personal diary, which both identifies her desire to grasp reality in its entirety, and recognises the challenges of conscious perception. She names 'some restless searcher in me,' who marvels at the inscrutability around her: 'Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say, "This is it"?'[298] This personal desire-and-struggle finds expression in 'An Unwritten Novel'. With telescoped authorial intentionality, Woolf sketches the intentional *poiēsis* of a narrator who is forming a *poiematic Sinn,* a meaning-full sense of 'Minnie'. Eventually the *poiēma* of 'Minnie' is shattered by extramental reality; the intentional object was not 'read right' by the narrator, and the novel she "intended" remains forever unwritten.

Artistically the story reveals the limits of authorial perception and naïve realism. Theologically the story thematises the narrator's implicit judgements/attitude around religious belief and the character 'types' attracted to it (recall Husserl on *hylic* and *thetic* qualities discussed in **II.3.2**). Like a *mise en abîme* painting, we peer over Woolf's shoulder, who peers over the narrator's shoulder, who peers at 'Minnie'. And the narrator's self-reflective *epochē* ('have I read you right?') draws the reader to consider each nested layer of intentionality, and the unthematised attitudes we bring to the nested states of affairs. (One writing an analysis of this story for his DPhil might look back 'over his shoulder', hoping that his thoughts are properly conveyed to the mind of the critical reader of his reflections.)

As one might expect Woolf scholars differ on how to treat 'An Unwritten Novel' as a short story. Julia Briggs finds it to be (with *The Waves*) a critique of Edwardian novelists' flattened materialist descriptions of daily life, of the 'suburban crusts and cruets, frills and ferns'.[299] Rodriguez argues that Woolf's work is not a critique so much as a parody with a purpose, '[y]et the story goes beyond mere ridicule, mockery and destruction: "An Unwritten Novel" is an example of how metafiction parodies and imitates as a way to a new form.'[300] What is this new form? Through ironic use of literary tools which the reader will recognise, she argues, Woolf shifts readerly attention away from pseudo-objective states of affairs. Rather, she draws readers' attention to

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[298] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III*, sec. 27 February 1926.
[299] Julia Briggs, "The Novels of the 1930s and the Impact of History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Sellers, Susan (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 73.
[300] Lojo Rodríguez, "Parody and metafiction," 78. Emphasis added.

how the creative artist consciously intends objects in the world. In language reminiscent of Husserl's emerging intersubjectivity, Rodriguez concludes that 'An Unwritten Novel' demonstrates 'that contemporary reality is continually being appraised and reformulated, appearing as a complex web of interrelating, multiple realities which is precisely what makes both life and fiction so fascinating.'[301] I push Briggs's Edwardian critique and Rodríguez's analysis (parody with a purpose) to suggest that 'An Unwritten Novel' demonstrates perfectly the phenomenology of authorial intentionality, i.e., the *poietic* consciousness of the intending author. The focus is less the content of the story and more a treatment of how/whether the narrator's consciousness perceives objects correctly (again, 'Have I read you right?').

Woolf not only offers us a glimpse into authorial intentionality, but she also suggests how a reader might 'intend' the text-world put before him by the author. As further explanation of Woolf's methodology, we now turn to two of Woolf's essays, 'On Re-Reading Novels' and 'How Should One Read a Book?', which together help decipher what 'An Unwritten Novel' accomplishes as a work of metafiction.

IV.2.2 Authorial intentionality and 'On Re-reading Novels'. In her essay 'On Re-reading Novels' Woolf comments on the difficulty of sitting for hours reading prose, compared to the relative brevity of poetry or a play between dinner and bedtime: 'The collective reading of generations which has set us at the right angle for reading plays has not yet shaped our attitude toward fiction. That Hamlet is a work of art goes without saying; but that [a George Meredith novel] is a work of art has to be said for the first time.'[302] The focus was a critique not of Meredith but of the Victorian and Edwardian 'novel' as a genre. She writes of the temptations in reading a novel: 'We identify ourselves with this person or with that. We fasten upon the character or scene which is congenial. We swing our imaginations capriciously from spot to spot. We compare the world of fiction with the real world and judge it by the same standards.'[303] The problem with the naïve realism in these novels, Woolf argues, is that the reader risks becoming distracted by textual formalism, without considering the aesthetic experience intended by the author. Citing Percy Lubbock's seminal *The Craft of Fiction*, she paraphrases his argument:

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[301] Lojo Rodríguez, 79.
[302] Virginia Woolf, "On Re-Reading the Novel," in *Genius and Ink* (London: TLS Books, 2019), 99.
[303] Woolf, 100.

> there is something lasting that we can lay hands on…the book itself. We should read at arm's length from the distractions we have named. We must *receive impressions,* but we must relate them to each other *as the author intended*; and *we can only do his bidding by making ourselves acquainted with his method*. When we have shaped our impressions, as the author would have us, we are then in a position to perceive the form itself, and it is this which endures, however mood or fashion may change.[304]

In this critical passage, Woolf proposes a framework for what I have been arguing in preceding chapters, both from Husserlian intentionality and Augustine's suggested approach to beautiful works of art.

Specifically, there is a book itself, an object in the world that presents itself for our readerly attention. Any reader will receive her impressions – a series of *noēmata* – of this intentional object and forms a meaningful relationship (noematic *Sinn*) to these impressions. But she does not do this intentional *noēsis* in a vacuum. The reader 'receives impressions', Woolf writes, and relates them together 'as the author intended'. In other words, these impressions are given, and readerly formation of the noematic *Sinn* is done in unseen concert with the author who gives. Woolf explains, 'we can only do [the author's] bidding by making ourselves acquainted with his method.' At first this appeal to the author seems unusual, given Woolf's aversion to dogmatic authors and her reluctance to assign 'meaning' to her work (as evidenced later in *To the Lighthouse*). Yet if we understand her project not as absolutizing an author's interpretive role, but as spurring the reader to consider the author while he forms impressions of her textual content, then this passage makes eminent sense. And the reader becomes familiar with her poietic method – what I have termed authorial intentionality – by working 'up' from what has been given to his intentional frame. Put simply, one cannot understand the methodological *meta-* of metafiction apart from passing through the *-fiction*. Such consideration of the author is not only to flatter the author, as Barthes would suggest, but to investigate her trustworthiness: What is her bias or 'angle' that I should keep in mind? Where do she and I differ?

How might authorial intentionality be investigated, exactly? Woolf considers Flaubert's short story '*Un Cœur Simple*' as an example of how the reader is to hold a series of disparate impressions that the author presents. Woolf explains a pivotal passage in the text which reveals an unexpected exchange of empathy between of the two principal characters (Madame Aubain and her servant Félicité):

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[304] Woolf, 100–101. Italics added for emphasis.

> The impressions begin to arrive. Madame's character; the look of her house; Félicité's appearance; her love affair with Théodore… *We accept them, but we do not use them*. We lay them aside in reserve. *Our attention flickers* this way and that, from one to another. Still the impressions accumulate, and still, almost ignoring their individual quality, we read on…always *awaiting the final signal.* Suddenly we have it.'[305]

The disparate impressions are registered and held in retention, as if in a slide deck, awaiting a 'final signal' from the author. Madame, who has been emotionally distant most of the story, at last shows her servant a moment of affection; the passage bears an 'intensity of phrase' which 'startles us into a flash of understanding. We see now why the story was written' by Flaubert. From this passage Woolf concludes that,

> all the observations which we have put aside now come out and arrange themselves *according to the directions we have received*. Some are relevant; others we can find no place for. On a *second reading* we are able to use our observations from the start, and they are much more precise; but they are still *controlled by these moments of understanding*.'[306]

The reader better senses how the author has subtly directed his attention by re-reading, which allows him to recognise the signs which were not yet fully understood prior to (what Woolf elsewhere terms) the 'moment of understanding'. This, I argue, is what is meant by becoming attuned to the author through the text. Throughout Woolf's essay she is disputing Lubbock's language of 'perceiving the form itself' *within* the text, as if the text had a blueprint buried somewhere within it. Yet Woolf agrees that the author reveals her artistry in presenting impressions for readerly intending.

I bring up this extended analysis from Woolf's essay 'On Re-reading Novels' for three reasons. The first reason is that it maps onto Husserl's description of how a subject's consciousness collects sensory impressions in the experiential 'horizon', which for our purposes treats the text as an intentional object, intended through sense impressions over time. Recall the triad of retention-primal impressions-protention described in **II.2.2**. For phenomenological purposes, Husserl writes, ordinary perception is composed of 'countless intentions, some purely perceptual, some merely imaginative,' yet 'as a total act' it 'grasps the object itself, even if only by way of an adumbration'.[307] This dynamic of *revealing* and *adumbrating* aspects of an intentional object – e.g., a text that can only be 'intended' across hours of reading – constitutes how a textual 'state of affairs' is disclosed as meaning-full content (the *noēma*) to the intending reader.

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[305] Woolf, 102. Emphasis added.
[306] Woolf, 103. Emphasis added.
[307] Husserl, *Logical Investigations Volume 2*, 221.

The second insight from 'On Re-reading Novels' builds off the first: Woolf extends Husserlian intentionality into the literary domain by suggesting that the 'total act' of grasping textual meaning is brought about through the author's subtle guidance of the reader's attention. This, I argue, is what Augustine called the 'hint' or 'nod' of the artist, as described in the previous chapter. It is worth noting that Woolf does not agree entirely with Lubbock's *Craft of Fiction*; she cautions against becoming so engrossed in the complexities of the text-world itself, as if it alone contained an excavable, reified 'form'. Rather, her argument is strangely reminiscent of Augustine: *do not get stuck in the text alone*, but let your intentional gaze run to the artistic creator for guidance. Woolf explains that one's impressions of the text ought to lead the reader to wonder about the author's creative method ('as the author would have us' shape impressions). Here I am drawing out the implications of Augustine's schema for readerly intentionality. Recall Augustine's insight on the relationship between the artistry of chestmaking (*arca in arte*) and a physical chest (*arca in opere*) in **III.2.3**. The craftswoman's artistry participates in the *ars divina*, the creative mind of God, whether she knows it or not. Because of this participation, there is therefore greater reality in the craftsman's artistry than in the chest that will rot away. The artist, if you will, 'lives on' in and through her work and we come to understand the artistry of the unseen craftsman by means of the *arca in opere*. The reader receives impressions from the physical book (*liber in opere*). While he is collecting them, he is looking to 'make sense' of them, 'according to the directions we have received' from the author. This, I suggest, is readerly attunement to the *liber in arte* – the *poiēma* – which is the fruit of the author's intentionality, what she 'has in mind'. A simple pedagogical observation flows from this: the more one reads a particular author, the better he can attune to her 'voice' [*Stimme*], i.e., the ways she directs readers' attention. Woolf may claim to reject the *suprema ars* of a divine Author, but the author of a text is very much alive and active in the attentional formation of her readers. In this respect, she preserves a 'theological' link between author and text that Barthes so readily dismissed.

The third insight from this essay follows from the first and second: Woolf (writing this essay in 1922) deftly navigates two author-excluding shallows that would emerge in later 20th-century literary criticism: reader-response theory and formalism. This dialogue of reader and writer, mediated by the text, allows the reader to avoid his solipsistic 'mood or fashion' on the one hand, and a critically-distant formalism on the other. The writer encodes an emotional, aesthetic sensibility in the text, and the reader

accumulates successive impressions on the hunt for an author-given 'flash of understanding' which attunes the empathic attention of the reader. Importantly, Woolf is keen to 'insist among all this talk of methods, that both in writing and in reading it is the emotion that must come first'.[308] This appeal to empathy indicates that the act for reading is not merely deciphering words on a page. Rather the reader is drawn to respond empathically to a self-disclosive author, through the text. The theological connection of author to text (described above) thus extends to the reader through the textual creation. This author-reader liaison does not end when the book finishes, as we shall see in the next section. Rather, Woolf argued, the emotional connection lingers in the mind of the reader well after the physical book is set aside. Here again, Augustine's framework (from **III.2.2**) strangely resonates with Woolf's: by running one's eyes [*percurrat oculis*] over a work of art, one returns to the artist with fondness [*recurrat affectu*]. But is Woolf not precisely arguing for reader-response emotivism (what Wimsatt and Beardsley derided as the 'affective fallacy')? We turn to another essay of Woolf's for clarifying answers.

IV.2.3 Readerly intentionality and 'How Should One Read a Book?' In her energetic and regularly updated essay 'How Should One Read a Book?' Woolf notes that the reader naturally has freedom to feel and interpret a text, but 'we have to control ourselves', training our interpretive attention on the 'very spot' of 'what books can give us'.[309] The sheer volume of impressions, and varieties of genres of text, mean that 'most commonly we [readers] come to books with blurred and divided minds…if we could banish all such preconceptions when we read, that would be an admirable beginning.'[310] Granted the difficulties of banishing preconceptions, Woolf asks us to 'control ourselves' as readers. How, praytell? She suggests (in her own way) that readers perform something of a phenomenological reduction: an *epochē*-bracketing of our readerly 'natural attitude' (those hitherto unthematised prejudgments/attitudes about what we encounter in a text). Doing so, she suggests, allows readers to intend a text with the author in mind, as-if the text's author had something meaningful to offer beneath the cluttered surface of impressions and our attitudinal responses to them.

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[308] Woolf, "On Re-Reading the Novel," 104.
[309] For an extensive treatment of the iterations and history of this essay, see Beth Rigel Daugherty, "Virginia Woolf's 'How Should One Read a Book?,'" *Woolf Studies Annual* 4 (1998): 123–85.
[310] Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?," in *Essays on the Self: Selected Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Joanna Kavenna (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2014), 64–65.

Woolf immediately follows with a stern admonishment: 'Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice.'[311] Textual interpretation, in other words, is not done by free-floating ego-centres, but intersubjectively (as Husserl came to argue in his later work). The reader is tasked with empathic collaboration with the author in unearthing meaning. To do so the reader must bracket his initial judgments and attitudes, and 'open your mind as widely as possible, [so that] signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences, will bring you into the presence of a human being unlike any other.'[312] Again, this is precisely how Augustine suggests the aesthetic observer approach works of art: not to get 'stuck in' the work per se, but to run one's vision [*percurrat oculis*] over the artistic hints and nods [*nutus*], to appreciate the artist herself.

IV.2.4 Readerly *reductio* to the author. Woolf could not more explicitly articulate the method slowly developed in the previous two chapters: the reader begins with a text, tracing its signs and hints in order to make a return to the author who always-already frames his readerly intentional horizon and trains his attentional response. In 'How Should One Read a Book?' Woolf continues, 'Steep yourself in this, acquaint yourself with this, and soon you will find that your author is giving you, or attempting to give you, something far more definite.'[313] The essay offers a pedagogy of readerly intentionality: take time with a text ('steep yourself') and become familiar ('acquaint yourself') so as to recognise that an author is attempting to communicate 'something far more definite' than the text, through the text.

Let us recall Gadamer, who suggested that an author remained inaccessible across the 'yawning abyss' of time, culture, and prejudices; hence interpretation is limited to the *Spiel* of reader and text alone. Virginia Woolf disagrees: the reader not only can access the writer, but indeed should read a text with an eye toward encountering the author. For Woolf, that yawning abyss contracts into a field of play. Together, as accomplices, they play on the 'field' of the text. To see *as* an author, Woolf suggests the reader 'bracket' his blinkered work of reading and attempt authorial intentionality – *seeing* the world *as* an author does – for himself:

> Make your own experiment with the dangers and difficulties of words. Recall, then, some event that has left a distinct impression on you…But when you attempt

[311] Woolf, 65.
[312] Woolf, 66.
[313] Woolf, 66.

> to reconstruct it in words, you will find that it breaks into a thousand conflicting impressions. Some must be subdued; others emphasized.[314]

Woolf is suggesting empathic attunement to the creator through mimesis: see what an author has written, and next look at your own life-world. For a reader to "play at" writing, he must first bracket his natural attitude to consider *what is going on* when he trains his own intentional gaze (*noēsis*) on objects and states of affairs, determining which elements present themselves as meaning-full *noēmata*. The aspiring writer then must reverse the direction of intentionality – from reception to production – in *poiesis*, conveying the phenomenological fruit (*poiēmata*) of his attempted authorial intentionality. This requires a writer's attentional, creative sense – poiematic *Sinn* – which is not an easy skill to replicate for the reader-turned-writer. Woolf cautions the amateur writer,

> in the process you will lose, probably, all grasp upon the emotion. Then turn from your blurred and littered pages to the opening pages of some great novelist…*now you will be better able to appreciate their mastery.* It is not merely that we are in the presence of a different person – Defoe, Jane Austen, or Thomas Hardy – but that we are living in a different world.[315]

Woolf has suggested a subtle double movement for the reader: first, from untroubled readerly *noēsis* to amateur *poiēsis* as-if an author himself, to learn of the difficulties. The second movement is a humbled return to readerly intending of master authors, newly aware of the complexities of the craft of writing. This shift from one's own feeble attempt at *poiēsis*, back to appreciating the fruit of an experienced author's intentionality is 'a difficult and complex art. You must be capable not only of great fineness of perception, but of great boldness of imagination if you are going to make use of all that the novelist – the great artist – gives you.'[316] We note here Woolf's use of the verb *give*, so central to our conception of the phenomenological activity between the world to an author, and then the author to the reader. The movement is chiastic: from the life-world given to an intending author, who records her intentional fruit so as to give it to the reader's subsequent intentional gaze as a text-world.

IV.2.5 From text-world back to life-world. Woolf's 'How Should One Read a Book?' moves from a phenomenology of the author-reader intersubjective engagement, to explore how the act of reading helps 'to refresh and exercise [the reader's] own

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[314] Woolf, 66.
[315] Woolf, 67. Emphasis added.
[316] Woolf, 67–68.

creative powers.'[317] After setting down a book, she notes, a reader now intends his extramental world in a different way: 'Is there not an open window on the right hand of the bookcase? How delightful to stop reading and look out! How stimulating the scene is, in its unconsciousness, its irrelevance, its perpetual movement…'[318] Just as a library is full of forgettable and memorable books, so too daily life presents impressions of varying importance:

> The greater part of any library is nothing but the record of such fleeting moments in the lives of men, women, and donkeys. Every literature has its rubbish-heap, its record of vanished moments and forgotten lives told in faltering and feeble accents that have perished. But if you give yourself up to the delight of rubbish-reading you will be surprised, indeed you will be overcome, by the relics of human life that have been cast out to moulder.[319]

Perhaps surprising to those who find her aloof and her writing abstract, Woolf defends even 'rubbish-heap' biographies and literature as the possible locus of intentional attunement: 'It may be one letter – what vision it gives! It may be a few sentences – but what vistas they suggest!'[320] Having had his intentionality trained to search for meaning-full objects in even the most humdrum texts, the reader shifts his gaze to intend the everyday world around him in a new, meaning-seeking way. This insight is shared by Marilynne Robinson, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Woolf notes that if we 'examine the ordinary mind on an ordinary day,' we find that 'the mind receives a myriad impressions [sic] – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel… which shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday.'[321] In language redolent of Husserl's phenomenological horizon, she offers that 'Life – the stuff of fiction – is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.'[322] The task of writers of fiction is to 'record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall; [to] trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.'[323] In *poietic* mimesis, the reader whose attentional frame has been trained by a book, now sets it aside to trace the patterns of thought that constitute his

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[317] Woolf, 71.
[318] Woolf, 71.
[319] Woolf, 71.
[320] Woolf, 71.
[321] Virginia Woolf, "'Modern Fiction,'" in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: 1925-1928*, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth, 1994), 160.
[322] Woolf, 160.
[323] Woolf, 160.

own consciousness. So runs Woolf's argument for how a clever author makes of her reader a 'fellow-worker and accomplice'.

IV.2.6 'Moments of understanding' and looking ahead. Woolf has demonstrated that a writer of fiction does not merely list objects or states of affairs, but also the succession of impressions and emotional movements they generate. Fiction, in effect, becomes a record of conscious life itself, which returns us to the Husserlian question of how any subject relates to his or her extramental world. Woolf effectively charts a phenomenology of literature by drawing a reader's attention to how authorial intentionality plays out. Coming to see an author-given 'pattern' rewards the reader when she reads and revisits a text, re-reading all the retained impressions in light of disclosive 'moments of understanding' (recall Woolf's analysis of *Un cœur simple*). Christine Reynier suggests that these 'moments of understanding' direct the reader's emotions to coincide with the characters' aesthetic experience.[324] Woolf's moments of understanding (in literature), I will argue in the final section, are the interpretative corollary to what (in life) Woolf calls 'moments of being'. For Woolf, 'moments of being' are those heightened experiences of awareness which constitute the 'only authentic religious or "spiritual" experience' that Woolf would claim.[325] Though abstract and evasive of rational assessment, these moments reveal 'life itself…residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek.'[326] Woolf's essays, memoirs, and literature plumb the association of moments of being and understanding in what she termed 'life-writing'. In the final section of this chapter, what emerges is that one cannot neatly disentangle the threads of Woolf's biography from her fiction. We turn now to see how her authorial intentionality deftly treats the nest of questions of religious belief, mysticism, aesthetics, and philosophy, inviting her readers to do likewise.

IV.3 Life & Fiction as *Locus Theologicus*

[324] Christine Reynier, "Virginia Woolf's Ethics of the Short Story," *Etudes Anglaises* 60, no. 1 (2007): 57. See also her 2009 book of the same title.
[325] Pericles Lewis argues this forcefully in Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, 155.
[326] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III*, 196. August 1928.

IV.3.0 Introduction. In this final section, we turn to Woolf's fictionalized treatment of her childhood vacation home in Cornwall. Woolf scholar Laura Marcus notes the difficulty of disentangling elements of Woolf's own life that are buried in her fiction: 'the autobiographical dimensions of her novels, *To the Lighthouse* in particular, contribute to the blurring of boundaries between biography, autobiography and fiction in discussions of her life and work."[327] In her diary, Woolf herself reckons that 'the method of writing smooth narrative can't be right. Things don't happen in one's mind like that. We experience, all the time, an overlapping of images and ideas, and modern novels should convey our mental confusion instead of neatly arranging it. The reader must sort it out.'[328] If Marcus is correct, then Woolf's diary entry suggests she is leaving it to her readers to 'sort out' what in her fiction reveals something of the author.

An objection is raised: does all this muddling of voices not collapse and confuse the author's voice with that of the narrator or protagonists? The answer is yes. Michael Cunningham's biographical/metafictional novel *The Hours* (and the 2002 film based on it) addresses this very muddling of author and protagonist. To it, he adds a third layer: the reader. *The Hours* threads together the lives of three women: Woolf herself in 1920s England, a 1950s closeted lesbian trapped in a loveless marriage who finds solace in reading *Mrs Dalloway*, and a modern-day recasting of the novel with openly lesbian Clarissa 'Vaughn' planning a party in New York City. The interweaving of their stories and voices is a clear homage to Woolf's own style. The juxtaposition of the author, her character, and the reader of *Mrs Dalloway* masterfully plays with our sense of what is biography and what is fiction.

The film also highlights an element that haunts Woolf scholarship. Woolf expert Laura Marcus writes, '[t]he narratives created by her biographers seem, almost inevitably, to shape themselves into the life, the scenes, that Woolf, in many different forms, had already composed.'[329] The careful reader of Woolf's fiction must discern where covert autobiography ends and fiction begins, and where biographers of Woolf themselves contribute to this kaleidoscopic blurring of an author and her characters. Woolf's trademark indeterminacy is the centre around which this confusion swirls. For example, in her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past' Woolf recalls a series of vignettes from her childhood and wonders why they should come together in her mind:

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[327] Marcus, "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf," 143.
[328] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III*.12 February 1927 *et passim*
[329] Marcus, "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf," 143.

> whatever the reason may be, I find that scene making is my natural way of marking the past. Always a scene has arranged itself: representative; enduring. This confirms me in my instinctive notion: (it will not bear arguing about it; it is irrational) the sensation that we are sealed vessels afloat on what it is convenient to call reality; and at some moments, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is, these scenes… Is this liability to scenes the origin of my writing impulse? These are questions to which I have no answer.'[330]

As Woolf herself suggested, 'the reader must sort it out,' which is precisely what this theological engagement of her life and fiction involves.[331]

IV.3.1 Moments of being and understanding. Early in 'A Sketch of the Past' Woolf recalls moments from summer holidays as a child at Talland House in Cornwall. They are etched in visual terms, but not just visual: 'the strength of these pictures — but sight was always then so much mixed with sound that picture is not the right word… [Such moments] can still be more real than the present moment.'[332] These vivid, multisensory memories she calls 'moments of being,' which rise above the forgettable rhythms of daily life. In such moments, we do not merely see a scene with a person-as-object within it. Instead we are privy to the sensing subject who is at the centre of it; we see as she sees and hear as she hears, revealing both the character's interiority and exteroceptive orientation to the world beyond herself.

Woolf's 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* is an extended exploration of such consciousness, seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world as the characters weigh it. In brief, the Ramsay family goes on holiday to their summer home on Skye, across the bay from a lighthouse. Mr Ramsay is a rationalist philosopher, a stand-in for her own father Leslie Stephen blended with Bertrand Russell. Mr Ramsay is intellectually curious, aloof, and more committed to his academic career than wife or children. By Woolf's account, Mrs Ramsay is 'an amazing portrait of our mother,'[333] Julia, a mother who 'has haunted me'. Like Julia Stephen, Mrs Ramsay dies young, disrupting normal rhythms of family life. And like the young James Ramsay, Woolf's brother Adrian hoped to visit a lighthouse in Cornwall as a boy. Mrs Ramsay is haunted by vestiges of the divine after the possibility of God has been set aside. They have with them various guests that include a young artist, Lily Briscoe, and atheist philosophy student, Charles Tansley.

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[330] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 122.
[331] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III*.12 February 1927 *et passim*
[332] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 67.
[333] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. III*. 16 May 1927. After reading the novel, Vanessa Bell wrote to her sister Virginia that 'you have given a portrait of mother which is more like her to me than anything I could ever have conceived possible.'

The waves and episodic strokes of the lighthouse hum below the characters' conscious attention. Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe in particular become attuned to the rhythms of the world without, which draws them to interior depths within, where adventitious utterances and insights occur. As we shall see, the inward, 'tunnelling vision' that Woolf champions bears striking resemblance, at times, to pagan philosopher Plotinus' mystical meditations, and at others, to the inwardness described by Christian mystics like John of the Cross. Who or what is speaking? Woolf does not neatly answer the questions she raises in her characters' stream of consciousness. Given the similarities between *To the Lighthouse* and Woolf's own early life, I argue that this novel is the most fruitful source for investigating Woolf's wonderings on questions of (A) theology, (B) aesthetics, and (C) the metaphysical underpinnings of narratival consciousness itself. We will treat each in turn.

IV.3.2 (A) Theological wonderings The stream of conscious prose in *To the Lighthouse* defies easy interpretation; that is precisely the point of Woolf's periphatic approach to questions of the divine. When Mrs Ramsay finds moments of respite from attending to family and guests, her attention becomes attuned to the horizon of her consciousness. Her audio-visual intentionality leads her inwards. Just as (for Gadamer) a reader and text have a merging of horizons, so Mrs Ramsay undergoes what I will call a 'consonant concrescence'[334] – an attuned melding of inner and outer worlds. In this liminal space, divine utterances occur to her unbidden, as she ponders their origin. She appears to be haunted by a non-existent deity, who interrupts her interiority like Woolf's 'angel of the house'. In order to quash the spectre of a *deus faber*, Mrs Ramsay grasps at her mental and material tools like a good *homo faber suae fortunae*: she knits her artifact, an earthy-brown knit stocking, and thinks through the irrationality of theism in repeated attempts to dispel it.

Literary scholar J. Hillis Miller argues that Woolf, typical of modernist writers, employs prolonged prosaic rhythms as an agnostic stay against the uncertainties and ephemera of life. In Woolf's characteristic free indirect style, early in the novel Mrs Ramsay ponders the meaning of the waves, whose sound rhythmically wafts in through the window:

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[334] I am not using 'concrescence' as Alfred North Whitehead does, i.e., as a metaphysical explanation of prehensions assembling to form actual entities. Rather, I use 'consonant concrescence' in the sense of a subject's intentional gaze at, and symphonizing with, rhythms of reality that appear to be both deeply interior and radically other.

> The gruff murmur…this sound, which had lasted now half an hour and had taken its place soothingly in the scale of sounds pressing on top of her…so that the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, '*I am guarding you—I am your support*.'[335]

Here Mrs Ramsay has grown attuned to the susurrus of extramental reality 'pressing' in upon her; a measured and soothing "I" offers her comfort and protection, as a parent to a child. Is this a divine call to her? In this same long sentence, Mrs Ramsay entertains a different interpretation of this encounter:

> but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly… [the waves] had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life…and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow—this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror.[336]

Just when she is lullabied into apparent consolation, her mind is struck by that 'ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat[ing] the measure of life.' This revised "reading" announces not a deeper reality, but contingency and meaninglessness. The (empty?) promise of some divine protection gives way to death thunderously announcing itself. Bertrand Russell's 'Free Man Worship' captures this sobering vision: 'we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose rolling wave we toss for a brief hour.'[337] Mrs Ramsay is torn between the calming promises of a divine call, and the prospect of Russell's uncaring universe with which one must contend. In either case, she makes a considered response. Chrétien's understanding of a finite subject's encounter with an infinite call (in **III.1.4**) helps explain this: the gross disproportion of infinite call to finite response renders the very possibility of the former suspicious, which accounts here for Mrs Ramsay's scepticism.

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Permit here a brief excursus juxtaposing Woolf and Christian mystic John of the Cross, the fruit of which I describe at the end. In her essay *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf reflects on the imagination's need for silence to create, particularly the many female voices whose dream of artistic expression was displaced by household tasks. She writes, 'it is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to

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[335] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Alma Classics, 2012), 16–17.
[336] Woolf, 17.
[337] Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, Routledge Classics (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1961), 71.

the top.'[338] This authorial insight guides Mrs Ramsay's interiority as well. Several chapters after Mrs Ramsay was lulled by the wave-rhythms, she turns her gaze inward again after putting her children to bed. In silence, she,

> could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of—to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.[339]

With silence secured, Mrs Ramsay's imagination can finally plumb its dark core, in a descent that implicitly echoes the language and interiority of mystics such as John of the Cross. In his poem *Noche Oscura* John of the Cross writes of a similar interior movement, undertaken alone and in darkness:

> *On a dark night…I went forth without being observed,*
> *My house being now at rest.*
>
> *In darkness and secure,*
> *By the secret ladder, disguised*
> *–oh, happy chance!–*
> *In darkness and in concealment,*
> *My house being now at rest.*

So too does Mrs Ramsay sink into her core of darkness, where 'it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by. Her horizon seemed to her limitless.'[340] This dark descent resembles John of the Cross', who continues:

> *In the happy night,*
> *In secret, when no one saw me,*
> *Nor I beheld aught,*
> *Without light or guide,*
> *save that which burned in my heart.*
>
> *This light guided me*
> *More true than the light of noonday*
> *To the place where he*
> *(well I knew who!) was awaiting me–*
> *A place where no one appeared.*

John encounters someone familiar ("Well I knew who!") within, yet no one was appearing. The English both affirms and denies the presence of an awaiting other, but the original Spanish encodes an intended ambiguity. He descends the ladder 'to where one was awaiting me' (*adonde me esperaba*). This 'one' is not named, and thus could grammatically be read 'to where I awaited myself.' The next line clarifies both subject

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[338] Virginia Woolf, *The Selected Works of Virginia Woolf* (Wordsworth Editions, 2007), 583.
[339] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 58.
[340] Woolf, 59.

and reflexive pronoun: John knows it is himself who is awaiting his own arrival (*quien yo bien me sabía*). John's darkness is a place where no one – i.e., no one else – appears (*en parte donde nadie parecía*). Yet he goes on to speak of the encounter of a lover with his beloved, subverting the earlier implication that he alone was awaiting himself. For John, this interior movement is ultimately about an encounter with the beloved Other, who both is, and is not, found deep within.

John of the Cross and Virginia Woolf may seem odd travelling companions, and nowhere does Woolf mention the mystic. Yet their collocation here highlights an element of my argument. On the one hand, scholars of Christian mysticism readily associate John of the Cross with apophatic theology – a poetic stripping away of names and language about God, to the point where 'God' is not even named in *Noche Oscura*. On the other hand, many scholars of Woolf take her agnosticism and animus towards religion at face value.[341] Yet her fiction, essays and diaries alike are rife with theological wondering.

A paradox emerges: John of the Cross (whose poem betrays no theological commitments) is named the 'Mystical Doctor' of the Church, and Woolf (who wrestles mightily with God) is lionized as a beacon of secular modernity. This chiasmus – John believing without naming God, and Woolf naming God without believing – complicates the question of what, precisely, 'belief in God' entails. I highlight this paradox to underscore that a theological engagement with literature (such as this thesis) is always-already responding to agnostic/atheist writers who engage seriously the questions of theology, if only periphatically. The religious-minded reader of Woolf will detect consonances between Christian mystical texts and her fictional characters' wonderings. And the non-believing reader of John of the Cross will resonate with his poetry of interiority.

