

Matthias Bauer, E. H. Messamore,
Jan Stievermann, Angelika Zirker (eds.)

Reworking the Sacred through Music and Poetry

The De/Sacralisation of Texts



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Introduction

MATTHIAS BAUER, E. H. MESSAMORE, JAN STIEVERMANN,
AND ANGELIKA ZIRKER

The title of this volume¹ may raise the question: Does the sacred need reworking? The answer will depend on our understanding of the sacred. If it is defined as something set apart from the ordinary,² something categorically different, and generally not within our reach, the idea of reworking the sacred seems to make little sense. But then there is the issue of mediation and communication. The perceived sacred quality of a text, just as much as what the text claims is sacred, is bound up with specific forms of speaking and writing. For it to keep being recognized in its set-apartness, the sacred needs ongoing (re-)translation and adaptation in response to changing cultural, religious, and literary contexts. Only by means of such reworkings can the sacred maintain its particular relation to the individuals and communities perceiving it as such. Thus, the nature of textual sacrality is inherently paradoxical: what has been regarded as a sacred text, as well as the sacred in a text, needs reworking to maintain its extraordinary status. Especially in the case of texts believed to be of divine origin, however, such human manipulation intended to ensure this status is beset with danger and risk. Desacralization, rather than affirmation or replenishment of the sacred, may be the consequence of human efforts, at least in the eyes of those who locate the sacred in some original textual state that must never be altered.

Cases of dealing with such risks, and of addressing the paradox, are the subject of this volume. However different these collected examples may be (they play out in widely divergent religious, aesthetic, and historical contexts), they are all concerned with artistic, and in particular musical, reworkings of texts perceived as sacred by various communities. “Musical” may but need not mean musical settings of texts; it may also refer to the musical nature of the texts themselves, their poetic form, the arrangement of lines

1 This volume is the result of the collaboration of its editors in the Research Unit 2828 “De/Sacralization of Texts,” funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation, project number 398344141).

2 On the sacred as “set apart,” see Evans.

and words, their rhythms and sound patterns. In our understanding, the term furthermore encompasses the use of tropes and figures that contribute to the ways in which texts are reworked in order to discover, maintain, and re-establish sacredness. Musicality in this wider sense may create a sacred aura and contribute to the effect of a text by affecting listeners and readers in unique ways. Musicality thus appears as a key strategy for resolving the paradox of reworking the sacred: if art, and in particular music and musicality, is a marker of the sacredness of texts, it offers the human creator a way of participating in God's work. Through art, the sacred may be reworked because, in certain cultural contexts, art is considered to be divine. At the same time, art may be or become a sphere of its own and an end in itself, ignoring or severing any ties to the religiously sacred. In that case, the act of reworking alters the status and nature of the sacred by replacing the divine as the source of the text with divine art itself, that is, an exclusively sacralized notion of human creativity.

From a religious point of view, this has been viewed with dismay. George Herbert, the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poet, provocatively asks, "Is there in truth no beauty?" (Herbert, "Jordan (I)" 200, l. 2), implying that art (or artfulness) claims to be devoted to beauty but is untrue as it does not acknowledge God and accordingly does not mean anything besides what it has itself invented. Musicality, however, does not seem to be included in that allegation. This is because it has a special status as a basic principle of creation (by number, measure, and weight) and therefore cannot but attest to its divine origin. Herbert, in a striking image, maintains that even the pain of human affliction makes sense if conceived as the "tuning of [one's] breast" ("The Temper (I)" 193, l. 23), serving "To make the musick better" (l. 24). As the mark of God's presence, even under the worst of circumstances, musicality thus lies at the heart of human efforts to maintain and keep visible this divine presence in writing. Through such efforts, writing assumes the quality of the sacred.

Herbert's insistence on musicality as a common denominator of poetry and God's own creative work is based on the Platonic and Pythagorean idea of music as comprising universal principles (*musica mundana*; in Kepler's term, *musica universalis*), human society (*musica humana*), and the actual

sounding of voices and instruments (*musica instrumentalis*).³ The latter in particular serves the purpose of expressing and triggering affects and may thus even encompass the groans of affliction, as emphasized by Herbert. It is plausible for him to do so since the risks of reworking the sacred not only include the possible human hubris of interfering with God's own Word by adding to it and reshaping it but also the human fallibility in stirring affects that detract from the divine message.⁴ In this respect, it is only fitting that Herbert comes back to the "one good grone" which is in fact "musick for a king," that is, for God.⁵ The dangers of hubris and detraction are minimized when music helps one grow good through sorrow and groans.

The notion of reworking sacred texts through human effort is, of course, tied up with the general question of a religious and/or sacred aesthetics.⁶ Hence, any artistic achievements in this regard (and reflections thereon) must be seen in relation to aesthetic debates and views on literature and music specifically, which the reworkings may adopt, influence, or reject. Throughout this volume, a number of such responses will be addressed. In the following, we offer a typology of four basic modes, variants and combinations of which appear across this volume. The list claims neither to be comprehensive nor universally applicable.

The first mode consists in locating sacredness in the medium of expression itself, be it verbal or musical. In this perspective, any reworkings must strive to use the medium appropriately – even though what *is* to be considered appropriate will vary considerably across contexts. Another view holds creation itself to be sacred and artistic, which means that textual and musical reworkings must do justice to this quality in what they strive to represent. The idea of a universal musical principle underlying creation is an example of such a view. Reworking the sacred in human verbal and musical expression in this mode may also mean finding ever new and appropriate forms of praising creation and its divine originator. A third mode of conceiving (and

3 On the formulation of the concept by Boethius and its influence on (Early Modern) aesthetics, see Hollander; Heninger; Wyman; Jackson, esp. 24-28; on Kepler, see Leimberg, esp. 317-21.

4 Awareness of this risk can be perceived, for example, in Augustine's ambivalent attitude towards music in *De musica*; cf. Holsinger 61; Jackson 30.

5 Herbert, "Sion" 382, l. 18 and l. 24.

6 For a systematic discussion concerning the Christian context, see Gerok-Reiter and Leppin, section 1 ("Defining the Problem: Christian Aesthetics?").

defending) acts of reworking the sacred focuses on didactic and kerygmatic functions of texts; new needs for teaching or promoting a religious message justify and require adaptation to the intended audience. Music and verbal art have been key to such didactic enterprises even when they were otherwise viewed with reservations. Besides didactic purposes, this mode of reworking the sacred with the audience in mind may also be characterized by reworkings sustaining the cultural and religious identity of their users. Neither last nor least, since this is not an exhaustive list, there is the paradoxical approach to sacred aesthetics indicated by George Herbert's poem "Temper (I)." It has to do with perfection and thus introduces an all-important criterion of aesthetic evaluation to the relationship between art and the sacred.⁷ Yet, the quality rests precisely in the imperfection of the artistic expression, which, in a Christian context, may paradoxically become a sign of similarity to Jesus, who chose the radical imperfection, aesthetic and otherwise, of the Incarnation and the Cross, thereby evincing His divinity and love of humankind.⁸ Perceived imperfection in reworking the sacred thus not only side-steps the allegation of human hubris through too much artfulness but also, in the very admittance of the shortcomings of the human artist, maintains that what is being reworked will justly lay claim to sacredness.

Historically and culturally speaking, the four (and further) views on sacred aesthetics have appeared singly or in combination, as well as in competition with each other. What they tend to share is their respect for a sacred text that originates and motivates the aesthetic reworking. At the same time, the appropriateness and success of the reworking is frequently grounded in a sense of special calling or status on the part of human artists, be it that they lay claim to (or are perceived to have had) a form of inspiration corresponding to the original, or that they regard their work in other ways as the

7 On the concept of perfection in relation to art and sacredness, see Niefer.

8 See Mattes on the mature Luther's theology of the cross: "Repentant sinners are adorned in Christ's beauty as a gift given externally to them. Forensically speaking, God judges the ugly to be beautiful for Jesus's sake. For Luther, in the words of the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), sinners are not loved because they are attractive (beauty as merit they could claim before God); instead, they are attractive because they are loved (God's love beautifies them by claiming them)" (91-92). Jackson, referring to the poem "Easter," points to Herbert's taking up the concept "in the emblem of Christ's sinews stretched like lute strings on the cross" (28).

outcome of an exceptional experience, such as a colloquy with God resulting in human-divine collaboration.⁹

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Psalter may serve as a key example showing the various views on sacred aesthetics with regard to literary and musical reworkings of sacred texts. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, the Psalms remained the focal point of almost every consideration of poetry and Sacred Scripture. Any rendering of the Psalms in the vernacular was to do justice to its divine and literary quality, but as the principles of versification in the original Hebrew were unknown, there was no certainty as to which form of poetical rendering could be considered adequate.¹⁰ For this reason, the Psalter invites and even requires ever new poetical and musical reworkings like no other biblical text. As the Psalms have always been perceived to be originally musical,¹¹ an adequate metrical and musical form had and still has to be found, which nevertheless (and/or for this very reason) does not distort and desacralize the sense of the Hebrew text. The first of the modes mentioned above appears to be especially relevant in this respect: if the Psalter is poetical and musical, the medium crucially contributes to its sacredness. Praising the Lord while accommodating the audience has also been considered essential in Psalm renderings, showing the sacredness of divine creation, as well as of kerygma. The fourth mode, focusing on the paradoxical aesthetics of imperfection, has been particularly relevant to the seven Penitential Psalms, which have frequently been singled out for new versions and translations.¹²

While the greater part of this volume addresses reworkings of the sacred through translations, poetry, and music in the context of the Psalms and Christian hymns, several contributions show that the modes of reworking the sacred may be perceived in other cultural and religious frames of reference as well. Thus, in the chapter following this introduction, Klaus Antoni examines the sacralization of eighth-century Japanese lyrical songs by European writers, notably Lafcadio Hearn, who hoped thereby to uncover the true essence of Japanese culture – a project that also aligned with the restorationist goals of the Meiji government. The search for the oldest Japanese

9 See Rogalski on the colloquy with God as a form of co-creativity.

10 See Niefer 5; and Todd 279-80.

11 Both Hamlin (87) and Jackson (175) cite St. Jerome's rhetorical question in his "Preface to Eusebius": "What is more musical than the Psalter?"

12 See King'oo for their prominence in the late medieval and Early Modern period.

poems helped constitute the eighth-century texts, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon-shoki*, as Japanese scriptures that possessed the transcendental soul of the nation. Of the four aforementioned modes of reworking the sacred, the first two are particularly relevant here. As Antoni notes, these poems were believed to possess magical qualities that could serve different functions, such as calming souls or granting strength. This supernatural power was a function of their *kotodama* or “word soul.” Moreover, the gods themselves are said to have authored the poems, either directly or through a human vessel. Relating to the second mode, these poems were deeply linked to the Izumo region as a sacred space, the so-called “Land of the Gods.”

Reworkings of the sacred often take place where religious and cultural traditions meet. This is shown by Merav Rosenfeld-Hadad in the next chapter of this volume, which focuses on one of the most ancient and valuable religio-cultural legacies of Arab-Jews (Jews originating from Arab-Muslim countries): their Paraliturgical Song (PLS, pl. PLSs), called *Shbah* by the Babylonian Jews, *Pizmon* by the Aleppo Jews, and *Piyyut* in Israel. The PLS is a Hebrew poem that expresses Jewish values and ethics mixed together with idiosyncratic Arabo-Islamic poetic features of form, style, and even content. This rich Hebrew poem is frequently set to a melody of a preexisting Arabic song and is typically sung at private and communal Jewish celebrations outside a liturgical setting, such as Sabbath meals and Bar Mitzvahs. The lyrics of the PLS, which emerged as early as the ninth century in Abbasid Baghdad, and which continue to be written until the present day, are documented in many collections that were published over the course of many centuries by Arab-Jewish communities throughout the Arabo-Islamic empire. The melodies, by contrast, were invariably transmitted orally, changed from time to time, and they were never documented in any kind of notation. Offering a thorough examination of the texts and melodies of several PLSs, the chapter explores the centuries-old process of poetization and musicalization of Jewish scriptures and other sacred texts, such as the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Kabbalah, and the Midrash. The author examines how and why the process that shaped the PLS in the aesthetic forms of Arabic poetical genres sung to Arabic melodies created and continues to create this significant genre. The genre remains central in Jewish worship, continues to function as a symbol of Jewish identity, and reflects Jewish-Muslim co-existence and convergence more than any other Jewish artifact. In the context of this volume, the PLS appears as an example of the third mode of

reworking the sacred, as it represents the creative use of sacred texts for and by the community they define.

In her chapter, Lea Schlenker writes about the Lutheran use of Psalm 145:15-16 for saying grace. Heinrich Schütz's 1657 hymn, "Aller Augen warten auf dich, Herre" ("The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord"), adapts the Psalm and puts it to music for singing before meals. The Psalm is also employed in Johann Conrad Zeller's 1680 *Christliche Sermones von dem Anhang des Catechismi* (*Christian Sermons on the Appendix to the Catechism*) in order to instruct believers about the proper manner in which to say grace. The singing of Schütz's hymn, with its theological emphasis on God's providence, Schlenker shows, becomes a way for believers to experientially appreciate God's benevolent sovereignty in feeding them and caring for all of creation. Similarly, Zeller's catechism takes Luther's Psalm translation and elaborates on its theological meaning, ensuring that believers take the correct message from it and also using it to justify the practices for grace laid out in the work. Most pertinent here is again the third mode of reworking the sacred, the didactic, as Schlenker shows how different textual contexts expound on the doctrinal meaning of the Psalm while also implying different "bodily engagements" with it. Moreover, musical and metric decisions synergize in order to emphasize certain interpretations of the text. But the prominence of the particular Psalm also evokes the second mode, which emphasizes the sacredness of creation, through its foregrounding of God's absolute sovereignty over the entire universe, humanity, and the animals. Through its recitation before meals, practitioners are called upon to feel their total reliance on God for their sustenance and very existence.

Several modes of reworking the sacred are addressed in the chapter on "Early Modern English Psalm Translations and Processes of De/Sacralization" by Matthias Bauer, Capucine Blanc, Julia Schatz, and Angelika Zirker. The authors analyze a corpus of ten Psalms and their poetic renderings, ranging from the translation by Myles Coverdale (1535) to Philip and Mary Sidney's version, completed in 1599. They identify three tendencies in the renderings which make it possible to compare and evaluate the textual features contributing to effects of de/sacralization: personalization and individual expression, the addition of poetic metaphors, and formal transformations, such as metrical reworkings and establishing iconicity. Each of these tendencies may be seen to affirm and renew the sacralization of the

Psalter in its use but also entail the risk of imperfectly expressing the biblical text's intended meaning and thus inadvertently desacralizing what was perceived to be the original word of God (in the Hebrew Bible and literal translations). The attention paid by many Early Modern versions to poetic form and language is an example of the first mode, in which the medium of expression is given a crucial role in ensuring the sacredness of the text. Metaphor and other poetic devices were perceived to be essential elements of what made the Psalms sacred in the first place and were therefore considered vital for poetic renderings. At the same time, the fourth mode with its emphasis on the paradoxical conception of the perfection of imperfection (and vice versa) is also highly relevant to the individual poetic versions. The dangers of desacralization through all too inventive poetic wit are counterbalanced by an emphasis on the lowliness of the speaker compared to God.

Continuing with these themes, the chapter by Matthew Gardner, Stefan Morent, and Angelika Zirker undertakes an analysis of the differences between various renderings of the Psalms by early modern writers and composers. Combining literary analysis with insights from musicology, the authors look at the ways text and music interact within musical settings as well as how composers reused and reworked extant literary versions. The chapter thus considers the networks involved in providing sources for translations and the trends informing this work. This chapter engages particularly with the third and fourth modes of reworking. In terms of the third mode, orthodox understandings of doctrine were crucial for informing translations for the Psalms to maintain a didactic function. The need for the words and music to harmonize, however, also made aesthetic considerations (mode one) important for maintaining the sacred quality of the Psalms.

In the next chapter, Jan Stievertmann offers a reevaluation of the eighteenth-century New England Puritan clergyman Cotton Mather's approach to psalmody, as reflected in his *Psalterium Americanum* (1718). Contrary to prior scholarship that saw Mather's translations of the Psalms as backward-looking holdovers from traditional Puritanism, Stievertmann argues that Mather sought to thread the needle between several goals that aimed to preserve the Psalms from desacralization. On the one hand, Mather's versions joined other new translations in hoping to rectify a widely perceived crisis of poor singing in congregations by offering Psalms that lent themselves more readily to singing. Against this, on the other hand, he also balanced a desire to retain the essence of the Hebrew originals and not to

deviate too far from them as he feared that others like Isaac Watts had done. Stievermann's analysis of Mather touches on aspects of the first mode in that Mather, and others, perceived the low quality of congregational singing as a potentially desacralizing threat to the Psalms – in other words, the poor use of the medium, Mather worried, could detract from its sacred status. The third mode is also relevant here. Since one of Mather's central concerns in his translations was that the Psalms sustained a Christocentric reading of the Old Testament, his annotations aimed at ensuring that singers and readers of the Psalms took away the appropriate message and that the Psalms fulfilled a prophetic function. Such instruction was also needed to help create an appropriate emotional response among Christians. The fourth mode is also present insofar as the translation of the Psalms into English needed to approximate the supposedly divinely inspired perfection of the Hebrew originals. As Mather was keenly aware and made clear, the free-form grandeur of the originals could not be adequately represented in English without sacrificing their musicality. Thus, any failure to inspire had more to do with faults in Mather's translation rather than the sacrality of the Psalms themselves.

The same modes of reworking the sacred, together with a strong focus on the didactic, also appear in the chapter by Benedikt Brunner. It looks at the role of music in the context of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Puritan funeral sermons. Early Modern Protestant funeral sermons are multimedia sources, which often contain poems, hymns and – although rarely in the Reformed context – pictures. Funeral sermons were an important instrument through which Protestant preachers could convey central norms about living, dying, and mourning. The chapter comparatively examines the significance of Psalms and hymns in Puritan funeral sermons from Old and New England, paying particular attention to those written by Cotton Mather. In a first step, the chapter examines how music was embedded in these sources, and how the source genre can be placed in the overarching discussions on homiletics and liturgy at the time. In a second step, the specific theological and pedagogical functions of including Psalms and hymns are analyzed. The chapter argues that musical references played an important role in the construction of the visible saint.

E. H. Messamore examines theories of poetry and practices of hymnody among nineteenth-century American Spiritualists, the alternative religious movement centered around communion with the spirits of the dead.

Through the use of Swedenborgian hermeneutics, Fourierist utopianism, and a radicalized appropriation of Romantic theories of art, Spiritualists literalized the notion of the “poet-prophet” as a conduit for divine revelations and put forth an understanding of hymn singing that sacralized it as a means of harmonizing with the underlying divinity of the universe. Owing to their expansive conception of the sacred, Spiritualists can be said to engage in all four modes of reworking mentioned here. As discussed in the chapter, Spiritualists sacralized literature, especially poetry, as a means of mediating spiritual truths to others; the poetic form indeed replicated the language of God and the angels. The ability of the poet-prophet to discern spiritual truth is owing to the second mode, the sacredness of nature, which in Spiritualist metaphysics is the direct reflection of higher spiritual referents. Thus, art, and particularly music, bears the same relation to nature as nature bears to spirit. Through their correspondence to divine natural principles, poetry and music also operate in the third mode, serving a didactic and kerygmatic function. By purifying the spirit through their revelatory and harmonizing power, poetry and music enhance the ability of humans to associate with divine truth, thereby driving the world’s evolution. Such progression in the Spiritualist worldview, however, is never complete and is predicated on an infinite ascension toward unity with the Godhead, of which all creation partakes, a dynamic that evokes the fourth mode under consideration. For Spiritualists, revelation, whether obtained through poetic genius or scientific enquiry, was progressively unfolding in history but must necessarily fall short of conveying the true essence of the divine, which belonged to the Deity alone. Nonetheless, the actualization of ever-higher spiritual truths within society and their personal appropriation through moral self-culture constituted the truest practice of religion.

In the concluding chapter, Alexandra Dick looks at Muslim covers of popular songs, sometimes referred to as *nasheed* covers, arguing that these constitute a means of sacralizing otherwise profane or *haram* music. Focusing on the contemporary British-Pakistani singer Omar Esa, Dick notes how Esa alters songs, such as Adele’s “Hello,” and makes them *halal* (that is, lawful in Islam) by modifying the lyrics, using only male voices, and removing instrumentation in accordance with the recommendations of Islamic scholars. In doing so, Esa attempts to invert the potentially desacralizing force of popular culture and rework it as a form of sacred music that nonetheless appeals to popular audiences. In an interesting dynamic, Esa engages

with the first mode by framing only a certain type of music as sacred, namely *acapella* male singing, provided the themes of the song are appropriate. In this regard, the third mode is also present, as the content of *nasheed* covers must offer Islamically sanctioned teachings or else be viewed with suspicion as the potential facilitator of pre-marital sex and other illicit activities.

Taken together, the essays in this collection offer a broad range of case studies that demonstrate the multifarious modes and contexts through which the sacred may be reworked through music and poetry. Whether through the medium itself or by representing the sacrality of the universe, whether by conveying prophetic truths and appropriate teachings or through a perceived gap between human efforts and the divine, the examples gathered here illuminate a broad range of human activities concerning the sacred that are contingent on, as well as influencing, historical and cultural context. Though aimed at more fully capturing or preserving the sacred through the use of music and poetry, the effects, these contributions show, can be complex, multidirectional, and sometimes paradoxical. At times, such efforts may bring forth new, living conceptions of the sacred, at others, cause them to break (inadvertently or otherwise), or perhaps both at once.

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Kodai-kayō – Lyrical “Songs of Antiquity” and Their Sacralization in Modern Japan¹

KLAUS ANTONI

1. Preface

Modern Japan experienced a deliberate sacralization of the state during the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The term “restoration” (Jap. *ishin*) implies that the new imperial system, which had replaced the previous Tokugawa rule, was oriented toward an idealized antiquity as a historical model. This system centered around the notion of a sacred ruler, the Tennō, whose position had been lost over the course of the Japanese Middle Ages but was now to be restored through a renewed process of sacralization. As its ideological basis, the state chose a mythological tradition as it had been preserved in written sources of the eighth century. The foundational narrative and its mythical tradition provided the justification for the new imperial Japan that emerged, ostensibly as the “restoration” of an idealized antiquity, in the mid-nineteenth century.²

In this process of sacralizing state and rule, the written traditions, now construed as the central writings of the indigenous religion Shintō, played a key role. Along with these works, the earliest Japanese poetry also underwent a process of sacralization and reevaluation as a nostalgic-nativist expression of a supposedly pure Japanese spirit, found only in the earliest times. This form of Romantic nationalism, quite prevalent in contemporary Europe, could therefore also be found at the opposite end of the Eurasian continent,³ in Japan. The following chapter will attempt to understand the role Japan’s oldest poetry played in this context, being received and

1 This chapter results from work in project P1 “Sacred Narrative – the political dimension of Japanese mythology,” funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation) within Research Unit 2828 “De/Sacralization of Texts” (Project Number 39844141).

2 This process of establishing a modern Japanese nation state on the basis of traditionalist concepts is subsumed under the term *kokutai* (“national polity”); see Antoni, *Shintō*; and Antoni, *Kokutai*.

3 In 2024, Bob van der Linden published a groundbreaking study on the topic of Romantic nationalism in the Asian context, see Linden, *Romantic Nationalism in India*.

constituted as sacred in the late nineteenth century. Particular attention will be paid to the person of Lafcadio Hearn, who shaped the Western image of Japan at the height of Romantic nationalism in Japan and Europe at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴

2. Yakumo

The oldest forms of Japanese poetry belong to the “Songs of Antiquity” (*kodai-kayō*) recorded in the early eighth century. These lyrically linked stanzaic songs were woven into the mythical and legendary prose of the first imperial chronicles, *Kojiki* (712 AD) and *Nihonshoki* (720 AD), and included in the first anthology of poetry, *Manyōshū* (c. 759 AD). The language and themes of these lyrical songs (*uta*) represent the earliest period of Japanese oral tradition, and the language of Old Japanese often takes the form of dialogic alternating songs or poems (Jap. *sedōka*⁵), which has not been in use since the ninth century. Outside Japan, the literary traditions of ancient Japanese were made known at the end of the nineteenth century primarily by a writer who, as a journalist and author of highly popular books on Japan, shaped the image of the country like no other: Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904).⁶ Through his work, the earliest and supposedly oldest songs of antiquity found their way into the Western world. In this imperialist age, the West was addicted to an “Orientalist” exoticism⁷ and the romanticization of the foreign, and Japan offered a welcome surface for projecting such notions. The influence of his writings is undebated to the present day, as evidenced by the recent resurgence of interest in his person and new editions of his works.⁸ Hearn catered to the exotic expectations of audiences in

4 For the following, see also Antoni, “Yakumo.”

5 Cf. Florenz, *Geschichte der japanischen Litteratur* 17.

6 Lafcadio Hearn was an Irish-American writer and journalist who became known primarily for his work on Japan. Born the son of a Greek woman and a British officer June 27, 1850 on the Ionian island of Lefkada/Lefkas (in Italian Santa Maura), he initially lived in England and worked as a journalist in the USA from 1869, before emigrating to Japan in 1890. He was to spend the rest of his life there as a teacher and writer. Hearn died in Tōkyō on September 26, 1904. For an introduction to his life and work, see Carl Dawson’s *Lafcadio Hearn*; and Paul Murray’s *Fantastic Journey*.

7 Cf. Antoni, “Yakumo” in this context.

8 Lehmann discusses various new publications on Hearn’s person and work. An example of a new edition is the recently published and lavishly designed new German-language edition of his work *Kwaidan*, titled *Geistergeschichten*.

Europe and North America with stories of a Japan that often resembled a fairy tale kingdom rather than a real country. This was despite the fact that the real Japan of the time was involved in a relentless race to modernize technologically, socially, militarily, and politically in order to match the West. Hearn was fascinated by the image of a pre-modern, supposedly authentic Japan that he based his enthusiasm on. So great was his pursuit of this ideal that, after his marriage to the Japanese woman Koizumi Setsu (1868-1932)⁹ in 1891, he took on Japanese citizenship and, after being adopted into his wife's family – the Koizumi family¹⁰ – chose the term *yakumo* as his personal name; from then on, he was known in Japan as Koizumi Yakumo.¹¹ Through such acts, he expressed his reverence for both the premodern, supposedly authentic Japan, as well as for his new home, the Izumo region,¹² with its shrine of Kizuki,¹³ also known as the great shrine of Izumo (Izumo-taisha),¹⁴ the place where the “eight clouds rise” (*yakumo tatsu*). But, in fact, this reference goes far beyond the regional aspect, since the term *yakumo* also has a direct connection to the oldest writings of Japan's religious and historical tradition and to the beginning of Japanese poetry itself, as will be shown in what follows. Lafcadio Hearn, now Koizumi Yakumo, had a lasting influence on the Western image of pre-modern Japan through his nostalgic Japanese books. As Hearn never learned Japanese, he drew his material from the oral and written traditions of Japan secondhand from his wife Setsu. Hearn took much of his material from the country's literary tradition, such as his adaptation of the archaic tale of the fisherman's

9 Cf. the new translation of Koizumi Setsu's memoirs by Hasegawa.

10 Hearn was adopted by his wife's family Koizumi. As Hori points out, legal restrictions continued to exist, as “foreigners with a Japanese spouse had no right to own land in Japan. In the case of foreigners like Hearn, who were adopted into a Japanese family and became Japanese, their children, for example, were denied the right to hold high state offices even though they were Japanese citizens” (95).

11 Hearn's naturalization was announced to him in February 1896 in an official letter by the Japanese government, which he signed for the first time with his new name, Koizumi Yakumo (see Hori 50).

12 On the specific position of Izumo in Japanese history and present, cf. Antoni, “Izumo.”

13 Hearn devotes a separate chapter of his first work in Japan to the Kizuki Shrine (present day Izumo Taisha or “Izumo Grand Shrine”). The opening passage is famous: “SHINKOKU is the sacred name of Japan – Shinkoku, ‘The Country of the Gods;’ and of all Shinkoku the most holy ground is the land of Izumo.” See Hearn, “Kizuki” 172.

14 See also *Fudoki* 94-95 and 98-99; and Florenz, *Japanische Mythologie* 124-25.

boy Urashima Tarō, a story known throughout Japan. Hearn cites the country's earliest anthology of poetry, *Manyōshū*,¹⁵ as one of his sources. No other work, however, was of such fundamental importance to Hearn as the *Kojiki*, Japan's oldest collection of myths from the early eighth century, which in modern times has been elevated to the status of the fundamental scripture of the indigenous religious system Shintō.¹⁶ From his very first days in the ancient cultural landscape of Izumo, the "Land of the Gods," Lafcadio Hearn was fascinated and deeply moved by the atmosphere he found, or rather tried to find. He undertook local explorations, equipped with nothing but the ancient Japanese text, the *Kojiki*, in the English translation by his mentor and friend, the great British scholar Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935).¹⁷ This book served as his guide to all the mysterious places from the deepest past that he sought to explore on his forays.¹⁸ It was largely Hearn's uncritical Romanticism that led to the perception of the *Kojiki* as "the most sacred scripture of Shintō,"¹⁹ a perception subsequently adopted by Western readers. Without Hearn's accounts of this fairy-tale Japan, and especially of the landscape of Izumo, few people in the West would have ever heard of the *Kojiki* or the songs of Japanese antiquity. It was here

15 Cf. Hearn, "The Dream of a Summer Day."

16 The ancient Japanese work *Kojiki* ("Records of Ancient Matters"), dating from 712 AD, is considered to be the oldest surviving literary document of Japan, though only copies from the fourteenth century onward survive. The text deals with the creation and legendary early history of Japan. In its mythological opening chapters, the *Kojiki* recounts the cosmogony and creation of the world by the deities of the Japanese pantheon, with Amaterasu, the sun goddess and ancestral deity of the imperial house, at the top of the divine hierarchy. The text places the human world and the age of the first "emperors" (*tennō*) – to whom the other parts of the work are dedicated – in direct continuity with the age of the gods (*kami no yo*). The *Kojiki* was written by the court official Ō no Yasumaro (?-723) based on a memorandum by an individual called Hieda no Are. It was completed in just a few months at the turn of the years 711 to 712 as a commissioned work for the Japanese imperial court at Heijō-kyō, later Nara. For an introduction with further reading, see Antoni, *Kojiki*.

17 For a more recent work on Basil Hall Chamberlain and his time, see, among others, Okagaki.

18 Hearn ("Kitzuki" 174) describes his early travels in Izumo: "With my fancy full of the legends of the *Kojiki*."

19 Hearn comments explicitly on the *Kojiki*: "The most ancient book extant in the archaic tongue of Japan. It is the most sacred scripture of Shintō. It has been admirably translated, with copious notes and commentaries, by Professor Basil Hall Chamberlain, of Tōkyō" ("Kitzuki" 172n1).

that he found the poem from which he would take his personal Japanese name: Yakumo.²⁰ Thus, Lafcadio Hearn's reception of these archaic songs of Japanese antiquity was ultimately also formative of our current view of the earliest Japanese poetry, and the antiquity idealized by Hearn is still present in the romantic yearnings of modernity. The first song of the *kodai-kayō*, the songs of antiquity, as recorded in the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, another eighth-century text, is the poem of the "Eight Clouds" (*Kodai-kayōshū* 34), recited by the most important deity of Izumo, Susanowo no mikoto.²¹

"Then Haya-susa-nó-wo-nó-mikótó looked for a place to build his palace in the land of Izumo. When he came to the place called Suga [...] he said, 'Having arrived here, my illustrious heart is serene (*sugasugashi*),' and he built his palace in that place to live. [...] When the Great Deity began to build his palace here in Suga, clouds arose all by themselves over this place, and he created an illustrious song; this song was:

<i>Ya-kumo tatsu</i>	Eight clouds rise,
<i>Izumo ya-he-gaki</i>	in Izumo, an eightfold fence,
<i>Tsuma-gó-mí ni</i>	to hide my wife,
<i>Ya-he-gaki tsukuru</i>	I erect an eightfold fence,
<i>Sónó ya-he-gaki wo</i>	this eightfold fence!" ²²

More recently, Lafcadio Hearn and his choice of name have become the subject of an internationally successful novel titled *The Sweetest Fruits* (2019). Its author, Monique Truong, describes Hearn's biography from the perspective of the most important women in his life. Addressing Hearn's

20 I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Kikuko Hirafuji of Kokugakuin University for pointing out that Hearn's first acquaintance with the *Kojiki*'s Yakumo poem probably was through the work of the French Japanologist Léon de Rosny (cf. Rosny xn2). On Léon de Rosny as Japanologist, see Hirafuji, "Shoki" 343-49; and Hirafuji, "Kijin."

21 See also Plutschow, *Chaos and Cosmos* 119.

22 "Yakumo tatsu": Song No. 1 in the *Kojiki*, cf. SNKBZ 1: 72-73, No. 1; NKBT 1: 88-89; Antoni, *Kojiki* 44; Philippi 30; Cranston, *Waka*. For the *Nihonshoki* version, see Florenz, *Japanische Mythologie* 124. For a list of these and other abbreviations, please see the end of this paper. For a further discussion of the subject, see the commentary in Antoni, *Kojiki* 553-54.

choice of the name Yakumo, Truong puts the following words into the mouth of Hearn's wife Setsu, based on her memoirs.²³

[Foster Grandfather's] favored poem was the very first tanka [Japanese poem], whose subject was Izumo, the Province of the Gods, the Province of his beloved Matsue. The tanka began with what you would choose as your Japanese true name. I remember you repeating its meaning aloud. "Yakumo" is a poem in and of itself, you marveled, your eye shining, lit by its own sun. (Truong 189)²⁴

This love song of the god Susanowo (Haya-susa-nó-wo-nó-mikótó) is traditionally considered the oldest surviving Japanese poem, as it appears first among the songs of the *Kojiki*. In fact, however, it is an anachronism. Its structure is based on the later, classical form of the Japanese short poem (*tanka*) and fully implements its syllabic sequence of 5-7-5-7-7.²⁵ Regardless, the content of the song points to the earliest level of Japanese poetry. The opening phrase *ya-kumo tatsu* is a so-called *makura-kotoba* ("pillow word"), i.e. a standardized *epitheton ornans*²⁶ to the term "Izumo." Such "pillow words" are "standing attributes of poetry" that carry phonetic, semantic, and metaphorical associations, though "the archaic *makura-kotoba* (in *Kojiki*, *Manyōshū*) are often transmitted with unknown meaning" (Lewin, *Wörterbuch* 258). The expression of eight clouds is considered a decorative epithet and is synonymous with the landscape of Izumo until today. It apparently originates with this song attributed to the time of the gods. The eight-fold fence is erected so that Susanowo and his wife Kushinadahime can indulge in their love undisturbed. Thus, as Cranston notes (*Waka* 7), this song establishes the oldest theme of Japanese poetry: the love between man and woman, here still on the level of the anthropomorphic deities of the Japanese pantheon. Although scrutinized from a textual critical and

23 For Koizumi Setsu's autobiography, see Hasegawa.

24 As the "Acknowledgements" to Truong's novel make clear, it is based on extensive source research by the author on Lafcadio Hearn in archives available worldwide. Her information thus goes beyond a purely literary-fictional level but cannot claim the status of a historical source work.

25 Cranston, *Waka* 7; cf. Antoni, *Kojiki* 554.

26 Florenz, *Geschichte der japanischen Litteratur* 25.

historical point of view,²⁷ the poem's reputation as the oldest surviving song poem (*uta*) in Japan persists. The fact that its authorship refers to divine spheres is taken as proof of the transcendental origin of Japanese poetry as a whole by tradition-conscious recipients. Hearn's choice of the name Yakumo, the very first word of the very first poem and thus the divine starting point of Japanese poetry, signals his unmistakable commitment to an archaic Japan as it presented itself to him in the oldest poetry.²⁸

3. *Kodai-kayō* – the Songs of Japanese Antiquity²⁹

The search for the oldest texts in the Japanese literary tradition leads us back to the early eighth century with the sources *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* (see above). Written on imperial orders, they still shape our image of Japanese antiquity today. The texts give a clear impression of the high level of governmental and social organization of this first centralized Japanese state, identified in later historiography as the Nara period (710-784), which was to become the model for the restoration of direct imperial rule in the mid-nineteenth century.

Embedded in the text of the *Kojiki* (as well as in the parallel work *Nihonshoki*) are a number of songs that predate the written source and represent the earliest historical period of Japanese poetry and textuality.³⁰ In contrast to the *waka*, the “Japanese poems,” or *tanka* (“short poem”)³¹ of later times, as we find them in the *Manyōshū* and elsewhere, the poetic sequences of the *Kojiki*, like the *Nihonshoki* and the *Fudoki*, are song poems sung by the reciter.³² Depending on the way of counting, the *Kojiki* contains a total of 112 or 113 such songs. The difference is due to the fact that modern text editions like NKBT 3 do not consider song no. 104 to be authentic, because in the original version it was not written in phonetic notation but with

27 Cf. Florenz, *Japanische Mythologie* 125n19: “While a number of conservative Japanologists declare this poem to be the oldest in Japanese literature, others consider it to be of more recent date than many other poems of the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, a view with which I agree” (my translation).

28 See, e.g., Hori 50: “Hearn chose his name in memory of the Japan he had once loved so much – the Japan of Izumo, his land of the gods” (my translation).

29 For the following cf. also Antoni, “*Kotodama*.”

30 Cf. Antoni, *Kojiki* 553.

31 Cf. Cranston, *Waka* xviii.

32 Cf. Cranston, *Waka* 3.

semantically used Chinese characters. In some editions, individual songs are also combined into a single song, which can lead to further discrepancies in the total number.³³

The linguistically oldest layers of the *Kojiki*, as well as the *Nihonshoki*, are thus those archaic songs loosely woven into their respective prose passages. Summarized by Japanese literary scholars as the genre of *kodai-kayō*, “songs of antiquity,” they form the earliest instance of Japanese *waka* poetry. With one exception (K 104), they were all written in phonetic Chinese characters (*kanji*) and represent the earliest surviving state of the Japanese language. Today, these songs are important sources for our knowledge of Old Japanese.³⁴

The language of the earliest Japanese poetry presents the immensely complex problem of the written fixation of ancient Japanese as a whole, a question closely related to the history of the creation of the *Kojiki*. The focus here is on the person of the author, or rather the compiler of the work, an official at the imperial court of Heijōkyō named Ō no Yasumaro (d. 723).

3.1 The Language of the *Kojiki*

Ō no Yasumaro’s preface to the *Kojiki*³⁵ reveals the great difficulties he faced as the author of the work.³⁶ The result was a document in a hitherto unique form that made full use of Chinese ideograms but applied them in a highly idiosyncratic and contradictory manner. Whereas written documents in Japan, such as Ō no Yasumaro’s preface itself, had previously used only Chinese as a written language, i.e. the individual characters of a given text were used according to their semantic but not phonetic value,³⁷ the compiler of the *Kojiki* adopted a form of writing in which the semantic use of the characters was supplemented in places by a further, purely phonetic use of

33 Below the numbers of each hymn follow the numbering of the latest edition (SNKBZ); see also Antoni, *Kojiki*.

34 The “Songs of Antiquity” are found in both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*; cf. *Kodai kayōshū* (NKBT 3) 34-108.

35 Cf. Antoni, *Kojiki* 9-15 and 483-504.

36 For the following, see also “On the textuality of the *Kojiki*” in Antoni, *Kojiki* 395-99.

37 As is well known, a classical Chinese text might be read and understood nearly without any knowledge of the Chinese language, since the characters (ideograms and pictograms), apart from those functioning grammatically and phonetically, are used mostly semantically.

the *kanji*. Especially for the many names in the text (of gods, people, places, etc.) as well as for the songs interspersed in the prose – the *kodai-kayō* – the Chinese characters were used as purely phonetic characters (with the exception, as already stated, of song K 104, which was written with semantic characters), although the respective phonetic value was not specified and could only be inferred by the reader.

As literary scholar Naoki Sakai points out in *Voices of the Past*, one of the main problems in this context is the multivocality of the characters to which no clear phonetic value can be assigned (see 257). This multivocality has led to considerable difficulties in understanding the text of the *Kojiki* in later times. Modern research has shown that the phonetic use of *kanji* was already being experimented with before Yasumaro's work, especially on wooden tablets (*mokkan*) which have come to light in large numbers in recent years and provide surprisingly rich primary material.³⁸ The early Chinese dynastic histories *Wei-chih* and *Hou Han-shu*, which contain ethnographic accounts of the Japanese islands, equally include Japanese terms in Chinese phonetic transcription. Thus, the phonetic use of *kanji* at the time of the *Kojiki* was not without precedent.

Yet the fact remains that, with the exception of the songs, the predominant prose corpus of the *Kojiki* uses the characters in a semantic sense without linking them to a specific pronunciation rule in Old Japanese. An authentic or “original” Japanese pronunciation for these characters can therefore only be (re)constructed and assumed retrospectively, as Japan's leading national philologist Motoori Norinaga recommended at the end of the eighteenth century. In his monumental commentary *Kojikiden*, this scholar referred to other sources of the Nara period, in particular the *Manyōshū* with its elaborate system of phonetically used *kanji* (*manyōgana*), or the *Semmyō*, *Fudoki*, etc. Modern research has provided detailed knowledge of Old Japanese in

38 The term *mokkan* refers to engraved wooden tablets that were used during the Nara period to transmit short messages, such as “bills of lading” etc., in the exchange of goods. The unusually large number of findings from recent years (e.g., at the site of the residence of Prince Nagaya, 684-729) are likely to correct the current picture of the Nara period. Lurie (see 251-53) refers particularly to the *Kojiki*; the author explicitly postulates that the *Kojiki* language is based on the language of the *mokkan* (Lurie 263). Kōnoshi (38) reports on a special *mokkan* finding from 2006, in which a Japanese *waka* text was written on a wooden tablet in phonetic *kanji*.

its various varieties,³⁹ for example, with regard to the vowel structure with its “Old Japanese special spelling” (*jōdai-tokushu-kanazukai*), i.e. a system of analogous vowels in two rows (*kō* and *otsu*),⁴⁰ as well as specific grammatical rules for morphology, lexis, and dialects. Quite recently, the late Alexander Vovin published a two-volume grammar of Old Japanese that documents the high level of research in this field. Yet, even Vovin cannot avoid the conclusion that the *Kojiki*, because of its interspersed songs, merely extends the knowledge of the earliest Japanese vocabulary but is not suitable for the study of the morphosyntax of Old Japanese itself (2).⁴¹

It can therefore be concluded that only the songs and not the prose sections are useful as authentic sources for our knowledge of Old Japanese in the context of the *Kojiki*. This fact alone documents their special value not just for our knowledge of Old Japanese poetry but also in relation to our knowledge of the language on which it is based.

3.2 Dialogic Alternating Songs

Everyone familiar with later Japanese lyrical forms will be surprised to find that these earliest examples of independent Japanese poetry are quite different in content and worldview from popular impressions of Japanese poetry. While today we generally associate Japanese poetry with minimalist forms, such as Haiku, that are formally rigorous, conventional in their use of allusion, emotionally restrained and interpretatively vague, we encounter a completely different world in the songs of Japan’s antiquity (*kodai*). These are filled with extreme human emotions such as love, jealousy, and even sheer hatred; they are full of sensuality and emotional power, unfiltered and unabashed, capable of speaking directly to the modern reader emotionally, even across the great distance of time, culture, and geography.

39 Vovin (XVII) distinguishes an Eastern form from standard Old Japanese (“Western Old Japanese”). Eastern Old Japanese belonging to a completely different dialect group. The so-called *azuma-uta* (“Eastern Songs”) of *Manyōshū* should be mentioned in this context. Lewin (*Der koreanische Anteil* 39n93) refers to a Korean origin of *manyōgana*, which correspond to the spelling of Old Korean.

40 Cf. Lewin, *Sprache und Schrift* 121 and 190.

41 Cf. Antoni, *Kojiki* 395.

3.3 Suseribime and Ōkuninushi

In particular, the dialogic songs of two lovers, which the *Kojiki* contains in large numbers, give a strong impression of the timeless emotionality of many of these songs. Such emotions, as strong love, are also the theme of the *Kojiki* songs K 2 to 5, which follow the Yakumo song (K 1) mentioned above. These are also the songs of the age of the gods, with equally divine authors. In a sequence of four very long *chōka* (“long poems”), we learn about the amorous adventures of the god Yachihoko, also called Ōnamuji or Ōkuninushi, the descendant of the aforementioned god Susanowo. The songs are related to each other in pairs. The consistent theme of the lyrical dialogues between the god Ōkuninushi and his divine consort Suseribime⁴² is her jealousy over the polyamorous escapades of her unfaithful husband, for which she reproaches him in clear terms.

The highly respected first *Kojiki* translator B. H. Chamberlain – incidentally a close friend and mentor of Lafcadio Hearn – speaking of song K3, remarked that the meaning of this “very plain-spoken poem needs elucidation” (Chamberlain 94n7). There is some Victorian prudery involved which becomes evident here: apparently, the translator finds it difficult to deal with the remarkable sensuality of the song, with its erotic passion transposed into the realm of the divine. Physical love is expressed in the poem with a degree of frankness that would be completely absent from later classical Japanese poetry. Commentators such as Chamberlain, firmly rooted in the European moral concepts of the late nineteenth century, appear to have lacked an understanding of the sensual freshness and sincerity that flows from these archaic Japanese songs.

The final song of the sequence (K 5) is noteworthy in this regard, and its treatment of gender seems downright modern, even topical today. The *Kojiki* says:

Then his empress [Suseri-hime] took a large bowl of the illustrious drink (*miki*), rose, and presented it to him. Singing, she said

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Ya-chi-hokó nó | The eight thousand spear's |
| 2 Kamí nó mikótó ya | Divine Highness, |
| 3 A ga Oho-kuni-nushidu, | my lord of the great land; |

42 Cf. Florenz, *Geschichte der japanischen Litteratur* 31 and 33-36.

4	Na kósó ha	because you, alas, verily
5	Wo ni imaseba	are a man,
6	Uchi-míru	you can circle
7	Shima nó saki-zaki	of all island headlands,
8	Kaki-míru	you can go,
9	Iso nó saki ochizu	to the end of all foothills;
10	Waka-kusa nó	like young grass you will be everywhere.
11	Tsuma mó taseramé	take a wife.
12	A ha mó yó	but I, alas
13	Me ni shi areba	since I am a woman,
14	Na wokite	have besides you
15	Wo ha nashi	no other man,
16	Na wokite	have besides you
17	Tsuma ha nashi	no other husband.
18	Aya-kaki nó	Under the patterned curtain's
19	Fuhaya ga shita ni	flutter,
20	Mushi-busuma	under the silk coverlet's
21	Nikoya ga shita ni	tenderness,
22	Taku-busuma	under the mulberry bast blanket's
23	Sayagu ga shita ni	crackling,
24	Awa-yuki nó	you will my fresh snow-like
25	Wakayaru mune wo	young breast,
26	Taku-zuno nó	my mulberry bast-like
27	Shiroki tadamuki	white arms,
28	Só-dataki	embrace with your hands,
29	Tataki managari	embracing me
30	Ma-tama-de	with jewel-like hands,
31	Tama-de sashi-maki	your jewel hands will love me.
32	Momo-naga ni	With outstretched limbs
33	I wo shi nase	let us lie together.
34	Tóyó-miki	This delicious potion of honor,
35	Tatematsurase	alas, raise the bowl!

