

# Penitent sinner and pleasing hoste : immediacy in Anne Lock's Psalm 51 sonnet sequence

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## Penitent Sinner and Pleasing Hoste Immediacy in Anne Lock's Psalm 51 Sonnet Sequence

I can not pray without thy movyng ayde,  
Ne can I ryse, ne can I stande alone.  
Anne Lock, *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*, sonnet 17, ll. 9-10<sup>1</sup>

Many roads led to (or from) the Psalms in early modern England. The Psalter was at once the lifeblood of inherited medieval liturgy, the arsenal of ongoing Reformation doctrinal war, the engine of an emerging Protestant piety, the centre of the «culture of translation,»<sup>2</sup> and the seed of a lively devotional poetry.<sup>3</sup> Take a single psalm as an illustration: Psalm 51. As one of the seven Penitential Psalms, the fifty-first psalm punctuated traditional burial liturgies and marked the season of Advent.<sup>4</sup> Its image of the «broken and contrite heart» offered on an altar featured prominently in the emblem books of the period.<sup>5</sup> This, King David's best known psalm of repentance, played its part in a royal public relations controversy over Charles I, «that Man of Blood.»<sup>6</sup> And, as we now know, Psalm 51 was the site of a literary *novum*: the first ever sonnet sequence in the English language.

While writing a history of the Genevan Bible in the 1970s Lewis Lupton discovered a little book published in 1560 by Anne Vaughan Lock (1530–ca.1590), who was known to us then primarily as a pen pal of John Knox. That book contained Lock's own English translations of four John Calvin sermons on Isaiah chapter 38, which recounts the sickness, healing and subsequent

- 1 All quotations from Anne Lock's sonnets are taken from K. Morin-Parsons (ed): *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner: Anne Lock's Sonnet Sequence*, Waterloo 1997. From this point on I will refer to the five prefatory sonnets using the letter «P» and the number of the sonnet, followed by the line numbers (e.g. P2:3-4). For the other sonnets, I will refer to the number of the sonnet, followed by the line numbers (e.g. 17:9-10).
- 2 H. Hamlin: *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature*, Cambridge 2004, 1.
- 3 See chapters 3 and 4 of R. Targoff: *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England*, Chicago 2001.
- 4 S. Gillingham: *Psalms Through the Centuries, Volume 1*, Malden 2008, 55, 103-104, 113-117.
- 5 E.g. Hamlin: *Psalm Culture* (n. 2), 198, 205, 208-209.
- 6 See further in P. Crawford: Charles Stuart, that Man of Blood, *Journal of British Studies* 16:2 (1977) 41–61.

prayer of King Hezekiah. For the front of this collection Lock wrote a prefatory epistle to introduce the sermons; to the back end of the book she appended a series of twenty-six English poems headed by the title *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*. Lock herself, or perhaps the publisher, included a note stating that while the poems were not authored by Calvin, they were «delivered me by my friend» and they «well agree with the same argument» as the sermons. So far as we know, these twenty-six poems are the first sonnet sequence composed and published in the English language. Since sonnet scholar Thomas Roche made the case in 1989, this anonymous pioneering work of English poetry is widely ascribed to the pen of Anne Lock herself.<sup>7</sup>

As literature, Lock's poems are by many measures an «astonishing» achievement, «brilliantly written for their date» and «very competently written for any date.»<sup>8</sup> What makes *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* of interest here is its interpretive character as a full-scale poetic exegesis of Psalm 51. Rather than offer one more metrical psalm translation like the many that jostled for attention in the period, Lock fused the line-by-line approach of the expository sermon with the form of the sonnet sequence; after five prefatory sonnets «expressing the passioned minde of the penitent sinner»<sup>9</sup> the following twenty-one sonnets turn to address God by using each line of Psalm 51 as the seed of a fourteen line sonnet.<sup>10</sup> If these long overlooked poems are astonishing as a literary first, they are more remarkable still as the interpretive work of an early modern Protestant.

Studies of Lock's *Meditation* have highlighted her construction of a speaking persona, often focusing on questions of gender, class, and political influence.<sup>11</sup>

7 For the story of how the sonnet sequence was rediscovered and attributed to Anne Lock and for references, see M.R.G. Spiller: *A Literary «First»: The Sonnet Sequence of Anne Lock (1560)*, *Renaissance Studies* 11:1 (1997), 41-55 (42f).

8 Spiller: *A Literary «First»* (n. 7), 45. See also Morin-Parsons's evaluation in her introduction to Locke's sonnets: «the *Meditation* is curiously out-of-place in history: the fact this it is not based on the Petrarchan model and does not attempt to translate or emulate Petrarch separates it significantly from the work of the earlier occasional sonneteers; its subject-matter – or the cast thereof – aligns it more closely with the work of Donne in the seventeenth century than with much written by anyone in the sixteenth ... Anne Lock thus has no exact contemporaries.» Morin-Parsons: *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* (n. 1), 36.

9 Morin-Parsons: *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* (n. 1), 55.

10 On Lock's choice of form and the «fit» between psalm to sonnet, see D. Serjeantson: *The Book of Psalms and the Early Modern Sonnet*, *Renaissance Studies* 29:4 (2015) 632-649 (642-643).

