

Southwell's Influence: Imitations, Appropriations, Reactions¹

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The blood of martyrs can germinate unpredictably. When the Elizabethan Jesuit priest Robert Southwell was put to death in 1595, he could have had little idea that his literary remains would have a seminal influence on both the sacred and the secular verse of his time. *Saint Peters complaint* and *Mæonia*, volumes of his verse printed after his execution in 1595, became best-sellers for several years; his poems were also copied widely in manuscript inside and outside the recusant culture he knew.² The popularity of his writing, especially his tears-poetry, helped to initiate a turn to religion in late Elizabethan literature, and fellow Catholics were not alone in finding his work inspirational.³

But he posed a problematic legacy to his literary successors, not least because it could be hard to call him an exemplar.⁴ Many comparably influential poets – Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser among them – are respectfully invoked in this period, but Southwell is rarely credited by name: which is not surprising, given his adherence to an outlawed religious denomination and his traitor's death. Acknowledgements of his influence sometimes take the form of an *hommage*, where his characteristic subject-matter and style are tacitly appropriated in the expectation that the audience will recognise the allusion. At other times his influence is subsumed, fought against or both, as part of the ongoing Protestant mission to make over Catholic writing.⁵ Within the devotional activity Southwell inspired, he becomes anonymous for different reasons,

largely out of his success at enabling his readers' self-transcendence and spiritual heightening. The writers considered below – Elizabeth Grymeston, William Evans, Richard Verstegan, Michael Drayton, George Herbert – demonstrate the range of reactions that Southwell elicited.

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Stephen Greenblatt's influential discussion of another Reformation-era saint, Thomas More, posits an opposition between self-fashioning and self-cancellation.⁶ Though Greenblatt does not discuss devotional writing at length, the latter coinage seems apt for a genre which typically points towards God and away from the self, aiming to reform both writer and reader along exemplary Christian lines. Whether devotional writers draw on Scripture, on named predecessors or on a general stock of pious tropes, they foreground *imitatio* and reassortment. Originality is never straightforwardly desirable during the early modern period, and devotional writing is a genre where explicit claims to authorial originality may seem especially inappropriate. Characteristically, the self-effacing author foregrounds Christian precedent, offering work up to the reader for the betterment of his or her spiritual condition, and the reader customises accordingly.⁷ In keeping with Southwell's missionary agenda, his verse is unusually susceptible to this type of appropriation: powerful because of, not in spite of, its reliance on homiletic exhortation and didactic commonplace. As animated by the reading habits of the time and Southwell's personal example, this makes strenuous religious and ethical demands upon well-affected readers.

The Catholic writer Elizabeth Grymeston, who remodelled Southwell's verse for use in her own prayer life, illustrates the kind of religious self-fashioning his writing inspired.⁸ From her posthumously published advice book *Miscelanea*, we learn that she reassorted stanzas from "Saint Peter's Complaint" and intermingled them with devotional reflection, "usually sung and played" on "the winde instrument" – seemingly an organ, the only wind instrument which allows one to sing and play simultaneously.⁹ The following extract illustrates how Southwell's verse was embedded in her devotional programme.

Happie is the man whose life is a continuall prayer.

O God to whom nothing is so great as can resist, nothing so little as is contemptible: O Christ the guide of those that seeke thee, the light of those that finde thee: O Holy Ghost that both fillest and includest all things; I am ashamed to be seene of thee, because I am not assured to be received by thee, having neither deserued pardon for my faults, nor participation of thy glorie: yet sweet Jesu, supply my defects, that by thy mercie I may obtaine remission, and by thy merits deserue saluation. Let thy passion worke compassion for me

*A sorie wight the obiect of disgrace,
The monument of feare, the map of shame,
The mirror of mishap, the staine of place,
The scorne of time, the infamie of fame,
An excrement of earth to heauen hatefull,
Iniurious to man, to God ungratefull. (D4b)¹⁰*

As adopted by Grymeston, this stanza becomes an extension of her own prayer: so much so that her sentence runs on into Southwell's prosopopoeia. In fact, she goes some way beyond what Southwell intends – his preface to the poem urges the reader, "Learne by [saints'] faultes, what in thine owne to mend", recommending a combination of empathy with St Peter and interpretive distance from him.¹¹ By aligning herself with St Peter so fully, Grymeston is metamorphosing into him, to the extent that she prays as a man by taking on his voice. As the heading to the passage reminds us, it was the convention – in

Grymeston's era, and till recently -- to use the male gender when referring to humanity in general, and the timid audacities of a female author could align well with the continual repentance for which Southwell's St Peter provides a model.¹² As the choice of this passage illustrates, describing oneself in the harshest epithets was central to early modern spirituality: which, at first sight, runs strikingly counter to the hierarchies implicit in a mother's advice book such as this.¹³ So far from passing on maternal counsel *de haut en bas*, Grymeston uses Southwell's verse to self-flagellate in front of her offspring. Yet to call oneself the worst of sinners was exemplary, even if one was a mother addressing a child, and adopting the voice of Southwell's St Peter is a way for Grymeston to deploy this backhanded devotional stratagem. The very act of borrowing from Southwell becomes part of Grymeston's abjection; as she writes, deploying an image often used to justify literary appropriation: "the spiders webbe is neither the better because wouen out of his owne brest, nor the bees hony the woorse, for that gathered out of many flowers; neither could I euer brooke to set downe that haltingly in my broken stile, which I found better expressed by a grauer author" (A3b).