After she sang, they made a vow with the wine bowl and embraced each other, and to this day they have their divine seat [together]. These are called the divine words (*kamu-gatari*).

(Song K 5, Antoni, *Kojiki* 60-62)⁴³

43 For a more detailed comment, see Antoni, *Kojiki* 566.

The presentation of the “illustrious drink” (*miki*) and the subsequent vow with the wine bowl by the two deities leads us into another region of the earliest Japanese poetry: its close connection to early Japanese religiosity.

4. Songs of Wine Blessing

Among the songs of antiquity there are those that at first block direct access, because the world that appears in them is too mysterious. As Hartmut Roter-mund points out (16-21) we find a whole series of poems that he describes as magical and that can be divided into several groups. One of the most impressive examples is a song in the *Kojiki* (K 39), which is also found in the *Nihonshoki*.⁴⁴ It is recited by the legendary regent Okinaga-tarashi-hime, alias Jingū Kōgo, on the occasion of the return of her son Homuda-wake, the later ruler Ōjin. On the one hand, the song deals with the production of the illustrious potion called *miki*, which can also be understood as a “holy potion”; on the other hand, it also raises existential questions about the ontological relationship between deity and human being.

The *Kojiki* says:

Sakahogahi no uta

When [the heir] finally returned to court, his illustrious mother, Okinaga-tarashi-hime-nó-mikótó, brewed a “wine of waiting” (*machi-zaké*) and presented it to him.

The illustrious mother then sang a song:

1	Kónó miki ha	This drink of the gods
2	Wa ga miki narazu	it is not my drink,
3	Kushi nó kami	the lord of the potion,
4	Tókóyó ni imasu	the one who dwells in Tókóyó,
5	Iha tatasu	stands like a rock,
6	Sukuna mi-kamí nó	the illustrious god Sukuna,
7	Kamu-hoki	with divine blessing,
8	Hoki kuruhoshi	blessing in wild dance,
9	Tóyó-hoki	with abundant blessings
10	Hoki mótóhoshi	walking around with blessing,
11	Matsuri kóshi	offered it,

44 Song K 39, cf. Antoni, *Kojiki* 169-71 and 706-09; see also Antoni, *Miwa*, ch. C “Der Heilige Trank.”

12 Miki zō	this potion of the gods,
13 Asazu wose	drink without rest
14 Sa sa	sa sa

Thus she sang and presented him the great illustrious potion.
(Antoni, *Kojiki* 169-71)

The *Nihonshoki* tells of a celebration at the court of the ruler Sujin (Mimaki iribiko),⁴⁵ a festival of thanksgiving for the deliverance of the country from epidemics and chaos. At the center of the celebration, there is a song almost identical in form and content to that of Sukunabikona, the “Lord of *kushi*.” Here, however, the divine potion does not come from the “Lord of *kushi*” but from Ōmononushi, the god of Miwa. His potion is a pledge of the god’s help in overcoming chaos: It gives the ruler the strength to rule well. The concept, however, is even more comprehensive, as the potion and the term *miwa* turn out to be identical; *miwa* itself is the name of the illustrious, in the sense of a sacred “holy potion.”

4.1 Miki/Miwa

We find the sacred potion to link God and man, a “divine gift” to the people and their most prominent representative, the ruler. Together, they operate in a closed system with the country’s tradition, which is linked to the deity Sukunabikona and the Izumo mythic circle.⁴⁶ Sukunabikona, in turn, has a special relationship with the sacred potion, the ritually used Japanese rice wine, Sake. Sukunabikona appears in the post-mythical tradition as the “lord of *kushi*,” the “healing potion” in its double meaning, as Naumann once characterized the term (62).⁴⁷ *Kushi* and *kusuri* (remedy, medicine) belong to the same root word. The myths moreover confirm Sukunabikona’s nature as a god of *kushi* and *kusuri* since they also recognize him as one of the founders of the art of healing.⁴⁸

45 Sujin 8/12/20, according to the early Japanese calendar. See NKBT 67: 242-243; cf. also Antoni, “Erstlingsopfer” n61.

46 Ōbayashi 197-209, esp. 203. For this section, see also Antoni, “Erstlingsopfer,” and Antoni, *Miwa*.

47 Cf. Antoni, “Erstlingsopfer” 25.

48 Cf. Antoni, *Miwa* 112-18.

The “healing potion” in this context takes on an entirely different quality from that of a pure sacrificial potion. It is not offered to the deity as a gift but is itself of divine origin, since it is the deity himself who brews the potion and passes it on to the people through the medium of the singer. The religious world of thought behind this concept is revealed by the nature of Sukunabikona himself. He resides in a mythical land called *tokoyo*, an otherworldly place above or far beyond the sea. According to the myth, he came from there in a boat to help the deity Ōnamuji create the world, which we must understand as a world of living things.⁴⁹ Only the help of Sukunabikona does enable Ōnamuji to complete his work, and the helpful god returns to *tokoyo*. We learn little about this land from the sources; but the information provided is sufficient to recognize it as a “life-giving other world.” This is what a *Manyōshū* song says about *tokoyo*:

You, my love
have obviously lived in the land of *tokoyo*
I compare you to the past
how young you have become. (M 650)⁵⁰

The expression “to become young again,” also “to return to the beginning, the origin” (*wochi*), deserves attention here.⁵¹ The land of *tokoyo*, the domain of Sukunabikona, is a place of vitality where youth returns. *Kushi*, the drink of Sukunabikona, is thus revealed to be an elixir of life that gives vitality to the recipient. The fact that, according to another tradition, the divine “moon man” Tsukiyomi is the owner of the “water of youth” (*wochimizu*), the elixir of life, seems remarkable in this context.⁵² Moon, *tokoyo*, elixir of life, and Sukunabikona belong together in an ideal sense; they form a conceptual unit. At this point, one should consider another deity: Ōmononushi, the aforementioned god of Mt. Miwa. His relationship to Sukunabikona is so close that both gods can only be understood together. In analogy to Sukunabikona’s appearance in the myth of the creation of the

49 Cf. *Kojiki* = NKBT 1: 107-109; *Nihonshoki* = NKBT 67: 128-133; cf. Antoni, “Erstlingsopfer” 25n56.

50 *Manyōshū* song M 650 = NKBT 4: 288-289.

51 Cf. Antoni, “Erstlingsopfer” 26; and Antoni, *Miwa* 101n203.

52 Tsukiyomi, the moon deity, is one of the three deities of Japanese mythology that emerged during the purification of Izanagi; for further details, see Antoni, *Miwa* 100.

land, the later god of Mt. Miwa also appears as Ōnamuchi's helper and "source of power."⁵³ Yet, he does not appear in any tangible form but as a luminous essence that comes from the sea and identifies itself as Ōnamuchi's *kushi-mitama-saki-mitama*. In this term, which is the only one found in the sources in this context, it is easy to see the connection with Sukunabikona and the sacred potion. *Kushi* is a healing potion and elixir of life. *Saki*- comes from the same root as *sake*, which is attributed by renowned linguists to a stem *sak*- with the basic meaning of "to blossom."⁵⁴ But the deity of Miwa is not only placed in this context by her name; rather, her connection to the sacred potion is essential to the point that the potion and the deity form a single entity.

In the songs of the *Manyōshū* we find *miwa* as the name of the sacred drink.⁵⁵ In the *Nihonshoki*, according to another source, the *Wamyōruijushō*,⁵⁶ the name is also *miwa*. *Miwa*, however, is also an alternative designation for the term "deity" itself. This meaning has been preserved in the name of the shrine, Ōmiwa-jinja ("Shrine of the Great Deity"), as well as in the name of the noble family originally associated with it, *Miwa no kimi*.⁵⁷ A tradition from the *Tosa fudoki*,⁵⁸ however, shows that it is not just a name of local significance, where we find a river *Miwa-gawa* (*miwa* also spelt with the symbol for "deity"). It is also said that good *sake* could be brewed with the water from this river. Thus, the identity of *Miwa*, the god and the potion, was also known on the island of Shikoku, far away from Yamato. While the *Nihonshoki* still allows us to sense a certain distance between the singer and what is being performed,⁵⁹ the *Kojiki* reveals the complex relationship and interaction between the deity and the singer. The ruler does not seem to be singing at random; rather, it becomes clear that this song is a necessary accompaniment to the making of the sacred potion itself. Although it is she who prepares the *miki*, the song reveals the identity

53 Cf. *Kojiki* = NKBT 1: 108-9; *Nihonshoki* = NKBT 67: 130-31; see also Antoni, "Erstlingsopfer" 29n59.

54 Cf. NKDJ 8: 691 ad *sake*, etym. No. 6; Ōno 111.

55 Cf. *Manyōshū* song M 202 = NKBT 4: 112-13.; cf. Antoni, *Miwa* 76.

56 Cf. Kariya 243 ad *miwa*; cf. Antoni, "Erstlingsopfer" 27.

57 Cf. Ōta 598, ad *miwa*.

58 *Fudoki*, NKBT 2: 499-500; cf. Antoni, "Erstlingsopfer" 27n65.

59 This distance seems to be derived from a corresponding expression in the Chinese classical work *Shih chi*; cf. Antoni, *Miwa* 71n149.

of another, or the actual creator: the deity herself. The singer appears as a medium between deity and human, and the brewing as a mediating, divine act.⁶⁰

As an in-depth analysis of this song, which cannot be pursued here but has been presented elsewhere (see Antoni, *Miwa*), shows, it leads us into the deepest layers of Japanese religious tradition. It deals with the sacred significance of the holy drink and its function as a means of communion between man and deity. The underlying religious world is that of the Izumo religion, so important in *Kojiki* mythology, with its main deities Ōkuninushi, Susanowo, and Sukunabikona as the god who intervenes directly in the shaping of the world from his aquatic seaside *tokoyo*. Although the song in *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, strictly speaking, appears in the post-mythical, semi-historical sections of the sources, in the age of Jingū Kōgo and Ōjin-tennō, its content takes us much further back, to the oldest mythical levels of Japanese tradition.

In a postscript, the *Kojiki* notes that this song and its obligatory response poem are a so-called *sakahogahi uta*,⁶¹ a term found only in this context. The word component *saka* refers to the alcoholic beverage (*sake*) while *hogahi* is linked with a magical practice (*hogafu*) of archaic Japan. The term is identical with *iwai* and means “blessing.” Lämmerhirt (51-54) refers to Motoori Norinaga and other scholars of national philology who understood *hogu* in the sense of “praying” and mentions in this context the archaic religious festival of *ōtonohogai* and the associated ritual prayer (*norito*).⁶²

4.2 The Magic Level: kotodama

Within the magical function on display in these archaic songs,⁶³ Rotermund makes a fundamental distinction between four areas of magical practice, which may overlap but that can be clearly distinguished⁶⁴:

60 Cf. Antoni, *Miwa* 71-72.

61 See Antoni, *Kojiki* 169-71.

62 Cf. Antoni, *Miwa* 71n148.

63 The magical character of Japanese archaic poetry is also emphasized by Konishi Jin'ichi in his comprehensive *History of Japanese Literature*. For a critique of his work, see the review by Cranston, “Word-Soul.”

64 Cf. Rotermund 17-21.

1. *Chinkon*, the “calming of souls,” can be seen in the example of the songs performed between the deities Ōkuninushi and his wife Suseribime, whose anger and jealousy were “pacified” by means of the poem we have already discussed.
2. *Tamafuri*, the “shaking of souls,” occurs when a supply of new strength is granted through the recitation of poems.
3. *Musubi*, the “binding of souls,” occurs when the poem functions as an offering, and *tama* powers are released through recitation.
4. *Hogi*, “bringing happiness and blessing,” is a blessing that is secured through material and qualitative “transformation.”

The only example of the fourth category is the *sakahogahi-uta*, the function of which is seen as “assuring the assistance of a deity for a certain process” (Rotermund 20). Ultimately, this expresses a transfer of power to an object. By speaking of the deity, one assures its intervention; by praising it, one appeals to its function. The function of language as an agent of magical power is clearly evident here: through the incantation, the reciter himself is transformed into the deity. The transformation takes on the quality of an ontological exchange, and man and God become identical through the power of the word. It is not surprising that Rotermund places these songs in a larger context of early Japanese intellectual and religious history which thematizes the magical function of language and is referred to by the term *kotodama*, the “word soul.”⁶⁵

If we have found an indirect reference to word-magical ideas in ancient Japan in these songs of the *Kojiki*, the earliest collection of Japanese poetry, the *Manyōshū*, offers direct references to this way of thinking, which is also explicitly connected to the term *kotodama*. A farewell poem by Yamanoe no Okura, written in 733,⁶⁶ describes Japan as a land “loved by the gods and blessed with the power of the word” (Lewin, *Sprachbetrachtung* 13).

65 Rotermund describes the poems quoted as “literary examples of the effect of *kotodama*” (17).

66 *Manyōshū* song M 894: “[...] Yamato no kuni wa / sumekami nó / itsukushiki kuni / kotodama nó / sakihafu kuni tó / kataritsugi [...]” (“[...] The land of Yamato, / it is the glorious land / of the Divine Sovereign / the land to which the *kotodama* / brings happiness, / so it is said [...]”). Cf. Antoni, *Kojiki* 385.

All in all, only a few other poems in the *Manyōshū* collection make explicit reference to the term *kotodama*,⁶⁷ but these poems alone prove the existence of certain ideas relating to the magic of words in ancient Japan, at the center of which is the beneficial and auspicious effect of the “word-soul.” The basis of this idea is a homonymy of the terms for “word” and “thing” in ancient Japanese: *koto*. There is no discernible linguistic difference between the signifier and the signified; ontologically, the two merge, and both have a *tama*, or “soul.” The soul of the word is also the soul of the designated thing. The thing and the concept of *kotodama* expresses the belief “that a word not only represents something, but is ontologically identical with its [...] reference object,” as Herbert Plutschow puts it (“Kotodama” 93). In terms of religious history, this concept is close to the idea of *mana*, i.e. the power generated and transmitted by a divine soul. The *tama* of the deity is as much the “soul” of the word as of the thing itself. We can clearly see this idea in the *Kojiki*, for example in the *sakahogahi* song of Okinagatarashi-hime mentioned above, wherein a transfer of power and being takes place from the deity Sukunabikona to the person reciting the song.

The elements of this way of thinking are to be found in Japan above all in the field of ancient Japanese poetry and song. As Plutschow notes: “in Japan dialogue between man and deity would only proceed through the ritual means of song. Controlled by the order of rhythm, form and sound, language was believed to generate a magical power” (*Chaos and Cosmos* 10).

The examples given here, and many more could be added, reveal a deep existential connection that links the spheres of humans and deities in the earliest Japanese poetry. It is either the deities themselves who appear as the authors of lyrical song, or it is man as the medium to whom they reveal themselves in song. In these sources, the world of archaic religiosity is primarily associated with the geographical and cultural region of Izumo. All the deities mentioned above belong to the Izumo branch of Japanese mythology, and it can therefore be postulated that the sacralization of the earliest poetry also finds its cultural and historical origins here.⁶⁸

67 *Manyōshū* songs M 2506, 3253 and 3254; cf. Antoni, *Kojiki* 385.

68 Unfortunately, it is not possible to go in more detail into this aspect within the present context. Reference should be made to my earlier works, in particular Antoni, *Miwa*, and others on Izumo.

5. Conclusion

Mentioning the Izumo branch of Japanese mythology brings us back to the beginning of our reflections, to Lafcadio Hearn and his idealization, even sacralization, of Japanese antiquity and its earliest poetry. For Hearn, the Izumo region was the place of authentic Japanese religiosity, the loss of which he deeply lamented in modern times. The choice of his personal name even became a political program, with “Yakumo” being not only the poetic name for Izumo but also the first word of ostensibly the oldest poem in Japan. With this term, Hearn marked an allegedly absolute beginning of a sacralized Japanese identity as an agenda for modern Japan, a nostalgic recourse to which he, as a foreigner, committed himself by adopting this term as his personal name.

It is now easier to understand why an author like Lafcadio Hearn, in his search for an archaic and “authentic” Japan of his own fantasy, gravitated toward the *Kojiki* and, ultimately, toward ancient Japanese poetry at the end of the nineteenth century. Here, he sought the hidden foundations of a supposedly pure Japanese religiosity, which for him was revealed in the country’s oldest works, namely the *Kojiki* and the ancient songs it contained. In line with the textual understanding of national philology, which was flourishing at the time, to him, the archaic songs seemed to offer direct access to those transcendental sources that had largely dried up in contemporary Japan and could only be accessed through archaic textual sources. The divine authorship of the first songs not only made them a poetic bridge between the worlds of heaven and earth, the immanent and the transcendent, but for Hearn they also manifested the sacred in the profane present. In contrast to his rationalist counterpart Chamberlain, the language and divine authorship of the songs sacralized the entire primeval era and could serve as a model for a desacralized contemporary Japan. The beginning of these “songs of antiquity” (*kodai-kayō*) was marked by their very first song, the Yakumo poem by the god Susanowo (K 1). In this poem, Hearn obviously found a kind of magical access to the spirit and initial spirituality of an idealized Japanese antiquity, an idea that connected him with the thinking of the indigenous national philology (*kokugaku*) of modern times.

To conclude, let us turn to the religious and political situation in Japan at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In his critical essay on Lafcadio Hearn, Roy Starrs explains how Hearn’s

development from an original romantic in a “Herderian” sense⁶⁹ to a Japanese nationalist took place in harmony with the political and religious situation of his time, the late Meiji period. Overall, he emphasizes the importance of the political and social changes in Japan after 1890.

He sees Hearn’s very last book, *Japan – An Attempt at Interpretation*, published posthumously in 1904, as a key work for this other, not at all romanticizing side of Hearn’s thinking. In contrast to his earlier purely literary works, which glorified Japan as a dreamy fairy tale land, Hearn attempted a systematic description and analysis of the society, politics, history, and religion of his new homeland. Drafts for a planned series of lectures at Cornell University in the United States were to serve as the basis for the book, but Hearn was never able to publish it in his lifetime.⁷⁰ In this late work, Hearn presents himself as an expert and also a supporter and apologist for the political and religious processes in Japan of his time, which are usually retroactively subsumed under the term “State Shintō.” Hearn upheld Shintō as a modern state religion and the basis of Japan’s modernization. In his chapter “The Shinto Revival,” Hearn saw Japan’s modernization as anchored in the “ancient cult.”⁷¹ All in all, Hearn’s work places him in conformity with Meiji state doctrine. He does not question Japan’s independence and its form of rule centered around the Tennō, and, as Starrs correctly points out, Hearn does indeed prove to be a propagandist for the official religious nationalism of the time. But Starrs hardly succeeds in working out the deeper motives, the spiritual and psychological background of Hearn’s transformation.

As I have explained elsewhere (see Antoni, “Yakumo”), Hearn saw himself as an uncompromising follower of the Social Darwinist teachings of the sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer and applied his ideas on the incompatibility of cultures to Japan. Hearn’s lament for the loss of the “authentic” ancient Japan and its archaic religiosity – which he often compared to the ancient religion of his glorified homeland Greece – is always accompanied by a Social Darwinist ideology that, in the spirit of late nineteenth-century imperialism, preached the incompatibility of “races” and cultures. The reasons for the break between Hearn and Basil Hall Chamberlain, the

69 Starrs interprets Lafcadio Hearn as a nationalist “of the old romantic Herderian school” (186). See also 193 and *passim*; cf. Antoni, “Yakumo.”

70 Cf. Siemer 40.

71 Cf. Hearn, *Japan* 378.

first translator of the *Kojiki*, becomes apparent here. After many years in this Japanese environment, Chamberlain took a clear stand against Japan's "new religion" of State Shintō, which he sought to expose as an invention of the state, or rather: of the bureaucrats. He showed solidarity with Japan's native liberals, who were also critical and skeptical of political and religious developments in their country. Chamberlain's attitude led him to criticize Spencer's teachings,⁷² to which his former friend Hearn seemed to have fallen prey.⁷³ This disagreement led to a rift between the two, though Chamberlain remained a close friend of the Koizumi family even after Hearn's death.⁷⁴ It seems sadly ironic that, in the public perception, and not only in Japan, Hearn and Chamberlain's reputations have been reversed. Hearn, with his hidden resentments and advocacy of a fundamental incompatibility of cultures, appears as a shining example of intercultural empathy, while Chamberlain, a source-based cultural scientist with a profoundly liberal worldview, is assigned the role of the arrogant Eurocentric.

For Hearn, the archaic songs of the *Kojiki* functioned as a gateway to the world of antiquity he nostalgically longed for. In my own opinion, the *Kojiki* and Chamberlain's translation of this source work are the fulcrum upon which pivot all of the differences between the two protagonists' points of view. Chamberlain's philological-textual approach introduced Hearn to a wonderland of ancient Japanese myths and legends. Hearn did not, however, take note of Chamberlain's historical-critical apparatus. As it turned out, in his romantic-idealist enthusiasm for the *Kojiki*, Hearn came to support political Shintō in contemporary Japan, something Chamberlain vehemently rejected on the basis of his knowledge of the sources. By choosing "Yakumo"

72 "Chamberlain had always been skeptical about scientific matters, so he expressed some doubts about Hearn's argument. This provoked a strong reaction from Hearn, and the tone of his letters to Chamberlain became increasingly aggressive as the debate on the subject progressed. It was inconceivable to Hearn that anyone could doubt the correctness of Spencer's teaching" (Hori 105).

73 Obviously in response to Hearn's letters and finally the political developments since the First World War, Chamberlain, in the posthumously published 6th edition of *Things Japanese* from 1939, which was received critically by Hirakawa (see *Rediscovering* 6), adopted a more critical tone, compared to his earlier article on Lafcadio Hearn (cf. also Hirakawa, *International Perspectives*); for counter arguments, see Ota on Chamberlain 164-65.

74 "Even after Hearn's death, Chamberlain remained very kind to his widow and children, as witnessed by Koizumi Kazuo, Hearn's eldest son" (Ota 156).

as his personal name, Hearn authenticated and symbolically sacralized the oldest song(s) that served as the basis of the modern state cult.

The unbroken popularity of his writings demonstrates the relevance of these questions for contemporary research. In academic cultural studies, I am convinced that we should follow the example of the critical scholar Basil Hall Chamberlain rather than his alter ego, the ultimately disillusioned romantic Lafcadio Hearn.

List of Abbreviations

NKBT: *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (“Collection of Classical Japanese Literature”; 100 vols)

NKBT 1: *Kojiki*

NKBT 2: *Fudoki*

NKBT 3: *Kodai-kayōshū*

NKBT 4: *Manyōshū*

NKBT 67/68: *Nihonshoki*

SNKBZ: (*Shinpen*) *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (“Newly Edited Collection of Classical Japanese Literature,” 88 vols)

SNKBZ 1: *Kojiki*

NKDJ: *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (“Shogakukan’s Unabridged Dictionary of the Japanese Language,” 20 vols)

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The Bible in the Paraliturgical Song of Middle Eastern Jewry: The Making of Song as a Guardian of Jewish Faith and Identity

MERAV ROSENFELD-HADAD

The paraliturgical song (PLS, pl. PLSs) is one of the earliest and most treasured religio-cultural assets of the Judeo-Arabic culture, namely, the culture of Jews of Arab-Muslim countries. Known as *shbah* (praise, pl. *shbahoth*) by Babylonian Jews, *pizmon* (song, pl. *pizmonim*) by Jews of Aleppo, and *piyyut* (hymn, pl. *piyyutim*) in modern Israel, the PLS is a genre of Hebrew poetry rich in praises and supplications to God. It expresses the Jewish biblical narrative and ethos, while incorporating distinctive Arabo-Islamic poetic features of form, style and occasionally content. The PLS is set to the melody of a pre-existing Arabic song that is familiar and well-liked, and is sung during private and communal celebrations outside the liturgical setting, such as Sabbath and festival meals, as well as weddings and Bar Mitzvah celebrations. While the texts of the PLS were documented in collections published by Jewish communities in Arab-Muslim countries over the course of many centuries, the melodies were passed down orally; these melodies changed over time and were never formally notated. Unlike the liturgy, the paraliturgical practice is not regulated and restricted by any halakhic ruling (*Halakhah*, Jewish law) and can therefore be sung together by women, men and children alike.

The history of the PLS spans over a millennium, encompassing all the places where Jewish poets created PLSs under the influence of the Arabo-Islamic civilization. The genre, as we know it today, emerged in the tenth century, in 'Abbasid Baghdad, the capital of the Islamic empire and the spiritual and intellectual center of Diaspora Jewry. Between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, it moved to Muslim Spain, which succeeded Baghdad as the heart of Jewish creativity. Between the sixteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, the PLS continued to be written and performed in various locations across the Ottoman Empire. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Arab-Jews were expelled from Arab-Muslim countries, where they had lived for centuries, with the majority settling in Israel. Over

the course of more than a millennium, the PLS expressed these communities' hopes for and belief in their salvation, while also addressing their national needs and fostering a sense of identity, both individually and collectively. In Israel, the PLS retained its significance for Arab-Jews. In the 1980s, socio-political and cultural developments aimed at recovering Judeo-Arabic culture and identity led the PLS to become central to the wider Israeli society. Its rich biblical Hebrew, which elevates and stirs the biblical narrative and ethos, coupled with its joyful and lively Arabic melodies, transformed the genre into a powerful artefact that fosters a strong sense of Jewish identity within the broader Israeli society, symbolizing their Jewish faith, culture, and identity.¹

This chapter explores the PLS as a significant artefact in Jewish worship, examining how, for over a millennium, it has functioned as a carrier of the biblical narrative and ethos of the Jewish Nation,² continuously preserving and enhancing Jewish faith, culture, and identity. It investigates how the combination of its biblical language and content, used alongside other Jewish canonical sources such as the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, together with its melodies, has enabled this extraordinary genre to remain an essential part of Jewish life for so long. Through an examination of two central PLSs written by prominent poets at opposite ends of the millennium, one in eleventh-century Muslim Spain and the other in nineteenth-century Baghdad, the chapter delves into the centuries-old process of poeticizing and musicalizing the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh),³ within the framework of sung poetry, the PLS. It begins with Rav Sa'adyah Ben Yosef Ga'on, the tenth century founder of the genre's central characteristics, and traces how these characteristics evolved and contributed to the creation of such a significant artefact.

1. The Beginning: Rav Sa'adyah Ben Yosef Ga'on, Tenth Century, 'Abbasid Baghdad

In the thriving, cosmopolitan Islamic city 'Abbasid Baghdad of the tenth century, the Qur'ān held a high status as the final divine revelation, and its Arabic language led Arab-Muslims to a deep engagement with both its text

1 For more about the history of the PLS, see Rosenfeld-Hadad, *Judaism and Islam* 44.

2 From this point onwards, also referred to as the Nation.

3 From this point onwards, also referred to as the Bible.

and a wide array of related Islamic works. Arabic poetry, which had originated in the Arabian Peninsula long before the rise of Islam and already occupied a central role in the lives of its people, became even more prominent among Arab-Muslims who considered it to be integral to both their history and culture. By contrast, among Jewish communities living within this religio-cultural sphere, the status of the Bible was relatively weak (see Tobi 124). Jews primarily used Arabic for most of their needs, while Hebrew was employed, often with limited proficiency (see Brody 91), only for prayers and Torah⁴ readings, which were vital for communal life and worship, and were regulated by the *Halakhah*. Additionally, Jewish scholarship was deeply immersed in Arabo-Islamic culture, with scholars using Arabic for nearly all forms of writing, secular and religious alike, except for poetry. As a result, Hebrew writing, and particularly Hebrew poetry, began to decline.

During this critical period, Rav Sa'adyah Ben Yosef Ga'on (RASAG) (882, Fayyūm, Upper Egypt – 942, Baghdad), one of the most influential spiritual leaders in Jewish history, provided guidance to these communities in the face of the overwhelming influence of Islamic civilization. As a prolific and versatile scholar who mastered all branches of Jewish rabbinic writings and of science, RASAG's contribution to Jewish law and thought would shape generations to come (see Allony vii). His extensive work reflects his deep concern with the growing prestige of the Qur'ān and its related intellectual activities, the increasing linguistic assimilation of Jewish writing and thinking, and thus the overwhelming impact of this culture on Jewish life and faith. While RASAG was impressed by Islamic achievements, he was determined to restore the stature of the Torah, its language, and Hebrew poetry, injecting new vitality into Jewish faith and identity. He embarked on an ambitious project that produced a wide range of works on biblical translation and commentary, as well as Hebrew poetry and grammar.

RASAG's efforts were unprecedented and had a profound impact on Judaism. From his time onward, Jewish culture, and particularly Hebrew poetry, began to evolve in ways that were significantly shaped by his work. Since poetry was considered in the broader Arabo-Islamic society, including among Jews, to be a central, accessible, and impactful medium for

4 The Torah comprises the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. For more about the structure of the Hebrew Bible, see Rosenfeld-Hadad, *Judaism and Islam* 24n15.

conveying new ideas to the public, RASAG focused on Hebrew poetry as a very effective vehicle for achieving his distinctively national goal. Hebrew poetry, nourished by the Bible's ethos and language, *leshon ha-ḳodesh* (the holy language, biblical Hebrew), became the means by which RASAG sought to preserve and transmit the Torah's message. In doing so, he established four central features of Hebrew poetry, including the PLS, as will be outlined below. These contributions, particularly to the PLS's text and music, ensured that the genre would remain central to Jewish culture to this day.

1.1 Expanding the Scope of Hebrew Poetry and Incorporating Arabo-Islamic Poetic Features

RASAG was the first to broaden the scope of Hebrew poetry, which until his time had been predominantly liturgical (Tobi 144). He wrote religious poems for private celebrations, such as weddings and circumcisions (Fleischer, "Piyyut" 573), as well as *baḳḳashot* (supplications to God) (Tobi 73). In these works, he introduced philosophical and personal themes into Jewish poetry for the first time, influencing his successors, the poets of Muslim Spain, and leaving a lasting impact on the genre. Moreover, RASAG was the first to incorporate Arabo-Islamic literary and poetic features, both in form and style, and at times even in content, into Jewish writing and thought, and Hebrew poetry in particular. He successfully blended these two cultural traditions, creating a refined combination that strongly emphasized Jewish features.

1.2 Ha-Egron (The Collector): Establishing the Role and Function of the Bible in Poetry

RASAG published two versions of his comprehensive work that, for the first time in a Jewish text, sets out the fundamental principles for using biblical Hebrew, primarily in poetry: *Ha-Egron* (Egypt, 902), in Hebrew, and *Kitāb Uṣūl Al-Shi'r Al-'Ibrānī* (*The Book of the Principles of Hebrew Poetry*, Baghdad, ?), in Judeo-Arabic. The following paragraphs focus primarily on the Hebrew version of the book.

1.2.1 Focus and Content

Ha-Egron underscores the importance RASAG placed on the power of both biblical Hebrew and poetry in Judaism. By presenting their richness and beauty, he creates a detailed methodology that instructs poets how to use this language effectively. He addresses its vocabulary, structure, rhetoric, and content, focusing on the intellectual properties of poetry rather than its emotional aspects. The book includes a lexicon of words, biblical syntax, rare and irregular words, and rhetorical devices such as metaphors, figures of speech, and imagery. Approximately eighty percent of the words in this work are biblical, while most of the remaining words come from assorted rabbinic literature (see Allony 63).

1.2.2 The Introduction: The Bond between God, His Nation, His Torah, Poetry and Music

Here, RASAG emphasizes the profound connection between biblical language and Jewish history and culture. He explains its religious significance: when embedded in poetry, the biblical language brings the Nation closer to God by praising Him and understanding His Torah. Using an elaborate biblical style, RASAG articulates, in an intimate language directed to his readers, the strong bond between God, His Nation, the Torah and its language, poetry and music, within broader historical and religious contexts, without referring to any halakhic aspects of these elements. This bond appears in the introduction in four key contexts:

A. The Religious Significance of Biblical Hebrew

In the opening sentence, RASAG outlines the elevated status of biblical Hebrew, describing it as the language of both the angels and the People of Israel, emphasizing the strong bond between biblical Hebrew, poetry and music (ll. 1-3)⁵:

<p>The book of Ha-Egron for the holy language that our God had chosen since eternity, with which His holy angels will sing to Him forever,</p>	<p>ספר האגרון ללשון הקדש אשר בחר בו אלהינו מני-עד, ומלאכי קדשהו בו יזמרוהו סלה,</p>
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5 The indications of the lines here follow the edition in Allony 156. All translations in this chapter are my own.

and with which all the angels in heaven ובו יעריצוהו כל-בני עליון;
 and the People of Israel on earth⁶ will
 exalt Him.

RASAG then traces the history of Hebrew, from Adam's creation to its establishment as the language of the People of Israel, who were rewarded by God for loyally preserving this language despite centuries of turmoil (ll. 3-22).

B. Biblical Hebrew's Role in the Nation's History and Life

RASAG elaborates on how Hebrew was central to the Nation's life when they resided in the Land of Israel until their expulsion to Babylon (ll. 22-27). After their dispersion, they adopted the local languages of the countries in which they lived, abandoning Hebrew (ll. 27-39).⁷ In the introduction to his *Kitāb Uṣūl Al-Shi'r Al-'Ibrānī* (see Allony 151), RASAG expresses concern over the declining status and knowledge of Hebrew among the people. He laments that poets rarely draw from earlier sources of Hebrew scriptures and literature, and often find biblical text confusing and mysterious (ll. 33-39). Continuing in *Ha-Egron*, RASAG urges the Nation to reconnect with Hebrew, as understanding this language is essential for comprehending God's Torah, which is "our lives and living, our light radiates from His Holiness forever and ever" (ll. 40-48). He stresses that his aim is to provide a source of knowledge for all God's people, the Nation, and particularly for those who know Jewish laws and regulations⁸ (ll. 48-51).

C. Poetry, Music, and God's Salvation

RASAG reassures his readers that his book provides all the knowledge necessary to create songs of praise and exaltation to God, for both poets and musicians alike (ll. 52-55). He reiterates that both biblical Hebrew and poetry help God's Nation to understand and adhere to His Torah and worship. Ultimately, this devotion will lead to God's salvation of His Nation (ll. 55-68). In the next section, RASAG outlines the scale and content of his comprehensive work, concluding that his book contains everything needed (ll.

6 See Allony 156n5.

7 As described in Neh. 13:23-24.

8 Esth. 1:13.

68-84) for the Nation's erudite scholars, because those who seek the Lord⁹ understand everything (ll. 84-92).

D. The Torah's Role in the Nation's Life

RASAG calls upon the Nation to study the Torah, as understanding God's words and guidance will open their eyes and ears and heal their hearts. Then, he promises them that they will understand God's words, and He will bestow His blessings upon them, and they will sing His song and praise His power forever (ll. 92-101).¹⁰

It is evident from these passages that RASAG refers to sung poetry, rather than merely written poetry. He depicts both the angels and the Nation as singing poetry (ll. 2-3; 99-100), as well as the Levites, priests (ll. 25), and ministers (ll. 26). RASAG views the relationship between the Bible and poetry as reciprocal: the Bible provides poetry with the richness of its language and content, while poetry transforms these assets into its own idiosyncratic form. In his *Kitāb Uṣūl Al-Shi'r Al-'Ibrānī*, he explains that the content of a poem is its most important feature (Allony 153). The acrostic¹¹ and rhyme, found at the beginning and end of each line, respectively, serve primarily to structure the poem, while the essence of the song, its *'etsem ha-shir* (content) lies between them (ll. 49-57). This content plays a crucial religious role by clarifying and enhancing the biblical message, thereby drawing the Nation closer to God and His Torah. RASAG's view on the centrality of both biblical Hebrew and poetry in the Nation's history is reflected in the PLS's poetic and linguistic features, which he established, as well as its content, which mirrors the Nation's biblical grand narrative. Furthermore, and as will be demonstrated here through the two PLSs, the content of these poems, when performed as sung poetry by the entire Nation, becomes even more accessible, relevant, and compelling.

9 Isa. 51:1, and other passages.

10 In this paragraph, RASAG quotes from Ps. 137:4; 150:1; and 51:12, and Isa. 6:10; and 45:17.

11 These acrostics may include the Hebrew alphabet, biblical quotations, or the name of a person, such as the poet himself.

1.3 *Kitāb Al-Amānāt Wal-I'tiqādāt (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions): Validating Music*

Drawing on Arabic sources, particularly the work of Al-Kindī (801, Kufa – 873, Baghdad), and adapting their theories to a Jewish belief and outlook, RASAG briefly discusses music in his Judeo-Arabic work *Kitāb Al-Amānāt* (933, Baghdad). This work was later translated into Hebrew several times as *Sefer Emunot Ve-De'ot*.¹² It marks the first instance in which a Jewish scholar addresses music in a philosophical, almost therapeutic manner, rather than a halakhic one. RASAG avoids the prohibitions decreed by his predecessors, who had restricted the use of music in Judaism, and instead reflects the views of his contemporaries, who did not regard music as a prohibited activity (see Farmer 12).¹³ In both *Ha-Egron* and *Sefer Emunot Ve-De'ot*, RASAG clearly affirms the positive role of music in Judaism. In *Ha-Egron*, he describes music and singing as integral components of poetry, with a religious status and role throughout the Nation's history. In *Sefer Emunot Ve-De'ot*, he explores the power of music to influence the human soul, solidifying its place in Judaism. Thus, through these two works, RASAG addresses the role of music in Judaism on both the collective and individual levels, respectively.

In the tenth treatise of *Emunot Ve-De'ot*, titled *Hanhagat Ha-Adam* (Human Moral Conduct), RASAG discusses the proper conduct of a person and refers to music in chapter eighteen. He begins the treatise with a principle that God is One and His creation is manifold and balanced. RASAG explores this principle throughout his work in various contexts. For example, in chapter one he argues that, in order to lead a balanced life, humans should base their conduct on a harmonious combination of traits and elements present in God's creation. In chapter eighteen (Sa'adyah Ga'on 320), RASAG places music within the broader context of the five senses and their effects on the human soul, mentioning only three: sight, hearing and smell. He explains how the principle of balanced multiplicity should be applied to these senses to achieve a positive outcome. For example, in the realm of sight,

12 The different translations led to confusion regarding RASAG's terminology. This is particularly significant in the case of music and warrants a separate study. In this study, I rely on Kafah's work in RASAG's *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*.

13 For the prohibitions decreed by his predecessors, see Rosenfeld-Hadad, "There on the Poplars" 180.

focusing on a single color evokes negative feelings such as submission, cowardice, and sadness. By contrast, a balanced mix of colors stimulates different mental faculties that benefit both the eye and the soul, such as fostering courage.

RASAG applies the same principle to music and hearing. He discusses how various elements of music, such as “*al-ṣaut al-mufrad*” (the single voice or sound), “*al-tanghīm*” (the tunes or intoning), and “*al-luḥūn*” (the melodies), each incite only one faculty of the soul which, when aroused on its own, may sometimes have harmful effects. However, when these elements are combined properly, they have a balanced, positive effect on the soul. Therefore, to create the right combination for a favorable impact on the human soul, it is important to understand the specific effect of each element. RASAG organizes these elements into eight categories, saying that “*al-alḥān*¹⁴ *thamāniya*¹⁵” (there are eight melodies), each of which has its own typical “*maqādīr min al-tanghīm*¹⁶” (measures, or rhythmic pattern that derive from its tunes). For the purpose of the present study, whether RASAG refers to eight modes of rhythm or eight modes of melodies is less important. What matters is that he is discussing the effect of music on the human soul and its positive or negative influence, framed within eight distinct patterns. He then describes the eight modes that were prevalent in his time and their effects on the human soul. The first mode, when combined with the second, arouses a desire to rule and govern. The third mode evokes courage and heroism, as well as similar qualities. The fourth mode, by contrast, elicits feelings of surrender, subservience, cowardice, and the like. The fifth through eighth modes, depending on their combinations in a tune, can induce various dispositions, sometimes joyous and at other times sad. RASAG adds that the kings tend to combine these modes in a balanced way, pleasing their ears and benefiting their souls, enabling them to rule effectively, avoiding extremes such as excessive compassion or cruelty and

14 “Rhythms” (Farmer 30). For the question of whether RASAG referred to eight melodic or rhythmic patterns, see Farmer 14, 27 and 30; and Shiloah 54.

15 According to Ḳafaḥ (Sa’adyah Ga’on 321), based on Ps. 6:1, RASAG refers to the eight types of melodies that were sung in the Temple. He explains that from the phrase “on the *sheminith*” (on the eighth) we can learn that the Levites in the Temple had eight melodies, each of which was performed by a different group responsible solely for a particular melody.

16 “Beats” (Farmer 30).

uncontrolled bravery or cowardice, and balancing their happiness and joy.¹⁷ Whereas when writing about poetry, RASAG focuses on the biblical vocabulary and aesthetics of the text, highly valuing its content as a means of drawing closer to God, and avoids portraying a direct connection between poetry and emotions, when writing about music, he clearly explores its emotional impact on the human soul.

1.4 RASAG's Legacy: The Bible and Poetry in Jewish Worship

1.4.1 Biblical Hebrew in Poetry

Although RASAG's successors did not follow his sophisticated poetic style, and his poems did not become part of the paraliturgical repertoire, perhaps because their complexity made it difficult to set them to music, his revolutionary effort to return to biblical Hebrew and its content left an enduring mark.¹⁸ His initiative has remained a defining feature of the PLS tradition to this day, elevating sung poetry to a significant religious and cultural status that has helped preserve and reinforce Jewish faith, history, and identity for over a millennium.

RASAG's devoted student, Dunash Ben Labrat (915, Fes – 970, Cordoba), embraced biblical Hebrew as the sole language of Hebrew religious poetry, a practice that was continued by his successors in Muslim Spain. These poets, much like RASAG, were deeply committed to preserving and protecting Jewish faith and identity through the use of biblical Hebrew, viewing it as central to the Hebrew language as a whole. Biblical words and verses were woven into their poetry, often reinterpreted and performed with music, resulting in powerful songs, particularly those with prophetic motifs (see Pagis, *Poetry Aptly Explained* 281). These poets also carried forward RASAG's rich use of biblical metaphors, which personify God, not only as a rich linguistic device but also as a means of conveying divine traits in a way humans can understand (see Tobi 146). Since they combined biblical language and content with the poetic norms of Arabic literature, they underscored the superiority of Jewish features, fostering a strong sense of national Jewish pride. Hebrew poets, alongside other writers, grammarians,

17 For further details about the eight modes, see Farmer 30.

18 For RASAG's sophisticated poetry, see Brody 124. For his paraliturgical poetry, see Brody 126.

and philosophers of the time, viewed this task as their prophetic mission (see Pagis, *Poetry Aptly Explained* 282).

Over the course of the following centuries, biblical Hebrew remained dominant in Jewish religious poetry, though it was also supplemented by sources from rabbinic literature, including Mishnaic, Talmudic, kabbalistic, and Midrashic texts. A few poets also blended biblical Hebrew with the local Judeo-Arabic dialect. For most of the PLS's existence, Hebrew was a language that was mainly written and read rather than spoken. However, thanks to the poets of the PLS, who always used biblical Hebrew as the primary language of this poetry, the songs remained accessible to their communities, even until today. This unique phenomenon, which did not occur in other languages (Pagis, *Change and Tradition* 51), may have contributed to the PLS's long survival and central role in Judaism.

1.4.2 Biblical Narrative and Sung Poetry

RASAG is widely considered to be the first rabbinic leader to have articulated the connection between biblical Hebrew and poetry in general, and sung poetry in particular. He recognized that these two elements were inherently tied to Jewish history and the Jewish ethos, and he understood the power of their combination to strengthen Jewish faith and identity, a perspective that has proven profoundly influential over the last millennium. From RASAG's time to the present day, the most striking elements of the PLS have been its biblical language and content, which encapsulate the Nation's narrative in many different ways. Rich in biblical vocabulary and literary devices and grounded in the grand biblical narrative of the Nation, the PLS recounts the Nation's glorious past, its painful exile in the present, and its anticipated salvation in the future. Saturated with words of praise and supplications to God, this narrative is tailored to the time and place of the poets and their communities, inherently linking the state of the Nation to its land: Both shared a prosperous past, have been abandoned by God in the present, and will be redeemed by Him in the near future. The songs reflect different parts of this narrative, sometimes directly, through references to historical events and figures from the Bible and other Jewish scriptures, and at other times subtly, using familiar biblical words and expressions associated with these events. It is important to note that this biblical narrative does not follow the conventions of a historical account but instead offers a theological explanation of the relationship between God, His Torah, the Nation,

and the Land of Israel. The narrative encompasses the past, present, and future of the Nation as interconnected periods that cannot be separated. The past is not seen as lost but as a model for the desired future, the time of salvation.

The Nation's narrative can be summarized as follows: It begins with the covenant between God and the forefathers of the Nation. Based on this covenant, He redeemed their descendants from slavery in Egypt, led them through the desert, gave them the Torah, and brought them to the Land of Israel. There, the Nation lived freely in its own land, with Jerusalem as its capital and the Temple as its center of worship, where the priests (*kohanim*) served God with offerings, the Levites sang His praises, and the entire Nation gathered to worship Him. Later, the people sinned and were punished by God with exile from their land. Since that time, the Nation has been scattered in the *golah* (exile), suffering under its oppressors while its land lies desolated. In its misery, the Nation pleads for forgiveness and calls on God to hasten the *ge'ulah* (salvation) and restore its former glory. This narrative is remembered and recounted from the perspective of the present exile, the only reality the Nation now knows, while also embracing a broader view of its past and future that strengthens its hope for and faith in the imminent redemption.

The optimistic message of this narrative is highlighted by the descriptions of music in the PLS's texts and the intentionally lively and cheerful melodies chosen for its performance. The songs depict the Nation rejoicing and praising God for His glory and salvation, and in the Temple the Levites sing to Him, and both the Nation and the Levites are accompanied by musical instruments. And since throughout the centuries, the poets and, later, the worshippers always adapted cheerful melodies to their PLSs, they further enhanced the uplifting atmosphere of the PLS's texts.

From RASAG's time onward, Jewish poets have engaged with his legacy, preserving many of his ideas while introducing new ones. The following sections illustrate, through two central PLSs, how the core features of the genre established by RASAG, namely its biblical Hebrew and its content, shaped in the form of sung poetry, have remained consistent throughout the second millennium. The first PLS represents the voice of the Nation and the second, that of the individual worshiper.

2. *El Eliyahu* (The God of Elijah)

Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089?, Tudela – 1164?, England) a prominent poet and a versatile scholar in rabbinic writing, known as one of Judaism's most distinguished biblical commentators, as well as an eminent scientist, wrote a PLS entitled *El Eliyahu*.