11 E.g. Teresa Nugent, who argues that «Lock adopts the subject positions of the penitent

Others have interrogated the poems' relationship to Calvin's theology,<sup>12</sup> and even his psalm interpretation more particularly,<sup>13</sup> going so far as to suggest that Lock's *Meditation* «translates Calvin's exegesis into performance.»<sup>14</sup> Tonal, thematic, and formal comparisons have sometimes been made to the later Holy Sonnets of John Donne (1572–1631).<sup>15</sup> A number of people have probed the sonnets in the context of Post-Reformation debates about the Eucharist.<sup>16</sup> In Lock's sonnets, all these *topoi* – questions of literary persona, sacramental controversy, and the writings of Calvin and Donne – intersect in a poetic interpretation of Psalm 51.

Biblical interpreters do not only explicate meaning, they enact it – and never the more when their medium is poetry.<sup>17</sup> As an exegetical performance of Psalm 51, Anne Vaughan Lock's *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* is distinctive both for its *what* and its *how*. Lock's poetic performance of Psalm

sinner and the unprofitable servant and constructs an abject poetic persona in order to authorize herself and establish her identity as a Calvinist and a poet» in T.L. Nugent: Anne Lock's Poetics of Spiritual Abjection, *English Literary Renaissance* 39:1 (2009) 3-23 (4). For a similar argument focused more on the political and economic implications of the persona Lock constructs, see C. Warley: «An Englishe Box»: Calvinism and Commodities in Anne Lok's a Meditation of a Penitent Sinner, *Spenser Studies* 15 (2001) 205-241. On the ambiguous gender of Lock's speaker, note M.E. Trull: Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature, New York 2013, 44-49. And for a reading that sees Lock instead as co-opting the authority of a specifically male voice, see M. P. Hannay: «Unlock My Lipps»: The Miserere Mei Deus of Anne Vaughan Lok and Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, in: *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England*, ed. J. R. Brink, Kirksville 1993, 19-36 (35-36).

- 12 E.g. Burton, who sets out to «show how Lock translates Calvinist theology into performance» in B. Burton: «The Praise of That I Yeld for Sacrifice»: Anne Lock and the Poetics of the Eucharist, *Renaissance et Réforme* 30:3 (2006) 89-118 (91).
- 13 See also Burton, who notes that Calvin's Psalms commentary was published nearly three years before Lock's sonnets were published, making it possible Lock had read them; Burton: «The Praise of That I Yeld for Sacrifice» (n. 12), 98.
- 14 Burton: «The Praise of That I Yeld for Sacrifice» (n. 12), 100.
- 15 Cf. Morin-Parson's comments quoted above in footnote 8, and more especially R. C. Evans: «Despaire Behind, and Death Before»: Comparing and Contrasting the «Meditative» Sonnets of Anne Vaughan Lock and John Donne, *Ben Jonson Journal* 16:1-2 (2009): 99-116.
- 16 See M.E. Trull: Petrarchism and the Gift: The Sacrifice of Praise in Anne Lock's «A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner», *Religion & Literature* 41:3 (2009): 1-25. Again see Burton: «The Praise of That I Yeld for Sacrifice» (n. 12).
- 17 Owing to what Kenneth Burke called «symbolic action.» See K. Burke: *Literature and Language as Symbolic Action*, Athens 1988, 63-64, 366-368.

51 stands out for its pursuit of assurance through an *immediate* encounter with God's grace. We see this most clearly, I argue, in two ways: (1) the way Lock dispenses with David's typological person in favour of the persona of «a penitent sinner», and (2) in the way Lock elides the Psalm's links to the sacraments through a polemical, figurative redefinition of the eucharistic «hoste.» To sharpen the exegetical profile of these devotional poems, I will compare Lock's interpretation of Psalm 51 with those of her two overlapping Protestant contemporaries: her theological influence, John Calvin, and her literary scion, John Donne.

*The Sonnet's Speaker: David and a Penitent Sinner*

In an essay comparing Anne Lock's *Meditation* with the psalm paraphrase of Mary Sidney Herbert, Margaret Hannay notes in passing that «Lock does not mention David by name» in her paraphrase the way a poet like Wyatt does.<sup>18</sup> Still, like others who have written about Lock's *Meditation*, Hannay assumes the Davidic persona of the Lock's speaker. Susan Felch is more careful; in her article on Anne Lock in the *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, Felch characterizes Lock's speaker as an «introspective narrator ... a penitent sinner hauled to the very gates of hell by her own conscience ... both a sonnet persona and a psalmic persona.»<sup>19</sup> A psalmic persona, yes, but not an explicitly Davidic persona. The distinction proves consequential.<sup>20</sup>

When John Donne preaches on Psalm 51:7 («Purge me with hyssope, and I shall be cleane; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow») the poet-preacher likens David to a gallery portrait whose eyes follow you no matter where you stand. So, he writes,

doth *David's* history concerne and embrace all. For his person includes all states, betweene a shepherd and a King, and his sinne includes all sinne, between first Omissions, and complications of Habits of sin upon sin . . . So wee need no other Example

18 Hannay: «Unlock My Lipps» (n. 11), 27.

19 S.M. Felch: «Lock, Anne Vaughn» in: M.A. Taylor and A. Choi (eds): *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide*, Grand Rapids 2012, 333-338 (336).