Another Catholic writer of this period, writing on the topic of repentance in a very different context, also borrows from Southwell. The manuscript play "The History of Purgatory", written as part of Christmas-tide festivities in the early 17th century, centres on a soul facing trial after death.¹⁴ Satan puts the case for hell, and Michael joins in the condemnation with the following speech:

If wiles of witt, had ouer raught thy will
 thy foyle had founde, excuse, in want of skill
 Or sutle traynes, misled thy steeps awrye
 yll deeds thou might, though not yll doome denye
 But witt and will, must now confesse with shame
 both deede and dome, to haue deserued blame

Thy ffancie deem'd, fit guyde to leade thy way
 witt lost his ayme, and will was ffanses pray
 But, now sith ffansye, did with ffollye ende
 now after death, to late it is to mende
 But, now thou hast, a loade so heauie founde
 that makes thee boow, yea full flat to the grounde ...¹⁵

This adapts two stanzas from Southwell's 'Davids Peccavi'.

If wiles of witt had overwrought my will
 Or sutle traynes misledd my steppes awrye
 My foyle had founde excuse in want of skill
 Ill deede I might though not ill dome denye
 But witt and will muste now confesse with shame
 Both deede and dome to have deserved blame

I phansy deem'd fitt guide to leade my waie
 And as I deem'd I did pursue her track
 Witt lost his ayme and will was phancies pray
 The rebell wonne the ruler went to wracke
 But now sith phansye did with follye end
 Wit bought with losse will taught by wit will mend. (19-30)

Like "Saint Peter's Complaint", "David's Peccavi" is a prosopopoeia. In it, the king and psalmist acknowledges wrongdoing, both over his affair with Bathsheba and in sending Bathsheba's husband Uriah to his death. In the dramatic reworking of these stanzas, much of Southwell survives, but there are suggestive changes in line-order and content. Most obviously, the dramatist shifts the speech from the first to the second person, deletes the references about the rebel and the ruler – less relevant to the soul than to David – and completely rewrites the subsequent lines. If "after death, to late it is to mende", Southwell's cautious evocation of repentance would be inappropriate.

The idea of bowing "flat to the ground" is suitable enough for a drama in which the action takes place after death, but it is also – quite literally – bathetic. Here, as occasionally elsewhere in this play, the juxtaposition of Southwell's lines to those of its

dramatist painfully illustrates the limited poetical abilities of the latter: which, in turn, begs the question of whether Southwell's verse is just being used to patch the later writer's deficiencies. Yet the play is a recusant production, outspokenly advocating prayer for the dead and lamenting the decay of hospitality after the Reformation; its readers and audience members would have been very likely to pick up on allusions to Southwell's verse, making it likely that the author intended these to be noticed. Besides, in the prologue to the play, the dramatist sets out an agenda not dissimilar to Grymeston's, in which borrowing or "gleening" from other writers becomes an expression of personal humility.

When as diuine matters, declare we
 An Angels voice, ys fitter to declare
 With reuerence, diligence, and great care
 Then seculer men, as gleenes here and their
 Our Authour, ys but a seculer man¹⁶
 gleeninge flowers of inspiration
 ffrom learned men, that are his conductour
 the holie Ghost, their guyde and protectour ... (p.2)

The play exhibits another extended borrowing from Southwell. When Mercy speaks in defence of the soul, she compares it to 'other brittle moulds, that now are Saints' and continues:

Ly[c]ense my single selfe, to seeke a phere [companion]
 Cloude not with mistie loves, your Orient cleere
 You heavenlye sparkes of wytt, shew native light
 sweete flightes you shoote, to this Soule leuell right ...
 ffavor my wish, wellwishinge, workes no yll
 I move the suyte, the graunt stands in your will (p.46)

These lines are adapted from 'The Author to the Reader' at the beginning of "Saint Peter's Complaint". The first part is taken from the point where, in relation to St Peter, Southwell exhorts his reader "Muse not to see some mud in cleerest brooke, / They once

were brittle mould, that now are Saintes”, while the second rewrites Southwell’s concluding stanza:

License my single penne to seeke a phere,
 You heavenly sparkes of wit, show native light:
 Cloude not with mistie loves your Orient cleere,
 Sweete flightes you shoote; learne once to levell right.
 Favour my wish, well wishing workes no ill:
 I moove the Suite, the Graunt restes in your will.¹⁷

In the original poem, Southwell is pleading with other poets to turn from amorous verse to religious; as rewritten and reassigned to Mercy, the lines advocate the soul’s salvation. As a transfer, it does not quite work, since Southwell’s injunction that his fellow writers should not obscure their perception with “mistie loves” becomes redundant. Nevertheless, the alteration from “my single penne” to “my single selfe” might, for anyone picking up on the reference, have added to the poignancy of the plea: Mercy is not even buttressed by authorial identity as Southwell was. Her relative isolation – at this point in the drama she is the only character to be defending the soul – also resonates with Southwell’s own prophetic stance, and her address to fellow heavenly beings would surely have gained emotional efficacy from the belief, shared by author and audience, that Southwell himself was now a saint in heaven.

Some poets responded more directly to Southwell’s call to arms. Among them was William Evans, whose *Pietatis lachrymae* was published in 1602, at the height of the Southwellian-influenced fashion for tears-poetry. Print would have inhibited any declaration of allegiance to Southwell’s faith, but what little is known about Evans would not be incompatible with a pro-Catholic writer, and the volume was dedicated to two patrons with Catholic sympathies: Sir Thomas Kitson and his “staunchly recusant” wife Elizabeth.¹⁸ Quotations from and allusions to Southwell permeate both *Pietatis*

lachrymae and its paratextual matter. Philemon Holland, speculating about the possible reception of the volume in a dedicatory verse, quotes from Southwell's couplet "In paynim toyes the sweetest vaines are spent: / To Christian workes, few have their tallents lent":

With some fantasticke foolish braine or other,
(Causles) thy weeping lines may be disgraced
While wisdomes wit their folly doth discourer,
And thou thereby in better thoughts be placed.
Thy lynes (no Panimne toyes) thy Text deuine,
Exhales such darkning clouds that Sun may shine.¹⁹