2.1 *Occasion of Performance and Communities*

At the heart of the song is the Nation's plea for salvation before the God of Elijah the Prophet. Elijah is revered both as the herald of salvation (Malachi 3:23) and as the patron of circumcision (*Zohar*, Lekh Lekh 93a). For centuries, Jewish communities across the Middle East, North Africa, and India have sung *El Eliyahu* mostly at the conclusion of the Sabbath, *Motsa'ey Shabbat* (End of the Sabbath, Saturday evening), during circumcision celebrations, and at various festive occasions. According to Jewish tradition, and as reflected in the song, there is a heightened sense of anticipation for salvation at the End of the Sabbath. This is because Elijah does not visit the People of Israel on the eve of Sabbath or any other holyday, as they are preoccupied with the preparations for these sacred occasions (*Talmud Bavli*, 'Eruvin 43b). Rabbi Avraham Ben Natan Ha-Yarhi (1135, Lunel, Provence – 1215, Toledo) explains in his *Ha-Manhig* (*The Guide*, 1518) (Hilkhot Shabbat 28, *siman* 71a) that this is the reason that the Nation beseeches Elijah to visit them at the End of the Sabbath. By observing the Sabbath, the Nation expresses its belief that God will send the redeemer to come to Zion and bring salvation to the People of Israel.¹⁹

2.2 *Biblical Hebrew and Content: Past, Present and Future*²⁰

The God of Elijah
The God of Elijah
In the merit of Elijah

אלֵּלֵיָּהוּ
אלֵּלֵיָּהוּ
בְּזִכְיוֹתֵי אֵלֵיָּהוּ

19 For Elijah's role in circumcision celebrations, see Rosenfeld-Hadad, *Judaism and Islam* 134.

20 This version of the song is taken from Mantsur 71. For the Babylonian, Algerian, Moroccan, Libyan, Indian and Turkish versions, see: https://www.nli.org.il/he/pi-yut/Piyut1media_010002669464105171/NLI.

the prophet please bring now ²¹ [salva- tion]	הַנְּבִיא הֵבֵא נָא
He [the Messiah] will harness him [Eli- jah] as his chariot ²²	בּוֹ יִרְתּוֹם רֶכֶבּוֹ
[The Messiah who] survived in captiv- ity ²³ in which	נָע בְּשִׁבִי כִּי בּוֹ
His heart taketh not rest ²⁴	לֹא יִשְׁכֵּב לִבּוֹ
Nor ever slept ²⁵	גַּם לֹא רָאָה שְׁנָה

The God of Elijah... אֵל אֵלֵיהֶו ...

My illness is aggravated by the sight of ²⁶	רַב מַחְלֵי בְּרֵאוֹת
my gaunt ²⁷ appearance compared to those who hate me	בְּחָשִׁי וּמִשְׁנָאוֹת
[who are] well-favored and fat- fleshed and fed [in the reed-grass] ²⁸	יָפוֹת וּבְרִיאוֹת בְּשָׂר וּתְרֵעִינָה

The God of Elijah... אֵל אֵלֵיהֶו ...

The Rock of Israel ²⁹ give them [our foes] water of gall to drink ³⁰	הַשֹּׁקֶה צוֹר מִי רֹאשׁ
Sharpeneth the eyes of [my] adver- sary ³¹	צָר עֵינָיו יִלְטוּשׁ
On the day when my eyes shall look with anticipation [for salva- tion] toward the Holy One of Israel ³²	יוֹם עֵינֵי לִקְדוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׁעִינָה

21 Exod. 4:6.

22 2 Kings 2:12.

23 *Midrash Pesikta Rabbati*. Chapter 34 on Zech. 9:9.

24 Eccles. 2:23.

25 *Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim Rabah*, Portion 5:2:1 on Song of Sg. 5:2.

26 The syntactic division of the verses is not always identical to the division of the stan-
zas' lines. Ibn Ezra uses this technique to align with the song's rhyming scheme.

27 Job 16:8.

28 Gen. 41:2.

29 2 Sam. 23:3, and other passages.

30 Jer. 9:14.

31 Job 16:9.

32 Isa. 17:7.

The God of Elijah... אל אליהו ...

When will You show a sign	מתי תראה אות
of salvation upon You they [the Na-	ישע אל קוראות
tion] call	
and to You they lift up	לך ולך נושאות
their voices and sing ³³	קולן ותרגנה

The God of Elijah... אל אליהו ...

The redeemer angel ³⁴	המלאך הגואל
Before Thee, the humbled is asking	לפני דל שואל
[for salvation]	
Please O Lord, the God of	אנא ה' אל
Abraham, send me [Messiah] I pray	אברהם הקדוש
Thee ³⁵	

The God of Elijah... אל אליהו ...

Adhering to the Nation's biblical narrative, values, and ideas, Ibn Ezra uses biblical Hebrew to portray the Nation as it recounts its present condition, yearning for its past and hoping for God's swift salvation. He draws on vocabulary, imagery, and ideas from a variety of biblical texts, including Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zachariah, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, and Ecclesiastes, occasionally incorporating Midrashic commentary and his own on these sources.

Pagis (*Change and Tradition* 71) identifies three types of biblical quotations commonly used by poets in Ibn Ezra's time: a single word or a short phrase, a complete verse, and a more extended passage. The first type typically serves a stylistic function, unless the words themselves are widely known; the latter two can either support the song's meaning verbatim or deliberately deviate from the biblical text to create an alternative or opposing meaning. Both types intensify the message conveyed in the song,

33 Ruth 1:9.

34 Gen. 48:16.

35 Gen. 24:12.

assuming the original biblical context is known. Ibn Ezra employs all three of these types in his poems.

The Nation's plea for salvation in the first stanza reflects its glorious past, its dire present, and its desired future. From its present state of hardship, the Nation calls upon the God of Elijah to bring salvation soon (Malachi 3:23), suggesting that the Nation hopes that God will, in the near future, restore its past in the Land of Israel. The phrase "bring now" (v. 1, l. 4; Exod. 4:6) alludes to a pivotal moment in the Nation's formation when God instructed Moses, its first leader, in how to convince the people that He, the God of their fathers, had sent him. In the song, the Nation calls upon God to honor His promise to protect their descendants, thus connecting the Nation's past, present, and future and preserving the sense of continuity in His commitment from the Nation's glorious past into its present and towards its hoped-for future of salvation.

The second stanza outlines the stages leading to future salvation, emphasizing two pivotal figures responsible for this mission: Elijah and the Messiah. Elijah is depicted as the driving force of salvation who, portrayed as the Messiah's chariot of war, precedes Israel and ensures their victories (v. 2, l. 1). This powerful imagery is drawn from 2 Kings 2:12 and is further heightened by the known dramatic biblical context of Elijah ascending to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). Elijah is also described as rescuing the Messiah from his restless, sleepless captivity (*Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim Rabah*, Portion 5:2:1, on Song of Sg. 5:2), where he has been vigilantly awaiting the moment to reveal himself and bring salvation (v. 2, ll. 2-4). However, the depiction of the Messiah in the song, riding Elijah as his chariot, contrasts with the biblical portrayal of the Messiah as a humble figure who rides an ass (Zech. 9:9). In this song, the Messiah is presented as a powerful figure suited for the monumental task ahead.

The following three stanzas (vv. 3-5) describe the Nation's current predicament, lamenting its dire circumstances (v. 3, ll. 1-2) in contrast to its prosperous and well-fed enemies (vv. 3, ll. 2-4). This imagery recalls the account in Genesis 41:2-3, in which Pharaoh describes the cows in his dream to Joseph. In the context of the song, the "well-favored cows" symbolize the Nation's enemies, who will eventually be overcome by the "ill-favored cows," the Nation itself, as outlined later in the chapter (Gen. 41:4). This implies that, like Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, the Nation will ultimately triumph over its enemies, and God will bring salvation,

liberating His people from oppression. It is noteworthy that in Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis 41:10 (*Mikra'ot Gedolot*, Bere'shit 41:10), Pharaoh is described as "every great king over Ishmael (Muslims), the prince of the faithful," representing the Nation's enemies throughout history, as reflected in the song. In the fourth stanza, the Nation turns to God, the Rock of Israel, asking for divine retribution against its enemies, requesting that they will be punished with the "water of gall" (v. 4, l. 1; Jer. 9:14). While in Jeremiah, this punishment is directed at the Nation for its transgressions, which are detailed in the chapter, including exile, destruction, and death, the song inverts this idea, calling for the punishment to fall upon the Nation's enemies instead. In the following three lines of this stanza, the Nation details the menacing gaze of its enemies, who watch the Nation as its people lift their eyes in prayer to God for salvation. The image of the menacing eyes (v. 4, ll. 2) recalls Job 16:9, where he laments that "mine adversary sharpeneth his eyes upon me." In the song, the phrase is abbreviated and reordered to fit the rhyming scheme of the song.³⁶ The Nation's seeking salvation is expressed through its yearning eyes, looking toward God for deliverance (v. 4, ll. 3-4), a motif drawn from Isaiah 17:7, "[...] and his eyes shall look to the Holy One of Israel." However, in the song, the verb "*tir'enh*" (shall look) is replaced with "*tish'enh*" (shall look with anticipation), emphasizing the Nation's eager hope for salvation. Similarly, the fifth stanza conveys the Nation's desire for God to reveal the sign of salvation (v. 5, ll. 1-2), echoing (v. 5, ll. 3-4) the image in Ruth 1:9, where Naomi and her two daughters-in-law "[...] lifted up their voice, and wept," which appeared also in the original version of *El Eliyahu*. However, at some point in the past, the verb "wept" has been changed to "sung," likely to express a more hopeful and uplifting tone about the anticipated redemption.

The sixth and final stanza, like the first, encapsulates the Nation's past and present as well as its future. At present, the Nation humbly calls upon God to send the redeemer angel, Elijah (v. 6, ll. 1-2), using the phrase "the redeemer angel" (Gen. 48:16). This reference to the Nation's past evokes deep emotional connection, as it recalls Jacob's blessing to his son Joseph and his two grandsons, after living through long years of grief over his loss, acknowledging the angel who redeemed him from all evil. Invoking this

36 The word "*yiltosh*" (sharpeneth) is adjusted to both "*ro'sh*" (head) (l. 1) and "*likdosh*" (to the Holy) (l. 3).

imagery calls to mind the Nation's belief that the same redeemer who saved Jacob will also redeem his descendants and will bring the Messiah.

The Nation's plea to the God of its father Abraham (v. 6, ll. 3-4) for the coming of the Messiah represents the song's most dramatic moment. It evokes two significant associations tied to both the Nation's past and its future. First, it recalls God's covenant with Abraham, wherein God promised to support and protect Abraham's descendants and bring them to their land (Gen. 17:7-8), a promise the Nation now hopes will be fulfilled. Second, the phrase "I pray Thee" (Gen. 24:12) is quoted from another important event in the Nation's history, when Abraham, at an advanced age, understood that he needs to secure the Nation's future and thus sought a wife for his son Isaac (Gen. 24:1). As his servant embarked on the mission, he prayed for God's guidance with the words "I pray Thee" and, soon after, Rebekah was found (Gen. 24:15). In the song, Abraham's descendants invoke the same phrase, asking God for His intervention to secure their future and bring salvation.

The entire song, both explicitly and implicitly, reflects the Nation's past and expresses its yearning for the future, while acknowledging its painful present exile. The memory of its glorious past, coupled with the hope for the redemption, empowers the Nation to endure its current suffering, believing that this period of hardship is a passing phase that will soon end.

Levin (40) asserts that the recurring motifs of the Nation's anguish and sense of abandonment in exile, its appeals for God's vengeance against its enemies, who are responsible for its suffering, and for God's salvation are constant themes in Ibn Ezra's poetry, which he classifies as national poetry. Levin argues that Ibn Ezra continued a much earlier tradition in Hebrew literature that reflects the reality of the persecuted Nation. However, Ibn Ezra's poetry also features strong and vivid descriptions of the Nation's cries for salvation, mirroring its reluctance to accept its suffering, its misery as result of its sins, and its trust in God's eventual deliverance. These descriptions are present in the song, although the Nation's sins are only subtly alluded to (v. 4, l. 1).

2.3 *El Eliyahu and Its Melodies*

The powerful sense of the Nation's history and its deep belief in the imminent arrival of salvation create a positive and uplifting atmosphere that is also reflected in the melody chosen for this song, *maqām Ḥusaynī*,

performed by both the Babylonian and Turkish communities. While singing and music are only explicitly mentioned once in the song's text ("[...] they lift up their voice and sing," v. 5, ll. 3-4), the lively melody and refrain enhance the song's hopeful tone, fostering anticipation for salvation.

3. *'Uzi Eleikha Eshmorah* [My Strength, I Shall Wait for Thee]

More than nine centuries after RASAG, Ḥakham (rabbi) 'Abdallāh Ben Ḥakham Khther Ḥnin (d. 1859, Baghdad), a prominent rabbinic figure and prolific poet, wrote his *'Uzi Eleikha Eshmorah*, a popular and cherished PLS widely performed by Babylonian Jews during the Sabbath. Like his predecessors, Ḥakham Ḥnin draws on biblical language to express the Nation's narrative and values, this time through the voice of the individual worshiper. Due to the limitations of space in this study, only a brief analysis of the song's key features, biblical Hebrew and the Nation's narrative and ethos, are presented here.

3.1 *Biblical Sources and Content: Past, Present and Future*³⁷

My strength [my Lord] I shall wait for Thee ³⁸	עֲזִי אֵלֶיךָ אֶשְׁמֹרָה
How awesome is your holy Sabbath For your blessing upon your people is plentiful ³⁹	שִׁבְתְּךָ קֹדֶשׁ מִהַ נִּזְרָא כִּי עַל עַמְּךָ בִּרְכָתְךָ מִיָּדְךָ עֲשִׂירָה
I shall recount your abundant good- ness ⁴⁰	זָכַר רַב טוֹבָךְ אֶזְכָּרָה
To praise your name I choose My eyes my heart [and] my spirit are Your creation	לְהוֹדוֹת שְׁמֶךָ אֶבְחָרָה עֵינֵי לְבִי רוּחִי חַי פְּעֻלָּתְךָ
[With] my eyes my heart [and] my spirit [O Lord] I shall sing to You Amongst the loyal congregation and with melodies of joyous voices and praises [of the Lord]	עֵינֵי לְבִי רוּחִי חַי אֶשִּׁיר לָךְ בְּקֶהֱל אֱמוּנִים וְנוֹגִינִים בְּרִנָּה וְזִמְרָה

37 This version of the song is taken from Mantsur 62.

38 Ps. 59:10, and Isa. 49:5.

39 Prov. 10:22.

40 Ps. 145:7.

You chose the Sabbath day ⁴¹	בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת בָּחַרְתָּ
In it You announced [the duty of keep- ing the Sabbath] to the People of Israel ⁴²	בּוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הוֹדַעְתָּ
With bounty and affection You Gave [Your People] a precious gift	מִתְּנָה טוֹבָה בְּנִדְבָה וּבְחֶבֶד נָתַתָּ
On this day You Gave them the Torah	תּוֹרָה בּוֹ לָהֶם הִנַּחְתָּ
Upon this day light shines ⁴³	וְתוֹפֵעַ עָלָיו נֶהָרָה

[With] my eyes my heart my spirit ... עֵינַי לְבִי רוּחִי חַי פֶּעֶלְךָ...

At the King's [God's] commandment ⁴⁴ and faith	דְּבַר הַמִּלְכּוּ וְנֶדְתּוֹ
I shall contemplate therein ⁴⁵ on the Sabbath day	אֶהְגֶּה בָּם בְּיוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹ
I shall shoot forth sprigs, ⁴⁶ dew of light ⁴⁷	אֲשַׁלַּח פָּארוֹת טַל אוֹרוֹת
To teach its [the Sabbath's] ban on work	לְהוֹרוֹת בְּמִלְאָכָתּוֹ
And from its coming in to its going out ⁴⁸	וּבִכְנִיסָתּוֹ עַד צֵאתּוֹ
The fear of the Lord is pure ⁴⁹	יִרְאַת יְיָ טְהוֹרָה

[With] my eyes my heart my spirit ... עֵינַי לְבִי רוּחִי חַי פֶּעֶלְךָ...

My heart will be gladdened ⁵⁰ at my [Sabbath] table	יִיטֵב לְבִי עַל שְׁלֻחָנִי
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41 *Talmud Bavli*, Shabbat 86b.

42 *Talmud Bavli*, Shabbat 10b.

43 Job 3:4.

44 Esth. 1:12, and other references in the Scroll of Esther.

45 Josh. 1:8.

46 Ezek. 17:6.

47 *Mishnah*, Shabbat 7:2, commenting on Isa. 26:19.

48 Lev. 16: 17.

49 Ps. 19: 10.

50 Eccles. 7:3.

A good and sweet savor⁵¹ in my right hand⁵² בִּשְׁם רִיחַ טוֹב בְּיָמִינִי

[with] spiced wine⁵³ [and] with good teaching [of the Torah] I will open my eyes⁵⁴ [be wiser] יֵין הָרִקְחָ בְּלִקְחָ טוֹב אֶפְקָח אֶת עֵינַי

The law of kindness is on my tongue⁵⁵ תּוֹרַת חֶסֶד עַל לְשׁוֹנִי
The mercies of the Lord⁵⁶ I shall sing חֲסָדֵי יְיָ אֲשִׁירָה

[With] my eyes my heart my spirit ... עֵינַי לְבִי רוּחִי חֵי פִּעְלָהּ...

He who delights with the Sabbath⁵⁷ his fortune will be abundant⁵⁸ הַמְעַנֵּג שַׁבָּת רַב טוֹבוֹ
[with God's goodness] נֹתְנִים לוֹ מִשְׂאָלוֹת לְבוֹ

All his wishes will be fulfilled⁵⁹ לֹא יִדְעָה גֵּרוֹ וְצוּרוֹ בְּעֶזְרוֹ וְסִבִּיבוֹ
His light [life] shall never be put out⁶⁰ and his Rock [God] is his help
and protection

God's Torah is in his heart and soul תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהָיו בְּקִרְבוֹ
Ordered in all things and secured⁶¹ עֲרוּכָה בְּכָל וְשִׁמּוּרָה

[With] my eyes my heart my spirit ... עֵינַי לְבִי רוּחִי חֵי פִּעְלָהּ...

And he who observes the Sabbath is forgiven [for his sins] וְשׁוֹמֵר שַׁבָּת מְחוּל לֹ

The eternal inheritance [of abundance] is in his border נִחְלַת עוֹלָם גְּבוּלוֹ

God will always save him from cruel enemies בְּלֹא מִצָּרִים מְזָרִים אֶכְזָרִים יִצִּיל לוֹ

51 Exod. 29:18, and other references.

52 Isa. 44:20.

53 Song of Sg. 8:2.

54 Zech. 12:4.

55 Prov. 31:26.

56 Ps. 107:43.

57 Isa. 58:13.

58 Ps. 31:20.

59 *Talmud Bavli*, Shabbat 118b, commenting on Psalms 31:20.

60 Prov. 20:20.

61 2 Sam. 23:5.

And a man is judged by his praise [ac- ואיש לפי מהללו
tion]⁶²

Is rewarded with an additional soul⁶³ זוכה לנשמה יתרה

[With] my eyes my heart my spirit ... עיני לבי רוחי חי פועלך...

The inheritance given by the Most High הנחל עליון עם ישלם
to the Nation⁶⁴ will be fulfilled⁶⁵

[In] the mountain of glory and holiness הר צבי קדש ואולם
[Zion] and the Temple

There [in Zion] they shall encamp, ושם יחנו ישכנו ירונו בקולם
dwell [and] sing joyfully with
their voices⁶⁶

A single entity in the world⁶⁷ חטיבה אחת בעולם

And Thy name is great in might⁶⁸ ושמה גדול בגבורה

[With] my eyes my heart my spirit ... עיני לבי רוחי חי פועלך...

'Uzi 'Eleikha 'Eshmorah is a song of praise to the Lord, His Torah and the Sabbath, expressed by a devout worshiper who intimately addresses God in the first person, and joyfully and gratefully shares his emotions. As is apparent from the allusion noted in the footnotes of the song's translation, it is rich in biblical language, references and commentaries.

In the first stanza, the worshiper reflects on his present life, expressing his devotion to God, praising Him, and committing to uphold the sanctity of the Sabbath (v. 1, ll. 1-2). He acknowledges God's abundant blessings upon His people (v. 1, l. 3), promises to remember and recount God's goodness (v. 1, l. 4), and vows to continually praise Him (v. 1, l. 5). The final three lines of this stanza, which also serve as the refrain of the song, highlight the worshiper's enthusiastic recognition of his identity as God's creation, and his pledge to publicly sing and praise Him with joyful melodies. In the second stanza, the worshiper recalls the Nation's past, when God graciously

62 Prov. 27: 21.

63 *Talmud Bavli*, Beitsah 16a.

64 Deut. 32:8.

65 Ps. 65:2.

66 Isa. 24:14.

67 *Talmud Bavli*, Sota 6a.

68 Jer. 10:6.

bestowed upon His people the precious gifts of the Torah and the Sabbath (v. 2, ll. 1-3), designating this day as a momentous occasion (v. 2, l. 4), radiating divine light (v. 2, l. 5). In the third stanza, the worshiper reaffirms his commitment to study and observe the Torah (v. 3, ll. 1-2). He refers to the Torah as *tal orot* (“dew of light”; v. 3, l. 3), symbolizing God’s life-giving light that illuminates the commandments of the Sabbath (v. 3, ll. 4-6). In the fourth stanza, the worshiper expresses the joy and wisdom derived from learning and following the Torah, as well as from observing the Sabbath, and offers praise to God in song for these blessings. In the fifth and sixth stanzas, he reassures those who keep and cherish the Sabbath that their desires will be fulfilled, and that they will receive God’s blessings and rewards. The final stanza conveys a longing for future salvation, in which the worshiper implores God to restore the Nation to Zion and the Temple, where they will dwell together in unity, singing joyfully to Him.

Music is integral to the text, with references to song and singing (in stanzas 1, 4, and 7), reinforced by the poem’s refrain. In these lines, the worshiper’s body and soul express their love for God through joyful, public praise. The melody, set in *maqām Hijāz*, amplifies the song’s uplifting tone of joy and hope, sentiments that are also conveyed by the text.⁶⁹

4. The Bible in Sung Poetry: The PLS as a Guardian of Jewish Faith and Identity

A thousand years ago, RASAG’s objective to strengthen Jewish faith and identity through the Bible’s Hebrew language, its narrative, and its ethos, shaped in the form of sung poetry, proved highly successful. The deep connection between the Bible and poetry, sung by a Nation of believers who continue to trust in God and long for His salvation, gave rise to one of the most significant and enduring artefacts of Jewish worship, the PLS. For over a millennium, and continuing into the present day, the PLS has expressed, more than any other artefact, the authentic feelings and emotions of the Nation, in all circumstances, while simultaneously preserving, nourishing and symbolizing Jewish faith and identity. The four main reasons for

⁶⁹ For its performance by the cantor and musician Mosheh Ḥabushah, see <https://youtu.be/MU2qBhEQj3o?si=v36U-OPC9p-OrfIP>.

the centrality and enduring presence of this genre in Judaism are explored in the following paragraphs.

4.1 The Bible in Poetry: Connecting to the Nation's Biblical Narrative

Eliot argues that poetry is “stubbornly national” (19). It serves as the most effective means to connect a nation to its past literature and culture. No other art form can safeguard a nation's identity with such persistence. This is because the native language of poetry carries profound significance for its people, expressing and preserving their national emotions. Unlike music or painting, which also have local characters but are more accessible to outsiders, poetry uniquely evokes the deepest feelings of its people. As Eliot asserts, it is easier to think in a foreign language than to feel in it, and people often find their most profound emotions expressed in the poetry of their own language. Thus, a nation's language can never be truly at risk or eradicated as long as its people continue to express their feelings through poetry, the ultimate vehicle of emotion. Without poetry, a nation's language and culture may deteriorate and vanish. Therefore, it is vital that a society remains engaged with poetry, or else the past will become distanced and foreign to its people. Furthermore, Shaked suggests that if past literature has succeeded by itself in preserving the national spirit and thus become canonical, the nation's connection to its past is even more firmly cemented (10).

Eliot's view of the role of poetry and language in preserving a nation's culture and identity and Shaked's assertion about its success are pertinent to the PLS's characteristics and qualities. As previously mentioned, one thousand years ago, when the Nation faced the crisis of losing its own language, culture, and identity, RASAG's solution was to focus on exactly these two key components: language and poetry, both rooted in the most authoritative and canonical source of Judaism, the Bible. Despite the PLS's Arabic melodies and many poetic features, the dominant presence of the Bible and its strong reflection of the Nation's feelings about its narrative made the genre distinctly Jewish.⁷⁰

Moreover, RASAG's emphasis on the strong connection between the Bible and poetry, which produced such a marker of Jewish faith and identity, contributed greatly to the status of both the Bible and poetry, enhancing the

70 For the Arabo-Islamic poetic features of the PLS, see Rosenfeld-Hadad, *Judaism and Islam* 54, 59, 69, and 76.

Nation's sense of Jewishness. As the most authoritative source in Judaism, the Bible has always served as the foundation for *Halakhah*, which governs all aspects of Jewish life and worship, as well as rabbinic scholarship, traditionally pursued by men.⁷¹ The Bible provides the PLS with its language, narrative, and ethos, serving as both its wellspring of inspiration and its framework of worship. Most importantly, the Bible bestows upon the PLS its unequivocal authority, allowing both the poets who wrote these songs and the worshippers who sing them to share a common ethos. By absorbing the Bible's valuable elements and shaping them into sung poetry, the PLS adheres to RASAG's explicit instructions for poets to create works that clarify, enhance, and explain the biblical message because the primary aim of poetry is to bring the Nation closer to God and His Torah. With its comforting, reassuring, and uplifting texts, the PLS mediates the biblical message to the entire community, not only men, creating an inclusive space for deeply emotional engagement with the Bible that strengthens people's faith and their identity.

The Bible itself has strong poetic features that elevate the texts beyond a simple narrative or a legal discourse allowing the reader to engage with the text both emotionally and spiritually. This is particularly evident in the Psalms, the Song of Songs, and the Prophets, which are frequently echoed throughout the PLS, as demonstrated here in two songs. However, the PLS's poets went beyond merely echoing the biblical narrative; they tailored its content to address the contemporary emotional needs and concerns of the Nation, making the Bible even more relevant to their lives.⁷² By crafting a narrative that resonates with the present struggles of the Nation, these poets reinforced and affirmed the people's sense of solidarity with the biblical message. They believed that their current hardship is part of a larger, ongoing story, the grand biblical narrative, and that their present reality is a temporary phase between a glorious past and a restored future. As shown in *El Eliyahu*, the Nation not only reflects on its glorious past and future but also acknowledges its present suffering, reinforcing a sense of belonging to its larger biblical ethos and to the collective Jewish destiny and identity, and rejoicing in the soon to come salvation as if it is already present. Similarly,

71 For the PLS's halakhic status, see Rosenfeld-Hadad, *Judaism and Islam* 23.

72 For further details about the historical circumstances of the poets and their PLSs, see Rosenfeld-Hadad, *Judaism and Islam* 44.

in *'Uzi Eleikha*, the individual worshiper expresses his current commitment to the Torah, which had been given in the past by God as a present to His Nation, and his elation from observing the Sabbath. Both the Torah and the Sabbath are suggestive of the Nation's merits, merits that ground the worshiper's petitioning God to bring the most important thing: the desired salvation of the entire Nation. In both songs, as in the entire repertoire of this genre, the Nation's strong faith in God and His promise of speedy salvation remains grounded in God's biblical covenant with its ancestors.

4.2 Poetry and Music: Voicing the Nation's Biblical Narrative

Eliot identifies four social functions of performed poetry that expand people's awareness and refine their sensibilities (18): it provides pleasure, communicates new experiences, offers fresh perspectives on the familiar, and expresses emotions that are difficult to articulate. While Eliot's analysis primarily concerns read poetry, it equally applies to sung poetry. The lively melodies of the PLS, paired with their uplifting texts, enhance the meaning of the Nation's narrative, making it vivid and tangible, and thereby further elevate the uplifting and joyful atmosphere. For centuries, during every holiday and celebration, women, men, and children alike did not merely passively read or listen to their biblical story and ethos as it is found in the liturgy or in any other type of worship. Instead, these melodies gave voice to their hopes and desires, empowering them to actively sing their narrative and embody their belief in God's salvation. Each performance recreated a living and breathing experience, in which they reaffirmed their connection to their past, which had never truly died. They relived the experience of a free nation living in its own land and expressed their heartfelt belief in its eventual return. Through this, they deepened their understanding and heightened their consciousness about their identity. Though they never lived through the past that they celebrated, they never stopped believing in its return and rejoiced in the anticipated moment of salvation. As Eliot observes, such a connection to the past ensures the survival of a nation and its culture (20).

In a similar vein, Engelhardt asserts that religious practice is not only intellectual or spiritual but also physical, with voice playing an essential role in creating a sense of belonging within the community (1). Voice, he argues, is a means of communication that shapes and conveys sacred texts, bringing them to life and making them accessible and meaningful. Voice, in this

“acoustic space,” bridges the divine and human realms, not merely expressing emotions but creating existence through rituals or prayers. Music, as Becker and Belzer also suggest, enhances religious experiences, fostering emotional engagement, connecting individuals and communities to deeper spiritual truths and acting as a bridge between the mundane and the divine. This concept of “acoustic space” in music aligns with Huber’s view of poetry as a space that captures time, elevating it and memorializing it for eternity (see Huber 1). Huber cites Tucker, who refers to this as “the spacetime magic of poetry” (Tucker 277), wherein the poem transcends time, offering the illusion of timelessness. Cameron further argues that poetry creates a sense of completeness that does not rely on time for its fulfilment (196).

In the case of the PLS, the combination of poetry, music, and voice fosters a profound religious experience in the worshippers. The uplifting melodies, intertwined with the Nation’s narrative and sung by the entire community, create an atmosphere that connects them to the divine, to God’s promise of salvation. This “spacetime magic” bridges their glorious past with their equally glorious future, making their present feel as though salvation is already within reach. This sense of immediate connection to the divine, to God and His salvation, deepen both faith and spiritual experience, allowing the anticipated salvation to feel as if it is already present, making the PLS the Nation’s means of relief and comfort at times of struggle and suffering.

4.3 Poetry and Faith: Believing in the Nation’s Biblical Narrative

Eliot asserts that poetry can survive only if it makes a meaningful impact on a nation’s sensibility, life, and culture (22). This can happen only if the nation’s culture is strong enough to maintain a continuous reciprocal influence and interaction with its poetry. Religious sensibility, or belief, he explains, is the ability to feel toward both God and man (25). While nonbelievers may, to some extent, understand certain concepts about God and man, poetry that expresses these feelings becomes meaningless to them. Looking at the PLS’s longevity and centrality in Judaism, there is no doubt that it has had a profound impact on the Nation’s faith and culture, both during the difficult centuries of exile and now, long after the return to its land. The PLS mirrors the Nation’s enduring faith in God and His salvation. The genre’s long history reflects Eliot’s argument that ceasing to write poetry marks the beginning of a culture’s decline (25); it signifies that people will no longer be able to express and feel the emotions of civilized society.

Indeed, the poets of the PLS, across time and place, have never ceased feeling and believing nor producing songs. Likewise, worshippers have never stopped feeling and believing nor singing these songs. Through this unbroken continuity, both poets and worshippers have kept their culture and faith alive and thriving.

4.4 The PLS's Timelessness: Preserving Cultural Identity

Tucker identifies three types of timeless poetry that are relevant to the PLS (6). The first type immortalizes an idea or concept, and its timelessness depends on its continued acceptance. The second type expresses themes that are conceived as timeless and never lose their relevance. The third type strives to resist, halt or transcend time, "encapsulating a moment in its poetic form" (6). The long history of the PLS, as an artefact that both poetized and musicalized the biblical ethos and the Nation's grand narrative, attests to its timelessness. Tucker's categories of timeless poetry provide further insight into the genre's enduring nature. The timeless and eternal ideas, concepts, and topics embedded in the PLS remain ever relevant to the Nation because they are all derived from the Bible, expressed in its language, and adhere to its ethos, which is based on the everlasting bond between God and His Nation. Furthermore, the PLS's enduring impact over a millennium, having been repeatedly sung and celebrated by the Nation, sustained a living memory of its biblical grand narrative and ethos, consistently preserving and transmitting Jewish culture and identity. Steedman argues that history is a dynamic and living cultural activity that remains ever-present. It is not silent or muted on the page but rather calls upon the poet to "teach us our recollections" (Steedman 8). Thanks to the PLS's poets, who have never ceased responding to this call, producing a poetry that recalls and celebrates the Nation's biblical narrative, the worshippers have never stopped singing, remembering, and believing in the return of their glorious past at the time of salvation.

5. Conclusion

Over a thousand years ago, RASAG responded to the cultural crisis of the Nation by focusing on two critical aspects: the preservation of the Hebrew language and the creation of a body of poetry that reflected the Bible's authority. His innovative approach, shaped in the form of the PLS genre, helped safeguard Jewish faith and identity, ensuring that the Nation remained connected to its biblical roots.

Imbued with biblical language and themes, the PLS fosters a deep connection between the Nation's people and their faith, and it reinforces their collective identity. With its biblical themes, sung to lively melodies, the PLS serves as a voice for the Nation's biblical narrative, enabling worshippers to engage with their faith on both emotional and spiritual levels, and allowing the community to relive their shared history and anticipate a hopeful future of salvation. This connection to the past and its integration with contemporary struggles reinforces the Nation's sense of solidarity and destiny, and the uplifting melodies of the PLS amplify this experience, creating an "acoustic space" that bridges the divine and human realms, thereby making the biblical narrative vivid and immediate. Additionally, the PLS highlights the role of faith in sustaining the Nation's cultural identity. As Eliot suggests, poetry that resonates with a nation's sensibility preserves its culture, and the PLS's long-standing presence has been essential in maintaining Jewish faith and identity. Through continuous engagement with this form of worship, Jewish communities have kept their culture alive, ensuring its transmission through generations. The PLS's timeless quality, rooted in biblical principles, encapsulates enduring themes of faith, salvation, and cultural continuity, making it a powerful tool for preserving Jewish faith and identity. It seems that RASAG's emphasis on the Bible's role in the PLS elevated both the Bible and poetry and made them integral to the Nation's culture. The PLS not only preserved the biblical message but also reinforced the continuity of Jewish identity. The combination of the poetry, music, and communal voice created a powerful space for religious and cultural expression, ensuring that the Nation remained firmly rooted in its biblical narrative, and thus strengthening its faith and identity for over a millennium.

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“Aller Augen warten auf dich, Herre”: On the Use of Ps 145:15-16 for Saying Grace in Lutheran Traditions¹

LEA SCHLENKER

The use of verses from Psalm 145 for prayers and benedictions at the table has a longstanding history in both Jewish and Christian traditions.² Today, these practices continue: Ashkenazi Jews, for instance, use verse 16 to thank God after a meal for the food He has provided. Christians, in turn, use the psalm to bless the food before a meal, be it by reciting the entire psalm, as in Eastern monasteries of Byzantine Rite, or by using only some of its verses, as in several Western monasteries (von der Goltz 11-13). It is this latter tradition which Martin Luther took up when he wrote his *Small Catechism* (Peters 200-01), an instruction for lay believers about the basic tenets of faith, the sacraments, and how to live a Christian life. This catechism includes his recommendation to pray Ps 145:15-16 for saying grace before meals, which was decisive for Lutheran ways of engaging with food.

In the following chapter, I will focus on two examples from the seventeenth century to shed light on how Lutheran traditions applied and interpreted these verses in the context of eating, highlighting multidimensional embodied engagement with the text. First, I will introduce and analyze a hymn which is still sung today for saying grace, namely Heinrich Schütz's hymn “Aller Augen warten auf dich, Herre” (“The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord”) from 1657. Here, the psalm verses have been slightly modified and combined with music, thereby indicating theological preferences and relating the singers in an experiential way to God. My second example is a contemporaneous commentary on the catechism and its instructions for

¹ This chapter results from work in project P4 “The Argument from Scripture,” funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation) within Research Unit 2828 “De/Sacralization of Texts” (Project Number 39844141).

² I have found no evidence of a Muslim reception of Ps 145. While the Qur'an mentions the psalms (*zabūr*) as a scripture revealed to the prophet David, the biblical psalms have hardly been received into Islamic discourses, let alone practices. David Vishanoff has identified several rewritten Islamic psalms; however, only two of them echo biblical psalms (Vishanoff 30).

saying grace. While Johann Conrad Zeller's *Christliche Sermones von dem Anhang des Catechismi* (*Christian Sermons on the Appendix to the Catechism*) (Tübingen 1680) is largely forgotten today, it allows us a glimpse into possible contemporaneous interpretations of the verses (and potentially the hymn). *Christian Sermons* provides explicit references to Christian doctrine as well as points to discrepancies in everyday experience. Thus, both examples interweave biblical passages with theological reflection and everyday experience: they apply scripture to the setting at the table, addressing questions of provision, human-divine relationships, and the question how to live a good and pious life. In this way, the table becomes a site of engaging with the holy, with God. In a final step, I will look at these examples of application of Ps 145:15-16 from both an etic, i.e. outsider's, and an emic, that is insider's point of view, taking up notions of sacralization on the one hand and sanctification on the other. I thus contextualize the examples within broader scholarly discussions of religious practice and show how different disciplinary perspectives can be mutually enriching.

“The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord”

The hymn “The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord” is a musical adaption of Psalm 145:15-16, which Heinrich Schütz composed in 1657 during his time as court conductor at the Electoral Court of Dresden. Before writing the hymn, he had already composed pieces for choir boys that were based on poetic versions of the psalms by Cornelius Becker.³ This context of a choir with experience in singing hymns explains the rather uncommon style of Schütz's hymn on Ps 145:15-16. “The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord” neither resembles hymns for congregations nor liturgical chants; rather, it is a piece of choir music in four voices for a group that regularly sings together. As it is often the case with Schütz's music, the hymn is difficult to sing. It is not composed in stanzas and has no clear melody; instead, it presents rich

3 Cornelius Becker wrote poetic versions of psalms based on Lutheran melodies of the sixteenth century. His psalm book in rhyme was printed in 1603 in Leipzig and was probably intended as a theological and political alternative to Ambrosius Lobwasser's psalm book from 1573, which was mainly used in Reformed congregations and thus perceived as Calvinist (Steude 284).

harmonies and diverse rhythms.⁴ The hymn has a declamatory style foregrounding the text, which closely follows the 1545 Luther Bible translation of Ps 145:15-16⁵:

Bible LUT1545	Hymn	English translation of the hymn
15 Aller Augen warten auf dich, und du gibst ihnen ihre Speise zu seiner Zeit. 16 Du tust deine Hand auf und erfüllst alles, was lebt, mit Wohlgefallen.	Aller Augen warten auf dich, Herre, und du gibest ihnen ihre Speise zu seiner Zeit, du tust deine milde Hand auf und sättigest alles was da lebet, mit Wohlgefallen.	The eyes of all wait upon You, Lord, and You give them their food in due season, You open Your mild hand and satisfy every living thing, with pleasure.

The differences between the biblical text and its rendering in the hymn are marginal. In two instances, additional syllables have been added to allow for easier singing (e.g., “du gibst” becomes “du gibest,” “was lebt” is turned into “was da lebet”). In the first verse, the hymn adds “Herre” (“Lord”) to identify the “You.” The addition clarifies whom the singers are addressing, which would otherwise be unclear because the hymn starts in the middle of the psalm. Further, it renders the Hebrew word מַשְׂבִּיעַ with “sättigest” (“satisfy”) instead of “erfüllst” (“fill”), which is also a legitimate translation. The only change in meaning occurs in the added description of God’s hand as “mild.”⁶

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- 4 Due to these characteristics, Wolfram Steude argues, Schütz’s music never became as popular as, for instance, Johann Crüger’s hymns and melodies. Nonetheless, they were included into hymnals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and were widely known, in part because Elector Johann Georg II made Schütz’s psalm pieces obligatory for church services (Steude 285).
 - 5 The Bible translation follows modern spelling. The text and analysis of the hymn follow its form in the current hymnal *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, no. 461. In my translation of the hymn from German into English, I pursue a middle path between the King James Version of the psalm verses and a more literal rendering of some terms that are relevant for the interpretation in German.
 - 6 If we compare the biblical text to how it is rendered in the *Small Catechism* for the purpose of saying grace, we can see that in the catechism Luther already adds “Herr” (“Lord”) to identify the “You” and uses the word “settigest” (“satisfy”) rather than

If we assume that the hymn was used according to Luther's instructions, the psalm verses constitute the beginning of the prayer before a meal. In the *Small Catechism* (1529), Luther says that the paterfamilias should teach the children and servants to approach the table with folded hands and chastity,⁷ first saying Ps 145:15-16, followed by the Lord's Prayer and a benediction of the food. With exception of the posture for prayer, nothing else leads up to the recitation of the psalm. The prayer before the meal begins with the psalm verses, or in our case with the verses in hymnal form. Thus, the singers start their prayer by situating themselves in relation to all other creatures and in relation to the Lord: "The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord."⁸ They remember that all human beings, all animals⁹ – and by extension the whole creation as a whole – wait for God to feed them. They do not wait in vain, as the following verses show. God gives them their food in due season, opening His mild hand and satisfying every living thing with pleasure. Both the image of the open, mild hand and the continuous address of God as "You" evoke an intimate atmosphere. The singers turn to God, addressing Him as Lord and trusting in His mild and pleasing provision. At the same time, the whole of creation comes into perspective.

Heinrich Schütz's music further supports this double movement of an all-encompassing perspective in one respect and an intimate interweaving of the Lord's "You" and the singers' "I" in another. The hymn divides the psalm verses into paired lines. The first pair counts with a caesura at the end of each line while the second pair is steadier (Meier and Marti 68). Regardless of the different number of syllables in each line, each line has eight beats (that are not equivalent with the stresses). Thus, some words are shortened, others are prolonged, allowing for a pronunciation of a phrase as if

"erfüllest." The additional syllables in turn cannot be found in the critical edition of the *Small Catechism* (Dingel 892).

7 "[M]it gefalteten Händen und züchtig" (Luther 522).

8 I am aware that singers do not automatically agree with or reflect upon every part of a hymn they sing. Sometimes one can almost hear the dissonances between a hymn and those who sing it. Nonetheless, I argue, singing is an embodied expression of faith which actualizes tradition, be it in an affirming, doubting, negating, or exploring manner. Ideally, a hymn enables singers to communicate with God through a specific tradition.

9 A note in Luther's *Small Catechism* shows that this reading of "The eyes of all" is not only a modern interpretation. He explicitly speaks of all animals ("alle Tier") when he explains the meaning of pleasure at the end of Ps 145:16 (Luther 522).

it was spoken. Still, within this declamatory style of the hymn, the music structures the verses and sets certain emphases. These can be shown as follows¹⁰:

Aller **A**ugen **w**arten auf dich, **H**erre ()
*und du gibest ihnen ihre **S**peise zu **s**einer **Z**eit, ()*
 du tust *deine* milde **H**and auf
 und sättigest *alles was da lebet mit* Wohlgefallen.

The **e**yes of all **w**ait upon You, **L**ord ()
*And You give them their **f**ood in **d**ue season, ()*
 You open *Your* mild **h**and,
And satisfy every living thing with pleasure.

Two types of emphasis can be discerned, either by long note values on certain words or by extending few syllables into a whole line (see fig. 1). The latter can be observed in lines one and three. Thus, the general emphasis is first on the eyes of all who are waiting for the Lord, and then on the Lord who opens His mild hand. At the same time, the prolonged words “eyes,” “wait,” “Lord,” “food,” “due season,” “hand” and “pleasure” stand out. Most of these words focus on God, on the food He provides, and on how He provides it, namely in due season, from His hand and with pleasure. The other two words point to the waiting eyes of all at the beginning of the verses. It is almost as if one follows these eyes, situating oneself among them, waiting, looking to God, to the food from His mild hand and eventually to the pleasure resulting from the act of nourishing.

10 In the scheme, bold print represents long and italics short note values. The brackets indicate caesurae. The translated English text cannot be sung to the hymn’s music. Here, the bold and italic prints simply parallel the indicated words in German so that non-German readers may follow the interpretation more easily.

Figure 1: Musical notation for “Aller Augen warten auf dich, Herre”¹¹

Al-ler Au-gen war-ten auf dich, Her-re, und du gi-best ih-nen ih-re Spei-se zu sei-ner Zeit, du tust

dei-ne mil-de Hand auf und sät-ti-gest al-les was da le-bet, mit Wohl-ge-fal-len. A-men.

The division of the text and the rhythm suggest an emphasis both on the overall connections and on smaller elements. At the same time, the hymn's harmony enriches this interpretation even further. It begins and ends in e minor, with several changes into the relative key G major and back. The two pairs complement each other harmonically. Generally, e minor is used for more intimate terms like “wait,” “Lord,” “give,” “mild” and “pleasure.” In turn, more conceptual terms like “eyes,” “food,” “in due season,” “satisfy” and “every living thing” are rendered in G major. Hence, both the harmony and the rhythm create parallels between the two pairs and particular emphases within them. They contribute to a certain dynamic, while they also allow for coherence. A clear melody is missing, and the different voices rather follow reciting tone repetitions and known cadences (Meier and Marti 68-69). Nonetheless, the hymn carefully arranges the psalm verses, which leads me to the following interpretation.

The hymn invites singers to locate themselves among the “eyes of all” and to follow their gaze to the Lord, witnessing, too, the benevolence of God's “mild hand.” It becomes clear that human beings, just like any other creature, depend on God's nourishing action. They have to wait for the due

11 Permission to use this image was granted by the copyright holder, the German Bible Society (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft).

season when every living thing will be satisfied. These rather abstract theological insights are fleshed out by the smaller movements and the more direct, intimate engagement of the singers with God as “You.” The singers wait and call upon God as “Lord,” they see His mild hand and experience pleasure. Hence, broader theological concepts are intrinsically linked to personal and embodied experience. This is further underlined by the key *e* minor employed for the more intimate terms. Singing this hymn before a meal is a way of experiencing the singers’ relation to the whole of creation and to God and expressing their trust in God as the one who provides for them with His mild hand.

The mild hand is not only emphasized by the hymn but is also noteworthy from a historical perspective. As we have seen, in comparison with the biblical text, “mild” is the only textual alteration which affects its meaning. First, this shows high respect for the biblical text as it is. Second, in line with Luther’s instruction in his *Small Catechism*, the hymn uses only verses 15 and 16, taking them out of the context of the entire Psalm 145. This implies that they are applied and interpreted independently. Third, this makes them stand out from the rest of the verses, simply by the fact that practitioners will know and recognize these verses better than others. While initially the biblical context gave authority to the hymn, eventually the hymn became more famous than the respective psalm verses.¹² Finally, this preference for the hymn had consequences even on the level of the text of the *Small Catechism*: When Schütz composed the hymn, the *Catechism* rendered Ps 145:15-16 according to the Lutheran Bible edition of 1545. At a later stage, however, the *Catechism* regularly reads “mild hand” instead of “hand” only (Meier and Marti 66). Even if the exact historical developments are difficult to trace,¹³ it becomes clear that this hymn – and potentially hymns

12 A similar development can be observed in the famous Advent hymn “Macht hoch die Tür” (“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”). While widely known, few people are aware that it is an interpretation of Ps 24:7-10.

