10 God making

An essay in theopoetic imagination

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Abstract: This essay revisits the concept of theopoetics as a divine becoming human and human becoming divine. It develops an "anatheist" reading of poetic re-creation (God after God) in terms of theopoetic imagination in Western philosophy, literature and culture. It then applies this hermeneutic reading to the contemporary artwork of Sheila Galagher.

Keywords: theopoetics, imagination, anatheism, poiesis, art, hermeneutics

Creation is a poem.

— Ernesto Cardinal, Cosmic Canvase

Introduction

Why is "making" considered a sacred activity for gods and mortals alike? Making something out of nothing. Making something in the image of something else. Creators making creatures while creatures in turn make their creators — in shapes and songs, paintings and poems, dreams and crafts. From the beginning to the end of time. One great game of holy imagination played with hands, mouths, ears and eyes. With bodies and souls. Art as divine-human interplay, again and again.

Theopoetics names how the divine [theos] manifests itself as making [poiesis]. The term dates back to the early centuries, meaning both the making human of the divine and the making divine of humanity. As the poet-scholar Ephrem of Syria wrote: "He gave us divinity, we gave Him humanity." Or as Athenaeus said in the 4th century: "God became human so that the human could become divine." Catherine Keller puts it succintly: "The term theopoetics finds its ancestor in the ancient Greek theopoiesis. As poiesis means making or creation, so theopoiesis gets rendered as God-making or becoming divine." 2


2 These quotes are from Catherine Keller, Theopoetic Becomings: A Brief, Incongruent History (New York: Fordham University Press, forthcoming). Keller traces the origins of theopoetics from the participatory mysticism of Patristic authors and the cosmo-theology of Cusanus to a third millennium process cosmology inspired by Whitehead's notion of God as "Eros of the universe." In her recent, groundbreaking work, Cloud of the Impossible (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), Keller amplifies further theopoetic insights by Cusanus and Whitehead concerning the "creatable-creating" character of God in dialogue with ideas of infolding-exfolding from Leibniz, Deleuze and the contemporary physics of "planetary entanglement" (see especially 209-210 and 306-316).
Theopoeics carries an attendant claim that first creation calls for second creation – recreation or creation again [anai]; a double act where humanity and divinity collaborate in the coming of the Kingdom. This play of recreation goes by the name of “ana-theism.”

Most wisdom traditions involve an original story of creation – or cosmogony – which serves as paradigm for their subsequent spiritual narratives. In what follows, I will draw mainly on Abrahamic and Hellenic narratives to trace a short history of theopoeics before illustrating the notion of sacred play with reference to the work of contemporary Boston artist Sheila Gallagher. My overall suggestion is that certain expressions of artistic imagination offer ways of responding to the call of creation, which precedes and exceeds the abstract systems of philosophy and theology. Theopoeic imagination gives flesh to word and word to flesh. It works both ways.

1. Theopoiesis

The use of the term poiēsis – to make, shape or form – occurs often in the Bible in relation to divine creation. This theopoetic motif features from the start in Genesis (1:1, 1:7, 1:27) where we read, famously, that “In the beginning God created [poiēsen] heaven and earth” (1:1); or, again, “Let us make [poiōsomen] man” (1:26). In Proverbs 8, we witness the great primal scene of God’s creation [poiēsis] of Wisdom:

The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be [poiēsis], When there were no watery depths, I was given birth, when there were no springs overflowing with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made [poiēsais] the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth... Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day rejoicing always in his presence. (Proverbs 8: 22–29)

In the The Wisdom of Solomon, the formative power of Sophia is even more explicit:

God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who by your Word (logos) made (poiēsas) all things, and through your Wisdom ( Sophia) framed man... (Wisdom of Solomon 9: 1–2)

These early panegyrics of the divine play of Sophia echo the first book of Genesis in which God creates humans in his own image and likeness. The original Hebrew term yar בָּרָא plays on the mirroring between the divine Creator [yeter] who creates [yazir] and the human power to form and shape [yetzer] according to the secret alphabet of creation [yetsirah]. It is telling that the Lord did not make anything on the seventh day of genesis, leaving it free for humans to complete. The unfinished Sabbath is a gap calling for perpetual recreation – in imagination and action. And Adam and Eve, as first creatures shaped from earth [adamah], deployed their power of “good imagination” [yaevet hatseva] to engender a human race capable of fashioning a Kingdom in the image of their God.