Evans's own introduction, sarcastically enjoining profane poets to "Deuote thy wits to loue and venery, /... Be-witch mens soules with beauties fopperie, / By *Uenus* forged-Goddesse praise to winne" quotes Southwell's "Ambitious heades dreame you of fortunes pride: / Fill volumes with your forged Goddesse prayse."²⁰ Elsewhere, he responds to Southwell's mournful reflection on contemporary poetics, "*Christ's* Thorne is sharp, no head his Garland weares", by entitling one of his holy sonnets "Christes Crowne is sharpe".²¹ One early modern meaning of "garland" is a verse-anthology or miscellany, so this expands upon Southwell's original double meaning.²²

However, Evans is not an entirely uncritical disciple of Southwell. "A passion of an afflicted soule", an early item in his collection, appears at first sight to be simply a reworking of "Saint Peter's Complaint": it begins in a pastoral setting, where a young man laments how his sinfulness surpasses even that of St Peter. The following stanzas contain many recollections of Southwell's poem: for instance, the lines "Earths excrement, (alas) of all men hatefull; / vnkinde vnto my selfe, to God vngratefull", a couplet which Evans barely rewrites, and Grymston also selected.²³ Yet the ending takes a different turn from the original. An aesthetically challenging feature of "Saint Peter's Complaint" is its recapitulation of woe; mimicking the thought-processes of a depressive in the way it circles back on itself, it gives us no obvious trajectory towards divine

comfort.²⁴ Though Christ's mercy is edged up to more than once, the speaker sinks again into a state where it is hard to distinguish contrition from despair. In this context, the poem's ending, tentative in any case – "Tender my suite, clense this defiled denne, / Cancell my debtes, sweete *Jesu*, say Amen" (791-2) – becomes especially inconclusive. The last words of Evans's abject speaker are not dissimilar: "Mercy sweet Iesu mercy let me win, / Since now I hate my selfe, & loath my sin" (B5b). But as rewritten and repositioned, they have a very different effect from St Peter's unanswered plea: the speaker ends on a note of explicit self-alienation in declaring 'I hate my selfe', which, in turn, is framed within a broader first-person narrative. As the complaint dies away, this earlier voice takes up the tale:

This he no sooner said, but I might see
 A man well seeming Angell-Saint to be;
 Of comely hue of golde his pleated hayres,
 More graue in Wisdoms booke, then aged yeares.
 His feete instead of sandals troade the ayre,
 And windes for wings, did this Cælestiall beare. ...

Doe not dispaire (quoth he) thou wofull man,
 Doubt not, but he that made all, all things can;
 Thinke not that he that breath'd into thee breath,
 Will ought reioyce in thy soules fearefull death.
 No wretched man thy God willes thee to know,
 Sinnes red as scarlet, he makes white as snow.²⁵

Seale this (O Lord) cleare my sinne-spotted-Den,
 Teares beg the warrant, Iesu say Amen. (B5b-6a)

This concluding couplet is potentially attributable either to the narrator or the complainant, and also voices the aspirations of a well-affected reader. In it, Evans does revert to and rewrite the ending of Southwell's poem, but the visitation of the 'Angell-Saint' has lifted the mood, with its external assurance that the petition will be answered.

On one level, this interprets Southwell as Southwell must have intended, given his pastoral duty to communicate the Christian message of salvation. Yet Evans's rewrite

only illustrates how radically Southwell's original minimises hope: dramatising St Peter in his darkest hour, forgoing anticipation of the Resurrection and leaving any sustained confidence in divine grace up to the reader to supply. Southwell has no more fervent literary admirer than Evans, but even Evans shies away from Southwell's darkest intuitions; his reworking, emphasising God's grace to the penitent, has a normative effect and can be seen as correcting Southwell.²⁶ Something similar is true of the Catholic author Richard Verstegan, whose *Odes* (1601) include a pastiche of 'Saint Peter's Complaint' entitled "St Peters Comfort". Like the original, this begins in despondent mode, but – as the title indicates – the tone progressively lightens. Around the middle of the poem, St Peter can declare: "The wound is heal'd, yet must the skar remaine, / The skar my stil remembrance of the sore, / For which, kynde grief stil wil I entertaine, / That neuer may sufficiently deplore" (p.82). But by its end, the mood has modulated to one of thankfulness:

O endlesse comfort ending thus my care,
 Vn-ending thankes must therefore bee my parte,
 VVhich for thy due, I duly wil prepare,
 To offer on the Alter of my hart,
 VVhereas the fyre of loue for euer lies,
 To serue for my eternal sacrificise. (p.84)

A more thoroughgoing critique of Southwell's agenda shapes an early version of a poem by Michael Drayton. Like "A passion of an afflicted soule", this features a sinner complaining in a rural setting, capitalising on the period's fashion for Spenserian pastoral. The first of a collection of eclogues which initially appeared in 1593 in the collection *Idea: The shepheardes garland*, it was republished in 1606, heavily revised, and appeared for a third time in 1619.²⁷ The differences between the first version and the later two are considerable, not just from the stylistic point of view but in their moral

focus. The first version shows Rowland – Drayton's pastoral name – sunk in a melancholy partly occasioned by sin, partly by lack of preferment; he pours out his complaint to a deity successively imaged as Pan, Jove and the Christian God, and asks that his contrition should win forgiveness.²⁸ As first recognised by Bernard H. Newdigate, the poem pastiches Southwell.²⁹ Drayton had experimented with religious verse earlier in his career with *The harmonie of the church* (1591), a versification of the Song of Songs and other portions of the Bible, and he may have been especially interested in Southwell's work for that reason. But his agenda in this poem, marked as it is by worldly disappointment and imaginative syncretism, seems far removed from Southwell's, suggesting that his engagement with Southwell's work may primarily show eagerness to be *au fait* with the latest literary productions.³⁰ If so, the knowingness of alluding to Southwell at all would have been accentuated by the overt parody of him at the end of the poem.