13 The addition “mild” also features in the hymn “Allmächtiger gütiger Gott” (“Almighty Gracious God”) in *Gesangbuch der Böhmisches Brüder* (*Hymnal of the Bohemian Brethren*), which was included into *Bapstsches Gesangbuch* (*Pope’s Hymnal*) in 1545. Probably both versions, with and without “mild,” existed independently (Meier and Marti 66-67). *Christian Sermons* first renders the psalm without “mild,” yet in the following exhortations, it consoles readers that God will open his mild hand (Zeller 22, 31). This might indicate that Zeller knew Schütz’s hymn and alluded to it.

more generally – have a strong impact on the reception of biblical texts, including the possibility of different renderings.

The hymn “The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord” had a long-lasting impact on the reception of Ps 145:15-16 in Lutheran traditions, not least because of its musical form which generally facilitates the memorization and distribution of texts. In addition to still being sung today, the hymn was quoted in a later hymn for Thanksgiving, namely in the second stanza of “Herr, die Erde ist gesegnet” (“Lord, the earth is blessed”) by Heinrich Puchta (1842). Here, a hymn that is sung annually for Thanksgiving clearly takes up elements from a hymn that is sung daily for saying grace. This quotation allows for a mutual illumination of different instances of eating, pointing to God’s faithfulness across time and settings. From these examples we can see that singing is a strongly embodied form of engaging with a text. It involves the singers emotionally¹⁴ and integrates them in the performance of ancient words directed at God. While the hymnal form emphasizes certain aspects, we now turn to a different genre to better understand how contemporaries might have interpreted these verses theologically.

Christian Sermons

After the Thirty Years’ War, church officials in Württemberg had the impression that people were lacking catechetical knowledge. Hence, they commissioned theologians and local church leaders to write commentaries on the catechism that could be used in schools, churches and for education at home. One of those commissioned was Johann Conrad Zeller, then prelate and abbot at Bebenhausen monastery in the vicinity of Tübingen. He composed the *Christian Sermons*, which was published in 1680.¹⁵ Reprinted in 1681 and 1682, it was initially frequently used and even featured in school syllabi. Due to its length, an abridged version was published. Yet, already by 1694, it was limited to private use (Weisman, *Katechismen* 1:

14 For an overview of the many connections between emotions and music, see Juslin and Sloboda.

15 While the *Christian Sermons* does not mention an author, we can assume that it forms the second part of Johann Conrad Zeller’s *Catechistische Unterweisung zur Seeligkeit* (*Catechetical Instruction for Bliss*), which was published in the same year. What is more, in the *Christian Sermons*, Zeller mentions similar aspects to his exegesis of the Book of Sirach, published in 1672 in his *Summaria* (*Summary*), 529-532, which provides additional indications of his authorship.

450-56). Today, few copies exist, probably because catechetical literature was not considered worthy of archiving in libraries, despite its popularity at one time (Weismann, *Katechismen* 2: 1-2). Zeller’s *Christian Sermons* is of interest here because it offers a glimpse into contemporaneous theological interpretations of Ps 145:15-16 in the context of saying grace.

In accordance with its full title,¹⁶ the *Christian Sermons* contains explanations of the morning and evening prayer, of saying grace before and giving thanks after a meal, as well as a “Table of Duties,” which describes social and family responsibilities. As is typical of catechetical literature, it follows a question-and-answer structure. The section on saying grace opens with “Question. How do you pray when you go to the meal? Answer: The eyes of all wait upon You, Lord, and You give them their food in due season” (CS 22).¹⁷ An exegesis of the verses follows, continuing the pattern of questions and answers. The section discusses how to pray, what prayers one should recite, why one should use verses from scripture, what the words mean and why it is important to know such things (CS 22-31). Zeller combines his interpretation with instruction and exhortation, relating the psalm verses to Lutheran doctrine as much as to everyday experience. In the following, I elaborate on these dimensions of interpretation, instruction and exhortation in order to show, on the basis of one example, how Ps 145:15-16 was received in seventeenth-century Württemberg.

In his interpretation of Ps 145:15-16, Johann Conrad Zeller clarifies that “the eyes of all” means that “the eyes and hearts of all creatures” (CS 25) shall be directed towards the Lord and wait on Him. In fact, God should be seen as the one who provides for every living creature that requires nourishment. Here, Zeller refers for proof both to Ps 65:3 and to Ps 145:16, the second half of the prayer, which speaks of the Lord satisfying every living thing. Given that all depend on God for their nourishment, they turn their eyes to Him, ask Him for nourishment and wait and trust until He provides (CS 25-26). The respective type of nourishment corresponds to what is

16 The full title reads *Christliche Sermones von dem Anhang des Catechismi, So bestehet in Morgen-, Abend- und Tisch-Gebett, und in der Christlichen Haustafel* (Christian Sermons on the Appendix to the Catechism, Consisting of the Prayer for the Morning, Evening and Meal and of the Christian Table of Duties).

17 Here and in the following, (CS) refers to (Zeller, *Christliche Sermones*). All translations are mine.

required and beneficial for the nature of each creature, as Zeller explains with a reference to the Book of Sirach.¹⁸ In both cases, Zeller thus explains the psalm verses with the help of other biblical passages.

While the type of nourishment depends on the needs of each creature, the “due season” is defined by the Lord. Here, the German (and Hebrew¹⁹) text is more ambiguous than my English translation, literally saying “at His/its time,” with the possessive pronoun pointing in both directions. For Zeller, however, it is clear that it must be “His time,” for we do not receive food when we would like to have it but rather at the time that God has determined in His wisdom. Ultimately, God knows when it is best, even if He “sometimes hangs the breadbasket up high” (CS 26). Here, Zeller skillfully combines the interpretation of the verses both with everyday experience and with Christian doctrine. He connects the verses with the everyday experiences of his readers, using the collective “we” and the image of a breadbasket hung out of reach to evoke a shared sense of dependency. Simultaneously, he introduces theological concepts – such as the doctrines of God’s prescience, wisdom and goodness – to illuminate the aspects of these experiences that lie beyond the grasp of human understanding. This is an example of how catechetical literature addresses discrepancies between doctrine and experience by making room for possible doubt and yet reaffirming the validity of scripture, doctrine and pious practice. Zeller rereads scripture through lenses of both everyday applicability and coherence with Lutheran teachings.

The belief in God’s goodness and wisdom is further underlined when Zeller turns to the interpretation of “pleasure.” Diverging from Luther’s

18 Zeller refers to Sir 39:5 here, but the quotation indicates that he means the passage which is commonly known as Sir 37:28. Because of a transposition of pages in the Greek Septuagint and different orders in the Latin Vulgate and the Syriac Peshitta, different styles of counting the chapters and verses of the Book of Sirach exist up until today (see Reiterer).

19 In Hebrew, the suffix בְּעִתּוֹ can refer to either those waiting or to the Lord. A comparable passage in the Hebrew Bible is Ecclesiastes 3, which speaks of the appropriate time for different actions, but here the phrase uses a preposition instead of a suffix. The same phrasing with a suffix can be found in Deut. 11:14 and 28:12, which comment on the time when the land needs rain. From these passages, it is plausible to read the suffix in Ps 145:15 as “at its time.” Still, it could equally be attributed to God. I would like to thank Desiree Zecha for her help with this question.

interpretation of pleasure in his *Small Catechism*,²⁰ Zeller emphasizes that the pleasure is on both sides: for God, according to what He knows is useful and good for us, and for us, because we can enjoy the food and be happy. Further, Zeller notes that we should be pleased whenever God gives, be it as little as it may (CS 26-27). This emphasis on God’s sovereignty in determining both the “due season” and the related “pleasure” might reflect theological leanings in Württemberg.²¹ Zeller himself points to a special element in the local catechism, namely the addition of a threefold “Kyrie” calling upon God’s mercy right after saying the psalm verses. This, Zeller states, underlines that we do not receive nourishment according to our merits or misdeeds but only according to God’s grace and mercy (CS 27).

Throughout the text, it becomes clear that Zeller’s interpretation is not meant for idle rumination but for being put into practice. His instructions begin with how to approach the table. When food is served, he says, one “shall not fall into it like pigs” (CS 24); instead, one should say grace first, with chastity and fear, for God is Himself present at the table and one’s actions should reflect one’s fear of God. This reverence implies that one should not do or think of anything else during prayer and that one shall say it clearly and without muttering (CS 24). At the end of saying grace, after

20 It is noteworthy that Luther generally refrains from interpreting the verses Ps 145:15-16 in his *Small Catechism*, except for the term “pleasure.” According to him, pleasure means that all animals receive enough food to be joyful and happy, because worries and stinginess would prevent pleasure (Luther 522-23). Luther does not mention God’s pleasure, which obviously does not preclude it either.

21 To this day, the church in Württemberg differs from other Lutheran churches in some aspects of theology, liturgy and pious practice. At first sight, this might be attributed to a different catechetical tradition. The catechism by Johannes Brenz was initially preferred in Württemberg because it was more ambiguous in its interpretation of the Lord’s Supper and thus acceptable for both Lutheran and Reformed Protestants. However, Brenz’s catechism was also quite Lutheran in doctrine and eventually Reformed Southern German tendencies in Württemberg ceased. Thus, while the church order of 1553 only foresees Brenz’s catechism, by 1640, Luther’s catechism was officially recommended as well. In 1662, eighteen years before *Christian Sermons* was published, a general rescript ordered that both catechisms be studied (Holtz 29-30). Zeller’s work reflects this later stage of combined traditions: while Brenz’s catechism features in the title of the first volume, *Catechistische Unterweisung zur Seeligkeit. Das ist kurtze Auslegung deß Brentianischen Catechismi (Catechetical Instruction for Bliss. This is Short Interpretation of Brenz’s Catechism)*, Zeller frequently refers to Luther as a key authoritative figure.

the aforementioned “Kyrie,” one should say the Lord’s prayer and with a sigh ask God for His blessings so that the food satisfies the partakers of the meal and does not cause any illnesses (CS 28). Again, Zeller emphasizes the need to pray and warns against those who do not deem it necessary, who are ashamed of praying, who do not fold their hands properly, who speak hastily, or who look at the food instead of looking towards God (CS 29).

In addition to his instructions for *how* to pray, Zeller provides ample reasons *why* one should pray. He dedicates several paragraphs to exhortation, contrasting those who wait upon the Lord with those who neither look towards Him nor trust in His nourishment. Such individuals, Zeller says, are almost never content and do not want to depend on God’s grace and mercy but rely on their own works (CS 30). Here, Zeller applies the Lutheran emphasis on justification and salvation by faith alone to everyday acquisition of sustenance. Utter reliance on God’s grace concerns not just questions of eternal life but should also shape a believer’s everyday attitude in all aspects of life in this world. Christians should rely on God as their “one and only nourisher” (CS 30). They should pray to God as a faithful and almighty Father, to honour and sanctify His name and further His kingdom according to His will (CS 30). Those who pray, Zeller writes, can trust that “the faithful God will always nourish him, He will save body and soul; He will open His mild hand in which He has everything and gives everyone what corresponds in its due and pleasant season” (CS 31).

This promise following the exhortation links everyday perspectives with eternity. What is true in the here and now extends to the Hereafter, as the words “always” and “body and soul” indicate. To further illustrate the eschatological promise, Zeller notes that those who pray can hope to be part of God’s eternal table in His kingdom so they will eat their bread in eternal joy (CS 31). In turn, those who do not call upon God for His blessings eat their bread in sin and with guilty conscience; as a consequence, they will later be held accountable to God (CS 30). As we can see in his exhortation, Zeller interweaves this-worldly everyday concerns with more encompassing and eschatological aspects. For him, prayer in everyday life expresses reliance on God, as it contributes to the sanctification of God’s name and furthers His kingdom. These formulations allude both to Ps 145:15-16 and to the Lord’s Prayer. Hence, while writing *about* the texts used for saying

grace,²² he also uses elements of the same texts *in* his argumentation. This performative aspect is exemplary of how Zeller writes.

In the *Christian Sermons*, Zeller combines a clear structure following the pattern of questions and answers on the one hand with different forms of theological reflection and instruction on the other. In his commentary on the prayer before meals, he interweaves descriptive and prescriptive passages. Shifting between interpretation, instruction and exhortation, he recurs to biblical passages and well-known texts such as the Lord’s Prayer. He employs biblical passages for prayer, for ethical exhortation and to justify his interpretation or even the practice of saying grace as such. In reference to 1Tim 4:5, Zeller argues that one should use a “verse and prayer from the word of God” (CS 24-25) so He may sanctify the food. And, in fact, he appears to take prayer seriously as part of his own theological writings. At the beginning of his explanation of the prayer before a meal, Zeller includes a prayer and thereby directs himself, his writing and his audience to God: “O Lord help! O Lord, grant success! Amen” (CS 23). Overall, appropriate behaviour at the table appears to have been essential for Zeller. We can find similar passages not only in his commentary on the Book of Sirach (Zeller, *Summaria* 430-31) but also in the funeral speech for his wife Juditha (Hößlin 17).

In his writings, Zeller works closely with scripture. Yet, he is aware of possible discrepancies between scripture and everyday experience – for instance between the promise of God’s provision and the experience of hunger and scarcity – and addresses these realities. Still, he trusts in the teachings of faith, employing different degrees of doctrinal terminology. One example for a low degree of doctrinal terminology is when he speaks about God as the “one and only nourisher” (CS 30), implying the belief in one God who provides. In a stronger doctrinal wording, he addresses soteriological and eschatological issues when he declares that one should rely on God alone and not on one’s own works (CS 30), or when he speaks about

22 Following Luther’s stipulations in his *Small Catechism*, Zeller says that one should recite the Lord’s prayer after Ps 145:15-16 (CS 28). Thus, the Lord’s prayer can be seen as an integral part of the prayer before meals. In addition to this instruction, Zeller links the two texts performatively when writing about them. In his commentary on Ps 145:15-16, he alludes to the Lord’s Prayer (CS 30) and vice versa, in his explanation of the petition for daily bread in the Lord’s prayer, he alludes to Ps 145:15 (Zeller, *Catechistische Unterweisung* 233).

the hope of eating one's bread in eternal joy (CS 31). His critical stance towards human works and the expression "eternal joy" clearly refer to doctrinal concepts such as the justification by faith alone and the hope for eternal life. At the same time, these formulations avoid theological jargon so they can be more readily understood. Thus, Zeller's commentary is deeply theologically grounded and broadly accessible at the same time.

Sacralization and Sanctification in "The Eyes of All" and in the *Christian Sermons*

The hymn "The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord" and the catechetical instruction *Christian Sermons* are examples of how Psalm 145:15-16 was interpreted in the context of saying grace in the seventeenth century. The analysis of these examples shows how their different genres are linked to different forms of bodily engagement with the text. Both sources interpret the verses in relation to everyday life and doctrine, justifying their interpretations by reference to different authorities. At the same time, and in a performative way, they put readers or singers in a relationship with God. These ways of employing Ps 145:15-16 can be described as contributing to their sacralization. The notion of sacralization comes from the field of Religious Studies and describes processes by which something that was previously religiously insignificant is treated as sacred. In the following, I elaborate on the definition of sacralization provided by Magnus Schlette and Volkhard Krech and examine how these aspects can be observed in the concrete context of using Ps 145:15-16 at the table. In a second step, I offer a theological re-reading of the constellation, pointing to some discrepancies from an emic, insider's point of view.

In the *Handbuch Religionssoziologie (Handbook of Sociology of Religion)*, Schlette and Krech define "sacralization" in relation with and in contrast to the notion of "secularization" (437). For Schlette and Krech, the sacred ("das Heilige") is a phenomenon of ambivalence ("Ambivalenzphänomen") that oscillates between making the transcendent immanent and the immanent transcendent. Considering that, from a religious point of view, things other than God are sacred only when they are related to God and come from Him, the sacred is situated on the threshold of immanence and transcendence, covering and uniting the distinction between the two spheres (439). Identifications of the sacred owe their existence to processes

of sacralization. In these processes, the members of a particular religious community sacralize something that was previously religiously insignificant by collectively addressing it as sacred, interpreting it as a form of the presence of transcendence and ultimately accepting it as a reason for certain forms of behaviour and action (441).

This definition of “sacralization” focuses on human collective practices. It provides a concept for better understanding how texts and practices are used to mediate and locate the sacred. To show how this concept plays out in a concrete context, I summarize key points from my earlier analysis of the hymn “The Eyes of All” and the *Christian Sermons*, focusing on their contexts, genres and the kinds of embodied engagement they prompt. Using the Bible and widely accepted prayers as a starting point, I argue that these multidimensional bodily usages further emphasize the significance of Ps 145:15-16. Here, processes of sacralization lead to a distinction within the canon and occasionally even to a punctual modification of the text. While this chapter focuses on the use of Psalm 145:15-16 for saying grace in two seventeenth-century Lutheran traditions, the verses feature in Jewish and Christian table practices more generally. All of them apply biblical texts to everyday eating, which means that the verses are interpreted in a practical context rather than in their textual framework or liturgical use. The verses are taken out of the scriptural and liturgical context that lends them authority. At the same time, they are sacralized as an independent unit that stands out from the rest of the psalms, giving the verses particular prominence in the context of food and eating.

As we have seen, within the Lutheran tradition, the prominence of these verses stems from Luther’s instruction in his *Small Catechism*. Luther writes that the paterfamilias should teach children and servants to use them to say grace, thus reinforcing their importance through daily bodily practice. It is the plurality of bodily uses that contributes to sacralization here. While the verses can be prayed simply by saying them, it is also possible to sing the hymn “The Eyes of All Wait upon You, Lord.” For Lutheran Christians, singing is one of the main religious practices. The hymn therefore places the singers in a long tradition and invites them to express their faith in an embodied way. In the case of “The Eyes of All,” we have a hymn that is a piece of choir music; it requires practice and communal singing. Instead of a clear melody, the hymn uses recitative tone repetitions and familiar cadences, evoking a “church feeling” and suggesting a certain internal and

external posture when singing. The music encourages a movement that follows the waiting eyes, placing oneself among them, looking to God, to the food that comes from His hand and, finally, to the experience of pleasure. The symmetrical structure of the hymn allows for an all-encompassing perspective while the employment of different keys and smaller movements invites the singers to relate more intimately to the Lord's "You." Thus, the singing of the hymn guides both external and internal movement, allowing the singers to identify with "the eyes of all" that speak in the psalm verses.

This experiential relationship is further supported by the catechetical interpretation of the verses. Structured in question and answer, the *Christian Sermons* addresses people directly, requesting them to put the words into practice. It combines prescriptive and descriptive passages, offering interpretation, instruction and exhortation. Zeller accompanies his theological reflections with detailed instructions on how to pray, including remarks on the appropriate attitude, the posture of the body, the articulation of the words and the attention paid to God. In addition to religious education at home, catechetical literature – mainly Luther's *Small Catechism* but also commentaries such as Zeller's *Christian Sermons* – was used in churches and in schools for centuries: students learned it by heart and used it as a primer for reading and writing (Weismann, *Katechismen* 1: 331). In terms of bodily practice, this means that the verses were heard, said, sung, memorized, studied, read and written. The verses appeared time and again in different contexts, so that practitioners knew and recognized them better than other biblical passages. Here, embodied religious practice is intrinsically linked with biblical texts, for example, when Zeller explains the Lord's Prayer, he uses the words of Ps 145:15 and does not need to elaborate on the situation at the table; the hint suffices. The same holds true for the reception of the verses in the nineteenth-century hymn for Thanksgiving mentioned above: when people sing this hymn annually at harvest time, they immediately recognize the reference to the verses for saying grace and thus the connection to everyday meals. In addition to this example of reception within the genre of hymns, Ps 145:15-16 has also been formative across genres. We have seen, for instance, how the hymnal description of God's mild hand affected the rendering of the biblical text in the *Small Catechism*.

In these examples, the recurrent use of Ps 145:15-16 through different bodily means and in different contexts can be described as a form of sacralization. In this case, sacralizing practices further increase the importance of

an already acknowledged text, to the extent that a widely accepted interpretation leads to a minor modification of the text as it is known and “inscribed” in the lives and bodies of the practitioners. However, a close contextual analysis also reveals that, from a theological point of view, sacralization comes only from God and not from human action or attribution. In the following, I highlight how the texts themselves refer to sacralization or sacredness, arguing that religious experience is but a passive realization and understanding of God’s preceding and sanctifying action.

First, from an emic perspective, the intentional purpose of the repeated engagement with Ps 145:15-16 is not to treat these passages differently or to sacralize a text. Rather, the verses function as a tool for believers to communicate with God within the context of a particular tradition. Not only do they speak *of* God and His provision; they also invite readers and singers to *communicate with* God. This communication is threefold: the singers begin their prayer by placing *themselves* in relation to *all other creatures* and to *the Lord*. They communicate directly and intimately with God, addressing Him as “You.” The prolonged words in the hymn focus on God, on the food He provides and how He provides it, thus emphasizing the relationship with God as foundational for the relationship with everything else, be it the food, other creatures or oneself. Similarly, in the *Christian Sermons*, Zeller contrasts those who wait upon the Lord with those who neither look towards Him nor trust Him. They eat their bread in sin and with a guilty conscience, and when they are judged, he warns, they will not be able to answer to God for the food they have received. Thus, the right ordering of their relationship to food is seen as decisive not only for their well-being in this world but also for their eternal fate.

Second, this well-being based on appropriate relationships has a sanctifying dimension. Eating becomes a designated place of worship, as believers turn to God and ask for His blessing. But this sanctification comes strictly from God, placing believers in a totally receptive position. Zeller exhorts the readers of the *Christian Sermons* to rely on God as their one and only provider, to pray to Him, to honour and sanctify His name and to hope to partake of the eternal table in God’s kingdom. Zeller also points to God’s presence at the table already now, to which believers should respond with actions that witness to their fear of God. While expecting prayer and trust in God as a faithful response, *Christian Sermons* emphasizes that God feeds all creatures out of His grace and mercy, without regard to their deeds,

reflecting a Lutheran emphasis on justification and salvation by faith alone. Unlike an etic, outsider's view on human collective practices and processes of sacralization, here God is the one who provides and sanctifies. Human action is limited to receiving and responding appropriately, which in turn is only possible in faith.

These observations from within the text and based on theological reflections lead to the question of whether an etic perspective on human action and sacralization on the one hand and an emic perspective on God's sanctification on the other hand can be reconciled at all. Here, I find Christoph Schwöbel's reflections on divine revelation helpful. According to Schwöbel, revelation is a "success word," for revelation can only be recognized retrospectively. In a Christian understanding, God reveals Godself and makes people realize that all their experiences and actions are passively grounded in God's action and revelation. Faith then describes the perspective in which divine revelation – with God as its sole author – has had an effect on believers, fundamentally shaping their understanding of their life situation (Schwöbel 196-202). What at first appears to be human activity then turns out to be possible only thanks to God's previous action. God's providing and sanctifying action can only be discerned from the perspective of faith. Thus, the etic perception of sacralization coming from collective human action and the emic perception of God as the one who sanctifies while believers merely respond in faith are simply this: two different perspectives, each likely to regard the other to be a misinterpretation of what is at work. Nevertheless, both have their value in highlighting different aspects and, ideally, in contributing to a better understanding of different positionalities and perspectives in research.

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Early Modern English Psalm Translations and Processes of De/Sacralization¹

MATTHIAS BAUER, CAPUCINE BLANC, JULIA SCHATZ, AND ANGELIKA ZIRKER

1. Introduction

The Old Testament Psalter, consisting of 150 “short lyrics” (Zim ix), is a group of texts that has never gone out of fashion and that continues to inspire writers in general and poets in particular.² The Early Modern period (i.e. the time from the translation of the Psalms by Miles Coverdale into the vernacular for the English Bible of Henry VIII, well into the eighteenth century) was a particularly productive one when it comes to re-writing and translating the Psalms as well as textually modifying and rendering them into poetic versions.³ Given that King David, the presumed author of the Psalms, was considered to have been inspired by God, these changes and new versions raise the question whether they could be regarded as acts of desacralization – or whether these transformations, in fact, tend to even strengthen the sacred quality of the Psalms by their choice of new words and different forms, also aiming at different contexts of publication.

In order to address this issue of the de/sacralization of the Psalter through poetic modifications, we have looked at a corpus of ten Psalms and their

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- 1 This chapter results from work in project P2 “Figurations of Inspiration, Authorisation, and Auratisation in English Literature,” funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation) within Research Unit 2828 “De/Sacralization of Texts” (Project Number 39844141).
 - 2 Fairly recent examples include Robert Alter’s *The Book of Psalms* (2007) as well as Malcolm Guite’s poetry collection *David’s Crown: Sounding the Psalms* (2021); Donald Davie’s anthology *The Psalms in English* provides an overview of Psalm renderings through the ages.
 - 3 See also Hamlin: “The Renaissance was a cultural movement founded on the enterprise of translation [...]. [It] involved the translation of not one but two ancient cultures, two ancient literatures, the classica and the biblical. [...] The Protestant Reformation sanctioned and even demanded vernacular translations of the Bible, but no biblical book was translated more often or more widely in the subsequent two centuries than the Psalms” (*Psalm Culture* 1).

poetic renderings during the Early Modern period.⁴ The present chapter focuses on five of these Psalms and on some of the versions included in the survey. Our wider analysis ranges from the translation by Miles Coverdale (1535), who gained his doctorate at our very own University of Tübingen, followed by Robert Crowley, a stationer, printer and clergyman who fled England because of his Protestant leanings and returned under the reign of Edward VI; in 1549, he published the first complete metrical psalter, “which was also the first to include harmonized music.”⁵ In 1556, William Whittingham published 51 metrical Psalms, “whereof .37. [sic] were made by Thomas Sterneholde: and the rest by others. Conferred with the hebrewe, and in certeyn places corrected as the text, and the sens of the Prophete required” (Zim 229-30); in 1562, the first complete edition of the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter was published, and it went through numerous editions until it was replaced in 1698 by the *New Version of the Psalms of David* (by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady).⁶ The translator Arthur Golding, most famous today for his English version of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, finished his own Psalm translation in 1571 (which he included in his translation of Calvin’s *Commentaries*). At the end of the sixteenth century, in 1599, Mary Sidney completed the translation of the Psalms begun by her brother (Philip had passed away in 1586): it is based on a variety of Psalm renderings and

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- 4 Zim lists English Psalm Versions that were printed between 1530 and 1601 (“excluding Bibles and Primers”) in the appendix to her study. Our text selection is not at all comprehensive but rather serves to point towards a few tendencies in the context of de/sacralization. – The following chapter by Gardner, Morent, and Zirker can be read as a continuation of this analysis with a focus, however, on musical renderings.
 - 5 See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Crowley_\(printer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Crowley_(printer)), the Wikipedia entry on Robert Crowley. For Crowley’s biography, see Minton’s entry in *The Encyclopedia of English Renaissance Literature*. Crowley’s printing and publishing career is outlined in Blayney and Martin. Crowley used the Latin version of Leo Juda (d. 1542) for his translation; as Zim points out, he noted in his epistle: “God hath reveyled [to Juda] [...] those things that were unknowne to them that before hym translated the Psalter out of the Ebrue” (Zim 223).
 - 6 “At the end of the century came *A New Version of the Psalms of David, Fitted to the Tunes used in Churches*, by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady. It reflected the new plainness of the English language encouraged by the philosophers (i.e. scientists) of the Royal Society, and became a widely accepted successor to *The Whole Book of Psalms*, which thereafter became known as the ‘Old Version’” (Watson 93); see also Hadden.

translations that also include the Marot and Bèze French Psalter of 1562.⁷ We furthermore included the Authorized Version (1611) in our comparison, as well as the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640) and the translations by Isaac Watts (1719), Charles Wesley (1743), Thomas Cradock (1756), and Thomas Prince (1758). In this chapter, we will mostly concentrate on Coverdale, Crowley, and the Sidneys.⁸

The corpus under consideration in our analysis of the psalms includes four laments (Ps 6, 12, 51, 56), three hymns (Ps 8, 136, 150), two thanksgivings (Ps 23 and 30) and one imprecatory psalm (Ps 137). Here, we will focus on passages from Ps 6, 30, 51, 77, and 150. The Sidney Psalter has been a trigger for our comparison as their rendering is particularly idiosyncratic (see Niefer 15) and was expressly considered to be an example of reworking the sacred. It was none other than John Donne who attested to the version of the Psalms by Philip and Mary Sidney that just as God's "blessed Spirit fell upon / These Psalms' first author in a cloven tongue" (ll. 8-9), God "cleft that Spirit, to perform / That work again, and shed it here upon / Two [...]" (ll. 12-14).⁹ To Donne, the evidence of such an inspiration lies in the musicality of the reworking by the Sidneys. They are "The organ, where thou art the harmony" (l. 16); in other words, God, the *musica universalis*, ensures that the sounding music of these Psalms "hath all" (l. 29).¹⁰ In this way, a sacralization of the human effort takes place, as "forms of joy and art do re-reveal" (l. 34) God's word to us. *Re-revelation* is the ultimate term of praise that reworkings of the sacred may earn.

The Sidneys provided us with categories of analysis as we went through examples that struck us with features sensitive to processes of de/sacralization. In Psalm 8, for instance, Coverdale has "What is man, that thou art

7 "In English, [the Sidneys] used the prose versions of the Book of Common Prayer (from Coverdale's 1539 Great Bible translation) and the Geneva Bible. In French, the artful verse translations of Marot and Beza in *Les CL. Pseaumes de David, mis en rime Française* (1562) were an important source. In addition, they consulted the Psalms commentaries of Calvin and Beza, available in English translation [...] The extensive marginal notes in the Geneva Bible provided another source of scholarly commentary" (Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon xviii).

8 Most Psalter collections are available on *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*; the database can be accessed here: <https://textcreationpartnership.org/tcp-texts/eebo-tcp-early-english-books-online/>.

9 Donne 580-83, quoted in Hamlin et al.'s edition of *The Sidney Psalter* (3-4).

10 It thus forms the "third choir" (l. 27) besides heaven and the spheres (l. 23), expressive of the tuning of "God and man" (l. 30) and even heard by the angels (l. 28).

myndfull of him?" (8:4), which, in Sternhold and Hopkins, Whittingham, and Sidney is expressed more subjectively through the addition of a personal pronoun and a verb: "What thing is man [...] think I" in Sternhold and Hopkins (v. 4) as well as Sidney (l. 13), and "(say I)" in Whittingham's prose version for the Geneva Bible (v. 4). Such a change is at least potentially relevant to the sacred status of the text. In our wider project, the categories identified in order to find patterns of strategies of de/sacralization include features of personalization, such as the introduction/addition of personal pronouns (in comparison to Coverdale), expressions of inwardness, metaphors, and syntactic changes like the addition of modals, questions, and imperatives.¹¹ The guiding questions underlying our categorization of text passages from the individual psalms were, firstly: what do the differences do, i.e. what do they say about God, the poet, and their relationship? And, secondly, what do these changes say about the sacred, i.e. do those changes contribute to sacralizing or desacralizing the Psalm?

In pursuit of these guiding questions, we continue the work done by Janina Niefer's *Inspiration and Utmost Art: The Poetics of Early Modern English Psalm Translations* (2018), who uses early modern English translations of the Psalms to highlight reflections on the possibility of divinely inspired poetic production. Niefer has shown how early modern authors substantiate their claim to a translation that is adequate to the assumedly divinely inspired texts by their own strategies of authorization. Within this framework, the assumption of inspiration is extended to poetry and the art of language, but this process does not appear as desacralization; rather, poetic creativity itself, conveyed through personal expression as much as stylistic devices and perfect form ("number, measure, order, proportion," Sidney, *Apology* 101) is to be seen as divinely effected and authorized.¹² The

11 All data were collected in an Excel-sheet that includes information relating to the categories identified in our analysis (see above); it also includes colour highlighting for overlaps (green), strong similarities (yellow), and striking divergences (red). See <https://zenodo.org/records/14046233>.

12 A key example is George Wither's *A Preparation to the Psalter* (1619); see Niefer 74-75: "Wither's claim [...] is remarkable because with it he explicitly establishes a relation between inspiration and the formal perfection of the psalter. He suggests that the form of the psalms is determined by the Holy Ghost, and that the text thus has to be perfect. [...] [I]t seems as if Wither does not grant the human author any part in the creative process during which the form of the text is established, since he explicitly assigns this function to the Holy Ghost." In terms of the different modes of reworking

iconic relation of form and content (i.e. form miming meaning), for example, may indicate such a claim. The main defense against the allegation of idolatry through the attempt at making poetry sacred¹³ was the assumed poetic nature of the Hebrew Psalter itself, an assumption proven to be correct by Robert Lowth in the eighteenth century (as Niefer has shown), and hence equivalent forms had to be found in order to aptly re-create the expression as well as the effect of the biblical text, even if this meant a deviation from the literal sense of the source.

In order to compare and evaluate the textual features that may contribute to effects of de/sacralization in Psalm renderings from the Early Modern period, we have noticed several interconnected tendencies in the poetical versions that can be found in a number of texts. In agreement with the categories mentioned, the versions can be distinguished by the degree to which they seek personalization and individual expression, the addition of poetic metaphors, and formal transformations such as metrical reworkings and establishing iconicity. Since processes of de/sacralization can never be described in an absolute manner, we identify a number of features and functions, relative to which de/sacralization takes place. In other words, we consider the effect of a particular choice of expression (or form) with regard to the sacredness of the text. A point of orientation is offered by the sacredness ascribed (in early modern England) to the most authoritative Psalter version, the *Coverdale Psalter*, which remained the long-time standard through its inclusion in the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) from 1549 onwards.¹⁴ Sacralization denotes processes by which something is endowed with, and perceived as having, unquestionable validity and authority. What is held sacred

the sacred described in the the introduction to this volume, emphasis on formal perfection belongs to the first mode, while the recognition of its divine origin belongs to the second.

- 13 Such a point was made in the context of American Puritanism; see Stievermann's chapter in this volume. It should be noted that our focus is on the textual strategies underlying poetic renderings of the Psalter from the early modern period; we are not concerned with their reception.
- 14 Miles Coverdale's English translations of the Psalter will be used as a point of reference for the comparative purposes of this paper. Its authoritative status derives from the fact that he was the first to "publish[...] in 1535 a complete edition of the Bible in English" (Devries 154); his Psalter versions were also "included in the *Great Bible* and published in the *Book of Common Prayer*" (Niefer 40). Thus, it likely was the best-known version of the Psalter for contemporaries of the Early Modern period. In this chapter, citations of the Coverdale Psalter will be from the 1539 *Great Bible*.

is considered to be of the highest value. This value may relate to the perception and experience of the divine as well as to verbal expressions of such a perception. In this way, texts may be sacralized as well as the matter that they are about. The loss of this quality, i.e. processes of desacralization, may equally apply to both.

One should not jump to the conclusion, however, that the choice of expressions belonging to spheres not traditionally associated with biblical texts automatically has a desacralizing effect. The correlation of secular contexts with desacralization and devotional contexts with sacralization is far too simple. Rather, the two processes take place simultaneously in both spheres (i.e. the secular and the devotional) and are thus at work within the complex double function of Psalter variations: they serve as devotional texts as well as examples of a poetic genre. From its original Hebrew version onwards, the Psalter has combined God-talk with poetic form; it is the archetype of devotional poetry. Especially since the Early Modern period, vernacular versions have participated in the appreciation of poetry for its own sake; texts may be sacralized for their poetic rather than devotional quality, as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the history of its reception have shown.¹⁵ Still, such a distinction between devotional and poetic sacralization is also a simplification, since the two processes may depend upon each other (as the shared idea of perfection indicates) and de/sacralization may furthermore depend on other factors.

What we notice when considering the different English versions of the Psalter from Coverdale onwards is primarily a variation as to the degree of individual (or personal) expression.¹⁶ While such personal relevance is part

15 Helen Gardner describes Milton's extraordinary style, which sets his poetry apart from other work of his period: "Milton's epic style is highly artificial, [...] his syntax is very far from the syntax of common speech [...]. To put it crudely, it is impossible to read *Paradise Lost* aloud without going far beyond the range of one's normal mode of speech" (1). The appreciation and sacralization of Milton's poetic language is visible, for example, in Andrew Marvell's dedicatory poem to the second edition of *Paradise Lost*. He asks: "Where couldst thou Words of such a compass find? / Whence furnish such a vast expense of Mind? / Just Heav'n Thee, like Tiresias, to requite, / Rewards with Prophesie thy loss of Sight" (Marvell 139, original emphases). For an extensive overview of the reception of Milton's work, see Leonard's *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970*.

16 See also Zim, who notes in relation to the Psalms: "Psalms are vehicles for the expression of human feeling – excitement, anger, fear, doubt, tenderness – as well as earnest personal prayer and jubilant adoration" (ix).

and parcel of the biblical Psalter, with David as the originator of the Psalms who voices his own feelings, fears, despair, and hopes, the poetic subject is even more foregrounded in at least a number of the Psalms discussed here. This may become manifest in the smaller or greater emphasis on the person of the speaker, the use of individualized language (such as the addition of specific metaphors), and the choice of individualized vs. canonical poetic form. The textual strategy of making the Psalms more personal may result in updating the text to facilitate the identification with the speaker and his¹⁷ experience of the sacred.¹⁸ The emphasis on the individual poetic subject, existing in the Psalter from the start, leans on means of expression familiar from secular poetry. In a similar vein, individual poetic metaphors are used for such personal updates of the psalms; their addition to the biblical text may be considered an act of desacralization on the one hand and of sacralization on the other. The display of poetic language detracts from the sacredness of the canonical text, while at the same time the individual, inventive use of language may enhance the *energeia* of the text and both heighten its poetic value and endow the sacred matter with persuasive force. Similarly, the choice of poetic form may either confirm the canonical status of the Psalter or contribute to creating unique texts which may be praised for their artistry, such as the perfectly iconic relationship of form and content. We are, accordingly, interested, as a first step, in what the most generally accepted English version of the biblical text has in common with poetic renderings during the early modern period, and how versions differ from one another; and we would, in a second step, like to learn more about patterns and possible inferences from the data, i.e. the poetry under consideration here.

For instance, Psalm 6, a desperate plea for God's mercy for David who is in profound distress, presents a psalmist who acknowledges his sins and recognizes his deficiency. While most translations and renderings of the psalm follow Coverdale's wording of the first verse, in which the presence of the speaker is just marked by a personal pronoun: "O Lorde, rebuke me

17 We are using male personal pronouns to indicate David as the assumed persona of the speaker in the versions discussed, even though, of course, the authors of the Psalm translations are not all male.

18 In this way, the third mode of reworking the sacred, as presented in the Introduction to this volume, is evoked: the didactic and kerygmatic function of the Psalm version is enhanced by the invitation to identify with the speaking subject.

not in thine indignacyon,” Crowley’s version insists on the modesty of the psalmist: “Lorde checke thou not thy pore seruaunt in thine hasty furie” (l. 1). This emphasis on the speaker’s low status is further reinforced by the Sidneys, who metaphorically transform the poetic voice into that of a worm only: “Lord, let not me, a worm, by thee be shent” (l. 1).¹⁹ The implied degradation of the speaker, who is no longer worthy of being human because his fault is so great, conveys contrition and complete helplessness compared to the divine power and wrath. The metaphor of the worm reinforces the gap between God’s greatness and man’s infirmity. The same image can be found in Psalm 22, “But as for me, I am a worme and no man: a very scorne of men and the outcast of the people” (Coverdale, v. 6), where it expresses even more clearly the self-humiliation of the speaker before God. The Sidneys, by reusing the imagery that is already present in other psalms, elaborate and reinforce the personal dimension of the one praying in them. This is done without distorting the Psalter itself but by lending an extant notion more rhetorical force and by using a metaphor to highlight the speaker’s awe and humility; the monosyllables that are exclusively used in the first line of Psalm 6 further foreground the speaker’s vehemence in his plea before God. This version of the psalm is sacralized by the emphasis on the speaker’s experience and its presentation as being powerful and inscribed in the body and mind of the believer. Accordingly, the foregrounding of the speaker and his relationship with the divine, through added poetic metaphors that further describe him, contributes to the sacralization of the psalm rendering.

19 This image of the worm is taken up later by Watts (1719), who amplifies it still further: “In Anger, lord, rebuke me not, / Withdraw the dreadful Storm; / Nor let thy Fury grow so hot / Against a feeble Worm” (stanza 1).

2. Personalization and Individual Expression

When it comes to sacralizing processes within the poetic translations of the Psalms, we see a significant transformation in the personal dimension of the prayers, as the dynamic of communication between the speaker and God changes. In what follows, we will exemplify this dynamic with the help of three Psalm renderings, Psalms 150, 30, and 51. We have chosen to focus on these Psalms as the rewording (or: reworking) in poetic versions of each of them changes the position of the speaker in his relation to God. In each case, the translation by Miles Coverdale for the English Bible will serve as the point of comparison: we find that Coverdale, in general, abstains from using personal pronouns whenever these are not to be found in the main sources for his rendering, the Vulgate, Luther's Bible translation, and the Zürich Bible.²⁰ In more poetic renderings, by contrast, personal pronouns are amplified – and this may bring about an altogether inward turn, as the example of Psalm 51 from the Sidney Psalter will show. Personalization, accordingly, will be introduced by subtle grammatical variations and may have very different effects.

Coverdale's rendering of Psalm 150 begins as follows: "O Prayse God in hys holynes, prayse hym in the firmament of his power" (v. 1).²¹ The imperative (or: jussive form) urges the general (and unspecified) audience to worship God. In Coverdale and the majority of the versions in our corpus, it is not marked as the command of an individual speaker but appears as a general resolution. By contrast, Robert Crowley (1549), in his rendering of Psalm 150, introduces the first person singular and thus an individual speaker: "Praise him, I say, with timbrel" (l. 7). This foregrounding of the speaker is somewhat surprising in that Psalm 150 serves as a triumphant choric conclusion to the Book of Psalms, exhorting praise to God and expressing adoration for the divine through music and various instruments. While the psalm expresses a universal call to praise that encompasses both celestial and earthly realms, the speaker highlights his position as a commanding and authoritative voice. Uncommon as such a change in tone and the attribution of the speech act to an individual person may be in Psalm

20 See, for an extensive study of Coverdale's use of sources, Hine's "Modeled on Zürich: A Fresh Study of Miles Coverdale's 1535 Bible."

21 Luther, for example, has: "Halleluja! Lobet den HERRN in seinem Heiligtum; lobet ihn in der Feste seiner Macht!"

150, it is not without precedence. This becomes evident when we turn to the French rendering of the Psalter by Marot-Bèze: “*Soit, dis-je, tout hautement*” (l. 3). In this case, the speaker insists on his voice being the one commanding humankind to praise God’s greatness. Both Crowley’s and Marot-Bèze’s versions are metrical, but it is hardly enough to note that “I say” and “dis-je” were simply introduced to fill up the number of feet. The poetical nature of these metrical versions agrees with the introduction of a first-person speaker familiar from lyrical poetry, and the effect is a twofold one: on the one hand, the resolution becomes individual and personal, and on the other, the speaker is no longer just part of a larger community but in a position to issue pleas and commands.

The focus of Psalm 30, by contrast, is on the transformative power of God’s intervention: it celebrates His mercy. In this case, even Coverdale uses the first-person singular pronoun:

I wyll magnifie the, O Lord, for thou hast set me vp, and not made my
foes to triumphe ouer me.
2 O Lord my God, I cried vnto the, and thou hast healed me.
3 Thou Lord hast brought my soule out of hell: thou hast kepte my life,
from them that go downe to the pytte.
4 Singe prayses vnto the Lord O ye saintes of his and geue thanks
vnto him for a remembrance of his holynesse.

The speaker opens his invocation of the Lord with a reference to himself: “I wyll magnifie the”; at the same time, he sets himself in a relation with God: “for thou hast set me vp.” The following lines continue this dynamic: the speaker reflects on how “I cried vnto the, and thou hast healed me.” The connection with and dependence on the Lord is here emphasized through the parallel structure. Robert Crowley in his poetic rendering again goes much further than that:

I Wyl prayse the (O Lorde) because thou haste me broke and worne:
But haste not suffered my foes, for to laugh me to scorne.
O Lorde my God, in my sycknes I haue cryed to the:
I haue called on the, I saye, and thou haste healed me.

Crowley has his speaker open the Psalm with a seeming paradox: the speaker will praise the Lord because he has “broke and worne” him.²² The particular bond that has thus been created between speaker and God is emphasized through the following occurrences of the “I” which serve to highlight his individuality but also the effect that God’s actions have had on him: the breaking and wearing (l. 1) is followed by the healing (l. 4). While Crowley also uses a parallelism, his is different from Coverdale’s in that he bases the parallel structure on the speaker’s actions: “I haue cryed to the: / I haue called on the.” The action of speaking is then stressed through the following “I saye” (repeated in lines 22 and 26) and concluded with the healing through the Lord (l. 4, 22, 26).

The emphasis on the individual voice in the Psalm is expressive of a conversation between God and the speaker; indeed, the speaker may even be conceived of as a mediator between humankind and God and thus obtains a special position. Through this personal and individualized relationship between speaker and God, the communicative exchange is sacralized; and as the introduction of the first-person pronoun, as we have seen, allows for the identification of every speaker of the Psalms with the “I” in the text, it is possible for each individual to enter into this sacred colloquy. Whereas, in Psalm 150, either a community speaks or is addressed by an individual speaker, Psalm 30 shows how the individual speaker’s action may be imitatively performed by each praying believer.

Poetic renderings of the Psalms tend towards reinforcing and emulating the personal relationship between speaker and God. Mary Sidney’s version of Psalm 51 is a case in point²³: it is a heartfelt plea for God’s mercy and forgiveness, and it reflects the profound repentance, humility, and dependence of the speaker on God’s grace. The very personal and intimate nature of the request for forgiveness for one’s own sins is underlined by the

22 John Donne would later refer to a similar seeming paradox in “At the Round Earths Imagined Corners” (535-36); see, e.g., Bauer and Beck. Cowley’s version ties in with the fourth mode of reworking the sacred indicated in the Introduction to this volume, the paradoxical conception of the perfection of imperfection.

23 It is generally assumed that Mary Sidney is behind all psalms beyond Ps 43: “By the time of his death, Philip had completed translations of Psalms 1-43. [...] Mary Philip, in essence her brother’s literary executor supervising the posthumous, authorized (by her) publication of his works, continued the Psalter project, translating the remaining 107 Psalms and revising many of Philip’s” (Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon xiv).

changes and additions made by Sidney, and one line is particularly striking in this regard. While Miles Coverdale has “thou shalt wash me, and I shalbe whiter then snowe” for verse 7, Sidney’s rendering reads: “And that shall cleanse the leproy of my mind” (l. 24).²⁴ The change from “washe me” to “cleanse [...] my mind” introduces a turn from an outward action of cleaning to an inward one, with the mind becoming a metonymy of the speaker as a whole but in particular of his inner being.²⁵ What is to be purged is the sinful infection of his thoughts rather than the speaker’s outer appearance. Just as the heart is the true source of the poet’s words,²⁶ the inner self is the place that this poet’s version of the psalm marks as the true aim of God’s attention. This turn to the inward state of the speaker also specifies the role of God: while an outward cleaning is generally possible, the purification of the soul and access to it is only possible for God.