This play of mutual recreation between human and divine is what we call theopoetics. It involves creatures co-creating with their Creator. In this view, God depends on us so that the promissory word of Genesis may be realized in embodied figures of time and space, image and flesh, art and action. Or as Thomas Mann aptly observes in Joseph and His Brothers, “God created for himself a mirror in his own image... as a means of learning about himself. Man is a result of God’s curiosity about himself.” But greater than curiosity was desire. For in forming the human, God bore witness to a gap within divinity, a sabbatical crack or fracture from which the life-drive of eros could emerge as desire for its other. God created because he desired a playmate. Someone to consort with, as we know from Hosea and the Song of Songs. Or as the contemporary Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, put it, “Dieu a créé l’homme car on s’amuse mieux à deux.” Creation is a love affair. Theopoetics is theoreotics.

It is important to repeat that both Genesis and Proverbs declare that God is relation. Not a self-subsuming remote substance but a relationship between two – Yahweh and Sophia, Elohim and Adam – through the medium of a third (the breath of language). Indeed the fact that the Creator is also called by a plural name, Elohim, itself reveals that God is originally a community rather than some autonomous Supreme Being. “Let us make man.” Divine creating is divine speaking from the start, as evidenced in the Hebrew word play on the first and last letters of the alphabet in Genesis 1:1. The first

OR: Polebridge Press, 2016; Amos Wilder, Theopoetics: Theology and the Religious Imagination (Lincoln: OH: Academia: Revival Press, 2001); Colby Dickenson, Words Fail: Theology, Poetry and the Challenge of Representation (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Noerin ni Rann Theoscopy: Towards a Theology of Listening (Dublin: Columbia Press, 2011); Patrick Hederman The Haunted Inkweli: Art and the Future (Dublin: Columbia Press, 2001); and John Manoussakis, God after Metaphysics (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009). It is worth noting here that there are three main terms used to designate “creation” in the Hebrew Bible: poiēsis, kitās and bara. It would require another work to explore fully the different nuances of these usages.

4 Cited in Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 37.


6 I am grateful to the biblical scholar Stephen Rugg for the following analysis in the first line of the Hebrew text of Genesis, there is a Hebrew “word” that doesn’t translate. The “word” is constructed of two consonants: the aleph (first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) and the tav (the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet); it is like seeing A or O. That “word” has a grammatical purpose in this sentence as the “direct object marker.” Hebrew does not have noun cases and word order is not absolute, so when a direct object needs to be specified, this “word” is placed before the direct object(s). Rhetorically (and theologically), every “jet and title” would also be significant. Here we could suggest that the grammatical marker is a sign. “In the beginning God created aleph-tav,” where aleph-tav is a metonym for the alphabet and a synecdoche for language. The aleph-tav appears twice (because there are two noun objects).
word of Genesis is dialogue, not monologue, and this is echoed in the opening of St. John’s Gospel, which declares that “In the beginning was the word [ logos] and the word was with God.” The preposition “with” [pros] here actually means “toward” or “before,” revealing a relation of face-to-face or person-to-person [prosopon]; a dynamic liaison which mirrors the inaugural scene of Sophia (a feminine noun) playing before the face of the Lord in Proverbs 8. These Jewish and Christian claims to the primacy of relation between persons is later reinforced in the Patristic figure of creation as a Trinitarian dance [penecchos].

In Jewish Scripture, the leitmotif of theoepoesis extends well beyond Genesis and the Books of Wisdom to the Psalms and Prophets. Think, for example, of Isaiah 29:16 where the human creature is described as the clay of the potter, the handiwork of the craftsman, the art of the artist. Or, again, recall the Rabbinical and Kabbalistic commentaries on the making of Golems: human-like figures shaped from clay according to the Book of Creation [Sefer Yetzirah]. One such version tells of how Abraham and his teacher, Seth, were invited by God to study the Sefer Yetzirah for three years “until they knew how to create a world.” But, lest they succumb to the temptation of idolatry—like Enosh who worshipped his own clay image—humans were admonished not to replace God’s creation but only to repeat it so as better to appreciate the power of divine making. It was good to experiment with the divine letters of creation as art, exploration and invention but not to substitute God with an idol. If you yielded to the temptation of literal imitation, the Golem risked becoming a monster who turns on its creator. And so to prevent such idolatrous destruction, the makers of Golems were exhorted to remove the “shem” (a parchment sealing ometh, meaning “alive”) from their creature’s lips so as to respect the difference between human and divine creation. The point was for humans to participate in divine yetsirahpoeisis in the right manner—namely, abiding by the Way [Torah] of the Creator [Yotzer]—rather than set themselves up as mini-Gods in their own right. According to Jewish wisdom, then, we are not divine makers but human makers—finite creatures called to collaborate with God in the completion of Creation.

