

Christ's Ganymede*

Richard Rambuss

The King of the gods once loved a Trojan boy/
Named Ganymede.
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Vertue hath some perversenesse.
John Donne, "To the Countesse of Bedford"

Both lauded within its own West Hollywood industry and seized during a St. Valentine's Day police raid on the Bijou Theatre in Chicago, the recent gay porn videotape *More of a Man* opens, as these things go, with its leading man Vito down on his knees.¹ Before him is a naked male form. Vito, still on his knees, hoarsely to the same: "You name it, I'll do it." That this solicitation is staged in an empty church to pealing bells and votive candles, and that the unclothed male form Vito addresses is an effigy of Jesus on the cross dangling from the rosary beads bound up in Vito's hands—Jesus' being only the first of the denuded male bodies to be exhibited across the pornographic field of vision—all this could be taken as a wittily profane gesture. But the conceit that the naked Christ is not out of

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1. For one of the celebratory reviews of *More of a Man*, see the gay magazine *Advocate Men*, which honored the tape as its "Best Feature Video of 1990," and named Jerry Douglas Best Director and Joey Stephano (who plays Vito) Best Actor. Reviews, *Advocate Men*, May 1991, 72. A critic in *Adult Video News* praises the videotape for elevating "the adult feature into the realm of cinematic art without sacrificing the sexual intensity" and acclaimed its screenplay as "what may be the best . . . in the twenty year history of gay adult features." Reviews, *Adult Video News*, November 1990, 72.

My discussion of *More of a Man* is indebted to the insightful treatment of the tape's erotic, political, and religious schemes of meaning offered by Mandy Merck, "More of a Man: Gay Porn Cruises Gay Politics," in *Perversions: Deviant Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 217-35. See pages 220-21 for Merck's wry discussion of the opening scene as "the limit case in sacred submission." However, whereas Merck sees the religious component being replaced or subsumed into the political and the erotic as this pornographic narrative unfolds, I see the video as wanting to fashion a redemptive melding of all three forms of devotion. I provide a fuller discussion of *More of a Man* in a companion piece to the present essay, which likewise opens with the tape and its first scene; see Richard Rambuss, "Homodevotion," in *Cruising the Performative*, ed. Philip Brett, Sue-Ellen Case, and Susan Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

place within gay porn's carnival of desired and desiring male bodies can also be seen as a provocation more than a little overdetermined by the contradictory, closeted libidinalities of Christianity itself. For what is to be said of an institution whose influential assessment of same-sex desire is, maybe now more than ever, predominantly censorious, yet which has always sought to stimulate devotion by the display made of Christ on the cross, an arresting spectacularization of the male body uncovered *in extremis*—a naked man offered up to our gazes (“*Ecce homo*”) for worship, desire, and even identification? Considered in these terms, Christianity cuts a rather peculiar figure as a censorer of male homoeroticism. Indeed, as theorist-of-the-closet Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has remarked, “The scandal of [Christ’s displayed body] within a homophobic economy of the male gaze doesn’t seem to abate: efforts to disembody this body . . . only entangle it the more compromisingly among various modern figurations of the homosexual.”²

More of a Man provides graphic—hardcore pornographic—testimonial to this usually scrupulously closeted entanglement, climactically emblemized by its concluding shot, a bedside freeze-frame of Vito’s rosary beside a spent condom. Presented as the coming-out story of a conflicted, Catholic construction worker, *More of a Man* effects a reconciliation of Vito’s devotion to Christ, his correspondingly fervent (though, he feels, illicit) erotic desire for the male body, and his insistently affirmed identity as a man who is “more of a man.” Thus Vito’s provocative pledge at the beginning of the film (“You name it, I’ll do it”) is attached to his anxious supplication that Jesus rid him of “all these impure thoughts.” But from here, coming as though it were the divine answer to his prayer (if hardly the one he expects), Vito is led through a series of escalating homosexual encounters. From scene to scene, he carries with him those rosary beads—a token, I take it, of Christ’s sanctioning accompaniment. The end of the videotape presents a now fully uncloseted Vito atop a float in a Gay Pride parade and then moves him inside the float itself, where he brings off his tape-long flirtation with Duffy, a comparably butch, L.A. Dodgers fan, but also, as it happens, a committed ACT-UP AIDS activist. Their coming together enacts more than the climactic sexual number of the pornographic narrative; as Mandy Merck suggests in her provocative treatment of *More of a Man*, it also consummates a redemptive coupling of

2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 140. Sedgwick’s brief foray into the libidinalities of Christianity has proved an important stimulus for my project.

religion, activism, and sex—homosex, I would specify in this context.³ Salvation is thus wrought for Vito, but not according to the terms he originally calls for, terms which would have maintained an opposition between his devoutness and his queerness, as well as between his virility and his lust for the bodies of other men. Instead, redemption, the answer to prayer, arrives as both a coming out and a come shot.

Apropos of Sedgwick's intimation, as well as of the sizeable allurements of *More of a Man*, I want to approach the sacred body from the vantage afforded by one of our culture's most closely maintained closets, one I will term the prayer closet of Christian devotion to Christ. Departing somewhat from Sedgwick, whose primary interest lies with modern cultural formations, I want to do so, however, by turning back at this point to the devotional outpourings of some seventeenth-century male lyric poets. For theirs, we find, is an expression of devotion (to reverse Sedgwick's formulation) that exhibits little inclination "to disembody [Christ's] body."

In his lyric poem "Confession" George Herbert discloses that: "within my heart I made / Closets."⁴ Herbert is one of several religious writers in the seventeenth century, who, recognizing the performative possibilities of closetedness,⁵ repeatedly trope on the closet, and on the devotional body (whether the worshipper's or Christ's) as a closet—as an often eroticized interior space to be opened, penetrated, made fertile with devotion. It is here, within the closet of devotion, that poets such as Herbert, John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and Thomas Traherne, among others, can more or less self-consciously reassign in same-sex configurations (male devotee, male God) the conventional terms and postures of Petrarchan love lyric. All this in the endeavor, as more than one of them puts it, to court Christ:

Thou art my lovelinesse, my life, my light,
 Beautie alone to me:
 Thy bloody death and undeserv'd, makes thee
 Pure red and white.