20 In so doing Lock sides with one current of Protestant reading of the Psalms – the psalms as the prayers of every soul – against the Protestant interest in the personae of the Psalms generally, and particularly in David. On those two currents, see B.K. Lewalski: *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric*, Princeton 1979, 232-236.

to discover to us the slippery wayes into sin, or the penitentiall wayes out of sin, then the Author of that Booke, *David*.<sup>21</sup>

Because of that conviction Donne spends the sermon's first part developing a tropological (moral) reading of David's history.<sup>22</sup> So inextricable is David from the psalm's sense that Donne feels it necessary to define what it does and does not mean to step into David's words, warning his hearers that to treat David's life as permission to sin takes one further rather than closer to David, for «*David* did not justifie sin, by any precedent example.»<sup>23</sup> Unlike David, Donne's hearers come into the words of Psalm 51 in the company of an example. That is, this penitential psalm comes with a person appended:

For God sends *Nathan* to thee, with *David* in his hand; He sends you the Receipt, his invitations to Repentance, in his Scriptures, and he sends you a *Probatum est*, a personal testimony how this Physicke hath wrought upon another, upon *David*.<sup>24</sup>

The words of Psalm 51 are mediated explicitly to Donne hearers by the persona of David.<sup>25</sup> For Donne, the psalm's universal compass relies on the fixed foot of David's particularity.

Two generations prior, John Calvin espoused the same typological instinct. Though typically reticent to refer to himself, Calvin allows himself a lengthy autobiographical digression in the preface of his commentary, where he emphasizes that it was his suffering as an exile among exiles that qualified him to comment on the psalms, because it was this experience of persecution, which had tuned Calvin in sympathetic resonance with the fugitive David.<sup>26</sup>

For although I follow David at a great distance, and come far short of equalling him; or rather, although in aspiring slowly and with great difficulty to attain to the many

21 G.R. Potter and E.M. Simpson (eds.): *The Sermons of John Donne*, Volume 5, Berkeley 1959, 299.

22 The core of Donne's canonical-biographical sketch is in Potter and Simpson: *The Sermons of John Donne* (n. 21), 300-304.

23 *Ibid.*, 304.

24 *Ibid.*, 304.

25 «Here in this first branch of this first part, wee seeke God, and because we seeke him, where he hath promised to be, we are sure to find him; Because we joyne with David, in an humble confession of our sins, the Lord joyns with David, in a fruition of himselfe.» Potter and Simpson: *The Sermons of John Donne* (n. 21), 298.

26 J. Calvin: *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Volume 1, translated by J. Anderson, Edinburgh 1945, xliv-xlv.

virtues in which he excelled, I still feel myself tarnished with the contrary vices; yet if I have anythings in common with him, I have no hesitation in comparing myself with him.<sup>27</sup>

True to the preface, the person of David dominates Calvin's exegesis of Psalm 51 just as he does Donne's sermon.<sup>28</sup> Calvin begins by setting the words of the psalm against the backdrop of the biblical account of David's adultery and murder. Marvelling that David appears to have suffered a numb conscience «for upwards of a year» before the confrontation with Nathan, Calvin frames the psalm as a chance for his readers to wake up to old, overlooked sins.<sup>29</sup> When he comes to the words «Against thee only have I sinned» (Ps 51:4), Calvin again uses David as a lens to sharpen the picture; «To have a clear apprehension of their meaning, it is necessary that we reflect upon the covenant which God had made with David,» he writes.<sup>30</sup> Later still, Calvin asks why David needed to pray this psalm of repentance even after Nathan had spoken pardon to him (2 Sam 12:13). The reason, concludes Calvin, is that David's example shows how long it can take to internalize God's forgiveness – a tropological point that could not be made apart from the canonical persona.<sup>31</sup> King David acts as the cornerstone of Calvin's Psalms from the preface on.<sup>32</sup> Although Calvin and Donne differ hermeneutically at many points in their expositions of Psalm 51, both nevertheless insist on sounding each line of the psalm through the mouth of David.

By contrast David is absent, or at least muted, in Lock's *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*. Instead of an explicit Davidic persona, Lock's sonnets present a figure the title calls «a penitent sinner.»<sup>33</sup> We first meet this speaker in the five

27 Ibid., xl.

28 J. Calvin: Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Volume 2, translated by J. Anderson, Edinburgh 1946, 281-309.

29 Ibid., xl.

30 Ibid., 287.

31 «God's pardon is full and complete, but our faith cannot take in his overflowing goodness, and it is necessary that it should distill to us drop by drop.» Calvin: Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Volume 2 (n. 28), 297.

32 This is not to say there are not tensions – even specifically temporal ones – in Calvin's use of David. See B. Pitkin: Imitation of David: David as Paradigm for Faith in Calvin's Exegesis of the Psalm, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24:4 (1993): 843-863.