In the later Christian tradition, we find similar calls to cooperate in the coming of the Kingdom by joining the Trinitarian dance of perichoresis, thereby repeating the original act of genesis. Such a collaborative theoepoesis between the divine Logos and human action seeks to follow Christ the God-Man in completing the “New Creation” (Galatians 6:15). We read in Ephesians 2:10 that “we are the workmanship [poiesis] created by Jesus Christ for good works . . . that we should live in them.” As such, Christian-ity may be understood as the historical-cultural task of carrying on and carrying out this “poem.” Whence the notion of Christ as Lord of the Dance and Supreme Artist—echoed in the vibrant Christian culture of image-making, both in the iconography of Eastern Orthodoxy and the religious art of the Italian humanist Renaissance and after.

8 As cited in Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 55.
9 On the Talmudic and Kabbalistic readings of the Golem, see Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 46-48. See also the illuminating account of the Jewish literature of Golem-making in Gershon Scholem, Major TRENDS in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1974). Scholem does not hesitate to note the implications of this for contemporary computer science and the new technology of virtual simulation. His critical conclusion is that we should explore the power of making [poiesis] to experiment with “creations of imagination and mind” [yetsirah mahsharit] but not substitute ourselves for God.
10 Kearney, The Wake of the Imagination, 133-138. Since, for Christians, God is made man in the person of Christ, images are permitted and even encouraged, for there is now said to be a legitimate analogy or similitudine between the finite and the infinite, overarching Deuteronomy’s prohibition (“Thou shall have no graven images”). Image becomes the mediator or chiasm between word [logos] and flesh [sark], On the notion of Christ as artist-dancer-player see my hermeneutic analysis of the mystical tradition of Deus ludens in Richard Kearney, La Poétique du Possible (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 269-272. The notion of divine play has an important role in popular Christian culture also, involving different forms of public liturgies, pageants, processions and Passion plays on Holy Feasts and rituals (e.g., Mardi Gras, Corpus Christi, Good Friday, All Saints [Halloween], All Souls, Christmas, the Epiphany, etc.), a common feature of many Latin Catholic cultures in particular to this day. We also find it in the notion of Christ as “Holy Fool” and “Lord of the Dance,” where in certain sacred
It is worth noting briefly here that when, in the Greek philosophical tradition, Aristotle seeks a term for the divine mind, he chooses *nous poietes* – the mind that “makes.” And in his *Poetics* [Peri Poetiikes] – though now talking of human not divine making – Aristotle describes poetic creation as a mirroring-emploting [mimesis-mythos] of life: an art of recreation involving, in Paul Ricoeur’s words, a radical “configuring” of our world. The term *poiesis* occurs in the very first line of Aristotle’s classic text and regularly thereafter, referring to the transformation of everyday haphazard events (one thing after *meta* – another) into a meaningful configured plot (one thing because of *dia* – another). And it is by means of such creative remaking of our experience that we achieve healing catharsis: namely, a poetic distillation of our basic drives of *pity* [eleos] and *fear* [phóbos] into compassion and serenity. Poetics, in short, involves a “creative redescription” of experience, which replays our actions and sufferings in a storied way that issues in the pleasure and wisdom of art. Configured by the poetic work, we, the audience, reforged our own lives existed. We refine our