("Dulnesse," lines 9-12)

In this poem Herbert aestheticizes Christ's body and his Passion in terms of the conventional blazon colors of erotic poetry.⁶ Christ's

3. Merck. *More of a Man*, 234-35.

4. "Confession," lines 2-3. All citations of Herbert's poetry are according to *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941).

5. On the notion of "closetedness" as a performance and on the ways in which silence and gestures of secreting and withholding can be "as pointed and as performative as speech," see again Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1-61, especially pages 3-4.

6. Here Herbert is writing within the tradition of Christ's crucified body being paradoxically a sight of horror and shame, as well as a vision of arresting beauty. That is, Christ's sacrifice is

wounded body likewise blooms red and white in one of Crashaw's several epigrams on the Circumcision: "Ah cruel knife! which first commanded such fair lilies / to change into such cruel roses" (*In circumcissionem*, lines 1-2).⁷ From such stock amorous conceits comes a form of devotion that turns on an affectively, even erotically, expressive desire for the body of Jesus.⁸

Christ's body is, moreover, repeatedly held forth in seventeenth-century verse as an object of the rapturous gaze. "See, see, ah see," John Davies again and again solicits in his lengthy Passion poem "The Holy Roode," which he subtitles a "speaking-picture."⁹ In "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," Donne terms Christ's Passion "That spectacle of too much weight for mee" (line 16), yet the poem relentlessly presents us with just such a sight:

Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
And turne all spheares at once, peirc'd with those holes?
Could I behold that endlesse height which is
Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
Humbled below us?

(lines 21-25)¹⁰

This spectacularization is rendered even more ostentatious in the numerous sacred epigrams Crashaw plies on Christ's wounded body: "And now th'art set wide ope, The Speare's sad Art, / Lo! hath unlockt thee at the very Heart" ("I am the Doore," lines 1-2). From the Circumcision to the Crucifixion, Crashaw's rapturous lyrics probe the openings in Christ's body and their unending flow of secretions with an explicitness, a studied fascination that I find presciently evocative of contemporary pornography's explorations and excavations of the body's interior spaces—its cavities and valves—as Linda Williams's recent book *Hardcore* has so acutely begun to

both a gruesome spectacle of innocent suffering and beatific evidence of God's love.

7. I cite the translation of Crashaw's Latin provided in *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, ed. George Walton Williams (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1970). All citations of Crashaw's verse, Latin and English, follow this edition.

8. Of course, the amatory gestures I have cited here from representative lyrics by Herbert and Crashaw are not confined to the verse of male Christians. Aemilia Lanyer, for instance, sets Christ apart as the lover "In whom is all that Ladies can desire," ("To the Ladie Katherine Countesse of Suffolke," 40), and goes on in her long poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* to blazon "His alabaster breast, his bloody side" (line 1162) by means of the same red and white color scheme amorously employed by Herbert and Crashaw. I cite Lanyer's work according to *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, ed. Susanne Woods (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

9. John Davies, "The Holy Roode or Christes Crosse," in vol. 1 of *The Complete Works of John Davies of Hereford*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 6-29.

10. All citations of Donne's poetry are to *Donne: The Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

map.¹¹ What Crashaw's poems on Christ thus offer is a male body made visible to desire, one that is uncovered, vulnerable (literally penetrable), a mechanism for ejaculatory excess: "Lo, how the streams of life, from that full nest / Of lous . . . / Flow in an amorous floud," another of his epigrams rhapsodizes ("*Vexilla Regis*, the Hymn of the Holy Crosse," stanza 2).

This summary of Crashaw's devotional poetics leads to another generalization I would like to advance concerning metaphysical devotional verse, one that distinguishes it, I think, as an especially compelling siting of the sacred body. That is, this poetry proffers a kind of spirituality that, in its figures and effects, remains trenchantly, at times even extravagantly, corporealized. Here we find devotion routinely conceived and performed in terms of, in view of, Christ's body. Accordingly, Leo Steinberg's *The Sexuality of Christ*, a remarkable compendium of the denuded, often prominently endowed Christs that proliferate in Renaissance visual art, graphically reveals Christianity to be an incarnational religion, one turned especially ostentatious in this period in the depiction of its God as fully human and, we shall see, as expressly male.¹² The poets with whom I am concerned here similarly show themselves to be deeply attuned—sometimes rapturously, sometimes bathetically—to the meanings attendant upon the Word made flesh, of Jesus being, in Pope Leo the Great's canonic formulation, "born true God in the entire and perfect nature of true man, complete in his own properties, complete in ours;" or as the Council of Chalcedon declared, a savior who is "of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead . . . of one substance with us as regards his manhood; *like us in all respects*, apart from sin."¹³ Or again, as an anonymous 1614 English sermon on "The Mysterie of Christs Nativitie" insists: "Undoubtedly he was a true man, and had a true, naturall, and not a celestiall and phantasticall body."¹⁴ Indeed, although seventeenth-century verse is densely nuanced psychologically, arguably its most profound subjectivity effects well up—as in the remarkable contortions of Donne's "Good Friday, 1613" or in, say, Herbert's eerie crucifixion monologue "The Sacrifice"—around some imaging of Christ's body *as body*, as a material form subject to passions, both pain and bliss. Coincident

11. On pornography's drive for maximum visibility and its will-to-knowledge of the body's inner spaces and orifices, see Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), especially 48-57. I explore these linkages between pornography and the corporeal poetics of metaphysical verse further in Rambuss, "Homodevotion."

12. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

13. Both as cited in Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 16.

14. *The Mysterie of Christs Nativitie* (London, 1614), D2v.

with their devotion to Christ's body, these poets rarely show much inclination to vanquish or utterly transume their own. Rather, "All that the soul does," Donne instructs in an Easter morning sermon, "it does in, and with, and by the body."¹⁵ I am describing here in rather broad strokes a spirituality that paradoxically keeps returning us to the fact of the body, even—or all the more so—in the endeavor to discipline it. Moreover, it is a spirituality that in so attending to the body often works ultimately to enhance its operations and possibilities, including erotic possibilities, I would insist, that are homoerotic.

In order to ground and further specify these claims, I want to take up one of Donne's most anthologized and most studied poems, his Holy Sonnet "Batter my heart, three-person'd God." There the poet's intense longing for spiritual satisfaction is metaphorized in terms of a rather explicit fantasy of divine abduction and ravishment, one that is framed, as I will discuss, in terms that cut back and forth across genders, across "eroticisms," across desires both sacred and illicit.

Before turning to Donne's poem, however, I should situate my consideration of the sacred body more explicitly in relation to the work of some distinguished cultural historians, Steinberg among them, who have opened the way for the recovery of the corporeal dimension of Christian devotional expression and experience.¹⁶ While my own scholarship has been richly enabled by theirs, I question what I find as a devotion to a delimiting kind of theologism in this work, one that has resulted in a propensity to see the sacred body as chiefly operating in the most orthodox ways. Caroline Walker Bynum, for example, is apt to read nearly every expression of medieval female piety, no matter how apparently outlandish to modern sensibilities, through a normalizing semiotic scheme of marriage, impregnation,

15. Donne, from a sermon preached at St. Paul's, Easter Day, 28 March 1623, as cited in *John Donne*, The Oxford Authors Series, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 324. For a powerful account of Donne's corporeal poetics in terms of both his sacred and his secular verse, see Elaine Scarry, "Donne: 'But yet the body is his booke,'" in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988). Yet as illuminating as Scarry's account of Donne's incorporation of the material body into his textual corpus is, I find it limited in so far as it turns a blind eye to questions concerning the *gendered* body.

16. Among the most important scholarship in this field, in addition to Steinberg's book, is the work of Peter Brown, especially his *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), as well as that of Caroline Walker Bynum, including *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992). Other important contributions to the discussion of the topic include Rudolf M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); and Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

lactation, or food preparation—terms, in other words, that keep the female body, even in its most ecstatic states, quite properly domesticated.¹⁷ My interests, however, go more to expressions of devotion entailing desires and somatic performances that exceed, at times even violate, any number of cultural orthodoxies. I am especially concerned with spiritual desires voiced (as in Donne's sonnet) in a metaphoric existing outside the licit sphere of the married or marriageable couple. A number of such longings, as I have already suggested, become activated around the body of Jesus and its privileged status within a Christian libidinal scheme that both stimulates and abjects same-sex possibilities. One thus finds this body—which is God's body, but also the body made to bear all the sins, infirmities, and corporal functions of man—sited in the breach between sacrosanct cultural boundaries. Christ's is a sacred body, in other words, that *by its very nature* keeps exceeding, keeps transgressing categories of the licit, doing so in ways that touch upon the profane, the defiled—even, I am going to suggest, the sodomitical, in its diffuse shape as an early modern social and legal category.

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That “the sacred and the forbidden are one, that the sacred can be reached through the violence of a broken taboo,” are among the governing postulates of Bataille's erotics of religion as cultural system.¹⁸ But, as he sees it, Christianity has from its inception looked to sever this encouplement of the holy and the taboo, and done so much to its own impoverishment. “Misunderstanding the sanctity of transgression,” Bataille remarks, “is one of the foundations of Christianity.”¹⁹ Although Bataille would make Christianity the exception to his axiom that transgression is complementary, even requisite to the production of sacrality, it strikes me that in just such terms he has mapped the very contours of the Christian devotional imaginary as it is expressed in the flamboyant paradoxes of Donne's “Batter my heart.” The poem begins profanely enough with the poet cajoling God, forthrightly registering his dissatisfaction with divine measures to date: “for you / As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend” (lines 2-3). Donne then advances his own

17. Thus Bynum asserts: “Women's symbols [of spiritual life] did not reverse social fact, they enhanced it.” Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 279. A more fully developed engagement with, and critique of, Bynum's work can be found in my essay, Rambuss, “Pleasure and Devotion: The Body of Christ in Seventeenth-Century Lyric,” in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) 264-69.

18. Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 126.

19. *Ibid.*, 90.

program for spiritual renewal, one that becomes increasingly incendiary as it unfolds, climaxing in the injunction that he, like a Christian Ganymede, be carried away by God and ravished:

Divorce mee,'ntie, or breake that knot againe,
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthral mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

(lines 12-14)

Surveying some of the history of criticism concerned with this sonnet, one finds that it is critics from an earlier generation, those writing in the 1950s and '60s, who candidly address and repeatedly fret over the erotic and moral implications of Donne's final metaphorical turn, noting how it seems to "open a field for scatological interpretation," to evoke a "notion of God 'corrupting' man."²⁰ But it is really no such thing, we are then reassured. What looks to be a case of a male poet begging to be figuratively sodomized by his male God is not that after all; for, the argument goes, the erotic operations Donne so much desires would be metaphorically performed on his soul, his *anima*, and, we are instructed in such criticism, "with Donne (as with Shakespeare and Spenser) the soul is always feminine."²¹

Feminizing the soul is certainly sometimes the convention in Renaissance devotional materials, but it is not always so—as it is not in another of Donne's Holy Sonnets, "Oh my blacke Soule!," where the poet thinks of his similarly unregenerate soul in terms of being a "hee" and a "himselfe."²² But for the moment I am less concerned with contesting the normalizing critical practice of a previous generation of Donne scholars than I am in remarking on their willingness to face head-on, if only to vanquish, the homoerotic possibilities of Donne's most transgressive sonnet. For this criticism is a marked contrast to more contemporary critical commentary on "Batter my heart," which, as I have detailed elsewhere, rather more effortlessly heterosexualizes Donne's ultimate figure for Christian

20. J. C. Levenson, "Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, XIV" (1954), reprinted in part in *John Donne's Poetry*, 2d ed., ed. Arthur L. Clements (New York: Norton, 1992), 327.