O shepherds soveraigne, yea receive in gree,³¹
 The gushing teares, from never-resting eyes,
 And let those prayers which I shall make to thee,
 Be in thy sight perfumed sacrifice:
 Let smokie sighes be pledges of contrition,
 For follies past to make my soules submission.

Submission makes amends for all my misse,
 Contrition a refined life begins,
 Then sacred sighes, what thing more precious is?
 And prayers be oblations for my sinnes,
 Repentant teares, from heaven-beholding eyes,
 Ascend the ayre, and penetrate the skies.

My sorowes waxe, my joyes are in the wayning,
 My hope decayes, and my despayre is springing,
 My love hath losse, and my disgrace hath gayning,
 Wrong rules, desert with teares her hands sits wringing:
 Sorrow, despayre, disgrace, and wrong, doe thwart
 My Joy, my love, my hope, and my desert. ...

Thus breathing from the Center of his soule,
 The tragick accents of his extasie,
 His sun-set eyes gan here and there to roule,
 Like one surprisde with sodaine lunacie:
 And being rouzde out of melancholly,
 Flye whirle-winde thoughts unto the heavens quoth he.³²

Like Evans, Drayton deploys a poetic observer to provide an external perspective on the complainant's emotional turbulence. But in place of Evans's gentle amelioration of Southwell, we are given a caricature of a sinner's spiritual disquiet. Even the speaker recognises his own "lunacie" when he signs off on his deranged prayer: "Flye whirle-winde thoughts unto the heavens". Yet, if anything, his return to composure leaves him in a worse state. As night falls, "*Rowland* from this time-consumed stock, / With stone-colde hart now stalketh towards his flock" (83-4). His chronic *accidia* has not been allayed by hyperbolic complaint, which suggests its lack of spiritual efficacy.³³ In the two subsequent versions of the poem, the religious language remains to some extent, but the theme of religious contrition almost disappears; the sole reference to "sinnes" is calculatedly ambiguous, perhaps referring to the speaker, perhaps to the sinfulness of the world.³⁴

Shepherds great Sovereigne, graciously receive,
 Those thoughts to thee continually erected,
 Nor let the World of Comfort me bereave,
 Whilst I before it sadly lye dejected,
 Whose sinnes, like fogs that over-cloud the Aire,
 Darken those beames which promis'd me so faire.

In addition, the final stanza goes completely, displaced by Rowland's complaint at his lack of recognition and preferment:

My hopes are fruitlesse, and my faith is vaine,
 And but meere shewes, disposed me to mocke,
 Such are exalted basely that can faine,
 And none regards just ROWLAND *of the Rocke*.
 To those fat Pastures, which Flocks healthfull keepe,
 Malice denyes me entrance with my Sheepe.

Yet nill I Nature enviously accuse,
 Nor blame the Heavens thus haplesse me to make,
 What they impose, but vainly we refuse,

When not our power their punishment can slake.
 Fortune the World, that towzes to and fro,
 Fickle to all, is constant in my wo.³⁵

In both incarnations, Drayton's rewritten eclogue is – as so often with this genre – a debate about the poet's role more than anything else. Though Rowland is Drayton's alter ego, he should not be wholly identified with Drayton, author of the finished product. Rather, he stands for the poet at the point of decision and experimentation, within a pastoral landscape which enables the trial, **endorsement** and rejection of various poetic personae: which is how Drayton is able to present Rowland speaking like Southwell, even though he has reservations about Southwell's poetry. Perhaps we are meant to read this autobiographically, as an admission of Drayton's temporary penchant for Southwell's verse and its attendant mental attitudes; perhaps he is simply trying the Southwellian persona on for size and discarding it. Either way, it is striking that the parody vanishes from the later reworkings: perhaps it felt dated or – given that Southwell had been executed by then – in bad taste. If Drayton's poetic persona 'Rowland of the Rocke' can be read as retaining a suggestion of Southwell's St Peter -- the rock on whom the church was built – it would surely suggest the saint's later integrity rather than his contrition at having denied Christ.³⁶

George Herbert, also writing after the initial vogue for Southwell's work had passed, manifests a similarly ambivalent relationship with his predecessor, despite – or because of – the fact that the two poets have much in common. What Herbert borrows from Southwell is, most of all, a poetic attitude: a commitment to devotional writing, coexisting with a certain intolerance of secular literature. What are probably Herbert's

first surviving English poems set the tone for what is to follow: two sonnets sent to his mother in 1610, his first year of undergraduate study, which lament the dominance of love-poetry and ask for God to be more celebrated by poets. In them, Herbert asks God, “Doth Poetry / Wear *Venus* Livery? only serve her turn? / Why are not *Sonnets* made of thee?” and again, “Why should I *Womens eyes* for Chrystal take? / Such poor invention burns in their low mind / Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go / To praise and on thee Lord, some *Ink* bestow”.³⁷

These are stirring words, but also deeply disingenuous. It is not to downplay Herbert’s religious fervour to remark that these sonnets show the agonistic restlessness of a new literary generation. Written around the same time as Shakespeare’s were published, they reflect, like them, the sense that straightforward amatory sonnets were *passé*. But where Shakespeare consciously parodies the tradition – most famously in Sonnet 130, ‘My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun’ -- Herbert sets off towards God in a direction that he claims has hardly been travelled.³⁸ As a well-read undergraduate, he would have known he was exaggerating. Though the after-effects of the English Reformation certainly had a withering effect on non-biblical religious verse, instilling widespread uneasiness about imaginative additions to Scripture and prompting a move towards secular topics, several other English poets had written religious verse in the recent past.³⁹ The very poetic genre Herbert chooses, that of the sonnet, may be paying homage to previous efforts in that vein by Donne and others.⁴⁰ Yet Southwell provides the most obvious antecedent for two distinctive features of Herbert’s poetic practice: his advocacy of a plain style which is nevertheless consciously artful, and his avowed distance from secular verse.⁴¹ Herbert almost certainly knew Southwell’s rebuke several years earlier to

his poetic contemporaries: “Still finest wits are culling Venus’ rose. / On Paynim toys the sweetest veins are spent; / To Christian works, few have their talents lent.”⁴² By the time Herbert was writing, Southwell was not – as illustrated by the writers discussed above -- the only English poet to have taken this position, but he was the earliest, and remained the most conspicuous. Herbert ignores him as he ignores the rest.