moments in the liturgical calendar – for example, Shrove Tuesday and the Feast of Saint John (June 21 summer equinox) – in which the faithful are invited to don masks and costumes in a time of Carnival, where the normal rules of time, space, gender, class and behavior are traversed and reversed in a divine comedy of fantasy experimentation and play, where the conventional logic of non-contradiction no longer applies. This gives popular currency to Samuel Coleridge’s definition of poetic imagination as “the yoking together of opposite and discordant qualities.” On this notion of Carnival as sacred time and space, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). See here also Simon Critchley’s fascinating reflections on Oscar Wilde’s account of Christ as supreme artist in *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2012). One finds similar accounts in the works of William Blake, for example: *“Jesus and His Apostles and Disciples were all Artists. . . . A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect; the man or woman who is not one of these is not a Christian.”* The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art. Art is the Tree of Life. . . . The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination; that is God Himself, the Divine body (Hebrew) Jesus; we are His Members. It manifests itself in His Works of Art. . . . Prayer is the study of Art. Praise is the practice of art” (“Engraving on the Lacoon”). It is important to recall in this context that *poiesis* is not confined to works of high art but is also found in the most basic forms of everyday sacred making – of food into feast, of sound into chant, of wool into sacred weaving and clothing, and of wood and stone into sacred architecture and furniture (from simple Shaker cabinets to holy chapels and cathedrals). In these forms of common sacred practice, making God is a making good and making beautiful of everyday existence. Religious culture as popular culture. The Sacred in the profane.

11 See Paul Ricoeur on Aristotle’s account of poetics as catharsis and narrative employment in Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, Vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2005), 31–51. Aristotle’s philosophy was to exert a considerable influence on Western Christian intellectual culture, especially during the great medieval Scholastic period following Thomas Aquinas in the 13th to 14th centuries; but his potential impact on a Christian aesthetics of *poiesis* was often overshadowed by the Platonic critique of imagination as a mimetic and mendacious act subordinate to reason. For Plato, the power of making (teknē demiourghikē in his dialogue, *Protagoras*) belongs properly to a quasi-divine maker or demiurge half way between the eternal Forms (which are not made but exist outside time and space) and human mortals, who are condemned to replicate mere copies and imitations, removing themselves further from the original truth of the Transcendental Ideas, which remain timeless, immaterial and immutable. See my account of passions [*pathémata*] and are invited to become, in Aristotle’s terms, more serene and compassionate citizens of the polis.

Before concluding this preliminary note on theopoetics, let me recite what I consider to be a telling example from modern religious literature. Gerard Manley Hopkins was a Jesuit poet who combined a Scotist-Aristotelian aesthetics of singularity [*unica*] with a Biblical-Ignatian belief in the inherent divinity of all things. He describes the moment of literary epiphany as a recreation of creation, or as he puts it, an art of “aftering and seconding,” a motion of “over and overing,” which replays secular experience as sacred.12 Hopkins speaks of a retrieval of past time that, like Proust, repeats forward, proffering new life to memory, giving a future to the past. This poetic revisibility involves a detour of distance and disenchantment, after which we may return to our first experience in a new light, in a second naivete, over and over. Freud calls this temporal retrieval *nachträglichkeit*; although he is speaking of “trauma,” the same après-coup structure is operative in poetic “wonder”: both terms come from a “wound” of shock or surprise that explodes our normal sense of time and space. In Hopkins’s work, this wounding expressed itself in a series of dark sonnets that prefaced his poetic epiphanies:

I wake and feel the fell of dark not day . . .
Oh the mind, mind has mountains,
sheer, frightful, no-man fathomed.
Hold them cheap may those who ne’er hung there . . .

Traversing such dark nights of the soul, the poet returns, in “That Nature is a Heraclean Fire and the Comfort of the Resurrection,” to a celebration of ordinary things as micro-theoceans:

Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; world’s wildfire, leave but ash:
In a flash, as a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor poished, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond

("That Nature is a Heraclean Fire").

A Catholic author, Hopkins performs a sacramental reimagining of everyday experience. But this notion of holy repetition is not confined to any other particular religion. It extends to any poetic movement of returning to “God after God.” God again after the loss of God. As in the replay of a child’s game, “gone, back again.” “Fort/Da.”

We learn young what that disappears as literal comes back again as figural – that is, as sign and symbol, as a second presence in and through absence. And by symbol here we do not mean untrue or unreal. The return of the lost one – in the case of religion the lost God – may well be the most “real presence,” theoepoetically speaking. It may in fact be a more powerful and moving presence precisely because of the detour through separation and letting go. This involves a new notion of time – kairological rather than chronological – a time which traverses and reverses time, as in the Eucharistic formula: “we do this in memory of Him until he comes again.” Theoepoiesis is about coming back again (ana) – creating again time-after-time. In a word: ana-poiesis. Theoepoics is anaepoetics.