21. John E. Parrish, "No. 14 of Donne's *Holy Sonnets*" (1963), also excerpted in Clements, *John Donne's Poetry*, 332. See also George Knox, "Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, XIV" (1956), likewise reprinted in Clements, *John Donne's Poetry*, 329: "The sexual ravishment involves no bisexuality on the part of the poet nor does it require our imagining literally the relation between man and God in heterosexual terms. The traditions of Christian mysticism allow such symbolism as a kind of 'as if.'"

22. "Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned / By sicknesse, deaths herald, and champion; / Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done / Treason, and durst not turne to whence *hee* is fled, / Or like a thiefe, which till deaths doome be read, / Wisheth *himselfe* delivered from prison" (lines 1-6; emphasis added).

salvation.²³ In this essay, I would like to consider another, more recent example of the propensity to domesticate Donne's arresting analogy that couples Christian salvation with (desired) sexual violation. This instance is drawn from the new *Cambridge Companion to English Poetry*, where, in the chapter devoted to Donne, Achsah Guibbory offers the following paraphrase of the poem's erotic scenario: the speaker is "like a woman who loves one man (God) but is betrothed to another (Satan), and wants to be rescued, even by force." Thus "Christ is the bridegroom," Guibbory remarks, while the poet adopts the "conventionally 'feminine,' passive role of bride."²⁴

The connubial narrative Guibbory reads into "Batter my heart," while orthodox enough in form, is, however, unwarranted by the sonnet itself—the critic taming the poem of the very outrageousness that is surely its point. For although Donne sees himself as betrothed to the devil, he never asks God to intervene to make a proper bride out of him. The poem, that is, fails to end with the expected and complementary call for a new betrothal to Christ as a more appropriate spouse for the soul. Indeed, little is appropriate about what Donne's sonnet has in mind, inasmuch as its multiply metaphorized scheme of redemption is predicated on a series of violent and violative actions: God is to take a battering ram to the heart; to lay siege to a town that belongs to another; to provoke a divorce. And here it is not remarriage that the poet says he desires, but something I see as more transgressive. What he wants is the experience of being ravished, and thus what is offered as the poem's devotional climax is Donne's insistent solicitation that God capture, enthrall, and rape his desirous devotee.

In a move widely reduplicated in readings of "Batter my heart," Guibbory similarly shortchanges the poem's profanity by mandating a sex-change for its speaker, making the male poet "*a woman* who loves one man . . . but is betrothed to another." In this way, the desire expressed in Donne's sonnet is figuratively heterosexualized, as though a man who longs to be ravished automatically recasts himself as female. Yet nowhere does the poet give a similar indication that he regards himself as a woman, much less a bride, in the eroticized conversion scenario he envisions. Rather, despite enduring cultural proscriptions that tended generally, though not monolithically, to see

23. See Rambuss, "Pleasure and Devotion," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Goldberg, 271-73. For a consideration of feminist and gender-oriented critical treatments of Donne's sonnet, see Rambuss, "Homodevotion," in *Unnatural Acts*, ed. Brett et. al.

24. Achsah Guibbory, "John Donne," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 141-42.

any body subject to penetration as effeminized,²⁵ Donne's desire in view of divine ravishment remains assertive, punningly phallic, even studly: "That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee."²⁶ It is as though Donne wants the Godhead to ravish him, to "breake that knot againe," *in order that* he be rendered potent, erect. If there is any taking on of the woman's position here, it is one the poet looks to abjure in seeking severance from the devil: "Divorce mee, . . . / Take mee to you." It is Satan who has made a woman of him, a rectifiable situation if only God would at last save him, ravish him, make more of a man of him.

The erotics of salvation in "Batter my heart" are thus specified as homoerotic ones. Such is also the case in a sexy religious poem simply called "Love" by Donne's later contemporary Thomas Traherne, an expression of devotion which likewise turns out to involve another divine rape/rapture fantasy:

Did my ambition ever dream
Of such a Lord, of such a love! Did I
Expect so sweet a stream
As this at any time! . . .
.
.
.
Joys down from Heaven on my head to shower
And Jove beyond the fiction doth appear
Once more in golden rain to come
To Danae's pleasing fruitful womb.²⁷

From the pleasure of imagining himself, like the mythological Greek maiden Danae, drenched and impregnated with Christ's "sweet . . . stream," however, Traherne shifts his metaphors across genders, across (what we now call) sexualities in the poem's final stanza. There he offers himself to Jesus as "His Ganymede! His life! His joy!" (line 31). Now, Traherne exalts, whether "He comes down to me, or takes me up / . . . I might be his boy" (lines 32-33). As Christ's Ganymede, the poet thus rapturously takes as his own the name and position of the handsome shepherd who Zeus carried off to heaven to serve as his cupbearer, although this is also the name that serves in the period, as one Renaissance dictionary puts it, for "any

25. On the cultural effemination of the penetrated or passive partner, see, for instance, David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 32-36, and *passim*.

26. Compare Donne's employment of these well-worn erection puns on standing and rising with those in his "Elegie XIX. Going to Bed": "Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defie, / Until I labour, I in labour lie. / The foe oft-times having the foe in sight, / Is tir'd with standing though he never fight" (lines 1-4).