33 So Nugent: Anne Lock's Poetics of Spiritual Abjection (n. 11), 7: «the essay «a» rather than «the» generalizes this subject/object from a particular penitent sinner, such as King David, to connote any and all sinners.»

prefatory sonnets where the individual is haunted by «The hainous gylt of my forsaken ghost» (P1:1) and gropes about «in darke of everlasting night» (P2:8). The speaker «feles» only a despairing guilt, a sign of reprobation, which appears to mark the speaker as a «damned vessel of [God's] heavie wrath» (P3:9). This inner eclipse of any sense of God's mercy renders prayer impossible, shutting the self up like a prison. Hermeneutically, these five prefatory sonnets play a role analogous to the psalm's canonical superscription; they render the praying persona.

Who is this «penitent sinner»? Temporally and theologically speaking, Lock's penitent sinner speaks a non-Davidic idiom – a distinctly A.D. language appropriate to a Genevan Protestant. This penitent sinner can look back in time on God's «law» as an «unperfect shade of perfect lyght» (9:3) and from that vantage point spy the type of the «death and bloodshed of thine only sonne» in the «swete hysope» mentioned by Psalm 51. The «Hierusalem» of Psalm 51:18 parallels the «chirch» in that line's sonnet (20:9). And it is not merely the stain of guilt, or the potential loss of God's spirit, or prospect of Sheol, but the threat of «deserved flames» and damnation «to depth of during woe» that so distresses the speaker (6:11-13). This A.D. anxiety about hellfire intensifies Psalm 51's already desperate tone, stoking an interior crisis even more anguished than that of the canonical David. This intensified misery is coloured by a particularly Protestant and Calvinist crisis of assurance: «*doubt of . . . mercy ground of all my paine,*» cries the penitent sinner (14:3; italics mine). Whereas Psalm 51's superscription places the prayer in the mouth of David at a specific moment in time, Lock's five prefatory sonnets dramatize a different persona at a different location in time: the guilt-ridden Christian believer. By crafting this non-Davidic, A.D. speaker, Lock raises the psalm's psycho-spiritual drama to a fevered pitch.<sup>34</sup>

The non-Davidic voice of the paraphrase is all the more striking because Lock does mention David paratextually. The Israelite King's name appears in the *Meditation's* subtitle: «Written in maner of a Paraphrase upon the 51. Psalm of David».<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Lock's prefatory epistle juxtaposes King Hezekiah and King David – the former the subject of Calvin's sermons, the latter the author

34 Ibid., 7: «It is important to note that Psalm 51 does not refer to blindness, tears, or darkness; these details are added by Lock.»

35 Morin-Parsons: *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* (n. 1), 54.



of the Psalm upon which the appended sonnets are based. Both were kings, Lock notes; and both were patients of the good physician, Hezekiah literally and David figuratively. Lock uses the psalm's connection to David as rationale to append the poems to Calvin's sermons, even as the sonnets mute David's persona in favour of the persona of «a penitent sinner.»

When it comes to the portions of the psalm most suggestive of David, Lock proves herself subtle and allusive, but once again blurs the image of David. Where David pleads for deliverance from «bloods» in Ps 51:14 (i.e. from bloodguilt), Lock's penitent sinner prays, «Assoile me, God, from guilt of giltlesse blood» (16:3), thereby keeping the referent of «blood» open-ended by choosing not to mention Uriah explicitly and adding instead the adjective «giltlesse», which can be read as a gesture toward the sinless Christ. Then, in Sonnet 15, the penitent sinner imagines teaching rebels the Lord's ways (15:9-10): «So shall the profe of myne example preache / The bitter frute of lust and foule delight.» Neither «frute» nor «lust» are mentioned in the verse on which the sonnet is built. The former recalls the first child born from David and Bathsheba but remains figuratively open; the latter recalls the David and Bathsheba affair, while avoiding the narrowness of adultery *per se*.<sup>36</sup> Although Lock does not sever the psalm's connection to David, neither does she adopt David as a speaking voice.<sup>37</sup>

Previous studies of Lock's sonnets have tended to assume David's hermeneutical role as mediating persona.<sup>38</sup> Lock knew well David's connection to the psalm and obviously was not unaware of his centrality in the Christian tradition of reading. This makes her construction of an alternative persona

36 For a different view, see Trull: *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (n. 11), 44. Trull argues that Lock «plants specific references to Bathsheba as well as David alongside the speaker's ungendered self-references ... [and out] of this welter of bodily connotations, no single persona emerges for the speaker, who could be David lamenting his murder of Uriah, Bathsheba complaining of the burden of original sin that she is doomed to pass on to the «giltlesse blod» of her child, or a universal sinner with whom anyone can identify.» Trull's argument is subtle, perhaps too much so.

37 Contra the reading of R. Ma: *Counterpoints of Penitence: Reading Anne Lock's «A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner» Through a Late Medieval Middle English Psalm Paraphrase*, ANQ 24:1-2 (2011) 33-41 (esp. 35, 37).