2. Anathemism

“Ana” is a prefix defined in the Shorter Oxford English dictionary as: “Up in space or time; back again, anew.” So understood, the term supports the deeper and broader sense of “after” contained in the expression “God after God.” Ana opens a semantic field involving notions of retrieving, revisiting, reiterating, repeating. But, as already mentioned, repeating for/wards not back/wards. It is not about regressing nostalgically to some prelapsarian past. It is a question, rather, of coming back “afterwards” in order to move forward again. Reculer pour mieux sauter! So it is in this sense that I use the term anathemism as a “returning to God after God” – a critical hermeneutic retrieval of sacred things that have passed but still bear a radical remainder, an unrealized potentiality or promise to be more fully realized in the future. In this way, anathemism may be understood as “after-thought,” which is more than an “after-thought” or “after-affect.” After-faith is eschatological – something ultimate in the end that was already there from the beginning. And that is why the “after” of ana is also a “before.” A “before” that has been transposed, so to speak, into a second after. As Sophia says when she plays before the face of the Lord, “Before he made the world I was there . . . constantly at his side . . . filled with delight, rejoicing always in his presence” (Proverbs 8: 26–29). And this Hebraic sense of ana-chrony is echoed in Jesus’s claim: “Before Abraham was I.”

But let us be clear from the outset: anathemism is not a dialectical third term which supersedes theism and atheism in a sort of Hegelian synthesis or final resolution. True, anathemism contains a moment of atheism within itself as it does a moment of theism. Or to be more precise, anathemism pre-contains both – for it operates from a space and time before the dichotomy of atheism and theism as well as after. The double “a” of anathemism holds out the promise, but not the necessity, of a second affirmation once the “death of God” has done its work. But it differs radically from Hegel’s “negation of the negation” which sees the return as an ineluctable synthesis or sublation (Aufhebung). In contrast to such a theodicy, the “ana” of theoepoics is always a wager – a risk that can go either way. It is a matter of discernment and decision on our part. A replay of wisdom, again and again. The event does not take place behind our backs, irrespective of our agency, like Hegel’s dialectic of Absolute Spirit. There is no “Rule of Reason.” Anathemism is not some predetermined dialectic leading to a Final Totality. It is not about uppercase Divinity. Anathemism has nothing to do with Alpha-Gods or Omni-Gods. It is about reimagining – and reliving – the sacred in the “least of these.” It is lowercase from beginning to end.

Anathemism concentrates, therefore, on unrealized or suspended possibilities which are most powerfully reanimated, if one also experiences a moment of a-theism; the “a” here being a gesture of abdication, privation, withdrawal, negation. A moment which is less a matter of epistemological theory than a pre-reflective lived experience of ordinary loneliness and solitude – a mood of angst or abandon – an existential “dark night of the soul” which everyone experiences at some moment in their lives. Even Christ on the Cross, or weeping for Lazarus. This privatice “a” of atheism is indispensable to anathemism. But in “a-n-a” we have two As, and the second “a” is the “not” of the “not.” The yes after the no, which repeats the first yes of creation. The double A-A of anathemism. A reopening to something new. A dance of twelve steps and more. After all.

So, I repeat, the “ana” is not a guarantee of ineluctable rational progress. The end of religion brings us back to the beginning of religion – to a foretime preceding the division between theism and atheism. And in this respect, we might think of John Keats’s famous definition of poetic faith a “willing suspension of disbelief,” a returning again to Adam’s experience on the first day of creation when everything was fresh and up for grabs, when anything could happen, for better or for worse. Keats calls this originary moment of not-knowing “negative capability” “the ability to experience mystery, uncertainty and doubt, without the irritable reaching after fact and reason.” And it has echoes, I think, of Kierkegaard’s famous “leap of faith” in Fear and Trembling. A sacred repetition, not to be understood as a regression to some original position, but as an originary disposition of openness to the radical incoming Other. Abraham has to lose his son as given in order to receive him back as gift; he has to abandon Isaac as possession in order to welcome him back as promise. Isaac is not Abraham’s (as extension, acquisition, property, projection); he is another’s, another, a gift of the Other (the return gift of what Kierkegaard calls the “Absolute”).