27. Lines 21-24, 27-30, cited according to *Thomas Traherne: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. Alan Bradford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

Boy, loved for carnal abuse, or hired to be used contrary to Nature to commit the detestable sin of *Sodomy*.”²⁸ Instancing another dovetailing of the profane and the sacred, Ganymede had also been, of course, widely adopted in the Renaissance as an emblem of the soul’s rapturous ascent from the world to God. Traherne’s ecstatically amorous lyric is evidence that the Christian allegorization of Ganymede did not necessarily entail a corresponding chaste vaporization of all the figure’s original (homo-)erotic significances.²⁹

I have been insisting upon the homoerotic contours of devotional desire against the grain of prevailing scholarship on the sacred body that, in its own dehistoricizing ways, has pronounced this desire “pure” of sexual expressiveness or has found the erotic present only by heterosexualizing it.³⁰ But my point is not to homosexualize Donne or Traherne, to “out” them from their prayer closets. Such a gesture would be conceivable only at the cost of anachronistically dislocating these early modern writers to a modern regime of sexuality. For as the efflorescence of recent work on the history of sexuality has shown, a notion of sexuality *as identity* was not yet in place when these poets wrote, awaiting the late nineteenth-century crystallization of a dichotomized model of sexual subjectivities, homo and hetero.³¹ That is, while we tend to experience our sexuality as *who* we are—as an orientation, even a subject position—early modern

28. Thomas Blount, *Glossographia: Or a Dictionary Interpreting the Hard Words of Whatsoever Language, Now Used in our Refined English Tongue* (London, 1670), 596.

29. On the figure of Ganymede in Renaissance schemes of representation, see Leonard Barkan, *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Renaissance Humanism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); and James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). Although Saslow’s encyclopedic study treats both the erotic and the religious significances of Ganymede, I find that his account tends to keep these sets of meanings more binarized than Traherne’s lyric “Love,” or even than some of the materials Saslow himself discusses, show them to be. Saslow’s discussion, in other words, seems premised on the notion that a spiritualized employment of the Ganymede trope necessarily precludes any activation of its erotic valences—a polarization of the religious and the erotic that my essay looks to undo.

30. On this point, see also Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 21-23 and *passim*.

31. The starting point here, of course, would have to be Michel Foucault’s aegis-making volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, especially vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978). But also see the crucial work of Alan Bray in *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1982) and “Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England,” *History Workshop Journal* 19 (1990): 1-19. Bray’s essay is reprinted in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Goldberg, a volume which contains a number of important essays that productively engage and extend the groundbreaking work of Foucault and Bray. See also Goldberg, *Sodometries*; Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*; Gregory Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). On the matter of the homoerotics of Christian devotion in early American devotional materials, see the illuminating essay by Walter Hughes, “‘Meat Out of the Eater’: Panic and Desire in American Puritan Poetry,” in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, ed. Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden (New York: Routledge, 1990), 102-21.

conceptions of sex are organized more in view of a juridical index of erotic activities one might perform, some licit, many not, though theoretically predicable of anyone. In that respect, to speak of sexuality in the early modern period is anachronistic. Yet the absence of an ontologizing apparatus of sexuality should be seen not to preclude erotic meanings in these texts, but rather, I suggest, to open them in the direction of a more transitive plethora of erotic possibilities, ones not entirely containable by our own (often only suppositiously coherent) sexual polarities. Thus every man, and not just a minority possessed of a certain sexual nature, was exhorted to be on guard against the allurements of sodomy, a sin, cautions Puritan divine John Rainolds, to which "men's natural corruption and viciousness is prone."³² Sodomy: the "natural" form of unnaturalness. Similarly, Samuel Danforth, a seventeenth-century American preacher, warns that the "holiest man hath as vile and filthy a nature, as the Sodomites."³³

Though travelling along a far more redemptive vector, Traherne's erotic ecstasies in "Love" likewise refuse to cohere according to modern sexual binarisms in their traversal of complementary, not opposed, identifications with both a ravished maiden and a too beautiful boy swept away to serve at bed and board in heaven. The desires expressed here are thus ones that cannot be summed up as either hetero- or homosexual: "I am His image, and His friend. / His son, bride, glory, temple, end," Traherne's poem concludes (lines 39-40). The poet is Christ's son, his boy, his bride, his boy-bride—Christ's Ganymede; he is his pleasure, his end—his end pleasure.³⁴

* * *

In a recent autobiographical essay, Michael Warner brilliantly and movingly overlays his own conversion narrative of a boyhood of fervent evangelical Christianity with another of his emergent queer identity, doing so in ways that make plausible, even inevitable,

32. John Rainolds, *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Players* (London, 1599), 10, 32, cited in Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 17. See also, in the context of New England Puritanism, Thomas Shepard's *The Sincere Convert* (1641): "thy heart is a foul sink of all atheism, sodomy, blasphemy, murder, whoredom, adultery, witchcraft, buggery It is true thou feelest not all these things stirring in thee at one time . . . but they are in thee like a nest of snakes in an old hedge. Although they break not out into thy life, they lie lurking in thy heart." Cited in Michael Warner, "New England Sodom," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Goldberg, 349.