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In Mrs Ramsay's interior descent, she encounters an unthematised horizon of 'unlimited resources' that is dark, spreading and unfathomably deep, which grounds her imagination: 'There were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness

[341] Pericles Lewis charts out how Woolf's atheism and feminism are treated by different scholars. See Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, 143. Michael Lackey, for example, reads *Orlando* (1928) and *The Waves* (1931) as Woolf's attempt at 'post-God' and 'post-subject' discourse, as a refutation of Eliot's project of re-Christianizing the modern mind. See Michael Lackey, "Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot: An Atheist's Commentary on the Epistemology of Belief," *Woolf Studies Annual* 8 (2002): 63–91.

could go anywhere, for no one saw it.'[342] This core of darkness, Woolf intimates, is that imaginative innerscape where one makes mental maps of the world, transporting Mrs Ramsay beyond the confined world she inhabits. Woolf captures Gerard Manley Hopkins' sense of 'deep down' life from 'God's Grandeur':

> And for all this, nature is never spent;
> There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.

This thesis is not here 'baptising' Woolf's texts but drawing out the theological consonances her periphatic fiction 'sounds like' to the religious reader. Mrs Ramsay's interior descent to the wedge-shaped core of darkness is a depth sounding, an interior search for a point of access and attunement to the infinite source she detects calling to her.

IV.3.3 Objections to theology and a Rahnerian response. Where Chrétien helps us read Mrs Ramsay's encounter *phenomenologically*, Rahner helps frame this encounter *metaphysically* and *theologically*. As noted above Woolf refers to these imaginative moments as 'moments of being,' which entail a privileged, fleeting contact with the metaphysical underpinnings of reality. The Russellian sceptic – a posture Woolf alternately channels and scorns – might ask why 'moments of being' need to be read in theological terms.[343] Is this not still baptizing non-religious writers? By way of response, Rahner offers an epistemological frame for understanding the implicit theological underpinnings of agnostic writers like Woolf.

When Mrs Ramsay probes these 'unlimited resources,' she is becoming more explicitly attuned to the metaphysical horizon of being, which is (Rahner argues), an emergent awareness of what Christians call 'God'. The human person is grounded in the mystery of God, such that the human person is the locus *par excellence* of divine self-communication. Whether one acknowledges it or not, humanity is both grounded in, and orientated toward, Ultimate Mystery: this condition Rahner terms the Supernatural Existential.[344] For Rahner this is God's offer of grace to humans which 'is present prior

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[342] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 59.

[343] Indeed, several scholars of Woolf read these 'moments of being' as psychological, not religious, experiences. See, for example, Hussey, *Singing of the Real World*. And also Christine Froula, "Picture the World: The Quest for the Thing Itself in *To the Lighthouse*," in *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 129–74. I am grateful to Pericles Lewis's text for pointing this text out.

[344] David Coffey argues that the Supernatural Existential, in the *ordo doctrinae* is the foundation of Rahner's doctrine of grace. See David Coffey, "The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential," *Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (February 2004): 95–118. The supernatural, for Rahner (as with De Lubac

to their freedom, their self-understanding and their experience.'[345] To this we could add prior to one's stated faith commitments. Every human possesses an 'unconditioned/implicit [*unbedingt*] desire for God,' which only remains implicit unless and until it is made conscious. But it is also an absolute [*unbedingt*] desire for God in that God is the necessary [*unbedingt*] telos for all humanity.

We cannot help but aim for God, whether we recognise God as our destiny, because God is always-already where we begin, metaphysically if not epistemologically. As Mrs Ramsay probes her own 'wedge-shaped core of darkness' the false bottom of perception opens to deeper existential questions for herself, and for us as readers. Rahner identifies discomforting questions that occur for believers and atheists alike in these depth soundings: 'Have we ever been absolutely lonely? Have we ever decided on some course of action purely by the innermost judgment of our conscience, deep down where one can no longer tell or explain it to anyone, where one is quite alone and knows that one is taking a decision which no one else can take in one's place?'[346] For Rahner, one's initial inquiry into the mystery of God is not God-as-object-of-conscious-reflection, but as an emergent awareness of that 'transcendental horizon' on which the mystery of the self emerges and sensorially explores the exterior world.[347] And it is on this God-horizon that questions of consciousness and meaning ineluctably arise for inquirers like Mrs Ramsay. If Rahner were using Woolf's terms, we might say 'moments of being' and 'moments of understanding' are the entry points whereby the human person becomes conscious of God, whether or not she names it thus.

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and other supporters of *nouvelle théologie*) is not opposed to the natural in the *duplex ordo* schema of the neo-Scholastics, as if the supernatural were a separate layer superimposed upon the otherwise distinct natural order of creation. What separates Rahner from de Lubac et al. is the question of whether this desire for God is constituted by human nature, or by God's gratuitous gift. Rahner argues the latter, which accounts for the 'supernatural' qualifier.

[345] Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127.

[346] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations. Volume III: The Theology of the Spiritual Life* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1967), 87–88.

[347] I note a resonance between Rahner's theology and minority-readings of Husserl's transcendental project. Eileen Brennan notes that when the young Paul Ricœur, who translated Husserl, raises the question, 'Is the most radical subject God?', Ricœur 'is in fact speculating on how Husserl is going to bring to an end a series of regressions, each of which leads to an even more fundamental ego, an extreme difficulty thrown up by his brand of transcendental idealism. That there is such a series of regressions in Husserlian transcendental idealism is something Ricœur has learned from Eugen Fink, Husserl's student. Ricœur noted in his *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology,* that "Husserl at one time recognised as his own Fink's interpretation of Husserl, [i.e., that the most radical subject is God]'. See Eileen Brennan, "Paul Ricœur and the 'Theological Turn' in French Phenomenology," *Philosophy Today (Celina)* 62, no. 1 (2018): 166.

IV.3.4 Rahner's Transcendental Horizon or Plotinian Oneness? Neither Rahner nor Woolf is particularly easy reading. But Rahner scholar Harvey Egan speaks of Rahner's transcendental horizon in terms analogous to Woolf's description of waves: 'this "implicit," "unthematic" form of God consciousness—an actual mystical consciousness—forms the ambience, the undertow, or the basal spiritual metabolism, of daily life.'[348] Egan's description of Rahner helps illuminate Woolf's quasi-mystical descriptions of interior depths. In her autobiographical 'A Sketch of the Past', Woolf describes this interior core of 'infinite resources' in terms similar to her fictional Mrs Ramsay:

> If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory: it is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach… It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here.[349]

Recall from earlier that Woolf read broadly and admired the thought of Plotinus, with his (pre-Christian) thoughts on Oneness and emanations. One might read theses passages from *To the Lighthouse* and 'A Sketch' in light of Plotinian thought, as Woolf scholar Donna Lazenby does. The rhythm of water – ρυθμός from ῥέω,[350] 'to flow' – primes the stream of consciousness and evokes the Plotinian concept of emanation (cf. ἀπορῥέω). Furthermore, the enchantment by light resonates with Plotinus' metaphor of the One as περιλαμψις – a light that illuminates without diminishment. I noted Woolf's use of waves and light as entry points to interior depth in her autobiographical writings. She attributes similar movements to Mrs Ramsay in an extended meditation that I analyse here, first in relation to Plotinian thought, and then to the divine call-response dynamic I have earlier suggested. Staring out at the lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay plunges once again into the undertow of daily life:

> There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience …but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity.[351]

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[348] Harvey D. Egan, Soundings in the Christian Mystical Tradition, 339.
[349] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 64.
[350] For a treatment of the linguistic range of these terms, see Pascal Pascal Michon, "From *Rhuthmós* to Rhythm (7th-4th Centuries BC)," *Rhuthmos* 25 (December 2016): 19.
[351] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 59. *Emphasis added*.

As she settles upon this platform of stability, she finds her intentionality drawn again to the rhythms of the ambient world; specifically, the circling arm of light flung out by the lighthouse:

> [P]ausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three…and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke. Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light, for example."[352]

Here again, Woolf deftly captures a consonant concrescence: (1) Mrs Ramsay moves inward and downward to her platform of stability that paradoxically (2) attunes her attention to a reality that transcends herself. Such transcendence occurs not first by fleeing or sidestepping the finite natural sphere, but by moving deeper into oneself, towards an identification with the Lighthouse. Woolf is meticulous in capitalizing Lighthouse, dressing it with the grammatical raiment of proper nouns: persons, places, the Divine. It is helpful here to recall her aunt Caroline's description of God as a lighthouse that only ever communicates intermittently. But is this the creator God, *deus faber*, of Judeo-Christianity? The ever-cagey Woolf wrote to her friend Roger Fry,

> I meant nothing by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions—which they have done, one thinking it means one thing, another another. I can't manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalised way. Whether it's right or wrong I don't know, but directly I'm told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me.[353]

These valences resonate with Plotinus who considered all being as emanating from the One, just as light emanates from a lamp without diminishing its source. Plotinus does not advert to the God of Judaism or Christianity, but the One beyond predications to which the mind is naturally drawn.[354] Lazenby writes that for both Plotinus and Woolf, 'the moment of vision and the inspiration to attempt expression stand side by side, their energies sourced in the same conviction of the presence in an underlying order: an order which, albeit fluctuating and elusive to their touch, simultaneously imbues and transcends the world around them.'[355] Recall that for Augustine the Neo-Platonic contemplation occasions a *reditus* to the creator God whose *vestigia* and hints are the

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[352] Woolf, 59.
[353] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: 1923-1928*, ed. Joanne Trautmann and Nigel Nicolson, vol. III (New York: Harcourt, 1989), pt. 27 May 1927.
[354] We might also note that 'coming to a oneness within' resonates further with John of the Cross' *Noche oscura*.
[355] Donna Lazenby, *A Mystical Philosophy: Transcendence and Immanence in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Iris Murdoch* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 73. *Emphasis added.*

epistemic pathway up from creation. Plotinus, by contrast, locates this oneness as the immanent, co-present god within. This Plotinian vision seems to resonate more with Woolf's stated agnosticism.

In *To the Lighthouse*, young James's desire to visit the Lighthouse is routinely rebuffed by his agnostic parents and the atheist guest Charles Tansley. After Mrs Ramsay herself delivers the news that they will not visit it the next day, James's face registers the disappointment. Mrs Ramsay imagines that he will remember that moment all his life, since 'children never forget' such rejections; hence for parents, 'it was a relief when [children] went to bed.'[356] Just when we think the text has settled on a non-religious, perhaps Plotinian metaphysical frame, the narrator probes a bit further into the rhythms of emanating light. The Lighthouse's stroke of light suddenly *speaks* to Mrs Ramsay, once again as if a divine allocution,

> lift[ing] up on it some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind like that—*'Children don't forget, children don't forget'*—which she would repeat and begin adding to it, *It will end, It will end,* she said. *It will come, it will come,* when suddenly she added, *We are in the hands of the Lord.*[357]

Mrs Ramsay is startled that a religious sentiment – We are in the hands of the Lord – should emerge from somewhere in her consciousness; is there something childlike within Mrs Ramsay that does not, would not, 'forget' a caring divinity? Woolf drops inverted commas halfway through this rumination, blurring the line between Mrs Ramsay hearing an adventitious address and speaking it through indirect statement. The omniscient narrator, probing Mrs Ramsay's inwardness, interrogates the curious occurrence for answers:

> But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said it? Not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean. She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke [from the Lighthouse] and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any lie. She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light.[358]

By virtue of the free indirect style, the narrator deftly refrains from landing on either reliable theism or atheism. Rather, Mrs Ramsay engages in periphasis, familiar to people of belief and unbelief alike: what is the source of my thoughts of divine protection? Are they merely childish rhymes? Is God communicating intermittently like a lighthouse (as

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[356] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 58.
[357] Woolf, 59. *Emphasis added.*
[358] Woolf, 59–60.

Woolf's aunt Caroline suggested in Woolf's own younger years)? Or are these the soothing lies people tell themselves to ward off fear of death?

Perhaps Mrs Ramsay's visual attunement to the Lighthouse is just a Plotinian 'coming to a oneness' described above. Rahner might note that Mrs Ramsay finds herself encountering God. Mrs Ramsay acknowledges the irritation felt at being trapped in a mawkish afterglow of theism. But such a thought has occurred once again, in spite of herself. We, the reader, are perplexed; shall we bracket our reading of the text for a moment? We recall Woolf-the-critic's advice to ponder what the author might be trying to give us in *To the Lighthouse*.

IV.3.5 A phenomenological bracketing. If we readers of Woolf step back a moment to consider such passages from the perspective of authorial intentionality, a new set of questions emerges, without clear answers: why is the novelist Virginia Woolf expending so much ink on a character worrying about religious belief? If an author chooses what she offers for her readers' attention, why did she choose to spend so much time wondering whether a self-disclosive God was at the root of these quasi-mystical experiences? This consideration is not question begging, nor is it rhetorical flourish: these are the questions that a proudly agnostic author has decided to place before her readers' attention. Woolf, in her authorial intentionality, has raised the spectre of divine self-revelation, *etsi Deus daretur,* offered as a record of her *poiēma*, for our readerly intentionality and sense-making.

This, I argue, constitutes a serious, generous, and emphatic literary engagement with theology, which induces us readers to do likewise. Woolf is not willing to commit to theological doctrine; nor is she willing to dismiss completely the divine possibility. In the *Edge of Words,* Rowan Williams cautions that dismissal of revelation means that we overlook 'any notion that God actively interrupts our perceptions or thought processes, that God "gives" the divine self to be known in any direct way.'[359] Woolf is wary of institutional Christianity, to be sure. But she likewise loathes the cool confidence of Russellian rationalism which cannot admit of the divine. She has presented Mrs Ramsay's nest of theological wonderings to our attention: what do you think, kind reader? To what is your readerly intentionality drawn as you become make sense of Mrs Ramsay staring at the lighthouse?

[359] Williams, *The Edge of Words*, 1.

IV.3.6 A return to the text-world itself. But let us return to Mrs Ramsay, wrestling for meaning herself within the text. How does she make sense of this apparent divine call? In his essay 'Religion, Atheism, and Faith' Paul Ricœur describes moments when a person runs up against utterances that are unexpected: a so-called 'occurrence of word': 'When the word [*la parole*] says something, when it reveals not only the meaning of beings but Being itself… something is said of which I am neither the source nor the master.'[360] Mrs Ramsay has 'run up against' (*ob-curro* gives us the word 'occurrence') a disturbing word and cannot make sense of it; she is drawn into deeper rhythms of silence as she puzzles through it. The third stroke of light bathes her, and she finds herself staring as if into her own displaced eyes, probing her own heart. She ponders this consonant concrescence: why would she be drawn outside of herself to find life, when she is alone with herself?

> It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover. What brought her to say that: 'We are in the hands of the Lord?' she wondered. The insincerity slipping in among the truths roused her, annoyed her. She returned to her knitting again.[361]

The use of 'one' may evoke a Plotinian simplicity of the One towards which all plurality points. Alternatively, 'one' is the lone subject who casts out to find consonance with an external object – a divine person? – beyond herself. She recognises life calling to meet her, both from deep within and without, like a mist off a still lake, or a bride meeting her husband. Her stream of consciousness suddenly seizes upon the occurrence of an adventitious phrase: 'We are in the hands of the Lord,' which sounds a lot more like a personal, protective God. Her knitting is a stay against uneven ponderings that arise from within. With knitting needles for scalpel and forceps, she goes to work dissecting the irruption with her own words of reasoning: 'How could any Lord have made this world? she asked. With her mind she had always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that.'[362] This seizing with the mind reduces the prospect of a benevolent *deus faber* to the observable vagaries

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[360] Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Essais d'herméneutique. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 445.
[361] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 60.
[362] Woolf, 60.

of human frailty. The mystical visions she encounters in her 'core of darkness' are challenged by a rational second opinion. Her body mirrors outwardly her mind's inner activity: 'She knitted with firm composure, slightly pursing her lips and, without being aware of it…stiffened and composed the lines of her face in a habit of sternness.'[363] Her philosopher husband, Mr Ramsay, enters the scene and observes his wife's suddenly severe demeanour, and is saddened by her cold composure.[364]

The matrix has grown more complicated; Woolf's is not merely a question of her characters' (a) theism, but competing narratives of metaphysical understanding of the narrative itself. Is Mrs Ramsay illumined by the disinterested Oneness of Plotinus? Comforted by the personal God of Judeo-Christianity? Or trapped in a closed frame of fantasy, with no recourse beyond her faculty of reason? This nest of questions, not neatly resolved by or for Mrs Ramsay, remains for the reader's theological consideration. As Christopher Knight notes, Woolf's fiction is less about whether God exists, and

> more characterized by a tone of inquiry, of questioning, wherein it is understood that if the object of the inquiry, of the quest even, is to be imagined as worthy, it should admit of a full freedom of probing, of questioning, where even doubt and disbelief are not unwelcome. Unlike the imperceptive audience member, who, after watching Miss La Trobe's English pageant play in Between the Acts, mutters, 'if we're left asking questions, isn't it a failure, as a play?', *Woolf's readers are expected to take an interest in the questions as questions, the search as a search*.[365]

What I have argued is that Woolf's choice to place this intentional content before readers' intentional gaze perforce raises theological questions for the reader himself. She is engaging her reader in theological periphasis, play upon the field of fiction she places before us, where God is decidedly not out of play, *hors jeu*.

IV.3.7 (B) Aesthetic/artistic wonderings. A second *homo faber* in the novel, Lily Briscoe, idolizes Mrs Ramsay and wishes to capture her essence through artistic creation. Some house guests have dismissed Lily's artistic capacities; aspiring philosopher Mr Tansley whispers in her ear, 'Women can't paint, women can't write.'[366] Tansley's first insult is directed at Lily; the second glowers from the page, impugning the creator that called him into being. Even in rejecting one's creator lies a response to a

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[363] Woolf, 60.
[364] His interior consciousness takes over the narration momentarily; he chuckles at the thought that David Hume, 'the philosopher, grown enormously fat, had stuck in a bog.' Woolf trusts her reader to know the story of Hume getting stuck in Edinburgh's Nor' Loch. It was 'faith' that saved Hume: the woman who agreed to extricate him did so on the condition that he first recite the Our Father.
[365] Christopher J. Knight, "'The God of Love Is Full of Tricks': Virginia Woolf's Vexed Relation to the Tradition of Christianity," *Religion & Literature* 39, no. 1 (2007): 31. *Emphasis added.*
[366] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 46.

call. The more sympathetic Mr Bankes stares quizzically at Lily's painting of a purple triangle, asking what she means by it. She replies, 'It was Mrs Ramsay reading to [her son] James... She knew his objection—that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said.'[367] One detects Woolf rebuffing critics of her own fiction: Why not be clearer in your meaning? Mr Bankes continues his interrogation:

> For what reason had she introduced [such shapes] then? he asked. Why indeed?—except that if there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness. Simple, obvious, commonplace, as it was, Mr. Bankes was interested. Mother and child then—objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty—might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence.[368]

Lily's response reveals Woolf's premise that artistic *representation* is not the same as *reproduction*:

> But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in his sense. There were other senses too in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute. A mother and child might be reduced to a shadow without irreverence. A light here required a shadow there.[369]

In this aesthetic aside, Lily illustrates the impression/adumbration element of Husserlian intentionality described in **II.2.2**. Lily's depiction of mother and child ('objects of universal veneration,' referring perhaps to the veneration of the Madonna and child) could be reduced, abstracted, and adumbrated without thereby eliminating them. Light perforce casts shadows, and creative representations need not be exact likenesses to reverence their subject matter. Read intertextually with the above meditations on the Lighthouse, this passage suggests that Woolf is not excluding the divine, but 'reverencing' God's possibility by having Lily refuse to fashion a graven image.

I suggested earlier that Woolf writes around the divine periphatically; here the reader finds Lily painting around objects of veneration, relying on *chiaroscuro* subtlety and obliqueness. Lily struggles throughout the novel to represent Mrs Ramsay well as she is still living; the matriarch's visible presence outpaces and eludes a satisfying artistic representation. After Mrs Ramsay has died and everyone gathers at the house again ten years on, Lily brings out her painting supplies to finish what she could not complete while Mrs Ramsay was alive. She requires quiet to achieve consonance with the Lighthouse which inspires her to limn imaginatively Mrs Ramsay after the absence

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[367] Woolf, 51. Emphasis added.
[368] Woolf, 51.
[369] Woolf, 50.

of death. Yet Mr Ramsay hovers at the edges of Lily's focus, and she becomes frustrated in her thoughts, grabbing the wrong brush in agitation. Where does the inspiration to begin creation come from?, she wonders. The fear of starting incorrectly – with the wrong brush, with the wrong stroke – paralyzes her activity:

> Where to begin?…One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions. All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex; as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are divided by steep gulfs, and foaming crests.[370]

Lily recognises the limits of perception of the lone creator, struggling as one drowning at sea. Suddenly Lily's intentionality becomes attuned to the rhythmic lapping of the waves. Such auditory and visual attunement fires her imagination and impels her forward: 'With a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and the same time must hold herself back, she made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. A second time she did it – a third time.'[371] With language redolent of scoring a musical composition, Woolf blends the peaks and troughs of waves with the strokes and pauses of Lily's brush:

> And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her.[372]

Mrs Ramsay was drawn in by the cyclic flashes from the Lighthouse, as she fashioned brown stockings. Lily's strokes of the brush have a similar mesmerizing property. The rhythmic movement of waves attunes the intending subject to her once-threatening surroundings, and a merging of consciousness with intentional object to form a *poiēma*, the aesthetic fruit of her creative intentionality. Lily's imagination is illuminated – 'she felt it looming out at her'. She is able to complete her painting at a distance from the Lighthouse, just as she watches the remaining Ramsays finally reach it by boat. The lighthouse hazes over and disappears from Lily's sight, just as the novel ends. Distances collapse for a moment; moments of being loom out, pulling characters in and granting inspiration and hope; only to fall again into the quiet haze of daily life.

> It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.[373]

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[370] Woolf, 148.
[371] Woolf, 148.
[372] Woolf, 148.
[373] Woolf, 194.

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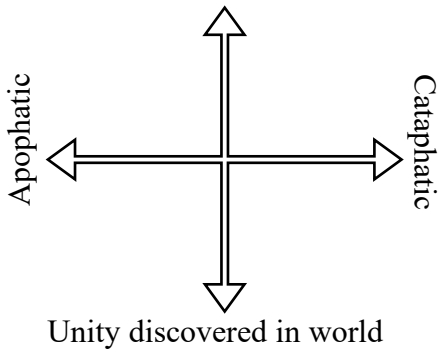
The artistic vision of the text – rendered not in greens and browns, but in black print – gives way to the attention-grabbing haze of a white page. The silence returns and the reader's intentionality moves from the text-world up back to the life-world around him: *What did I just read? What does Lily's finished painting look like? What is it that Woolf might be giving me here?* In the next section I attempt an explanation of what Woolf may be offering her readers.

IV.3.8 (C) Introducing metaphysical wonderings. We have just analysed extended passages of two different movements in the text: of (A) Mrs Ramsay 'hearing' apparently mystical utterances and (B) Lily Briscoe's visual attunement to reality. Woolf scholar Donna Lazenby explains how these passages represent two dialectical axes of Woolf's metaphysical, narrative plane.[374] Mrs Ramsay (in A) moves back and forth along a *theological axis* of mystical discourse, i.e., narrative language concerning the divine that ranges from the cataphatic to the apophatic: what is sayable and what is unsayable. Lily (in B) slides along the *artistic, 'visional' axis* of accounting for the source of creative unity. Is unity a discoverable order given to the aesthetic eye in the sensible world of appearances? Or is unity created by an artist's vision, whose esemplastic (shaping-into-one)[375] imagination fashions a whole from an otherwise chaotic natural

(1) **Lazenby Model**



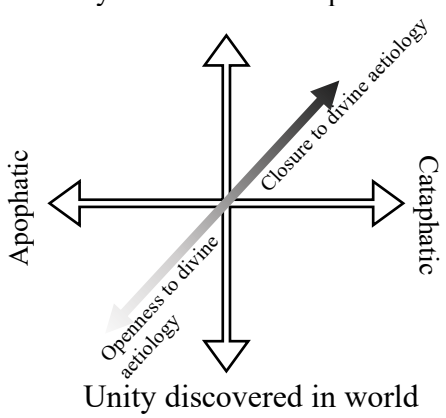
[374] Lazenby refers to them as "dialectics" in her *A Mystical Philosophy*, 74–75.
[375] Samuel Taylor Coleridge's neologism for the creative imagination's capacity to mold elements into a whole. For more on this, and the distinction of the primary and secondary imagination, see his free-form musings in *Biographia Literaria,* 76.

world?[376] Lazenby finds in both these dialectics a 'necessary simultaneity of their apparently mutually exclusive strands.'[377] I amend Lazenby's analysis by suggesting that for Woolf, these dialectics are not distinct inquiries that just happen to run simultaneously. Rather the four extrema serve as tensive tent posts, which Woolf uses to frame a taut narratival canvas of free imaginative play. The stream-of-consciousness movement along and between these dialectics reveals Woolf's innovative mode of aesthetic-theological investigation within the field of a text. Hence I suggest Lazenby's schema can be represented initially as an A-B plane (see diagram 1).

Indeed, Woolf's fiction, biography, and essays meditate on what we can and cannot say *about* the divine (Lazenby's cataphatic/apophatic dialectic A) in a text. But *To the Lighthouse* indicates that characters wrestle with an appeal and inspiration perceived as *coming from* without, as if by the divine, which is not the same as characters' wondering *about* the divine (axis A). I suggest that Lazenby's model of investigation is incomplete without considering whether the adventitious words in Woolf's fiction indicate a self-disclosive divine call, or merely embody warmer versions of philosophical intuitions that emanate from a cool Neo-Platonism (as Lazenby suggests).

Hence I suggest we move from (1) Lazenby's dialectical model (axes A and B) to (2) an amended model for understanding Woolf's periphatic writing. This amended model admits a third dialectic (axis C), which is the larger subject of our investigation: whether the non-reducible narratival voice of the novel itself is porous to, or closed to, deeper metaphysical interrogation of consciousness. Recall Rahner's notion of the transcendental horizon: that God is that existential plane upon and within which all human being and wondering take place. A writer may (not) choose to make this explicit, which opens up questions of divine origins and destiny. Does Woolf's wandering narratival consciousness admit of a possible divine aetiology and metaphysical depth, or is it foreclosed within a Russellian

(2) Woolf's Periphatic Writing



[376]As her field is primarily literary, Lazenby does not engage with phenomenology in general or Husserl (or Heidegger) in *A Mystical Philosophy*. Nevertheless this question of vision and unity covers the terrain of intentionality developed earlier.

[377] Lazenby, *A Mystical Philosophy*, 75.

rationalistic account of the characters' consciousness? As with axes A and B, in *To the Lighthouse* the narrative resists settling at either end of this openness/closure axis.

IV.3.9 Axes A, B, and C in Woolf's fiction. We have seen that this is a running theme in Woolf's fiction, and indeed her metafiction. Recall the confident writer-observer in 'An Unwritten Novel,' who has formed a story around 'Minnie Marsh'. On the theological axis A, she wonders how to define the God underpinning Minnie's life ('Who's the God of Minnie Marsh… I, too, see roofs, I see sky; but oh, dear – this seeing of Gods!'). On the artistic axis B, she wonders whether her artistic representation of Minnie is accurate ('have I read you right?') or whether she is forcing the woman on the train into her limited vision. Once her attempt to articulate Minnie's story falters, the writer-observer engages a phenomenological bracketing of her 'naïve realism', what Husserl called the 'natural attitude'. She begins to thematise the domain of this 'C axis' so as to interrogate her own intentional gaze:

> But *when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking*?–the entombed soul, the spirit driven in, in, in to the central catacomb; the self that took the veil and left the world–a coward perhaps, yet somehow beautiful, as it flits with its lantern restlessly up and down the dark corridors.[378]

Recognising the 'dark corridors' within one's consciousness knocks down the false walls of scientific certainty that Woolf rejected in Russell, and of the naïve realism she rejected in earlier novelists. Woolf describes this metaphysically disclosive level of analysis in various ways (which I term the domain of the C-axis). Here in 'An Unwritten Novel' she describes it as a realm of dark corridors and interior catacombs; in *To the Lighthouse* it a 'wedge-shaped core of darkness' reminiscent of John of the Cross' *Noche Oscura*.

This domain of the C-axis proves to be the burning, third-rail question for Virginia Woolf. Mrs Ramsay, like the author herself, is stuck between inherited Victorian religious sentiment on the one hand, and the Russellian mind that 'asserts its subtle mastery over the thoughtless forces of nature,' and 'must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of the universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears.'[379] At times Mrs Ramsay and Lily find themselves attuning and melding with sources and forces beyond themselves in consonant

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[378] Woolf, "An Unwritten Novel" in *Monday or Tuesday*, 47. Emphasis added.
[379] Russell, "Free Man's Worship" in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, 70–71.

concrescence; at other times they feel in control of their thoughts and creative output, the courageous *homo faber fortunae suae*, forging their fates in a hostile cosmos.

To chart human interiority in mathematical graphs, even three-dimensional ones as we are doing here, would cause Woolf to shudder. If Woolf's fiction has demonstrated anything it is that one's consciousness cannot be mapped with rational propositions. Rather she likens the best writing to a transparent, delicate web of interrelated tugs and disturbances:

> Fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible…But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.[380]

Woolf herself weaves together (A) quasi-mystical and (B) aesthetic wondering, pushing her characters to wandering around the web of interiority. And when her characters pluck the web's sinews, they send disruptive waves through the entire novel, pulling at the corners of life, (C) thematising the grounding of consciousness itself. Woolf thematises the outer horizons when she probes and plucks at the webs of thought, to test the tensive strength of different threads that have shaped her creative output. She does not settle on reliable religious belief (*pace* Aunt Caroline) any more than on cold, philosophical rationalism (*pace* Russell). Rather she wanders around periphatically, employing intersubjectivity from one character's consciousness to another, shifting the reader's intentional gaze as he reads.

IV.3.10 Chapter review. This chapter moved from religion *around* Woolf to Woolf *around* religion. Although Woolf resisted institutional Christianity, she did not thereby avoid the spiritual, artistic, and intellectual terrain that is a perennial *locus theologicus* for Christian theology. I have argued that the 'moments of understanding' that an author embeds in her text, and the 'moments of being' embedded in the 'cotton wool' of one's life, are central for understanding Woolf's intentionality in life and fiction. Rahner helps us see that all Woolf's phenomenological attention to such 'moments' is implicitly searching for the grounds of being and knowing itself, which is God:

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[380] Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 39–40.

> Insofar as we ask about the world known by man [i.e., the human person],[381] the world and the man asking are already placed in question all the way back to their absolute ground, *to a ground which always lies beyond the boundaries within man's grasp, beyond the world*. Thus every venture into the world shows itself to be borne by the ultimate desire of the [human] spirit for absolute being,…striving towards the absolute.[382]

Woolf and Rahner would agree that the human person is a spiritual being who is nevertheless bound to operate within the limits of a visible, physical world. This chapter's first section considered Woolf's push against *historical* limits: of sex, educational access, family, religion. The second section analysed how she pushed against *literary* conventions. Her essays offer methods, and her literature offers content, to help readers become better attuned to what the author gives through her text-worlds. I analysed her approach to the craft of writing, the connection of author to reader through the text, and how reading (and re-reading) fiction trains readerly intentionality to attend to 'moments of being' in their own life-world. That Woolf does not explicitly associate 'moments of being' with God's gracious presence is not surprising given her history.

In the final section, I argued that Woolf's masterful (if confusing) fiction probes theological, artistic, and philosophical terrain. We considered the dialectical axes A, B, C: the stream of consciousness shows her characters wandering and wondering about the meaning of 'moments of being' and 'moments of understanding'. On axis A, Mrs Ramsay assessed possibly religious experiences with a range of lenses, from the comfortingly religious to the coolly rational. On the B axis, Lily Briscoe wondered about her own phenomenological relation to the extramental world, and how to articulate it artistically. On the C axis, Mrs Ramsay and Lily -- like Woolf herself – chart out the relationship of the human subject to the ground and source of her consciousness, which returns us to Rahner's theological investigation. The human subject, Rahner writes, 'is the mid-point suspended between the world and God, between time and eternity, and this boundary line is the point of [our] definition and [our] destiny: "as a certain horizon and border between the corporeal and incorporeal."'[383] Woolf is a master of charting out the horizons and borderlands of human consciousness. Never one for received conventions, she conjures questions of origins and destiny that distress believers and unbelievers alike, especially when one's mind slackens and unbidden angels appear.

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[381] The German 'man' is not the same as English 'man', but the equivalent of 'someone' or 'human person'. To avoid clunkiness with pronouns, I leave Donceel's English translation.
[382] Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, 407.
[383] Rahner, 407. Rahner is quoting Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.68.