In short, theoepoetic faith is a retrieval of something after you’ve lost it. It involves the repeating of the former as latter, of the earlier as later – a replay which surpasses the model of linear time as one moment succeeding another in favor of a time out of time:

an epiphanic moment (Augenblick or Jetztzeit) where eternity crosses the instant.16 “Ana” is a prefix that seeks to capture this enigma of past-as-future, before-as-after.17

To say this is not, however, to deny that ana also involves historical time. Far from it. Infinite time is in-finite, as Levinas reminds us; it traverses finite temporality and cannot exist without it. As such, anatheism in its current manifestation does indeed coincide with a concrete historical situation that comes after the death of God culturally, socially and intellectually. It is marked by the announcements of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud — by the atheist exposés of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the modern critique of Ideology, and so on. It is something that very much expresses a typical modern anxiety in the face of what Max Weber terms the “disenchantment” of the world, the desacralizing of society, the general malaise of the abandonment of God and loss of faith. In this sense, anatheism is indeed an historical-cultural phenomenon that engages with our contemporary secular humanist culture. But not in any teleological manner, that is, in the sense that we were ignorant and have now seen the light — that all faith was delusion and we are finally free at last! For anatheism, losing the illusion of God (as sovereign superintendent of the universe) offers the possibility of reenacting oneself to the original promise of the sacred Stranger, the absolute Other who comes as gift, call, summons, as invitation to hospitality and justice in every moment. In sum, as someone or something that was lost and forgotten by western metaphysics and needs to be recalled again.18 And here, I think, we can move from the historical formulation of the anatheist question — what comes after the disappearance of God? — to the more existential question: how do we experience this today in our concrete lived existence?

This is why anatheism calls not for new theories but for new “examples” and “testimonies” of the anatheistic moment in art and action. It is why anatheism needs theopoetics: scriptural, literary, visual portraits of lived abandonment and disillusionment followed by a turning (what Socrates called periagoge, what Augustine called conversion). The negative moment of letting go is, let me repeat, indispensable to a proper appreciation of anatheism. Without it we have cheap grace — God as comforting illusion, quick fix, opium of the people. I often think here of Dostoyevsky’s sense of faith through radical alienation, “true faith comes forth from the crucible of doubt,” or of the “dark night of the soul” powerfully depicted in the mystical poetry of John of the Cross or Gerard Manley Hopkins, mentioned above — or of Christ’s
dradical sense of abandonment on the Cross. These are all concrete moments of emptying (kenosis) which open the possibility of a return to the inaugural moment of anatheism: the wager of saying yes to the Stranger. This primal wager is first-and foremost an existential one — not a purely logical one à la Pascal (which is more a wager of knowledge than of flesh, epistemological rather than ontological). The anatheist wager — to turn hostility into hospitality — signals the inaugural moment of all great wisdom traditions. And with respect to Abrahamic theopoetics specifically, it invites us to recall certain prismatic scenes of hospitality recounted in the Scriptures and illustrated in great works of religious art: viz., Abraham and Saraf as they encounter the strangers in Mamre, Mary faced with the stranger called Gabriel, the disciples meeting the risen stranger at Emmaus.19 Which brings us to the final part of our reflection: anatheism as theopoetic art.

3. Theopoetic art: anatheist imaginings

Here I will only consider one example of theopoetic art.20 Elsewhere (Anatheism and Reimagining the Sacred), I have explored the role of anatheism in a number of literary writings, from Hopkins and Proust to Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Here I propose to look at one artistic work which I believe powerfully illustrates this phenomenon: Sheila Gallagher’s Pneuma Hostis.

My suggestion is that works of art and imagination are more likely to express the superabundance of meaning, seeded by the ongoing process of theopoiesis, than the purely conceptual systems of speculative metaphysics and dogmatic theology. The polyvalent excess of theopoetics epitomizes the continuous creation of God, which in the words of Teilhard de Chardin, “prolongs itself in history and culture.”21 Paintings are more embodied than doctrines. Art is more incarnate than dogma. Orthoepia — like its twin orthodoxy — precedes orthodoxy. Indeed, it is important to recall that theory is itself a derivation of poiesis and only retains its pedagogical force by acknowledging its creative origin in the latter.22 More simply put: images are more

16 For philosophical interpretations of this epiphanic moment, see Kierkegaard’s treatment of the “Instant” (Augenblick) and “Repetition” (Wiederholung) in Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dystastic Problem of Hereditary Sin, trans. A. Hanyay (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2015) as well as the ontological readings of these terms in Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010). One would also do well to see the later deconstructive readings of these terms by Derrida and Caputo.