3. Poetic Metaphors

With this inward turn, a literal washing is moreover transformed into a metaphorical cleansing. The enrichment of the biblical text with metaphors is part of the auratization of the poetic renderings of the Psalms and, accordingly, their sacralization.²⁷ The fact that the introduction of poetic metaphors does not necessarily desacralize a text may appear paradoxical to begin with; the particular linguistic form as well as the creation of complex typologies through metaphors, however, does indeed enhance the sacredness of these renderings.

We have seen above how in Psalm 51 Mary Sidney introduces the metaphor of the “leproy of the mind” (l. 24). Psalm 51, superscribed with the Latin title *Miserere mei* in the BCP, is about King Daniel’s sin with Bathsheba

24 The metaphor of leprosy will be discussed further in the third part of this chapter.

25 A similar analogy can be found in the final couplet of Donne’s Holy Sonnet “Oh my black Soul”; see Zirker 126.

26 As Mary Sidney’s brother put it in the first sonnet of *Astrophel and Stella*, “looke in thy heart, and write” (Sidney, *The Poems* 165).

27 “If we focus on language and form, we see that sacralization is paradoxically enhanced by stressing a quality of the poems that is not primarily determined by their religious content. We call this the aura of an utterance, especially since it includes aspects of form that inspire awe and veneration” (Bauer and Zirker, forthcoming).

and his subsequent repentance in 2 Samuel 11-12²⁸; because of this background, any reference to this penitential psalm would automatically have evoked the biblical message of sin, atonement, and redemption. To understand the extent of Mary Sidney's alterations, we will refer once more to Coverdale's translation of verse 7:

Thou shalt poure me with Isope, and I shal be cleane:
thou shalt wash me, and I shallbe whiter then snowe. (Ps. 51:7)

The psalmist addresses God, wishing for spiritual renewal through a cleansing process that remedies his sin, reinforced by the reference to the purifying function of hyssop in the Pentateuch (cf. Lev. 14:1-7). Mary Sidney's version contains the same key notions, rendered into iambic pentameter:

Then as thyself to lepers hast assigned,
With hyssop, Lord, thy hyssop, purge me so:
And that shall cleanse the leproy of my mind. (ll. 22-24)

Here, too, God's ability to cleanse the speaker is being foregrounded; what is more, the poetic rendering takes up the keywords from the biblical psalm version in Coverdale's translation ("purge," "cleane" / "cleanse," and the reference to the "hyssop" stalk). While these similarities make the source text recognizable and authorize the poetic rendering, Sidney moreover introduces a metaphor that is unique among the early modern renderings of Psalm 51: "as thyself to lepers hast assigned" (22), God "shall cleanse the leproy of [the speaker's] mind" (24).²⁹ Notably, leprosy is in this context not

28 Psalm 51, one of the penitential psalms, was particularly popular during the Early Modern period; see Gardner/Morent/Zirker in this volume. According to the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, it was read at commination, "[d]enouncing of Gods anger and judgements against sinners, With certain prayers to be used on the first day of Lent, and at other times, as the Ordinary shall appoint" (Cummings 459); it was "recited constantly across Europe. Among many other occasions, it accompanied processes of penance, consecrations, death, and burial" (Barbezat 499).

29 The variation does not occur in the contemporary biblical versions, i.e. the *Vulgate*, the *Coverdale Bible* and the *Great Bible*, nor in any poetic renderings that preceded the Sidney version, including Crowley's *Psalter of David* (1549), Whittingham's *One and Fiftie Psalmes* (1556), Sternhold and Hopkins's *Whole Book of Psalmes* (1562), Marot and Bèze's *Pseaumes de David* (1562), and Golding's *Psalmes of David and*

conceived of as a physical ailment but denotes an inner disease; it becomes a “physical representation of a diseased and sinful soul” (Houston 30).³⁰ The metaphor accordingly serves to show the gravity of the speaker’s sin.

What is more, the leprosy metaphor enhances a typological reading as it links the Old Testament and the New. In Leviticus 14:6-7, the link between hyssop and leprosy can be found: “he shall take the [...] ysope [...] and sprynkle vpon hym (that must be clensed of hys leprosy) seuen tymes” (Coverdale).³¹ While God is the agent who grants the remission of sin, Sidney’s phrasing “as thyself to lepers hast assigned” (l. 22) calls to mind Christ’s service to the sick, and in particular His healing of the leper in the New Testament, i.e. in Matthew 8:2: “And beholde, ther came a leper, [...] sayinge: Master, yf thou wylt, thou canst make me cleane” (Coverdale). In this instance, Christ’s physical healing equally symbolizes the spiritual renewal of the believer.³² Sidney changes the addressee of the Psalm from the Lord of the Old Testament to Jesus Christ. In this way, the Psalter is re-sacralized with the help of poetic metaphor.

By deepening the links between the Old and New Testament, Mary Sidney makes the abstract notion of the cleansing from sin more relevant for the reader of the Psalm, “thereby bringing his own life close to the province of typology” (Lewalski 132; see also Dickson). The reader’s own sinfulness becomes the basis for his or her identification with both the leper and the

Others (1571). The metaphor reoccurs in Isaac Watts’s *Psalms of David* in 1719: he writes “No outward forms can make me clean; / The Leprosy lies deep within” (l. 4); it is likely that he drew on the Sidney Psalter for inspiration.

- 30 While the metaphor may be unusual, the transferral from an outward physical ailment to an inner condition can be explained in the wider historical context. As Houston explains: “By the year 1400, leprosy had all but disappeared in England: by the middle of the 15th century, it had become more a disease of myth than something confronted by English people on a regular basis. [...] As the decades passed, leprosy began to be used to symbolize a just punishment for specific sins or wrongdoings in the characters afflicted” (40).
- 31 The reference to the leper can be found as early as in Leviticus 14:1: “this is the law of leper in the daye of his clensynge.”
- 32 The double reference to the Old and New Testament passages thus created is typical of the “Reformation emphasis upon the application of all scripture to the self [...] Christians were invited to perceive the events and personages of the Old and New Testament salvation history not merely as exemplary to them but as actually recapitulated in their lives” (Lewalski 131).

sinning King David, which may result in a reflection of his or her own need for atonement – but also the reassurance of salvation.

The typological scope of the Sidney version is further expanded through the amplification “[w]ith hyssop, Lord, *thy* hyssop purge me so” (23, emphasis added), while Coverdale merely has “pouurge me with Isope” (51:7). Not only is the hyssop emphasized in its significance through the repetition, but it is also marked as the Lord’s property through the possessive pronoun, which allows for another typological link, namely to John 19:29-30:

29 They fylled a sponge with vyneger and wonde it aboute with ysope,
and helde it to his mouth.

30 Now whan Iesus had receaued the vyneger, he sayde: It is fynished,
and bowed his heade, and gaued up the goost.

The purification process described in the Old Testament, i.e. the cleansing from sin with hyssop, is thus transformed into a sign of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross.³³ Again, Jesus Christ becomes the addressee of the speaker’s wish. In Hebrews 9, Paul provides an explanation and even justification for this typological approach when he “remind[s] the Hebrews that the blood Moses sprinkled, using hyssop, over the people, the tabernacle, and the book of the law was a type for the redeeming blood shed by Christ (Hebrews 9:11-20)” (Ball 627). Christ becomes the new hyssop and makes believers righteous before God. This link is emphasized by Mary Sidney’s version of Psalm 51 when she extends the image of the leprous mind to Christ as the redeemer who can absolve the speaker’s contrition and suffering.

The typological references that are introduced to the Psalm by Sidney result in both the authorization of her own rendering as well as its sacralization. She reinforces the biblical message of salvation that can be found in the Old Testament Psalter through linking it with the New Testament promise of deliverance from all sin. The reference to “thy hyssop” points towards Christ as the redeemer and may even evoke *imitatio Christi* through the reminder of Christ’s purgation of all sin at the Cross: after He has received the cleansing hyssop, His work is “fynished” (John 19:30), and redemption is complete. Sidney’s version of Psalm 51 thus forms a characteristically

33 Barbezat quotes Rabanus Maurus, who explains: “Why hyssop? [...] Because hyssop is a humble herb growing on stones. The humility of Christ is signified by this herb, and the fortitude by which our innermost being is purged” (498).

typological “pattern[...] of prefiguration, recapitulation, and fulfillment” (Lewalski 111). It authorizes the New Testament as the ultimate truth that the Old Testament Psalm points to; the Sidney version confirms, through the introduction of the complex poetic metaphor of the “leproy of the mind” (l. 24), the redeeming power of Christ, which sacralizes both the poetic Psalm version and the biblical source texts. It is a moot point if this poetic Christianization of the Psalter leads to the desacralization of the original.³⁴

4. Metrical Reworkings and Iconicity

Psalm 51 can be used as an example of the differences between the prose version of a Psalm and its metrical rendering. For the 1539 Great Bible, Coverdale presented the following version of the Psalm:

Psalm 51: Miserere mei, Deus

1 Have mercy upon me (O God) after thy great goodnes: according vnto the multitude of thy mercyes, do awaye mine offences.

2 Wash me thorowly from my wickednesse, and cense me fro my sinne.

3 For I knowledg my fautes, and my synne is euer before me.

4 Against the onely haue I sinned, and done this euell in thy syght, that thou myghtest be iustified in thy sayinge, and cleare when thou art iudged.

If we compare this version with the poetic rendering by Mary Sidney of Psalm 51, the differences becomes immediately obvious:

O Lord, whose grace no limits comprehend;
 Sweet Lord, whose mercies stand from measure free;
 To me that grace, to me that mercy send,
 And wipe, O Lord, my sins from sinful me.
 Oh cleanse, oh wash my foul iniquity;
 Cleanse still my spots, still wash away my stainings,

34 This simultaneity of sacralization and desacralization processes around biblical texts is also noted by Landmesser, who emphasizes that the early Christians regarded the story of Jesus Christ as closely linked with the religious traditions of Israel (87-88). The important scriptures of early Judaism also become sacred scriptures of the early Christian communities. Depending on the perspective taken, this process of sacralization also entails elements of desacralization.

Till stains and spots in me leave no remainings. (l. 1-7)

Not only do the lines rhyme, they also conform with Sir Philip Sidney's notion of "number, measure, order, proportion" (*Apology* 101): the seven lines of the rhyme royal stanza end on a couplet, and the preceding lines are linked through an a-b-a-b-b rhyme scheme, with line four becoming the centre of the stanza, both "when it comes to the rhyme scheme but also in relation to the content" (Niefer 305). Thus, while Psalm 51 is one of the rare examples among their Psalm renderings for which the Sidneys did not choose an individual form of their own making, the form is nevertheless employed in such a way as to become expressive of its subject matter. Niefer goes on to comment:

In the first stanza, for instance, we can see the perfect union which Mary Sidney creates between form and content. Here, line four is also the central part of the stanza when the subject matter is concerned: In this line, the speaker confesses her sins for the first time, thus giving it a prominent focus. This has the effect that the central paradox of Mary Sidney's rendering of Psalm 51 is highlighted: it is not the perfect human being who has been inspired by God and enabled to utter perfect praise, but the human sinner. God will see the greatest need to write on a slate that is blotted. The thought behind this paradox is the Renaissance idea that harmony can only be achieved because it also contains elements that are debased. (305)

The metrical rendering accordingly not only strives towards "poetic perfection" (Niefer 289) in introducing metre and rhyme but also through creating and establishing a relation between form and content.³⁵ This relation may include its opposite, as is shown by the line "My filthy fault, my faulty filthiness" (l. 9). By opting for "an exaggeration with an onomatopoeic quality" (Niefer 321), Sidney chooses what by her time had become a mark of poetic imperfection.³⁶ In combining it with chiasmus, however, she signals a

35 See also Fernandez on the degree of innovation through "translation and metrical experimentation" in Psalm renderings (her focus is, however, on Surrey).

36 Niefer (319) cites Freer to show that this judgment has also been applied to Mary Sidney herself, as Freer regards her use of repetition in this passage an end in itself and therefore "confusing or trite" (42). By contrast, Niefer points out that Sidney "is

deeper purpose of her choice, marking the deliberate imperfection of her verse as a sign of Cross. The paradoxical fourth mode of reworking the sacred as outlined in the Introduction to this volume will become salient here, as Sidney clearly signals Christ's own sanctioning her reworking of the sacred text in spirit of elevating the imperfect.

These metrical reworkings and the introduction of iconicity indicate a textual strategy which is programmatic in Mary Sidney's Psalm renderings; and she pursues the metrical rendering to a degree different even from the metrical Psalms by Sternhold and Hopkins. If we look at Psalm 77, for instance, this becomes obvious, too. Coverdale has

1 I will crye vnto God with my voyce, euen vnto God wyll I crie with my voyce, and he shall herken vnto me.

2 In the tyme of my trouble I sought the Lorde: my sore ranne and ceased not in the nyght season: my soule refused comforte.

Sternhold and Hopkins render the first verse of this Psalm as follows:

1 I with my voice to God did cry,
 who lent a gracious ear;
 My voice I lifted up on high,
 and he my suit did hear.

The first obvious difference is length: although even Coverdale includes repetitive structures in the first verse of the Psalm,³⁷ Sternhold and Hopkins repeat not only the crying out of the speaker but also the act of hearing by God. The first line is varied in line 3, with the initial subject "I" being inverted with the object "My voice." Mary Sidney apparently takes up the syntactical inversion but also embeds chiasmus in her version of the Psalm:

To thee my crying call,
 To thee my calling cry
 I did, O God, address,
 And thou didst me attend:

well aware of the danger of *repetitio*, and plays with it instead of avoiding its danger, thus turning the exaggeration into a meaningful instrument of expression" (321).

37 The *Vulgate*, for example, is entirely different: "Intellectus Asaph. Attendite, popule meus, legem meam; inclinate aurem vestram in verba oris mei."

To nightly anguish thrall.
 From thee I sought redress;
 To thee incessantly
 Did praying hands extend.

All comfort fled my soul;
 Yea, God to mind I called,
 Yet calling God to mind

...

(ll. 1-11)

The opening lines are anaphoric and parallel but also contain the chiasmus “my crying call / my calling cry”: the despair and the “address” of God are emphasized in this version – a structure that is repeated in lines 2 and 3 of the following stanza: “God to mind I called / calling God to mind.” The chiasitic phrasing foregrounds but also varies the action of calling. Form and content mirror each other and become one through iconicity. This structural and stylistic device, however, concurrently also makes the Psalm more personal again, and we can see how form, content, style all become part of an attempt to making the Psalm relevant for the individual. The poetic form is necessary for that in that it lends the content which is expressed *energeia* and *evidentia*.

5. Conclusion

Early modern Psalm renderings apparently strive to emulate the personal voice that concurrently became prominent in the love poetry of the time and thus make the Psalms relevant for each individual reader and speaker. That this textual strategy would become prevalent in the Early Modern period is certainly linked to the interaction between secular and sacred poetry – but even more so to the wider context of having at hand the Bible in the vernacular: the biblical text was now accessible to many, i.e. meant to become part of everyone’s life in their own time. The Psalms served this purpose particularly well, as they lent themselves to modernizations through the poets as they were poetic to begin with – they were, after all, the Songs of David.

That it was in particular the care with which poetic devices were employed, that their newly added aesthetic quality served to make the Psalms more relevant to individual users may appear to be paradoxical; but then, in an early modern context, the aesthetic makeup was linked to the content:

form and rhetoric were integral components of texts and part of their meaning. One may even claim that the emphasis on the poetic nature of the Psalms enhanced their sacred status and contributed to the sacralization of poetry by foregrounding the balance between personal expression and biblical text.

While the Psalms as “songs” – and this goes equally for the musical renderings – highlight or even reinforce the communal aspect of their performance, it should not be forgotten that the genre as such was conceived not only “for congregational usage, but an educated reader could return virtuously home to intricate and metrically various psalm renderings designed for private studies” (Serjeantson 636). Mary Sidney is perhaps the most outstanding example of this dynamic: the comprehensiveness that is characteristic of her poetic version is linked to her emphasis on the individual inner self that is also universal, the personified “heart-broken soul” (l. 49, another poetic creation) with which every reader may identify. At the same time, the formal intricacies, even idiosyncrasies, that she introduces to her version of the Psalter, including iconicity, make the texts less apt for communal use.

The means to vernacularize and modernize the biblical texts identified here – personal expression, poetic metaphors, and formal features, including metre and stylistic devices – serve to enhance the sacredness of the Psalter by the contexts they raise; this becomes evident, for example, through the intertextual reference to Jesus’ healing of the leper. The speaker’s communication with God through prayer is equally sacralized by means of the poetic rendering as the special relationship between a human being and God is foregrounded. At the same time, poetic renderings of the Psalms also help us reflect on how the reception of a text may be the basis for textual production, and on how the poet uses the toolkit at his or her hands to update a text – even a corpus of texts – through lending it a very personal note that eventually becomes universal.

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“Sing unto the Lord a New Song”: Reworkings of the Psalms and Their Musical Settings in Early Modern England

MATTHEW GARDNER, STEFAN MORENT, AND ANGELIKA ZIRKER

The topic of “reworkings” lends itself particularly well to the corpus of English psalms (see Bauer et al., this volume), as Early Modern England produced a particularly large and variegated corpus not only of vernacular texts based on the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin versions of the Book of Psalms (as well as on one another), but also of musical renderings.¹ This proliferation of reworkings of the Psalms results in a comparatively large corpus of texts that are all based on the same source but vary in their (material) realization. In combining literary analysis with the perspective of musicology, this chapter exemplifies how the two disciplines complement each other: literary analysis of early modern English psalm versions rarely considers musical settings – this is simply not what literary studies is generally concerned with; musicologists, in turn, rarely undertake a detailed analysis of the text and its origins. This combination of approaches and expertise seeks to shed new light on how reworkings were made, on which texts these were based, and what happened to texts when set to music – and if (as well as how) the music had to adapt to textual features and formal requirements. Against these background assumptions, two case studies will be undertaken. The first will consider two settings of Psalm 15 by William Byrd and the textual versions on which they are based, with the aim of showing how words and music interact with each other, as well as how the two settings differ in this regard. The second example applies the same approach to Byrd’s two English settings of Psalm 51. The similarities and differences between the versions identified become more easily interpretable when methods from the Digital Humanities are used to conceptualize them. Accordingly, an

1 This proliferation appears to be typical for the context of England, while the Geneva Psalter was influential all over Europe – see, for example, Bernoulli and Furler; as well as Grunewald, Jürgens and Luth; Haug; Weeda, *Psautier de Calvin* – compared to England, studies of continental Psalm renderings are rare: see, for instance, Bach and Galle; Weeda, *Itinéraires*.

informed outline of an analytical model will be proposed which is derived from research in Digital Humanities. The versions of Psalms 15 and 51 will provide the basis to show how this approach facilitates tracking and conceptualizing the variations of text and music in a systematic manner.

1. Poetry and Music: Psalm Renderings during the Early Modern Period²

The Early Modern period was particularly rich in psalm renderings, with Coverdale's translation into the vernacular for the English Bible of 1535 being the first example of note. His translation of the Bible was preceded by a few versions of the Psalter in English, for example, George Joye's *The Psalter of David in English Purely and Faithfully Translated [...]* of 1530, and William Marshall's 1534 translation of Psalm 51, one of the most frequently translated and reworked texts; Anne Locke's 1560 rendering of Psalm 51 as *A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* is probably among the most famous of this particular psalm still studied today. Rivkah Zim in her 1987 study of *English Metrical Psalms* provides "[a] guide to English psalm versions printed 1530-1601" that stretches over almost 50 pages (see 211-59), and it is not the aim of this chapter to fully repeat what Zim has so usefully catalogued. Underlying the present analysis is a corpus of psalms by authors and translators of the period as well as psalm renderings that proved to be particularly fruitful and lasting in their use. Apart from Coverdale's version, exceedingly influential versions of this period are, among others, those by Robert Crowley, Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins's *Metrical Psalter*, and Sir Thomas Wyatt (all 1549), William Whittingham's *Whole Booke of Psalmes* of 1562, Arthur Golding's *The Psalmes of David*, published in 1571, and, last but not least, the psalms translated and rendered into poetry by Sir Philip and Mary Sidney, completed by Mary in 1599, after the death of her brother thirteen years earlier. All these versions differ from each other, sometimes to a surprising extent – and the variations become even greater once musical settings are also taken into account.

In terms of music, the Psalms were a particularly attractive textual source for composers in Reformation and post-Reformation England, since they, like the Old Testament songs of Deborah, Moses and Miriam, are a part of

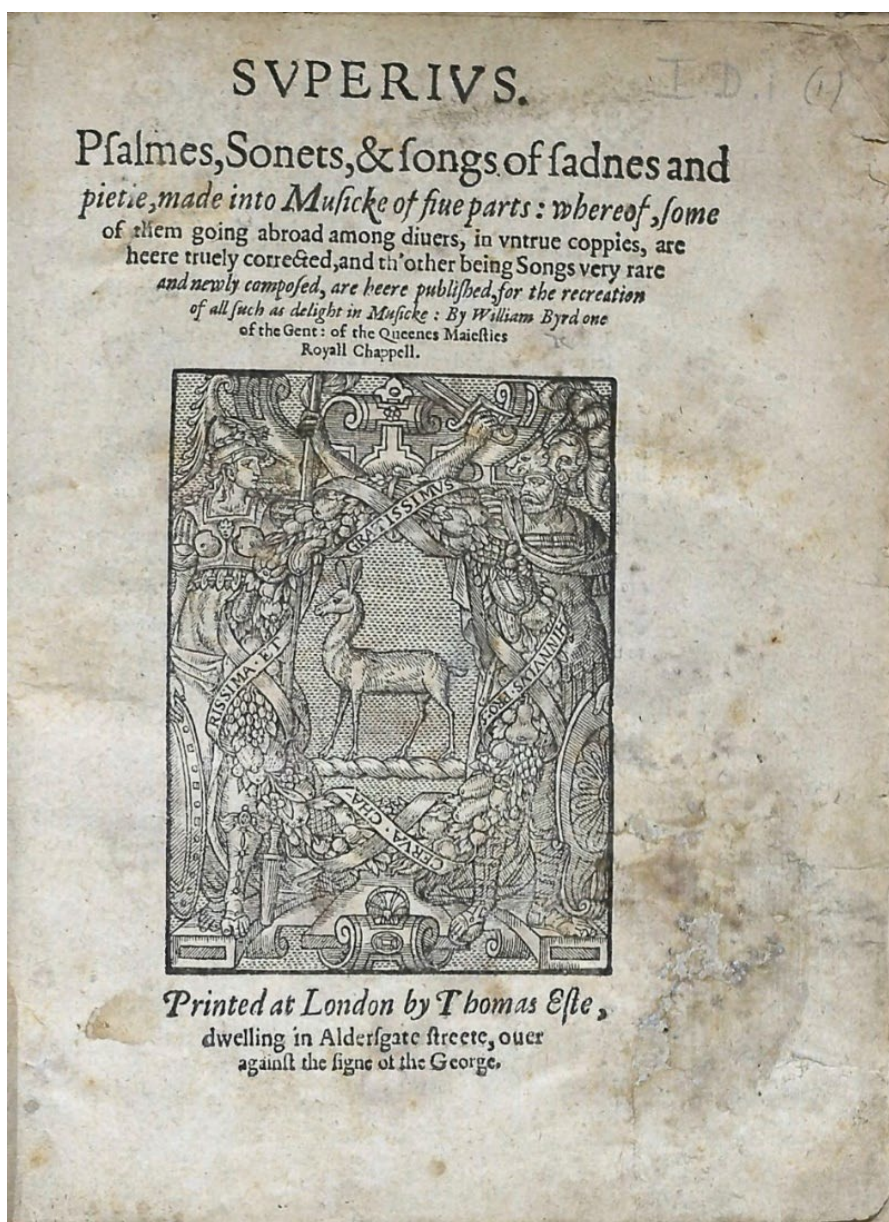
2 On the general background during this period, see also the chapter by Bauer, Blanc, Schatz, and Zirker in this volume.

the Bible that justify singing. Metrical psalms were a central part of Reformation church music, with simple musical settings being imported into England from Geneva, inspiring the development of anglicized metrical psalms. For church music one of the major consequences of the Reformation during the reign of Edward VI was that complex polyphony, in which the lyrics are difficult for the listeners to understand with each voice moving independently, was pushed out of the ecclesial and into the secular realm. This trend continued under Elizabeth I and eventually led to the rise of secular music for viol consort. For this genre composers could continue to write contrapuntal music, albeit without text. Church music, by contrast, was restricted, with a few exceptions, to simpler settings, where all the vocal parts move homophonically together, making the text easier to understand. Religious songs for secular use, however, also became increasingly popular in Elizabethan England and were intended not for liturgical use but for private devotion. It is in this context that William Byrd produced his *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs of Sadness and Pietie* – a collection of 35 songs, published in 1588 (see Fig. 1). Byrd began his professional career at Lincoln Cathedral before being made a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal under Elizabeth I in 1572. He is now widely recognized as one of England's leading composers of the second half of the sixteenth century. As far as is known, Byrd's *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs of Sadness and Pietie* was only the third published collection of songs to be printed in England and was consequently still revolutionary for the time.³

As was common for the period, the music was published in part-book format, meaning that there was no full-score in the modern sense but rather just individual parts for each performer. As Byrd states at the start of each of the part-books, one of his aims was to encourage everyone to learn to sing. However, he also offers a valuable piece of information about the arrangement and intended performance of the collection:

3 See Kerman and McCarthy.

Fig. 1: Title page of William Byrd's *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs of Sadness and Pietie* (1588)



If thou bee disposed to pray, heere are the *psalmes*. If to bee merrie, here are *sonets*. If to lament for thy sins, heere are songs of sadnesse and *pietie*. If thou delight in Musicke of great cōpasse, heere are the divers songs, which beeing originally made for Instruments to expresse the harmony, and for one voyce to pronounce the dittie, are now framed in all parts of voyces to sing the same. (Byrd, *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs of Sadness and Pietie* 3)

So, there are songs for different purposes – prayer, merriment and lamentation; but, more importantly, they were originally conceived as solo songs with instrumental accompaniment and were arranged in the 1588 publication for five singing voices. Byrd’s approach was simply to add word-underlay to the viol parts. This, however, also represents a further level of transformation of the text, depending on repetition across multiple voices rather than just within one voice. Some of the solo songs survive in manuscript, but thankfully Byrd indicated throughout the printed volume which voice was the original singing part, so it is possible for both versions to be performed from the parts he provided.⁴

Byrd also published two further collections of songs in English that included settings of the Psalms. Only one year after *Psalmes, Sonnets and Songs of Sadness and Piety*, his *Songs of Sundrie Natures* appeared in 1589. This collection took a different approach in that it was made up of songs for differing numbers of voices. The first twelve are for three parts; this is followed by five songs for four parts, ten songs for five parts and seven songs for six parts. There are 34 songs in total, some of which are multi-sectional – Byrd gave each section a number, bringing his total to 47. As Jeremy L. Smith has pointed out, none of the songs indicate an original singing voice, suggesting they were all intended for the full complement of voices, rather than for interpretation as solo songs with viol consort, although three of the five-part songs exist in manuscript in this format (see Smith 9). Like the 1588 collection, *Songs of Sundrie Natures* was published in part-book format, as was Byrd’s third collection of English songs, published under the title *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* in 1611. The subtitle of this collection indicates that the music is “fit for Voyces or Viols or 3. 4. 5. and 6. Parts,”

4 For a transcription in full score of both versions, see The Byrd Edition, vol. 12, *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs* (1588), edited by Jeremy Smith (24-27), and vol. 16, *Madrigals, Songs and Canons*, edited by Philip Brett (77-80).

which suggests that the music could be performed in a variety of ways – for example: voices only, viols only, or as solo songs with viol accompaniment. This is the only one of Byrd’s songbooks, however, to specify instruments, and the collection includes two instrumental fantasias (one in four parts, one in six parts). There are 28 songs in total with seven each for the four different combinations of voices, and two songs (one for three voices and one for five voices) are divided into two parts.

The examples by William Byrd considered in this chapter are drawn from all three collections: “O Lord, who in thy sacred tent” (Ps. 15) was published in *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* (1588); “O God which are most merciful” (Ps. 51) appeared in *Songs of Sundrie Natures* (1589); and “Have Mercy upon me, O God” (Ps. 51) was included in *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* (1611). In addition to these three published psalm settings, Byrd’s unpublished “O Lord, within thy tabernacle” (Ps. 15), dating from before 1588, also serves as an example. Byrd’s settings of Psalms 15 and 51 are particularly illuminating in terms of the different levels of textual transformation and alternate readings, as they are examples of the few psalms of which two musical settings by a single composer (Byrd) based on different versions of the text survives. The comparative wealth of material in the works of just one composer as well as the variety of approaches that can be found in the psalm settings by Byrd allow for a comparison within a fairly limited corpus.

2. Case Study 1: William Byrd’s Two Versions of Psalm 15

Byrd’s two settings of Psalm 15, display some striking textual differences⁵:

O Lord, within thy tabernacle who shall inhabit still? Or whom wilt thou receive to dwell in thy most holy hill? The man whose life is uncorrupt, whose works are just and straight, Whose heart doth think the very truth, whose tongue speaks no deceit. [Before 1588.]

O Lord, who in thy sacred tent, and holy hill shall dwell: Even he that both in heart and mind, doth study to do well. In life upright, in dealing just, and he that from his heart, the truth doth speak, with singleness, all falsehood set apart. [1588, Medius.]

5 For word repetition, see the discussion of the musical settings below.

The first (and assumedly earlier⁶) version of Psalm 15 by Byrd is identical with the metrical version of the psalm by Thomas Sternhold (first published c. 1549, as the Byrd Edition of the psalm has it; see Sternhold), with the apostrophe of “Lord” moved by Byrd to the beginning – to which he, moreover, adds an emphatic “O.”⁷ As Byrd strictly adheres to Sternhold’s version and the iambic metre (a major difference from Coverdale’s unsystematic stresses in his version). Sternhold has fourteeners that are broken down to ballad metre (or “common metre” as popular since the Middle Ages, with the second and fourth lines rhyming⁸), and Byrd follows suit. The metre is apparently necessary to transform the text to a piece of music that can be sung by the congregation in Church as hymns, as for a metrical psalm each verse (or alternate ones) has to have the same number of syllables to fit the music; otherwise, this results in either too much music or too much text. It may therefore be assumed that Sternhold took both the Vulgate and Coverdale’s translation, transformed the latter into metrical lines that conform with ballad metre, and his text served, in a next step, as the basis for Byrd’s setting.⁹

Things become more complicated when Byrd’s 1588 setting of Psalm 15 is also taken into consideration. From line 1 the text is significantly, if not altogether, changed. Instead of “O Lōrd, withīn thy tābernācle who shall inhābit stīll?”¹⁰ it reads (for the singing part in the pre-1588 solo song version): “O Lōrd, who īn thy sācred tēnt, and hōly hīll shall dwēll.” Byrd here also has an apostrophe of the Lord that is identical with the “O Lord within thy tabernacle” version; “thy tabernacle,” however, is replaced with “thy sacred tent” while the remainder of the line conforms mainly with the latter part of Sternhold (“Or whom wilt thou receive to dwell in thy most holy

6 Smith notes that the “calligraphic specialist Robert Dow thought highly enough of it [Byrd’s musical rendering of Psalm 15 in the “tabernacle version”] to include it in his splendid manuscript collection sometime before 1588” (38), while the “sacred tent” version is part of the 1588 publication.

7 It should be noted that the Vulgate, for example, also begins with an address of the Lord: “Domine quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo?” As there are settings by Byrd to the Latin Psalter (see below), he was aware of this.

8 See Abrams and Harpham 376.

9 Cf. Zim 119: “Besides the Vulgate, Sternhold made extensive use of Coverdale’s Great Bible translation (1539); he also adopted the interpretations of different translators and paraphrasts.”

10 Typographical markup has been added to foreground the metre.

hill?”). The origins of this phrasing is much more difficult (if not impossible) to trace: “tabernacle” is rendered as “sacred tent,” a phrase that can be found in the Wycliffite Bible, Num. 24:5: “How feyr thi tabernaclis, Jacob, and thi tentis, Yrael,” where the words “tabernacle” and “tent” are treated as synonyms (see *OED* “tabernacle, *n.*” 1.a.).¹¹ What is more, the adverb “still” is missing in the second version, which goes with the next sentence as it is not only about those who are with God anyway but who study to get there. In this version, Byrd ends up with seven stresses and, except for “sacred,” has monosyllables only in line one. The repetition of “O Lord” is increased further in the version for five singing voices as found in the 1588 publication (see below).

These textual differences between the two versions of Psalm 15 by Byrd have not gone unnoticed. Smith, for instance, comments:

As in the Vulgate version of Psalm 15, both English translations Byrd set properly begin by asking who in the end will be with God, and both produce a set of ten traits as an answer. One distinction rests in the confidence they express. Whereas Sternhold portrayed “the man whose life is uncorrupt, whose works are just and straight,” in the first line of the verse Byrd set in his 1588 collection, it is “he that both in heart & mind *doth studie* to doe well, in life upright, in dealing just” (*italics added*). Thus the poem Byrd includes in his *Psalmes* suggests a progression toward correctness; Sternhold’s offered a description of its achievement. If Byrd’s “student” of 1588 is less secure in his status than Sternhold’s psalmist, and more dependent on God, it makes sense for Byrd to prolong the “longing” association with “O Lord, how long” as we hear in this carefully calibrated song pairing. (Smith 38)

Overall, Smith’s comment on Byrd in this context can be deemed as simplifying the differences between the texts used and set to music. He does

11 The Latin *tabernaculum* (cf. Vulgate) is given as “A paviion, tente, or haule” in Cooper’s *Thesaurus* (1578). The Geneva Bible has: “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, *and* thine habitations, O Israel!” for Num. 24:5, the later KJV “How godly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel” – which once more shows the synonymous use of the words. For the sake of completeness, Geneva renders the first verse of Psalm 15 as follows: “Lord, who shall dwell in thy Tabernacle? who shall rest in thine holy Mountain?,” and KJV has: “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?”

not try to determine textual sources beyond his identification of the Vulgate and Sternhold, which, admittedly, is more difficult than might be assumed.

2.a. *“O Lord, Who in Thy Sacred Tent” (Solo Version)*

As the second version of the text was the first to be published with music, it makes sense to use this as a starting point for the analysis. In “O Lord, who in thy sacred tent” the six verses of the psalm are divided across three repeats of the music. Byrd only provides word-underlay for verses 1-2; verses 3-4 and 4-6 must be aligned with the music by the performer, which, given that repetition of words is involved, requires a certain amount of guess work. In the earlier pre-publication version of the song for a solo soprano voice accompanied by a four-part consort of viols, the opening words, in this case “O Lord,” are repeated once. Repetition of this kind at the start of a song is a fairly common feature of the period. The repetition is musically intensified by being a second higher – so that the repeated words are at a higher pitch. Further words that are highlighted through repetition in the first musical verse are “the truth doth speak,” again with a rising motion to intensify the relevance of the statement – the first note is a fourth higher, the rest a fifth. This emphasis is in line with a heightened didactic or moral function of the injunction: the reference is to those who are striving (rather than those who are with God already; see the “still” in the earlier version). The whole textual phrase “the truth doth speak with singleness, all falsehood set apart” is then repeated again. The transformed text is therefore as follows – the underlying psalm text based on Sternhold as Byrd set it on the left; the transformed text as a result of repetition in the musical setting on the right.

<p>1 O Lord, who in thy sacred tent, and holy hill shall dwell: Even he that both in heart and mind, doth study to do well.</p> <p>2 In life upright, in dealing just, and he that from his heart, the truth doth speak, with singleness, all falsehood set apart.</p>	<p>1 O Lord, O Lord, who in thy sacred tent, and holy hill shall dwell: Even he that both in heart and mind, doth study to do well.</p> <p>2 In life upright, in dealing just, and he that from his heart, the truth doth speak, the truth doth speak, with singleness, all falsehood set apart: The truth doth speak with singleness, all falsehood set apart, set apart. [First singing part / Medius.]</p>
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For the repetition of the text “the truth doth speak with singleness,” the voice and four-part homophonic accompaniment move together (bars 32-35), which is in direct contrast to the contrapuntal writing of the preceding section (bars 25-29) – all the parts musically move rhythmically and harmonically “with singleness” here (see Fig. 2); form and content correspond with each other and present a case of iconicity.

Byrd continues for “all falsehood set apart,” by setting the phrase apart from the previous one with the lower parts playing alone for the cumulative length of one bar, followed by an accompaniment with only the upper viol parts for one repetition of the text “all falsehood set apart” (bars 35-38). But then Byrd returns to a contrapuntal style of writing in the viol parts for the next repeat of the words (bars 38-40). The individual parts are “set apart” from each other, again underlining the meaning of the text. The transformation of the psalm text here is therefore largely a consequence of Byrd’s musical objectives in reacting to the content of the text, the goal of which was to highlight the words “O Lord,” “the truth doth speak” and “all falsehood set apart.”

Fig. 2: Byrd, "O Lord, who in thy sacred tent" (solo with viols), bars 32-41.

32

part; the truth doth speak with sin - gle - ness, all

37

false-hood set a - part, set a - part, set a - part.

1 O Lord, who in thy sacred tent,
and holy hill shall dwell:
Even he that both in heart and mind,
doth study to do well.

2 In life upright, in dealing just,
and he that from his heart,
the truth doth speak, with singleness,
all falsehood set apart.

3 With tongue besides that hurts no man
by false and ill report,
Nor friend nor neighbour harm will do
wherever he resort.

4 That hates the bad and loves the good,
 and faith that never breaks,
 But keeps always, though to his loss,
 the word that once he speaks.

5 Nor filthy gain by love that seeks,
 nor wealth so to possess,
 Nor that for bribes the guiltless soul
 doth labour to oppress:

6 Like as a mount so shall he stand;
 nothing shall him remove.
 That thus shall do, the Lord hath said;
 no man can it disprove.

As the text of the psalm needs to fit the three verses of music, Byrd apparently saw it fit to avoid trisyllabic words, except for “singleness” – which, as shown above, has its own purpose in the composition – and “wherever” (v. 3) which is much more inclusive and marked by determination than Sternhold’s corresponding verses: “Nor to his neighbour doeth none ill, / In body, goodes or name: / Ne seketh not to bring his friend, / To take rebuke and shame” (26). Bisyllabic words are arranged so as to fall into the pattern of the iambic metre, with the result of, for instance, the rather redundant “Like as” in the opening of 6. Through this overall composition of the words, the psalm has six verses/stanzas rather than seven in Sternhold’s rendering. The ballad metre rules the choice and number of words in either case, but Byrd’s choice of words generally goes for simplicity and ease of singing.¹²

2.b. “O Lord, Who in Thy Sacred Tent” (Five-Voice Version)

The version of “O Lord, who in thy sacred tent” as published in 1588, where the viol parts have been given a text to facilitate choral performance when

12 See, for example, Sternhold’s verse 4:

That in his heart regardeth not,
 Malicious wicked men:
 But those that love and fear the lord,
 He maketh much of them.

In the first two lines, trisyllabic words can be found that are replaced by much simpler phrasings in Byrd; see also the replacement of “innocent” (Sternhold, v. 6) with “guiltless soul” in verse 5.

desired, results in a further level of textual transformation. While the basic structure as to which words are repeated remains similar to the solo version, the effect is now further intensified with additional repetition generated by the ‘new’ parts – in bars 1-7, for example, the superius and the original singing part (*medius*) next to each other (see Fig. 3). The overall effect is particularly evident in the opening phrase, where across all voices the words “O Lord” appears fifteen times. However, as the opening is contrapuntal and the voices overlap, what the listener actually hears in performance is about eight repetitions of the words in bars 1-7.

Owing to the counterpoint of the viol parts, several other repetitions can now also be heard, for example, “holy hill shall dwell” (bars 9-11) or “in life upright” (bars 17-20). The effect outlined earlier for the words “the truth doth speak with singleness” (bars 32-34) is now also foregrounded, as all five singing voices are moving together and speaking as one in a declamatory style, as opposed to the jumble of words in the preceding counterpoint. The same applies to “all falsehood set apart,” with the lower voices moving together, followed by the upper voices (bars 34-36) before counterpoint sets the voices apart (bars 37-40). On the one hand, Byrd’s approach here is, as he said in his preface, to encourage singing, as well as making the publication as flexible as possible – it can be performed with five voices, with one voice and viol accompaniment, or indeed with, for example, three singing voices and two viols, or even other instruments. On the other hand, the addition of text to the original instrumental parts causes an additional transformation of the verbal text as opposed to the solo version. A further step would be to consider how musical effects such as these work with the text of the additional verses. In addition to the musical aspects already mentioned, other features such as harmonic progressions will also be considered in the outline of the framework for digital modelling the psalm texts (see below).

Fig. 3: Byrd, “O Lord, who in thy sacred tent” (five-voice version), bars 1-9.

Superius

Medius
The first singing part

Contratenor

Tenor

Bassus

O Lord, O Lord, who in thy sa - cred

O Lord, O Lord, who in thy sa - cred tent,

O Lord, O Lord, who in thy sa - cred tent, and

tent, O Lord, who in thy sa - cred tent, who in thy sa - cred tent,

tent, O Lord, O Lord, who in thy sa - cred tent, and ho - ly

tent, O Lord, O Lord, who in thy sa - cred tent, and ho - ly

2.c. “O Lord, within Thy Tabernacle”

“O Lord, within thy tabernacle” which, as mentioned earlier, was probably composed sometime before 1588, exists only as a solo song with four-part, contrapuntal viol accompaniment. Similarly to “O Lord, who in thy sacred tent,” Byrd created a strophic setting where the music is designed to be repeated four times, with the text of the psalm distributed across musical verses. In this case, the metrical psalm text makes it easy to align the words

with the music. In the first half of the setting there is no repetition of text, but in the second half, Byrd repeats the words “Whose tongue speaks no deceit.” This is followed by a repeat, marked as a “chorus” in the vocal part, of the final line of the verse pair “whose heart doth think the very truth, whose tongue speaks no deceit, whose tongue speaks no deceit.” This results in only the final line of the second verse of the psalm being transformed through repetition as shown here – this would also apply to verses 4 and 6 in performance.

“O Lord within thy tabernacle” and “O Lord who in thy sacred tent” vary in words but both adhere to ballad metre; in the one version, polysyllabic words do not necessarily dominate but are much more frequent than in the 1588 version with its predominant monosyllables and only few words that go beyond two syllables (“singleness” and “wherever” being the exceptions). Byrd thus removes the somewhat disharmonious feminine ending of “tabernacle” and replaces it with “sacred tent”; a problem that Sternhold and Hopkins had avoided in the first place by positioning “tabernacle” within the line so as to have it fall into place with the iamb. This choice implies the hypothesis that the second version was not necessarily found in the psalm renderings of another author or translator but that it was written deliberately for musical performance. Form and content thus conform to each other, and they do so even iconically in relation to the musical setting – when “singleness” becomes sung harmoniously whereas falseness is indeed “set apart” on the level of the music.

3. Case Study 2: Some Versions of Psalm 51, “Miserere mei, Deus”

Psalm 51 was particularly popular among early modern poets. Among the different penitential psalms, some poets chose to focus on Psalm 51 alone (see, e.g., Anne Lok). It was also a psalm that, owing to its penitential nature, attracted the attention of composers around 1600, with three settings by William Byrd (one in Latin, two in English), as well as one each from John Mundy, John Dowland, Thomas Ravenscroft, and William Cranford. While most of these are simple homophonic metrical settings (Dowland, Ravenscroft, Cranford), the two English settings by Byrd and the setting by Mundy are through composed and provide further case studies for how a

composer reacts to and transforms the text through music.¹³ The following analysis focuses on select renderings that exemplify the variety of textual reworkings. It is limited to the first two verses of the psalm, as these are the verses that Byrd used in his two settings.

In his 1539 version, Coverdale offers the following translation for the opening verses of Ps 51:

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness; according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin.

In the Authorized Version of this psalm from the 1611 King James Bible, the textual differences begin with the title that is given the psalm: while Coverdale has “Miserere mei, Deus,” the AV has “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba,” which means that the context of the origins of this Psalm is specified; this also follows the Vulgate.¹⁴ The text itself is also vastly changed:

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:

according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Coverdale’s “great goodness” is changed to “thy lovingkindness,” “wickedness” to “iniquity,” probably following the Vulgate, which has “ab iniquitate mea”; the perhaps most striking modification is that of “offences” to “transgressions” – which are no longer “done away” with but “blot[t]ed out.”¹⁵

By considering a selection of renderings from between 1539 and 1611, some tendencies in the intermediary poetic versions of this psalm can be

13 Mundy’s setting lies outside the scope of this chapter. Byrd’s Latin setting of Psalm 51 was published in *Cantiones Sacrae* (1591).

14 For reasons of space and focus, we will not include the Vulgate in our comparison, except for a few pointers.

15 In v. 3, Coverdale has “faults,” whereas the AV repeats “transgressions.”

observed that also give some insight into the difference to the officially used texts for Anglican Church services.

Crowley in his 1549 translation *The Psalter of David*, one of the early verse renderings, provides a strongly alliterative version with rhyming couplets:

Lord God for thy great goodnes sake, be mercifull to me:
And for thy passyng great mercie, purge myne iniquitie.
From myne iniquitie good Lord, wash thou me plentuously:
And frō¹⁶ my synnes and trespasses do thou me mundifie.

Crowley maintains “great” from Coverdale but introduces a second mention of “great” to qualify “mercie” – which also leads to a repetition of this adjective from line 1 to 2. Instead of “offences” (in Coverdale), “iniquitie” is used, which is repeated between lines 2 and 3; and Crowley employs the Latinate “mundify” (*OED* 1. To cleanse, purify (a thing); 2. also medical; he probably follows the Vulgate’s “munda me” here), which goes together with the purging in line 2. The four lines rhyme (as do all following quatrains in the altogether 24 lines) and are structured as fourteeners in accordance with the ballad metre (i.e. seven stresses, iambic). The notion of cleansing (from sin) is almost over-emphasized in this version: the speaker asks the Lord to “purge,” “wash,” and “mundifie.”

Sternhold and Hopkins in their 1562 *The Whole Book of Psalms* give yet another completely different rendering of these opening lines of Psalm 51 (“Miserere mei deus,” 118-19):

- 1 Lord consider my distres,
And now with spede some pitie take:
My sinnes deface, my faultes redresse,
Good Lord, for thy great mercyes sake.
- 2 Wash me (O Lord) and make me cleane,
From this unjust and sinful act:
and purifie yet once agayne,
my haynous crime and bloody fact.

16 It should be noted that here the horizontal bar is not a stress sign as above but an abbreviation mark.

Instead of pleading for mercy, the speaker pursues what appears almost like a more rational approach and asks to “consider” and take “pitie.” Instructions are then given to the Lord as to the measures that need to be taken in order to help the speaker, and this is where the notion of “mercy” comes into play in line 4. While overall the language is simpler (no “mundify” here, but “wash me and make me cleane”), Sternhold and Hopkins also change the text to make it fit their tetrametre, e.g. through adding adjectives in line 8 that also add some *energeia* to the “faultes” committed.