IV.3.11 Looking from Woolf to Robinson. In this chapter, we have considered a writer of fiction who speaks around the divine – what I term periphatically – without claiming religious belief. Yet Woolf offers divine possibility for her readers' intentionality, writing *etsi Deus daretur*. The next chapter considers Marilynne Robinson, who is explicitly Christian. Yet Robinson depicts characters for whom God's grace[384] is absent or elusive, writing *etsi Deus non daretur*. Woolf and Robinson share an interest in the interior life of their characters, going about the Ordinary.[385]

One point of comparison between Woolf and Robinson is how each treats the Ordinary vis-a-vis transcendence. For Robinson, the Ordinary contains an excess of meaning due *both* to the limits of human cognition, *and* to the superabundance of divine grace operating in and through the world. This yields two modes of thinking of transcendence. The first mode is anthropological and available to the atheist: 'transcendence' is that which lies beyond the light of human understanding and ability to articulate, a noumenal sense of 'more'. As crafters of essays and literature, both Woolf and Robinson recognise the power of this sense of transcendence. But Robinson also takes into account a *theological* understanding of transcendence. Instead of beginning with the limits of the human mind, the theological mode starts from the mysterious nature of divinity, and how God's ineffable presence saturates the Ordinary. In this chapter I argued that Woolf's literature betrays *implicit* and *reluctant* awareness of the divine, despite Woolf's stated rejection of belief. In the next I argue that attunement to the divine involves making God's grace – and its absence – explicit. This is what Robinson does, even when God's grace goes unnoticed by her characters. To Marilynne Robinson we now turn.

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[384] Recall that I defined grace as 'God's abiding *presence to* and *action in* creation'

[385] The Ordinary is far from 'ordinary,' as will be discussed in the following chapter. I borrow Robinson scholar Andrew Cunning's capitalization and definition of 'Ordinary' as i.e., the irreducible strangeness and meaningfulness of everyday rhythms of life.

Chapter V
Marilynne Robinson and the Subtleties of Grace

V.1 Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman

V.1.0 Introduction. Marilynne (née Summers) Robinson was born in the small town of Sandpoint, Idaho in 1943. Like Woolf she had a distant father, and spent much of her childhood with her mother Ellen and brother David. Unlike Woolf, her father was not an academic and so much of Marilynne's bookishness stemmed from her own youthful curiosity. As a child, '[r]elevance was precisely not an issue for me,' and so steeped herself in 'old and thick and hard' books that others might pass over.[386] In her dedication to *When I Was a Child I Read Books* she calls her brother her first and best teacher. As children he thought he was going to become a painter, and she would be a poet. He became a scholar of Renaissance art, and she dabbled in poetry long before turning to fiction and essays. One unpublished poem from her teen years evokes *The Raven* by Edgar Allen Poe, whom she admired:

> *Now I lie in silence fearing*
> *that some sound escape my hearing*
> *so that I might lose the pattern of the tread.*
> *My exaggerated senses*
> *make an end to all pretences*
> *of composure — and they leave me sick with dread.*[387]

Robinson jokes that it was a hackneyed poem. But even at fifteen, she was keyed into the importance of the senses, and the twin dangers of missing the world's perceptible patterns, or over-analysing what the senses gather. This theme will emerge in our treatment of her fiction in the third section of this chapter.

Marilynne Summers attended state-school secondary education sixty miles south of Sandpoint, in Coeur d'Alene. She writes warmly of her public education, which provided her with 'odds and ends – Dido pining on her flaming couch, Lewis and Clark mapping the wilderness', in addition to a robust classical education in Horace, Virgil, and Cicero.[388] Where her fictional dialogue is marked by the understatement of Hemingway, she suggests that overall, her 'style is considerably more indebted to Cicero

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[386] Robinson, "When I Was a Child I Read Books," 85.
[387] Cited in Wyatt Mason, "The Revelations of Marilynne Robinson," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/05/magazine/the-revelations-of-marilynne-robinson.html.
[388] Robinson, "When I Was a Child I Read Books," 87.

than to Hemingway.'[389] While her essays read like the former, the spare conversations in her fiction evoke the latter. Given that she has penned more essays than works of fiction, her self-appraisal stands.

After high school Robinson studied English literature at Pembroke College, the women's college later merged into Brown University. She focused heavily on 19th-century American literature, which is treated in her corpus of essays. After graduation in 1966, she returned to the Pacific Northwest where she married, had two sons, and pursued a doctorate at the University of Washington. Robinson, like Woolf before her, is a consummate contrarian who eschews received opinions. With Ciceronian flourish, her collected essays engage in forceful disputation of 'settled' ideas. Despite her progressive politics, Robinson criticizes feminist scholars and rejects the secularizing impulses of fellow academics. She was sued by Greenpeace, despite her vigorous defence of ocean preservation in *Mother Country* (1989). There is, for Robinson, no unalloyed ally or enemy: she combats both the reductive materialism of scientism, and voices of Christian revanchism that find only cause for war with contemporary culture. She rehabilitates figures consigned to the 'naughty list' of history: puritans and pilgrims, Oliver Cromwell and John Calvin, to name just a few. Fascinating though they are, the primary focus of this thesis is not her essays, interviews, or lectures, apart from those that help us understand her project as a writer of fiction that wrestles with religious (un)belief. This chapter focuses on her later fiction, notably on hold for 24 years: the Pulitzer prize-winning *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008), *Lila* (2014), and *Jack* (2020). This 'quartet' I term GHLJ for ease. Before getting into an analysis of her authorial project and fiction, let us turn to an overview of this chapter.

V.1.1 A review of Robinson scholarship and chapter overview. Given that Robinson is (as of December 2022) alive and her corpus not definitively closed, there are attendant risks of writing on her. While there are dozens of articles and interviews that continue to be written, there are few book-length scholarly treatments of Robinson, though four come to mind: Alex Engebretson's *Understanding Marilynne Robinson* (2017), Timothy Larsen's edited volume *Balm in Gilead: A Theological Dialogue with Marilynne Robinson* (2019), Andrew Cunning's theological analysis and interview *Marilynne Robinson, Theologian of the Ordinary* (2021) and Laura Tanner's literary

[389] Robinson, 87.

treatment, *The Elusive Everyday in the Fiction of Marilynne Robinson* (2021). I refer to these secondary scholarly texts periodically, all of which generally praise Robinson's style, content, and overall project. Many interviews, including Andrew Cunning's, prove helpful in understanding her self-understood project.

Robinson's *Housekeeping* and her short stories are worthy of treatment, but do not reflect the Calvin-inflected theological vision of her later work.[390] Given the limits of space, this chapter focuses primarily on her latter-day fiction. Prior to the 2020 arrival of *Jack,* scholars and fans alike often referred to the first three books as the '*Gilead* Trilogy,' as if they were three sequential narratives of the same fictional characters. Aside from Tanner (2021), earlier scholarship was unable to treat *Jack*, and so in this chapter I aim to make an original contribution to Woolf scholarship by treating *Jack* in greater depth than the earlier three. I argue that the first three instalments (GHL) are three perspectival accounts of a roughly single set of events, each told from a different character's perspective. In multiple interviews, Robinson dismissed the possibility of focusing a novel around Jack Boughton, on the grounds that he was too inscrutable to treat at the centre of a novel. Despite her misgivings, *Jack* centres entirely on the mind and misgivings of Jack; it thereby entirely decentres the narrative from sleepy Gilead to racially segregated St Louis, Chicago, and Memphis, offering a definitive "outsiders" take on the trilogy's events.

While Robinson enjoys near universal acclamation, one notable critical voice is Jessica Hooten Wilson, whose 2019 essay, 'Pushing Back Against Marilynne Robinson's Theology', I refute throughout this chapter. By way of introducing the theological analysis of this chapter, I offer one example where Hooten Wilson and I disagree in interpretating Robinson's treatment of grace. According to Hooten Wilson,

> *For Robinson, grace is free for all, found everywhere, and in everything*. This grace sounds wonderful, but it ignores the problem of evil. I know that Robinson prefers to highlight the goodness in creation and is frustrated by dark writers who[m] she considers misanthropic. However, writers who acknowledge darkness and evil represent reality as it is, not how we wish it to be. *A world that glimmers and shines, as it does in Robinson's novel, paints over the ugly, but by doing so, marginalizes injustice*.[391]

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[390] For a treatment of *Housekeeping* in relationship to the then-trilogy of *GHL* see, Joseph E. Simmons, "*Via Literaria*: Marilynne Robinson's Theology Through a Literary Imagination" (Boston College, 2017), http://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:108075.

[391] Jessica Hooten Wilson, "Pushing Back Against Marilynne Robinson's Theology," *Church Life Journal*, May 13, 2019, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/pushing-back-against-marilynne-robinsons-theology-2/. *Emphasis added.*

This chapter argues that Hooten Wilson misconstrues Robinson's treatment both of grace and injustice. While Robinson does admit disliking the fiction of Flannery O'Connor, Robinson does not herself shy away from darkness and evil.[392] All does not glimmer and shine in her novels; the muted history of *racial* injustice is one issue in particular that Robinson deftly treats in *Jack*. Hooten Wilson admits, 'I feel somewhat embarrassed to admit that I could not finish *Home*, and I jumped between scenes of *Lila* on my audiobook.'[393] Hooten Wilson's error as critic is, ironically, akin to what she accuses Robinson of doing as writer: 'painting over the ugly' and thus missing the dark realities which Robinson subtly, though lucidly, treats in fiction.

In fairness to Hooten Wilson, she wrote her critique before *Jack* was published. Yet this chapter reveals that a cluster of unsavoury issues is addressed *throughout* GHLJ. What I hint at in this chapter, and develop in chapter six, is that reading each element of Robinson's quartet cultivates intersubjective empathy for the reader of her fiction. Robinson draws on Calvin's interest in spiritual attention, and the fact that no one of us can take in the whole of reality. Hence she offers a plurality of characters' intentionalities, with competing sense impressions and interpretations of the same states of affairs. Such states of affairs overlap, but each volume emphasizes different elements. These include mortality and religious doubt (*Gilead*), family trauma and despair (*Home*), precarity and prostitution (*Lila*), and suicide ideation and racial injustice (*Jack*).

V.1.2 The *Gilead* Quartet. By way of overview, the GHLJ quartet I analyse in the final section can be summarized here:

1. ***Gilead*** (2004) is a first-person epistolary novel, written by pastor John Ames to his young son Robbie. In Ames' vision, all is gift and grace, despite doubts and uncertainties of his health and future. The natural world and human relationships are charged with the grandeur of God. He recounts memories of his young wife Lila, his lifelong friend Reverend Robert Boughton, and his troubled namesake Jack, who is Boughton's wayward son.

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[392] See, e.g., Robinson's interview with Scott Hoezee: 'For some reason it is not conventional for serious fiction to treat religious thought respectfully – the influence of Flannery O'Connor has been particularly destructive, I think, though she is considered a religious writer, and she considered herself one.'
Scott Hoezee, "A World of Beautiful Souls: An Interview with Marilynne Robinson," *Reformed Journal*, May 16, 2005, https://reformedjournal.com/a-world-of-beautiful-souls-an-interview-with-marilynne-robinson/.

[393] Wilson, "Pushing Back Against Marilynne Robinson's Theology."

2. ***Home*** (2008) is written in the third-person limited, from the perspective of Glory Boughton, the unmarried daughter of Reverend Boughton. Boughton is aging and unwell, and Glory returns to the haunts of her childhood home along with her prodigal brother Jack. She notes that the 'furniture and the damage done to it in the course of the old robust domestic life were all still there. And the old books,'[394] perhaps nodding to the first instalment, *Gilead.*
3. ***Lila*** (2014) in the third-person limited voice recounts the uneven flashbacks of Lila, the shame-ridden woman from nowhere, who turns up in Gilead and stumbles into the care of the older minister John Ames. She is fickle and unsure of herself; one minute she is baptised and the next she attempts to wash it off. Her pain cuts deep, and her recollection of events – like her interpretation of Scripture –contrasts to Ames's favourable account in *Gilead.*
4. ***Jack*** (2020) recounts in third-person limited the star-crossed love of Jack Boughton and Della Miles. The first quarter of this instalment takes place in Bellefontaine, a sprawling antebellum cemetery in St. Louis. We amble slowly with Jack and his would-be wife Della, eavesdropping on their conversation under cover of darkness. At daybreak the pair emerges from the cemetery like Adam and Eve, sloughing off the anonymizing bliss that night affords. They must face the dulling shame reserved for interracial romance in 1950s America, a motif that has played quietly at the margins of the *Gilead* series until now.

Before this theological engagement, however, it is helpful to consider what Robinson understands her fiction-writing project, and what has influenced her along the way. As with chapter on Virginia Woolf, I consider Robinson as a literary critic, a writer, and a reader herself.

V.2 Robinson the Critic, Writer & Reader

V.2.1 Consciousness, American religion, and modernism. Like Virginia Woolf, Robinson elevates human consciousness as a channel of religious revelation. Robinson draws upon Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which she quotes approvingly: 'the real and permanent grandeur of these [United] States must be their religion,/ Otherwise there is just no real and permanent grandeur, /(nor character nor life worthy

[394] Marilynne Robinson, *Home* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 58.

the name without religion…'.[395] Yet this same Whitman continues, 'All religion…falls into niches and corners/ before the procession of souls along/ the grand roads of the universe.' Robinson highlights the tension of religious belief in Whitman, Emerson, Melville, and Dickinson, as well as William James and Wallace Stevens. In their school of American religiosity, she writes,

> *creeds fall away and consciousness has the character of revelation.* To identify sacred mystery with every individual experience, every life, giving the word its largest sense… is a vision that is wholly religious though by no means sectarian, wholly realist in acknowledging the great truth of the centrality of human consciousness.'[396]

Nowhere does Robinson advert to having read Woolf, but her description of this strain of religious expression ("revelation-through-individual-consciousness") captures Woolf's intrepid spirit. But Robinson locates the origins of consciousness and authenticity decades before, and half a world away from, Woolf's upper-class English upbringing.[397]

Robinson's distaste for literary modernism – particularly the likes of ex-patriots T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound – comes through in a *New York Times* essay, 'Writers and the Nostalgic Fallacy'. She challenges what she describes as the nostalgia of modernist writers, where everything before some arbitrary "catastrophe" was a prelapsarian, halcyon bliss; and everything since has been alienation. 'European modernism,' for example, 'sees the rise of democratic impulses as the trampling of culture under the feet of barbarians. We Americans, being modern and democratic, are conspicuous among the barbarians in this version of events, and our works and ways are a single vast barbarism.'[398] One detects Robinson's irritation that American thought should be so roundly dismissed. What is more she rejects the idea that modernist writers 'discovered' the difficulty of human consciousness, as if no one beforehand was capable of critical interiority:

> The idea at the heart of modernism is that once beauty and meaning bloomed in the meadows of experience, heigh-ho… Look where you will, you will find no such dewy meadows in this world. Therefore, everything has somehow changed disastrously. *Consciousness is a nuisance, a fright, a disappointment – this is something new under the sun, the 'modern' condition. A premodern consciousness was, presumably, as sound and shapely as a good pear.* This notion is so widely approved it hardly seems to require proof – yet, starting at Gilgamesh and reading

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[395] Marilynne Robinson, "Preface," in *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), xiii–xiv.
[396] Robinson, xiv. *Emphasis added.*
[397] No doubt Woolf would bristle at the suggestion that this is an American innovation (!).
[398] Marilynne Robinson, "Writers and the Nostalgic Fallacy," *The New York Times*, October 13, 1985, sec. 7.

> forward, I find no evidence that consciousness has ever been a comfortable experience.[399]

For Robinson, modernists' 'nostalgic fallacy' posits a foregone idyll against which the democratizing tendency is judged wanting. The pointed critique she levels at Eliot may, by extension, challenge Woolf's confident modernist pronouncement that 'the world' – by which she meant England – forever changed on or around 1910 (see **IV.1.1**). Though Eliot and Woolf clearly differed in theological conclusions, they shared a confidence that the world-weary modernist writer was uniquely poised to capture characters' consciousness, like cultural seismologists detecting tectonic shifts beneath them. Where Eliot prescribed a return to a more robustly Christian culture, Woolf sought to kill off the "angel of the house" of Victorian Christianity and innovate through novel writing.

Against both their approaches, Robinson offers a confident American historiography: 'Emerson and Whitman, among others, solved the problem of developing a democratic aesthetic by finding the origins of poetry in the workings of consciousness, perception, and language. An elegant solution,' which predated literary modernism by a century.[400] Here as elsewhere, Robinson the critic unsettles historiographies by investigating 'old books' that demonstrate earlier origins than settled accounts recognise. Her account of 19th-century American religion indirectly refutes Woolf's confidence of the originality of the early 20th-century European modernist project. For Robinson but not Woolf, an aesthetics of consciousness is compatible with Christian belief because *God's grace* underpins the experience of the ordinary.

V.2.2 Robinson on authorial intentionality. Like Woolf, Robinson suggests that fiction is a prime medium for recording human consciousness. Consistent with the Husserlian authorial intentionality I developed earlier, Robinson explains her process of writing fiction:

> For me, at least, writing consists very largely of exploring intuition. A character is really the *sense of a character*, embodied, attired, and given voice as he or she seems to require. Where does this creature come from? *From watching*, I suppose. *From reading emotional significance in gestures and inflections*, as we all do all the time. These moments of intuitive recognition float free from their particular occasions and recombine themselves into nonexistent people the writer, and if all goes well, the reader feel they know.'[401]

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[399] Robinson.
[400] Robinson.
[401] Marilynne Robinson, "Freedom of Thought," in *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 6. *Emphasis added.*

Like Woolf's self-articulated intentionality, Robinson the fiction writer watches – i.e., *intends* – human behaviours in the extramental world, and 'recombines' these occasions artistically to generate characters ('nonexistent people') whom she (and subsequently her reader) recognises as veridical, *as if* extramental objects and states of affairs. Furthermore, Robinson employs fiction as her imaginative attempt at recording the *intentionality of characters within a text*, much like Woolf's author-observer on the train observing 'Minnie Marsh':

> When I write fiction, I suppose my attempt is to *simulate the integrative work of a mind perceiving and reflecting*, drawing upon culture, memory, conscience, belief or assumption, circumstance, fear, and desire – *a mind shaping the moment of experience and response and then reshaping them both as narrative*, holding one thought against another for the effect of affinity or contrast, evaluating and rationalizing, feeling compassion, taking offense. These things do happen simultaneously, after all.[402]

The creation of fictional characters, for Robinson, is not merely recounting their outward activities, but creating intentional subjects who are conscious of their place in their (fictive) life-world: '[T]here is that mysterious thing the cognitive scientists call self-awareness, the human ability to consider and appraise one's own thoughts. *I suspect this self-awareness is what they used to call the soul*.'[403] That this appears in an essay entitled 'Freedom of Thought' indicates that the creator-author of fiction seeks to imbue her characters with free will of the intellect, or what feels very much like it from within the text-world. In a conversation with Rowan Williams entitled 'Faith in the Modern World', Robinson was asked about writing the interior consciousness of an atheist with a 'thin cosmological vision'. She replied, 'I don't use the word "atheist" loosely, I think people say "I am an atheist" when they mean, "I have not reached conclusions," you know?'[404] In GHLJ her characters wrestle with religious belief as well as doubt, *etsi Deus (non) daretur*, without reaching easy conclusions.

V.2.3 Self-consciousness and theological categories. That Robinson associates this self-conscious free will with the human soul pushes into a *theological* register of explanation, different to Husserl's 'ego-subject' interacting with the extramental world. Much of Robinson's talk of creating fictional souls includes having to think about the

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[402] Robinson, 7.
[403] Robinson, 8. *Emphasis added.*
[404] Andrew Marr, "BBC Radio 4: Faith in the Modern World," accessed September 28, 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000my6r.

embodiedness of her characters as locus of their self-awareness. Her essay 'When I Was a Child' compares writing abstract essays with creating characters of fiction:

> as a fiction writer I do have to deal with the nuts and bolts of temporal reality — from time to time and character has to walk through the door and close it behind him, the creatures of imagination have to eat and sleep, as all other creatures do. I would have been a poet if I could, to have avoided this obligation to simulate the hourliness and dailiness of human life.[405]

For Robinson, these embodied, self-consciousness souls come to recognise themselves in the 'hourliness and dailiness of human life'. Andrew Cunning (2021) argues that the ordinariness of life in Robinson's fiction is precisely where divine grace is revealed; hence the titled that Robinson is the 'Theologian of the Ordinary'. Theological essays cannot, for Robinson, map out the phenomenon of grace in daily life. Where philosophical or theological language falters, the arts *gesture towards* this meaning; as she describes it, 'Art is the vocabulary beyond vocabulary.'[406] Cunning describes Robinson's fiction as a commitment to art as the vocabulary of existence, which is the 'means of rendering the excess of experience intelligible.'[407]

Given the difficulty of unpicking the transcendent from the immanent, or the sacramental from the quotidian, Robinson refuses to draw a line between the sacred and secular, or between the religious and irreligious. As Cunning aptly describes her fiction, 'the interface between *experience* and *religious consciousness* really is not an interface at all, but a symbiotic relationship of *mutual dependence, a closed loop that has no discernible beginning or end*.'[408] Throughout the following section of this chapter, I assess Robinson's understanding of nature and grace as a rebuttal to Hooten Wilson's critical assessment. I highlight the necessity of *concrete particularity* for recognising, and attuning to, divine grace's subtle operations in space and time. This, I argue, is Robinson's way of demonstrating William Lynch's conception of the Christian imagination: one cannot leap to the infinite without engaging concrete time, space, and place. To the GHLJ quartet we now turn.

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[405] Robinson, "When I Was a Child I Read Books," 20.
[406] Andrew Cunning, *Marilynne Robinson, Theologian of the Ordinary* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), chap. 5.
[407] Cunning, 9.
[408] Cunning, 10-11. *Emphasis added.* Similarly in his book *Anatheism*, Richard Kearney argues that there belongs a dash between sacred-secular. Kearney calls this a 'matter of reciprocal interdependency rather than one-dimensional conflation' Kearney, *Anatheism*, 141.

V.3 Intersubjectivity and the *Gilead* Quartet

V.3.1 *Gilead*. *Gilead* introduces John Ames, an aging Congregationalist minister in 1956, who is writing a series of letters to his young son Robbie. Like Robinson's debut novel *Housekeeping* (1980), the story is elegantly written, marked by impressionistic understatement. The town's name Gilead – mentioned in Genesis 31:25, comes from Hebrew *gal* (heap or mound [of stones]) and *'êd* (witness, testimony), revealing the capacity of even a spare, rocky landscape to give testimony. As critic Lila Meyer succinctly puts it, '[t]here's space in Gilead, and there's space between Robinson's words and sentences. You can imagine them spoken slowly.'[409] Ames' tableaux of the daily life of a minister and father in a small fictional Iowa town reveal a beauty embedded *within* creation. The vignettes cycle through Ames' childhood recollections of his father and grandfather; encounters of unexpected grace in the sacraments; reflections on philosophy and religion from his days of study and arguments with both his highly educated brother Edward and his godson Jack Boughton.

Gilead's sometimes-joyful, often-melancholic musings recall another stolid cleric, M. le curé de Ambricourt in George Bernanos's *The Diary of a Country Priest*. Ames specifically mentions enjoying that novel: 'I felt a lot of sympathy for the fellow, but Boughton said, "It was the drink…the Lord simply needed someone more suitable to fill that position."'[410] Unlike Boughton, Ames is wary of guessing why God might 'give' the priest stomach cancer. Rather Ames is drawn to how the disconsolate priest navigates questions of faith, meaning, and what mark he will leave in his small corner of the world, given his circumstances. M. le curé's diary reveals authentic doubts and periodic despair of even the believer, *etsi Deus non daretur*. Ames admits 'reading that book all night by the radio till every station went off, and still reading when the daylight came.'[411] Reverend John Ames, despite his belief, resonates with the doubts and fear of death of a fellow clergyman. *Gilead* reads like an American homage to Bernanos's French country priest.

Between Robinson's first novel *Housekeeping* and *Gilead* 24 years later, Robinson familiarized herself with Calvin's *Christian Institutes*. No surprise then that the latter work considers the inner life of a Christian preacher, both explicitly and

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[409] Lily Meyer, "Literary Enemies: Marilynne Robinson vs. Flannery O'Connor," *Ploughshares at Emerson College* (blog), June 2015, https://blog.pshares.org/literary-enemies-marilynne-robinson-vs-flannery-oconnor/.
[410] Robinson, *Gilead,* 46.
[411] Ibid., 46.

favourably. Ames takes the phenomenal world as a starting point for considering the operations of divine grace. He offers a modest if indeterminate phenomenology of the sacraments:

> There is a reality in blessing, which I take baptism to be, primarily. *It doesn't enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it, and there is a power in that.* I have felt it pass through me, so to speak. The sensation is of really knowing a creature, I mean really feeling its mysterious life and your own mysterious life at the same time.[412]

The power of blessing lies not in a supernatural *bestowal* of sacredness; a non-believer might dismiss this as a vestige of enchanted superstition. Rather Ames regularly describes the beauty of creation as pointing to God's hidden purpose. He shares a love of the elements of nature with materialist Ludwig Feuerbach, who (minimally) recognised the symbolic power of water used for baptism. But Ames's appreciation of nature is not of the materialist sort: '[Feuerbach] is about as good on the joyful aspects of religion as anybody, and he loves the world. Of course he thinks religion could stand out of the way and let joy exist pure and undisguised. That is his one error, and it is significant.'[413] What is his error? Ames analogizes Feuerbach's error by comparing him to the family cat Soapy. Just as Soapy makes 'feline appraisals' that can never fully grasp the workings of the human mind, so Feuerbach mistakenly presumes human appraisals of reality are suitable adequations of reality: 'The inadequacy of [such] concepts would have nothing to do with the reality of the situation.'[414] Ames considers Feuerbach's (and Soapy's) error to be a demonstration of the 'awkwardness of language', rather than a substantial objection to religious claims as such. Ames expands on this appraisal of Feuerbach by way of vignette:

> There was a young couple strolling along half a block ahead of me. The sun had come up brilliantly after a heavy rain, and the trees were glistening and very wet. On some impulse, plain exuberance, I suppose, the fellow jumped up and caught hold of a branch, and a storm of luminous water came pouring down on the two of them, and they laughed and took off running…it is easy to believe in such moments that water was made primarily for blessing and only secondarily for growing vegetables and doing the wash.[415]

Ames offers didactic codas to his artistic impressions of beauty in the physical world. A Christian minister like Ames recognises nature elements (water, etc.) not as givens, but as *gifts* from God that elevate human experience. Feuerbach's materialism inhibits a more capacious appraisal of the depth and beauty of reality. After the water and branch

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[412] Robinson, *Gilead*, 23. Emphasis added.
[413] Robinson, *Gilead*, 24.
[414] Robinson, *Gilead*, 143.
[415] Robinson, *Gilead*, 27-28.

vignette, Ames advises his son, 'I wish I had paid more attention to it…This is an interesting planet. It deserves all the attention you can give it.'[416]

But in Ames's telling, the reader's gaze does not remain on this planet. After preaching at a service about the 'gift of physical particularity and how blessing and sacrament are mediated through it,'[417] Ames finishes without letting his son partake of the bread and wine. His wife Lila takes their son up to the bread and wine after the service: '"You ought to give him some of that." You're too young, of course, but she was completely right. Body of Christ, broken for you. Blood of Christ, shed for you. Your solemn and beautiful child face lifted up to receive these mysteries at my hands.'[418] Ames moves from the image of a father feeding his son, to elucidating the Christian belief to which it points: 'They are the most wonderful mystery, body and blood. It was an experience I might have missed. Now I only fear I will not have time enough to fully enjoy the thought of it.'[419] Robinson employs such vignettes – where even the *religious* leader is slow to see the sacred embedded in ordinary bread and wine – as a challenge to a false dichotomy of transcendence *versus* immanence. Robinson makes a case that greater theological weight be given to the inklings of religious experience that one has in daily life, amidst the ordinary.

Later in *Gilead*, Ames warns of two insidious notions of Christianity in the modern world. The first is that religion and religious experience are illusions (Feuerbach and Freud, et al.). The other insidious notion, he writes, 'is that religion itself is real, but *your* belief that *you* participate in it is an illusion. I think the second of these is more insidious, because it is religious experience above all that authenticates religion for the purposes of the individual believer.'[420] Ames directly addresses his son Robbie, and through him, the reader: the vignettes in *Gilead* aid as a spiritual guide for training the intentionality of its readers to attend to their own experiences.

V.3.2 Immanence, transcendence, and the limits of imagination. In an interview Robinson notes that 'We have no way to make an account of [the natural world] except on its terms, yet at the same time it continually surprises us, continually

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[416] Robinson, *Gilead*, 28.
[417] Robinson, *Gilead*, 69.
[418] Ibid., 69-70.
[419] *Gilead*, 70.
[420] Robinson, *Gilead*, 145. Emphasis original.

surprises us, continually seems to present itself as alien.'[421] John Ames' grandfather and father designate the extremes to be avoided in pursuing a Christian vision of the natural world. Ames describes his grandfather, a preacher, as having a purely spiritual encounter with God, with no reference to grace at work in the created world. Having lost an eye in the civil war, Ames' grandfather viewed religious commitment in stark terms: 'He lacked patience for anything but the plainest interpretations of the starkest commandments.'[422] Ames explains how his grandfather's half-blindness affected his view of others: 'Normally speaking, it seems to me, a gaze, even a stare, is diffused a little when there are two eyes involved. He could make me feel as though he had poked me with a stick, just by looking at me.'[423] His monocular approach left him keenly aware of the transcendent alone. Afire with the old certainties of faith, Ames' grandfather lived life 'at a dead run,' without much time for savouring creation around him: 'I believe that the old man did indeed have far too narrow an idea of what a vision might be. He may, so to speak, have been too dazzled by the great light of his experience to realize that an impressive sun shines on us all. Perhaps that is the one thing I wish to tell you.'[424] The other extreme is Ames' preacher father, whose overly rational reading of his experiences wore down his transcendent faith commitment. When Ames' father takes young John Ames to the bare gravesite of his grandfather in Kansas, young Ames marvels at the equipoised beauty around him:

> I saw…a full moon rising just as the sun was going down. Each of them was standing on its edge, with the most wonderful light between them. It seemed as if you could touch it, as if there were palpable currents of light passing back and forth, or as if there were great taut skeins of light suspended between them."[425]

Yet Ames' father dispels any wisp of transcendence or grace at work:

'You know, everybody in Kansas saw the same thing we saw.' At the time (remember I was twelve) I took him to mean the entire state was a witness to our miracle. I thought that whole state could vouch for the particular blessing my father had brought down by praying there at his father's grave, or the glory that my grandfather had somehow emanated out of his parched repose. Later I realized my father would have

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[421] Cunning, *Marilynne Robinson, Theologian of the Ordinary*, chap. 5.
[422] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 31.
[423] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 31.
[424] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 91.
[425] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 14.

meant that the sun and moon aligned themselves as they did with no special reference to the two of us.[426]

Ames' father is likewise 'half blind,' with the other eye closed to the layers of transcendent explanation. Where a reductive scientism would give a non-purposive, physical account of the gravesite scene (à la Feuerbach), Robinson is suggesting that a *theological* explanation need not compete with a *scientific* explanation. Robinson's sacramental imagination draws on material signs, such as a sun and moon equipoised on the horizon. The young Ames intended this scene theologically ('a great taut skein of light' presiding over their graveside prayer), as a sacred sign, pointing to a divine reality that was at once beyond the signs, and mysteriously, irreducibly borne by them.

Such a description is consistent with Husserl's phenomenology of intentionality, wherein what is manifested is always-already *meaning-full* to the subject. What appears, and what does not – reveals the intentional subject's *relationship of attention* with what is intended. Yet early Husserl cannot easily account for *multiple* imagining subjects. Later-Husserl offers a more capacious account for the different intentional subjects formulating noematic meaning*s*: Ames describes something of a phenomenological reduction, noting that he and his father have formulated different meanings of this act of intending the sun-moon equipoise. That two characters intend the same extramental state of affairs, and can weigh their divergent *noematic Sinne*, reveals (minimally) their joint attention, their intersubjectivity. A Husserlian reading of this passage corrects the 'monocular' limits of each of Ames' forebears, who each generate only a *partial perception* of a state of affairs and confuse it for the totality. A phenomenological reflection on the *shared attention* of intersubjectivity (introduced in the next chapter) helps correct the partial intentionality of any one subject. This is consistent with Calvin's theological anthropology: vision is a key sense, and our human vision is blinkered. In an essay on the reliability of perception, Robinson writes: 'We are poor observers, rarely seeing more than we intend to see…our expectations are received, therefore static, which makes it certain that they will be like nothing in reality.'[427]

The resulting dialectical tension of *Gilead*, then, is Ames' attempt to navigate a path that avoids the poles of (what Lynch would describe as) a detached transcendence or a flattened immanence. Robinson employs Ames' grandfather and father as examples

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[426] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 48.
[427] In the essay 'The American Scholar Now' in Marilynne Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 91.

of how intending subjects only ever have a partial vision of the whole of reality. Ames challenges his son (and Robinson her readers) to probe the false bottom of this material world, considering how the physical universe's operations resonate with the human subject's intuitions of a deeper force – grace – at work. With the power of a boy's imagination, something as mundane as a sun setting and moon rising on the horizon challenges readers to consider the vibrancy – or deficiency – of their own imagination.