33. Cited in Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 95-96.

34. I adapt the evocative phrase "End-Pleasure" from Paul Morrison's essay of that title in *Narrative and Culture*, ed. Janice Carlisle and Daniel A. Schwartz (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 160-78.

disclosures like the following: "Jesus was my first boyfriend. He loved me, personally, and told me I was his own."³⁵ From here, Warner goes on to discuss, with reference to Bataille and Marcuse, how religion "makes available a language of ecstasy, a horizon of significance within which transgressions against the normal order of the world and the boundaries of self *can be seen as good things*."³⁶ This sense of ecstatically authorized transgressivity is strikingly thrown in relief by Traherne and Donne and their metaphors of illicit, unlawful sex—rape, debauchery, sodomy—to body forth divine operations that are world-altering. Nor, it is worth adding, is this salvific transgression played out exclusively within the terrains of the homoerotic, as exemplified by Donne's no less perverse handling of the revered biblical trope (honed out of the *Song of Songs*) of Christ's marriage to his Church. In another of the Holy Sonnets, "Show me deare Christ, thy spouse," Donne advances the astonishing analogy that the true church is most true, most faithful, not when she remains a chaste wife to Christ, but when her divine husband plays pimp and she, like a whore, opens her legs to all comers:

Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sights,
 And let myne amorous soule court thy mild Dove,
 Who is most trew, and most pleasing to thee, then
 When she's embrac'd and open to most men.
 (lines 11-14)

In Donne's sonnet, salvation comes by a divinely sanctioned debauchery. George Herbert works a related trope in his poem "Church-musick," which analogizes the pleasures of sacred music to what sounds like a recuperative foray in a whorehouse:

Sweetest of sweets, I thank you: when displeasure
 Did through my bodie wound my minde,
 You took me thence, and in your house of pleasure
 A daintie lodging me assign'd.
 (lines 1-4)³⁷

Although both poems cast devotional desire in heteroerotic terms, neither chooses to route it through licit sexuality, through the scripturally sanctioned metaphors of marriage between Christ and

35. Michael Warner, "Tongues Untied: Memories of a Pentecostal Boyhood," *Voice Literary Supplement* (February 1993), 14.

36. *Ibid.*, 15.

37. Michael Schoenfeldt provides suggestive commentary on this poem, noting that in the next stanza entering the church "is likened to the entry into another's body": "Now I in you without a bodie move, / Rising and falling with your wings: / We both together sweetly live and love." Schoenfeldt continues: "'Comfort, I'll die,' declares the speaker, anticipating a death which is both spiritual and sexual." Michael Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 241.

the soul; instead, Donne and Herbert here prefer to court a more transgressive sacred eroticism.

In “Batter my heart,” to return to my touchstone text, Donne’s no less transgressive desire for a limit-experience with God is, as we have seen, vehiculated through a same-sex rape fantasy—a rape fantasy that also performs as seduction, as an overweening attempt by the poet to woo a trio of divine lovers (“Batter my heart, *three-person’d* God”), who hereto have been either disinclined or uninformed on how best to serve their servant’s desires. Piling up his imperatives for God, Donne willfully, aggressively calls for his own undoing: “o’erthrow me,” “bend your force,” “take mee to you.” It is here that I would locate, not only the always at once exalted and abjected sacred body, but also the conditions of devotional subjectivity itself: this place where the subject is moving between, transgressing the hyperbole of his or her own agency and longing with a matching desire for the self’s abasement, even dissolution. From this vantage, what Donne desires from his God looks a lot like what Leo Bersani says we should get from good sex, and from being sodomized in particular. Pursuing what he sees as a more radical, though somewhat nervously submerged, pulse in psychoanalytic erotic theory, Bersani argues in his controversial essay “Is the Rectum a Grave?” that the value of sex resides not in some intersubjectively grounded sense of self to be derived from it, but in just the opposite.³⁸ He points to Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sex* and the speculations

38. Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”, in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 217-18. Bersani offers this revaluation of sex as a polemic against what he terms “the redemptive reinvention of sex” being undertaken by both feminist and gay and lesbian theorists of sexuality, a project with a “frequently hidden agreement about sexuality being, in its essence, less disturbing, less socially abrasive, less violent, more respectful of ‘person-hood’ than it has been in a male-dominated, phallogocentric culture.” In this respect, Bersani perversely aligns himself with the position of antipornography crusaders Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. Dworkin and MacKinnon regard all pornography as inherently violent, whether or not it involves rape or explicit sadomasochism, because they see pornography as eroticizing those operations of patriarchal power and inequality that inhere in “real world” sexual and social interactions. Bersani parts company with them, however, in terms of the valence he ascribes to sex understood in terms of a fantasmatic of power and dominance. Whereas the connection between sex and power makes pornography (and most sex for that matter) hateful to Dworkin and MacKinnon, Bersani values it for just these reasons:

[Dworkin and MacKinnon] have given us the reasons why pornography must be multiplied and not abandoned, and, more profoundly, the reasons for defending, for cherishing the very sex they find so hateful. Their indictment of sex—their refusal to prettify it, to romanticize it, to maintain that fucking has anything to do with community or love—has had the immensely desirable effect of publicizing, of lucidly laying out for us, the inestimable value of sex as—at least in certain of its ineradicable aspects—anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving.

Ibid., 215. Where one might want to part company with Bersani himself, however, is his own essentialized vision of sex in these terms: is it, as he suggests here, *always* “anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving,” or might these attributes be among the performative possibilities of sex?

hatched there that sexual pleasure is often tied to sensations or affective processes somehow “beyond” those attendant upon psychic organization, processes which may disrupt the perceived coherence of the self. Hence what sex can do, and do valuably, Bersani asserts, is to effect a temporary undoing of the self, a shattering of the subject. “The sexual,” he determines, thus “emerges as the *jouissance* of exploded limits”³⁹—although here he might just as well be evoking the conversion experience envisioned by Donne as advancing a notion of sex as a tautology for a pushy masochism. Indeed, the term *pervert*, in a meaning now gone out of date, was once as likely to designate the religious convert as it was to name the sexual outlaw.⁴⁰

With Donne, the convert/pervert at hand, the question would then have to be: Are the Holy Sonnets redeeming sodomy, or are they sodomizing Christian redemption? Given his notorious propensity for excess, it may seem inevitable that Donne in particular would pursue the sacred to the utmost limit posed by sodomy, a category of sexual dissidence that, in its recurring early modern linkage with the capital crimes of sedition, heresy, and sorcery, is seen to mark utter profanity, a gross social disorderliness that would undermine law and nature on an almost cosmological scale, bringing down the apocalyptic fate of its namesake city.⁴¹ But even apart from Donne’s own knack for courting the perverse, the sacred path towards sodomy may already be overdetermined here in so far as Christ’s own body could be seen as assimilable under early modern conceptions of the sodomitical, a category of transgression which prominently included, but was by no means limited to, doings of the same-sex variety. A diffuse, even confused, rubric, sodomy potentially named any sex act (pederasty, but also heterosexual anal and oral intercourse, bestiality, incest,

39. *Ibid.*, 217.