In his mature verse, Herbert again critiques poets for bypassing religious matter. The famous rhetorical question in “Jordan I”, “May no lines passe, except they do their dutie / Not to a true, but painted chair?” (4-5) recasts the Platonic prejudice against the second- or third-hand truths of creative writing, to condemn poetry which at best praises God’s creation rather than God himself.⁴³ Again, Herbert may be harking back to a time when it was difficult for poets to write creatively about religion except at several removes, and Southwell, who did so much to counter this, would have been one model for Herbert’s witty christianisation of this neoplatonic commonplace. For instance, in his lyric “Man to the wound in Christs side”, Christ’s wound is seen as a cave which represents not the limitation of perception, as it does in Plato’s *Republic*, but the destination of choice for all seekers after heavenly bliss: “O happy soule that flies so hie, / As to attaine this sacred cave” (25-26).⁴⁴

The aspiration to seek refuge in Christ’s wounds is common within devotions on the Passion, epitomised in the medieval prayer *Anima Christi* – “O good Jesu, hear me, / Within Thy wounds hide me”.⁴⁵ Herbert utilised it in one of his own poems, “The Bag”, but in a manner which epitomises his distance from Southwellian devotional poetry. The poem begins in a way which appears puzzlingly gratuitous.

Away despair; my gracious Lord doth heare.
Though windes and waves assault my keel,

He doth preserve it: he doth steer,
 Ev'n when the boat seems most to reel.
 Storms are the triumph of his art:
 Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart. (1-6)⁴⁶

This refers to the occasion in the Gospels when the disciples are alarmed by a storm and wake up the sleeping Jesus, who rebukes them for their lack of faith, but quells the wind and sea.⁴⁷ It bears no direct relation to the poem's main focus, the narrative of the Incarnation and Passion developed from stanza 2 onwards – “Hast thou not heard, that my Lord JESUS di'd? / Then let me tell thee a strange storie ...” (7-8) – perhaps a reason why the poem has routinely been reckoned among Herbert's least appealing.⁴⁸ But read as Herbert's commentary on an earlier tradition exemplified by Southwell, it starts to make sense. While storms were a fairly common figure for the journey of the guilty soul towards repentance, any of Herbert's contemporaries familiar with recent religious poetry would have noticed how this opening stanza evokes the storm at the beginning of ‘Saint Peter's Complaint’: “Launch foorth my Soule into a maine of teares, / Full fraught with grieffe the traffick of thy mind: / Torne sayles will serve, thoughtes rent with guilty feares: / Give care the sterne: use sighes in lieu of wind” (1-4).⁴⁹ Southwell's St Peter proclaims himself to be setting out on a voyage of despair; Herbert's speaker dismisses despair in the very first sentence as a way of clearing the air for genuine devotional utterance.

But is it Southwell's St Peter who is being criticised, or Southwell himself? Peter, after all, is only a prosopopoeia, and “Saint Peter's Complaint” is not endorsing him by giving voice to him; Southwell himself – as Herbert may have known – advised emotional moderation.⁵⁰ Perhaps the best answer is to read “The Bag” as a critique not of Southwell himself, but of the devotional trends Southwell tapped into and the poetic tradition he instigated. The 1590s and early 1600s saw many writers who followed in

Southwell's path while failing to pick up on his checks and balances, presenting uncontrolled transports of grief as exemplary; Grymeston's meditations, quoted earlier, illustrate this trend and suggest how it may have influenced devotional practice. Thus, in announcing "Away despair", and proclaiming his trust in God, Herbert's speaker – and thus Herbert himself – may well be dissociating himself from the perceived excesses of Southwellian tears-poetry, rather than Southwell himself.

Herbert's poem is governed by the conceit that the wound in Christ's side can be seen as a carrying-pouch, or bag, for dispatching man's petitions to God. When Christ is "returning" to heaven upon the cross, "there came one / That ran upon him with a spear", and turning "to his brethren", Christ asks them:

If ye have any thing to send or write,
 (I have no bag, but here is room)
 Unto my fathers hands and sight
 (Beleeve me) it shall safely come.
 That I shall minde, what you impart;
 Look, you may put it very neare my heart. (25, 26, 30, 31-36).

On one level, the thought of thrusting something into a bleeding stomach-wound is bound to engender visceral disgust. Devout early modern readers, especially those who had practised Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises or were influenced by similar devotional traditions, would have alleviated this by meditating on the salvific quality of Christ's wounds. Southwell's "Man to the wound in Christs side" encourages this exemplary manner of reading: "Heere would I view that bloody sore, / Which dint of spiteful speare did breed, / The bloody woundes laid there in store / Would force a stony heart to bleede" (17-20). Comparing this to Herbert's stanza forcibly presents one with a poet's main alternatives when engaging with the topic: whether he should emphasise the affective

impact of the wounds, or leave this up to the reader's imagination. "The Bag" is one of the least Ignatian poems possible, with the carrying-pouch conceit steering the reader firmly away from the physicality of Christ: perhaps Herbert's attempt to create a fully thought-through Protestant poetic praxis, most at ease when picturing the divine by means of analogy.⁵¹ At the end, Christ reiterates his intention to act as messenger between God the Father and man, returning to and confirming the injunctions at the beginning of the poem: "what he sends / I will present, and somewhat more, / Not to his hurt. Sighs will convey / Any thing to me. Heark despair, away" (39-42). Regret for sin is fitting, but Christ cares too much about man's well-being to ask for anything more than "sighs"; transports of repentance, we infer, are so nearly related to despair that they can only hinder salvation.