V.3.3 *Home*. Where *Gilead* tells the GHLJ story from the perspective of a caring Father writing about creation, *Home* (and later *Jack*) consider the parabolic wanderings of a Son and imagines its repercussions; we read not just the father and older envious brother, but a constellation of siblings and townsfolk who know too well Jack's wiles. Robinson is not simply recasting the Biblical story, but slowly twisting it like a cube for the reader to make impressions of all facets. *Home* imagines the ongoing strains of love after the wayward child has been welcomed home. Jack had good reason to stay away, and the beneficent father is not as saintly as Ames portrayed him in *Gilead*. Watching TV with Jack, Boughton criticizes the African-Americans as they are being firehosed in the streets for being so disruptive in demanding civil rights. He shows no concern that Jack himself is married to a black woman. Boughton overlooks his daughter as well; Glory, who has been the faithful caretaker of both Robert and Jack, does not factor into her father's attention. Amy-Jill Levine observes that the lost child in the parable is *not* the wandering son, but the overlooked dutiful one whom no one thought to invite to the family feast: 'Children, unlike sheep and coins, have long memories, emotional needs, and a voice of their own.'[428] *Home* gives voice to this dutiful sibling, and with a refreshing change from older brother to younger sister; it is no small thing that the novel is told from Glory's third-person limited perspective.

How might the Prodigal Son story continue in time from this altered perspective? *Home* unfolds the strains of the father-son relationship, long after the fattened calf has been eaten. Jack struggles to receive the gratuitous love offered by Glory, which the Reverend takes as ingratitude: 'You ought to let the Lord decide what you deserve. You think about that too much, what you deserve. I believe that is part of the problem… nobody deserves anything, good or bad. It's all grace. If you accepted that, you might

[428] Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (HarperOne, 2014), 68.

be able to relax a little.'[429] Jack replies, 'Somehow I never felt that grace was intended for me, particularly,' which leads his father to rebuke him once again. Through careful dialogue, Robinson ruminates on the gratuitous nature of grace, the elusiveness of recognising it, and the subtleties of resistance to receiving grace as gift.

Aside from this tension with his father, Jack feels rejected by Della's returned letters, pointed sermons from John Ames, and his inability to get on his own feet. The novel comes to a head when Jack gets drunk in the garage, stuffs an oily rag in the tail pipe of the DeSoto he repaired, and passes out. He cannot even succeed at suicide, and Glory intervenes again by cleaning him up without their father knowing. Jack reckons that coming to the family home was a mistake and plans his departure from Gilead. Glory tries to console him, as she scrubs his hands of grease.

He ponders the redeemability of his soul, and she says she likes his soul just as it is. He demurs, and the text takes a theological turn. Glory asks him what he thinks a soul is: 'He shrugged. "On the basis of my vast learning and experience, I would say—it is what you can't get rid of. Insult, deprivation, outright violence--…[I'm] a drunk and a thief. I'm also a terrible coward. Which is one of the reasons I lie so much."'[430] In a scene reminiscent of a sacramental confessional, Jack proceeds to enumerate his venial sins to Glory. She notes that Presbyterians don't believe in venial sins, but permits his candour. Having failed to secure forgiveness from two preachers – Ames and his father – he turns to his sister for reconciliation. Jack then describes his rejection by yet a third Christian preacher, and the existential homelessness it induces in him:

> 'Reverend Miles, Della's father and my biographer, told me I was nothing but trouble. I felt the truth of that. I really am nothing…Nothing, with a body. I create a kind of displacement around myself as I pass through the world, which can fairly be called trouble. This is mystery, I believe. It's why I keep to myself. When I can. Ah. And now the tears.'[431]

Here we see the depth of his alienation from family, but also from a Christian vision that declares all things good, except Jack *etsi Deus non daretur*. Jack's displacement is not just the prodigality of an immature child in a distant country.[432] Jack's *khōra makra* is a felt nothingness (*khōra*) that seems to taint all it touches. In a perverse twist, he chooses a distance (*makra*) in order to preserve the goodness of those he loves. *Home* (and later *Jack*) imaginatively plunges into the spatio-temporal psychical space around and beneath

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[429] Robinson, *Home*, 271.
[430] Robinson, 288.
[431] Robinson, 288–89.
[432] cf. Luke 15:13, *eis khōran makran*.

the surface of a familiar parable, *Home*'s principal characters – Glory, Jack, and Reverend Boughton – parabolically depart and return from kinship and mutual understanding. We wander with these characters through their missteps, mis-speakings, mistakes, and mis-takes. Moments of forgiveness are undone by the return of destructive habits. In the end, Jack packs his suitcase to leave. He goes to say farewell to his father, whose health and mind are fading:

> 'I have to go now. I wanted to say goodbye.' He went to his father and held out his hand.
>
> The old man drew his own hand into his lap and turned away. 'Tired of it!' he said.
>
> Jack nodded. 'Me, too. Bone tired.' He looked at his father a minute longer, then bent and kissed his brow. He came back into the kitchen [where Glory was] and picked up his suitcase.
>
> 'So long, kiddo.' He wiped a tear from her cheek with the ball of his thumb…
>
> She went to the porch to watch him walk away down the road. He was too thin and his clothes were weary, weary. There was nothing of youth about him, only the transient vigor of a man acting on a decision he refused to reconsider or regret… A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as one from whom men hide their face. Ah, Jack.[433]

Shortly after Jack disappears, the trusty doctor-son Teddy arrives and Boughton greets him with a stroke of his face, 'You told me goodbye, but I knew you couldn't leave.' A mistaken identity leads Boughton to the tragic misprision that Jack (not Teddy) has returned, because Father Knows Best. And finally, two days after Jack departed, Della shows up with their mixed-raced son, whom they have named Robert after Boughton *père*. Mother and son are eager to make a home with Jack in his native place, but tragically, he has wandered off again. Here again, *destinerrance* emerges: roaming as destiny, an error in destination.

Readers of this text are likely gutted by Jack's missed opportunity for resolution; a 325-page movement that ends on an unresolved minor chord. Glory takes care of their fading father, with promise of inheriting the homestead. She wonders, perhaps, whether Jack's son Robert might one day return – a deferral of hope from father to son, once again. And so *Home* ends with the same open-ended hope of the parable. It 'leaves us with father and [child] in the field. The challenge continues.'[434]

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[433] Robinson, *Home*, 317–18.
[434] Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 49.

In the Cunning interview, Robinson notes that 'what I've been interested in doing in both *Home* and *Lila* is complicating the sense of what the religious is.'[435] The wanderings of Jack raise questions of whether one can claim any earthly place as home, let alone a heavenly home. They also challenge Christian readers to consider the imaginative continuation of the story of the Prodigal Son, which may not end as well as once hoped. But in both *Gilead* and *Home*, we have never set foot outside the environs of Gilead. In *Lila*, Robinson takes us beyond the geographic and religious confines of the town, and gives us a view from the theological margins: a non-baptised, kidnapped woman forced into prostitution by the vagaries of life. We wander around theological terrain with Lila, where she feels the pulls of belief and unbelief as she makes her way from her own distant country into the heart of Gilead.

V.3.4 *Lila*. Charles Taylor's *Secular Age* speaks of the [William] 'Jamesian open space,' wherein the modern individual 'can feel the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief,' to an openness to the possibility of transcendence beyond, or a closed ontological reading of human experience.[436] My thesis has argued that writers such as Woolf and Robinson lead readers' intentional attention to this open space in order to weigh the possibility of God's non-existence *etsi Deus non daretur*.[437] This concept challenges readers of faith – or no faith — to consider how the divine, if there be a God, communicates to the individual. In this section, I will argue that *Lila* is a literary exploration of the vulnerability of venturing into that open space, from the margins of belonging.

Lila's faith comes adventitiously, as she notices surprising resonances between her life and uncanny stories from Scripture. Her husband John Ames' attempts to explain Christianity do little to satisfy her curiosity; the appeal of faith emerges in spite of his ministrations. *Lila* reads like a sustained accounting of Christian faith, hope, and love, but presented in photo negative *etsi Deus non daretur*.

Raised without any faith herself, Lila is stolen from a family she never knew. From childhood she travels in a rag-tag group of nomadic day-labourers, led by Doll and Doane. Doll and Doane rehearse familiar critiques of churches, pastors, baptism, and

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[435] Cunning, *Marilynne Robinson, Theologian of the Ordinary*, 180.
[436] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549.
[437] Recall that Richard Kearney's book *Anatheism* makes the case for a *return* to the possibility of faith again (ana-theism), after faith claims and religious institutions have proven themselves unreliable.

people of faith: they are all charlatans out to get your money, with no genuine interest in the material needs of others. Observing an aged preacher at a tent revival, Lila remarks,

> 'That old man had no idea. Let us pray, and they all did pray. Let us join in hymn number no matter what, and they all sang. Why did they waste candles on daylight? Him standing there, talking about people dead who knows how long, if the stories about them were even true, and most of the people listening, or trying to listen.'[438]

She dismisses the posture of faith as 'finding comfort where there was no comfort, just an old man saying something he'd said so many times he probably didn't hear it himself.'[439] Given her unremittingly hard life, such a perspective is understandable. Readers of *Gilead* detect a foreshadowing of her future husband who sought the comfort of faith.

After happening upon Gilead, Lila is mollified by the hospitality of Reverend John Ames. She hears herself consent to both baptism and marriage, to her great surprise. Lila's wandering intentional consciousness doubts the sincerity of the commitments she has just undertaken. Immediately after her wedding reception, she and John Ames return to their new home:

She'd thought, I'll do this first and think about it afterward. Now afterward had come and she had no idea what to think. I am baptised, I am married, I am Lila Dahl, I am Lila Ames. I don't know what else I should want. Except for the shame to be gone, and it ain't.[440]

Amidst her ruminations, she sees her much older husband standing in the adjacent room, with his head bowed down. 'She thought, He sure better be praying. And then she thought, Praying looks just like grief. Like shame. Like regret.'[441] Lila is blocked by a profound shame that cannot be washed away by either morning river baths or a sacramental baptism. Yet she finds in Ames' plaintive demeanour a family resemblance to her own grief. In Lila's mind, a posture of prayer can encompass – perhaps mask – grief, shame, and regret.

V.3.5 Addressing Robinson's critics. In *Books & Culture*, the literary reviews arm of the magazine Christianity Today, Linda McCollough Moore takes issue with the apparent permissiveness of the God found in *Lila*: everyone is saved, and no one with a

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[438] Marilynne Robinson, *Lila* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 74.
[439] Robinson, 74.
[440] Robinson, 74.
[441] Robinson, 94–95.

hard life can be held responsible for sins in this life. Moore concludes, '[b]ut this religion that she writes of with such love, appealing though it be, is in the end, I am afraid, a gospel thin, exiguous, a story slight and wanting, and Flannery isn't here to say so.'[442] Presumably Moore is invoking the same Flannery who wrote the short story 'Revelation', wherein a self-assured Christian pig-farmer, Ruby Turbin, has a vision wherein all 'the white and black trash' she disparaged in this life were ascending to heaven before 'good country people' like herself: 'She could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away.'[443] In response to Moore, I argue that the plot of *Lila* imaginatively fleshes out the last-shall-be-first characters which Flannery O'Connor (and Matthew 20:16) only hint at. Moore invokes O'Connor's more demanding theology, while ironically embodying the 'Christian' irritation of righteous Ruby Turbin.

A related but distinct criticism comes from theologian Jessica Hooten Wilson who argued that Robinson gives insufficient account of the cross and Resurrection in her theological vision.[444] As mentioned in this chapter's overview, Hooten Wilson's argument is that *Gilead* is all sunshine and wistful nostalgia, with no shadows or despair, and thus no need for Christ's atonement of human sin. Had she finished *Lila* – which Hooten Wilson admits not getting through – she may well have encountered Robinson's discussion of sin, hell, and life post-Resurrection.

Shortly after Ames' and Lila's marriage, Lila is walking down a road and imagines running into Doll, the deceased woman who kidnapped and raised her. With echoes of post-Resurrection Jesus, Lila imagines Doll embracing her on the road: "I had to leave for a time, but I'm back now, I'm resurrected!"[445] Lila recalls how Doll kidnapped her in order to save her; Lila could only understand it now, after the fact. Lila's gratitude suddenly shifts to the stern theologizing of Boughton, who explained one afternoon that the unbaptised – folks like Doll – were not the elect who were saved in Christ. Lila wanders around the open theological space, weighing competing interpretations: 'Maybe [Doll] died with dark sins on her soul. Lila had heard the

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[442] Linda McCullough Moore, "*Lila*: A Dissenting View," *Books and Culture*, December 2014, https://www.booksandculture.com/articles/webexclusives/2014/december/lila.html.
[443] Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 508.
[444] Jessica Hooten Wilson, "Pushing Back Against Marilynne Robinson's Theology," Church Life Journal, accessed May 13, 2019, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/pushing-back-against-marilynne-robinsons-theology-2/. We will treat this in greater depth later in discussing the intertextual conversation of GHL.
[445] Robinson, *Lila*, 96.

preachers talk that way. Or maybe the…crime was just some desperate kindness, like stealing a sickly child. Any maybe it made no difference to the Lord, one way or the other.'[446] Such wondering entertains the Christian doctrine of sin, but also the possibility that Doll kidnapping her was an act of mercy. Finally Lila wonders whether God judges human actions in the same way that God's self-appointed ministers do. Curious about Doll's eternal destiny, Lila presses her minister husband to explain hell and baptism. Ames stammers, and she is not satisfied by his vague response: 'For a preacher you ain't much at explaining things.'[447]

Throughout *Lila*, Ames is perpetually surprised by the religious incomprehension of his neophyte-wife. Her theological wondering induces him to ask questions of himself: into what worldview have I baptised my wife? What about her unbaptised adoptive family? He admits that his theological training has not prepared him to deal with her earnest questions: 'Sorry if you're disappointed. Again. But if I tried to explain I wouldn't believe what I was saying to you. That's lying isn't it? I'm probably more afraid of that than of anything else. I really don't think preachers ought to lie. Especially about religion.'[448] A noble minister, she reckons: he would sooner admit his theological limits, than delimit God's mercy. Ames takes a while to articulate his thoughts on hell. Eventually he offers that,

> thinking about hell doesn't help me live the way I should. I believe this is true for most people. And thinking that other people might go to hell just feels evil to me, like a very grave sin… Any judgment of the kind is a great presumption. And presumption is a very grave sin.'[449]

Here Ames inverts the sin of presumption; it is less about taking one's *own* righteousness for granted, and more about the risk of arrogating divine judgment to one's necessarily limited human imagination. Here Robinson winks to the reader; Lila confesses that she does not understand theology, and 'I don't think I like it. Lots of folks live and die and never worry themselves about it.'[450]

Lila's most theologically weighty act occurs once she senses that she is with child. She walks down to the river before sunrise and 'wash[es] herself in the water of death and loss and whatever else was not regeneration.'[451] She wavers between running from and staying with Ames, and her mind drifts to a childhood memory of coming upon

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[446] Robinson, 98.
[447] Robinson, 99.
[448] Robinson, 99.
[449] Robinson, 101.
[450] Robinson, 101.
[451] Robinson, 103.

a lone mother giving birth in a shack. The memory shocks her and she resolves to stay with Ames for the sake of their child. Returning to the house, Lila is afraid that unbaptizing herself might have harmed the child, so she asks Ames over breakfast whether one could wash off one's baptism:

> He smiled and said no.
> 'Even if you wanted to?'
> 'Well, that's probably about as close as you could ever come. But no. You don't have to worry about that.' She was relieved, in a way.[452]

Pace the charges of Hooten Wilson, Robinson does not *avoid* discussion of sin and atonement, as much as suggest that Christians – preachers and theologians included – ought to be cautious in delimiting God's Economy of Salvation.

One of the more arresting images in *Lila* is Robinson's treatment of the brothel in St. Louis where Lila worked for a time. What little sense of self she has is covered with rouge and the workname Rosie. She deals with the caprices of the bordello's matriarch, 'Mrs,' who withholds and bestows affection on a whim. The other prostitutes, Peg and Rita, mock Lila for being ugly. The building is filthy and dank; when the prostitutes upset Mrs, she shuts the house down and darkens its blinds. Lila prefers the dangers of the outdoors to this enclosed squalor, and 'she was beginning to think now and then about sunshine, and the smell of the air. Trees. She thought, I'm just doing that to devil myself.'[453] For sanity's sake, she sets to cleaning the brothel's kitchen and tending to the furnace that heats the house.

In the basement she enjoys solitude, but also a pre-baptismal coat of black and filthy soot. As she feeds coal into the furnace, she fantasizes filling it so much that it explodes: 'the whole damn house would burn down, probably. She could fill it up, leaving just enough room for her to crawl in after and close the door. Boom! She'd go flying, a flaming piece of her right into that girl's face, that Peg, and another into Rita's lap'.[454] She suddenly hears Doll's voice explain how she was beaten with a hot skillet by a crazy woman, breaking her cheekbone and leaving a permanent mark. Lila's vivid fantasizing of violence – let it all burn, but vengeance first – reveals Robinson's capacity for depicting imaginative hellscapes just as well as Flannery O'Connor. That such passages prove unpleasant to read only underscores their evocative power.

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[452] Robinson, 105.
[453] Robinson, 198.
[454] Robinson, 198.

V.3.6 *Jack*. In several interviews, Robinson suggested that she would never write a novel around Jack Boughton, confessing that she dare never get too close to the enigmatic character who was the disappointment of both his father and godfather. And yet Robinson's fourth instalment of the Gilead series, *Jack*, is a meditative continuation of the parable of Jack Boughton, wayward son and godson of two pastors in small-town Iowa.

The first quarter of the novel takes place in Bellefontaine, a sprawling antebellum cemetery to the north of St. Louis. We amble slowly with Jack and his would-be wife Della, eavesdropping on their conversation under cover of darkness. At first Della cannot make out Jack in the dark of night: 'I thought I recognised you. It's so dark I couldn't be sure. Looking into the dark makes it darker. Harder to see anything…' Jack responds, 'Yes. It depends where you're standing, how dark it is. It's relative. My eyes are adjusted to it. So I guess that makes light relative, doesn't it.'[455]

Darkness and light emerge early as a theme of the novel. In keeping with *Gilead* and *Home*, Robinson drops allusive clues for readers to consider on the side: Hamlet and the Prodigal Son, Paradise Lost and the Garden of Eden, Raskolnikov and the Prince of Darkness. We learn that Della has lent Jack a signed copy of an 1893 book of poetry, *Oak and Ivy*, in addition to her copy of *Hamlet*. *Oak and Ivy*, the reader is not told, is the first book of poetry by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), the first African-American writer to achieve professional success. Dunbar's gloomy poetry laments the place of Black Americans, out of sight and largely out of mind at the turn of the century.

Della and Jack spend several pages discussing the stories behind and around *Hamlet.* They interpret Hamlet's putative letter to Ophelia, read by her father Polonius to Hamlet's mother and uncle to demonstrate Polonius' trustworthiness and Hamlet's madness. Della offers, 'Remember I mentioned that there seemed to be stories behind *Hamlet*? That weren't told and weren't hidden?'[456] Stories behind stories, which are neither told nor hidden, captures the architectural backdrop of the entire novel *Jack*.

Another understated allusion comes in the passing mention of the school where Della teaches, Sumner High School. The school is celebrated for being the first high school opened for African-Americans west of the Mississippi. What is Robinson doing here? This chapter suggests that there is continuity between Robinson's project in fiction and essays: rescuing figures forgotten or overlooked by history, burnishing

[455] Marilynne Robinson, *Jack* (London: Virago Press Ltd, 2020), 10.
[456] Robinson, 43.

reputations that they might shine for the contemporary reader. Just as grace is embedded in the ordinary life events of her characters, so too interesting figures and events are embedded in history and deserving of attention. Her project is expressed in John Ames's admonition to his son: I wish I had paid more attention to it…This is an interesting planet. It deserves all the attention you can give it."[457] As we shall see, the stories hidden in *Jack* are of Black neighbourhoods and churches demolished, of anti-miscegenation laws, and contemplating suicide.

The spare dialogue of the first 75 pages is not easy reading, and at one point Jack muses, 'a night can seem endless.'[458] At daybreak the pair put their shoes on and emerge from the cemetery, 'like Adam and Eve' Jack thought, sloughing off the anonymizing bliss and protection that night affords. 'Daylight was Purgatory. It was terrible, being a thing to be looked at.'[459] They must now face the dulling shame reserved for interracial romance in 1950s America, a motif that has played quietly in the background of the *Gilead* series until now. They find resistance both from Jack's Presbyterian family and Della's established Baptist family in Memphis. He stumbles into a Black church in St. Louis, hearing every sermon as if delivered just for him. We meet the solicitous ministers and family members who want the best for Della and Jack, up to but excluding their free consent to be married. Jack plies trades and cleans up long enough to woo Della, and then spoils it again.

A plodding start in the cemetery turns out, on reflection, to be Robinson's method of slowing the reader's intentional gaze down, like a docent teaching museum-goers to linger over a work's subtleties. Jack gets a job selling shoes in a sleepy store, where his 'genuflecting' before customers at times feels like the 'cost of doing this particular business'.[460] And yet Jack entertains an alternative explanation of kneeling before another: 'he could think of it as an act of reverence, towards souls who would otherwise never enjoy even the outward sign of any such thing. His father would like that.'[461] As the prodigal father hopes for his son's return, so Jack cannot shake his respect for the Reverend Robert Boughton.

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[457] Robinson, *Gilead*, 28.
[458] Robinson, *Jack*, 66.
[459] Robinson, 76.
[460] Robinson, 83.
[461] Robinson, 83.

V.3.7 Intentional framing and Lynch's particularity in *Jack*. In her reading of *Jack*, Laura Tanner argues that Jack lives most of his days in his imagination; I sharpen this to suggest that Jack's misery stems from living in the fanciful flight from interpersonal relationships and concrete particulars. His consciousness, Tanner writes, 'co-opts the rhythms of everyday life in a form of immaterial constraint.'[462] Jack avoids responsibility and domesticity – moving around from tenement to tenement, wandering the streets at night, stealing library books and using their pages to write notes to Della. His short-term employment at the shoe shop ends when he shows up one day to find that it has gone out of business: 'a fragile strand of connection to ordinary life gone. What to do with the rest of the day. Beer, he thought.'[463] This exploration from within Jack's intentionality reveals a character not running merely from his Christian family, but from the felt pressures of finitude that William Lynch charted out (in **III.3.1**.).

Feeling doubly-damned by failure in earthly life and by the spectre of his father's theology of predestination, Jack embraces further injurious behaviours as evidence of his damnation; this Tanner succinctly calls 'a frame of reference that structures even as it damns.'[464] Recall that Lynch criticized the 'new tragedy' imaginary, wherein an unbounded human spirit is set against a limited, limiting world. *Jack,* then, emerges as a phenomenology of the 'new tragic' protagonist, told in the third person limited, i.e., limited to his intentional subjectivity. Nowhere is Jack's desire to escape the finite more evident than when he does, occasionally, entertain what Robinson elsewhere calls 'the hourliness and dailiness of human life'.[465] He chafes at keeping a job selling shoes and later, teaching dance. Early on, when Della mistakes Jack for a minister and invites him into her home, he steps into another world. Recall from above (**V.2.3)** how Robinson suggested that her goal in fiction was to depict the soul of her characters through their self-awareness in situations. In Della's house, Jack's intentionality directs the reader's:

> Taking a chair at a small table by a window, surrounded by the modest good order and general teacherliness of her apartment, he… was calming himself, which meant he was nervous. Jesus was there among the pictures on the upright piano, the only one in colour.… Sweet Jesus, don't let me say anything strange.
>
> She brought tea in in an old-fashioned china pot with a chip in its spout. She gave him a cup and saucer that somehow commemorated Memphis. Sunday things, because he was [dressed like] a minister. He couldn't see what her cup commemorated, but it was small and ornate like his. Like the cups that lined a

[462] Laura E. Tanner, *The Elusive Everyday in the Fiction of Marilynne Robinson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 149.
[463] Robinson, *Jack*, 146.
[464] Tanner, *The Elusive Everyday in the Fiction of Marilynne Robinson*, 153.
[465] Robinson, "When I Was a Child I Read Books," 20.

> narrow shelf in the kitchen at home at once pointedly and futilely out of his reach. Those little handles break off so easily, and they can't really be glued on again.[466]

Much is evoked in such a passage: Della lives an orderly life as a teacher who is devoted to her faith; this clearly unsettles Jack. The portrait of Jesus 'in colour' – though not a Jesus *of* colour – is the same as the Boughton family's, we read elsewhere. She brings out chipped china from her native place to host Jack, whom she (at this point) has mistaken for a minister. Delicate items, Jack recalls, are usually kept off limits from his destructive handling; but not here, not yet. Reflecting back on this meeting, the narrator notes that,

> She had called him Reverend and offered him tea, and he had stepped over a threshold into a world where there would of course be a hymnal open on the piano, the odds and ends of a grandmother's China, no doubt a hundred trifling things not at all worth stealing that he could slip into his pocket, given the chance.[467]

What Jack visually intends in Della's home, the narrator collects and records as a meaning-full *poiēma*, for our readerly attention. Certain items are presented with importance, while passing over 'no doubt a hundred trifling things' that a petty thief like Jack might lift. One important item is her family's signed copy of Paul Dunbar's *Oak and Ivy*, which Della brings out to show Jack before lending it to him, against his better judgment. These items, in other words, appear as meaning-full to Jack's intentionality, and by their very inclusion, to the reader's.

V.3.8 Suicide ideation and entertaining objections. At several points in the novel, Jack imaginatively intends his death and contemplates bringing it upon himself. The reader is presented with an unpleasant line of thinking: how might he end it all? Drown himself in a lake, leaving open the possibility it would look like an accident? Hang himself? Leave his hat and shoes on, so that his family's grief would be tinged with suspicion upon finding his body? 'And Jack, *which was a name he had for his soul*, would even then be falling through uncanny voids and starry abysses toward perdition.'[468] Here again, Hooten Wilson's objection that Robinson 'paints over the ugly' mistakes the author's subtly mesmeric writing *style* for the rather jarring *content* she treats. Hooten Wilson prefers the jarring writing of Flannery O'Connor on the grounds that she is not afraid to depict the ugly. Critic Lily Meyer, in her pertly named series 'Literary Enemies', compares Robinson's spaciousness to Flannery O'Connor's

[466] Robinson, *Jack*, 112–13.
[467] Robinson, 114.
[468] Robinson, 144.

prose. In contrast to Robinson's, O'Connor's writing is 'swampy and cramped. She is a writer of small places and small minds. She finds beauty and meaning and supernatural menace in petty hatreds and rivalries, in false legs, in a mummified dwarf.'[469] In response to Hooten Wilson, I suggest that Flannery O'Connor writes *jarringly* about *subtle* theological themes, while Robinson does the inverse. In both *Lila* and *Jack*, Robinson writes beautifully subtle prose about jarring theological themes. Here Jack ponders the possibility that he seems predestined for hell, so he might as well end this miserable life as soon as possible.

With the great question of theism rattling in his head, Jack returns to his room in the boarding house, where the clerk and another tenant mock him for bringing a geranium to his spartan quarters to woo Della. He banishes them, and begins contemplating killing either the clerk or himself. He,

> spent an hour or two attempting to ponder how gross disproportion, incommensurability, could be a structural principle of Creation. Mighty hostility pitted against harmless fantasy. The cosmic disorder… So here he was, buffeted like Satan, falling through the billowing voids… Giant miseries and giant hopes can carry on their wars in the merest cranny.'[470]

As Jack ruminates, his door is breached again and the clerk tosses a stray kitten onto Jack's bed: 'Dames like cats,' he said. Concrete reality literally re-grounds Jack in the room, animal absurdity piercing Jack's existential despair. 'This [gift of a cat] was conciliatory. Jack could think of no other way to interpret it, though he was, of course, cautious….If there was a trick involving the cat, there was nothing obvious about it.'[471] The reader, like Jack, sorts it out as he goes, through free imaginative variation. The man who eschewed domestication and everydayness now finds himself tending two living creatures: flower and feline. Jack douses the cat in *Old Spice* to distinguish it from the others on the street. Jack, finally, realizes the beauty of particularity:

> Every defect is singular, but a perfect cat is indistinguishable from a million others, in theory, even though in fact there might be just one perfect cat. Well, he'd call this his cat and put a mark on it…so he would not be tricked into wasting sardines on a cat that had no claim on him.'[472]

Jack's bliss arrives in these moments of *particular* love and recognition; his accumulated missteps and bad habits are periodically shocked by hope in his love for Della. Shortly after the cat episode, Della comes to give him a gift of poems by Hilda Doolittle, and

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[469] Meyer, "Literary Enemies: Marilynne Robinson vs. Flannery O'Connor."
[470] Robinson, 170-171.
[471] Robinson, 171.
[472] Robinson, 173–74.

falls asleep in his room while he is out on a late-night stroll. He is delighted to find her, "blessing his shabby bedclothes with her peacefulness, her soft breathing. Blessing the whole barren room with her amazing trust. There was dread, yes, but grace, too.'[473] After she awakens and describes the awful dream she has just had of Jack dying of loneliness, he invites her to put her head on his shoulder: 'A fellow told me that if the Lord gave this doomed soul a few minutes of grace, He wouldn't mind if I enjoyed it.'[474] They share a picnic meal as the sun comes up, and Jack finds a reprieve from despair. Jack's destinerrance – a wandering through space and time – is focused by particularities. Here again, *grace* is revealed through particulars of time and place: this night with Della, this meal, in this tiny bedroom.

In the days leading up to a dinner date at Della's home, Jack cleans himself up and 'walked out into a world oddly untransformed. Miracles leave no trace… they happened once as a sort of commentary on the blandness and inadequacy of the reality they break in on, and then vanish, leaving a world behind that refutes the very idea that such a thing could have happened.'[475] The miracle for Jack is becoming regrounded in place and time: a purpose (going to his job) and sense of worth as both a son and husband (if only as a tacit agreement, this 'lonely marriage of ours' forbidden by Missouri state law[476]). After Jack spends the night at Della's – which all the neighbours notice – he attends a service where Reverend Hutchins preaches against those who disturb peaceful homes. Jack cannot help but feel in the preacher's crosshairs: 'Jack Boughton seemed to be as fruitful a sermon text as the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son, the Unfaithful Steward. When he was young, the feeling made him smile. Now it made him sweat.'[477] Where *Home* imagines the continued story of the Prodigal Son, *Jack* reads as an imaginative extrapolation of the son while on his journey in the distant country – his *khōra makra* – where he feels the occasional pulls of his father, and life of faith, to make a return.

V.3.9 Intentionality and grace; *seeing as* Jack. Jack goes at night to the dance studio where he works by day, and the reader is given a glimpse of the objects of his intentionality through recollection. He notes that 'one mind by itself can fill a room',

[473] Robinson, 199.
[474] Robinson, 202–3.
[475] Robinson, 219.
[476] Robinson, 210.
[477] Robinson, 222.

and his imagination intends a series of memories: his first wife Annie and dead daughter; his time as a college man; and of being 'entrusted again, by whatever it is that does the entrusting, with another human soul [Della]'.[478] The ambiguity of this 'entrusting' sentence accounts for Robinson's twinning of phenomenological *givenness* with her theological insights of grace. He comes to recognise *grace* at a delay, by intending through recollection what he first intended during his tea date with Della, where she mistook him for a minister and invited him into her world: 'Tea from that chipped pot. Tea! It brought tears to his eyes. A moment of grace, truly, that ended with his slipping her book into his pocket… He had long recognised in himself a nagging urge to confess, which he sometimes indulged.'[479] Jack recognises once again that he comes to recognise grace in particularity. If he is to be saved, it is through the care and love of particular people relationships, making particular demands on him. The novel ends with him getting on a bus after being politely rejected by her parents; Della shows up and leaves with him, in spite of her father's disapproval.

> The knowledge of good. That half of the primal catastrophe received too little attention. Guilt and grace met together in the phrase despite all that. He could think of himself as a thief sneaking off with an inestimable wealth of meaning and trust… Or he could consider the sweet marriage that made her a conspirator with him in it, the loyalty that always restored them both, just like grace.[480]

After 300 pages of wrestling with his own worth, Della's loyalty reveals to Jack the knowledge of his goodness. At one point, Jack notes that his father is 'waiting for me…I know. I should go home. I'm afraid that might put an end to him.'[481] *Jack* will almost certainly put an end to the *Gilead* quartet; the prodigal father/son dynamic reaches a conclusion, a call and response between *Home* and *Jack.* His father, Jack explains, lives on hope: 'hope for things unseen. Me in this case.'[482] This brings back a few themes treated throughout the GHLJ series, which leads us to concluding thoughts for this final section of the chapter.