Whittingham in his rendering of *The Bible That Is, the Holy Scriptures Conteyned in the Old and New Testament* (first published in 1561) is simpler and closer in his version to the later AV than Coverdale:

1 HAue mercie vpon me, ô God, according to thy louing kindenes,
according to the multitude of thy compassions put away mine iniquities,
2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquitie and clense me from my sinne. (Whittingham 217)

Merely “compassions” have replaced “tender mercies,” and instead of “blot out,” Whittingham has “put away.” Both, overall, appear to follow the Vulgate.

Two further versions of Psalm 51 should be considered in order to get an overview of the textual renderings. Arthur Golding, who also translated Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* into English, in his 1571 *The Psalmes of David and Others*, after introducing “The Conteintes of the. Ij. Psalme” in a prose prologue and giving two verses of introduction that take up the context of “Bethseba,” appears to rely in parts on Sternhold and Hopkins as well as Coverdale in at least a few word choices. He does so, however, in a somewhat idiosyncratic mix:

3 Have pitie upon mee ô God according to thy mercy, according too the multitude of thy compassions wpe away myne offences.
4 Multiply to wash me from my sinne, and clenze mee from my wickednesse. (Golding 201)

Instead of following Coverdale in his opening of the psalm, he adds “pitie” to “mercy” but replaces the “multitude of mercies” as in Coverdale with

“compassions.” There are no recognizable rhymes, which may be considered to be the most surprising fact about Golding’s rendering.

The *Sidney Psalter*, the final example of textual renderings, stands out for being even more idiosyncratic while, concurrently, strictly following an individual form¹⁷:

O Lord, whose grace no limits comprehend;
 Sweet Lord, whose mercies stand from measure free;
 To me that grace, to me that mercy send,
 And wipe, O Lord, my sins from sinful me.
 Oh, cleanse, oh, wash, my foul iniquity;
 Cleanse still my spots, still wash away my stainings,
 Till stains and spots in me leave no remainings. (ll. 1-7)

There is a double apostrophe of the Lord over the first two lines – “O Lord” and “Sweet Lord” – which emphasizes the communicative situation and the pleading character. The notion of “mercy” is equally emphasized, but this time through the introduction of “grace,” an essential notion in Protestant creed. The speaker’s position is also foregrounded through the *geminatio* of “To me” in line 3; line 4 also ends on the first-person pronoun. Sidney is similar to Crowley in finding a number of synonyms for the process of cleansing that is required – and highlights this through introducing that which needs to be cleansed, namely not merely sins but “spots” and “stainings” (embedded in a chiasmus over the concluding couplet of the stanza) that may be related to the notion of a stained soul through sins as present in works from the Early Modern period that were still influenced by morality plays.¹⁸ While textually and stylistically the Sidney version is most-removed from Coverdale (and from the AV), it is probably also the most expressive of the penitential speaker of this text and his despair.

The later setting by Byrd published in *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* (1611) strongly relies on Coverdale, with only a few changes:

17 See Niefer 305 on Mary Sidney’s Psalm 51.

18 Prominent examples are John Redford’s *Wit and Science* (written between 1531/34 and 1547) as well as Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*, where Tarquin’s soul is described as a “spotted princess” (721); see Zirker 131-32 and 60.

Coverdale	Byrd
1 Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness; according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.	Have mercy upon me, O God after thy great goodness and according to the multitude of thy mercies wipe away mine offences.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my wick- edness, and cleanse me from my sin.	Wash me clean from my wickedness and purge me from my sins.

The first line is identical with Coverdale. In line 3 the conjunction “and” is added; “do away” in line 4 is replaced with “wipe” – as Sidney has it – and thus enhancing the alliteration (wipe – wash – wickedness). The second verse is equally rendered almost identically to Coverdale, with the exceptions of “purge” for “cleanse” – again: as in Sidney – as well as “clean” for “thoroughly.” What is most striking in comparison with his renderings of Psalm 15 is the closeness to Coverdale’s text in every respect, lexically but also formally. This is far removed from the intricate poetic renderings of the psalm as shown in the examples above.

The earlier setting in *Songs of Sundrie Natures* (1589) is vastly different:

O God which art most merciful,
have mercy Lord on me,
according to thy mercy great
let me relieved be,
and put away my wickedness,
which sundry ways hath been,
according to the multitude
of thy compassions seen.

Here the ballad metre is employed as in Psalm 15; the repetition of “mercy” is reminiscent of Crowley’s rendering; whereas “wickedness” is an item that is kept from Coverdale, and “compassions” is reminiscent of Wittingham’s version, who has “according to the multitude of thy compassions put away mine iniquities.” For both of Byrd’s English settings of Psalm 51, the textual basis is apparently identifiable.

The music, like the text, also differs considerably between Byrd’s two settings. The earlier setting for three voices (STB) “O God which are most merciful” is relatively short in length at 55 bars and is contrapuntal in style,

employing imitative and often canonic entries for each phrase. As a result, the text is repeated across different voices. At the opening, for example, the words “O God which are most merciful,” are first heard in the bass, then a bar later in the tenor, and then half a bar after than in the superius. Some parts of the text are repeated more than others, suggesting which words Byrd found most important, for example, “mercy” (bars 6-12) and “wickedness” (bars 24-30): the elements that are thus emphasized are also expressive of the speaker’s state. The final couplet of the text is also repeated in full (from bar 47) with similar music to the preceding iteration (bars 36-46). Harmonic and rhythmic emphasis is placed on certain words, for example, the juxtaposition of b-flat (bars 7 and 10) and b-natural (bars 11-12) for “have mercy” or “wickedness” in bars 26 (b-flat) and 28 (b-natural), and the syncopated rhythm for “thy compassions” in bars 42-55. The musical phrases generally follow the structure of the text, with a clear cadence at the end of each of each rhyming couplet (see bars 13, 22, 36 and 55).

“Have Mercy upon me, O God” in contrast is set as a verse anthem, meaning a soloist, in this case a soprano (*cantus primus*), sings passages labelled “verse” which alternates with the full choir (SATTB). The anthem is accompanied by viols, which would have doubled some or all of the vocal parts in the full sections. The verse anthem became a popular form of composition in the post-reformation Anglican church as the text could be easily understood in the verse section, and the full sections are often homophonic in nature with only a limited amount of contrapuntal writing. The contrast between sections provided variation in the musical texture as an alternative to the pre-reformation polyphonic writing style. As is typical for many verse anthems, the full sections repeat the text of the verse passages, which in themselves also include some repetition of single words or texts. The transformed text that the listener hears in performance is as follows:

Verse	Have mercy upon me, O God
Full	Have mercy upon me, O God

Verse	Have mercy upon me, O God after thy great goodness
Full	Have mercy upon me, O God after thy great goodness thy great goodness

Verse and according to the multitude of thy mercies
wipe away, wipe away mine offences.

Full and according to the multitude of thy mercies
wipe away, wipe away, mine offences, wipe away mine of-
fences.

Verse Wash me clean from my wickedness
and purge me from my sins, and purge me from my sins, from
my sins,

Full Wash me clean, wash me clean, from my wickedness
and purge me from my sins, and purge me from my sins, and
purge me from my sins, and purge me from my sins.
Amen

Byrd's basic structure is once more orientated around the couplets of the text, but with the amount of text repetition increasing with each verse and full section. In the final section the words "purge me from my sins" are given particular attention with thicker counterpoint, suggesting Byrd almost wanted to create a sense of desperation in this plea of supplication. This impression is also evident at the start, through the repetition of "have mercy upon me" in the first and second sections of verse + full. The second verse section begins in a similar way to the first, and the music for "mercy upon" is identical but now a third higher to further intensify the plea. Individual words are also given emphasis throughout the setting, such as "O God" (bars 8, 11-13, 15-16, 21-22), "goodness" (bars 18-19), "offences" (bars 35-37 and 45-48), "my sins" (bars 56-57, 64-65 and 67-69), and "wickedness" (bar 60) by means of melismas. Harmony is used suggestively, for example the ending of the second full section in the parallel major key (Bb major) to reflect the word "goodness," or the major/minor contrast between "wash me clean" and "from my wickedness" (bars 48-51). Throughout Byrd's rendering, it becomes clear that emphasis (of individual words through the musical setting) enhances the expressivity of the speaker's pleas.

4. Reworkings Conceptualized in Text and Music: Reading the Psalms with Methods from the Digital Humanities

The literary and musical renderings of Psalm 15 and 51 in the examples discussed above show how the texts of the psalms were transformed in different ways. The following suggests an initial approach to conceptualize these reworkings through the application of methods from the Digital Humanities that will make it easier to trace and document these processes of transformation across literature and music. The methods presented here will also help with offering new insights into common practices of adaptation as well as the associated networks of poets, writers, and composers.

By employing digital annotation, a framework will be created by further developing and adapting existing digital tools that will link and visualize the textual and musical annotations analyzed in the reworkings. The linking and visualization of complex data will reveal inherent, hitherto hidden aesthetic processes in the textual and musical transformation of psalms in Early Modern England, for example as markers of emphasis and expressivity, and how they are distributed in the relation of text and musical settings as outlined above in the renderings of Byrd; it will also facilitate the recognition of patterns and prototypes in an innovative way, based on the generated data sets and their comparability. Combining the disciplinary perspectives and methodologies of literary studies and (digital) musicology will lead to a deeper understanding of the relationship between text and music, for example, the elements and musical techniques (harmonic progressions, repetition of melodic phrases and motives) that are used to express the speaker's state in Byrd's settings of Psalms 15 and 51. This will allow for more general observations on the creative processes involved in reworking the psalms.

While established standards for the markup of texts and music with TEI and MEI (Music Encoding Initiative) exist, this is not yet the case for the interrelation of text(s) and music(s). For literary annotation, markup methods (such as in CATMA¹⁹) must be combined with an additional commentary function (similar to the explanatory annotation in TEASys²⁰) in such a way that comparative observation (through visualization) is possible at the same time. As far as music is concerned, individual tools exist that may

19 For CATMA, see here: <https://fortext.net/tools/tools/catma>.

20 See here for TEASys – the Tübingen Explanatory Annotation System: <http://www.annotating-literature.org/>.

serve as a basis for objectives pursued in analyzing the transformations; they can be further developed or adapted to meet the specific requirements of comparing music and text. These extant tools include, in particular, those developed in the context of LOD (Linked Open Data), such as the complex intertextuality of medieval motets (Rose-Steel and Turnator), the Enhancing Music Notation Addressability (EMA) project based on the Music Addressability API (Viglianti) and the Music Encoding and Linked Data (MELD) project (Lewis, Weigl, Bullivant, and Page). Various methods of multi-modal annotation of music were also explored within the Towards Richer Online Music Public Domain Archives (TROMPA) project.²¹ The Music Addressability API allows the direct addressing of individual sections, excerpts, passages, or bars of an encoded music document and their transfer to processing procedures (visualization, analysis, etc.). Based on MEI encodings, it is already being used successfully as an Open MEI addressability service (OMas) in the Lost Voices Project²² and in Richard Freedman's Citations: The Renaissance Imitation mass (CRIM) project.²³ The MELD framework allows the linking of MEI encodings with non-musical digital resources such as text, audio and video on the basis of RDF.

Among other tools, the Beethoven in the House Annotator App²⁴ serves as a web-based application supporting the creation and sharing of musical commentary along with the exact fragments of the digital resources they reference. A tool like this allows users to create editorial annotations as Linked Data by combining the MELD platform and tools developed by the Edirom Virtual Network (ViFE). This app, in turn, can then be used to display different versions of a psalm text, annotate them, and link them to different versions of musical settings of the psalm text. Another possible adaptation to visualize and then conceptualize psalm texts and their variants in various editions and musical settings in Early Modern England could be linked to the Tasso in Music Project²⁵ which has developed tools to encode and visualize variants of Torquato Tasso's poetry not only in the literary manuscripts but also in the musical sources of compositions based on texts by Tasso.

21 <https://trompamusic.eu/>.

22 <http://digitalduchemin.org/>.

23 <https://mith.umd.edu/research/citations-renaissance-imitation-mass/>.



24 <https://domestic-beethoven.eu/annotapp/>.

25 <https://www.tassomusic.org/>.

The working hypothesis is that, with the help of such tools and their underlying techniques, a corresponding framework can be created through further development and adaptation, linking and visualizing the textual and musical annotations within the project. As a result, it is expected that such a linking and visualization of complex data will reveal inherent, previously hidden aesthetic processes, for example, as markers of emphasis and expressivity as outlined above in Byrd's settings of Psalms 15 and 51, in the textual and musical transformation of English psalms.

The central method of the project is annotation (which will be carried out in English for the English-language corpus). Aesthetic features (at word and style level, but also with regard to the overall composition, metrical peculiarities, etc.) will thus first be analyzed and operationalized in a comparative manner. The first level of investigation is therefore purely text-philological. In a second step, the operationalization takes place on the basis of annotation categories and guidelines to be developed from them. Within the digital medium, the texts and annotations are coded with TEI and form the basis for the visualization, which then allows a comparative examination of the psalms. In addition to markup for pure textual highlighting, hermeneutic annotations in the commentary tradition (see Bauer, Viehhauser, Zirker 2022; and Bauer, Göggelmann, Rogalski, Zirker, forthcoming) are used for explanation.

Figure 4: Corresponding Framework for the Setting of Psalm 51 by William Byrd

<i>Psalmes, songs and sonnets</i> (London 1611) 4x	Coverdale (1539), Psalm 51
Have mercy upon me, O God after thy great goodness and according to the multitude of thy mercies wipe away mine offences. Wash me clean from my wickedness and purge me from my sins. Amen	Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness; according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences. Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sins.
Metadata: Voices: 6, Cantus Primus/Secundus (S), Contratenor (A), Tenor (TI), Sextus (TII), Bassus (B) Key: G minor Meter: 4/2 Length: 64 m.	
Music Addressability API	
	

Songs of sundrie natures ... London 1589-1610 Nr. 4

O God which art most merciful,
have mercy Lord on me,
according to thy mercy great
let me relieved be,
and put away my wickedness,
which sundry ways hath been,
according to the multitude
of thy compassions seen.

Voices: 3, Superius (S), Tenor (T), Bassus (B)
Key: G minor
Meter: 4/2
Length: 56 m.

S, T, B/1-6/1-3/1-4

S, T, B/5-13/1-3/7-8

S, T, B/13-18/1-3/7-8

S, T, B/17-23/1-3/3-4

S, T, B/22-31/1-3/7-8

The reference to musical versions of psalms first requires a transcription of the corpus in MEI. Subsequently, special passages (sections, bars, phrases, motifs in individual or several voices) are to be marked and labelled according to textual and/or musical characteristics so that they can be related to other data (such as the psalm texts coded by verse in TEI) on the basis of standardized interfaces. A visualization to be developed should enable the most intuitive and user-controlled presentation of the correlations possible.

The principles of the development of a corresponding framework are outlined in Fig. 4 using the above-mentioned settings of Psalm 51 by William Byrd (“Have mercy upon me, O God” and “O God which art most merciful”) as examples. Here, on the left, the differences between the text in Byrd’s Anthem and Coverdale’s version are marked with the help of TEI encodings (yellow) and linked to corresponding formal passages in Byrd’s setting on the basis of the Music Addressability API²⁶; on the right, for comparison, Byrd’s second setting. The observations mentioned earlier on musical techniques such as repetition, imitation, homophonic versus contrapuntal setting, harmonic emphasis etc. can therefore be linked and traced to the corresponding text passages. In a larger setting categories and principles could be discovered that reveal how a certain composer or a group of composers react to the same or slightly different version of a psalm text either in a common way or differently according to a personal style of composition.

5. Conclusions

This small corpus of psalm renderings that reflect on their reworkings as texts and in music serves to present a first approach towards a comparison during the early modern period. It also exemplifies parallel developments of text and music as much as the assets of integrating the analyses in a digital tool that will (1) offer the possibility to visualize and make explicit the transformation process of text (side-by-side view) using TEI; (2) include critical commentary about changes, transformation process, sources; and (3) allow for a depiction of musical transformation, i.e. show how the musical setting changes the text through (a) repeated words, (b) musical emphasis / rhetoric.

26 In the project a corresponding MEI encoding will be provided.

Combined with DH methods, these two perspectives will also give insight into networks, i.e. which composers worked with which texts and what kind(s) of variations. This allows for the modelling of stemmata and timelines of textual development as well as annotated text and music to create a large enough corpus that makes it possible to quickly establish sources for text and individual words but also visualize trends in transformation processes. These approaches will also make visible the relations of form and content in individual psalm renderings, both in poetry and music – as well as in this specific corpus of psalms during the early modern period.

Reworkings of the Biblical Psalter during that particularly rich period of translations, poetic renderings, and musical settings consequently provide a basis for further analysis and the conceptualization of how sacred texts continue to be conveyed by language and music (see also Introduction to this volume). The psalms have always and will probably continue to persist in being perceived as sacred texts, and to understand better how this works and has worked since the sixteenth century is an enterprise worth undertaking.

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Cotton Mather's Psalm Translation in Light of Contemporary Debates over Congregational Singing, Hebrew Poetry, and Scriptural Hermeneutics¹

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Among the many works of Cotton Mather (1663-1728), *Psalterium Americanum* (1718) is one of those that has received the least attention. It is usually mentioned in passing by historical accounts of New England psalmody and musical culture as one of several unsuccessful attempts made by third- and fourth-generation New England clergymen to introduce new translations of the Psalms. As such, *Psalterium* has been seen as a kind of “false start” in a development that, over the course of the eighteenth century, would eventually lead to the displacement of the old Puritan *Bay Psalm Book* by more modern and poetic versions imported from England, notably the free Psalm imitations and hymns of Isaac Watts (1674-1748).

As scholars have argued, this development was driven by the spread of new aesthetic standards among the colonial elite, which also found expression in the efforts of many New England ministers to establish more regular and harmonious practices of singing among their parishioners. Mostly through his publication *The Accomplished Singer* (1721), Mather is known to have been one of the principal voices for reform in the so-called “Singing Controversy,” which divided New England congregations during the 1720s and 1730s. Yet he is, curiously enough, thought to have resisted tooth and nail the new literary trends emanating from the metropolitan center. Indeed, the utter poetic failure of his *Psalterium* – as it is often characterized – has been blamed on his religious traditionalism and outmoded biblical literalism, which, in the words of Henry Wilder Foote, made him adhere “to the text of the psalms in total disregard of the desirability of poetic form” (230). Similarly, Maxine Turner, to cite a more recent voice, paints Mather simply

1 This chapter results from work in project P8 “American Scriptures: Transformations of Scriptural Authority and the Canon in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Protestantism,” funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation) within Research Unit 2828 “De/Sacralization of Texts” (Project Number 39844141).

as a backward-looking defender of the founding generation's "plain and scriptural style" and considers *Psalterium* (in contrast to other eighteenth-century revisions) a return to "the sixteenth-century spirit" (273) of the *Bay Psalm Book*.²

Unsubstantiated by any closer analysis, such summary judgments tell us more about some of the long-held but now largely discredited stereotypes of Mather as a cultural reactionary than about the nature of *Psalterium Americanum*. Since Kenneth Silverman's 1976 insightful but short essay on the subject ("Reform"), no serious further explorations of that work have been undertaken. Mather's position in the debates over the reform of psalmody and the specific intervention he was trying to make with *Psalterium* are still not well understood. Over the last few decades, Mather scholarship has greatly advanced in several areas that are highly relevant to a better appreciation of *Psalterium*. Most importantly, with the ongoing edition of *Biblia Americana* (1693-1728), his massive hitherto unpublished Bible commentary, a whole new side of Mather has come into view, showing him to be a pioneering biblical scholar in the context of the early Enlightenment (Stievermann, *Prophecy*). As Clark Maddux, editor of volume 4, has demonstrated, Mather's psalter project was a direct outgrowth of his *Biblia* commentary on the Psalms. Reading the two side by side, can, therefore, help us better appreciate the high scholarly aspirations and theological concerns that informed the re-translations and "Illustrations" of *Psalterium*. At the same time, what Mather writes about Hebrew poetry and music in the *Biblia* explains much about the very deliberate literary choices he made in *Psalterium* regarding rhyme and meter.

Moreover, several studies have established that in terms of his religious position Mather was not so much the rearguard of an old school Puritanism but rather a colonial representative of what Bruce D. Hindmarsh has called the "spirit of early evangelicalism." As such, Mather was in dialogue with reformist-revivalistic Protestants across the British Empire as well as with Continental Pietists (see Kennedy; Stievermann, and Hoselton; Hoselton).

2 His best recent biographers have painted a much more complex picture of Mather's general reception of metropolitan cultural, scientific, and literary trends. He is now seen as someone eager to keep abreast of the latest development, including current forms of poetry and hymnody, as long as these did not conflict with his religious commitments. See Silverman, *The Life and Times*; and Kennedy. On Mather's engagement with literary forms of the Augustan Age, see Stievermann, "Essays to Do Good."

With these groups he shared a concern over experiential forms of Bible interpretation but also over renewing practices of piety, such as prayer and singing. Mather's program for how to read and use the Psalms, which he outlined in the preface of *Psalterium* and *The Accomplished Singer*, is closely connected to the program of scriptural hermeneutics and devotion he lays out in the *Biblia* and other works. He hoped that *Psalterium* would offer a version of the psalter, as he put it in a diary entry from April 1718, "more accommodated for answering its End, and being the most glorious Book of Devotion in the World" (*D* 2: 528).³

In light of this new scholarship and the *Biblia* materials, this essay will revisit Mather's *Psalterium* and offer a fresh examination of the text's distinct but interlinked features and the specific intentions behind them. To make these intentions legible, I will first sketch out the history and crisis of New England psalmody which, in many ways, gave shape to *Psalterium*. I will argue that, around the turn of the eighteenth century, Mather perceived a complex dynamic of desacralization at work that threatened to profane what was in so many ways a core part of Scripture and Christian worship. One threat was primarily aesthetic in nature. It consisted in, as it were, the sonic disfigurement of the Psalm's original beauty in worship practice as a result of a decline in congregational singing, primarily stemming from parishioners' lack of musical competency. In the context of the "Singing Controversy" Mather took the side of those New England ministers who wished to promote "regular singing" but, at the same time, worried about colleagues who looked for alternatives to the native *Bay Psalm Book*. From this arose another perceived threat of desacralization, which can, perhaps, be characterized as one of excessive literary license. Partly in response to this perceived crisis of psalmody, more and more New England congregations adopted new English versions of the Psalms that were aesthetically more refined but, in Mather's view, dangerously detached from the Hebrew original. The third threat was theological and intellectual. It emerged from trends in critical scholarship on the Old Testament that challenged the legitimacy of "naively" reading Christ into ancient Hebrew texts and ultimately raised the question whether Christians could lay claim to these texts as sacred Scripture. Generally speaking, Mather responded to this dynamic of desacralization by trying to create a version of the Psalms that would lend

³ A list of abbreviations appears before the Works Cited.

itself to beautiful and variable singing but that would also combine fidelity to the original texts and the poetic style of the Hebrew Psalms in its translation. Alongside these translations, he offered “illustrations” that provided a resolutely Christocentric perspective. Such an English psalter, he hoped, would contribute to a re-sacralization of psalmody in that it would be conducive to devoutly immersing worshippers’ in the texts to the point that their minds and hearts would become one with those of the Psalms’ human authors and be filled with the same divine Spirit.

Psalterium Americanum and the History and Crisis of New England Psalmody

New England’s Congregational churches followed a strictly Reformed model that made unaccompanied, unison singing of the biblical Psalms – complemented by a small number of other scriptural songs such as the Song of Moses based on Exod. 15 or Mary’s Song based on Luke 1-2 – the only acceptable form of sacred music in official worship. Other hymns and instrumental music were confined to the private sphere. In his 1726 account of Congregational church order, *Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum Nov-Anglorum*, Cotton Mather wrote that, in accordance with the New Testament witnesses and the testimony of the best patristic authorities, the New England Puritans had always been set against “singing *Hymns* of their own Invention” and continued to restrict themselves to “Those in our *sacred Psalter*, and some other Poetical Paragraphs, of the *sacred Scriptures* Versified” (53-54). In church, only the inspired Word of God (as preserved in the canonical Bible) was to be preached and sung. Everything else ran the risk of idolatry and religious corruption.

The first settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony had brought with them from the old country the authorized psalter of the Church of England, *The Whole Book of Psalmes* (1562) by Thomas Sternhold and Thomas Hopkins, with musical settings from the *Ravenscroft Psalter* (1621). This version continued to be used for a while in some congregations.⁴ However, a consortium of thirty Massachusetts divines (the principal authors were Richard Mather, John Eliot, and Thomas Weld) produced an entirely new translation

4 Initially some New England congregations, including the Pilgrims of Plymouth, also used the *Ainsworth Psalter* (1612). On the history of New England psalmody, see McDougall; Foote; Covey; Haraszti; Lowens; Krummel; and Niefer (367-407).

of the Psalms, first printed in 1640 under the title *The Whole Book of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre* but commonly known as the *Bay Psalm Book*. As the famous preface by Richard Mather, Cotton Mather's paternal grandfather, points out, the "godly learned" of New England had been unhappy with Sternhold and Hopkins because "they have rather presented a paraphrase than the words of David translated according to the rule 2 *Chron.* 29. 30." With this reference to the command of King Hezekiah to "to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David," Richard Mather suggested that he and his colleagues regarded it as imperative to sing the Psalms in a translation that was as close as possible to the original words of their divinely inspired author. However, in the Sternhold and Hopkins version "addition to the words, detractions from the words are not seldom and rare, but very frequent and many times needles," and "their variations of the sense, and alterations of the sacred text" constituted a constant irritation "to them that are able to compare the translation with the text." By contrast, the *Bay Psalm Book* promised a version of the Psalms that would make it possible to perform "this ordinance [...] in its native purity." Convinced that "Gods Altar needs not our pollishings," the New England divines thus opted for a programmatically "plaine translation" rather "than to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase, and so have attended Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather than poetry, in translating the hebrew words into english language" (Preface n.p.).

Since "the poetry of the hebrew language" could not be directly carried over into English, the authors of the *Bay Psalm Book* considered it legitimate to render their psalter in one of the most common forms of "english poetry" (Preface n.p.). This was also a way to ensure their singability. That form was the flexible ballad meter with quatrains that rhymed the second line of each couplet. Compared to other English metrical psalters, the *Bay Psalm Book* clearly aimed for metrical simplification. While Sternhold and Hopkins featured no less than 17 metrical schemes, the *Bay Psalm Book* employed only six metrical variants within the ballad meter paradigm, sticking most often with the simple common meter, alternating between iambic tetrameters and iambic trimeters. This sharply limited the number of tunes that could be used. While the first editions did not include musical notations, an appendix referenced a total of forty-eight tunes from Ravencroft, thirty of which were four-line common meter tunes.

Regrettably, the hyperliteralism of the first edition made for an awkward, even uncouth English style in many places. Moreover, it was hard to sing and conveyed little of the Psalm's majestic beauty. Soon demands for a refined translation grew louder.⁵ "But while the book met with general approval, it was felt that there was some room for improvement" and that "a little more of Art was to be employed upon them [the psalms]," as Cotton Mather politely puts it in his 1702 New England church history *Magnalia Christi Americana* (bk. III, ch. xii, 100). Prepared by Harvard president Henry Dunster (with the assistance of Richard Lyon), the third edition of the *Bay Psalm Book* in fact provided a complete overhaul of the original, everywhere "smoothing out the versification, adding alternative versions of certain psalms, and appending to the book a group of 36 newly translated 'other Scripture- Songs' traditionally included in English psalters" (Lowens 26). It was published in 1651 under the altered title *The Psalms Hymns and Spiritual Songs of the Old and New Testament Faithfully Translated into English Metre*. Commonly known as the *New England Version* or *New England Psalter*, this new incarnation of the *Bay Psalm Book* was frequently reprinted and used across New England into the mid-eighteenth century. It also enjoyed considerable success among Dissenting churches in England and Scotland, where at least forty prints appeared (see Krummel).

The new version continued the trend toward an "increasing reliance upon the common meter text and the resultant decrease in the number of essential psalm-tunes" congregations could use (Lowance 26). According to Lowance's calculation, the percentage of psalms rendered in the common meter increased from 75% to 83%. Starting with the ninth edition of 1698 (or possibly the now lost eight edition), the *New England Psalter* also included an appendix with some psalm-tunes in simple musical notation taken from different editions of John Playford's *Brief Introduction to the Skill of Musick* (first ed. 1672), a standard work on music in contemporary England. Of these thirteen psalm-tunes in two-part arrangement, nine are four-line common meter tunes. The four other remaining metrical variants, such as the long meter, are only afforded one tune each.

5 As Mather writes rather apologetically in *Ratio Disciplinae*, "In this Version, the Poetry may indeed want refining; yet the nearness & closeness of the *Translations* unto the *Original*, may make some amends for other Defects" (54).

However, at the time of the ninth edition's appearance, only very few congregants would have been able to read even those simple musical notations. Their use would have been made even harder by the fact that the notations were not printed with the words of the Psalms but in the back of the book, meaning the tunes essentially had to be learned by heart.

The much-reduced musical repertoire, together with the appendix's rudimentary musical instructions for singing in harmony, already suggest the poor state of psalmody in many New England congregations when Cotton Mather became pastor of Boston's Old North Church. As a general rule, congregations still followed the tradition of lining-out, in which, as Mather describes it in *Ratio Disciplinae*, "the *Psalm* is read line after line, by him whom the Pastor desires to do that Service; and the People generally sing in such *grave Tunes*, as are most usual in the Churches of our Nation" (52). This "Old Way" of psalmody, as it came to be called, was thus "essentially an oral tradition" (Becker 80), in which, interrupted by the cantor's lining-out of the Psalms, a very limited set of tunes were sung from memory in a slow tempo with considerable improvisation, and irregularity.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, in Stephen Marini's words, "the clumsy texts and limited musical resources of *The Bay Psalm Book* had created a liturgical crisis [...]. While lining out guaranteed that the people understood the words they were singing, it also ensured that their singing would lose much of its musicality" (75). At first, only a few ministers wished to completely abandon the tradition of lining-out altogether in favor of uninterrupted singing in unison. But there was widespread agreement among the clergy that their congregants' musical abilities were in dire need of improvement to make singing more harmonious and enable more variety of tunes. Documents written by ministers around this time are filled with complaints about the doleful howling of their parishioners and their resolutions for reform. Thomas Walter of Roxbury, for instance, reported that "the tunes [of the *Bay Psalm Book*] are now miserably tortured and twisted and quavered in some churches into a horrid medley of confused and disorderly noises" (qtd. in Marini 75).

Thus, Mather was deliberately obfuscating matters when he wrote in *Ratio Disciplinae* that "strangers" had judged new England psalmody "*not worse than what it is in many other parts of the World*" (55). His own diaries tell a different story, also with a view to the Old North Church. On September 24, 1716, for instance, he noted: "The Psalmody in our Assembly must

be better provided for.” Two years later, on October 13, he recorded: “The Psalmody is but poorly carried on in my Flock, and in a Variety and Regularity inferior to some others; I would see about it.” And for March 1721, to cite another example, he jotted down: “I must of Necessity do something, that the Exercise of *Singing* the sacred *Psalms* in the Flock, may be made more beautiful, and especially have the *Beauties of Holiness* more upon it” (*D* 2: 373, 560, 606).

Around 1720, Mather and other New England clergymen moved from complaint to action. A reform party arose that undertook considerable efforts to make their flocks abandon the “Old Ways” of singing “by rote” (that is, by ear) and guide them toward singing “by rule” or “regular singing.” To that end, they gave programmatic lectures and sermons, organized singing-schools and published numerous tracts and manuals. Most important to mention in this context are Thomas Symmes’s pamphlet *The Reasonableness of Regular Singing, or Singing by Note. In an Essay to Revive the True and Ancient Mode of Singing Psalm-Tunes [...] the Knowledge and Practice of Which is Greatly Decayed in Most Congregations* (1720) and two handbooks of musical instruction: John Tufts’s *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm-Tunes* (1721) and Thomas Walter’s *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained* (1721). These handbooks offered lessons for learning how to read musical notations and accurately sing the music as printed. Especially in their initial phase, the reform efforts met with a mixed response, ranging from enthusiastic endorsement to total obstruction. Scholars such as Laura L. Becker have argued that younger people appeared to have been more open to “regular singing” than their elders. Rural congregations generally responded more negatively and tended to defend the “Old Way,” while congregations in and around Boston had a more positive reaction. In any case, churches across New England experienced considerable strife and divisions in what has come to be known as the “Singing Controversy.”

In 1721, Mather made his own contribution to the debate with *The Accomplished Singer*. As the second part of the tract’s subtitle conveys, it was partly written to *Accompany the Laudable Endeavours of Those Who Are Learning to Sing by Rule, and Seeking to Preserve a Regular Singing in the Assemblies of the Faithful*. As such, *The Accomplished Singer* was wholly unoriginal and repeated the arguments made by Symmes and others. More importantly, Mather’s tract offered *Instructions How the Piety of Singing with a True Devotion, May Be Obtained and Expressed*. It was thus a work

primarily dedicated to the renewal of piety and devotional reading of the Psalms (Silverman, "Reform" 55). We will return to this later in the essay. Here it is important to note that Mather, like many of his reform-minded colleagues, interpreted the "Singing Controversy" as part of a larger crisis of religion in New England. As Becker has argued, the "Singing Controversy" must be viewed "within the context of broader ministerial anxieties and goals during the decades preceding the Great Awakening" (80). The endeavors to make their parishioners' psalmodic practice more regular and harmonious were inextricably linked to larger concerns about strengthening ministerial authority and social order as well as to a hope for a general revival of religion.

These connections are reflected in a letter dated November 5, 1723, which Mather wrote to his English correspondent Thomas Hollis, Jr. Here he mentions the conflicts over psalmody as a symptom of the "fearful decay of piety among us." As a consequence, "A mighty spirit came lately upon abundance of our people to reform their singing which was degenerated in our assemblies to an irregularity, which made a jar in the ears of the more curious and skillful singers," Mather writes. For Mather, the irregular singing in New England's churches was not just jarring to the human ear but constituted a profanation of a central ordinance in the worship prescribed by Scripture. It reflected a degeneration of true piety among many New Englanders, as evident in the outraged reaction to their ministers, who "encouraged the people, to accomplish themselves for a regular singing, and a beautiful psalmody." Especially outside the "more polite city of Boston [...] some numbers of elder and angry people" perversely decried and resisted "these wicked innovations" as popery and devil worship, necessitating the convening of "several ecclesiastical councils" to assuage animosities (*SLCM* 376-77).⁶ Mather, therefore, painted a rather idealized picture for the international readership of his *Ratio Disciplinae* when he wrote in 1726 about Psalm-singing in New England's churches, claiming that recently "they have reasonably Recovered it, and Reformed, and Refined it, from some Indecencies, that by length of Time had begun to grow upon it" (55).

By the mid-1720s, the debate over "regular singing" was still in full swing. There was also a growing dissatisfaction with the translation of the *New*

6 Mather also sought to calm opponents of regular singing with his *A Pacificatory Letter* (1723).

England Psalter among many congregations. The recently established Anglican churches of the Boston area were beginning to adopt the new royally sanctioned psalter of the Church of England by Poet Laureate Nahum Tate and Royal Chaplain Nicholas Brady. Their *A New Version of the Psalms in Meter* (first ed. 1696) offered what were in effect paraphrases rather than translations of the Psalms written in an elegant neoclassic poetic style and filled with numerous allusions to royalty and court life. The differences to the *New England Psalter* can be illustrated by a comparison of the first stanza of Ps. 42. The *New England Psalter* has: "Like as the Hart panting doth bray / after the water brooks, / even in such wise O God, my soule, / after thee panting looks" (*NEP* 109). In Tate and Brady this becomes: "As pants the hart for cooling springs, / That sinks exhausted in the summers chase, / So pants my soul for thee, great King of kings, / So thirsts to reach thy sacred dwelling place" (qtd. in Turner 271). At least a few of Boston's Congregational churches with high cultural aspirations also seem to have experimented with the Tate and Brady psalter.

Another version that gained much greater popularity in New England was *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Apply'd to the Christian State and Worship* (first ed. 1719) by the English Congregationalist minister and poet Isaac Watts (1674-1748). We know of a number of Congregational churches that voted to replace the *New England Psalter* with Watts in the 1720s and 1730s. During the second half of the century, more and more congregations also became open to singing hymns in addition to the Psalms. They would frequently turn to Watts's *Horae Lyricae: Poems Chiefly of the Lyrical Kind* (first ed. 1706) and *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (first ed. 1707).

Watts's approach to the Psalms represented a stark alternative to that of the *New England Psalter* in that he challenged the self-conscious "Hebraism" of the Puritan tradition. In Watts's view, as Marini explains, "the Psalms were too constraining a standard for Christian worshippers, whose spiritual experience had moved beyond the light of ancient Israel," making the composition of "original songs of Christian experience" warranted and necessary "for authentic worship." While Watts did not mean to eject the Psalms, he thought they required "modification for Christian worship" (Marini 75-76). Watts laid out the specific goals of his project in a letter to "my honored and very dear friend Dr. Cotton Mather." Dated March 1717 and thus more than one year before the work's publication, the letter also

contained a sampling of seven Psalms that he submitted "for Mather's free Censure & Judgment."⁷ What he had been working on, Watts tells Mather, was "not a Translation of David [...] but an Imitation of him so nearly in Christian Hymns, which in the Jewish Psalmist may plainly appear yet leave Judaism behind." To this end Watts freely rearranged and adjusted the Psalms, frequently inserting "words of the N.T." and Christ into his paraphrases. Short notes in-between the Psalms would explain his editorial choices and theological interpretations. Thus, in his self-consciously Christian "renovations" of the Psalms, Watts attempted "to teach the Author to speak like a Christian," as the preface to printed version of *The Psalms of David* subsequently proclaimed.

In terms of literary style, Watts, as his letter to Mather explains, did not attempt "Poetic flourish, but Simplicity of English [?] Verse, for the Use of Vulgar Christians." Indeed, Watts modernized the diction of the Psalms by removing Hebraisms, smoothing out any archaic or difficult diction and even including references to the contemporary life world of Britain. Watts employed cross-rhymed quatrains but alternated between common and long meter versions to offer more choices for singing tunes. Moreover, Watts frequently centered his version of the Psalms around the perspective of a speaker with whose religious experiences reader or singers could directly identify, thereby offering an immediate application of the ancient Hebrew Psalms to the lives of modern Christians. Thus, the opening of his version of Ps. 42 becomes a lyrical evocation of the believer's inward experience of painful distance to God and a prayer for graceful reunification with Him: "I. With earnest Longings of the Mind, / My God, to thee I look; / So pants the hunted hart to find / And taste the cooling brook. II. When shall I see thy Courts of Grace, / And meet my God again? / So long an Absence from thy Face / My Heart endures with Pain." In other places, Watts made it explicit that the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ was needed for such a reconciliation and inserted his Christocentric interpretations directly into the texts. For instance, the first part of Ps. 110, which Watts also sent to Mather for inspection, receives the title "*Christ exalted, and Multitudes Converted; or the Success of the Gospel.*" It begins: "Thus the Eternal Father spake / to

7 Manuscript letter in *The Mather Papers* at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Watts chose to send Mather seven Psalm imitations in which he had directly inserted Christ and New Testament references: Ps. 85, 87, 92, 110, 112, 118, 119.

Christ the Son; Ascend and sit / At my Hand, till I shall make / Thy Foes submit at Thy Feet" (Watts, *Psalms of David* 114, 288-89).

Mather was deeply conflicted about the works of Watts, with whom he corresponded for years. He greatly admired Watts's poetic talent as well his innovative style and evangelical piety. Mather approved of using Watts's spiritual hymns and poems for devotional purposes at home or in the context of small group religion. For these ends, he even actively promoted Watts in New England by printing selections of his hymns with various religious tracts of his own (see Phillips). Mather also composed and printed original scriptural hymns in such tracts that in many ways strikingly resemble those of Watts (Stievermann and Smith).

Regarding Watts's *Psalms of David*, Mather had much more ambivalent feelings. He recognized their merits as literary interpretations of the originals and seems to have enjoyed reading and singing them in private. Mather even incorporated Watt's Psalm imitations, along with other recent poetic versions, as interpretative glosses or experiential applications of the Psalms in the *Biblia Americana*.⁸ In contrast to many of his colleagues, however, Mather had strong reservations when it came to their use in official worship. To Mather's mind, Watts's Psalm imitations took too many liberties with the Hebrew text and implied too much discontinuity between the Old Church of ancient Israel and the Christian Church.

In a letter to Watts, dated September 7, 1719, Mather thanked his English correspondent for sending him the "very charming version of the Psalms" and assured him that he had many friends and admirers in New England. From this Mather proceeded to a cautious but telling critique of Watts's *Psalms of David*:

But while you do admirably accommodate the songs of the Old Church unto the plainest intentions of Christianity in our days,

⁸ In the preface to his *Biblia* commentary on the Psalms he let readers know, that "Some Ingenious and Well-Disposed Men, have given us diverse Versions of the *Psalms* in Meetre. And those Versions, no doubt, have some Good & Fine *Illustrations* here and there scattered in them" (BA 4: 327). Across his annotations Mather thus cited samplings from Charles Darby's 1704 *The Book of Psalms in English Metre* (BA 4: 327-38), from Brady and Tate, Richard Blackmore's 1721 *New Version of the Psalms* (BA 4: 620-22), as well as Watts's rendition of Psalm 148, originally included in *Horae Lyricae* (BA 4: 782-83).

you will not wonder if some are fond of retaining all the words of the ancient inspiration, partly because there is a profound sense in every one of them, and every syllable is full of instruction to them who are (which, alas, too few are!) so wise as to observe it. (*SLCM* 297-98)

As shown by his call for “retaining all the words of the ancient inspiration,” Mather wanted to uphold the basic translation approach of the original *Bay Psalm Book*, retaining as much faithfulness as possible to the divinely inspired Hebrew text whose every “word” and “syllable” was pregnant with meaning – meaning that was in danger of being obscured by free paraphrase or imitations, no matter how beautiful or pious in spirit they were. “For this cause,” had he “published a *Psalterium Americanum*,” as the closing of Mather’s letter somewhat obliquely suggests to Watts (*SLCM* 298).

Mather’s commitment to the literalist impulse behind the *Bay Psalm Book* does not mean, however, that he thought that either the original version or the 1651 revisions had reached the aim of a truly faithful as well as comprehensible translation. As he noted in the preface to *Psalterium Americanum*, there were still many passages in the *New England Psalter* that by the light of “all that are Masters of the *Hebrew Tongue*” did not conform to the original or had been “so Translated, that People could scarce tell how well to understand them” (*PA* ix-xi). What was more, both incarnations of the *Bay Psalm Book* – like all other English metrical versions of the Psalms – had artificially expanded or contracted lines. They had also made questionable word choices just for the sake of keeping the meter and creating rhymes.⁹ Or, as Mather put it, they had “for the sake of a *little Jingle at the end of the Line* [...] *left out* much of that which the Holy SPIRIT has provided for us, and *put in* much more that is none of His Provision” (*PA* xxxiv).¹⁰ Nor was Mather blind (or rather deaf) to the aesthetic

9 Mather asserted that this fault of adding or leaving out words for the sake of rhyme was to be found with the more than “than twice Seven Versions which I have seen,” by which he meant metrical Psalters in the vernacular languages (*PA* vii).

10 Mather was surely aware of the seventeenth-century debate on rhyme in England, with John Milton defending blank verse in the preface to the second edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1674 (“rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse”) against John Dryden’s advocacy of rhyme in his essay “An Essay of Dramatic

shortcomings of Dunster's new version. As someone who wished to improve the quality and variety of Psalm-singing in New England, he also saw problems with the sometime bumpy metrification of the *New England Psalter* and its almost exclusive reliance on common meter tunes.

Consequently, Mather decided to create a new psalter that promised, as the subtitles of *Psalterium* announced, *a translation exactly conformed unto the original*; and fitted unto a variety of *tunes commonly used in our churches*, together with explanatory and edificatory *illustrations*, as well as some advice on how to read and devotionally employ the Psalms *upon the glorious and various intentions of it*. To the Psalm translations themselves he added versifications of *other portions of the sacred Scripture* in the same meters *to enrich the cantional*. Between 1716 and 1718 Mather invested much time, work, and care into the project. His diaries mention how he engaged in an almost daily "Morning-Exercise of Translating the *Psalms*" in his library, making the work simultaneously a "Devotionary and Sanctifying Exercise" (*D* 2: 365). Alas, his efforts proved unsuccessful, as he failed to have *Psalterium* adopted in the churches of New England or even beyond after it was published in Boston in 1718.

Nevertheless, *Psalterium* is significant as an attempt at making a twofold intervention. First, Mather sought to prevent churches from replacing the *New England Psalter* with new versions that offered loose paraphrases or, in the case of Watts, even free imitations of the Psalms. Second, Mather hoped that *Psalterium* would provide a more accurate alternative to the *New England Psalter* that would simultaneously help to halt the perceived crisis in psalmody and offer a better choice of tunes for those wishing to advocate "regular singing."

To make congregational singing in harmony easier, Mather's *Psalterium*, on the one hand, continued the trend towards homogenizing metrical patterns. It gave a basic version of all the Psalms in common meter, alternating between iambic tetrameter and trimeter (8.6.8.6). But because he wanted to avoid the flaw of other English metrical version by detracting from or adding to "the Original Hebrew" merely "for the Clink of the Rhime" (*PA* vii),

Poesy" (1668). Mather's formulation almost seems to echo Milton when he disdainfully speaks of rhyme as "the jingling sound of like endings." Characteristically, however, Milton does not support his argument by referring to the Hebrew Bible but "the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory." Thanks to Matthias Bauer for this insight.

Mather, on the other hand, opted for unrhymed quatrains. While he regarded unrhymed verse as closer to the nature of Hebrew poetry (something to be further discussed below), he also pointed out that some of the most “famous pieces of Poetry” of this “Refining Age” were in “*Blank Verse*,” so that offering the “Glorious Book of PSALMS” in unrhymed iambs would not be seen as amiss. This is how the first stanza of Ps. 42 sounds in Mather's rendition:

1 As the Hart makes a panting cry / for cooling streams of waters; / So
my Soul makes a panting cry / to Thee, O mighty God.
2 My Soul does flame with thirst for God, / ev'n for the living God; /
when shall I come, and *when* appear || before the face of God? (PA 100)

While metrically more regular than the *New England Psalter*, Mather clearly avoids the artful elegance as well as the elevated “courtly” diction of Tate and Brady. Indeed, the example shows a recurring problem in Mather's metrification that mars not a few of his Psalm translations. The words that would naturally take semantic emphasis (Hart, Soul) remain metrically unstressed, which potentially trips up readers/singers or makes them to spontaneously shift the accent.