38 For example, note the tension in this sentence because of its assumption about Davidic persona: «Wyatt and Lok each supply prefatory verses that deal with David's sins, although Lok does not mention David by name as Wyatt does»; Hannay: «Unlock My Lipps» (n. 11), 29.

all the more significant. It might be a natural choice given the conventions of the lyric poem as well as Lock's intention to offer these sonnets as «medicine» to her contemporaries – but it is not a necessary choice.<sup>39</sup> My point is that her construction of this persona represents a meaningful interpretive decision that has theological effects.

David's history and person «concerne and embrace all,» writes Donne.<sup>40</sup> In a way, Lock puts her own twist on this traditional commonplace of David's universality. Her penitential speaker dramatizes Psalm 51 as a universal Every-sinner,<sup>41</sup> soul-sick for some assurance of grace. And – perhaps intentionally, as some have suggested – the gender of the penitent sinner remains unmarked (facilitated by the unmarked grammatical gender of the first person).<sup>42</sup> The effects of this choice are profound. Lock intensifies the interior psycho-spiritual drama of the psalm; she opens the psalm devotionally for wider identification. And Lock has done so by removing the mediating role of David's canonical life and times. Psalm 51 has been made immediate.

*Pleasing Hoste: Figuring (Out) the Eucharist*

Water, stains, cleansing, hyssop, sacrifice, bulls, and altars: from beginning to end, Psalm 51 trades in Old Testament cultic imagery. For many patristic and medieval interpreters, washing and sacrifice inevitably figured baptism and Eucharist. Because the psalm itself redefines «sacrifice,» its own literal sense invited reflection on the nature of ritual and sacrifice. By Anne Lock's time, however, Reformation battles over the sacraments had upped the interpretive stakes. Fierce debates about the mode of signification<sup>43</sup> now synonymous with

39 See Serjeantson: *The Book of Psalms and the Early Modern Sonnet*, 644.

40 Potter and Simpson: *The Sermons of John Donne* (n. 21), 299.

41 I borrow this portmanteau from Trull: *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (n. 11), 26.

42 See the reading of Rosalind Smith, who notes the effect: «[Lock's] reworking of Wyatt shifts from his third-person, descriptive observation of David, to a first-person expansion on the now gender-less penitent sinner's subjective experience of sin. This shift stresses the individual's interaction with God in line with Calvinist theology, and provides by default or omission a subject position available to readers of both genders.» R. Smith: «In a *Mirror Clere*»: Protestantism and Politics in Anne Lok's *Miserere Mei Deus*, in D. Clarke and E. Clarke (eds.): «This Double Voice»: *Gendered Writing in Early Modern England*, London 2000, 41-60 (53).

43 The debates over the semiotics of the Eucharist have attracted a lot of attention lately among those who study early modern literature – particularly for the way theologies of

the names Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Trent were made to bear much of the weight of ecclesiodicy in the newly divided church.<sup>44</sup> These debates rippled out into the post-Reformation exegesis of standard eucharistic *loci* like John 6, 1 Corinthians 11 or the Gospel narratives of institution, but hardly left texts like Psalm 51 untouched.

John Donne's interpretation of Psalm 51:7 («cleanse me with hyssop») emphasizes the public, concrete, exterior mediation of grace in the Church's ordinances:<sup>45</sup> «Nothing in the world,» writes Donne, «can send me home in such a whitenesse, no morall counsaile, no morall comfort, no morall constancy; as Gods Absolution by his Minister, as the profitable hearing of a Sermon, the worthy receiving of the Sacrament do.»<sup>46</sup> Note that Donne includes the Eucharist («the Sacrament») within the scope of his figural reading of Psalm 51:7, although in much of the sermon he connects sprinkling by hyssop to baptism. In Psalm 51 Donne hears David asking for a «totall, and intire washing ... like Naamans», a sevenfold, daily, hourly washing «begun in Baptisme, pursued in sweat, ... continued in teares ... and perchance to bee consummated in blood, at our deaths.»<sup>47</sup> For Donne the blood, sweat, and tears of a Christian participate in a sacramental reality begun in baptism; the sprinkling-by-hyssop in Psalm 51 figures them all. But like the Christic reality they figure, these derivative, sacramentally-linked means of grace are exterior and concrete; they are all bodily fluids. For Donne, the more mediation the better.<sup>48</sup>

the Eucharist relate to devotional poetics. See R. Whalen: *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert*, Toronto 2002, 3-21. For more recent treatment, see K. Johnson: *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England*, Philadelphia 2014, 1-33.

44 The word «ecclesiodicy» was coined by E. Radner: *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West*, Grand Rapids 1998, 245ff. A portmanteau play on theodicy, ecclesiodicy refers to theological justification of the church, by which Radner means of this or that claim to be the Church over against other so-called churches.

45 For Donne, the means of God's grace, the blood-sprinkling «hyssop», does not operate in private «Home-infusions» but in the public «seals of reconciliation» because «the blood of Christ [is] applied in the Ordinances of the Church.» Potter and Simpson: *The Sermons of John Donne* (n. 21), 310.

46 *Ibid.*, 314.

47 *Ibid.*, 312.