V.3.10 Grace in the *Gilead* quartet. The first theme is the importance of intersubjectivity to overcome the 'monocular vision' that blinds one's apprehension of the whole. This was evident in John Ames' recollection of the sun-moon in equipoise from his childhood. It emerged in *Lila* as the reader was given multiple interpretations

[478] Robinson, 255–56.
[479] Robinson, 256.
[480] Robinson, 309.
[481] Robinson, 47.
[482] Robinson, 47.

of Scripture. Jack's growing acquaintance with Della's goodness counterbalances his sense of his own evil; the Christian faith she observed -- and he observed from afar -- offered him an interpretive frame for understanding the sheer gratuity, the givenness, of his worthiness.

A second point ties together Andrew Cunning's theology of the ordinary, with Lynch's description of the Christian imagination: one comes to discover grace in the ordinary rhythms of time and place. Glory's return in *Home* was marked by the melancholy, and eventual acceptance, of returning to her native place. Jack comes to recognise his worth both in *Home* and *Jack* by giving himself to the 'hourliness and dailiness of human life' in work, chores, and vulnerable conversations. Yet whenever Jack ran from particular relationships and the rhythms of family and society, he despaired, fantasizing destroying himself, Della, or Reverend Hutchins's church. Recall from chapter 3 Lynch's critique of the 'new tragedy' of the modern cosmic imaginary (**III.3.2)**: the lone unbounded hero must reject the absurd limitations of the 'human condition' in order to be true to himself. *Jack* implicitly rejects this modernist anomie, much as Robinson (as literary critic) herself rejected the self-importance of modernist writing. The classic tragedy, by contrast, forces the tragic hero to embrace the human condition and reckon with his own limits. This vision, Lynch argues, is consistent with the Christian imagination's *embracing of finitude* so as to find one's way back to God. This, Lynch argues, is the level 'into which Christianity descends to operate its unique effects.' [483] Only at this level, Lynch reasons, can faith, hope, and love appear as viable options – only here can one hear the call and make one's response to God. Where the modern tragic mind requires one to steel one's nerves and will against a cold universe, the Christian seeks help from beyond. And in great tragedies, when a soul reaches out to a fellow person (like Della), a response of love – attending to the good of another – becomes possible. One recall Chrétien's observation that 'revelation must shatter [*briser*] something in us in order to be heard. It reaches us only by wounding us.'[484]

A final point is to return to Hooten Wilson's misreading of grace's operations in the *Gilead* series. Hooten Wilson attributes to Robinson an unwillingness to address the need for a savior: 'in *Gilead*, the cross becomes unnecessary. Resurrection is not mentioned, at least, not in the sense of everlasting life in the presence or absence of God. For Ames, heaven is just a magnified version of this world, which is itself a

[483] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 110.
[484] Chrétien, *Lueur du secret*, 22. Translation by Anne A. Davenport in Chrétien, C*all and Response*, xxiii.

manifestation of God's grace.'[485] I have earlier noted the irony of accusing Robinson of gliding over difficult elements of life; Hooten Wilson admits that she could not quite bring herself to finish reading either *Home* or *Lila*, and so she constructs an entire case against *Robinson's* theology, based on *John Ames's* hoary nostalgia in *Gilead*. This is to conflate the voice of one character with the intentions of the author. GHLJ reveals that Robinson does not shy from proposing a range of interpretive intentionalities. *Jack*, published a year after Hooten Wilson's appraisal, as well as *Lila*, do not spare consideration of sin, predestination, and divine wrath. *Jack* and *Lila* demonstrate that the criticism may rightly be directed at John Ames's limited vision in *Gilead*, but it cannot be attributed to the GHLJ quartet in toto – let alone the author herself.

V.3.11 Conclusion and looking ahead. Ultimately what Robinson aims to show in fiction is that the 'locus of human mystery is perception of this world. From it proceeds every thought, every art.'[486] Human mystery, she implies, involves our intentional relationship to the extramental world and states of affairs. With Calvin she names the limits of any one intentional gaze; even people of faith require others to help train their intentionality to a greater vision of the whole (*kath'holou*). In an interview between Robinson and Rowan Williams, the latter observes of her work, 'It's as if the people of Gilead, and even the very attractive figures of the past, it's as if they don't know how they've learned what they know, and so they don't really know it, so it takes a Lila and it takes a Jack to say, *"I don't see how this connects, I don't see how this works".*'[487] Their earnest questioning and pushback forces GHLJ's believing characters, and indeed the readers, to better articulate how a life of faith connects, how it works.

Robinson appeals to Calvin's metaphor that nature is a shining garment in which God is equally revealed and concealed: 'As we perceive we interpret, and we make hypotheses. Something is happening, it has a certain character or meaning which we usually feel we understand at least tentatively, though experience is almost always available to reinterpretations based on subsequent experience or reflection.'[488] The reader should not be surprised, then, that characters such as Jack or Lila occasionally interpret their lives *etsi Deus daretur* – as if there were a providential God, who offers grace even when it remains concealed. Nor, in the theological inversion of their doubt,

[485] Wilson, "Pushing Back Against Marilynne Robinson's Theology."
[486] Robinson, "Freedom of Thought," 9.
[487] Marr, "BBC Radio 4: Faith in the Modern World."
[488] Robinson, "Freedom of Thought," 9.

should we be surprised that characters such as Reverend John Ames or Robert Boughton occasional despair of God's providence – *etsi Deus non daretur.* Robinson's GHLJ quartet provides enough impressions of her characters' self-conscious interiority to allow 'reinterpretations based on subsequent experience or reflection.'[489] This, I will develop in the following chapter, is Robinson's way of articulating Husserlian free imaginative variation and Gadamerian *Spiel*. And the reader enjoys a second-order intentionality, induced to wrestle with the same questions and reflections, interpretations and re-appraisals, that her characters undertake.

[489] Robinson, 9.

PART III: Towards a Katholic Imagination

Chapter VI
Revising the Hermeneutical Circle

VI.0. Chapter Overview

Having taken a deep look at both Woolf and Robinson, this sixth chapter revisits the tools and voices presented from earlier. The goal of this chapter and the next is to draw together the parts towards a greater – if always incomplete – sense of the whole. The first section **VI.1** reviews the contributions and limits of Gadamer (from hermeneutics and literary theory) and Husserl (from phenomenology). Each contributes a methodologically helpful though incomplete part for our theological engagement through literature. I push Gadamer's thinking to include a "vertical" dimension to his otherwise "horizontal" hermeneutical circle. The second section **VI.2** revisits how a *theological* vision offers a stabilizing groundwork to their methodologies. Cusa demonstrates how "vertical" attunement to God is embodied, and corrected, in "horizontal" communities of primal faith, i.e., mutual human trust. This finds analogical resonance with how reading always-already occurs within communities of interpretation. Hence in section three **VI.3** I close the circuit by returning to literature. I weigh Cusa's experiment against Woolf's short story, 'A Mark on the Wall', which is a narratival phenomenology *of* an ego-subject's intentional solipsism. By way of contrast I revisit Robinson's *Gilead* Quartet to demonstrate how the intersubjectivity she regularly employs trains the reader, over the course of the four novels, to seek a more capacious vision of reality. This includes how God's grace is enfolded in, and refracted through, the *horizontal* human relationships of her characters. With due respect to Woolf's brilliance as a writer, Robinson's fiction emerges as the stronger literary interlocutor for a theological engagement through literature. This is precisely because she trains her reader's attunement to the "vertical" (i.e., God's gracious presence) as always-already accessible through the "horizontal" of human relationship and experience of creation.

VI.1 Broadening Hermeneutical Circles

VI.1.0 Introduction. 'Understanding begins,' Gadamer writes, 'when something addresses us.'[490] Gadamer helps us overcome the subject-ego limitations of Husserl by reminding us that we are always-already engaged in a community of interpretation. And yet Gadamer's dilemma remains: the 'yawning abyss' of historically-situated consciousness, which is the 'insuperable difference between the interpreter and the author that is created by historical distance.'[491] Because the reader cannot reach back through history to excavate the author's consciousness, the author *de facto* is excluded from interpretation. Gadamer's disbarring of the author seems like the safer hermeneutical path, what we might call an *argumentum a tutiori*. Gadamer's hermeneutics is more cautious than counter-theological, unlike Roland Barthes for whom the author must be actively excluded. But is the challenge Gadamer suggests really an insuperable dilemma for hermeneutics? The discipline itself evokes Hermes, the ancient patron of reading. Hermes was also the messenger between the gods and the living, and between the living and the dead. A hermeneutics that cannot bridge these "in-betweens" is not worthy of its namesake.

In this chapter I propose to address Gadamer's dilemma by expanding his hermeneutical circle with theological assistance. The analogical faculty of the imagination helps to grasp the theological dimensions of interpretating artistic/literary experiences. A theological hermeneutic, in other words, can help bridge the gap between reader and author. Recall that in chapter three I suggested that Gadamer's yawning abyss between author and reader (and the consequent challenge for interpretation of a text), relates analogically to the *major dissimilitudo* in mode of being between the divine Author and human 'reader' of God's creation. Chrétien sketched out the dilemma of divine difference, and a corollary question. The dilemma is the impossibility of the finite human comprehending, let alone overcoming, the *major dissimilitudo* between the infinite (God) and the finite (human). The question that Chrétien poses is: If indeed there is a divine Author calling, how might we become attuned to it? Epistemic humility is a necessary starting point for theological inquiry: we are creatures bounded by time and space, and the limits of our theological language are indeed *our* limits, not the limits of the referent of "God". Chrétien helps us understand the theological analogue to

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[490] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 310.
[491] Gadamer, 307.

Gadamer's hermeneutical dilemma, i.e., the 'yawning abyss' between the divine call and the creature's response.

In the third chapter, we also reviewed Chrétien's answer to the theological dilemma: the lack of correspondence between an infinite call and finite response does not mean there can be no communication; only that the former cannot be domesticated or wholly grasped by the finite human subject. An author of fiction is not de-fined (i.e., limited within) her text-world, and is thus in-finite relative to her creation. The theological insight responds analogically to Gadamer's hermeneutical dilemma: by our own epistemic lights, we cannot fathom the a/Author's purposes, so we have a choice: to dismiss the a/Author from consideration, or to investigate how we *might* make an attuned response, *as if* there is an a/Author appealing to our attention. The latter option requires a reader's conscious *epochē*: an epistemic openness to intend the text-world/life-world *etsi Deus daretur*. Reading a piece of fiction, or intending one's life-world, as if there is meaning to be disclosed, is the phenomenological disposition of *receptivity* to the possible call of the a/Author, without which attunement is an impossibility.

Having analysed Woolf and Robinson's approaches to writing Part II, in this chapter I argue that Gadamer's thinking can be pushed further, to serve as a corrective to Gadamer. The text is the field of interpretive play, which requires minimally two players. The players that 'meet' in the text, I argue, are the author who "calls" the game together, and the reader who responds. But not just one reader, but many readers, whose intersubjective "readings" help to fashion a more capacious response of understanding of the whole in Gadamer's hermeneutical circle.[492] If understanding *begins* when something addresses us, understanding is *verified* with an evolving response that seeks verification and amendment. This moves one to a more capacious view of the whole of reality.

To understand how the *katholic* imagination undergoes formation, in the second section of this chapter I revisit Nicholas of Cusa, whose *De Visione Dei* offers correctives to Gadamer and early-Husserl's ego-subject, by prescribing an activity that demonstrates embodied intersubjectivity. I then compare Cusa's *De Visione Dei* with Woolf's and Robinson's fiction, to see how a subject's intentionality – and attention to

[492] The etymology of lessons – French *leçons* from Latin *lectiones* "readings" – reveals a liaison between knowledge acquisition through reading. This is, on one level, an anodyne observation: knowledge is contained in books. On a deeper level, however, the etymological link implies that knowledge is acquired through the experiential activity of reading**s**. Furthermore, the fact that second "readings" yield alternate insights indicates the value of intersubjective readings.

others' intentional content – works in both of their fiction. By setting Gadamer's horizontal hermeneutical circle in conversation with theology, we introduce the vertical element back into the hermeneutical conversation, open to the One who reaches us across the yawning abyss. Recognising this vertical axis, I suggest, is a recognition of God's gracious presence to humanity in and through creation. Attunement to the divine begins with recognising the a/Author at work. Finally, I gesture towards chapter seven, which will describe how *analogical thinking* about the arts – including writing – helps us begin our *anagogical* return to God – the *reductio mentis in Deum.*

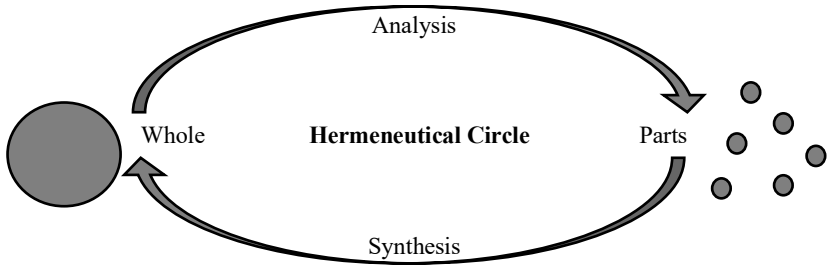
VI.1.1 Gadamer's *methodological* groundwork for the katholic imagination.

This first section lays the groundwork for how one's imagination undergoes formation not in aesthetic isolation, but in experiences of works of art – like the fiction we have treated – that puts us in contact with others. For Gadamer, experiencing a work of art is an interpretive event (*Geschehen*). A successful 'understanding' of a text, Gadamer maintains, is when a reader recognises something in the text that claims to be true. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer explains the experience (*Erfahrung*) of artwork in analogical terms of play or game (*Spiel*). I participate in the game as a reader, but the event of interpreting the game goes far beyond my own plans, interests, or even intentions: 'When we speak of *play* in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the *mode of being* of the work of art itself.'[493] In this game of interpretation, normative rules frame play without predetermining an outcome. On the reception side of play, when a reader or viewer encounters a text or painting, she gives herself over to the context of meaning that frames the artwork. Her interpretation, Gadamer maintains, is guided by the limits and possibilities of the work, without being predetermined or foreclosed by them. The evolving interpretive claims of truth that she entertains (her ongoing, adaptational "reading" of the text) are not *de facto* evidence of errors in reading, but of a hermeneutic "advance of play". Competing interpretations of characters in situations are entertained, compared, and perhaps set aside in favour of more capacious, more transparent, or more veridical assessments.

Spiel is central to the hermeneutical circle, where one moves from an image of the whole, to analysing the component parts. In play, one deliberately destabilizes one's

[493] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 106.

sense of the 'whole' of reality by scrutinising new data points, and assessing how they contribute to a more capacious understanding of the whole (*kath'holou*). This sifting of new specifics recalibrates one's broader sense of truth, in so doing revealing one's prejudgments and blind spots. Synthesizing insights from these particularities gives a modified (if always incomplete) understanding of the whole of reality. We might depict Gadamer's circle like this:



Gadamer argues that there is a post-Enlightenment bias that an interpreter's understanding of a text is inherently better than the initial writer's understanding of the text he or she produced. Such a blatant bias is evident in successive waves of hermeneutics, already treated in chapter two. The esteeming of reader over writer is a misreading of the act of understanding, Gadamer argues:

> [The interpreting reader's] understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all*.[494]

An interpreting subject begins at a different starting point from the writer and can only consciously intend so many phenomena at once. Indeed, every ego-subject filters "signal" from "noise" based on what manifests itself to one's intentional attention. Woolf's hortatory essay, 'On Re-reading a Novel', supports this argument (cf. **IV.2.2**). Gadamer further combats the presumption that one can approach a text in a subject-object relationship that is purely objective, as the formalist critics suggested, for example (cf. **II.1.4**). For Gadamer, the reader is always reading *from* somewhere, and the reader's "historically-effected consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) precludes any pretence of neutrality or objectivity in interpreting a text.

A text is only understood, Gadamer argued, when it is addressed to a *particular* receiver, when a text *questions* a particular reader, who is likewise historically bounded by one's temporal horizon. A text, like *Catcher in the Rye* or *King Lear*, will 'read' one way as a teenager, and 'read' quite differently as a parent. In an interview, Robinson

[494] Gadamer, 307. Emphasis original.

was asked whether she re-reads books. She replied, 'I tend to think of the reading of any book as preparation for the next reading of it. There are always intervening books or facts or realizations that put a book in another light, and make it different and richer the second or the third time.'[495] The text, we say, *questions* and *reads* the reader as she changes through time. In both of these grammatical constructions, the text displaces the reader as subject of the verb's action. Understanding (*verstehen*) is when the horizons of the text and interpreter fuse, conscious of the particular histories in which both text and reader are inexorably situated. This 'fusion of horizons' is not a fixed point of contact, but a dynamic process:

> [T]he discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; *it is in fact an infinite process*. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that all kinds of things are filtered out that obscure the true meaning; but new sources of understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of meaning.[496]

Such describes, with some needed simplification, the elements of Gadamer's hermeneutical circle that I wish to revise in this chapter. This circle is a constitutive element of the hermeneutical *methodology* of the katholic imagination. Gadamer has established, minimally, that an author's *text* serves as a stable gauge against which a reader – indeed multiple readers – might compare and revisit their interpretations over time and space.

VI.1.2 *Horizontal* 'formation' of the katholic imagination. A logical second element is that formation of the katholic imagination occurs in a community. For Gadamer, engaged familiarization with a text contributes to *Bildung*, 'cultivation' or 'formation,' which he defines as 'the properly human way of developing one's natural talents and capacities.'[497] Important for our consideration of the imagination, Gadamer links *Bildung* to the cluster of words that share its root *Bild* (form, image, picture): *formation* draws on an *ideal image* of what it means to be human. Insofar as the arts generate images and representations in the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), art too plays a central role in *Bildung*.[498] We will see shortly how Gadamerian *Bildung* prepares the

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[495] Pamela Paul, "Marilynne Robinson: By the Book," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2013, sec. Books, www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/books/review/marilynne-robinson-by-the-book.html.
[496] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 309. Emphasis added.
[497] Gadamer, 10.
[498] Other concepts lose their lexical links evident in the German, e.g., *Urbild* ("original"), *Vorbild* ("model), *Abbild* ("copy"), and most importantly for our inquiry, *Einbildungskraft* ("imagination"). For more on this and the challenges of translating Gadamer's German, see Joel Weinsheimer's preface to Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

reader's imagination to attune to the divine, but first some clarification of Gadamer's particular terminology.

The term *Bildung* itself is laden with connotations for late 18- and 19th-century German Romanticism, though in *Truth and Method* Gadamer goes to great lengths to develop and distinguish his use of the term. Tracing its origins, he notes that 'the rise of the word *Bildung* evokes the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image [*das Bild*] of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself.'[499] Gadamer further considers Hegel's conception of *Bildung* which, 'as rising to the universal, is a task for man. It requires sacrificing particularity for the sake of the universal'.[500] Developing his own synthesis, Gadamer emphasizes that the general characteristic of *Bildung* is,

> keeping oneself open to what is other – to other, *more universal points of view*. It embraces the sense of *proportion* and *distance* in relation to itself, and hence consists in rising above itself to *universality*. To distance oneself from oneself and from one's private purposes means to look at these in the way that others see them.[501]

In other words, one's formation is never solitary but bound up with the *sensus communis* – knowledge that can only be gleaned from being situated in a community and tradition. Though not religious himself, Gadamer had deep respect for his mother's Pietism. He quotes the Pietist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger's description of the *sensus communis* approvingly, as 'concerned only with *things that all men see daily before them*, things that hold an entire society together, things that are concerned as much with truths and statements as with *the arrangements and patterns* comprised in statements.'[502] This Gadamerian sense of *Bildung* through *sensus communis* will be evident later this chapter as we appraise Cusa's experiment with the monks of Tegernsee, and in our comparison of Woolf and Robinson's approaches to religious experience.

VI.1.3 Gadamer corrects Husserl…and Gadamer. *Bildung* for Gadamer is not concerned with cultivating an effete, aesthetic consciousness through subjective experiences (*Erlebnisse*). Gadamer rejects a neo-Kantian *Erlebnis,* understood as an enduring residue of immediate moments that an artist transforms into timeless art which

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[499] Gadamer, 10.
[500] Gadamer, 12.
[501] Gadamer, 16. Emphasis added.
[502] From Oetinger's '*Die Wahrheit des* sensus communis' quoted in Gadamer, 26. Emphasis added.

supposedly bears universal significance.[503] Rather, Gadamer explains in part two of *Truth and Method* that *Bildung* entails a different type of experience of art which he calls *Erfahrung*. Here again, Gadamer's connotation of the term differs from others'. Weinsheimer notes that for Gadamer, *Erfahrung* 'provides the basis in our actual lives for the specifically *hermeneutic way* we are related to other persons and to our cultural past, namely, dialogue.'[504] The dynamic of dialogue begins with *question* and *answer*. *Erfahrung* 'is not the residue of isolated moments [as it is with *Erlebnisse*], but an ongoing integrative process in which what we encounter widens our horizon,'[505] correcting less capacious subjective perspectives. One's horizon expands not through sublime moments of beauty, but through an *integrative experience* that reveals and challenges one's limited subjectivity; one is drawn into an event (*Geschehen*). Put simply, in Gadamer we may say that while an interpreting subject 'has' aesthetic *Erlebnisse*, she 'undergoes' *Erfahrung* that displaces her as the primary interpreting subject. *Erfahrung* is a constitutive activity for *Bildung*, in that it helps one *recognise* the subjective insulation of an *Erlebnis* – so as to overcome it.

Gadamer's distinction between the lone *Erlebnis* vs. the horizon-expanding *Erfahrung* challenges early-Husserl's ego-subject investigations. Having reviewed Woolf and Robinson, now I argue that Gadamerian *Erfahrung* can also correct Gadamer's own *a tutiori* timidity about including the author. To begin, let us recall Gadamer's *Spiel*, which is the question-and-answer 'play' between a text and a reader. This *Spiel* of meaning-determination, Gadamer argues, cannot be reduced to the author's circumstances:

> The *real meaning of a text,* as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it *is always co-determined* ***also*** by the historical situation of the interpreter and *hence by the totality* of the objective course of history.[506]

Gadamer's language in this excerpt is cautiously vague; he claims meaning does not *depend on* the contingencies of the author – fair enough – yet he goes on to acknowledge that the meaning 'is always co-determined *also*' by the historically situated interpreter. The structure of this passage implies that the author is the initial co-determiner of meaning. Gadamer does not forcibly banish the author as Barthes would; nor does he admit the author's interpretative contribution. Gadamer's *argumentum a tutiori* amounts

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[503] Gadamer, 56.
[504] Gadamer, xii. Emphasis added.
[505] Gadamer, xii. Emphasis added.
[506] Gadamer, 307. Emphasis added.

to a begrudging admission: the reader's experience of the text *need not exclude* the writer, but the interpreting reader is *also* important.

A stronger claim that Gadamer could make, which I am arguing, relies on Lynch's not-yet-theological concept of primal faith in another person. Recognising shared personhood is the ground of primal faith and human empathy: both author and reader are communicating persons, equally endowed with consciousness and free will, reason and emotion, scepticism and self-deception. A reader is first interested in the author as *another person*, who (empathy suggests) is probably trying to communicate *some image* or *idea* with her creative arrangement of words. When that communication is imperfect or confusing or opaque – like when I misspell **oomveld* – the curious reader gathers more information from or about the author, in search of a more capacious understanding of the author's text. In this respect, the katholic imagination is interested in the pursuit of truth, without presuming to exhaust it. As I suggested in **II.2.8**, such investigation involves practices that we employ whenever we are interested in understanding someone from a distance of space and time: searching out other primary works, biographical information, interviews, or any secondary sources about the author.

Indeed, the writer is the element of interpretative play that most resembles the reader, beginning with the fact that both have existed in human space and time. To put the author "out of play", or to imagine oneself playing the game of interpretation alone, risks letting the reader fancy that he, alone, is the arbiter of textual meaning. Gadamer admits that 'the space in which the game's movement takes place is not simply the open space in which one "plays oneself out," but one that is specifically *marked out and reserved for* the movement of the game.'[507] Who, but the author, 'marks out' the bounds of the game of the text? (Presumably in setting out to write *Truth and Method*, Gadamer wrote not *simply* for himself, but to chart out a domain of inquiry for his readers as well.) In the play of engaging a text the observer-reader can no more restrict interpretation of a text in self-indulgent isolation, than the artist-writer did in writing it.

Gadamer does not satisfactorily explain why a writer is barred from the field of play. As we saw in chapter four, when Woolf "plays" around the question of God in her fiction, unexpected occurrences emerge that do not align with her own religious sensibilities. And Robinson, in multiple interviews, explains that she waits for her characters to reveal themselves to her, and is loath to force them to speak what she as

[507] Gadamer, 107. Emphasis added.

author thinks they should say. Rather *both* author and reader are taken up with others (other writers, readers, critics, etc.) in a shared game of interpretation.

Woolf's and Robinson's notably different styles – and self-articulated projects – help to see that the authors themselves can close the "yawning abyss" of Gadamer's dilemma. The rules of a shared underpinning structure (*Gebilde*) of what fiction is, and how it works, are debated and negotiated through and across novelistic endeavours. In *Spiel*, an artist does not merely express herself in a vacuum; she is at once responding to previous authors' styles and content, and building upon her own earlier works. In both cases, her response is calling ahead to unseen future readers and writers. This thesis has collocated two unlikely writers for your readerly consideration. Recall Woolf's stated distaste for the naïve realism of the fiction of her youth, and her experimental response through fiction. Recall, too, Robinson's appreciation for Calvin's sacramental vision and her distaste for the modernist novelist's world-weary outlook. Robinson implicitly critiques Woolf's modernist outlook, as Woolf would surely critique Robinson's American historiography. Your interpretation of each is inflected, however imperceptibly, by *my* collocation of them in this thesis. Hence a reader does not receive interpretative insights in a vacuum; rather the text-as-game presents *Erfahrung* for consideration by, and formation in, a meaning-full community of literary writers and fellow readers, across time and place.

The play of interpretation, Gadamer freely acknowledges, 'is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process.'[508] Gadamer's admission of an *in-finite* element of interpretation suggests that there is more grounding hermeneutics than what finite human readers and authors can achieve in the horizon of space and time.

VI.1.4 Rendering implicit faith explicit. Gadamer, with modifications, has helped lay the methodological and horizontal elements for the formation of the *katholic* imagination. What lifts the katholic imagination 'off the ground' is the ascendent formation [*Bildung*] that begins with an understanding of faith in another. In chapter one, Lynch was employed to highlight that faith is primally embodied and shaped on the ground, but its destiny is "upwards", ultimately towards a religious faith in God. Let us revisit some principal arguments developed in preceding chapters (with the help of Cusa,

[508] Gadamer, 309.

Coleridge, Husserl, and Chrétien) that show our movement from mere *literary hermeneutics* to a properly *theological engagement through literature.*

First, I have argued that an author's creative act is never *ex nihilo*, but always-already responding to the foregrounding creativity of other creators, either as a rejection or an homage. Woolf read and rejected the staid Victorian and Edwardian fiction that ignored human interiority, which motivated her experimentation with depicting the consciousness of her characters. Robinson read and admires 19th-century American writers (Emerson, Melville, Poe, Dunbar) and theologians John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. Robinson weaves their thought together in subtly plaited homages through essay and fiction.

With these authors in mind, recall this thesis's proposed phenomenology to literary intentionality. Before writing, an author intends the life-world around herself, as well as others' text-worlds that seize her attention. She subsequently participates in the creative act of *poiēsis*: conjuring and combining words and images to create new text-worlds. From one creative poietic mind unfold many new characters with disparate perspectives. Authors create meaning-full text-worlds, inhabited by characters who enjoy *as-if* free will. Writers frame certain states of affairs with which their characters must contend. The characters pose questions to one another, and through them, to the interpreting reader who intends the text-world. Within a text, characters have differing, evolving perspectives; dialogues and disagreements; surprises and betrayals. This plurality of perspectives subverts any easy discernment of "authorial intention", and serves as a caution against the automatic collapsing of character-narrator-author into a *univocal* perspective. These insights have been treated extensively in chapters two, four, and five. From chapter three, Cusa's *explicatio-complicatio* schema explains *analogically* how an author relates to her text: a text-world's plurality unfolds from, and enfolds, the creativity of a single authoring mind. Every text, if you will, is a partial *explication* of its author. Cusa's *explicatio-complicatio* also frames sub-creation, i.e., how an author's creativity itself unfolds from God's creative activity, and God's creative activity is thus enfolded in the author's creative act of writing. The human author can never create *ex nihilo*: she is always-already responding to the image-formations and activity of others, and of the Other.

Secondly, the author's creative 'play' is different from the reader's in that her act of creating a text-world is the *initiatory* act of generosity and trust. The author gives a text-world freely, and the interpreting reader chooses whether to investigate or ignore

her, accept or reject other sources of insight on the author's history, intentions, etc. Even where there is no outside information about the author, her text nevertheless is the stable record of her authorial intentionality (*poiēma*). Hirsch calls it the 'stable object of inquiry' for consideration (from **II.2.8**). The author uniquely relates to her *poiēma* by her poiematic *Sinn*, a "sense" which can never be perfectly investigated or replicated; but it can be ignored. The author is 'enfolded' in every element of the text-world; in this respect the author is very much present, though unseen. In writing a text, an author submits to "play" in a literary community larger than herself; she is making an act of faith, entrusting her work to the interpretative responses of her readers. An author's meaning-full relationship to the text – her poiematic *Sinn* – does not result in some authorially-enforced interpretation that inhibits the free "play" of her readers' interpretation.

Thirdly and subsequently, the curious reader intends – that is to say, attends to – this text-world, and in doing so, is "playing" with the author *through* the text. Surely one way for a reader to overcome his subjective prejudices is by looking for all available interpretive data points, especially other game-playing subjects, which (I have argued) include the author herself. Drawing on Gadamer, Hirsch noted that the only way to *honour the otherness* of another is to try to glean their *intended* meaning by asking questions for clarification, where possible. Both writer and reader have incomplete visions of the whole, and thus naturally interpret the text-world differently. But both Woolf and Robinson model for their readers empathic 'bracketing' of interpretive prejudices. Writer and reader join the hermeneutical circle, *as if* each has more of the whole to understand from another's perspective. It is this phenomenological, literary *epochē*, I suggest, that thematises one's historically-situated consciousness when intending a text. The fruit of this is an epistemic humility that acknowledges that one cannot grasp the whole of reality. And so the reader undergoes formation (*Erfahrung*) of his imagination in an interpretative "play" with the author. Seeking to understand the author's perspective honours the author *as other*.

Fourthly, this *literary epochē* is the phenomenological corollary to Coleridge's famous endeavour to offer an object for his readers' intentionality that would prompt their poetic faith. As author, Coleridge aspired 'to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient' so that the author's 'shadows of imagination' might stimulate in the reader the 'willing suspension of disbelief for the

moment.'[509] The creative act of the writer, Coleridge asserted, is what constitutes and elicits the reader's poetic faith which is none other than *a trust* in the creative activity of the unseen author. Graham Ward notes that poetic faith goes much further than normal trust of another in ordinary matters of life; 'normal trust' amounts to accepting accumulated evidence or a reasoned case. But poetic faith, Ward argues, requires an engaged, imaginative participation with a text *over time*, 'an entrustment that allows access to a level of affectivity that can operate existentially. There are books that have changed people's lives!'[510] This process of *formation* is what Gadamer is referring to in the integrative experience of literature (*Erfahrung*): an entrustment of the reader to the text in a community of fellow interpretive players. Such formation takes time, with all the wondering and wandering, mis-takes and misapprehensions, that 'free-imaginative play' entails. The initiatory player, I have argued, is the writer who entrusts her text to unseen future readers; they may never spare a thought for the creator of the text-world, but that is never a neutral interpretative stance. This leads to a final point.

Fifthly and finally, Chrétien's *appel et réponse* schema (from chapter three) helps us better understand Coleridge *theologically*: I, as interpreting reader, am never the lone ego-subject engaging the world; I am always-already responding *in trust* to a text-world that was given, given *in faith* by an unseen author. In the case of Woolf or Robinson, the author's artful "play away from home" foregrounds the possibility of her readers to do the same. Without the author's initiatory creation of a text open to interpret, there would be no-thing to call forth the reader's interpretative response. On the responsive side of poetic faith, the reader must begin with the phenomenological *epochē*: bracketing his natural attitude – with his instinctual suspicions and unthematised prejudices – in order to attend to the possibilities that the text-world *has something to teach his limited imagination*.[511] The willingness of a reader to thematise and scrutinise his (dis)belief – the presumption being that an author is purposive and intelligible, *as if* telling a believable story – reveals a faith that an author can convey meaning across the 'yawning abyss' of time and space, *pace* Gadamer.

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[509] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, chap. XIV.
[510] Ward, "How Literature Resists Secularity," 83.
[511] We see echoes of this in Newman's illative sense regarding doctrines of faith, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. See, for example, John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1870). David Hammond argues that the imagination is constitutive of Newman's illative sense: see David M. Hammond, "Imagination in Newman's Phenomenology of Cognition," *Heythrop Journal* 29, no. 1 (1988): 21–32.