40. I am indebted to my colleague Janice Carlisle for putting me on the trail of this etymology. Donne, as the rector of St. Paul’s, had himself converted from Catholicism, a turning away—a perversion—from the faith of his family, a family whose ancestors included the sister of Thomas More. One of Donne’s uncles headed the Jesuit mission in England during the poet’s youth.

41. See Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 19-30, especially 25:

[Homosexuality] was not part of the chain of being, or the harmony of the created world or its universal dance. It was none of these things because it was not conceived of as part of the created order at all; it was part of its dissolution. And as such it was not a sexuality in its own right, but existed as a potential for confusion and disorder in one undivided sexuality.

Ibid., 25.

In “*Bowers v. Hardwick in the Renaissance*,” in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Goldberg, Janet E. Halley masterfully anatomizes the 1986 Supreme Court decision against consensual “sodomy” and the warrant for such a ruling the Court sought to locate in early modern proscriptions against sodomy, proscriptions understood by the Court in the most presumptively ahistorical terms.

masturbation, prostitution, even sex between Christian and Jew⁴²) that might be construed as undermining married procreative sex and its service to a system of social alliance.⁴³

Although this line of my discussion becomes more speculative—some might say even wishful, a judgment which I would not take entirely as rebuff—I would like to pursue briefly this sodomitical Christ by pressing Steinberg's case for *The Sexuality of Christ*, as his book is (rather ahistorically) entitled. Never venturing far outside a singular, normativizing doctrinal context, Steinberg argues that the single point of all those Renaissance images which compromise decorum by featuring an ostentatious display of Christ's penis (images Steinberg's book presents in fabulous abundance) is to provide graphic evidence that God has become man indeed:

If the godhead incarnates itself to suffer a human fate, it takes on the condition of being both deathbound and sexed. The mortality it assumes is correlative with sexuality, since it is by procreation that the race, though consigned to death individually, endures collectively to fulfill the redemptive plan. Therefore to profess that God once embodied himself in a human nature is to confess that the eternal, there and then, became mortal and sexual. Thus understood, the evidence of Christ's sexual member serves as the pledge of God's humanation.⁴⁴

This is the doctrine of the Incarnation, the crux of the Christian redemptive scheme: Jesus can save us not because he is God, but because he is necessarily also wholly man—one of us. Remarkably, the place where this doctrine can be most manifestly read in Renaissance iconography is, according to Steinberg, Christ's groin—his virile member, the site where the carnal mystery of the Incarnation is best endowed, the penis at the center of the confession of faith. “And is not this reason enough,” Steinberg demurely proposes, “to render Christ's sexual member, even like the stigmata, an object of *ostentatio*?”⁴⁵

Steinberg further contextualizes the Renaissance convention of *ostentatio genitalium* in terms of a Christian tradition that regards sex in its generative capacity as doing battle with sin and its attendant

42. On this last transgression as a sodomitical one, see Theo van der Meer, “The Persecutions of Sodomites in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam: Changing Perceptions of Sodomy,” in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Kent Gerard and Gert Hemka (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), 265.

43. On the importance of alliance in the historical and cultural production and regulation of sexuality, see Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 106-14. No one, it seems to me, has interrogated the (often homophobic productive) diffusions and confusions of the slippery category of sodomy more brilliantly than Jonathan Goldberg in *Sodomities*, especially 1-26.

44. Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*, 13.

45. *Ibid.*, 17.

penalty of death for mankind: though themselves sullied by sin, “Unconquered, the nuptial weapons fight with death, they restore nature and perpetuate the race,” as Bernardus Silvestris’s *De mundi universitate*, an influential medieval allegory, celebrates.⁴⁶ Likewise emblematic of power and life, “the organ of the God-man,” Steinberg declares, “does better”—though, I would add, it also does *other*. For Christ’s phallus vanquishes death by grace and specifically not by procreation—“it obviates the necessity for procreation,” Steinberg argues, “since, in the victory over sin, death, the result of sin, is abolished.”⁴⁷ This conquest, moreover, is not cast as one in which the sexual is simply eradicated by means of Christ’s lifelong chastity. Indeed, for that chastity to rank as a meaningful accomplishment, Jesus must be physiologically capable and potent—a point dramatized, Steinberg maintains in one of the most controversial aspects of his argument, by numerous paintings that show the Savior with what looks like an erection. In other words, Christ needs to be endowed with what Steinberg terms “sexuality,” a sexuality that is redemptive, a sexuality that could even be said to be the fulfillment of sexuality. Yet Christ’s is also a “sexuality” conspicuously not in the service of procreation, his naked, multiply penetrated male body iconicized for us as a spectacle of nonreproductive but fully operational eroticism. Thus, to play out to its end Steinberg’s argument and the line of carnal incarnational theology he calls to the fore, with Christ we have another sort of sexual expression, one that is manifestly not procreative—one that exceeds, even displaces sex pointed towards generation. And, as we have seen, in that direction, the direction of the sexual that is nonreproductive, lies the sodomitical.