18 On the critique of ontotechnology as a double forgetfulness of Being and God see the deconstructive readings of Heidegger, Derrida and Caputo and my own hermeneutic treatment of this theme in Postique du Possible and The God who May Be: Hermeneutics of Religion (Bloomington, IN and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).

19 On celebrated theopoetic paintings of hospitality and strangers, in addition to those analyzed in this essay, see also my treatment, in Anatheism, of Botticelli’s Castello Annunciation (1490), Rembrandt’s famous etching series of Emmaus, and Chagall’s “Abraham and Saraf.” One might also include films here, citing such classic examples as Balboffe’s Feast (based on story by Karen Blixen) and Andrei Tarkovsky’s Andrei Rublev. On the notion of artistic making (icon making and bell making) as a divine call to human co-creation — which excludes no one — see Jana Trajčelová and Anthony Steinbock, “Transcendence as Creativity: Vocation and Andrei Tarkovsky,” in The Yearbook on History and Interpretation of Phenomenology, ed. Jana Trajčelová (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016), 139–175. Theopoetic art is exemplary of human–divine co-creation, but it is not exclusionary (or elitist). Everyone is called to participate in the art of ongoing poiesis in many different manners, great and small, sacred and secular, miraculous and banal. Every time anyone acts, speaks, or makes, one is participating, for better or worse, in the creation or recreation of the Kingdom.

20 Sheila Gallagher owns the copyright to the images of Pneuma Hostis and Jacob’s Ladder.

21 On the derivation of intellectual concepts from imagination, see Kant’s argument for the primacy of transcendental productive imagination in The Critique of Pure Reason.
the stake for believing she was part of a divine love affair. Pneuma Hostis – meaning “Spirit Host-Guest” – is a flaming halo created out of gold-leaved cigarette butts. It is a circular maze mandala in the form of a commercial Lasko window fan modeled on the one installed in the artist’s Boston studio to clear smoke and toxic fumes from her workspace. The used butts – is there anything lower? – are combined with fan blades in the shape of a gold host – is there anything higher? And this combinatio oppositorum sets in motion a dance between life and death, inhalation and exhalation, celestial sky and downtrodden earth, the addict and the saint.22 Gallagher’s image is polycoded in both form and matter. It offers the viewer multiple possible readings. Here are some from a theopoetic perspective.

The rotating icon-fan mimes a communion host. It takes the form of a gold monstrance used in the Catholic rite of Benediction to exhibit Eucharistic bread to the public. As such, Gallagher’s sacred-profane host replays the “exposition” of the inner core of divinity, namely the chora, which contains the uncontaminate. The womb that incubates the holy. The flesh that grounds the Word in the smoke and ashes of incinerated butts. The mother host (hostis) who invites each viewer to become a guest (hostis) in the image-play of spirit (pneuma).

Pneuma Hostis is hostess to the holy in the very least of things. It is the chiasmic crossing of the sacred and the secular, a maze of ladders moving upwards and downwards, sideways and backwards. Like the ladder of Jacob’s dream featured alongside Pneuma Hostis in Gallagher’s New York show, another open-ended structure equally composed from gold-leaved butts, which extends the Christian communion host to the famous Jewish narrative. And this inter-iconic play between the two works performs the primacy of relation over self-enclosed substance, of open allusion over hermetic enclosure. Pneuma Hostis invites us to enter and leave its space, just as Jacob’s Ladder invites us to ascend and descend. Both works solicit movement and migration, not security and stasis. They beg for visual interpretation, again and again.

The insistence on openness and incompleteness is also embodied in the gap between the four Lasko blades which make up the round circle. There are eight panels in the gold radius itself, four filling and four emptying. It is hard to tell which is which, but the negative spaces are unavoidable to the eye, suggesting there are cracks, fractures and differences in the most holy of things. The image is formed from both the rotator blades of the fan and the four spaces in between them where things (air, dust, wind, fumes) pass through. Faced with the play between positive and negative, figure and ground, we cannot tell which is which. The eye spins, the spirit breathes.