These five interconnected arguments render explicit the implicit acts of human faith and trust involved in writing and reading fiction.

VI.1.5 Concluding thoughts and looking ahead to a theological *reditus*. This phenomenological *epochē* through literature, I have argued, constitutes poetic faith. And this poetic faith – suspending disbelief and entrusting oneself to the imagination of the author – trains our attention through the intentional content of the text-world, to reflect on the author herself – whether in gratitude, indifference, or aversion. Recall from previous chapters Lynch's discussion of primal faith: without suspending one's infantile sense of omnipotence and omniscience, one could not survive in the world. The primal faith of the infant for his caregivers is attuned to the parent's rhythms of nourishment or withholding, visible presence or absence. In reading fiction, the reader makes a similar act of primal faith in the author; not awaiting nourishment, but a text-world worthy of the reader's attention and time. I expand on Lynch to argue that *poetic faith serves as a propaedeutic for reflection of weightier theological reflection*, as demonstrated in Woolf's and Robinson's fiction. Weighing the serious question of divine reality (the *etsi Deus [non] daretur* stipulations) through fiction presents *risks*. This is because, Gadamer writes,

> one can play only with serious possibilities. The attraction that the game exercises on the player lives in this risk. One enjoys the freedom of decision which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited…the same is true in serious matters. If, for the sake of enjoying his own freedom of decision, someone avoids making pressing decisions or plays with possibilities that he's not seriously envisaging and which, therefore, offer no risk that he will choose them and thereby limit himself, we say he is only 'playing with life' (*verspielt*).'[512]

Far from escapism, Woolf's and Robinson's imaginative play train the reader to think through earnest theological questions over the course of a novel, without facing the demand for an immediate answer: what if God does [not] exist after all? How does the answer to the God question in *To the Lighthouse* touch on questions in one's life-world, after reading? What if Lila can wash off her baptism in the river? Recall Woolf's description (treated in **IV.3.10**) of how fiction 'attaches' to life:

> Fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible… But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of

[512] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 110–11.

> suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.[513]

If Gadamer is correct here about the seriousness of play with fiction, then what Woolf and Robinson achieve through fiction carries great theological weight. Each is framing for her readers the imaginative space to wonder about God's (un)reality and gracious activity, for readers' *intentional, sustained* consideration and application. Application happens when the reader weighs the *etsi Deus (non) daretur* stipulations to sort out how they relate back to his own life, in a 'world determined by the seriousness of purposes'. For Gadamer, a work of fiction 'has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience – *Erfahrung* – that changes the person who experiences it.'[514] Great fiction is no escapist fantasy from reality, but an imaginative frame to play out possible answers to the questions life poses, including theological questions of origins and destiny.

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In chapter two I introduced Gadamer to explain how human sciences like theology and the arts have their own methods and tools of inquiry. One comes to understanding in these disciplines, Gadamer explains, through engaging in play (*Spiel*) with others so as to merge horizons of understanding through an integrative experience (*Erfahrung*). Near the end of his own life, Gadamer was asked about his own theological commitments. What lies beyond the horizon of our human condition? Is there a God, and how can we know? He refers to the human condition as *ignoramus*; we cannot know anything substantial about a realm 'beyond' our finite world. Given his language of horizons, it may be helpful to speak of the finite realm as the horizontal, X-axis of human condition. What of the vertical horizon? 'Transcendence,' he offered, 'derives from the admission of our finitude: *ignoramus* – we do not know.'[515] Consider again his hermeneutic circle from earlier, operating on the horizontal plane of human experience through time: we can move from our historical-situated prejudices and ignorance towards a more capacious understanding of the truth, through a merging of horizons. Yet Gadamer remained agnostic about the possibility of reliable 'play' even with a human author across the distance of space and time. Small wonder, then, that his *argumentum a tutiori* would extend to excluding the vertical horizon.

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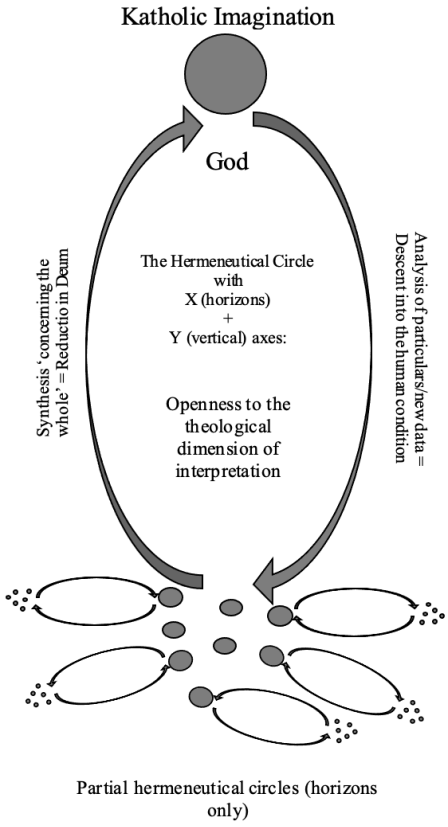
[513] Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 39–40.
[514] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 107.
[515] Jens Zimmermann, "*Ignoramus*: Gadamer's 'Religious Turn,'" Symposium 6, no. 2 (2002): 208–9.

In their theological engagement through literature, however, both Woolf and Robinson play with the possibility of divine reality for interpretation of human experience. Like the messenger Hermes shuttling between mortals and the gods, their fiction plays on the "in-betweens" of the everyday and the transcendent. As such, Woolf and Robinson offer a helpful theological supplement to the self-imposed limits of Gadamerian hermeneutics. Writers "bothered by God" introduce the possibility of play – *etsi Deus daretur* – along the 'vertical' Y-axis of transcendence, which I propose can be depicted in this image to the right.



In the next section, I revisit Nicholas of Cusa and Lynch to explain how a *vertical hermeneutical horizon* must be first grounded in, and checked against, the intentional horizons in which we find ourselves. A greater vision of the whole (*kath'holou*) we shall see, takes both X + Y axes into account. In what follows I lay out the theological schema of Cusa, which charts how the human mind might begin a mystical ascent to God.

VI.2 Nicholas of Cusa and the *Reductio Mentis in Deum*

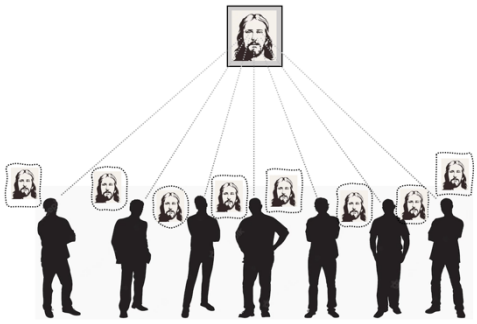
Recall from **I.2.4** Cusa's epistemology of doxological signs, i.e., how he relates wonder and praise as a pre-reflexive awareness of God. This second section of the chapter introduces Cusa's curious experiment for the monks of Tegernsee Abbey and analyses this experiment in light of the "in-betweens" of our philosophical, theological, and literary inquiry.

VI.2.1 Cusa's *De Visione Dei*. A group of Benedictine monks asked Nicholas of Cusa for a theological treatise on how to come to know God. In response he sent an icon to their monastery in Tegernsee, Germany, along with instructions to hang it on a north wall in large room, presumably so that the sun coming through southern windows would

illuminate it. The instructions were Cusa's treatise *De Visione Dei* (1453). No doubt he relished the ambiguous genitive of the Latin title, rendered either 'on the vision of God', or 'on seeing God'. The purpose of this exercise, he writes in DVD §1, is to demonstrate 'the facility of mystical theology', i.e., the ease of the mind's ascent to God.[516] Before addressing the monks, he prefaces his exercise with an appeal to God for self-disclosure:

> I pray first that the Word from on high and the all-powerful Discourse, which alone can disclose (*pandere*) itself, may be given to me so that I may be able to describe (*enarrare*) for your comprehension the wonders (*mirabilia*) which are revealed beyond all sensible, rational and intellectual sight. But by means of a very simple and commonplace method *I will attempt to lead you (manuducere)* into the most sacred darkness'[517] (DVD §1, 235).

Important for *Cusa* is that the *reditus* to God does not begin with the observer; it is not a going forth into what is unknown, but a being led *(manu-ducere)* by the hand of the author whose job is to describe wonders (*enarrare mirabilia*) that the Word has first self-disclosed (*pandere*). This *reductio* begins with the shared horizon of experience among the monks. Cusa next describes the category of icons that appear to be all-seeing as "icons of God" (DVD §2, 235).[518] Each of the monks is to stand around the icon equally distant, and gaze up at it. Each will note that the icon's eyes will seem to regard him alone. The apparent singularity of the gaze is a result, Cusa writes, of the manifest limits not just of each observer's vision, but of the human imagination: 'For the imagination of the one who is standing in the east cannot conceive that the icon's gaze is turned in any other direction, such as the west or south' (DVD §3, 236 '*neque poterit imaginatio capere'*).



To broaden one's imagination, Cusa instructs, 'one must then move from his spot and swing around to the other side, where the gaze remains fixed upon him as he moves from east to west. Since the monk knows that the icon is fixed and unchanged, Cusa

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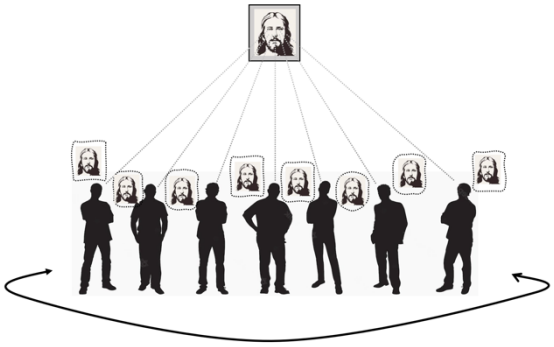
[516] *circa facilitatem mysticae theologiae*. Latin texts available through Nicholas of Cusa, "Cusanus Portal," n.d., http://www.cusanus-portal.de/.

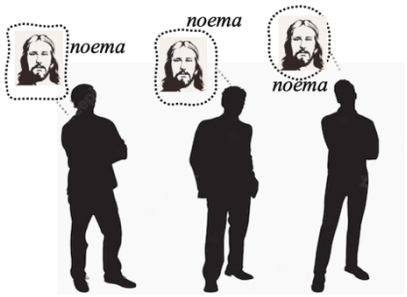
[517] Nicholas of Cusa, "De Visione Dei," in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), §1. Emphasis added. Because of multiple forms of notation, I provide paragraph section (§) and page number of Bond's text. The original Latin is suggestive: '*orans imprimis mihi dari verbum supernum et sermonem omnipotentem, qui solum se ipsum pandere potest, ut pro captu vestro enarrare queam mirabilia, quae supra omnem sensibilem, rationalem et intellectualem visum revelantur. Conabor autem simplicissimo atque communissimo modo vos experimentaliter in sacratissimam obscuritatem manuducere'*

[518] The icon was presumably of Christ, though the text does not specify.

writes, ‘he will marvel at how the unmoving gaze is set in motion’ (DVD §3, 236 *‘et admirabitur quomodo immobiliter [visus] moveatur’*).

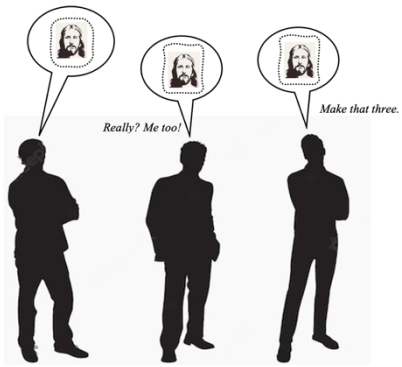
Cusa offers the sort of embodied *Spiel* that Gadamer suggests as a way of gathering experiential data for a more capacious interpretation of the whole. Husserl spoke of this sense-impression collection as ‘free imaginative play’, discussed at length in **II.2.2.** When I, for example, see at most three sides of a cube, my background experience of cubes primes the anticipation of the remaining three unseen aspects (this anticipation Husserl calls *protention*). Yet in the case of Cusa’s two-dimensional icon, protention would anticipate the icon’s eyes to remain fixed on that first position. So the apparent movement of the icon’s gaze reveals a *disruption of expectation*. Cusa suggests that this series of surprising impressions increases one’s capacity for *marvel (admirari)*. This ‘marvelling’ recalls the doxological awe inspired by that which shatters expectations and precedes reason. As a lone monk moves from east to west, noting the eyes following him, Cusa writes that ‘his imagination will not be able to grasp how it is moved in the same manner with someone coming forth to meet him from the opposite direction’ (DVD §3, 236). Cusa takes the Greek word for God, θεός, to be from the verb θεωρέω, ‘to look at’ or the middle-voice, θεάομαι ‘to gaze/contemplate with admiration’.[519] This image of God – εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ – viewed from a pre-reduction “natural attitude”, appears to gaze upon each alone. Yet Cusa suggests a phenomenological investigation of this intentional impression of God by inviting more data; not from a lone subject’s eidetic reduction to an intentional object’s essence, but by appealing to another sense organ, one’s hearing.





[519] Compare with PIE **dyeu-*, ‘to shine,’ which gives “day”, “divine”, “deity”, etc. It is more likely the case that θεός comes from PIE **dhe-* ‘to set or put,’ where we get words like “thetic” and “hypothesis”, but that was demonstrably not what Cusa thought.

And so, Cusa instructs, the first monk should move to meet an approaching monk in the middle of the room, to ask whether the gaze follows his companion's movement as well. The first hears from his companion that the icon's gaze also tracks a monk coming from the opposite direction. Cusa writes, the first monk 'will believe [the other], but *unless* he believed him, he *would not imagine that this is possible*' (DVD §3, 236). From his interaction with another subject, the first discovers that the icon of God is able to behold two opposite directions at once; indeed further inquiry reveals the gaze encapsulating all monks' intentionalities at once. Recall from chapter two, latter-day Husserl came to recognise the stability of extramental objects by observing other subjects' similar intentional activity. This intersubjectivity, impossible to verify from within one's intentional subjectivity, *is itself an act of faith*. The icon's gaze is moved towards a single place, and all places; it tracks one movement, and all movements, simultaneously. The first person's trust in the testimony of the second, then, is a precondition for the first's expansion of the imagination to include not only what he has directly intended or anticipated, but also *what is attested to by another*. The primal, horizontal faith between one person and another opens the imagination to the possibility of faith in the unseen, unverifiable testimony of another. A faith in another's *personal testimony*, as a category, opens the imagination to consider faith in what is unseen or what cannot be seen. Such faith does not neatly yield to rational demonstration, but it is not *ipso facto* irrational to trust in another's testimony. This primal faith grounds the very possibility of human relationship. And faith in another's testimony also amplifies the intersubjective element of marvelling.



This is not merely theoretical but experiential: imagine happening upon someone in a forest staring up at the sky, with mouth agape. You would instinctively look up to try to see what, if anything, she is marvelling at. *Her* doxological awe primes the conditions for *you* to bracket your natural attitude (e.g., of scepticism) and, perhaps, be awed as well. This is precisely what happens when a character in a text (like Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, or Lila in *Lila*) seems to marvel at what cannot be fully grasped. Her playful curiosity directs the intentional gaze of a reader, who joins her quest for understanding.

How can it be that one apparently infinite gaze grounds all monks' gazes? For Cusa, thinking about the infinite is possible, by way of a rational ascent (*reductio*) from one's experience of finitude to the infinite. Through horizontal conversation, one learns that all gazers are looked upon equally, the greatest and the least. Each *finite* gaze is a response to the *in-finite* gaze of the icon. The initial *appeal* of the infinite is what unites the finite elements' response: out of a multiplicity, there is the *unum* which is not numerical, but an indivisible ground of all intentional activity.

Cusa helps us understand what Lynch meant in his claim that faith '"has" a body, indeed many bodies'.[520] The movement around the room is embodied thought; thinking and speaking about the divine, in the sense of *periphatic* – moving around (*peri*-) and talking (*phasis*) to understand how the same gaze addresses each monk. Cusa suggests that if this schema is true of the icon of God, how much truer is it 'in the true gaze of God?' (DVD§4, 237). The astute reader will notice that Cusa has inserted a theological claim, an appeal to analogy of proportionality between the icon and the Creator. What is true of items in creation, how much more so of the Creator? This leads us to analyse Cusa's exercise for its phenomenological and theological significances.

VI.2.2 A phenomenological and theological analysis. Cusa turns from this embodied, audio-visual exercise of contemplation to theological reflection. Because of God's highest simplicity, there is no distinction between God's being, acting, seeing, or creating: these are different attributes employed for different reasons, Cusa writes. Our thinking and speaking about God's activity is thus a circle unto itself, since each attribute points to and is connected with all other attributes of God (DVD §8, 238). Important for this discussion is the stipulation that God's act of seeing *is* God's act of being. For God to regard me, Cusa suggests by the transitive property, is not just to sustain God's gaze at me, but to sustain my very being. If God no longer regarded me, I would cease to be, according to Cusa's logic. This also flows logically from Cusa's argument that all human being and activity always-already unfolds from God's being and activity.[521] Each monk's gaze is sustained in and by what Cusa terms the 'absolute sight' without which there can be no 'contracted sight' (DVD §7, 238).

Centuries before Husserl, Cusa's association of *vision* with *being* is crucial, as it lays the groundwork for a proto-phenomenology of how an ego-subject 'I' becomes

[520] Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 10.
[521] We recall that Jean-Louis Chrétien developed this idea in Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 2003, 106–7. which I treated in **III.2.3**.

conscious of what is *not me*. Cusa speaks of the ego-subject's tendency towards solipsism: 'there is no thing which does not prefer its own being to everything else and does not prefer its own mode of being to all the modes of being of other things; and each thing so cherishes its own being that it would let the being of all other things perish rather than its own' (DVD §9, 239). Because God is 'present to all and to each, just as being, without which they cannot exist, is present to all and to each', then each individual ego-subject falls prey to the idea that God 'had no concern for others.' (DVD §9, 239).

The experiment at Tegernsee reveals that one's intentional subjectivity is blinkered, which allows us to re-evaluate the limits of Husserl's project. I have already cited from Husserl's *Ideas* the section entitled 'The Transcendence of God Suspended', which reads differently now after our consideration of Cusa's discussion of the 'absolute sight' of God:

> What concerns us here, after merely indicating different groups of such rational grounds for "believing in" the existence of an extra-worldly "divine" being is that this being would obviously transcend not merely the world but "absolute" consciousness. It would therefore be an "absolute" in the sense *totally different* from that in which consciousness is an absolute, just as it would be something *transcendent in a sense totally different* from that in which the world is something transcendent.[522]

In other words, the question of God's absoluteness is far beyond the human capacity for judgment, beyond even what is available to the transcendental reduction that Husserl prescribes.[523] Hence, as I've argued in chapter three, an Husserlian reduction can only get us so far and so I have limited his tools for the purposes of a phenomenology of literature.

What our modified literary *epochē* allows the intending reader to do theologically is to recognise, firstly, that his prejudgments and feelings about the question of God's existence occur *as* his belief-constructs, which precondition his intentional approach to theological questions. Secondly, he recognises that fiction by another human subject – e.g., Woolf or Robinson – will likewise be inflected by the author's prejudgments and feelings about the question of God's existence. The literary *epochē* helps to thematise the epistemic limits of the intending subject, and further to distinguish it from the God to

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[522] Husserl, *Ideas I*, sec. 58. Italics original.

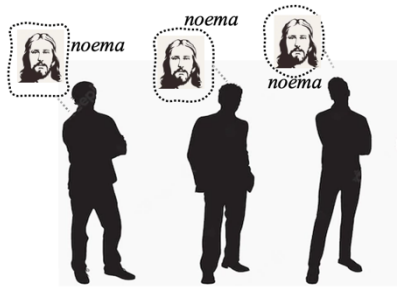
[523] Chrétien, as we shall see soon, indirectly refutes Husserl's claim on the grounds that the absolute disproportion of divine 'call' to human 'response' does not prevent our coming to consciousness of the absolute's in-breaking call.

which the text may point. The author's attitude around one's treatment of God[524] advances Aquinas' observation (in **I.2.1**) of the difference between the *modus significandi* and *res significata*: the author's or reader's mode of treating the question of the divine (*poiēma*) is entirely distinct from the object of inquiry (*Deus simpliciter*). Recall St Paul's attempts to capture the ἀγνώστος Θεός also mentioned in chapter one: theological "God talk" always falters in the face of the infinite, but that does not render theological engagement futile. Rather it presses theologians to 'play away from home', as this thesis has attempted to do, searching new modes of limning the mystery, if only periphatically.

With Husserl's schema in mind, we return to the monks of Tegernsee, where the icon offers a gaze that cuts through the limits of Husserl's dilemma of transcendence. It is not we who close the gap with the absolute, but the absolute who bridges the yawning abyss – in Christ. Cusa identifies Christ as the *contracted absolute* – the absolute choosing to become complicit – enfolded – in the finite, so as to guide the finite back to the absolute. Christ is the preeminent epistemic path to understand God's absolute otherness. The icon of Christ's intentionality has addressed the monks and has invited their respective intentional contemplation in return. The icon 'reads' each, and 'questions' each. Cusa switches from prescribing how the monks are to gaze and discuss what they see, to making a direct *response* to the face itself. He writes at the start of DVD chapter 6 entitled 'On Facial Vision',

> The longer I behold your face, O Lord, the more keenly you seem to fix your glance on me. And your gaze prompts me to consider how this image of your face is thus portrayed in a sensible fashion since a face could not have been painted without colour and colour does not exist without quantity. But I see the invisible truth of your face, represented in this contracted shadow here, not with the eyes of flesh, which examine this icon of you, but with the eyes of the mind and intellect…. When I consider how this face is the truth and most adequate measure of all faces, I am numbed with astonishment (DVD §17, 242).

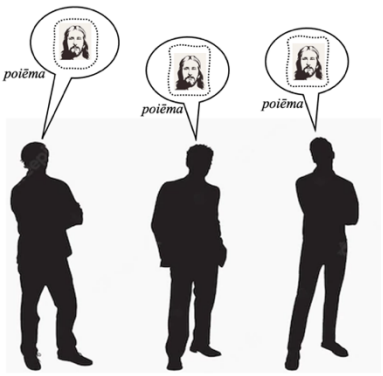
Cusa is offering a phenomenology of contemplation, of *doxological* intentionality, if you will. The unique, doxic (wonder and awe) relationship one monk has with the icon cannot be replicated by another; and yet each monk intends the icon and forms his own *noēma*-noematic *Sinn*, his own 'doxological sense' of the icon, if you will. These



[524] Cf. **II.3.2** on the thetic quality of the *noema*, here applied to the author's *poiēma*

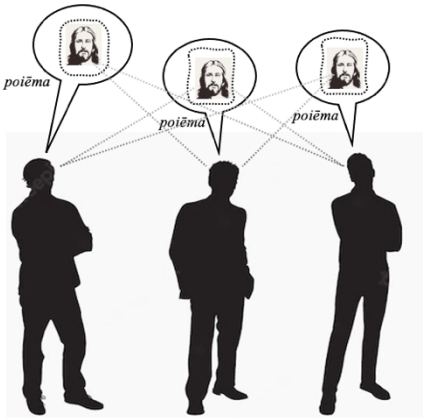
doxological senses are recorded and conveyed as *poiēma* – narrative testimonies of individuals' intentional impressions of the icon, developed through movement in time and space. Cusa continues his address to God,

> A human being cannot judge except in a human way. When a person attributes a face to you, one does not seek it outside the human species since one's judgment is contracted within human nature….[hence] a young man, if wished to conceive it, would fashion your face as youthful; a grown man as manly; and an older man as an elderly face' (§19, 244, emphasis added).



Allow me to suggest that for Cusa to say that human vision is 'contracted within human nature,' he is anticipating phenomenological language of 'seeing *as*' – a monk cannot see the icon from nowhere. Rather he sees as a subject bounded by space and time, with his limited human reason. Given the "contracted sight" of any given subject, naturally not all impressions of the divine may prove favourable or doxological.

I note briefly here (and develop more in the seventh chapter) that Cusa's piercing psychological/phenomenological insight helps understand how writers like Woolf or Robinson represent the divine in their fiction. The author, like any subject, "sees" God *as* – and judges what she sees – 'in a human way'. This involves attributing qualities to the divine which are necessarily filtered through her human experience of the divine. This necessarily involves the people and institutions that purport to mediate divine activity, for good or ill. In her fiction, Woolf regularly depicts religiously-minded people to be intrusive nuisances; and subsequently "intends" the divine accordingly. Robinson can understand this antipathy, but keeps open the possibility that God is a suitable object of doxological awe, in spite of the manifest limits of religious-minded characters.



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Cusa's experiment prescribes behaviour to illustrate the importance of shared attention and verification of religious experience. Both Virginia Woolf and Marilynne Robinson offer similar scenarios, through fiction, of the value of shared attention when

interpreting extramental realities. In the final section of this chapter, we move around the hermeneutical circle to assess the "in-betweens" of Cusa's theological insights and the literary figures I have treated.

VI.3 Katholic Imagination in Literature

VI.3.1 Testing Cusa's schema within literature. Virginia Woolf's 1917 short story 'The Mark on the Wall' features a narrator idling in a sitting room of her own. She[525] notices a mark on the wall above the mantelpiece, and playfully imagines its origins. A nail hole for a painting? A bump? A dead leaf? The intentional gaze of the subject is punctuated with stream of consciousness musings on the ongoing Great War, life and death, and the ego's fascination with itself. Finally another character enters the scene, pointing out that it is just a snail climbing up the wall. In this story, as in Cusa's exercise, the finite perspective of a second reading becomes a surprise and a corrective to the limited – indeed distorted – perspective of the first. After assessing Woolf's story, I offer a comparative analysis of Robinson's *Gilead* quartet from chapter five, without rehashing that chapter's argument.

Recall that in 'An Unwritten Novel' (**IV.2.1**), Virginia Woolf elaborated through fiction the modified Husserlian intentionality I introduced in chapter two. Through free imaginative play, the protagonist of 'An Unwritten Novel' forms a *noēma* of lonely 'Minnie Marsh' in real time, only to have it corrected at the end by a more accurate, *visual* impression of the woman's son helping her off the train. In slight contrast, the narrator in 'The Mark on the Wall' summons to her intentionality the *noēma* of a memory, which is corrected by the *audial* testimony of another observer. The scene begins with a memory of her visual impressions:

> Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall. In order to fix a date it is necessary to remember what one saw. So now I think of the fire; the steady film of yellow light upon the page of my book; the three chrysanthemums in the round glass bowl on the mantlepiece.… I remember that I was smoking a cigarette when I looked up and saw the mark on the wall for the first time.[526]

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[525] Though unidentified, let us stipulate the narrator to be a woman. This not to suggest that the narrator is identical with the author.

[526] Virginia Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall," in *Monday or Tuesday: Virginia Woolf* (Richmond, Surrey: Alma Classics, 2016), 69.

The short story is the narrator's record of her *noēma*, inflected as it is with her meaning-full connection to it (the *noematic Sinn*). She establishes a state of affairs for our readerly attentional frame, an intentional horizon populated with certain ordinary details but not others. The story reads as a phenomenological account of distracted consciousness: having one's intentionality drift to memories, and then refocus to the mystery mark on the wall.

At first, she is distracted by the burning coals in the fire, fancying them to be red knights riding over black rocks. Suddenly 'the sight of the mark interrupted my fancy, for it is an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a child perhaps. The mark was a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece.'[527] The narrator has consciously set aside mere fancy, focusing her – and the reader's – imaginative gaze on the mark on the wall. The narrator deftly adds, 'How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way...'.[528] Though not *beautiful*, the mark is novel, difficult to understand, a source of pre-reflective awe and curiosity for the narrator. The narrator wonders whether it merits attention. The conspiring reader wonders as well. Like Cusa's exercise, the marvelling of one witnessing subject primes the curious marvelling of the other.

The narrator engages free imaginative play with this intentional object: is the mark a nail hole for a picture? If so, how big a nail was needed? 'As for that mark, I'm not sure about it,' she continues. 'Oh dear me, the mystery of life! The inaccuracy of thought!'[529] The narrator's attention wanders to thoughts on culture, loss, and mortality: 'if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour… Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked!'[530] The afterlife, she reckons, will be just as difficult to comprehend as this one: 'why, after all, should one not be born there as one is born here, helpless, speechless, unable *to focus one's eyesight*…? There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark… which will, as

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[527] Woolf, 69.
[528] This phenomenological/literary observation is consistent with what physiologists term the *orienting response* or *reflex*, which is how an organism responds immediately to novel stimuli in its surrounding environment. Such pre-reflective responses include rapid visual and audial attunement, a change in heart rate, and other autonomic responses in the sympathetic nervous system. Compare this to Robinson's observation from a 2013 interview about familiar places: 'I like to read in my own house, in any of the rooms I always mean to paint or otherwise improve and never do. Every detail is so familiar to me that it makes almost no claim on my attention.' In Paul, "Marilynne Robinson: By the Book."
[529] Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall," 70.
[530] Woolf, 71.

time goes on, *become more definite*, become… I don't know what…'[531] Her solitary wondering has led her far afield, into thoughts on life and death, the possibility of God or nothingness. As often happens in Woolf's fiction, stream of consciousness leads to periphatic wondering about the divine.

The tree outside the window taps very gently on the pane, and the narrator undergoes what Woolf described as the "tunnelling process" employed to plumb the depths of her characters' interiority.[532] This tunnelling charts the phenomenological *epochē* of the literary characters who undergo it. Here the narrator's natural attitude toward a life-world rendered unpredictable by war is paused; the *epochē* reflects back to her consciousness her own ennui:

> I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciously, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts.[533]

Her imagination fires and plays in this secluded space: 'To study myself, let me catch a hold of the first idea that passes… Shakespeare… Well, he will do as well as another. A man who sat himself solidly in an armchair, and looked into the fire, so – a shower of ideas fell perpetually from some very high heaven down through his mind.'[534] Having imagined how Shakespeare received inspirations in solitude, the narrator focuses back on herself:

> All the time I'm dressing up the figure of myself in my own mind, lovingly, stealthily… it is curious how instinctively one protects the image of oneself from idolatry or any other handling that could make it ridiculous, or too unlike the original to be believed in any longer… Suppose the looking glass smashes, the image disappears and the romantic figure with a green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shallow person which is seen by other people – what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes![535]

Rather than generalities about what the category of "people" see or believe or do, novelists (the narrator hints) ought to dedicate ink to describing the consciousness of particular subjects. Recall from chapter four Woolf's distaste for the naïve realism of Victorian and Edwardian novels. Given Woolf's stated delight ('I dig out beautiful caves') in tunnelling into characters' interiority, it seems the narrator is applauding her

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[531] Woolf, 71–72.
[532] In an August 1923 diary entry, Woolf describes a discovery: that 'I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters'. Quoted in Edward Hungerford, "'My Tunnelling Process': The Method of *Mrs Dalloway*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1957): 164–67.
[533] Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall," 72.
[534] Woolf, 72.
[535] Woolf, 73.

creator *from within the text*, offering Woolf a bit of doxological praise for being a visionary 'novelist of the future'.

The narrator breaks off from her wondering to reconsider the mark on the wall once again; perhaps it is not a hole at all, but a protrusion. But what use is it to figure it all out? 'Nothing is proved, nothing is known. And if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really – what shall we say? – the head of a gigantic old nail…what should I gain? Knowledge? Matter for further speculation?'[536] The narrator's lassitude overcomes her curiosity: 'I can think sitting still as well as standing up… How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up…' She imagines her human 'Nature [*sic*] once more at her old game of self-preservation. This train of thought, [my Nature] perceives, is threatening mere waste of energy, even some collision with reality'.[537] The narrator acknowledges the appeal of solipsism, even at the expense of a broader vision of reality. She engages in another long distraction fit until, finally, she is interrupted by someone standing over her in the chair, announcing plans to buy a newspaper, with details of the war. Objective reality comes crashing back in, despite her best efforts. Her interlocutor casually notes, 'I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall,' which brings the story to a swift close, and with it, the narrator's wandering imagination.

I have noted several themes of Woolf's short story: the transitory nature of life, war, death, the afterlife. But the story also demonstrates a few central themes of this thesis. First, 'The Mark on the Wall' explores in prose what the *epochē* thematises for the ego-subject, i.e., how much one's intentional consciousness always-already *sees* (or does not see) extramental objects *as* meaning-full. It also demonstrates Gadamer's hermeneutical critique: the aesthetic isolation of an ego-subject's *Erlebnis* is punctured by reality pushing back, often with ironic simplicity: *it's just a snail, dear*. There is a similar surprise in Robinson's *Jack*, where the title character's suicide ideation is disrupted when a cat is thrown on his lazing body.

Gadamer notes that correction to solipsistic interpretation comes from beyond us: 'Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The *focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror*.'[538] In the 'Unwritten Novel' about

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[536] Woolf, 76–77.
[537] Woolf, 78.
[538] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 289.