It is not that one is likely to find Christ explicitly positioned over there; not even Donne goes so far as to *name* Christ, or himself in his desired relation to Christ, a sodomite. Such a way of designating this relation, however forthrightly it is homoeroticized, would be implausible here inasmuch as the name *sodomy* anathematized what was most heinously *contra naturam*, and what could be more natural than a man loving his God? Naming Christ or Christian the sodomite may thus be untenable, almost illogical, but this is not to say it passes in the period as absolutely unimaginable, unspeakable: “St John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and leaned alwaies on his bosome, . . . [Christ] vsed him as the sinners of Sodome.” So another scandalous poet of the time, Christopher Marlowe, is reputed to have declared, if the memorandum of his heresies sent to Elizabeth I by

46. Cited in *ibid.*, 46.

47. *Ibid.*, 46.

informant Richard Baines after Marlowe's death is to be credited.⁴⁸ Yet however we assign this speech act—whether to a freethinking Marlowe, or to a libelous Baines, or as the unconscious of the culture uttering what needs to be said in order to be kept as censored—it is worth considering what it means that a declaration of a sodomitical Christ is circulated in the service of constructing a plausible, if excessive, case of heresy, of what one might (but should not) be seduced into believing. We might wonder, too, what, apart from its baldness, separates “Marlowe’s” blasphemy from Donne’s and Traherne’s uncensored fantasies of themselves being used as Christ’s Ganymede?

The difference, I would suggest, is vast and at the same time nominal. One dividing line is certainly rendered by context. The sodomitical declaration attributed to Marlowe is part of a case made to predicate the sodomitical of Marlowe himself, a case whose logic, as these matters were wont to go, is unflinchingly circular: that is, Marlowe would see Christ’s relationship with the beloved disciple as sodomitical because Marlowe is himself a sodomite, and how we know Marlowe is a sodomite is that he says things like Christ sodomized his beloved disciple. Furthermore, as Alan Bray’s and Jonathan Goldberg’s subtle analyses have shown, early modern sodomy typically emerges into view *as such*, as sodomy, only in the most stigmatizing contexts, when its perpetrator can also be branded a heretic, traitor, or some other sort of outrageous violator of the social order.⁴⁹ Given sodomy’s supposed world-negating power, it is unlikely, Goldberg remarks, “that those sexual acts called sodomy, when performed, would be recognized as sodomy, especially if, in other social contexts, they could be called something else, or nothing at all.”⁵⁰ This is to say that when behavior that might be deemed sodomitical was assimilable under another name, some more proper or productive social relationship—be it friendship, patronage, pedagogy, the routinized sharing of a bed between master and servant, even, I add, a male Christian’s eroticized devotion to his male God—such behavior might very well pass unremarked, unstigmatized.

48. Richard Baines, “A note Containing the opinion on Christopher Marly Concerning his damnable Judgment of Religion, and scorn of Gods word,” in *Marlowe: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Millar Maclure (London: Routledge, 1979), 37. According to Baines’s document, Marlowe apparently regarded Christ as possessing a transitivity of sexual object choice similar to what we have seen expressed in Traherne’s and Donne’s divine raptures; that is, in addition to Christ’s sexual relationship with St. John, we hear how he also found female disciples not without their own attractions: “The woman of Samaria & her sister were whores & . . . Christ knew them dishonestly.”

49. On this account, see Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 19-30, and Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 19-20.

50. Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 19.

This was the early modern tendency, and it may still be our own. The sodomitical scandal of “Marlowe’s” declaration that Jesus used John as the “sinners of Sodome” is that it does not permit any other way to name the libidinalities of Christian devotion, does not allow any other more proper cover for what is imagined and desired within the libidinal structures of the prayer closet as closet.

I would like to conclude by calling attention to the cultural revival that Christ happens to be enjoying in our own cultural moment, a Christ who, like “Marlowe’s” and to a certain extent Donne’s and Traherne’s as well, is again out of the prayer closet in his sexy transgressiveness. One need not think here only of the religious chic of a figure like Madonna, who has said that she reveres the cross because there is a naked man on it.⁵¹ There is also *More of a Man*, the redemption-minded gay porn videotape with which I began, and the chiasmas of its devotional vectors—religious, erotic, and political. I also have in mind Tony Kushner’s critically and popularly acclaimed play *Angels in America*, a text that understands something of the seminal role religion occupies in generating and sustaining the American national imaginary. A self-described “Gay Fantasia,” the narrative of Kushner’s play turns on the character of “Prior,” a gay male PWA (person with AIDS), who is also an emerging “Prophet. Seer. Revelator,” one who tells us he “get[s] hard” every time he hears the voice of the angel beckoning him to his apocalyptic mission. The play also features “Joe,” a closeted Mormon who recounts how, as a devout little boy, he found himself turned on by the picture of a hunky Jacob wrestling with a handsome, blond angel.⁵²

Then there is the crack-and-peel sticker, available in abundance at the 1993 national lesbian and gay rights march on Washington, which features an image of a Renaissance Madonna and Child—but a Christ-child who is turned toward and adoringly clutching a similarly beatific male cherub, framed by the slogan “Every tenth Jesus is a queer!” Or semi-underground “zines” like *Divinity*, purveyor of a quasi-religious S/M, or the campy *Holy Titclamps*, whose pages regularly feature, amidst sundry cultural and political cant and jerk-off stories, playfully homoeroticized Christ or St. Sebastian icons. (Is it any wonder, by the way, that Sebastian, as the “gay” saint, is the one who, in representations of his martyrdom, most resembles Christ in his Passion?) At issue in these examples, as in the canonical

51. See Merck, “*More of a Man*,” 230.

52. Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part One: The Millennium Approaches* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992). For these references, see Act 2, Scene 5 and Act 3, Scene 1 (on Prior, the prophet-to-be); and Act 2, Scene 2 (on Joe, the closeted Mormon).

seventeenth-century devotional poetry we have been examining, is, I would argue, not so much a perverse pleasure in perverting the sacred (a pleasure in itself, to be sure, and one I would not want to underplay), but more a sense of how perverse the sacred is to begin with, of how the sacred body—even the sacred body of Jesus—already glistens with the sheen of a queer erotics.