Gallagher’s image play is material as well as formal. From a Christian perspective, one could say that Pneuma Hostis monstrates the Mater of matter: at once mater dolorosa and mater beatifica. Or as the Greek Fathers put it: the host-womb is both theodochos (bearer of the God who comes to it) and theotokos (bearer of the God who comes from it). Gallagher is no stranger to theology. Her golden hostis is a carrier of the more in the less, of the inexhaustible extra in the flesh of matter. It is a chora which serves as a chorus (same Greek root) mediating between the gods invoked on stage and the audience which beholds them.23 In provoking a multiplicity of readings, Gallagher’s

- Schelling’s claim that philosophy and theology are derived forms of an “unconscious poetics of nature,” or Nietzsche’s argument that metaphysics is a form of masked mythology – “an army of mobile metaphors” – that has forgotten its own mytho-poetic origin (a point later developed by philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida and Ricoeur).

23 On the interreligious power of this work and other non-lexical icons and rituals, see not only Rohr 2016 but also Patrick Hederman, Anchoring the Altar: Christianity and the
Using terms of mystical theology, familiar to Gallagher, we might say that she combines the apophatic medium of *pneuma* (smoke, breath, air, spirit) with the kataphatic medium of *hostis* (matter, flesh, the communion bread of touch and taste). She plays ingeniously on the double entendres of her twinned title: Greek *pneuma* as natal and terminal breath; Latin *hostis* as guest and enemy. So doing, the artist mixes word-play with image-play in a way that is wry but not whimsical, mischievous but not facetious. Iconostasis and iconoclasm in one and the same breath. Gallagher’s host testifies to the wrestle between hostility and hospitality at the heart of every religion. She is bold. She does not shy from the wagers involved:

We hear the age-old ambivalence of religion as both sacrificial violence and salutific healing. What are we to make of this double legacy today, when wars are still waged in the name of One True God? And where so many still search and work for healing and peace? No work of art ever stopped a tank, as Seamus Heaney said. But he added: “The end of art is peace.” Might that this little image of alchemical play be an intimation of such peace? 23

Theopoetics is about making peace as well as making art. Gallagher’s anatheist imagination brings *poiesis* and *pragma* together.

Conclusion

So let me conclude by repeating the question motivating my reflections throughout: why do we need art to recover God after God? Why look to poetry and painting rather than doctrine and theology? Why is Creation a matter of making as well as revealing? Because, we hold, poetics is the first bridge between word and flesh. Theopoetic imagination is the Janus-face looking back to Creation and forward to the Kingdom. It is the medium and membrane that moves us, that makes ideas of Truism divinity touch our lives, reminding us that abstract disputes about Filioque’s and other dogmas—dividing our churches for centuries—are but footnotes to the real work of theopoetics: us “making” God as God makes us. When it comes to divinity, *poiesis*, not *theoria*, has the last word. Orthopoiesis trumps orthodoxy. In the beginning, God creates *Sophia*. In the end, *Sophia* recreates God.

References


11 Husserl’s awakening to speech

Phenomenology as “Minor Philosophy”

Nicolas de Warren

Abstract: The aim of this essay is to outline a novel way of approaching and reading (and ultimately: writing about) Husserl’s phenomenological thinking. Although Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy is rarely considered from either the point of its materiality in language or as a form of discourse, this paper examines how Husserl conceived of his thinking as requiring an original form of writing and fashioning of philosophical discourse. Husserl’s legendary research manuscripts and the unique style of their composition (in his own kind of shorthand) are essential to his redefinition of philosophy as a modernist project of philosophical research. As this paper argues, when approached from the materialization of his writing and form of discourse, Husserl’s phenomenology can be seen as a type of “Minor Philosophy,” by which is here understood, a type of doing philosophy that struggles to create novel philosophical concepts within established – inherited and institutionalized – dominant languages of philosophy.

Keywords: phenomenology, Husserl, Minor Philosophy, manuscripts, language

Der eigentliche und zentrale Sinn der Philosophie Edmund Husserls ist heute immer noch unbekannt.

– Eugen Fink

Alle theoretische Forschung . . . terminiert doch zuletzt in Aussagen.

– Husserl

1. Husserl’s modernism

Much as Heidegger writes, “through and from what is the artist that which he is through the work,” so in the case of Husserlian phenomenology, Husserl is through and through his oeuvre.1 Ever since the first volumes in the early 1950s, the Husserlana has progressively expanded as well as complicated our view of the bracing magnitude of Husserl’s phenomenological enterprise, and especially during the past decade, the appearance of hefty volumes on eidetics, the reduction, and the life-world has provided more than ample evidence for the declaration that we are approaching