Yet Mather also wanted to allow for more variety in singing. He, therefore, created metrical alternatives for many, if not all, of the Psalms. This he did by adding two extra syllables to each shorter line. To visually set these apart as additions from the rest of the text and to avoid “any Danger to the Truth of the Translation,” he employed the typographical device of printing the extra syllables in black-letter Gothic type and set them within brackets. In this way, every Psalm thus rendered could also be sung in tunes fitted for long meter (8.8.8.8.). This gave congregations more tune choices but was still very simple to use in worship. The pastor or cantor, as Mather explains, “need only say, Sing with the **BLACK LETTER**, or, Sing without the **BLACK LETTER**, and the Tune will be sufficiently directed” (PA xxxv-vi). Consider, for instance, the first two stanzas of the famous Ps. 23:

1 MY Shepherd is th' ETERNAL God / I shall not be in [*any*]
want:
2 In pastures of a tender grass / he [*ever*] makes me to lie down:
/ To waters of tranquillities / He gently carries me, [*along*,]

3 My *feeble* and my *wandring* Soul / He [*kindly*] does fetch back again; / In the plain paths of righteousness / He does lead [*and guide*] me along, || because of the regard He has / [*ever*] unto His Glorious Name. ||

4 Yea, when I shall walk in the Vale / of the dark [*dismal*] shade of Death, / I'll of no evil be afraid, / because thou [*ever*] art with me. / Thy rod and thy staff, these are what / yield [*constant*] comfort unto me. (PA 50)

In addition to the bracketed words in black-letter Gothic type, we also find italicized words and phrases. As he explained in the preface, Mather used the “*Italica-Character*” to make the reader aware of cases “when a *word of supply* is introduced,” even if this convention might be considered “a needless Complement unto the *care of exactness*,” for he always made sure that his additions were “really in the Intention and Emphasis of the *Original*” (PA ix).¹¹ In the spirit of maximum fidelity, Mather thus typographically highlighted all the extra words with no or uncertain foundation in the Hebrew that he introduced for the sake of metrification. In this way, Mather wanted to offer the “PSALMS fitted unto the *Tunes* commonly used in the Assembles of our *Zion*: But so fitted, that the Christian Singer has his Devotions now supplied, with ALL that the Holy SPIRIT of GOD has dictated,” while “there is NOTHING BESIDES the pure Dictates of that Holy SPIRIT imposed on him” (PA vii-viii). Mather’s version of Ps. 23 also exhibits the tension between his scholarly and theological agenda of exactness, on the one hand, and a supple metrification, on the other. Again, there are multiple conflicts between semantic emphases and metrical accentuations.

The goals behind *Psalterium* are not sufficiently explained, however, by situating that work in the history of New England psalmody. They must also be seen as an outgrowth of Mather’s *Biblia Americana* project and its engagement with contemporary scholarship on the Bible. Specifically, *Psalterium* is informed by Mather’s involvement with the project to revise the common translation, contemporary debates over Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and by new insights on the nature of Hebrew poetry. Moreover, the work must also be seen in relation to efforts of Pietists and

11 The practice of italicizing words of supply Mather adopted from the King James Bible.

early evangelicals to promote more experiential forms of scriptural hermeneutics, something that is also advocated in the *Biblia*.

Psalterium Americanum as a Translational and Interpretative Project

As Clark Maddux's editorial footnotes of volume four amply document, the Psalms commentary of *Biblia Americana* was the seedbed of *Psalterium Americanum*. As an overall project, the *Biblia* has to be understood as Mather's response to the rising tide of historical scholarship and textual criticism on the Bible in the context of the Early Enlightenment – a response that was at once innovative and conservative. Mather's hope was to create a synthesis of the best scholarship of the day that would be up to the highest scientific standards but also fully orthodox and pious in accordance with his understanding of true Christianity. The *Biblia* pioneered a new type of deeply learned, historically conscious but apologetically oriented biblical criticism in America. While ultimately seeking to edify his readers and to strengthen their faith, Mather offered them rich historical contextualization on all parts and aspects of Scripture. He did not shy away from engaging with thorny issues, such as the inspiration of the biblical texts, debated cases of authorship, or textual variants and supposed corruptions.

As Mather highlighted in an advertisement pamphlet for subscriptions from "the Lovers of Religion and Learning," one other important feature of the *Biblia* was that it sought to address those "Instances, wherein the most Polite and Pious Masters in Philology, have expressed their Wishes to see the Common Translation Amended and Refined" (1714, 11). The "Masters of Philology" to which Mather alludes came from all sections of British and international Protestantism. Just as the King James Version of 1611 had been an outgrowth of humanist Bible scholarship, its continued flowering in seventeenth-century Britain put the Authorized Version under critical scrutiny and generated a substantial discourse among specialists, who pointed out numerous problems in the translation.¹² Well before the great revision of 1769 by Benjamin Blayney, there were serious misgivings about the accuracy of the Authorized Version. Among New England's clerical

12 On the history of English Bible translations in the early modern period, see the chapters in Part I of Killeen, Smith and Williet. On the history and reception of the KJV translation, see Norton; and Scanlin.

elite, these debates over the KJV were well known. Different Bible editions and translations, ancient and modern, polyglot Bibles, and specialized works of scholarship filled the bookshelf of collegiate libraries and even the private collections of well-to-do clergymen such as the Mathers. As is true for the motherland, however, none of this led to open rebellion against the monopoly of the Authorized Version. And without the king's permission, no alternative English version was to be printed.¹³ The commonly used metrical versions of the Psalms in English were similarly out of touch with the current philological scholarship on the Hebrew text. This was true even for the *New England Psalter*, although Richard Mather and the original translators had put a premium on accuracy. By the turn of the eighteenth century, many of their translational choices appeared inadequate.

Cotton Mather's *Biblia Americana* was the first large-scale attempt from New England to contribute to improving the common translation (see Stievermann, "Cotton Mather's Biblical Enlightenment"). While we do not yet have a complete count, it is safe to say that Mather offered amended translations in several hundred places across the biblical canon. In his annotations on the Psalms we find an especially high number of suggested revisions in the Authorized Version. These revisions then also became the basis for his new translation of the entire Psalms published as *Psalterium*. For these revisions Mather examined the original text with the help of Hebrew dictionaries but also consulted rabbinical commentaries, numerous specialized works of scholarship, English commentaries and paraphrases, and a wide range of other vernacular versions of the Psalms.¹⁴

Overall, Mather's goal with this translation was, as he puts it in the preface, to offer a New England a psalter that would be "much more agreeable to the Original than the Old one" (PA ix). In charting a course between fidelity to the original and idiomatic, even elegant, expression in the target

13 On the discussion over the KJV in the seventeenth century, see Campbell (108-28).

14 For a survey of Mather's sources on Psalms and the main themes and contexts of his commentary, see Maddux (41-63). As Maddux points out, Mather's most important tool in translating the Psalms and also a frequent source of his annotations is *Decapla in Psalmos* (1639) by the Church of England English divine John Viccars (1604?-1653?). The work provided a synopsis of ten versions of the Psalms, featuring a Latin translation alongside Arabic, Syrian, and Aramaic versions of the Psalms; and Greek, Roman Catholic, Italian, Spanish, and French commentaries," supplemented by extracts of patristic and classical rabbinic glosses (41-42).

language, as every translation must, Mather made it his policy to rather err on the side of literalism. "We have tied ourselves to *Hebraisms*, more scrupulously, than there is real occasion for," he explained to the readers of *Psalterium*. "Yea, the just *Laws of Translation* had not been at all violated, if a much greater Liberty had been taken, for the beating out of the Golden and Massy *Hebrew* into a more *Extended English*." However, as a firm believer in the plenary inspiration of Scripture, Mather was afraid of losing some of its divine richness of meaning or corrupting it by human accretions. Regarding his Psalms translation he was convinced that the "*Difference* in this, from the former and common Translation" would hold up well under the scrutiny of "the more Learned Reader" who would "please to Examine the *Original*" (PA ix).

Mather's nervousness about the fidelity of his translation was not simply motivated by his orthodox commitments and general involvement with current biblical scholarship. Paradoxical as this might sound, the fact that Mather tied himself so closely to "*Hebraisms*" also grew from a concern over the Christian hold on the Psalms. This was a reaction to critical debates over the Hebrew Scriptures and their relation to the New Testament and the Christian religion. Which parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, if examined according to the standards of critical philology, could really be said to have prefigured or even prophetically predicted Christ and the gospel dispensation?

Already in the seventeenth century, the famous Dutch-Arminian scholar Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and his followers had argued that only the prophetic books such as Isaiah actually predicted future events. However, in their literal sense even the prophetic books pointed to and had their primary fulfillment in ancient Jewish history. Only for a precious few of the Hebrew prophecies would Grotius concede that, from the perspective of faith, they could also be applied to Christ in a secondary, mystical sense, which, however, was detached from the intended meaning in its original context. Such a mystical sense of prefiguration could also be allowed for some of the Psalms, but they certainly did not accurately predict any events or details in the life of Christ or church history. As prophetic evidence for the truth claims of Christianity they had no value. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, this line of argument was radicalized by much more skeptical critics, in particular English Deists such as Anthony Collins (1676-1729), who dismissed any Christian interpretations of the Hebrew prophets as

arbitrary allegorizations with no merit at all. Such arguments threatened to loosen the general ties between Old and New Testament (see Stievermann, “Debate”). With regard to the Psalms, criticism of this kind called into question their legitimate use in Christian worship. Indeed, from a Christian theological perspective, this amounted to a de-sacralization of the Psalms.

British Protestant apologists of Mather’s day responded to this challenge in various ways. Some became much more guarded in their Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures and restricted these to such passages to which the New Testament writers had made explicit reference or in which the literal sense seemed to warrant Christian readings. Others, like Mather, insisted that all parts of the Hebrew Bible were pregnant with Christian meaning, and not just in a typological or mystical sense but also in the prophetic sense. Mather’s re-translation of the Psalms thus stood in the service of, as he put it in his *Biblia* commentary, showing readers that “whole *Psalter*” was a “Book of the MESSIAH” (BA 4: 470), typologically as well as prophetically.

In his above-cited 1719 letter to Watts, Mather specifically mentions that he wished to retain every syllable of the Psalms, “because the spirit of prophecy has therein described unto us the condition of the church, both in our days and in those which are to come, with intimations that carry a vast pleasure and wonder in them” (SLCM 298). Mather was concerned that paraphrastic translations or imitations à la Watts obscured the precise but often subtle ways in which certain phrases or single words of the Psalms pointed toward a *Christus futurus* and even the millennial age of the church, which he expected to commence soon.¹⁵ Indeed, it was the stated aim of Watts’s hymns as well as his *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* to give devotional expression to the most frequent and general forms of Christian experiences. Doctrinally, as Marini explains, Watts wished “to promote Protestant consensus by focusing on the most essential beliefs of Reformed theology and the promotion of a deeply emotional piety,” while, in Watts’s own words, “‘avoid[ing] the more obscure and controverted points of Christianity,’” notably those concerning eschatology (74).

15 Mather was an ardent millennialist who expected the kingdom of Christ on earth to begin in the early eighteenth century. For a survey of Mather’s millennialism, see Stievermann (“Editor’s Introduction” 143-96).

While also invested in furthering Protestant unity, Mather, by contrast, thought that such generalized Christian readings of the Psalms potentially constituted a great loss, as they might obscure the amazing particularity with which the Hebrew texts predicted events several hundreds of years later. In his tract *The Accomplished Singer*, without mentioning Watts's name, Mather protested against denuding the Psalms of their "Jewish Dress" and presenting "a *Psalter* without any Air the Old Testament." The "*Things* and the *Terms* Originally pertaining to the Church of *Israel*," he proclaimed, "will do *us* no damage; There is a Sweet *Gospel* in them, if we give Attention to it; Yea, we lose too much of the Beauty discovered in our *Gospel*, if we lay them wholly aside!" (AS 15). Moreover, by freely blending the language of the Psalms with the language of the New Testament, as Watts did, the boundary between translation and Christian interpretation was erased. This carried the danger of inadvertently strengthening the position of skeptical critics who claimed that Christian appropriations of the Psalms were not warranted by the original texts.

Yes, the Psalms were a wonderful Christian "*Prayer-Book*," Mather writes in the preface to *Psalterium*, "from hence to learn, for what *Things*, and with what *Frames*, we are to make our Prayers," praising and thanking the Lord or asking for consolation and reassurance of faith in times of adversity (PA iv-v). But it was more than that: "It is very certain," he continues, "That in the PSALMS, the *Person*, the *Natures*, the *Vertues*, the *Humiliation*, the *Exaltation*, the *Extensive Kingdom*, and the admirable *Glories* of the MESSIAH, are every where scattered and glittering, after such a manner, as calls for our Wonderment." One could find Christ and his works typically foreshadowed in the imagery of the Psalms that often appeared like "a piece of *Canvas*, on which the Holy Spirit has inlaid the *Mystical sense*, which concerns our SAVIOUR, as a *Golden Embroidery*" (PA xiii-xiv). But just as often the Psalms, in their most literal sense, predicted in minute detail the life and redemptive work of Christ, the gospel, as well as the history of the Christian church right down to latter-day events. Through his "Hebraizing" translation, Mather wanted his readers to be able see that for themselves. "If we would be well instructed in the *Mysteries* of the *Great Salvation*, or be well acquainted with the *Prophecies* of what is to be done in the *Latter Days*," he exclaimed, "Let the PSALMS be well studied" (PA vi).

From Mather's point of view, it was also better to translate as accurately as possible, so as to have a sound foundation for evaluating the debates over

the correct Christian interpretations, which he so extensively covered in his *Biblia* commentary. In *Psalterium* he chose to keep these interpretations separated in the form of short addenda with “Illustrations” on every Psalm. They were to “assist the Reader in coming at the vast *Profit and Pleasure*” and unlocking “the Immense Treasures of *Truth*” contained in every Psalm (PA xix). To Mather, this was no mere academic exercise, for he hoped that such illustrations might also find use in the context of public worship. In the preface to *The Accomplished Singer* he proposed that the pastor would introduce the psalm with a “short *Expository Preface* (which need not extend beyond Four Five Minutes) [...] expressing the *Lessons* PIETY found in the Verses” as well as “the *Tempers and Wishes* of PIETY with which they are to be Sung withal” (n.p.). In this way, Mather hoped to contribute to both a better Christian understanding of the Psalms and their deeper personal appropriation and pious use, something to be further discussed at the end of this essay.

Mather’s unabashedly Christocentric “Illustrations” thus complement his “Hebraizing” translation. In contrast to Watts, however, the specific Christian interpretations the “Illustrations” offer are not directly built into the new version of the texts. For *Psalterium*, Mather only made a small selection from the burgeoning commentary on Psalms in the *Biblia*. Still, the “Illustrations” comprise a great plurality of voices, reflecting Mather’s vast reading on the subject. Especially striking are the frequent references to messianic readings of the Psalms by rabbinic exegetes, which Mather takes as inadvertent confirmations of his view that the Psalms foreshadow or outrightly predict Jesus Christ. But like all other voices, these rabbinic interpretations are presented to readers as interpretative offers in addition to the original text, which they are free to accept or ignore.

For all its claim to high fidelity, *Psalterium*, unlike other literalist translations, tends not to retain Hebrew terms (in transliterated form), as other English versions had done, notably the *New England Psalter*. Most significantly, Mather chose to translate the holy names of God, rendering “JEHOVAH” as “The ETERNAL GOD,” “*Elohim*” as “GOD the Judge,” and “*Adonai*” as “The GOD on whom I lean.” These different titles and their meanings were “in the Hebrew Term,” Mather explained in the preface, and should be brought out for the better appreciation of English users. Moreover, rather than settling on just one, Mather frequently offers different semantic facets of Hebrew words by pairing two different translations, such as “All

Day and Every Day” for the Hebrew “*Col Haijom*” (PA ix-x). This necessarily adds more words than are in the original. But in such cases when “Two English Words are employ’d for One Hebrew Word,” Mather marked these “with an * Asterisk,” even though, as he assured his readers in the preface, “the *Hebrew* signified *Both*.” Generally, these translational choices were guided by Mather’s desire to do justice to the original while ensuring comprehensibility for users with no knowledge of Hebrew. But sometimes the addition of extra words also appears to have been motivated by metrical concerns. To shed at least some light on the concrete character of Mather’s re-translation and the interpretative work of his “Illustrations,” the following paragraphs will briefly discuss Ps. 17 as a more or less representative example, using the 1698 *New England Psalter* as a comparative foil.

Ps. 17 (“A Prayer of David”) is a good example of how Mather attempted to make his translation at once more faithful to the Hebrew text, clearer and easier to understand in its English diction, as well as more even in its met-rification. In the *New England Psalter* the first six verses read:

- 1 JEhovah hearken to the right, /
attend unto my cry: /
Give ear unto my pray’r that goes /
from lips that do not lie. /
- 2 My judgment from thy face let come, /
thine eyes let see the right. /
Mine heart thou hast examined, /
and visited by night. /
- 3 Thou hast me as in furnace tri’d, /
and yet shalt nothing find: /
For that my mouth shall not transgress /
I am resolv’d in mind. /
- 4 For what concerns the works of men, /
by thy lips words have I /
The paths of him that doth destroy /
observed heedfullie. /
- 5 Uphold thou my forth-going steps /
within thy beaten way: /
lest otherwise at any time /
my footsteps go astray ./
- 6 Because that thou wilt answer me, /
God, on thee I call:/. (NEP 51)

Psalterium offers instead:

1 HEar, O ETERNAL God, the right: attend unto my cry; / Give ear
unto my prayer, which is / not in deceitful lip
2 Let there come from before thy face the sentence pass'd on me: / Let
thine eyes favourably look / upon things that be right/
3 Thou h'st prov'd my heart; thou'st visited / by night; me hast thou
try'd: / Thou shalt find nothing; I have thought, || My mouth shall not
transgress. /
4 For what concerns the works of Men, / by the word of thy lips, / I
have observed well the paths / of him who does destroy. /
5 My goings, O do thou uphold / in thy well-tending paths: / *When
thou hast done that thing for me* / my footsteps have not slipt. /
6 Upon thee I have call'd, because / thou hearest me, O God: / O do
thou bow thine ear to me, / O hearken to my speech. || (PA 30-31)

If one compares these two versions to modern hyperliteralist word-by-word translations (such as Buber and Rosenzweig in German or the Literal Standard Version in English), it immediately becomes clear that Mather tends to hew much more closely to the Hebrew. For instance, his rendition of v.1 makes “the right” an apposition of God, which more closely follows the original, as does the phrase “deceitful lip.” Likewise, his translation of the difficult-to-understand ending of v. 3 seeks to make legible the actual meaning of the original, which Dunston had further obscured by paraphrasing “For that my mouth shall not transgress / I am resolv'd in mind.” Mather's version sticks to the Hebrew as much as possible but disambiguates it as a promise of the speaker that God shall not find him having thought one thing, while saying another (cf. also *BA* 4: 407). Furthermore, Mather carefully follows the Hebrew and supplies “hearken to my speech,” a phrase that Dunston apparently left out to keep the meter. By contrast, in v. 5 Mather adds the phrase “*When thou hast done that thing*” in italics (thus signaling that it was an interpolation) in order to clarify the meaning of his translation, which does away with Dunston's interpretative insertion “lest otherwise at any time” and retains the verbal phrase in the past tense (“my footsteps have not slipt”).

Occasionally, however, Mather's revisions could also be of greater theological import. Consider the last line (v. 15) of Ps. 17, which the *New*

England Psalter had carried: "In righteousness thy favour I / shall very clearly see: / And waking with thine Image I / shall satisfied be." In *Psalterium* v. 15 becomes: "My portion's this; I shall behold / thy face in righteousness: / I shall be satisfy'd when that / thy Image shall awake." Mather's "I shall behold / thy face in righteousness" is a much more literal rendering of the Hebrew and significantly changes the meaning of the clause: righteousness is not a favor bestowed upon the believer who experiences God's goodness that way. Rather, in acting righteously (instead of self-interestedly as the wicked) the believer is graciously allowed to see "the face of God." In the *Biblia* annotation as well as the "Illustration" on that verse in *Psalterium* Mather explains that in the Hebrew Scriptures "*Righteousness*" is firmly associated with "*Alms-giving*." Indeed, Talmudic tradition had it that David "gave *Alms* to the Poor every day; using these Words, *I will behold the Face of God in righteousness*" (PA 33; BA 4: 408-9).

What is more, Mather's "Illustration" reads the ending of v. 15 as a prediction of the death and resurrection of the Messiah. According to rabbinic tradition, he noted, "the Messiah is the Face of God – *may we get into His Righteousness!*" (PA 33). Of course, Mather believed that none other than Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the verse's prophetic sense. This agreed well with what he took to be the meaning of "thy Image," which adumbrated the Christian-Trinitarian understanding of the Son as the "Image" of the Father. The "awakening" of that "Image" signified the resurrection after Christ's redemptive death on the cross, in which believers would partake and be "satisfy'd."

Thus, compared to the *New England Psalter*, Mather's translation of Ps. 17 offered a profoundly different lesson of faith and practical piety to be imbibed by its readers and singers. Through his "Illustrations" Mather embedded this lesson in a larger Christian framework of redemptive history. Not only did Ps. 17 predict the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Messiah. David's prayer to be saved from the "wicked one" and to be set apart from "the mortal men of the world" was to be interpreted in an eschatological sense as well. More specifically, as Mather notes, it concerned "the fate of Antichrist" and his followers, who were allowed to prosper and reign over this world for an allotted time, but would be destroyed in the latter-days upon the return of Jesus before his ushered in His millennial reign (PA 32).

Psalterium Americanum in the Context of Mather's Understanding of Hebrew Poetry and Experiential Hermeneutics

Just as the revised translations and the illustrations of *Psalterium* were the results of Mather's scholarly labors in the *Biblia*, so was Mather's decision to render the Psalms in unrhymed iambs informed by his command of current critical debates on the nature of Hebrew poetry and song. In the preface to *Psalterium*, Mather briefly mentions that the question, "*To what Rules the Poesy of the Davidic PSALMS is to be adjusted*" has been a most "vexed a Problem to our *Modern Criticks*." Citing the German Lutheran theologian and exegete August Pfeiffer (1640-1698) as his authority,¹⁶ Mather conveys to his readers that the slowly emerging consensus among the best contemporary scholars was "That the *Poesie* of the *Ancient Hebrews*, knew no *Measure*, but that of the unknown *Music*, wherein it was to be accommodated" (PA xii). The critical debate to which Mather here alludes and its implications for his psalter project are laid out in much greater detail in the *Biblia*, specifically his introductory annotations on the Psalms in the BA (4: 323-26). Here Mather reviews the opinions of various ancient authors, including Josephus, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome, who had asserted, or at least mentioned, the notion that the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms was also composed in quantitative meters, similar to that of Greco-Roman poetry.

Starting with the great Dutch humanist Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609), a growing number of sixteenth and seventeenth-century humanist scholars had disparaged such a view as sheer conjecture. They maintained that there was no Hebrew poetry with a metrical system and that the Psalms ought to be seen as a form of prose animated by a poetic style (see Haugen).¹⁷ A significant counterargument was presented by Franciscus Gomarus (François Gomaer, 1563-1641), whom Mather also mentions. A student of Scaliger, Gomarus disagreed with his teacher. In his *Davidis lyra: seu nova Hebræa S. scriptures ars poetica* (1637), he argued that the now lost Hebrew prosody could be systematically reconstructed and that the Psalms and other poetic books could be scanned in their entirety using Greek and Roman metrical forms. But Gomarus's reasoning did not catch on. Mather, too, found himself unconvinced by Gomarus's strained attempts, noting in the

16 Mather cites August Pfeiffer, *Dubia Vexata Scripturae, Sive Loca Difficiliora Vet. Test* (1679), in *Opera* (1704), lib. 1, at cent. 3, loc. 46 (279-82).

17 See Joseph Scaliger, *Thesaurus temporum* (1606), "Animadversiones" (6-7).

Biblia how “tis very certain, that all the Skill in the world, will not find the Rules of that *metred Poetry*, with any tolerable exactness observed in our Bible.” Of rhyme the ancient Hebrews knew nothing. Mather agreed with Pfeiffer and others that, historically, metrical poetry was probably of later origin than the Psalms. The Psalms, Mather concluded, “are not so much *metrical* as *musical*: and hence, the very Inscriptions of them, intimate that there was a Sort of *Melody*, whereto they were fitted” (BA 4: 323).

Thus, like Scaliger and others after him, Mather regarded the Psalms as essentially a special form of prose, set apart from other sections of the Hebrew Bible not by metrical regularity or rhyme but a poetic style of characterized by sublime thought, pious affect, and a highly figurative language. “The *Sublime Thought*, and the *Divine Flame*, alone is enough,” Mather emphasized, “to challenge the Character of *Poetry* for these Holy Compo-sures.” What distinguished the Psalms most of all was their emotional-spiritual quality, expressive of how David had “his HEART [...] Holily affected, with the *Word* of GOD, that came unto him” and burned with a “Flaming LOVE towards GOD; and then towards *Men*, for the Sake of GOD, the *Root* of all *Spiritual Affections*” (PA xiii, xxi-ii). This sublime style had its origins in the sacred music of temple worship and lent itself to singing by others similarly affected.¹⁸

Generally speaking, Mather would have aimed for an English version that mimicked the unique poetic power of the Psalms but was hampered in his expressive freedom by the principle of literalism. As he acknowledged, the high degree of fidelity to the original texts sometimes diminished the affective quality of the translations. “And if any *Beauties* be wanting,” he apologetically preempted his critics, “tis owing to the lowness of the *Language*, whereinto a strict and close *Translation*, is what we are here tied unto” (PA

18 Shortly before his death, Mather wrote and appended to the *Biblia* an essay titled “*Psalmes. Or, The Ancient Music and Poetry of the Hebrew*” (BA 10: 943-54) in which he further developed his theory of the Hebrew Psalms as “*Natural Poetry*,” not characterized by formal regularity but by “Passion breaking forth with Spirit; with Vehemence of Expressions, daring Figures, & Elevation of Thoughts, in Proportion to the Quality of the Subject” (BA 10: 953). Here Mather’s main sources was *A Discourse Concerning Poetry in General, and concerning that of the Hebrews in Particular*, penned by the Cistercian Abbot Claude Fleury (1640-1725) but published (also in English translation) as part of a larger work by Augustine Calmet (1672-1757), *Antiquities sacred and profane: or, a Collection of Curious and Critical Dissertations on the Old and the New Testament* (1724), sec. 1., 1-18.

xiii). When it came to following the emotional-spiritual flights of the Psalms, the free imitations of Watts were clearly at an advantage.

Moreover, Mather had to concede that by his own Hebraist standards he should have done not just without rhyme but also without meter. If “our *Translation* is all in *Metre*; and really more tied unto *Measure*, than the *Original* appears to have been,” this was so, he explained, because in English (and other European languages, for that matter) having the Psalms in regular “*Numbers and Measures*” rendered them “capable of being *Sung*, in those grave *Tunes*, which have been prepared and received for our *Christian Psalmody*” (PA xi, vii). In other words, his choice was a pragmatic one, owed to the liturgical context in which the Psalms would be used. Unmetrical Psalms would have made congregational singing far worse rather than more harmonious and edifying.

Finally, the preface to *Psalterium* together with *The Accomplished Singer* shows Mather’s wish to teach Christians how to make psalm-singing a complex exercise of devotion in which they would engage Scripture in an affective, prayerful, and Spirit-centered way. Such a devotional engagement Mather considered indispensable for fostering a living faith (Silverman, “Reform” 55). Mather’s reform of psalmody has to be seen as part and parcel of a larger project of developing a scriptural hermeneutic of experiential piety, which we can trace across many of his later writings and also the *Biblia*. While this project responded to the perceived decline in popular religion, it was also a counter-reaction to the rise of historical-textual criticism that threatened to distance the learned reader from the Bible.

As several studies have carefully reconstructed, Mather’s project was deeply influenced by German Lutheran Pietism of the Halle school and especially August Hermann Francke (1663-1727).¹⁹ Mather greatly appreciated Francke’s *Manuductio ad lectionem Scripturae Sacrae* (1693) and extensively cited this work when he composed an essay on reading the Bible experientially, which Mather appended to the *Biblia*.²⁰ This essay, in turn, was the basis for Mather’s chapter on studying the Bible in his handbook for candidates of the ministry, *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726), as well as the respective sections of *Psalterium* and *The Accomplished Singer*.

19 On these connections, see Lovelace; Stievermann, “Imagining Global Protestantism”; Stievermann and Hoselton; and Hoselton.

20 The essay is titled “An Essay, for a further COMMENTARY on the Sacred Scriptures” (BA 10: 797-810).

Mather found congenial Francke's emphatic claim that in reading the Scriptures natural reason and historical understanding were not enough. Like Mather, Francke greatly valued philological and historical expertise. Ultimately, however, both men were convinced that the scholarly perspective could only produce outward knowledge about the Bible that pertained to its linguistic and contextual dimension. Such knowledge was very important, helping to establish the literal meaning, confirm prophetic predictions, and reconstruct the historical truth of the Bible. However, for truly grasping the Bible's saving truths, one needed the direct aid and illumination of the Spirit and to exercise methodical piety.

Mather also followed Francke's lead in drawing a sharp distinction between regenerate and unregenerate readers of Scripture. No matter how learned, unregenerate readers who had not yet experienced conversion to a living faith in Christ by the agency of the Spirit could do no more than interpret the literal, grammatical, and historical dimension of Scripture, or what Francke calls the "rind" of the text. Without the inner support of the Spirit and a personal experience of faith, however, they cannot get to the "kernel" or inner spiritual sense of a given text. This was only possible for the regenerate, who, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, can personally take hold of the Word and are quickened by its power to grow in holiness.

Citing the "excellent *Franckius*" as his authority and with a view to engaging the Psalms in an experiential fashion, Mather accordingly wrote in *Psalterium*, "That an *Unregenerate Mind* is poorly qualified for such an Exercise as this." Yet this was no excuse for unconverted parishioners abstaining from the practice in public worship or at home. Indeed, a "Soul pressing after a true *Regeneration*, cannot readily take a more likely way to arrive unto a Blessed Experience of it," Mather emphasizes, even though, of course, the new birth in faith ultimately came *sola gratia*. But by lively singing the Psalms with as much feeling and personal identification as they could, those desirous of conversion were doing all they could to prepare their minds and hearts, "waiting upon the Holy SPIRIT of GOD, with *proper Trials*, whether He will not quicken such *Affections* in it, as are to be found no where, but in a *Soul Regenerated*, and Animated and Actuated from Above." Those parishioners "who are indeed *Born again*," Mather admonished "to make this *Exercise* of PIETY more usual with you" to further deepen their faith (PA xxiv).

For this purpose, Mather distinguishes two interrelated modes or dimensions of engaging with the Scriptures in an experiential fashion. Both of these modes he found suggested, if not fully developed, in the writings of Francke and his teacher Philipp Jacob Spener. The one Mather calls the “*Affectuous way*,” the other the “*Porismatic way*” (PA xxi, xvii), a term to be explained below.²¹ Together these two modes were to be practiced in Mather’s reformed psalmody, which, in turn, could serve as a model for how to devotionally engage with Scripture more generally. With its alternation between meditative reading and emotional singing, a reformed practice of psalmody would involve the mind as well as the heart and be especially conducive to a Spirit-filled, personal appropriation of the biblical texts. Mather’s “*Affectuous way*” essentially propagates a hermeneutic of personal identification with, as he puts it in *Psalterium*, the “*Holy Men of GOD*, who wrote the SCRIPTURE, [and] were *moved by His Holy Spirit*, in and for the Writing of it.” More particularly, Mather encourages the pious reader of the Psalms (or any biblical text) to consider how the “the *Spirit of Holineß* at the Time of the Inspiration made suitable *Impressions* on the *Affections* of His Faithful Servants” and how the “Good Men had their *Hearts* Holily, Graciously, Divinely, and suitably *Affected* with the Matter, which the Spirit of GOD employ’d their Pens” (PA xxi).

Serious students of the Bible must therefore try as best as they can to inhabit the minds and hearts of the biblical authors through an exercise of pious empathy and imagination. In so doing, they must carefully meditate on the content of each section, immerse themselves in the context and the author’s circumstances in order to “Discover which of these *Affections* may be most obvious and evident, in the *Sentence*, which may be now under thy consideration.” For this Mather advises his readers to go slowly with frequent “Pause” and prayer as they are finding “the same *Affections* beginning to stir in thy own Soul, and marvellously to Harmonize & Symphonize, with what the Holy SPIRIT of GOD raised in His *Amanuensis*, at the moment of His Writing it.” Ideally this identification with the holy thoughts, aims, and emotions of the text’s human author leads to a momentary fusion of souls in which the Holy Spirit similarly fills the mind and heart of the interpreter. “Be not at *Rest*,” Mather writes, “until thou feel thy Heart-strings quaver, at

21 Compare Mather’s “An Eßay” (BA 10: 803-5) and *Manuductio* (80-83), where he cites Francke and Spener repeatedly.

the Touch upon the Heart of the *Sacred Writer*, as being brought into an *Unison* with it, and the Two Souls go up in a Flame together" (PA xiii-iv).²²

Mather regarded singing as especially conducive to reading the Bible in the "*Affectuous way*." If rightly practiced, psalmody, for him, was a "way to be *filled with the Spirit*, from whence the PSALMS are dictated" (PA vi). Beautiful singing made it easier than mere reading to be drawn into those "Motions of Piety, which are discernible in the Verse now before us," Mather explained in *The Accomplished Singer*, and to enter "into *Holy Symphony* with the *Saints* who had their *Hearts* burning within them, when they sang these things unto the Lord (AS 13).

To help with this goal, the "Illustrations" in Mather's *Psalterium* frequently left little hints about the general mood and "Motion of Piety" that animated a particular Psalm. On Ps. 17, for example, he noted that it had "the same Subject as the X. Psalm" and the same basic impetus. It was a prayer against the temptations by the devil and his agents, that is, the wicked men who seemed to prosper and prevail in this world (PA 20 and 32). Hence, singers had to put themselves in the same plaintive mood and state of distress from which David cried unto the Lord for succor and ultimately received consolation in faith. For other Psalms, an affective state of joyous praise and thanksgiving was to be assumed and so on.

To Mather, then, the "*Affectuous way*" of reading was not to be exercised at the expense of intellectually comprehending the text's content. Rather, intellectual comprehension formed the basis but remained necessarily incomplete without involving the affective dimension that created a connection with the Spirit. And through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, regenerate Psalm-singers could even come into a *unio mystica* with Christ. "BUT, O *Eagle-Eye'd Believer*,"

when thou art Singing the Graces, the *Actions*, the *Sufferings*, and the *Grandeurs* of the REDEEMER, and perhaps coming into *Thoughts* and *Frames*, that have some little Resemblance to those, which the *Prophetic Spirit* here assigns to thy REDEEMER, in the Time of His *Working out thy Salvation* for thee, what an *Angelical Dignity* art thou

22 Mather, *Manuductio as Ministerium*, 81-82. See also AS: "Nor is there Nobler Method, among all our Hermeneutic Instruments, to come at the True sense of our spiritual Songs, than Experimental Taste, the PIETY which was working in the Hearts of the Writers at the Time of their Inspiration" (13).

advanc'd unto! What a *Token for Good* hast thou, that thy RE-DEEMER will one day bring thee to a Consort with Him, in the *Songs* and *Joys* of the Heavenly World! (PA xv-vi)

By singing the Psalms, Mather hoped, his parishioners might be able to inwardly experience and personally affirm all the amazing things predicted about Christ by David, which *Psalterium* sought to faithfully carry over into English in all their particularity.

Reflecting Mather's concern with practical piety, the "*Affectionous way*" was to go hand in hand with the "*Porismatic way*" of reading. In mathematics, the term originally signified "a proposition arising from the consideration of another proposition" (Silverman, "Reform" 55). For Mather and his Pietist sources it came to mean a method of examining each portion of the Bible "to observe and educe, the *Doctrines of Godliness*," "with a *Note* and a *Wish* devoutly formed upon every *Verse*," that God would allow them to follow in their own lives the lesson thus learned. Devout souls had found "this Method of Communion with Him" and "conversing with His Testimonies" a source of boundless blessings. To this end, pious readers were to "Make a *Pause* upon every *Verse*, and see what *Lessons of Piety* are to be learnt from every Clause. Turn the *Lessons* into *Prayers*; and send the *Prayers* up unto the Heavens" (PA xvii-iii).²³

The New England tradition of lining out Psalms offered such moments of reflection and prayer after every line in public worship. Even during singing, as Mather suggested in *The Accomplished Singer*, the rhythm of the metrical Psalms provided not only pauses for breathing but "the Time of *Dilatation* which we take in our *Singing* affords usually sufficient Opportunity" to transform each line into a prayer (AS 15-16). For private devotion, Mather recommended that the "Singer gives himself Time, to do the part of such a Reader" (PA xviii). An ancient collection of prayers, the Psalms, by personal appropriation, were to be converted into new and explicitly Christian prayers by the individual reader-singer.²⁴

23 "We should first Hear what the Glorious GOD speaks unto [in the psalm], and then with fit Echo's of Devotion give our Consent and Answer unto it" (AS 15).

24 Significantly, Mather also reports in his diary that he used the same method of piety in writing the new translations for *Psalterium*. In June 1716, he notes: "Stepping into my Library every Morning, for a Version of the Psalms into blank Verse, I should

Some of his "Illustrations" on Ps. 17 provide examples for how Mather imagined such an exercise in porismatic reading. At Ps. 17:4 ("For what concerns the works of Men, / by the word of thy lips, / I have observed well the paths || of him who does destroy"), he noted that David's prayer could be paraphrased here: "I know what Men are apt to do in such Circumstances. But the respect I bear to thy Commandments, hath preserved me from those Murderous Practices, which the Violent Man would have attempted" (PA 32).²⁵ In this form, singers could easily convert the verse into a personal prayer promising God to be obedient to His commandments in a given situation and asking Him to preserve them as He did David. On v. 15, Mather derived from his re-translation ("I shall behold / thy face in righteousness") a very concrete lesson of piety to be turned into a prayer. Here as in so many other places of Scripture "*Alms-giving*" was presented as an essential "*Article of Righteousness*" and "for weighty and obvious Reasons. 'Tis opposite here, to the spirit and conduct of the *Men of this World*, who what they don't spend on their own Bellies, are studious to leave all the rest unto their *Children*" (PA 32).²⁶ Accordingly, singers could pray for a spirit of righteousness and charity that would set them apart as true Christians from the "*Men of this World*."

Mather had no doubt that if worshippers engaged with the Psalms, "on such an *Intention*, and with such a *Management*" as he recommended, they would find it "the most serviceable, and the most comfortable, *Instrument of Devotion*" (PA xviii). Moreover, Mather's reform of psalmody could serve as a model for reading Scripture more generally. Of course, not all parts of Scripture lent themselves to be sung, although many did.²⁷ Albeit less easily and deeply, it was possible even without singing to come into unison with the hearts and minds of the biblical authors and, through them, the Holy Spirit of God that inspired their writings. Through this kind of

make this Exercise, exceedingly subservient unto my Devotion. And particularly fetch Lessons and Wishes out of every Verse as I go along" (D 2: 356; see also 364).

25 See BA 4: 408. Taken from Simon Patrick, *The Book of Psalms Paraphrased*, 2nd. ed., (1691), bk. 1, 52.

26 BA 4: 408 from John Gregory, *Notes and Observations upon Some Passages of Scripture* (1646), ch. 14, 58-59.

27 Indeed, Mather expanded the repertoire of other "scriptural songs" derived from the Old and New Testament (such as the Song of Moses or the Song of Mary), which were included in the English psalters. *The New England Psalter* in Dunston's version had included 36 of such additional scriptural songs; Mather's *Psalterium* featured 54.

sacred fusion, the infinite riches and deep mysteries of the entire Bible could become legible to the regenerate soul, who would turn the lessons taken from “this inexhaustible *Store-House of Truth*” (PA xvii) into prayers and pious deeds.

Conclusion

From the preceding discussion, a new understanding of *Psalterium* emerges. It was a programmatically multi-dimensional work that sought to reconcile up-to-date scholarship and philological exactness in translation with a clear but melodic English and, most importantly, usefulness for practical piety. Whatever one may think of the aesthetic merits of *Psalterium*, its defects are not to be explained by Mather’s backward-looking mind or lack of intellectual and literary sophistication. Rather, it stands to reason that *Psalterium* failed to catch on because it was too ambitious. In response to the twofold threat of a de-sacralization of the Psalms as a key text of Christian worship and theology, Mather aimed to do too many things at once that were hard, or perhaps impossible, to harmonize.

The greatest difficulty, it seems, lay in reconciling the desire to be as faithful as possible to the original texts with the need to somehow bring out the affective style and musicality that Mather recognized as the particular poetical quality and beauty of the Hebrew Psalms. So different from the poetry of the Greco-Roman and European tradition, this quality and beauty was extremely hard to capture. Although Mather was ready to rid his translation of the straightjacket of rhyme, he could not conceive of a poetic text in English without metric regularity, even though his theory of Hebrew prosody suggested something like free verse poetry. And, for the purpose of more harmonious congregational singing, he ironically furthered the trend toward metrical simplification, pressing all Psalms into common or long meter.

While Mather might have achieved his own goal of providing a more literal and comprehensible translation than the *New England Psalter*, he essentially remained stuck in the same aesthetic rut of a rather monotonous line-by-line metrification. He was unable to break into a new poetic form that would have given him more freedom to express the affective style of the Psalms. Indeed, *Psalterium*’s combination of literalist phrasings and sometimes clunky regularity works against Mather’s express desire to

transport and identify with the “moods of piety” that animated the original authors.

Another unresolved tension that runs through *Psalterium* is that between the “Hebraizing” tendencies of its re-translation and the goal of offering a psalter that would guide users toward Christocentric, even prophetic, interpretations and aid them in appropriating the Psalms by “affectuous” and “porismatic” ways of reading. As a scholar and theologian, it was apparently important to Mather to keep his translation separate from the Christian interpretation and pious application provided by the “Illustrations.” In practice, however, he aimed for a kind of ecstatic fusion of the Christian singer with the hearts and minds of the Hebrew authors, which provided its own experiential proof of the omnipresence of Christ in the Psalms and the general unity of the Old and New Testament. Again, the different features of *Psalterium* can be said to have worked at cross-purposes, at least to some degree.

Arguably the unabashedly Christian imitations of the Psalms by Isaac Watts offered a simpler and more effective way of achieving the same goal of practical piety. They worked the promises and predictions of Christ directly into the text and added a strongly subjective dimension. Watts also liberated himself from the constraints of line-by-line, or even word-by-word translation, freely dropping or re-arranging parts of the original Psalms and blending these with additions, many of which directly derived from New Testament texts. Aiming for maximum accessibility, Watts combined a simple idiomatic English with striking imagery and lyrical turns of phrases. He effectively rid the Psalms of everything that was difficult, obscure, or alien to modern Christian sensibilities. All of this made an affective identification and pious usage much easier. At the same time, Watts's Psalms and hymns were eminently catchy and singable according to the new standards of regular singing. Watts offered musical variety, by employing long and short meter as much as the common meter, all of which he used very skillfully. And he had no qualms about rhyme.

Mather frequently recognized the superior poetic talents of his English correspondent and clearly felt the strong attraction of his works. In his *Biblia* annotations on Ps. 148, for instance, Mather included Watts's “paraphrase” of that Psalm, titled “*The Universal Hallelujah*,” noting with open admiration how in this version, “notwithstanding the Fetters of the Metre,” the author launched himself into “poetical Flights” that “sometimes notably

Illustrate the [Christian] Sense of the sacred Poetry.” Here are the first four quatrains of Watts’s version, with their direct mention of Jesus Christ in line 3:

Praise ye the Lord with joyful Tongue,
Ye Pow’rs that guard His Throne:
JESUS the Man shall lead the Song,
The God inspire the Tune.

Gabriel and all th’ Immortal Choir
That fill the Realms above,
Sing, for He form’d you of his Fire,
And feeds you with his Love.

Shine to his Praise, Ye chrystal Skies,
The Floor of his Abode,
Or vail your little twinkling Eyes
Before a brighter God.

Thou Restless Globe of golden Light,
Whose Beams Create our Days,
Join with the silver Queen of Night
To own your Borrowed Rayes. (BA 4: 782)

Compare this to Mather’s own translation of the first six verses of Ps. 148 with its evident care to preserve all the words and idiomatic qualities of the Hebrew original:

1 Let HALLELUJAH *now be Sung!* / Now from the Heav’ns above /
Praise the ETERNAL God; praise Him / in the high places there./
2 All you His Angels, O Praise Him; / Praise Him, O all His Hosts./
3 Praise ye Him, O thou Sun, and Moon; / Praise Him all Stars of
light./
4 Praise Him, ye that the Heavens are / of Heavens, *Seats of Bliss:* /
and *Praise Him*, you the Waters which / above the Heavens are. /
5 Let them give Praises to the Name || of the ETERNAL God; || For He
gave His Commandement, / and they created are. /
6 He also hath establish’d them / forever, Evermore; / He hath made a
Decree, and it / shall never be transgress’d. || (PA 404)

Read alongside the versification of Ps. 148 in the *New England Psalter* (362), Mather's version was actually a clear improvement and much smoother, linguistically as well as metrically. But for Protestants inclined towards the new pietistic or evangelical style in theology and aesthetics, Mather's version could not compare with the soaring lyricism and strong Christian stamp of Watts. Mather himself felt the strong pull in this direction and experimented with the new paradigm of spiritual hymns à la Watts. He wrote a sizeable body of such hymns and published some of them in tracts for private or small group devotion (see Stievermann and Smith). Yet for theological and scholarly reasons, Mather could not endorse the use of Watts's Psalms in official worship services. Ultimately, he chose to defend the strict Reformed tradition that songs of "private" invention, not directly based on the words of the canonical Scriptures, were unfit for this purpose. Those who insisted on this position and wished to reform rather than discard the *New England Psalter* had an increasingly difficult stance, however.

While its ambitious goals and design were distinctly "Matherian," *Psalterium* was not the only such attempt. About thirty years after its publication, John Barnard of Marblehead (1681-1770) authored *A New Version of the Psalms Of David; Fitted to the Tunes Used in the Churches; with Several Hymns out of the Old, and New, Testament* (1752), a work that also offered a revision of the *New England Psalter* but in more elegant, neoclassical diction. Six years later, the Boston minister Thomas Prince (1687-1758) produced one other native psalmody in colonial New England. Cut from a similar cloth as his then deceased friend Mather, Prince sought to reconcile philological exactness and scholarly erudition with an agreeable new metric translation, which he published as *The Psalms, Hymns, & Spiritual Songs of the Old and New Testaments Faithfully Translated into English Metre* (1758). Like Mather's *Psalterium*, both Barnard's and Prince's versions never found acceptance beyond their pastor's congregations, if they were used there at all.