Minnie Marsh, reality shatters the writer-observer's emerging character sketch; in 'The Mark on the Wall' another set of eyes challenges the narrator's ego-subjectivity, correcting *her* partial understanding of their shared life-world. Husserl has articulated for us the *phenomenological* primacy of subjective consciousness; Gadamer reminds us of *metaphysical* primacy of interpretative communities, which corrects each subject's limitations. As another example of Woolf's ironic metafiction, the story's abrupt ending gently lampoons *from within* the modernist mesmerized fascination with one's interiority, and how extramental reality thematises the limits of human consciousness. In this respect 'Mark on the Wall' also suggests – with humour rather than piety – the intersubjective verification Cusa was prescribing for the monks of Tegernsee.

VI.3.2 A final comparison of Woolf and Robinson's literary imaginations.

The experience of art, like the experience of extramental realities, is an *Erfahrung* over time, subject to partial errors that arise amidst distractions. Furthermore, formation [*Bildung*] of our imagination always-already occurs in a community that offers a more *katholic* vision of reality for our scattered, fallible consciousnesses. And yet, Woolf's katholic imagination never manages to 'get off the ground' because her characters' focus remains on their consciousness, rather than relationships of primal faith. We do not find out, for example, whether the mark on the wall was in fact a snail, or how the narrator responds to the interlocutor's impression. Is her interlocutor a lover? A friend? A stranger? The narrative both *depicts* an interruption of consciousness, and *embodies* that interruption as an unresolved conclusion, the meaning of which is ambiguous. What distinguishes Woolf from Robinson (and Cusa) is that there is no "in-between" contact point for her characters; there is a lone subject, despairing in a room of her own, opposite a snail – maybe – on the wall. And there is an alternate assessment, but no shared metaphysical horizon upon which the reader can gain interpretive traction. In the *Gilead* quartet, John Ames, Lila, and Jack Boughton each find themselves isolated by their interpretations of reality; yet there is an in-breaking call of grace that re-grounds them in relational communities of trust. In-breaking grace displaces each from the subjective centre of the narratives and attunes them to their life-world. Indeed, this is the strength of Robinson's *Gilead* quartet: each subsequent instalment recentres the narrative, offering a corrective to the partial views of each of the other protagonists. We learn slowly through the novel that their impressions of reality and grace are blinkered by circumstances, and the masterful author stitches together these stories over four volumes,

with God's gracious presence serving as the connective tissue and the horizon upon which they wander about.

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With the help of Gadamer's distinction of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, we now see that Woolf and Robinson are engaged in outwardly similar, though differently-structured, projects. A principal difference is rooted in what a subject's intentionality *offers* for each of our writers. We can get at this difference by considering from whom each of our writers draws inspiration: Montaigne for Woolf, and Calvin for Robinson.

When Woolf speaks of 'moments of being' that rise above the usual humdrum of daily life, she is describing Gadamer's conception of *Erlebnis*: aesthetically sublime, but consciously immanent, solitary experiences that she endeavours to capture. Montaigne, whom Woolf emulated in her writing,[539] spoke of the need for man – and it was a man, free from the care of wives and children – to have his *arrière-boutique,* an interior 'back shop' of leisure in which we establish '*nostre vraye liberté'* [sic] from anyone or any One, where one's soul '*se peut faire compagnie*'. Therein one must 'hold our ordinary conversation between us and ourselves, so private that no acquaintance or communication of another's matters finds a place there'.[540] Montaigne's ironic *we* is first-person singular: the lone constructor and inhabitor of one's enclosed space. Montaigne's goal, Woolf wrote admiringly, was neither to preach nor teach, but to have one's writing reflect honestly upon one's self: '*Je n'enseigne poinct; je raconte.*'[541] Woolf was so convinced of his self-understanding and transparency that she boldly claimed that '[w]e can never doubt for an instant that his book *was* himself'.[542] One wonders who the 'we' is that Woolf here employs. Perhaps one could turn to religion to guide us, she asks. Montaigne's answer, she paraphrases, is straightforward: 'Certainly, seek the Divine guidance by all means, but meanwhile there is, for those who live a private life, another monitor, an invisible sensor within, *un patron au dedans*, whose blame is much more to be dreaded than any other because he knows the truth.'[543] Woolf concludes her essay on Montaigne with a double scepticism: both of his hedonic living, and of the divine:

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[539] See Judith Allen's essay, "Those Soul Mates." or Woolf's essay, 'Montaigne': 'Montaigne stands out from the legions of the dead with such irrepressible vivacity. We can never doubt for an instant that his book was himself. …All his effort was to write himself down.'
[540] Montaigne's *Essays*, Book I Chapter 38, 'Of Solitude' (or 39, depending on numbering).
[541] Virginia Woolf, "Montaigne," in *Genius and Ink* (London: TLS Books, 2019), 133.
[542] Woolf, 129. Emphasis added.
[543] Woolf, 135.

> But as we watch with absorbed interest the enthralling spectacle of a soul living openly beneath our eyes, the question frames itself, Is pleasure the end of all? Whence this overwhelming interest in the nature of the soul? … Is the beauty of this world enough or is there, elsewhere, some explanation of the mystery? But to this there is no answer, only one more question – "*Que sçais-je?*"[544]

Like Gadamer's *ignoramus*, Montaigne and Woolf remain contently, or at least resolutely, in the back-shop of their interiority. Like Mrs Ramsay, Clarissa Dalloway cherishes privacy, even from her husband Richard:

> And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect—something, after all, priceless.[545]

Like her protagonists, Woolf cherished a room of her own, content to stay there with a proud, if uneasy, agnosticism that was not much interested in second appraisals, or a return to religious community.

In marked contrast to Woolf and Montaigne, Robinson's theological inspiration is John Calvin. Jean-Louis Chrétien draws on John Calvin to offer a competing explanation of this *arrière-boutique*. For Calvin, *l'arrière-boutique* is an escapist fantasy, what Chrétien described as that '*lieu en moi où je m'éloigne de Dieu*'.[546] Calvin treats such interiority as an *artificial closure* from God which must be 'opened, aired out, and made to let God's light penetrate it, "to purge the pretences we have".'[547] A *properly understood* interiority, for Calvin and Robinson alike, is an attuned response to a prior call, answering a question that comes from beyond and invites transformation.

Robinson's fiction, in contrast to Woolf's, aspires to depict the *Erfahrung* of God by showing grace's shattering [*briser*] of her characters' self-enclosures. This happens throughout GHLJ: in *Gilead* John Ames lives unhappily in his head until Lila, and his son Robby, pull him out of himself to recognise grace at work. In *Home* and *Jack*, God's grace – mediated by Della and Jack's family – regularly shatters the existential confines of Jack's *arrière-boutique*. In *Lila*, despair and shame of her past are healed by the in-breaking of scriptural passages that allow her to re-assess her memories in light of revelation. Throughout GHLJ the reader intends (and co-inhabits) each protagonist's self-enclosure; in subsequent instalments, we move around the Midwestern terrain – like

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[544] Woolf, 141.
[545] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Harcourt, 1981), 120.
[546] Jean-Louis Chrétien, L'espace intérieur (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2014), 97.
[547] Chrétien, 97. '*Il ne s'agit donc pas d'en refermer la porte, ni de nous y réfugier, mais au contraire de l'aérer et d'y faire pénétrer la lamuière afin de "purger ceste [sic] feintise que nous avons*".' My translation.

Cusa's monks moving about a room – to see how God's grace operates in the lives of a new protagonist, whether the protagonist recognises it or not. To read the GHLJ quartet is to see how God is graciously present to each of Robinson's characters, and how her characters become attuned with the help of others' testimonies.

One example of many from *Gilead* illustrates this point. After John Ames preaches at a service about the 'gift of physical particularity and how blessing and sacrament are mediated through it,'[548] his wife Lila takes their son to Ames after the service: '"You ought to give him some of that." You're too young, of course, but she was completely right. *Body of Christ, broken for you. Blood of Christ, shed for you.* Your solemn and beautiful child face lifted up to receive these mysteries at my hands.'[549] With Lila having corrected his blinkered vision, Ames recognises the gracious invitation: 'They are the most wonderful mystery, body and blood. *It was an experience I might have missed*. Now I only fear I will not have time enough to fully enjoy the thought of it.'[550] For an aging clergyman, questions of mortality are no longer merely academic exercises, but serious theological questions of destiny that affect believer and non-believer in equal measure. Robinson employs such vignettes – where even the religious leader is slow to see the grace embedded in ordinary bread and wine – as a challenge to a false dichotomy of transcendence *versus* immanence.

In her essay 'Psalm 8' she writes, 'I have spent my life watching not to see beyond the world,' but, 'merely to see, great mystery, what is plainly before my eyes. I think the concept of transcendence is based on a misreading of creation. With all due respect to heaven, the scene of miracle is here, among us.'[551] Robinson's theological vision, which suffuses the GHLJ quartet, reveals a robust katholic imagination: admitting of the theological grounding of all reality, the God who is graciously present in and through creation. Several of her characters begin in their self-constructed back-rooms, but God's grace is always-already present, on offer to them. The attunement to grace *within* her fiction becomes a pedagogy for the reader's attunement: thematising how characters within texts recognised the divine call, despite their quantum finitude. Both Woolf and Robinson depict the 'back-room' of characters' interiority. The difference is that for Woolf, interiority is a welcome refuge from others and from the divine; for

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[548] Robinson, *Gilead*, 69.
[549] Robinson, 69–70.
[550] Robinson, 70. Emphasis added.
[551] From 'Psalm 8' in Marilynne Robinson, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (New York: Picador, 1998), 243.

Robinson, interiority is an incomplete vision of both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of human experience. In this respect Robinson's fiction trains her readers to seek a more capacious vision of reality *kath'holou*; she better embodies and promotes the *katholic* imagination. This is not an aesthetic evaluation, but a theological one grounded in analysis of her Gilead quartet.

VI.3.3 Concluding thoughts and looking ahead. The 'hermeneutical circle' of this thesis has been one of movements: setting out from the domain of theology in chapter one, we began to "play away from home" with literary theory, hermeneutics, and phenomenology (chapter two). This revealed a need for deeper grounding once again in theology (chapter three). Part II then engaged methodologies developed in Part I, to test their explanatory power of writers of fiction. This sixth chapter has been a shorter redux of that same movement: I first (**VI.1**) reviewed helpful voices from philosophy and theology, sketching out the dilemma of Gadamer's horizon and modifying it with the vertical Y-axis. I tested this vertical interpretive dimension with Cusa's theological exercise (**VI.2**). I drew from both **VI.1** and **VI.2** to thematise the theological implications of Woolf and Robinson's fiction (**VI.3**).

In each successive pass around this hermeneutic circle, analysing literature with different lenses, we move towards a more capacious vision of how the human imagination can be attuned to the author's presence, and by analogy, to God's. In the brief next chapter, I demonstrate how, through the ongoing formation of one's katholic imagination, one makes an attuned *reductio* to God, by opening oneself to God's always-already gracious presence, in and through creation.

Chapter VII
Reditus. Attunements to Grace

VII.0. An overview of in-betweens. In this brief chapter I review themes and voices to demonstrate what this thesis contributes to the field of theology and literature. Earlier chapters have both (1) explained how several human sciences interpret the "in-between" of subjects to their environs, and (2) offered a second-order assessment of the methodological "in-betweens" of seemingly different disciplines. By way of review, this thesis has considered how:

- Theological inquiry gave rise to hermeneutics (chapter two).
- Phenomenological methods can help chart out what happens within literature and hermeneutics (chapter two).
- The "theological turn" charts out what happens when phenomenology excludes or includes the theological dimensions of reality (chapter three).
- Quality literature, through free imaginative play and literary *epochē*, entertains theological questions and thematises implicit structures of belief (chapters four and five). *Periphasis* allows one to wander and wonder about God – in literature and theology – without delimiting the mystery of God.
- The *poetic* faith required to suspend one's disbelief as a reader serves as a propaedeutic to *religious* faith. The "theological turn" in literary studies charts out what happens when an ego-subject, or indeed hermeneutics as a discipline, excludes or includes the religious and communal dimensions of experience (chapter six).
- The "literary turn" in theology renders explicit that theology always-already draws on literary images, metaphors, and indeed narratives for understanding creation's relationship to the creator (chapters one and now here in seven). Theologians have used literary images as one path of *reductio* of the mind to God. The *analogical imagination* detects a similarity between the human author of a text and the divine Author of creation despite the *major dissimilitudo*.

By way of review, (1) **Literature** consists in the text-world, full of characters' relationships and how they interpret the fictive "life-world" around themselves. **Hermeneutics** considers the relationships of a human reader to this literary text-world, and perhaps to the human author who created it. **Phenomenology** considers the relationship of the conscious human subject to the "life-world" around himself. **Theology** draws upon ordinary language to considers the relationship of the human person to creation and to the divine Creator. (2) This thesis has reviewed voices that wish to keep these domains discrete. In order to challenge this separation, this thesis has

relied on the probing curiosity of the analogical imagination, which detects similarities-amidst-differences at the fertile "in-betweens" of disciplines. These (1) intra- and (2) inter-disciplinary analyses of "in-betweenness" together lead to a third insight (3): analogical thinking generates connective tissue within and across these disciplines. This thesis has argued that the human sciences require one another to cultivate a more capacious, *katholic* vision of reality; and such a vision absolutely requires engagement with theology. This final chapter highlights *what this thesis has demonstrated* (**VII.1**), *how it contributes to the field of theology and literature* (**VII.2**), and *where it may lead* for further study (**VII.3**).

VII.1 What Has Been Demonstrated

VII.1.1 Attunement through analogy. We have seen important similarities-and-differences emerge (1) within and (2) across domains. The analogical aspect of the imagination probes the horizons of disciplines in search of "connective tissue" and this thesis has been a modest attempt to thematise and evaluate these in-betweens. As suggested above, these two movements (1) and (2) lead to insight (3): the analogical faculty of the imagination allows us to move towards a more capacious (*kath'holou*) view of reality and the human sciences that explore it.

In this section I argue that this thesis has attempted to get the proportionality of analogy correct – the similarity-to-difference ratio, if you will – which is a matter of ongoing attunement, *Gestimmtheit*, between realities and disciplines. A guitar string must be attuned to just the right tensive pull to ring true; too tight and the string snaps; too slack and it does not play.

One extreme of being "out of tune" (*verstimmt*) is being possessed by a univocal imagination: differences are flattened, collapsed, or disbarred from play to make for a tidy narrative. The guitar string is too tight, if you will. This thesis has assessed how the univocal imagination operates in different domains. In the first chapter, we considered Aquinas' argument for caution in language, so we do not overlook divine difference and re-create God in our own image. Aquinas argued that our "God talk" is more reliable the farther away our images and metaphors are from the gravitational pull of univocal thinking. Aquinas, along with St Paul's explicit use of pagan sources on the Areopagus, gave theological warrant and biblical precedent for our theological engagement with literature "away from home". In hermeneutics (chapter two) Gadamer's wise caution

against the reader presuming to collapse the "yawning abyss" of space, custom, and history between author and reader is, in its own domain, a caution against univocal thinking. In literary analysis, the univocal imagination admits of only one interpretive pole: either total deference to the author's purported meaning (authorial intention), or to the free-standing text (New Criticism), or to the reader (reader-response). I have argued the hazards of appealing to only one interpretive framework. In chapter three William Lynch cautions against this totalizing tendency, for those reading literature as well as those attempting to do theology.

The other way to be "out of tune" is finding total difference, an *equivocal* imagination. Chapter three refuted the gap of equivocal thinking in phenomenology (i.e., where there is no *correspondence* between finite humanity and the infinite creator, or reader and author, there can be no relationality). The guitar string is too slack; no resonances can be detected and thus there is no ground for sympathies. Equivocal thinking underpins Janicaud's rejection of the "theological turn", wherein 'phenomenology and theology make two'[552]. Jean-Louis Chrétien helps demonstrate that ἀναλογία – "right relation", "correspondence", "proportion" – is possible, by recognising the infinite's initiatory call which underpins any and all finite responses humans make. Attunement invites deepening awareness of one's context, and Karl Rahner helps render explicit the implicit existential horizon on which we do all our being, thinking, and speaking. For Chrétien, this awareness comes when something in us is shattered (*brisé*) by the call from the unseen infinite. I have related this to Barthes' overstated dilemma of "appeals to the author": equivocal thinking forbids the possibility of attunement between author and reader through the text. The author is dead, and we have killed him. Yet Barthes grudgingly acknowledged that there can be another understanding of an author to her text: as a parent to a child. But such analogical thinking, Barthes cautioned, allows for a *theological* understanding of author-to-text, and his project is explicitly *counter*-theological. Barthes' observation is instructive: even an antagonist grants that excluding the author is not neutral, but reveals the *theological* implications of hermeneutics. The irony of declaring the author dead, I argued, is that it resurrects the author in the intentional horizon of those who read Barthes. A similar irony lies in Virginia Woolf's periphatic fiction *about* God, i.e., speaking "around" the divine lacuna. While stating her desire to banish the divine, she nevertheless resurrects

[552] Janicaud, *Theological Turn*, 99–103.

the possibility of God in the intentional consciousness of her reader. Woolf's repudiation of the divine call is a response all the same.

In chapter three, the appeal to William Lynch suggested that attunement to God comes not from a *rational* ascent, but through the active, concrete workings of the *analogical* imagination. Literature, which relies on metaphors and images, is an eminent way of doing this, since the supreme imaging of God is the Word's descent into human form, a movement that trains the imagination to press words to chart out particular conditions in a new way. Christ-as-typology is Lynch's inroad to the broader question of the finite and infinite: 'How can the literal and the transcendent be brought together in anything resembling a harmony?' such that one does not overtake the other.[553] He answers that the "literal" world should *signify* the "transcendent", without being diminished in doing so. Hence he suggests attending to finite signifiers in the world (and in text-worlds) that are capable of lifting the imagination, while letting them keep 'all the tang and density of that actuality into which the imagination descends.'[554] The Gospels are multi-perspectival accounts of God's self-revelation in Christ, who passes through all the tang and density of earthly experience as the definitive path of a human return to God. So too the *Gilead* quartet of Marilynne Robinson: a multi-perspectival account of God's gracious presence to characters as they pass through the tang and density of human experience. That Robinson's characters often miss God's gracious presence, intending their world *etsi Deus non daretur*, prompts the reader to bracket his natural attitude to assess whether he, too, is open to a more capacious vision of his life-world.

VII.1.2 The human sciences revisited. I have argued that implicit realities are rendered explicit in the fertile "in-betweens": integration of a subject with reality requires finding resonances –attunement– *across difference*. Human sciences are forever heuristic and thus prone to error in their self-articulation, relying as they do on the free imaginative play of the analogical imagination to avoid the gutters of univocal and equivocal thinking. The fertile ground "in-between" an ego-subject and her environs, or a character in his text-world, involves heuristic attunement *over time*. So too a thesis-length analysis of the "in-betweens" of the human sciences. Heuristic attunement involves misprisions and misfires, limping metaphors and imprecisions, which are generated and tested by the analogical imagination. Communities of scholars in the

[553] Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, 30.
[554] Lynch, 30.

human sciences offer, through empathic trust and intersubjectivity, gentle correctives and further insights to move all towards a more capacious vision of the whole.

If it is true that humans cannot stand too much reality at once, as T.S. Eliot suggested, then the question arises, what is a fruitful path towards a more capacious understanding of reality? Lynch suggested in his 1962 work *The Integrating Mind* that art, like theology, is interested in putting humans into contact with reality. Lynch suggests that 'the function of the artist is to imitate the ways of God himself in this matter, to lead us by *rhythmic endurable stages* to the truth, to give us only what at each moment is good for us, and to lead us finally into a world where there is plenty of room for God.'[555] The author's tactical revelations of details, in part and over time, lead the reader to the full understanding of the story. And God, by analogy, leads us through 'rhythmic endurable stages' of life, to a more capacious understanding of the whole of reality, clearing the path for a return to the source of truth itself. We come to know the author through the story that unfolds from her creativity, and God through the unfolding of creation. In the next section I revisit how this literary analogy makes a contribution to theological inquiry.

VII.2 Contributions to Theology and Literature

VII.2.1 Charting the "literary turn" in theology. This thesis makes several contributions to the field of theology and literature. The first and second (which I review in this section) address what literature contributes to theological discourse. The first comes in chapter one where I argued that cultural exchange with non- or pre-Christian sources has always-already informed Christian thinking. There is no neat division between sacred and secular language, since theology does not create language *ex nihilo* modernists or contemporary writers do. St Paul drew upon pagan poets, whose voices became unwitting participants in divine revelation through biblical Scripture. And avowed agnostic or atheist writers summon religious language and imagery, consciously or not. This thesis has endeavoured to help thematise the fecund borderlands of belief and unbelief, through a theological engagement with writers "bothered by God".

A second contribution (from chapter three) has been to highlight Christian theologians whose analogical imagination specifically draw upon the arts for

[555] William F. Lynch, *The Integrating Mind: An Exploration into Western Thought* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 142. Emphasis added.

understanding the divine. They have suggested that attention to the unseen author *of literature* is a way of becoming attuned also to the Author *of creation*. That chapter spoke of Saint Bonaventure's expansion on Augustine's *ars divina*, God's creative genius which is the Wisdom of God. Bonaventure argues that this Wisdom of God – the Λόγος itself – is first interior to God (the *liber intus scriptus*). Then God's Wisdom-Word is "written" into the "books" of Scripture and creation, *libri foris scripti*, deliberately external to God's self. Through Scripture, God employs our familiar human "words" to attune us to the divine Word. The beauty of God's creation is likewise "written" to be "read" in order to attune us to the creative Word itself. The Incarnation of the Word in Christ, then, is the perfect union of God's inwardly and outwardly written books, which have come together in a singular way.[556] Extending Bonaventure we might say that in Christ the *liber intus* and *liber foris* are one: Christ comes to inhabit creation and fulfil Scripture, as he likewise inhabits Scripture (cf. Luke 4:21: 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'). In his treatise *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, Bonaventure further spoke of the anagogic purpose of all arts – "arts" including other academic disciplines – to drive (ἄγειν) the observer back/again/up (*ἀνα-*) to a contemplation of God. All arts, Bonaventure argued, present beauty – what Cusa would recognise as a doxological sign – as the path of mystical ascent to God.

Having analysed the sacramental imagination of the *Gilead* quartet, I add here further insight from Robinson's preferred theologian, John Calvin. Calvin makes an argument for a theological *reductio*, based on St Paul's Letter to the Romans 1:19, 'what may be known of God is manifest among'[557]. Calvin argues that Paul means that the human person 'was formed *to be a spectator of the fabric of the world*, and was *endowed with eyes for the purpose of being led to God himself,* the Author of the world, by contemplating so magnificent an image.'[558] What may be known of the Author *is revealed through* the fabric of the world, though its Author remains invisible. Continuing to Romans 1:20, Calvin argues that God shines forth not only in the created *world*, but also in the *creatures* who inhabit it: 'God is in himself invisible; but as his majesty shines forth in his works and in his creatures everywhere, men ought in these to

[556] Bonaventura, *Breviloquium* II.11.2, cited in Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, n.d., 114–15.
[557] διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς.
[558] John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* 1:19, cited (slightly incorrectly) in Randall C. Zachman, "Calvin as Analogical Theologian," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (1998): 167. Calvin published this in 1540. Emphasis added.

acknowledge him, for they clearly set forth their Maker'.[559] Since humans are creatures, we too mirror (however imperfectly) what can be known of God. Humans are at once spectators *of* and actors *in* the world, as Robinson points out through the intersubjectival testimonies of the *Gilead* quartet. For Calvin a final way God is manifest among us is that God is the "framer" of all that he has created. Calvin cites Hebrews 11:3 ('this world is a mirror, the representation of invisible things') to argue that 'we can arrive at the knowledge of [God's] eternal power and divinity' through visible particulars because God 'is the framer of all things'.[560] God, that is, frames 'the fabric of the world' and directs our intentional gaze on this world as it is manifested to us. In sum, Calvin offers us that God is manifest when we attend to (a) visible creation, (b) human activity, and (c) the metaphysical framer of (a) and (b).

A common thread weaves through Augustine, Bonaventure, Cusa, and Calvin. Each employs analogies from the arts as an eminent pathway to God: *ars divina* as the wisdom of God; the Word written into the book of creation, beholding and discussing an icon, world-fabricating and -framing. Their appeal to the analogical imagination relies on images *of* image-crafting for the anagogical *reductio*. One can reason back in the horizontal domain of space and time (from artwork to unseen artisan), as an analogical aid in the vertical *reductio* from visible creation to the Creator. Cusa has helped us frame this analogical thinking in terms of *explicatio*/ *complicatio*: God is *explicated* (unfolded) by our human activity (conscious thinking and seeing and creating and being). And indeed, God is *complicit* (enfolded) in the same human activity, whether we acknowledge it or not, thematise it or not, choose to respond with faith or not.

Chapter six demonstrated that hermeneutics and phenomenology benefited from grounding in the theological dimension of reality; the theologians who draw on literary analogies demonstrate that theology has no private language and would struggle to articulate the faith without the analogical imagination. Like St Paul on the Areopagus, theology always-already relies on images and metaphors drawn from fields such as at the arts, and is richer for it.

So what does theological reflection offer to literary studies in return? This leads us back to insights from Lynch's *Images of Faith*, which generates a third decisive contribution of this thesis.

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[559] John Calvin, "John Calvin: Commentary on Romans," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., sec. Romans 1:20, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.v.vi.html.
[560] Calvin, sec. Romans 1:20.

VII.2.2 Charting the "theological turn" in literature. In this section, I explain how Lynch helps respond to the second task of the MLA Seminar on the "theological turn" in literature: 'developing theoretical paradigms that take religion seriously'. Recall the discussion from **III.1.4** about thematising the theological underpinnings of phenomenology. Jean-Louis Chrétien (and fellow proponents of the "theological turn") argued that the revelation of phenomenology's limits reorients the subject's attentional frame beyond what an ego-subject inquiry alone can give. William Lynch grounds a similar "theological turn" for literary interpretation. Like Gadamer, Lynch argues that arts and literature deliver more than mere aesthetic experiences (*Erlebnisse*); indeed, reading literature can be a definitive pathway out of one's *arrière-boutique* to connect with knowledge of broader culture, history and the particularities of one's surroundings. Unlike Gadamerian *Erfahrung*, however, Lynch argues that interpretation of literature begins with interpersonal trust ("primal faith") and culminates in openness to religious faith.

Recall Gadamer's *ignoramus* about the reality of God: all we have is the spatio-temporal horizontal axis, he imagined, and thus cannot reliably talk about a 'vertical' (i.e., transcendent) dimension of experience. But Lynch frames his pedagogy of faith in a way that even Gadamer would find attractive: a Christian's life of faith is not merely, or even foundationally, a disembodied, vertical relationship with an invisible God. Lynch entertains this misunderstanding wherein faith 'has a magnificently vertical but only a vertical life, in God, in the unknowable and the unimaginable. *Faith has no body or embodiment or horizontal life. It does not experience the world. It does not create society.* Thus we imagine.'[561] The misunderstanding concludes 'thus we imagine' with considerable irony, since the 'imagining' Lynch critiques is more Coleridgean fancy, a vertical escape hatch from spatio-temporal reality.[562] The disembodied vertical leap, Lynch suggests, is not an act of Christian faith or imagination, but a flight of fantasy.[563] Lynch's critique has a double-barrelled target: first aimed at the Gadamerian *ignoramus* of scepticism, and second, at a strain of religious thought that sharply separates faith in God's 'transcendent' operations from one's embodied experiences of faith. In this

[561] Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 4.
[562] This escapist leap to the heights is more Dionysian than Christian, Lynch argues in *Christ and Apollo* et passim.
[563] The bodily Ascension of Christ, and the bodily Assumption of Mary serve as forerunners of this embodied *reditus*.

misconception, there can be no attunement to grace operating through nature, because grace enters as a divine interruption in a fallen world. Lynch rejects this stark separation, as does Marilynne Robinson in her essay "Psalm 8": 'the concept of transcendence is based on a misreading of creation. With all due respect to heaven, the scene of miracle is here, among us.'[564]

In chapter one I argued that "grace" can be defined as God's gratuitous presence to and sustenance of, creation. Given the "givenness" of reality, it is easy to lose sight of its gratuitous giftedness. I argued that one way of understanding grace (Χάρις, "gift", "grace", "favour") is through *narrative*, attuning to it as it unfolds as a story in time. Differing accounts of how grace is revealed, then, is a major interpretative distinction for our reading of Woolf and Robinson. Woolf's characters imagine the possibility of divine presence as an adventitious, noisome disruption – as with Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Such characters, clearly bothered by God, bear striking resemblance to the writer who sought to rid herself of the "angel of the house" that haunted Victorian homes like hers. Mrs Ramsay is no more prepared to take the "leap of faith" in this God than is Clarissa Dalloway or Woolf herself. God is no gracious presence, but an intruder into one's back-shop of interiority. God's presence haunts Woolf's fiction, but remains unwelcome. For the theologically-minded reader, however, "moments of being" in her memoirs and fiction may register as implicit attunements to grace. One may identify grace operating upon or through another, without the recipient knowing or accepting it. Hence the category of *common grace* may help the religious reader articulate a religious phenomenology operative in Woolf's life and her fiction. This theological reading of Woolf's "moments of being" is an empathic attempt to find similarities-across-difference, "in-between" of belief and unbelief.

Robinson's *Gilead* quartet, by contrast, offers a pedagogical attunement to grace, wherein God's grace is not adventitious but enfolded in/mediated through the natural world, stories, and relationships of human trust. Jack comes to trust Della, and Lila comes to trust John Ames; in both cases, grace is mediated through imperfect "horizontal" relationships across the intersubjectivity of the instalments of GHLJ. These human experiences of trust (Lynch's "primal faith") are *sacramental signs* that lead one, anagogically, to a faith in God's unseen operations of grace. One's *reditus* to God, for Robinson, is not a vertical leap from nature, but a gradual attunement to God as that

[564] From 'Psalm 8' in Robinson, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*, 243.

deeper horizon of experience, wonder, and awe. For Robinson, attunement to this horizon happens by gradually making explicit – *explicatio* – God's grace that was always already operating implicitly. Once recognised, this enabling grace deepens and transforms Jack and Lila's trust in their all-too-human relationships.

VII.2.3 The irony of Christian faith. The fourth and final contribution of this thesis responds to the final task of the 2007 MLA conference: 'demonstrating how Christian commitments can lead to greater interpretive clarity'. Here again, William Lynch explains the importance of Christian *irony* for interpreting, i.e., "imaging" reality. If the remit of the imagination is *imaging* how a subject encounters phenomena, then the one's history and perspective at the outset will frame what sort of questions she will ask, and what sort of answers will be admitted for inquiry. Lynch asks what rationalism means in posing the question, 'what is the meaning of everything?'. And what does a paradigm of faith have in asking the same question? Lynch suggests that a theological vision of the world – i.e., the image God has of the world – populated by individuals with free will, is not a rational, 'well-ordered' image. A faith that can accommodate irony – i.e., which has learned to deal with what was not expected, relieves the imagination of the burden of neatly ordered, rational images. Surely, Lynch admits, faith is a place of thought, but,

> only the rationalistic assumption of some perfect plan, pattern, order and reason will make [faith] think and think without end or without rest, seeking a kind of answer that is not there for every situation and for life itself. A perfectly rational God would have limits. But a God who can tolerate and suffer so much freedom, so many free people (plus so many who are not free!), so many interesting, conflicting freedoms, so much time, so much waiting, so much evil and hatred that has no reason, so much space and time, does not have these limits. *Yet it is the lack of system in the system* that leads men to say there is no God. When the systematic fails they say he is silent or dead.[565]

The 'lack of system in the system', in other words, is a problem for any intending subject's sense-making. Humanity craves understanding, and where divine reality outpaces human understanding, humans have a choice: to dismiss God's reality outright (as did Bertrand Russell and Mr Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*), to settle into agnosticism (Woolf and Gadamer), or to yield to marvel and awe (Cusa, Calvin and Robinson, *inter alios*). An overactive rationalism presumes that phenomena should slot into extant human categories: the univocal imagination on overdrive. Agnosticism remains sceptical of others' testimonials of faith. In contrast to both, the ironic imagination of

[565] Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 147.

faith comes to expect that human subjectivity does not, cannot, account for the whole of reality. We see now through a mirror obscurely, as St Paul writes. Robinson is critical of writers, like Woolf, for whom individual perceptions holds pride of place. Rather than look towards a more capacious vision of reality, Robinson might say of Woolf, she contents herself with staring into the mirror. Lynch points out that operating with the belief-amidst-unbelief in mind, as Robinson does, allows for a more *katholic*, more mature, awareness of the irony and unpredictability of the human condition.