48 Donne at once insists on the visible, mediating realities of the church, that he warns paradoxically about an over-hygienic obsession with purity which might defile a Christian through «a schismaticall departing from the unity of the Church.» For «the maner of Christs presence in the Sacrament ... is secret, though the thing bee evident in the Scriptu-

Predictably, John Calvin proves more cautious around the sacraments. Where Psalm 51:17 redefines the sacrifice of God as «a broken and contrite heart» Calvin hastens to clarify that David does not place «his trust in the outward symbol of purification.»<sup>49</sup> For Calvin, David seeks not so much grace as «assurance of his reconciliation» in the sacrificial «seals of the grace of God», Calvin's typical term for the sacraments. The sinner should fix his eyes solely on the sacrifice of Christ, at most «*glancing* ... for the confirmation of his faith, to Baptism and the Lord's Supper.»<sup>50</sup> If Donne glories in mediation, Calvin consents cautiously to it, and here because the final verse of Psalm 51 explicitly celebrates animal sacrifices.<sup>51</sup>

Not only does Anne Lock veer from Donne's multiplying of outward means (perhaps to be expected given the influence of Geneva on her), she outdoes Calvin's caution and consent as well. In the sonnets based on the «sacrifice» lines toward the end of Psalm 51, Lock's sonnets avoid reference to the ecclesial practice of Eucharist altogether. Unlike Calvin, however, she does not avoid eucharistic terminology. Instead, Lock takes up eucharistic terminology to redefine the Eucharist (18:9-14):

... But thy swete sonne alone,  
With one sufficing sacrifice for all  
Appeaseth thee, and maketh the at one  
With sinfull man, and hath repaird our fall.  
That sacred hoste is ever in thine eyes.  
The praise of that I yeld for sacrifice.

The word «hoste», from the Latin *hostia*, refers to a victim or a sacrificed animal; by Lock's time it is closely associated with Roman Catholic eucharistic theology and practice. After borrowing from the Book of Hebrews a contrast between the Old Testament sacrifices to Christ's once for all self-offering (Heb 10:10), here in the final couplet she applies the word to Christ, the «sacred

res.» Therefore he cautions, «No man is pure that thinks no man pure but himself»; Potter and Simpson: *The Sermons of John Donne* (n. 21), 298, 313.

49 Calvin: *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Volume 2 (n. 28), 294.

50 *Ibid.*, 298. Italics mine.

51 Here Calvin worries a little about the «apparent ... inconsistency» of the psalm's view of sacrifice. He concludes with what feels like a concession; sacraments, like sacrifices are «of no value when considered in themselves, but ... [are] acceptable to God when viewed as expressions or symbols of faith, penitence, and thanksgiving.» Calvin: *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Volume 2 (n. 28), 308.

hoste» on whom God the Father gazes eternally. In Lock's astonishing reworking of the Catholic practice of eucharistic adoration, the ascended Christ is the sole eucharistic host. Here Lock «attacks the Catholic view of the Mass as a sacrifice.»<sup>52</sup> In the final line, the penitent's sacrifice is strictly the sacrifice of praise, not anything like a Roman re-offering.

After stressing Christ's unique status as sacrificial host in sonnet 18, the following sonnet opens surprisingly (19:1-3):

I yeld my self, I offer up my ghoste,  
My slayne delightes, my dyeng hart to thee.  
To God a trobled sprite is pleasing hoste.

Lock here continues to use «hoste» to describe the sacrifice of the broken and contrite heart. The language is at once provocative and puzzling, since her speaker offers no clues as to what connects these two hosts.<sup>53</sup> By the end of this sonnet, Lock has two hosts: the crucified and ascended Christ and the penitent's troubled spirit.

Lock takes «hoste» one final step further in the last sonnet. The last verse of Psalm 51 envisions the temple sacrifices restored in a rebuilt Jerusalem. While Calvin read this verse cautiously as reaffirmation of the sacraments, Lock paraphrases it as a further redefinition and displacement of the Eucharist (21:1-8; italics mine):

Then on thy hill, and in thy walled towne,  
Thou shalt receive the pleasing sacrifice,  
The brute shall of thy praised name resound  
In thankfull mouthes, and then with gentle eyes  
Thou shalt behold upon thine altar lye  
*Many a yelden host of humbled hart,*  
And round about then shall thy people crye:  
We praise thee, God our God ...

52 Trull: Petrarchism and the Gift (n. 16), 3.

53 As in the final line of the previous sonnet, a conceptual tension arises from Lock's introduction of Christ as a foil to «you do not desire sacrifice». In the next sonnet Lock naturally follows the psalm in identifying the contrite heart as the true sacrifice. Thus she ends up with a second foil-sacrifice because she has already cast that role. In other words, Psalm 51 means: «You do not desire sacrifice, so I give you my contrite heart.» Lock's speaker ends up saying something like, «You do not desire sacrifice because the death of Christ has exhausted all need of sacrifice – and also my contrite heart is a sacrifice instead.»

Here we encounter a second scene of eucharistic adoration. This time, however, the speaker imagines God gazing on a future gathering of all the penitent sinners who lie upon his «altar.»<sup>54</sup> Perhaps this group represents a more perfect Geneva, a fully reformed England, or the eschatological city of God; it is not clear. Whatever the case, this future gathering of God's penitential people – or rather their hearts – are now the «many . . . yelden host» of the Eucharist. The people *as* Eucharist is a patristic/medieval/Catholic commonplace.<sup>55</sup> The difference here is that the ecclesial act of Eucharist is absent; it has been overwritten as metaphor, rather than as mediating act.