Some poems in *The Temple* convey a very different message about the efficacy of intense emotion within repentance.⁵² But in "The Bag", Herbert's critique of the Southwellian tradition makes it necessary for him to advocate restraint, and this tells us something about the emotional register that he made his own. In "Saint Peter's Complaint", Southwell insistently pushes up against the limits of language, experience and perception. Herbert prefers litotes, conveying the ineffability of God through understatement. In retrospect, this stance has repeatedly, and not unreasonably, been co-opted into ideas of the Anglican *via media*; at the time, it would have uncoupled Herbert's poem from the Southwell-influenced hyperbolists of the previous generation. Just as the operatic *furor* of such plays as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was first widely copied and then ridiculed, Southwell's rhetorical stratagems were fertile enough to breed cliché and dissociation.

Two poets writing after Herbert's death, during the years of the Civil War, provide a coda to this discussion. In the introduction to Part 2 of *Silex scintillans* (1655), Henry Vaughan described Herbert as the first poet that "with any effectual success" stemmed the tide of profane verse.⁵³ Effacing Southwell along with Herbert's other predecessors in the field of divine poetry, the notion of "effectual success" may be denominationally biased. Vaughan was, after all, writing at a time when dispossessed Anglicans were much inclined to idealise their church and its great men. *Silex scintillans* is explicitly inspired by Herbert's poetic illustriousness and saintly reputation, with Vaughan constituting himself a son of George as so many did. Some years earlier, the young Catholic writer Francis Chetwinde – perhaps seeing himself as a nephew of Southwell – had cited the poet as an inspirational figure within the English Catholic literary pantheon, together with Jonson and Sir John Beaumont; the title of the poem in which he does this, *The New Hellicon*, reveals his canonising agenda.⁵⁴ While there is more work to be done on how Southwell's poetry was transmitted in manuscript, initial studies suggest that it was a staple of Catholic scribal endeavour well after his work had ceased to be printed.⁵⁵ Thus, it becomes possible to identify two main strands in the reception history of Southwell. There was an intense, appropriative, often agonistic response to him within the literary mainstream from the early 1590s, peaking in the years immediately after his death and continuing into the Jacobean era. England's Catholic community, on the other hand, not only inspired Southwell's work but was loyal to it longest. Some of its members were poets themselves, like Verstegan or Chetwinde. Others will have been more ordinary lovers of divine verse who, long after Southwell had

fallen out of fashion in the literary mainstream, quietly kept reading him, copying him and, like Grymeston, using him as a starting-point for prayer.⁵⁶

Though one of the most powerful literary and spiritual influences on late Elizabethan and Jacobean England, Southwell has always been canonically problematic. This chapter has argued that his contemporary importance can be hard to discern because he was reacted to so strongly, whether as an anonymised literary antagonist or as the provider of raw food for the devout: which raises the wider issue of how his authorial stance, effacing personal individuality and foregrounding the baroque invitation to religious emotion, has acted upon readers from the Elizabethan age onwards. In our own time a distinguished admirer of Southwell, the poet Geoffrey Hill, has identified an ecstatic strain in him, commenting: “I would ... suggest that the radical pun perceivable in ‘ecstasy’, in being ‘beside oneself’, either with a frenzy of egoistic thoughts or with a disciplined indifference to them, would not be lost on [Southwell]”.⁵⁷ While Southwell’s St Peter certainly experiences “a frenzy of egoistic thoughts”, the idea of “disciplined indifference” describes Southwell’s own poetic persona rather well; unlike – say – Donne, Southwell leaves himself alone. His readers are not told how he stands in relation to God, but enjoined to consider how they do: an awkward question at any time, and bound to leave a secularist nonplussed. But Southwell’s particularity intrudes in other ways, since he writes as one preparing for martyrdom, and is read as one who suffered it. Unofficially venerated from his execution onwards, he was canonised in 1970. Thanks to the pious conformations of hagiography, saints are sometimes perceived as less than individual. Yet the veneration paid by Roman Catholics to relics points in the opposite direction, suggesting a glorification of physical identity through the miraculous potential

of a saint's bones, possessions and scraps of clothing.⁵⁸ Southwell's verse can be seen as related to that legacy. Often enough, as this chapter has illustrated, it becomes detached from its progenitor. But when it bears his name, it can hardly be encountered without thinking of his martyrdom, and when one reads it, one reads a relic.

Notes

¹ My thanks to Hannibal Hamlin for reading a draft of this chapter, and for additional help given by Peter Davidson, Arnold Hunt and the editors of this volume. Preliminary versions of it were delivered to audiences at Durham and Oxford Universities; I am grateful to them for their interest and suggestions.

² See, most recently, Robert S. Miola, "Publishing the Word: Robert Southwell's Sacred Poetry", *Review of English Studies* 64, issue 265 (2013): 410-32.