In chapter one I laid out the principal themes of Lynch's *Images of Faith*: we do not receive knowledge or experiences unmediated, but by our personal histories and the primal faith that makes interaction with extramental, embodied reality possible. The imagination is not a single faculty of the mind, but 'the total resources in us which go into the making of our images of the world.'[566] These include not only the senses (sight, hearing, touch, etc.) but one's history and education, feelings and wishes, love and hate, 'faith and unfaith', insofar as they contribute to how one *images*, that is, how one intends the world with one's natural attitude. And faith, as described by Lynch in chapter one, is a primal and broad force of 'belief, promise and fidelity, which – by its presence or absence, by its operation or collapse, by its goodness or fury, by its fidelities or treacheries – shapes (or misshapes) the welfare…the very existence, of men and women in life and society.'[567] Moving through the stages of faith, then, is heuristic, beginning with horizontal experiences of trust. Here again, Gadamer's conception of horizontal *Erfahrung* is necessary but insufficient; it lacks descriptive capacity for experiences of God.

Having established how we might understand faith and the imagination, Lynch's *Images of Faith* turns to how the Christian faith in particular *images*, i.e., phenomenologically constitutes one's experience of, extramental reality. He emphasizes that irony is crucial for understanding how the Christian imagination intends a reality that does not conform to expectations. The usual quality of irony, Lynch suggests, is 'the unexpected coexistence, to the point of identity, of certain contraries.'[568] In philosophy, contraries come in pairs, pairs which are diametrically opposed members of a common class, genus, or species. So, for example, very sharp and very blunt are incompatible contraries within the category of *knives*. To say 'the wise' and 'the mad'

[566] Lynch, 18.
[567] Lynch, 10.
[568] Lynch, 85.

are contraries among humans would suggest they be separate classes of people. And yet, Lynch argues, among humans such contraries co-exist: 'The shock of irony (and of recognition) comes not only from uniting them but also from seeing that the act of uniting them is not a mistake.'[569] Hence, Lynch offers as example, Socrates teaches most *beautiful* truths though he is notably *ugly*; he is wisest because he recognises his ignorance. The coexistence of contraries in the human person – the good and bad, the high and the low – is a philosophical account for irony. What distinguishes a *Christian* vision of irony, Lynch suggests, is movement: one must *pass through* the lower to reach the higher. Christian irony is paradoxical but not a static point; it suggests transformative movement. Transformation of one's imagination is an *expansion* at the far side of *contraction*, patterned on the straitened path of Christ himself. (Recall Lynch's discussion of the three levels of life the Christian tragedy passes through, treated in **III.3.2**)

Lynch points to Pascal as a model of keeping these ironic contraries of the human condition in tensive pull: we are at once made like unto God, and in a state of corruption like beasts. The human body is weak and decays; fixation on this fact results either in paralysis of fear or an obsessive fixation on physical health. By contrast the pure intellect which wishes to rise above the human condition, despising embodiment, risks becoming mad, ruthless, and contemptuous of the physical world – that vertical leap! Neither instance abides the ironic contraries attendant to one's condition. Spirit and body coexist in the human person, as do fear and courage, despair and hope, capacity for good and evil. The irony of faith is marked by the coexistence of these contraries in the human person. Artificially resolving these tensions is not the solution to the belief-unbelief dilemma. We grope forward in our desire to understand what is incomprehensible. Lynch's account of irony, paradox, and coincidence of contraries at the heart of the Christian imagination grounds this thesis's constructive answer to the MLA Seminar's third question: how can Christian faith lead to greater interpretive clarity of literature? In the next section, I apply Lynch's interpretive insights to weigh *the theological contributions* of Woolf and Robinson.

VII.2.4 Ironic imagination of faith as literary hermeneutic. This review of Lynch's conception ironic imagination at the heart of faith highlights his importance for

[569] Lynch, 85.

our theological assessment of Woolf and Robinson's conclusions. It is an irony of the Christian imagination that belief and disbelief are irresolvable contraries: 'it is very important that the faith and the incredulity in this body of faith be not separated out into two acts that have forgotten each other.'[570] The prospect of unbelief is a constitutive element of forming one's belief. Artificially resolving this tension of contraries, Lynch continues, compartmentalizes or flattens reality; one valorises high religious ideals while disparaging present physical conditions, or vice versa: 'What is necessary is that we come with faith and unfaith, with a sense of reality and illusion, belief and criticism, high seriousness and mockery, to the same reality in the one in the same act.'[571] Reading challenging fiction, I have argued, forces the reader to bracket one's sense of reality, to understand empathically how someone else could arrive at religious belief – or unbelief. Having one's implicit beliefs chided or challenged is an opportunity to thematise them, probe them, and clarify where one's faith needs to pass through the straitened narrows that allow for transformation. Woolf offers the chiding challenge to religious belief, and many of her characters can never quite shake the possibility of faith. Yet as Woolf scholars Elyse Graham and Pericles Lewis point out,

> Woolf's ingenuity as a secularist lies, in part, in finding ways to lay claim nonetheless to *religious aspects of experience*. At the same time that she dramatizes the decline of institutional religion, she presents an *image of religious experience* continuing within *a more private, individual locus*.[572]

Woolf's confining of religious experience to interiority highlights Gadamer's distinction of *Erlebnisse* – solitary, aesthetic, inaccessible experiences – from *Erfahrung*, a shared experience relying on primal, horizontal faith. In the last chapter I argued that Robinson achieves a more capacious vision of religious *Erfahrung* in her fiction: from a posture of religious faith, she honours and "enfolds" the unbelief of her characters, putting their doubts in frank conversations with those who believe. God's grace is on offer, even when it is first unseen or rejected by principal characters like Jack and Lila. And when they encounter the faith of others, their own visions are transformed, as they, too, become attuned to grace. Woolf, by contrast, confines her characters' religious wondering to interiority; the wrestling and "second reading" need not happen between characters, because questions of belief religious experience, are matters of private interpretation.

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[570] Lynch, 92–93.
[571] Lynch, 93.
[572] Elyse Graham and Pericles Lewis, "Private Religion, Public Mourning, and *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Modern Philology* 111, no. 1 (August 2013): 95. Emphasis added.

This is not an aesthetic judgment of our two writers, but a theological assessment of which gives a more capacious account of both religious belief and unbelief. Robinson's fiction demonstrates that the life of faith is no fantastic retreat from the world; it is rather an attunement of the intending subject to God's gracious presence throughout the movements of life. But attunement to grace in Robinson is no sentimental exercise, despite Jessica Hooten Wilson's objections I refuted in chapter five. Recall Chrétien's observation that divine 'revelation must shatter [*briser*] something in us in order to be heard. It reaches us only by wounding us.'[573] Robinson's characters carry wounds and hurts from the very Christians that aspire, however imperfectly, to welcome them. Where faith in religious institutions is absolutized and abides no critique, Lynch argues, the result is disappointment and understandable fury. Irony comes to educate this naïve, primal faith, to de-absolutize outsize trust; this it does through parody, humour, and even contempt. Hence, Lynch suggests*, irony is a necessary principle of negation in faith*, wiping out false gods and exposing the univocal pretences of religious fundamentalism. throughout the *Gilead* quartet, Jack Boughton ironically quotes Scripture and hymns to his family and Della. He wonders in *Jack*, 'Maybe this was hell. Hellfire is figurative, his father had said…Still, what if it was true? No flames at all, just an eternity of disheartened self-awareness. Outer darkness. Wailing and gnashing of teeth.'[574] Yet his puckish distance from religion belies a deeper desire for sincere connection. Jack's belief amidst unbelief highlights Lynch's circular rhythms: faith goes blindly, omnipotently, until it is shattered by the humbling grounding of irony. But irony separated from a paradigm of faith – as we have seen in Woolf's fiction – scorns not only false gods but anything in its path. Lynch concludes that where irony and scorn break away from faith, the tensive dynamism disappears as well. This is because faith and its critique balance one another in the ongoing formation [*Bildung*] of the Christian imagination. One must pass through the humbling straits of critique to ascend to a clearer understanding of faith.

Understood in this way, we begin to see how Woolf and Robinson's treatments of the question of divine reality qualitatively differ. Woolf's theological misstep was allowing her irony and scorn to cut her off not only from religious faith, but from a primal trust in most of her contemporaries. Recall from chapter one the Tracey/Greeley taxonomy of the Catholic *analogical* imagination and the Protestant *dialectical*

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[573] Chrétien, *Lueur du secret*, 22. Translation by Anne A. Davenport in Chrétien, C*all and Response*, xxiii.
[574] Robinson, *Jack*, 205.

imagination. My initial objection with this taxonomy lay with the fact that only one writer (Robinson) is a confessional Christian, and she more closely fits the analogical "Catholic" description than the dialectical "Protestant". Having reviewed Woolf and Robinson's projects, the objection extends deeper. Both Robinson and Woolf draw on images and metaphors to consider the divine, and thus both engage the analogical imagination. But only agnostic Woolf captures the dialectical quality of Greeley's description of "Protestant" literature: 'The Protestant classics… assume a God who is radically absent from the world and who discloses Herself only on rare occasions…The world and all its events, objects, and people tend to be radically different from God.'[575] If one replaces "Protestant classics" with "novels of Virginia Woolf", then a description of her literary project emerges. An absent divine being who communicates intermittently, like the beam of a lighthouse, fits Greeley's description. The radical alterity of God's adventitious words ('*I am your help…I am your support'*) strikes dread and fear of death in Mrs Ramsay. In Woolf's fiction God is no benevolent horizon cosseting human consciousness, but a radical intruder into one's independent thought. Greeley's description of the "Protestant" imagination continues:

> [Such an imagination] tends to see human society as 'God-forsaken' and therefore un-natural and oppressive. The individual stands over against society and is not integrated into it. The *human becomes fully human only when [s]he is able to break away from social oppression and relate to the absent God as a completely free individual*.'[576]

Here again is a perfect description of Woolf's desire to push against received wisdom and conventions not only from religious traditions, but wider society. She rejects the conventions of family, faith, and even feminism, to 'relate to the absent God as a completely free individual'. In his essay 'Culture and Belief' Lynch diagnoses the aloof intellectual who is bothered by religious belief:

> [B]elief has a tendency to become difficult without some kind of commitment to a culture, some kind of belonging… The intellectual [may] add to the danger of the situation if [she][577] begins to enjoy the subtle pleasures of her alienation from society, if she begins to elevate the tragic *incident* of her isolation into a *metaphysical* value and propose that the isolated intelligence is the finest epistemological instrument for bringing judgment on either society or belief.[578]

Lynch deftly notes the horizontal element of belief and unbelief. One's suspicion of primal faith (trust in another human) attenuates even the possibility of religious faith.

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[575] Greeley, "Protestant and Catholic," 486.
[576] Greeley, 486. Emphasis added.
[577] I have changed Lynch's gender throughout this passage.
[578] Lynch, *The Integrating Mind*, 97–98.

Greeley's description of the Catholic vision, by contrast, describes Robinson's GHLJ quartet: 'a set of ordered relationships, governed by both justice and love, which reveal, however imperfectly, the presence of God. Society is "natural" and "good" therefore for humans, and their "natural" response to God is social.'[579] Robinson's fiction challenges the injustice of racial miscegenation laws and the marginalization of women; and it does so by appealing to the ever greater goodness of the families that reveal to Jack and Lila, however imperfectly, God's providential grace. Robinson's fiction brilliantly intertwines a robust vision of faith, with a critical corrective to complacency in communities of faith; the tension of seriousness and irony is not cut, but transformed into a multivolume story of grace. Lynch's schema suggests that Robinson is therefore the stronger theological partner of the two writers.

VII.3 For Future Consideration: The *Katholic* Imagination, Literature and Ecclesiology

This leads us to where this thesis might lead future conversation, in cultivating communities of religious belonging through literature. All of one's life, Cusa suggests, is lived *coram Deo*, which carries the lexical range of *in the presence of* God, *before* God, *under the gaze of* God, and *face-to-face* with God. This harkens back to St. Paul who (in 1 Cor 13:11) speaks of seeing things only partly, in obscurity now. But with God's grace, we come to an experiential knowledge of things as they are, as one sees face-to-face (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον, 1 Cor 13:12). One might believe in private revelations without participating in religious institutions, like Virginia Woolf. Woolf was rejecting a Victorian culture she deemed stifling, benighted, and beholden to institutional Christianity. But a community of faith, correcting the excesses of too-little and too-much subjectivity, binds together the vertical and the horizontal elements of human experience. Marilynne Robinson writes in her essay "Imagination and Community",

> I identify with my congregation, with my denomination, with Christianity, with the customs and institutions that express the human capacity for reverence, allowing for turbulence within these groups and phenomena. Since we are human beings, turbulence is to be expected. … Those of us who accept a historical tradition find ourselves feeling burdened by its errors and excesses, especially when we are pressed to make some account of them. I would suggest that those who reject the

[579] Greeley, "Protestant and Catholic," 486.

> old traditions on these grounds are refusing to accept the fact that the tragic mystery of human nature has by no means played itself out, and that wisdom, which is almost always another name for humility, lies in accepting one's own inevitable share in human fallibility.[580]

A community of faith grounds and corrects the solipsistic imagination, towards a more inclusive, empathic vision of reality (*kath'holou*). One comes to recognise that the sins and "turbulence" of any religious community are, ironically, part of the Christian account of humanity. Woolf expressed little interest in such a vision:

> We may stress the value of sympathy; we may try to sink our identity as we read. But we know that we cannot sympathise wholly or immerse ourselves wholly; there is always a demon in us who whispers, 'I hate, I love,' and we cannot silence him. Indeed, it is precisely because we hate and we love that our relation with the poets and novelists is so intimate that we find the presence of another person intolerable. [581]

In the *Common Reader* Woolf admires Montaigne's unique ability to reflect exclusively on himself: 'this talking of oneself, following one's own vagaries, giving the whole map, weight, colour, and circumference of the soul in its confusion, its variety, its imperfection'. She imagines centuries going by with a crowd standing 'before that picture [of Montaigne's interiority], gazing into its depths, seeing their own faces reflected in it, seeing more the longer they look, never being able to say quite what it is that they see.'[582] Woolf's fascination with Montaigne and with preserving solitude in one's *arrière-boutique*, reveals something perhaps deeper: that her scepticism may have more to do with dreading the demands others make on her attention, than on any particular objection to Christian belief. Recall Woolf's authorial intentionality in 'An Unwritten Novel', with the narrator's mounting disdain for the pious caricature of "Minnie Marsh". And Clarissa Dalloway nurses scorn for her devout nanny, Miss Kilman: 'for it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those factors with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood.'[583] Later Clarissa resents Miss Kilman, whose 'love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul'[584]. Woolf uses this same cherished expression, "privacy of the soul" in 1917's 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs.

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[580] Robinson, "When I Was a Child I Read Books."
[581] Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?," 77.
[582] Woolf, "Montaigne."
[583] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 12.
[584] Woolf, 126–27.

Brown' and 1921's 'An Unwritten Novel'. Like her many protagonists, Woolf is bothered more by the presence of Christians, than by the divine they profess.

In *Images of Faith*, Lynch comments on the need for primal, horizontal faith in other humans to overcome the limits of the ego: 'in any human situation where the alternatives are the choice between an individualistic or narcissistic construction of the facts on the one hand and a human and social construction on the other, it is finally *faith alone* that permits us to make a decisive move from a narcissistic, selfish closed world to a public world.'[585] It is for this reason that church communities, particular the Catholic Church, are cautious both of claims to private revelation, and to being "spiritual but not religious"[586]. The *religio* of religion is a *horizontal* binding together with common dogmas, rituals, and language that constitute a shared horizon – a Life-world – together. This *religio* operates in Robinson's GHLJ quartet, in spite of the blindspots, limitations, and errors of its constitutive members.

One outgrowth of this thesis could be a "literary turn" in ecclesiology: considering how, e.g., Woolf's distaste for inherited institutions influences her image of God. Her implicit theological positions – juxtaposed with, e.g., Robinson's explicit ones – may help members and ministers of faith communities understand the literary origins of "spiritual but not religious" diffidence to church affiliation. Reading such literature in tandem with Cusa's exercise for the monks of Tegernsee reveals the power of analogical thinking to give a multi-disciplinary – indeed *katholic* – understanding of how one's ego-subject intentionality is limited by one's history and place.[587]

Ecclesiology can go around the hermeneutical circle to the history of phenomenology as well. Husserl himself learned the lesson of intersubjectivity from his student Edith Stein, which was treated in chapters two and three.[588] Empathic, embodied intersubjectivity is precisely what Cusa prescribed for the monks; asking one another of their embodied experiences of the icon of God. For both Husserl and Cusa, each monk must bracket his belief in his first intentional impression ('the icon is gazing at me and

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[585] Lynch, *Images of Faith*, 48.
[586] See for example, Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[587] Cusa offers a simple but profound examination of pre-reflective, doxological signs which were not diminished by subsequent reflection in common. On the contrary, the mutual sharing and verification stimulated greater awe and wonder, allowing for an anagogical ascent of mind**s** back to God (*reductio menti**um** in Deum*).
[588] Recall that Husserl's latter-day writing on intersubjectivity was guided by Stein's 1917 dissertation on empathy. See Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*.

me alone, because I am so very special!'). Hereafter Husserl and Cusa part ways. Husserl prescribes that the ego-subject imagine how another person who looks and behaves like me will perceive things from the same egocentric viewpoint as I do. Such a belief, for Husserl, grounds one's confidence in ascribing intentional acts to other subjects who are part of one's pregiven *Umwelt*, the life-world underpinning my natural attitude wherein phenomena appear.

But another interpretation of Husserlian life-world is a community of subjects who come to share a *Homeworld*, which is grounded in common language and practices that help form and direct their life together. It is this latter understanding of life-world – a shared *home* grounded in a common language – that Cusa encourages the monks of Tegernsee to recognise. Each monk becomes attuned to the icon of God through his own, if you like, 'vertical' phenomenological intentionality. But the trustworthiness of that vertical attunement emerges from, and is evaluated against, each monk's willingness to "play away from home" through *horizontal* interaction with and primal faith in one's fellow monks. For the monks of Tegernsee, the Life-world of their abbey is both the religious backdrop, and the phenomenological safeguard, against the intellectual excesses of any one monk's ego. *Bildung*, in other words, displaces each ego-subject from the hermeneutic centre in order to give each a greater sense of the whole, cultivating a more *katholic* imagination.

Here is where a final lesson from Gadamer comes into play. Art, when done well, grounds not merely one observer but many, for whom that artwork becomes a shared object of intentionality. One comes to recognise that an icon can be religious in two ways: the common usage of "treating a religious theme" e.g., a devotional icon, that can attune one's vertical attention to the divine. But it is also *religious* in the sense of an image that binds people together in this shared Life-world, inviting communal discernment of "transcendent" experiences. Martin Buber writes a compelling thought in his *I and Thou*, which may serve as a good point of departure for this further study on literary interpretation and ecclesiology:

> True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too), but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a *single living centre*, and they have to stand *in a living reciprocal relationship to one another*. The second event has its source in the first but is not immediately given with it. A living reciprocal relationship includes feelings, but is not derived from them. A community is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active centre.[589]

[589] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribner, 1970), 94.

In literary hermeneutics, that shared "living centre" is the text, where (Gadamer suggests) readers alone engage in interpretive play. The "theological turn" for Gadamer, which I have argued, renders explicit that our shared interpretation of literature, or a work of art, necessarily raises our collective attention to the unseen author. The "merging of horizons" is not limited to the reader-and-text alone, but opens to a vertical – theological – attunement to the author as well.

Conclusion

The introduction of this thesis was brief, since the first chapter elaborated the scope and plan for the thesis. This conclusion mirrors that brevity, as the seventh chapter endeavoured to review what was demonstrate, articulate contributions to theology and literature, and offer one path for future scholarship. Here I review, in brief, each chapter of this thesis's themes, as they make an *exitus* from, and *reditus* to, theology.

Part I offered theological, phenomenological, and literary structures for setting out on a theological engagement through literature. The first chapter, **"*Exitus:* Grace Playing at the Horizons"** sketched out the impetus and scope of this thesis, and then introduced the theological voices and methodological warrants for the project. I drew upon Karl Rahner's description of the human person's direct presence to God by way of an 'unformed attunement [*Gestimmtheit*] which is the unembraceable ground of [one's] whole knowledge, the permanent condition of the possibility of all other knowledge, its law and gauge.'[590] The specific question I wished to address was how a believer or non-believer might come to recognise and thematise this ground of knowledge, which Rahner associates with our implicit presence to God (and hence God's gracious presence to us). This theological question, I argued, is best treated not "at home" in theology, where non-believers would be unpersuaded by theological claims. St Paul demonstrated that theology is never done in a vacuum; theological discourse (like Scripture itself) is always-already borrowing language and concepts from ambient culture and academic disciplines. I analysed St Paul's speech on the Areopagus to secular thinkers who

[590] Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ," in *Theological Investigations. Volume V* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 209.

recognised, with noted ambivalence, their ἀγνώστος Θεός. This serves as a biblical precedent and warrant for thematising the divine outside of traditional "God talk". Aquinas' careful treatment of metaphor and analogy in positive theology offers a theological argument for 'estimating-esteeming' God from a distance. This I termed *periphasis*, which I later associated with Virginia Woolf's speaking *around* the divine.

Chapter one further introduced us to Nicholas of Cusa's doxological framework – pre-reflective awe and wonder at what discloses itself to our attention – as a theological prelude to phenomenological intentionality. This chapter also introduced the complexities of grappling with the slippery term "imagination". William Lynch, whose interests cover faith, the imagination, and literature, offered a clear path forward for our theological engagement with literature, wondering and wandering "away from home."

Chapter two, **"Resurrecting the Intending Author"**, began by reviewing and critically assessing methodological voices that straddle the disciplines of theology and literature. The review culminated in 20th-century literary theorists who debated the merits and investigability of authorial intention. Literary theory offered helpful terminology and frameworks for considering whether and how the author-text-reader relate to one another. Hermeneutics investigates where 'meaning' (*sensu lato*) is located and investigable in this web of connections. How can we take account of the author in our assessment, particularly given the positions of New Critics – who reject extratextual evidence – or of Roland Barthes, for whom the author is dead? I challenged Barthes's strident rejection of the author, for even he acknowledged that excluding the author from consideration is not a neutral reading, but a *countertheological* approach to the text.

This first half of the chapter revealed that literary theory and hermeneutics alone do not offer methodological tools sufficient to the task of a theological engagement with literature. Since 'authorial intention' (*sensu stricto*) remains highly contested, I argued one ought to turn instead to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological toolbox to analyse authorial *intentionality*, i.e., what appears to an author's attentional *consciousness*, such that the author chooses to record it and offer it for our readerly attention. I developed a phenomenology of literary intentionality to explain how a writer pays attention in her act of *poiēsis*, forming an irreplicable, meaning-full relationship (poiematic *Sinn*) to objects and states of affairs in the world. Her *poiēma* is recorded as a literary text, which becomes a new intentional object for her readers' intentional consideration. I concluded that while 'authorial intention' is inaccessible and irreplicable, it does not follow that we must dismiss the author, since the work of fiction is our primary locus for empathic,

interpretive play with the unseen author. I then re-purposed Husserl's concept of *epochē* ('bracketing'), not to achieve an eidetic reduction, but to explain how authors like Woolf and Robinson play "away from home" on questions of religious belief *etsi Deus (non) daretur*. By bracketing their stated attitudes and beliefs in order to present a plurality of characters who contradict one another, these authors perforce train their readers to thematise their readerly 'natural attitude' vis-à-vis similar theological questions. In sum, I repurpose intentionality and *epochē* to analyse how writers like Woolf and Robinson train their readers' attention to consider the fruit of their authorial intentionality, without presuming to exhaust the meaning of the text, or extract a psychological *intention* from the absent author. There is, rather, room for *mystery* in discerning the author's relationship to her text. I conclude that this application of Husserl is a practicable connective tissue between *literary attention* and *theological attunement*: this phenomenology of literature serves as a propaedeutic to cultivating readers' *spiritual* and *theological* attention to the divine Author, which returns us in the next chapter to consider the theological underpinnings of phenomenology.

The third chapter is entitled **"Creations of God and of the Writer"**. As both poet and philosopher in the phenomenological tradition, I began this chapter by examining Jean-Louis Chrétien's argument that all human activity – our being, speaking, writing, loving, etc. – is a finite *réponse* to an initiatory, infinite call/appeal (*appel*) of God. The disproportion of the finite to infinity is impossible for humans to fathom, so some choose simply to exclude the prospect of the infinite. Yet the infinite Creator does not abandon us in our unknowing, but chooses to shatter our finitude to thematise our dependence. Chrétien draws on Platonic thought of how beauty calls to us to consider its origins, and our own. Drawing on St Augustine, Chrétien pointed out that artistic creations of beauty become an eminent pathway to return to the call of their creators. Christian theology after Augustine developed his analogy (Creator:creation::craftsperson:craft) to show a double exchange of identities, wherein God becomes the divine Artist, and humans are elevated to the place of creators.

Nicholas of Cusa helps to reformulate this theological position by showing that all human creation is nested in God's creative activity, with the language of *explicatio/complicatio*. Just as the human person is created in *imago Dei*, so too the writer's imagination is created in the image of the imagination of God. The writer conjures worlds and gives life to a plurality of characters, though not *ex nihilo*: rather, she draws from the communal well of words and images to re-present reality. For this

reason, such text-world creation can never be strictly secular, in the sense of a free-standing, self-authenticating domain. Rather all literary world-creating always-already draws from the wellsprings of the past to fashion a literary present (even ones rejecting the past).

I turned then to Lynch's metaphysics of literature, where particularities serve as signs that point to the transcendent without losing the 'tang' of materiality. In the Christian literary imagination, one must pass through the concrete and finite in order to make an ascent into insight. By synthesizing elements of Cusa's theology and William Lynch's movement through finite particularity, we see how literary engagement with concrete details is modelled on the Incarnation of the God-man Christ, who is the reasonable *Logos* of God. Having established a theological framework and literary methodology, the ground was prepared for a theological engagement with our two authors of fiction, and the text-worlds they created for investigation.

Part II's literary analysis began with chapter four, entitled **"Virginia Woolf's Periphatic Theology"**. I began by reviewing Woolf's biography for insight into why she was inclined to agnosticism. I moved into her self-articulated project as a literary critic and innovative writer of novels. I thematised her own authorial and readerly intentionality by critically examining several short stories and essays. Her fiction, I argued, speaks about God periphatically, probing characters' consciousness for remnants of belief. Theologians need not baptise non-religious literature like *To the Lighthouse* to assess how it nevertheless can attune the reader to God.

I briefly compared Woolf and Robinson's approaches to transcendence in fiction as an introduction to chapter five, **"Marilynne Robinson and the Subtleties of Grace".** Like Woolf, Robinson's fiction – *Housekeeping* and the four-part *Gilead* series – engages in world-creation that bears marks both of autobiography and authorial self-subversion. Unlike Woolf, Robinson sees her work as 'cosmic realism' wherein God's grace underpins her creative text-worlds, whether her characters recognise it or not. Robinson's attention-framing intentionality attunes her readers to divine grace by way of intersubjectivity. The free play of multiple individual perspectives, which illumine one another's manifest limits, is precisely what guides her reader's imagination towards a more informed and thus whole (*kath'holou*) vision of God's gracious activity in their own life-world. With Calvin, Robinson imagines God observing creation like a spectator at the theatre of life, who sees what characters in the drama cannot: Christ playing in ten

thousand places, and grace operating through characters like Lila and Jack, in spite of themselves.

Having done in-depth analyses of our two writers, Part III (**"Towards a Katholic Imagination"**) could offer corrective insights to the methodological voices from part I. The sixth chapter, **"Revising the Hermeneutical Circle"** began by revising the insights of Gadamer. Woolf and Robinson both demonstrated how even fictional experiences admit of multiple interpretive frames; reading with a katholic imagination challenges a reader to consider the limits – through poetic *epochē* – of one's interpretive framing. This *epochē*, I argued, is a spiritual discipline that engenders empathy, cognitive humility, and interest in dialogue with others. To develop the relationship between this spiritual discipline and the work of the katholic imagination, I explored Cusa's *De Visione Dei*. This imaginative exercise demonstrated that the act of intending a work of art is never done *in vacuo* (any more than its crafting was accomplished *ex nihilo*). I examine the account of Cusa gifting an icon to the monks of Tegernsee, instructing them to hang it above while move around below, letting the eyes follow each as he wanders. The infinite gaze remains graciously present to each in his quantum finitude, with each perceiver visually attuned back to the infinite. Importantly, understanding the whole (*kath'holou*) of this schema requires not only vertical (visual) but also horizontal (auditory) attunement: the monks are instructed to speak about what they see to each other.

Cusa's aesthetic framing demonstrated that attunement to the divine, like attunement to authorial intentionality, happens in communities of reception and verification. A text 'sees' and is seen by many readers across time and space; it is read by each reader and 'reads' each reader. Each character within a text-world is bounded by his cognitive limits and prejudices; each reader is likewise bounded by her limited perspective; her solitary reading cannot exhaustively 'see' the author, let alone the other readers whose interpretations remain unseen and unknowable to her. I compared Cusa's *De Visione Dei* exercise to Woolf's story "The Mark on the Wall" which has the narrator playfully imagining the origins of an apparent nail in her sitting room's wall. In this story as in Cusa's exercise, the finite perspective of one 'reading' becomes a surprise, a gift, and a possible corrective to the finite perspective of another's reading. I drew a final comparison of Woolf's fiction to Robinson's *Gilead* quartet, in light of Gadamer's conception of isolating *Erlebnis* and a communally-mediated *Erfahrung.*

At this point, the thesis returned to the phenomenology of literature introduced in chapter two. Woolf noted in an essay that a text continues to work on a reader well after the reading is over. I argued that fiction, like other arts, shifts one's readerly intentionality from a *particular* artistic creation to consider the ways one selectively attends to (i.e., *intends*) all of reality in one's 'natural attitude'; the reader's finite attentional frame itself is up for phenomenological interrogation, as the text 'reads' and 'gauges' the reader. We recall Rahner's question (from chapter one) of how we come to recognise our 'unformed attunement' to the divine. I reviewed Woolf and her inspiration Montaigne, for whom interiority is that "back-shop" respite from others and divine interference. I compared that to Robinson's inspiration John Calvin, for whom the ego's isolation requires God's initiatory action to help direct one's intentionality to God's gracious activity, in and through creation. Robinson's fiction, I conclude, better explains how reader and theologian *alike* attend to particulars of creation *in order to become better* attuned to c/Creator. She not only exercises the katholic imagination, but actively cultivates a more capacious attention in her readers.

In chapter seven, "*Reditus.* Attunements to Grace" I explained what theology gains from this extramural engagement with literature, reviewing the fruit borne at the "in-betweens" within and across disciplines. Attunement [*Gestimmtheit*] helps the analogical imagination experientially navigate between the twin perils of univocal and equivocal thinking. The imagination requires proper formation, which can be trained through great writers of fiction. The capacity to be surprised by irony – a feature central to the Christian story – is William Lynch's contribution to a theological engagement with literature. The capacity to be surprised within a text-world prepares the reader to attend to surpising evidence of God's gracious presence in his life-world, in whatever form it may emerge. Horizonal communities of belonging, Cusa demonstrated, help one interpret and discern the reliability of apparent religious experiences. Hence I suggested that religious communities ought to consider reading great literature –even non-religious fiction – together, as a way of helping interpret not only the text intersubjectively, but also their shared life-world.

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If a fiction writer is always-already enfolded in/*complicit* with the divine Creator, then Paul's speech demonstrates that Christians can read even consciously "secular" fiction for resonances with the Christian vision, since Paul himself drew upon pagan poets. An expansive interest in the whole (*kath'holou*) of human experience trains the

Christian reader to discern how humanity's 'unformed attunement' to the divine is operative, even where the human author is unseen, dead, or otherwise not available. Whatever an author *may have* intended – combined with whatever *significance* the text generates for a particular reader – reveals an ever-greater surplus of meaning that can be explored but never exhausted. That is because, Chrétien reminds us, all human speaking, thinking, and writing are but a response to the ever-greater, originating call of God, who is the source of all mystery.

This thesis has demonstrated that intellectual, spiritual, and artistic fruit emerges when religious belief and unbelief are presented and challenged through the free imaginative play of fiction. The task of the Christian theologian is to probe the familiar to see, hear, and read where God's Spirit is unpredictably active, even "away from home". Those who read Woolf and Robinson (and you as readers of this thesis) are engaging in theology at the edges of the discipline, which carries attendant risks and rewards. The danger of baptising Woolf as an 'anonymous Christian' is mitigated by allowing her life, authorial intention, and writing to remain *other*, while also seeking to investigate her authorial intentionality. The reward for a believer reading her fiction is recognising the spiritual fruit her periphatic wonderings may induce in the reader. The value of reading Robinson is that she articulates the suasive pulls of religious unbelief as well as religious belief; she trains her readers to empathise with unbelief while weaving a pattern of God's gracious activity underneath. These writers bothered by God thematise the reader's horizon before him, and attitudes within him. He must decide whether his imagination—consciousness—attention are but a utopian diversion before death, or the graciously given tools for constituting a *reductio mentis in Deum*, his path to a home unseen.

[Word count of thesis and footnotes: 99,961]

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