Donne emphasizes the sacraments as means of grace; Calvin cautiously retains the sacraments as seals and aids to assurance; Lock makes a figurative end run around the Eucharist altogether. Adopting the decidedly Catholic eucharistic term «hoste,» Lock applies that word and the controversial image of eucharistic adoration first to the risen body of Christ, subsequently to the heart of the penitent sinner, and finally to some future collection of those hearts. Nowhere, however, does Lock link the term with the actual practice of the Eucharist; that is the polemical edge of her interpretation. Lock's sonnet sequence annexes eucharistic terms inside a wholesale redefinition, while leaving the mediating practice of Eucharist behind.<sup>56</sup>

Yet Lock's interpretive move also leaves a theological puzzle: how do these penitent-hosts relate to Christ who is the one «sacred host»? By eliding the mediating role of the sacrament, Lock has, in her own way, re-performed and transposed Psalm 51's original redefinition of sacrifice. The sacrifice of God is Christ crucified and it is a contrite heart – and it is nothing else, and nothing between. Herein lies the drama of her sonnet sequence: the penitent sinner's

54 Lock may mean to conjure Protestant martyrdom at Catholic hands here if the «altar» alludes to Revelation 6:9.

55 See the extensive discussion in H. de Lubac: *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, translated by G. Simmonds, Notre Dame 2007. Cf. also the discussion in Radner: *The End of the Church* (n. 44), 238-250. In light of Radner's argument, it is especially interesting that Lock emphasizes one part of Augustine's figural equation of Eucharist/Church while leaving the other out. That is, in Lock's *Meditation* the church becomes the eucharistic host but this has nothing to do with participation in the liturgy of communion.

56 Contra Burton, who assumes that Lock's sonnets are designed to enact «a performance of praise, uniting godly readers in spiritual preparation for communion,» but assumes this claim rather than arguing it. See Burton: «The Praise of That I Yeld for Sacrifice» (n. 12), 97.

contrite heart pines desperately after an unmediated encounter with the one «sacred host.»

*Conclusion: «Ne can I stande alone»*

One year after returning to England from Geneva in 1559, Anne Lock published *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner*. Two years prior to her return she had fled to the continent with her two children, not so much from fear of persecution under Mary's reign as from fear of contamination, for her pen pal John Knox had admonished her by letter «to flee both the Mass and the resulting punishment which God would inevitably visit on the nation.»<sup>57</sup> If Lock's flight was darkened by spiritual crisis,<sup>58</sup> so was her return. Knox's 1559 correspondence with Lock indicates she still feared the spiritual danger of «Nicodemism» at communion even under the reign of the more moderate Elizabeth. Equally distressing, Lock seems to have entered a period of profound doubt with regard to assurance of her own election.<sup>59</sup> Spiritual and ecclesial crisis was the soil out which Lock's *Meditation* grew. As Mary Trull puts it, Lock's «imitation of David spilled beyond the boundaries of the poem and encompassed her spiritual life as a whole.»<sup>60</sup> The spiritual pressures of a riven church are mirrored in the poetic voice of «an unstable, internally riven self,»<sup>61</sup> who could not find «the way that other oft have found» (P2:4.).

Lock's paraphrase of Psalm 51 elides David and redefines sacrifice apart from sacrament in a desperate bid for immediate encounter with God. The sonnet sequence is engrossing; it carries the willing reader into the depths of prayed despair. The poems' penitent sinner is impassioned and tortured, begging God to break through all barriers between the deepest parts of the

57 Trull: *Petrarchism and the Gift* (n. 16), 10. Cf. also Trull: *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (n. 11), 23: «When Queen Mary reinstated the Mass, Lock heeded Knox's warnings to avoid «alsweill the occasioun of idolatrie as the plaguis that assuredlie sall follow that abominatioun.» Trull draws on a letter from Knox to Lock and Rose Hickman, 1556, in D. Laing (ed): *The Works of John Knox, 1846–64*, Eugene 2004, 4:219–20.

58 Tragedy cast its shadow too; Lock's infant daughter died just days after her arrival in Geneva; Trull: *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (n. 11), 23.

59 *Ibid.*, 23.

60 *Ibid.*, 23.

61 This phrase belongs to Debora Shuger. See her argument about the «riven self» of early Calvinist spirituality in D. Shuger: *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity*, Berkeley 1998, 100.

self and his mercy, spurning mediating realities all the while.<sup>62</sup> This dramatized immediacy is what gives Lock's sonnets their urgent power. Lock's *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* remains a stunning performance of Psalm 51.