³ On the genre of complaint, see Rosalind Smith, Michelle O'Callaghan and Sarah C.E. Ross, "Complaint and Elegy," chapter 25 in *A Companion to Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Catherine Teresa Bates (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2018). On Southwell's influence on the genre, see Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chapter 1; Arthur F. Marotti, "Southwell's Remains: Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern England," in Cedric C. Brown and Arthur F. Marotti (eds), *Texts and Cultural Change in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), chapter 2; and my *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 2. Recent studies of Southwell's writing include Anne Sweeney, *Robert Southwell: Snow in Arcadia: Redrawing the English Lyric Landscape*,

1586-95 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) and Scott R. Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature, 1561-1595: Writing Reconciliation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

⁴ See Kuchar, 46-8, and Shell, *op.cit.* Of Gervase Markham's *Marie Magdalens lamentations* (1601), Kuchar comments: "Southwell is everywhere and nowhere; he has become more of a ghost than a clearly avowed intertextual presence within the work" (48). A manuscript copy of Markham's poem was owned by Julian Crewe, a Catholic laywoman: see Lisa McClain, "'They have taken away my Lord': Mary Magdalene, Christ's Missing Body, and the Mass in Reformation England," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 38, no. 1 (2007), 77-96, at 77. In "Reforming St Peter: Protestant Constrictions of St Peter the Apostle in Early Modern England," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 33, no. 1 (2002): 33-49, Karen Bruhn examines William Broxup's *Saint Peters path* (1598), a Protestantised rewriting of 'St Peter's Complaint' which fails to credit Southwell.

⁵ On the idea of agonistic response to strong poetic inspiration, see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* [1st ed.] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁶ *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* [1st ed.] (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), index under More's name.

⁷ For the self-reflexivity generated by soteriological thought-processes, see Claire McEachern, *Believing in Shakespeare: Studies in Longing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵ Betty S. Travitsky's *ODNB* article on Grymeston calls Southwell a "kinsman" of Grymeston's.

⁹ *Miscelanea* [1st ed.] (London, 1604), D4b. All quotations are taken from this edition. Travitsky, *op. cit.*, comments on Grymeston's literary borrowings. The chapter heading runs: "Morning Meditation, with sixteen sobs of a sorrowful spirit, which she used for mentall praier, as also an addition of sixteen staves of verse taken out of Peters complaint, which she usually sung & plaid on the winde instrument." Household or residence organs were used for domestic music-making from the 16th century onwards: see Barbara Owen's entry on "residence organ," 317-9 in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Volume II: Performance and Production*, ed. John Shepherd *et al.* (London: Continuum, 2003). In a poem about his mother's musical activities, her son Bernye Grymeston does refer to "pipes" (E4b).

¹⁰ For Southwell's original, see stanza 6 in "Saint Peter's Complaint," 64 in *St Robert Southwell: Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007). All references and quotations to Southwell's verse are taken from this edition.

¹¹ "The Author to the Reader," line 6 (63). On interpretive distance, see Kuchar, *Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, 33-4.

¹² On another female copyist and appropriator of Southwell, see Victoria E. Burke and Sarah C.E. Ross, "Elizabeth Middleton, John Bouchier, and the Compilation of 17th-Century Religious Manuscripts," *The Library* (7th series) 2, no. 2 (2001): 131-60.

¹³ This was a popular genre for women writers: see Patricia Demers, *Women's Writing in English: Early Modern England* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2005), 176-180.

¹⁴ “The History of Purgatory”, possibly by Robert Owen [early 1600s]: item 7 in BL Add. MS. 11427. I discuss the dating, authorship and context of this play in *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Arden, 2010), chapter 2. The references below follow the document’s contemporary pagination.

¹⁵ *The History of Purgatory*, 25.

¹⁶ “Seculer men/man” may mean that the writer is a layman, or that he considers himself more worldly than the writers from whom he borrows.

¹⁷ A borrowing from *St Peter’s Complaint* itself occurs in the same speech: “Whose happie spirits, under the Alter slayne / Dive in sweete desiers...” (47). “St Peter’s Complaint”, stanza 64, reads “O Pooles of Hesebon, the bathes of grace, / Where happy spirits dive in sweet desires” (lines 379-80).

¹⁸ See Joy Rowe, “Kitson family (*per.* c. 1520-c.1660),” *ODNB*.

¹⁹ Southwell, “The Author to the Reader” (prefixing “Saint Peter’s Complaint”), 17-18; *Pietatis lachrymae*, A6a.

²⁰ *Pietatis lachrymae*, A7a; “Saint Peter’s Complaint,” 31-2.

²¹ ‘The Author to the Reader,’ line 15; *Pietatis lachrymae*, D1a.

²² *OED*, ‘garland,’ *n.*, 4 (first citation from 1526). Ref to Drayton’s *Idea: the shepheardes garland*, see below.

²³ *Pietatis lachrymae*, A8a-B6a. See above, p.XXXX.

²⁴ Nancy Pollard Brown, “The Structure of Saint Peter’s Complaint,” *Modern Language Review* 61, no. 1 (1966): 3-11. Cf. the interpretation of *Mary Magdalen’s Funeral Tears* undertaken by Bronwyn V. Wallace, “Robert Southwell’s Intimate Exegesis,” chapter 10 in *Sensing the Sacred: Religion and the Senses in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*,

ed. Robin Macdonald, Emilie K.M. Murphy and Elizabeth L. Swann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018). On the place of repetition in religious writing, see Susannah Brietz Monta, “Repetition,” chapter 8 in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Religion*, ed. Susan M. Felch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁵ This alludes to Isaiah 1:18.

²⁶ See Marjory E. Lange, *Telling Tears in the English Renaissance* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 44-5.

²⁷ All quotations are from J. William Hebel with Kathleen Tillotson and Bernard H. Newdigate (ed.), *The Works of Michael Drayton*, 5 vols (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press/Basil Blackwell for Oxford University Press, 1931-41). *Idea: The shepherds garland* (1593) is in Vol. 1, 45-94 (notes in Vol.5, 4 ff.); *Pastorals. Contayning eclogues* (1619) in Vol. 2, 515-73 (notes in Vol.5, 183 ff.). The text in *Pastorals*, as Hebel comments (183), is very similar to that of the intermediate edition, *Poemes lyrick and pastoral* (1606).

²⁸ On Catholicism and pastoral, see Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare’s Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chapters 3 and 5 (Drayton’s revisions are discussed at 205-8).

²⁹ *Michael Drayton and his Circle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), 215 (also discussing Drayton’s allusions to lines from the Roman Catholic breviary).

³⁰ Much of Drayton’s parody would be equally applicable to Southwell’s later imitators. However, the early date suggests that Southwell himself is Drayton’s target; while Southwell’s verses were not in print in 1593, they were almost certainly circulating in manuscript at that time. See Davidson and Sweeney, 145-51, and “Introduction” to *The*

Poems of Robert Southwell, S.J., ed. James H. McDonald and Nancy Pollard Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).

³¹ “Favour, good will,” punning on “Weeping, mourning”: *OED*, *n.2* and *n.3*.

³² Drayton, *Idea* (1593), Eclogue 1, lines 43-60, 73-78.

³³ The unease of a contemporary reader, Henry Gurney, with the register of “Saint Peter’s Complaint” may be related to concerns about hyperbole: “If that ther may a fault espied be / it is in that Decorum is not kept / sith youthfull phrase & arte do disagree / from fisher man, that into age was stept / whose Stile appostolique was grave & plaine / as that wch doth worldes Curiousnes disdeyne ...”. See Steven W. May, “Henry Gurney, A Norfolk Farmer, Reads Spenser and Others,” *Spenser Studies* 20 (2005), 183-223 (quotation 208-9).

³⁴ On the downplaying of religious language, see Hebel, vol.5, 183. Cf. Curtis Perry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture: James I and the Renegotiation of Elizabethan Literary Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 70-1.

³⁵ Drayton, *Pastorals*, Eclogue 1, lines 43-60.

³⁶ I am grateful to Vassiliki Markidou for this suggestion.

³⁷ “New Year Sonnets”: Sonnet 1, lines 3-5; Sonnet 2, lines 8-11. All quotations are from *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁸ See the introduction to *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Arden, 1997).

³⁹ I make this argument more fully in *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 2.

⁴⁰ See William L. Stull, "'Why Are Not 'Sonnets' Made of Thee?': A New Context for the 'Holy Sonnets' of Donne, Herbert, and Milton," *Modern Philology* 80, no. 2 (1982): 129-35.

⁴¹ Gary Kuchar, *George Herbert and the Mystery of the Word: Poetry and Scripture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cham: Springer/ Palgrave Macmilla, 2017), ch.7, discusses the relationship between the 'New Year Sonnets' and Southwell's work in terms of alchemical poetics. See also Gary M. Bouchard, "The Roman Steps to the Temple: An Examination of the Influence of Robert Southwell, SJ, upon George Herbert," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2007), 131-50; and Hannibal Hamlin, "George Herbert Plays Host to Robert Southwell: Allusions in 'Love (III)'," in Arthur Marotti (ed.), *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts, VI: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 2011-2016* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies / Renaissance English Text Society), forthcoming in 2018). I am grateful to Professor Hamlin for letting me see a copy of this article before publication.

⁴² See above, ADD PAGE AT PROOF STAGE.

⁴³ Cf. Wilcox, 202.

⁴⁴ For another storm-metaphor, cf. "The prodigall chyldes soule wracke" (38-9).

⁴⁵ See the entry for "Anima Christi" in the online *Catholic Encyclopaedia*.

⁴⁶ On negative critical reactions to the poem, see Wilcox's preface, 518-9.

⁴⁷ REF

⁴⁸ See Wilcox's commentary, "Modern Criticism".

⁴⁹ On the literary representation of storms in this era, see Gwilym Jones, *Shakespeare's Storms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

⁵⁰ See Lange, *Telling Tears*, and my *Catholicism, Controversy*, chapter 2.

⁵¹ Though, if so, it would pose an interesting tension with Herbert's evocation of a bloody Crucifixion in a poem like "The Agony," and his declared preference for religious straightforwardness in "Jordan (I)".

⁵² E.g. "Sighs and Groans" (Wilcox, 297-300).

⁵³ "The Author's Preface to the Following Hymns": quoted from *Henry Vaughan: The Complete Poems*, ed. Alan Rudrum (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 142.

⁵⁴ In classical mythology Mount Helicon was considered a source of poetic inspiration; Chetwinde may also be referring to the anthology *Englands Helicon* (1600). See my "Divine Muses, Catholic Poets and Pilgrims to St Winifred's Well: Literary Communities in Francis Chetwinde's 'New Hellicon' (1642)," in Roger Sell & Anthony Johnson (eds), *Writing and Religion in England, 1558-1689: Studies in Community-Making and Cultural Memory* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 273-88.

⁵⁵ The last 17th-century printing of Southwell's verse was in 1636 (STC 22968).

⁵⁶ Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V a 126 [dated to ca. 1625 on the online catalogue], juxtaposes Southwell's poems with prayers. On mid-17th-century Catholic copyists of Southwell, see Helen Hackett, "Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks in Seventeenth-Century England: New Research on Constance Aston Fowler's Miscellany of Sacred and Secular Verse," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2012): 1094-1124; and Cedric C. Brown, "Recusant Community and Jesuit Mission in Parliament Days: Bodleian MS Eng. poet. b. 5," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 23 (2003): 290-315. See also the items listed for Southwell in the *Census of English Literary Manuscripts (CELM)*.

⁵⁷ “The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell,” chapter 2 in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), quotation at 37.

This essay was originally published in *The Lords of Limit* (1984).

⁵⁸ A relic of Southwell is kept at the Jesuits in Britain archive (**awaiting reply to enquiry – Sally Kent**). On the notion of Southwell’s literary remains as relics, see **Bouchard and Marotti, *op. cit.***, and Sean Ross, **“Robert Southwell: Sacrament and Self”, *English Literary Renaissance* 47, no. 1 (2017): 73-109.**

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