If the *Meditation* gains urgency by bracketing out David and removing the Eucharist, this does not come without loss. In the loneliness of spiritual crisis, it is not clear that Lock's speaker prays in the company of David, a fellow penitent. And it is not only David who remains muted in the psalm paraphrase but Christ too.<sup>63</sup> Christ is only alluded to twice, both times as the far-off «sacred hoste» beheld in heaven by God. In this performance of the psalm, Christ is not present in the depths of despair within the voice of David, and not present in the eucharistic sacrifice of the church. Thus while Lock's sonnets dramatize the desire for immediate engagement with God, they also seem to leave her penitent sinner in a lonely place.<sup>64</sup> Although imagining a future congregation gathered in the last two sonnets of the sequence, for now, without the mediation of David or the sacraments, the penitent sinner prays alone (14:3, 9-11):

Doubt of thy mercy ground of all my paine

And:

Restore my joyes, and make me fele againe  
The swete retourne of grace that I have lost,  
That I may hope I pray not all in vayne.<sup>65</sup>

62 Thirty years later, Lock's translation of Jean Taffin will take up the connection between assurance and the meditation of the sacraments. See S. M. Felch (ed.): *The Collected Works of Anne Vaughan Lock*, Tempe 1999, 100, l. 174; cf. Burton: «The Praise of That I Yeld for Sacrifice» (n. 12), 109.

63 Absent, that is, within the penitential psalm, after the fashion of Augustine's totus Christus. Compare Potter and Simpson: *The Sermons of John Donne* (n. 21), 299: «Here, in this first branch of this part [of the sermon], we seeke God, and because we seeke him, where he hath promised to be, we are sure to find him; Because we joyne with David, in an humble confession of our sins, the Lord joyns us with David, in a fruition of himselfe.»

64 Contra Trull: *Petrarchanism and the Gift* (n. 16), 21, who writes, «although Lock's poem depicts a bitter human struggle between ignorance and revelation, superstition and religion, and the ungodly and the godly, once her speaker turns his eyes to God, struggle is subsumed in love.» The kind of comforting resolution Trull asserts never materializes for the speaker – it remains something yearned for, even in the final sonnet.

65 This is the persistent anxiety of the penitent sinner: that his/her prayer is in vain. The note is first struck in the prefatory sonnets: «While blinde for grace I groape about in vaine» (P2:11). It sounds in the final line of the last sonnet as well: «Restore my feling of they



*Abstract*

As the first sonnet sequence composed and published in English, Anne Vaughan Lock's «A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner» represents an astonishing literary achievement. Equally, as a line-by-line expansion of Psalm 51, Lock's sonnets continue to deserve study as a poetic performance of biblical interpretation. Previous studies of «A Meditation» have explored Lock's construction of literary persona, the sonnets' part in post-Reformation controversy over the sacraments, as well as their relationship to the theological writings of John Calvin and John Donne. Drawing on those currents in scholarship on Lock, I argue that what is most distinctive about Lock's interpretation Psalm 51 is the sonnets' pursuit of spiritual assurance through immediate – non-mediated – encounter with God's grace. We see this most clearly in two respects: (1) the way Lock dispenses with David's typological person in favour of the persona of «a penitent sinner», and (2) the way Lock elides the Psalm's figural links to the sacraments through a polemical, figurative redefinition of the eucharistic «hoste.» To sharpen the exegetical profile of Lock's devotional poems, I compare and contrast Lock's interpretation of Psalm 51 with those of two overlapping Protestant contemporaries: her theological influence, John Calvin, and her literary scion, John Donne.

Als erste Sonettensequenz, die auf Englisch komponiert und veröffentlicht wurde, stellt Anne Vaughan Locks «A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner» eine erstaunliche literarische Leistung dar. Ebenso verdienen Locks Sonette – als zeilenweise Erweiterung von Psalm 51 – weiterhin als poetische Leistung der biblischen Interpretation untersucht zu werden. Frühere Studien zu «A Meditation» haben Locks Konstruktion der literarischen Persona, die Rolle der Sonette im Streit um die Sakramente nach der Reformation sowie ihre Verbindung zu den theologischen Schriften von Calvin und John Donne untersucht. Ausgehend davon argumentiert der Autor, dass das Unterscheidungsmerkmal von Locks Interpretation zu Psalm 51 das Streben der Sonette nach geistiger Sicherheit durch unmittelbare – nicht vermittelte – Begegnung mit der Gnade Gottes ist. Wir sehen das am deutlichsten in zweierlei Hinsicht: (1) die Art und Weise, wie Lock auf Davids Typologie zugunsten der Persona «eines reuigen Sünders» verzichtet, und (2), wie Lock die figuralen Verbindungen des Psalms zu den Sakramenten durch eine polemische, figurative Neudefinition des eucharistischen «Gastgebers» ebnet. Um das exegetische Profil von Locks Andachtsgedichten zu schärfen, vergleicht und kontrastiert der Autor Locks Interpretation von Psalm 51 mit denen zweier sich überschneidender protestantischer Zeitgenossen: ihres geistigen und theologischen Lehrers Calvin und ihres literarischen Nachfolgers John Donne.

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grace againe: Assure my soule, I crave it not in vaine» (21: 13-14). Notice that the last line can be read to different ways: «assure my soul for I do not grave your grace in vain», or «assure my soul that I do not, in fact, crave your grace in vain.» I think the colon at the end of the previous line makes the second reading more likely.