By mid-century, the reform-minded ministers had effectively won the battle over regular singing and the vast majority of congregations sang in the "New Way." That triumph, however, went hand in hand with the rapidly growing popularity of hymn singing, which complemented or even replaced the Psalms in worship. Among the competing psalter versions on the market, the more fashionable ones imported from England won out. While Episcopal churches in the colonies tended to use the New Version by Tate and

Brady, most Congregational and Presbyterian churches adopted Watts's Psalms and increasingly introduced hymn books as well. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the victory march of Watts's Psalms and scriptural hymns in evangelical circles was seemingly unstoppable, especially after they were promoted by some of the most influential revivalists, such as George Whitefield. In the context of the Great Awakening, other versions of the Psalms and hymns in the free style of Watts also gained traction, notably *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1742) by John and Charles Wesley. And so, the older tradition of New England psalmody, to which Mather's work, for all of its innovative features, still belonged, was crowded out (see Turner 277).

List of Abbreviations

Works by Cotton Mather

AS: *The Accomplished Singer*

BA: *Biblia Americana*

D: *The Diary of Cotton Mather*

PA: *Psalterium Americanum*

SLCM: *Selected Letters of Cotton Mather*

Other Works

NEP: *The Psalms Hymns and Spiritual Songs, of the Old and New-Testament*

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Singing for the Living: Songs and Sacralization in New England Puritan Funeral Sermons

BENEDIKT BRUNNER

Introduction

Funeral Sermons are an often-neglected source among religious historians of New England Puritanism. Nevertheless, their relevance for understanding Puritanism should not be underestimated. By way of a case study, this chapter attempts to highlight their significance in three related processes of sacralization that can be observed in Puritan devotional culture. First, funeral sermons served as an important means by which the deceased were sacralized as exemplars of Christian holiness and virtue. In constructing such exemplars, second, funeral sermons promoted an ideal of personal sanctification among the living, which was a key objective of Puritan preaching and a central theme of Reformed theology more generally.¹ Third, by providing experiential proof of Christianity's teachings and promise of salvation, funeral sermons contributed to deepening the audience's sense of the sacrality of Scripture. As this chapter will argue, some Puritan ministers at the turn of the eighteenth century attempted to strengthen all three processes of sacralization by the inclusion of a new type of spiritual hymn in printed funeral sermons, which they intended for use in small group religious meetings.

The funeral sermons published by the prominent Boston clergyman, theologian and prolific writer Cotton Mather (1663-1728) provide most of the material for my case study. Following some introductory remarks on the genre of the Protestant funeral sermon, Mather's writings will be situated in their relevant historical and religious contexts, including the New England tradition of psalmody and the so-called New England "Singing Controversy," in which Mather played an important part. This will be followed by an examination of how the three processes of sacralization play out in his printed sermons and what role singing plays therein.

1 See the inspiring perspectives of Holzem; and Hall (23-24, 116-17, and throughout).

Funeral Sermons – a Reformed Genre?

Funeral sermons are a central genre in the history of early modern Protestantism. In print, the genre usually combines a contextualizing preface, the funeral sermon itself, a biography, poems, funeral songs, and occasionally pictorial representations or emblems. It is therefore a ‘multimedia’ source. The most influential definition was provided by social historian Rudolf Lenz, who has greatly advanced the research of funeral sermons since the 1970s.² However, his assumption that the geographical focus of their distribution was in central Germany and that they are a phenomenon primarily associated with Lutheranism has led to a certain imbalance in German-language research. Furthermore, the ideal type of the funeral sermon defined by Lenz was based on Lutheran examples exclusively.³

Reformed funeral sermons in some respects differ significantly from their Lutheran counterparts. It would be wrong, however, to understand these differences as marking the Reformed funeral sermon as a deficient variety of the genre. It stands to reason that theological considerations were a guiding factor in the modifications.⁴ This can be seen particularly well in funeral sermons from Basel: on the whole, they are shorter, and the print publications focus heavily on the sermon. At the same time, they also include longer biographical accounts, which continued to grow over time and often came to include material written by the deceased themselves.⁵ Epicedia, or poems in general, are less common, but they do occur occasionally.⁶ By contrast, pictorial representations, copperplate engravings or other portraits are not included. English funeral sermons printed in London and Boston are quite different. In London, there are hardly any pictorial representations to be found in the printed texts, and in Boston there are none at all. The scope of the prints in English can hardly be reduced to a common denominator either: copies range from very short prints that only reproduce the sermon to others which are several hundred pages long and usually also provide a

2 See Lenz; Brunner, “Die gedruckte Leichenpredigt.”

3 I have tried to stress the importance of Reformed funeral sermons in several articles, see Brunner, “Basler Leichenpredigten”; “Madensack”; “Stimmen”; “Chrysostomus.”

4 See Selderhuis; McKim; van den Broeke.

5 See Hartmann. See also Dürr.

6 See Weber-Reber.

detailed account of the life of the deceased, occasionally accompanied by elegies.⁷

Influenced by the different confessional cultures, the various components of the funeral sermons offer a range of insights, including those social norms that preachers believed should be lived and implemented. Such preferences were made plausible on the basis of more or less successful lives ending in what was regarded as a “blessed death.” Consolation and instruction were the central goals of mediation across the denominations. Funeral sermons, accordingly, record what the preachers considered to be particularly important.⁸

Cotton Mather’s funeral sermons are particularly relevant when it comes to the context of New England, not just because of the great influence of the Mather dynasty. Cotton Mather was also the most prolific colonial author of published funeral sermons. Because of his transatlantic connections, which also extended to the book market in Britain, Mather was very familiar with the English tradition of this genre. Yet, his pronounced self-confidence certainly also played a role in his decision to publish so many of his funeral sermons.⁹ William Andrews states that “[a]t least in terms of publication, Mather was the chief funeral sermonist in early-eighteenth-century New England” (24). But it can also be assumed that he recognized that publishing such sermons in print was a good opportunity to convey his own ideas of a holy life to listeners and readers and to assure them of the sacred authority of the Bible by real life examples that confirmed its salvific truths.¹⁰

The world in which Cotton Mather lived and was socialized underwent fundamental changes, which were partly due to the specific situation in North America and partly to the particular developments of the British ‘Restoration.’¹¹ The death of Cromwell and the end of Puritan rule in England in 1660 was a significant turning point, since now all hope seemed to be lost that the Reformation could be completed in the same way as it had been set

7 See Pritchard; Carlson.

8 See Dingel; Brunner, “Exhort.”

9 See Andrews; Elliott; Madden. For sermons in general see Stout; Davidson.

10 See Brunner, “Visible Saints.” I refer to findings of this article several times in this chapter.

11 See Levin, 1-56; for the political dimension see Peterson, “Boston Pays Tribute”; and Peterson, *City-State* 189-246.

in motion in New England.¹² “The Restoration also encouraged Puritan preachers to put new emphasis on New England’s moral standing in a spiritual wilderness – one that now appeared to include England” (Conforti 99). The energetic effectiveness that the Mathers and likeminded ministers began to display can be plausibly explained against this background. Now their task of calling for an exemplary way of life and of fleshing out the details of how to achieve it extended to the mother country to an even greater extent.

A whole series of regional disasters – droughts, crop failures, cold spells and, not least, King Philip’s War – gave contemporaries the impression that God himself was punishing New England for its backsliding (Morris 101; see also Smith and Hacker). Theologically, this group of reformers around the Mathers and other Boston-based clergy, developed the sermonic form of the Jeremiad, which was tailored to this specific situation and contrasted the heroic founding of New England as a biblical commonwealth blessed by God with the subsequent declension of its original piety.¹³ This motif also characterized regional historical works, above all Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, which appeared in 1702 and was intended to provide New Englanders with exemplary lives and histories from the early years of the colonies that called upon contemporaries to emulate the virtues of the dead. This basic impetus also characterizes the printed funeral sermon.¹⁴

Existing scholarship on Mather’s funeral sermons has given relatively little attention to their regular incorporation of lyrics for spiritual hymns to be sung by the audience in connection with reading the text alone or as part of a group. This is surprising since Mather is well known for having taken a great interest since the mid-1710s not only in improving congregational singing but also in spreading a new kind of devotional singing practice among smaller religious meetings outside the liturgical context of official worship services. It therefore makes sense to pursue the question what role exactly these spiritual hymns played in the normative intentions of the funeral sermons. This role can only be understood against the background of New England’s specific tradition of congregational singing.

12 For this aspect, see Morris.

13 Cf. Conforti, 102-03. For the Half-Way Covenant, see Gerbner.

14 See Stievermann.

Congregational Singing in Puritan New England

Puritans harbored a long-standing prejudice and a deep-seated hostility towards instrumental music especially in worship services. This rejection can be traced back to the Genevan reformer John Calvin, who only allowed the unaccompanied singing of psalms in church, while Lutherans were much more open to instrumental music and spiritual hymns composed by modern authors.¹⁵ Calvin had developed theological and ethical principles that were to shape the attitude of Reformed Christians toward the arts. Theologically speaking, all art and music was to promote knowledge of God and to praise him. It was not to lead people from the path of righteousness.¹⁶ A third distinction, however, that Calvin had introduced also had an impact on the puritanical approach to music: the distinction between the public and private use of music. Psalmody was considered the only legitimate public use of music, especially since social and ecclesiastical public realms were equated. Only the inspired Word of God was considered safe for singing in church. Yet, there were also opportunities in the private sphere to engage in musical activities that went beyond this, provided that they served the purpose of spiritual development and edification. In the Reformed and Puritan tradition, the private sphere, therefore, became the place where experimentation could happen with spiritual compositions that were not directly taken from the Bible but more loosely and creatively drawn from the Scriptures and personal experience.

By all accounts, the Puritans of seventeenth-century New England took this framework very seriously, along with the encouragement to use music for their own edification. As is well known, the *Bay Psalm Book* (first edition 1640) was the first book printed in New England and subsequently went through numerous editions.¹⁷ But we should not imagine New England as a monolithic block when it comes to access to music, as Bruce Daniels showed as early as 1995 in his study of how people spent their free time. That many New Englanders enjoyed music, and especially since the turn of

15 See Garside; Föllmi; Karant-Nunn. For Lutheranism, see Schmitz.

16 See Millet, especially 414-16; Grosse.

17 See Daniels 52-53.

the eighteenth-century desired more refined practices of religious singing is also in the background of the so-called “singing controversy.”¹⁸

Before we address this controversy, which forms the immediate context for the question of the use of songs and music in Cotton Mather's funeral sermons, we should ask about the liturgical place of music in Puritan worship services. Like their Reformed forebears, New England Puritans banned all instrumental music from worship and originally only allowed for the singing of metrical Psalms.¹⁹ From John Cotton to Cotton Mather this “restriction of praise to metrical psalmody” was upheld (Davies 118).²⁰ Cotton Mather stated in his historical work about New England:

Now there is not one word of institution in the *New Testament*, for *instrumental Musick* in the Worship of God. And because the holy God rejects all he does not command in his worship, he now therefore in effect says unto us, *I will not hear the melody of organs.* (*Magnalia* 228)²¹

The *Bay Psalm Book* was of the utmost importance for this endeavor: up until its ninth edition in 1698, it did not contain any musical notations. The ‘Old Way of Singing’ was characterized by a parishioner practicing the technique of lining out, whereby a verse was sung out which the congregation then repeated more or less competently.²² As contemporary sources suggest, this practice frequently resulted in people singing out of harmony and tempo. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, more and more Puritan clergy felt that this style of singing was deficient and sought ways to improve it, such as training congregants in “regular singing,” i.e. singing from notes. This change sparked an intense debate about whether to stick with the old way – which was initially preferred by many parishioners from

18 The British musicologist Percy A. Scholes “rebut[s] the charge that all Puritans were tone-deaf iconoclasts, fanatical Philistines, apostles of gloom and doom, and utterly antagonistic to music, dancing, and the visual arts.” See Davis 115, with the reference to Percy A. Scholes, *The Puritans and Music in England and New England*, published for the first time in 1934.

19 See Davies 117.

20 See also Beveridge.

21 Quoted after Davies 119. See also Skaggs.

22 See Tempereley; for the *Bay Psalm Book*, see, for instance, Morris and van der Woude.

rural parishes outside of Boston – or whether to introduce the new way of singing.²³

Along with Thomas Symmes and Thomas Walter, it was above all Cotton Mather who campaigned for the introduction of regular singing. In the works of these clergymen, we can see how the attitudes of Puritan theologians towards music, and singing in particular, changed increasingly around 1700, with the aim of improving the quality of the performance and thus the sacred beauty of worship in general.²⁴ In Mather's case, it seems likely that, as Joyce Irwin has suggested, it may have been his connections to Continental Pietism that did much to inspire a greater interest in beautiful singing as a particularly precious form of devotion (187).²⁵ But around the turn of the eighteenth century Dissenting churches in England, too, began to ease their restrictions against the singing of spiritual hymns besides the Psalms.

Mather's involvement with these trends is particularly evident in his 1721 publication *The Accomplished Singer*.²⁶ As was usually the case when the Boston theologian devoted himself to a matter, this work was accompanied by a comprehensive publication campaign. Mather here attempts to convey two aspects to his readers. Firstly, how one can sing beautifully and with true devotion and, secondly, "How the Melody of Regular Singing, and the Skill of doing it, according to the rules of it, may be easily arrived unto" (Mather, *The Accomplished Singer*, frontpage). Proper edification and proper singing had to go hand in hand. For the context of official worship at least, however, Mather still restricted singing to Psalms but promoted a greater variety of melodies. His own edition, intended for use in church services, was published in 1718, but it was not destined to be a great success.²⁷ The first part of *The Accomplished Singer*, at any rate, emphasizes the great value that devout singing can have for the pastoral care as much as the spiritual life of an individual.²⁸ Indeed, Mather regards devotional singing of scriptural texts as an especially intense, experiential form of reading the Bible and personally appropriating its saving truths:

23 For an overview, see Becker.

24 See Irwin, especially 181-90.

25 See also Benz; Bremer; Grainger; and Waczkat.

26 See also Stievermann, this volume.

27 See Mather, *Psalterium*.

28 See Mather, *The Accomplished Singer* 10, and throughout.

WE read, Rev. XIV. 3. Of, A song which no man could learn, but they which were Redeemed from the Earth. We have now described a Way of Singing, which none can Learn, but such as GOD Redeems from the Earth. And, O Earthly-minded Man, If upon a Trial for it, thou find thy self Enabled unto this Way of Singing, This will fetch see, and raise thee up from the Earth in which thy Soul has been buried; It will be a Token for Good upon thee, GOD has Redeemed thee from the Earth; and the Heaven which thou art Anticipating shall be thy Portion. (*The Accomplished Singer* 14)

Mather thus makes clear the connection between singing and obtaining salvation and going to heaven, the final destination of the immortal soul of man. On the one hand, he emphasizes the potential of ‘proper’ singing, while, on the other hand, he also emphasizes the importance of not just singing in the old and often unappealing way but of making singing an aesthetically pleasing experience that is conducive to true devotion. The rules for how to do this are explained in more detail in the second part of the tract. In conclusion, he states: “IT is to be desired, that we may see in the Rising Generation, a fresh and Strong Disposition to Learn the proper Tunes; that GOD may be Glorified, and Religion beautified, with a Regular Singing among us” (24). Mather specifically appealed to the younger generation, from whom he expected strong support for his ideas. Cotton Mather thus argues that regular singing is better suited to edifying the individual and aligning them with God, allowing them to progress in the process of sanctification. At the same time, the experience of such joyous worship would help to strengthen the sacred authority of the Bible on which it was based.

Songs and Sacralization in the Funeral Sermons of Cotton Mather

If we take a look at Cotton Mather’s sermons, we immediately notice that his primary concern was to lead his reader toward conversion and become a “visible saint,” that is a regenerate Christian who actively and methodically pursues holiness in their life.²⁹ By representing the deceased as exemplars of this ideal, Mather sacralizes them as persons, while also affirming the even higher sacrality of the biblical precedents from which this ideal is

29 See Brunner, “Visible Saints” 65-73.

ultimately derived. Examples of this process of sacralization abound in Mather's funeral sermons. In some, the inclusion of lyrics for spiritual songs is meant to deepen the audience's devotional experience of the sacred. Mather wrote over fifty funeral sermons; they are an important part of his many pastoral writings. His writings repeatedly provide detailed information about how he wanted people to conceive of a holy life. When we think of the mentioning of 'heavenly chants' that have been frequently referred to in the debate about regular singing, it is striking that Mather, on the occasion of the funeral of Joshua Moodey, a clergyman from Boston, speaks about *The Way to Excel*. Using the example of the lapidated Deacon Stephen, he describes an exemplary way of life that is characterized by looking up to heaven and towards heaven. The angelic face that the biblical texts mentions refers to both, the glory into which Stephen had entered and to the deceased Moodey. Mather then asks: "What are those Excellencies, that would make a Saint, Look like an ANGEL" (*The Way to Excel* 8).³⁰

He qualifies his claim by saying that the perfections of the angels are not fully attainable for humans due to their own mortality and sinfulness. But Jesus Christ would make his children angels of the New World, and this promise could be relied upon. At the same time, a permanent task of the Christian is to distinguish himself as far as possible during his lifetime through a sanctified, way of life. Mather states "That the Angelical Example is to be imitated" (*The Way to Excel* 12). He also suggests specific behaviours to serve this purpose. First the

continual apprehension of God in our minds. In Every place, we may Apprehend God. Wherever we are, we may subscribe to that Article of Ancient Faith in Ps 139, 7. Lord, Wither shall I flee from thy Presence? (14)

The continual apprehension must be accompanied by an equally fervent dedication to God, "upon all that we Have, and all that we Do" (14). For Mather, this explicitly included the mundane, i.e. the worldly things of daily life:

30 See also Weimer.

[One may ask] So our Eating, our Drinking, our Sleeping, what is it for? We may distinctly say, I do this, that I may be supported in the Service of God. Thus, our Labours, our Travels, our Visits, and our Exercises of Religion, we may thus Ennoble them, I do this, I will do it carefully and cheerfully, because God hath Commended my doing to fit. A Dedication of GOD, is the proper meaning of holiness; And very Angelical would be our Holiness, if we could be frequent and constant in such Acts of Dedication. (15)

Eventually, one's whole life must be dedicated to God and be directed towards Him. Everything one does must be done for God. Finally, the holy way of life is also characterized by the fact that "our continual apprehension of God, may produce our continual Satisfaction in God, under all His Dispensations" (14-15). Both the good and the bad things are to be taken patiently from God's hand with an appropriate equanimity. A central key phrase for Mather is obedience – that is, obedience to the revealed Word of God, which must be the guide for action in all aspects of life. Holy living can thus be promoted and enacted through the Holy Scriptures. At the same time, the lives of the visible saints work as experiential confirmations of the sacred authority of the Bible, which was increasingly ignored by worldly-minded people or questioned outright by skeptics.

The abnegation of all other aspects of life is also part of this process and has to be done in a certain way. *A Good Man Making a Good End* is the title of another funeral writing published in 1698. A blessed death, as it was, crowns and seals a holy life. The holy life, which was repeatedly presented in the sermons and their biographies, was thought to have prepared the deceased for death. Since he or she had already surrounded themselves with death during their lifetime, a sudden death could not surprise those who had lived a holy life. Accordingly, Mather urged his listeners and readers: "Every day let the Thoughts of Death, yea, and of a sudden death, have some Efficacy on you." Ideally, preparation for death and sanctification go hand in hand and begin early in life: "Indeed, what should all our Life be, but a preparation for Death?" (*A Good Man* 20). In the face of their own carnal sinfulness and the wickedness of the world, Christians must counteract "profanity" through their way of life, oriented towards the biblical concepts of and norms of the holy. But this did not mean a separation from the

world; rather, it meant that the Christian should be recognizable as such in a special way through their worldly activities.³¹

In Mather's funeral writings, the colonial context is mostly found in the biographies of the departed, but it is not a central theme in them. Here, the normative sacrality he wanted to convey to his listeners and readers was contested above all by the "world." Firstly, there were all those who did not want to follow the visible saints on their path and were thus considered godless and profane – in other words, those who could not find conversion and thus renewal of their sinful nature. To reinforce his communicative intentions, Mather often portrays the exemplary behaviour of the deceased in considerable detail, marking them out as "saints" and also as models for the bereaved. In his *Manducatio Ad Ministerium* (1726), a manual for prospective clergy, Mather instructed his readers to put themselves in the shoes of a dying person to move forward with their own spiritual renewal process. Sarah Rivett notes: "Mather constructs this exercise as the foundation of experimental philosophy for the Ministers, which 'establishes the proper frame of mind' for the promotion and discovery of divine knowledge" (475). In Mather's view, observing what happens on the deathbed can have an immediate effect on the mind of the observer.

It seemed particularly important to Mather and others who shared the same convictions that this holy lifestyle was not only practised continuously but above all as early as possible. In this context, he also liked to make use of writings that the deceased had written themselves in order to render these pious life stories more approachable and appealing. For instance, when Cotton Mather's sister Jerusha had died in 1711, he was able to get hands on some of her biographical writings, which he used extensively in the funeral writing *Memorials of Early Piety*," to compose a religious biography that was both idealistic and vivid as well as true to life.

The conversion accounts, which are included in many of his funeral orations and from which Mather likes to quote at length, are revealing with regard to the question of the sacralization of certain practices of daily living. Conversion meant a complete reorientation of one's life. In Puritanism, this went hand in hand with continuous self-examination to see whether one was continuing this path or falling back. The conversion was also the great transformation that was to lead to the cultivation of the sacralized virtues and

31 For this concept, see the classic work by Morgan.

behaviors in the individual, as well as the decisive rejection and turning away from the profane.³² Conversion thus set in motion a process that ideally continued throughout life and steered one towards a continuous improvement and approximation to the example of Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy, however, that Mather also warned against legalism, which could arise a false trust in work righteousness. Although critics have accused him of Arminianism, Mather left no doubt that salvation was only to be found in Christ's new birth, which is a "covenant of grace" and not one of works. In his typical manner, Mather thus built a theological argument into his funeral writing and referred to other Puritan authors who, in his view, had convincingly defended the traditional Reformed teaching of free grace (*Memorials* 11). In the biographies of the deceased, Cotton Mather repeatedly describes their piety in detail. There are references to singing, but they are often cursory in these passages, perhaps out of reverence, related to the still ambivalent attitude towards private singing among larger sections of the population.³³

Given the ideal of holiness to which Mather had his audience aspire, what significance did singing, or, to be precise, the provision of lyrics have for spiritual hymns in the funeral sermons? At first glance, the findings are rather disappointing. Psalm verses are quoted again and again, as Mather also did in his printed sermons, in addition to the typical accumulation of quotations from the Bible and the Church Fathers. However, there are few, if any, references to melodies or musical notations, to which these Psalms could be sung.

Yet, some of Mather's funeral sermons published in the 1710s and 1720s do contain samplings of a new type of scriptural hymn. These hymns were not taken directly from the Bible like the Psalms but were modern

32 See Brunner, "Visible Saints" 69; Kidd 92-97; Cohen.

33 In an important study published in 2012, Glenda Goodman showed that singing spiritual songs in Cotton Mather's time could be highly emotionally charged. She refers, for example, to a diary entry by Samuel Sewall, a Boston judge who was also the precentor of his community. After the death of his mother, he met with some close friends and relatives for private worship. But he was so emotionally moved that he could hardly utter a sound. She shows that the "affective power of music" (Goodman 693) was highly important and relevant to the Puritan context in New England. Personal piety has often been overlooked as a factor in how music was treated in previous research. She admits, however, that sources as vivid as Samuel Sewall's diary entry are rarely found, see Goodman 691-92.

compositions based on a variety of scriptural texts freely woven together and imbued with a strong sense of subjective religious experience. Some of these hymns were written by Mather himself, but most come from the pen of the English theologian and hymn writer Isaac Watts (1674-1748). Mather's relation with Watts, often considered the father of modern English hymnody, has been the subject of several scholarly essays. In 1711, two years after its publication, Mather had become aware of Watts's expanded edition of his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* and had evidently taken a great liking to them. As we know today, thanks in part to studies by David W. Music, Mather was a great supporter of their distribution in New England. Christopher N. Phillips has also pointed out that "Watts's hymns were first printed not in hymnbooks but as appendices to sermon pamphlets and guides to prayer. This practice, initiated by Mather, was deliberate, a strategy intended to reinforce clerical authority" (Phillips 205). In Watts's excellent songs, Mather saw an instrument with which to further substantiate his own position in the dispute over regular singing. Mather and Watts knew each other through extensive correspondence and repeatedly sent one another manuscripts. They saw in each other an opportunity to further strengthen and find support for their own beliefs and positions, including their conviction of the significance of spiritual hymns for the purpose of edification (Phillips 205-06). However, the two men crucially differed on one point: while Watts intended his compositions for liturgical contexts as well as private, Mather insisted that such hymns of modern composition were only fit for use at home or in private meetings, and that only Psalms ought to be sung in official worship services.

Phillips assumes that Mather used his sermons as a testing ground to introduce his readers to the new songs. Since the sermons were originally delivered orally based on key points, the songs of Watts (as well as his own compositions) were only added to the sermon in the process of writing and printing: "Sermon pamphlets were, then, removed from the public liturgical space in which they had originated, and Mather may have seen them as somewhat more flexible instruments for conveying his message to the public once those texts were removed from the patterned structures of the worship service" (209). The "paraliturgical character" (210) that Phillips has identified is a crucial point: it is this form that first gives Mather the freedom to try out songs not intended for official worship. The songs embedded in sermons in this way give no indication of whether they should be sung, "but

they clearly amount to miniature, rhymed versions of the sermons, aids to memory as well as emotionally concentrated summaries of Mather's discourses" (209).

As David W. Music and Christopher N. Phillipps have shown, Mather began a veritable campaign in 1712, actively using texts by Watts in his printed sermons. The excerpts he chose, however, always served to support the message he wanted to convey in his own texts (see Phillipps 211). At this point, the question naturally arises as to whether this also applies to funeral sermons, and, if so, whether they should support the appeal for self-sanctification that runs through so many of Mather's sermons. A whole series of sermons, which cannot be analyzed here, are directed at the young generation, who are called upon to stay true to the standards of Puritan religion. A good number of these sermons do indeed deal with the subject of death, and some of them are also 'proper' funeral sermons.

In September 1713, Cotton Mather had to mourn the death of his wife Elizabeth, to whom he dedicated a sermon on the religion of the cross. The cross, of course, is an important metaphor for an individual's suffering, and Mather chose it to reflect on what Elizabeth's death meant to him. In this sermon, Mather asks how one can suffer and also grieve in a Christian way. He is interested, as we would say today, in how resilience can be possible for a Christian in extreme situations.³⁴ Watts's famous hymn "Crucifixion to the World, by the Cross of Christ. Gal. VI. 24," is added at the end of the print with a reference to the author. It is obviously intended to emphasize the content of the previous section in a poetic way.

When I survey the Wondrous CROSS
On Which the Prince of Glory dy'd,
My Richest Gain I count but Loss
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the Death of CHRIST my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I Sacrifice them to his Blood.

See from His Head, His Hands, His Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down;

34 See Mather, *Religion of the Cross*.

Did e'er such Love and Sorrow meet?
Or Thorns compose to Rich a Crown?

His dying Crimson like a Robe,
Spreads o'er His Body on the Tree:
Then I am Dead to all the Globe,
And all the Globe is Dead to me.

Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.
(Mather, *Religion*, appendix, n.p.)

It is not far-fetched to assume that Mather himself also found these lines comforting and encouraging, and that he wanted to pass this instrument on to other mourners by printing them. But it is also conspicuous that the song itself describes a way to behave in a Christian way in such situations. A certain way of dealing with grief is, so to speak, sacralized here by the sermon and in connection with this song. The cross, in which the Christian receives his salvation and from which eternal life flows, demands the whole person, all his senses, his will, all his feelings, his whole life. The hymn is to be understood as an invitation to look away from the grief and towards the cross – and in this sense to enter into the process of sanctification with new strength.

A year earlier, Mather had published a funeral sermon, titled *Tabitha Rediviva*, for Elizabeth Hutchinson that, based on the story of Tabitha who was resurrected by Peter, dealt with the question of the good works of virtuous women. Here, too, Watts's hymn text is appended, and Mather introduces it as follows: "Some sweet Notes of the British Nightingale, are now to be offered unto the Mourners, which on the Decease of a Dorcas, have Walked in our Streets. The Singers at the ancient Funerals, had no Notes comparable to those, which our Scraphick Watts, hath in his Hymns and Spiritual sings, prepared for us" (*Tabitha* n.p.). The hymn is called "The Death and Burial of a Saint." The message that the deceased lived a life that ended in a blessed, successful death is contained in this selection of songs, which also allows statements to be made about the life previously lived. Mather then provides all six stanzas.

Why do we mourn departed Friends:
Or shake at Deaths Alarms?
Tis but the Voice that JESUS sends
To call them to His Arms.

Are not we tending upward too
As fast as Time can move?
Nor would we with the Hours more slow
To keep us from our Love.

Why should we tremble to Convey
Their Bodies to the Tomb?
There the dear Flesh of JESUS Lay,
And Lest a Long Perfume.

The Graves of all His Saints He blest,
And softned every Bed;
Upon to the Lord our Flesh shall fly,
At the Great Rising Day.

Then let the last loud Trumpet sound;
And bid our Kindred rise;
Awake, ye Nations Under Ground;
Ye Saints, Ascend the Skies.” (*Tabitha Rediviva* n.p.)

This song is also intended to contextualize the emotions felt after the loss of a loved one: it clearly serves to comfort the bereaved by providing an eschatological perspective, reminding them that God is Lord over life and death and has the power to resurrect his saints “at the Great Rising Day.”³⁵ For the time until the resurrection, the saints have been provided with a comfortable bed, and their condition is not to be mourned. This perspective can also be interpreted as a sealing, in the sense of an eternal sacralization, of those who have died as saints. Their status can no longer be taken from them, but it can also no longer be changed after death.

In addition to these two funeral sermons, in which Mather used Watts’s hymns, he published two works in 1712 and 1713 that addressed the question of human mortality. The first of these was *Seasonable Thoughts upon*

35 See for the importance of this motive for both authors Trigg 59-99; and Stokes.

Mortality, written in the context of an epidemic that killed several hundred people in Connecticut in 1712. The doctrine that Mather seeks to explain in this sermon is that “DEATH, will as Effectually and as Observably, as a THAW does the SNOW, consume the Sinful Children of Men; And this, Because they are the Sinful Children of Men” (6). Mather thus interprets the disease as divine punishment for the sins of God’s people. It is, accordingly, an opportunity for repentance and to sanctify one’s walk of life. The connection between one’s own sinfulness and death is drastically portrayed, but it is not untypical for the time.³⁶

To “Enrich the remaining Pages, with some Strings of Pearls, fetch’d from the Incomparable HYMNS of that Sweet-Singer, Mr. Isaac Wats,” Mather offers three songs, “which if more generally taken into our Houses, would Contribute more than a little to turn an Howling Wilderness, into a Pleasant Land” (*Seasonable Thoughts upon Mortality* n.p.). In this way, Cotton Mather makes explicit what he hoped for from the songs: they were to serve the purpose of personal devotion and sanctification at home and in small group meetings.³⁷ As such Mather deemed the new kind of hymnody an important instrument even as he sought to uphold the traditional restriction against using anything but the metrical Psalms in official worship. In this context, sacralization always means that certain virtues and behaviours as well as the people who embody them were to be sacralized with the help of songs.³⁸

The second of the songs cited by Mather emphasizes the importance of dying as a Christian.

Hear, What the Voice from Heav’n proclaims
For all the Pious Dead.
Sweet is the Savour of their Names,
And soft their Sleeping Bed.

They Dy in JESUS, and are Blest;
How kind their Slumbers are!
From Suffrings and from Sins releast,
And freed from ev’ry Snare.

36 See Brunner, “Gericht.”

37 Sanctification was a means of self-sacralization among Puritans; see Brunner, “Visible Saints.”

38 See Sherman.

Far from this World of Toyl and Strife,
 They're present with the Lord;
 The Labours of their Mortal Life
 End in a large Reward. (*Seasonable Thoughts upon Mortality* n.p.)

Dying in Jesus takes away the fear of death. The prospect of spending time with him in heaven is the end of all suffering and disease. In the presence of God, the trials of life in this world come to a good end and everyone receives their ultimate reward. Perhaps Mather wanted to soften the sharp moral demands of his sermon a little in this way. Through domestic use, the song is intended to encourage people to live in a Christian way during death, not to let up, but to continue to be sanctified and to continue to be focused on the heavenly goal.³⁹ Mather takes a similar approach in his sermon *What Should Be Most of All Tho't Upon*, in which he attempts to show what one must do to find oneself in a good state after death. He was convinced that "Men, that are, (as all Men are) to Die, have Reason to be concerned for a Good State after Death" (*What Should* 4). It is certainly not too bold an assumption to suggest that the songs by Watts, which are printed as an appendix, were also intended to serve the purpose formulated in the sermon's title, especially the second song, "Death Dreadful or Delightful":

DEATH! Tis a Melancholy Day
 To those that have no God;
 When the Poor Soul is forc'ed away
 To seek her Last Abode.

In Vain to Heav'n she lifts her Eyes;
 But Guilt, an heavy Chain,
 Stil drags her downward from the Skies
 To Darkness, Fire and Pain.

Awake, and Mourn, Ye Heirs of Hell,
 Let Stubborn Sinners fear;
 You must be driv'n from Earth, and dwell
 A Long For ever there.

39 The first song referred to by Mather is similarly contextualized. The third thematically has to do with "Sickness & Recovery."

See, how the Pit grapes Wide for you,
 And flashes in your Face!
 And thou, My Soul, Look downwards too,
 And Sing Recovering Grace.

He is a God of Sovereign Love
 That Promis'd Heav'n to me:
 And taught my Tho'ts to foar Above,
 Where happy Spirits be.

Prepare me, Lord, for thy Right Hand;
 Then come the Joyful Day;
 Come, Death, and come Celestial Band,
 To bear my Soul away. (*What Should* 41-42)

Cotton Mather also used this song as a means to foreground the message of his sermon and, by allowing people to sing its message, to integrate it in their daily lives to sanctify the individual. Mather, it seems, was aware of the power of song to reach people's hearts through their emotions and tried to incorporate this medium into his sermons. Although they are not a straightforward metrification of a particular text of the Bible but rather a *mélange* of numerous scriptural citations and allusions, the nexus to the authority of the Bible remains strong. Indeed, singers are invited to internalize the Word and experience its power aesthetically and on a deeply personal level, thereby strengthening the sacrality of Scripture.

Conclusion

Including the lyrics of spiritual hymns in his sermons thus served Mather's overall goal to promote a true, experiential piety and reverence for the Bible. He saw a chance to make the content of his sermons singable by making them available to be used in a domestic setting. The difference, however, to the continental Lutheran approach to songs is immediately apparent: here they were much more present in the sermons, as was the use of other genres, including images, in Lutheran funeral sermons.⁴⁰ But that was a conscious

40 See, for instance, Steiger; Veit; Pieper; Küster. For an interesting comparison, see Pitkin.

theological decision on the part of Reformed theologians who were willing to print such sermons in the first place.

The fact that they are found in his work at all is an important and exciting observation. In his case, it certainly had something to do with his admiration for the poetry of Isaac Watts, in which he discovered the evangelical truths that he also wanted to convey in his sermons as well as his own hymns. The appeal to live one's life as a "visible saint" in order to experience a blessed death could be effectively supported by songs, and Mather did not want to miss out on this opportunity. Because of his role in the controversy surrounding regular singing, it was only natural that he also experimented with new ways of using songs with the purpose of sacralizing a sanctified way of life.⁴¹

It is noteworthy that sung psalms do not play a major role in his funeral sermons. This observation needs further investigation, especially since Mather naturally continued to allow only psalms to be sung during church services in his parish. Therefore, the use of Watts's hymns should actually be seen as an experiment. A first analysis has shown that these texts often had a thrust that corresponded to Cotton Mather's intentions: to shake people out of their complacency and encourage them to sanctify themselves and lead an appropriate life. Singing a hymn could be helpful in this regard, at least in the realm of domestic piety. Overall, this analysis has shown that further studies will be needed to expand the source base and to determine how the song texts in the funeral sermons and other sermons by other clergy in the first half of the eighteenth century were treated, in order to shed more light on an important contribution to the genesis of the role of singing in the First Great Awakening.

41 For this mechanism, see Weyel.

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“Poets are no Dreamers!”

Spiritualist Hymnody and Sacred Poetics in Nineteenth-Century America¹

E. H. MESSAMORE

It is commonplace in studies of nineteenth-century American Spiritualism – the new religious movement centered around communicating with the dead – to note the ways in which Spiritualists appropriated the language of science and empiricism to validate their religion as a modern and rational alternative to orthodox Christianity. In positing Spiritualism as a “spiritual science,” they resisted the totalizing pull of an emerging scientific materialism that threatened to relegate “religion” to a separate (and inferior) sphere.² Thus, one of the central animating forces behind Spiritualism was a desire to unify various types of knowledge that, through processes of modernity, were increasingly seen as distinct and at odds with each other. For Spiritualists, then, the discoveries produced by the natural sciences but also philosophy and art, if properly understood, constituted a form of revelation. They represented the progressive uncovering of the laws of the Great Mind who created and indeed constituted a divine Nature. Within this epistemological framework, revelation was neither narrowly confined to the sphere of what was increasingly understood to be “religion,” nor was it to be found exclusively in the scriptural texts (a defining characteristic of “religion” *per se* in its newly emerging modern sense) of any given religion.³ Ongoing and virtually limitless in scope, revelation might also be expressed in other forms, such as inspired poetry, which simultaneously became as sacred as

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- 1 This chapter results from work in project P8 “American Scriptures: Transformations of Scriptural Authority and the Canon in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Protestantism,” funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation) within Research Unit 2828 “De/Sacralization of Texts” (Project Number 39844141).
 - 2 There is an extensive scholarship over the divergence of “religion” as a category from co-constitutive concepts such as “science” and the “secular” in the modern world (see, e.g., Harrison; Asad; Taylor; Bergunder).
 - 3 For the specific contribution of Spiritualism to discourses constructing “religion,” see Messamore; Modern 161-81; Taves 166-206.

the Christian Bible. The Bible, in turn, was both devalued through relativization but also reconstituted as a form of inspired poetry itself that helped authorize subsequent revelations.⁴ Similarly, by virtue of its likeness to the underlying metaphysics of the universe, singing and music became in Spiritualist practice a form of worship and a technology for facilitating communion with the world of spirit.

This essay will argue that, as an outgrowth of a radicalized Swedenborgian hermeneutics, Fourierist utopianism, and a literalized version of Romantic theories of art, Spiritualists collapsed the distinction between revelation and literature in pursuit of a unified knowledge that resisted modern distinctions between categories like “science,” “religion,” and “philosophy.” It will also show how this ontologizing of art translated into practice in Spiritualist hymnody. Within the American context, Romanticism has typically been associated with elite, regional contexts, mainly Transcendentalism and authors of the so-called “American Renaissance” centered around Boston. Thus, another objective of this essay will be to demonstrate the ways in which Spiritualism popularized currents of Romantic thought for a broader American audience. The first section will provide a brief overview of the metaphysics of Spiritualism that underpinned their understanding of art, focusing on the theory of correspondence, the law of progression, and ideas about association. The second section will examine the concept of the “poet-prophet” in Spiritualist writing, noting its divergence from better-known Romantic models. The final section explores how this distinct Spiritualist metaphysics intersected with the mainstream of evangelical Protestant culture of the nineteenth-century United States to place hymn singing at the center of the defining Spiritualist ritual practice, the séance.

There is a well-established scholarship on Spiritualism and literature following Howard Kerr’s pioneering work *Mediums, and Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900* (1972), written at a time when Spiritualism was generally regarded as a curiosity rather than a serious cultural force. Others, like John Kucich, have followed in identifying Spiritualist themes within a broad range of nineteenth-century American literature, also arguing for its reach beyond the white middle

4 As Seth Perry has argued, rather than actually possessing inherent authority, the Bible was “a complicated site of contestation with respect to religious authority” that “served as a source of symbols and models for the creation of authoritative relationships” (Perry 2).

class. Eliza Richards has specifically written about the practices of female mediums writing in the voice of dead poets like Edgar Allan Poe and how these complicate notions of “genius” versus “mimicry.” Virtually no work exists, however, on the radical appropriation of Romantic models of poetic inspiration as a form of revelation; in this regard, the scientific aspects of Spiritualism almost always take precedence (cf. Taves 166-206).⁵

Though there is some scholarship on Spiritualist aesthetics in visual art (Colbert), within the realm of music, there is very little. Leigh Eric Schmidt has written about Spiritualism and Swedenborgianism in his history of sound and American religion (see Schmidt 158-61, 199-245). In a similar vein, Codee Spinner has examined the role of sound in constructing Spiritualist cosmologies as well as their idiosyncratic understanding of sounds that operated beyond normal understandings of acoustics grounded in physics. Outside the narrow confines of Spiritualism, a few studies have engaged with esotericism more broadly and various forms of art, music, and poetry (Wilson; Gillman; Materer; Versluis, *Esoteric Origins*). Nonetheless, no one to my knowledge has thus far studied the ways in which American Spiritualist theories of art and religion rendered poetry and music integral parts of their sacred practice. Their distinct blend of Swedenborgian, Romantic, and Fourierist thought created a totalizing view of nature and types of knowledge that made art every bit as sacred as science.

“The Universe is a symbol”: Correspondence, Progression, Association, and the Spiritualist Theory of Art

Crucial for understanding the Spiritualist sacralization of poetry and music – and, indeed, all forms of art – is their radical appropriation of Swedenborgian metaphysics and hermeneutics, which overlapped with American Romanticism more broadly but also diverged from it in important ways. Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), the Swedish natural philosopher turned mystic, never formed a church during his lifetime; however, after his death, he acquired a small but influential following, especially in Britain and the United States. In reference to Swedenborg’s belief that the spiritual millennium had already occurred in 1757, these followers founded the Church of the New Jerusalem, or New Church, and were active in disseminating his

5 A forthcoming piece by Arthur Versluis on the medium and mystic Thomas Lake Harris considers poetry as part of his overall esoteric system.

ideas. Swedenborg wrote prodigiously of his spiritual experiences, which began at the age of fifty-four and included angel visitations and ecstatic travels through heaven and hell (see Gabay 3-13). Central to Swedenborg's revelations was the theory of correspondence, the Neoplatonic doctrine that the material world was a reflection of the spiritual, often summed up in the axiom: "As above, so below" (Albanese 140-42). As the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson put it in *Nature* (1836) – a work steeped in Swedenborgian influence – "Every natural fact is a symbol of spiritual fact" (43). For Swedenborg, this logic also extended to biblical exegesis: the outward symbols in the Bible (or at least certain books of it) corresponded to deeper spiritual referents – in fact, in its spiritual sense, the Bible was the *Logos* itself (Block 24-27).

Spiritualists, as well as some historians, tended to locate the advent of "modern Spiritualism" with the mysterious spirit manifestations experienced by the Fox sisters at their family home in Hydesville, New York, in 1848. Spiritualism's theological foundation, however, was largely supplied by the "Harmonial Philosophy" of Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), the clairvoyant "Poughkeepsie Seer," who had published a collection of trance lectures a year earlier, entitled *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (1847). Davis's lectures in New York City from 1845-47 were far-reaching in content and attended by literati, such as Edgar Allan Poe; the Fourierist socialist, Albert Brisbane (1809-1890); and the Swedenborgian professor of Hebrew at New York University, Dr. George Bush (Albanese 206-20). By 1850, Davis and his followers had endorsed the so-called "spirit-rappings" and provided an explanatory framework for the manifestations, which, in turn, supplied "a living demonstration" for Davis's philosophy (Davis, *Principles* 675; see Cox 7-10, 75; Albanese 217). The *Principles of Nature* was highly influential among Spiritualists, in some cases possessing almost Bible-like authority (Carroll 139), though Spiritualists were far from monolithic.⁶

In Davis's first work, as well as later ones, correspondence carried critical implications for humanity's access to the divine. Reminiscent of the primordial "fire-mist" postulated by the Scottish geologist and evolutionary

6 In terms of the canonical Bible, Ann Taves notes a continuum of attitudes from radicals like Davis on one end of the spectrum to so-called Christian Spiritualists on the other, who maintained the uniqueness of Christian revelation while arguing that spirit communication was biblically sanctioned (see Taves 400n1).

theorist Robert Chambers in his influential *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) (see Secord), Davis declared that the universe was born from an infinite sea of liquid fire that was co-eternal with and carried the attributes of “the Deity. This sea of fire exploded out into concentric rings of suns that flung off matter, thus forming the planets and life thereon” (*Principles* 121-39). Similar to the spiritual sun described by Swedenborg (*Angelic Wisdom* §151), Davis revealed that the entire cosmos orbited a massive central sun – the Great Positive Mind – which attracted spirit (a type of highly refined matter in Davis’s cosmology) and repelled matter. As such, everything contained the divine imprint and operated on the same underlying principles. The universe, and humans, represented a union between an interior essence – God – and an external expression – Nature. Similar to Swedenborg’s idea of “influx,” the Great Positive Mind poured inspiration into human interiors like the rivets of a mighty fountain (Davis, *Principles* 40-41, 121-23, 602-03, 618-19).

Davis’s visions also adapted Swedenborg’s doctrine of three concentric spiritual spheres of increasing perfection that made up the heavens; however, Davis discarded the increasingly diabolical hells that supposedly mirrored these, arriving instead at six spiritual spheres that existed between earth’s location in space and the great central sun. The Swedish seer had taught in *Heaven and Hell* (1758) that angels and devils were former humans who, of their own free will, associated with similarly constituted individuals in the afterlife. They lived in societies much like those on earth. Davis’s spirits dwelt in similarly earthly conditions and were hierarchically organized by mutually affinity (*Principles* 643-77). The emphasis on affinity also revealed the influence of Charles Fourier.

Swedenborgian emphases on progressive hierarchies and societies of spirits were articulated in Davis’s revelations as the laws of progression and association (“like attracts like”). All matter and life perpetually refined themselves and developed to higher forms, and higher forms were attracted to higher spheres. Thus, a highly developed interior might associate with knowledge and beings from the second spiritual sphere (*Principles* 734-36). Death was merely an organism’s ascent to a superior state of being. Following the logic of universal analogy, this pattern of progressive hierarchies was replicated in every aspect of creation, from the ordering of the planets to the evolution of humans and their societies.

Though Davis and other Spiritualists would continue to elaborate on various modes by which humanity could receive divine revelations, already in *Principles of Nature* Davis put forth a theory of art that collapsed the distinction between orthodox understandings of scriptural revelation and aesthetics. “Even the *laws of art* are in accordance with Nature,” Davis declared. The observations of the true artist inevitably led to the conviction that, “owing to the *progressive principle*,” “the Original contained undeveloped that which exists in present forms.” Thus, the Deity unfolded himself in Nature, and the artist used “[t]hese correspondences” as “a mediator – a fulcrum” for moving beyond “the senses” and attaining “deep and convincing proof of the invisible and *real Reality*” (*Principles* 93, 95). As Davis explained in the second volume (1851) of his “encyclopedia” *The Great Harmonia*, the artist “is an interpreter and a representative of nature” who seeks to “refine and elevate” “the spirit through the medium of the senses.” The power to convey higher truth made the artist analogous to God through a chain of corresponding representations: “Pictures are thoughts upon canvas – just as the objects of Nature are the thoughts of God. As nature is a mirror in which we see God, so is the Picture a mirror in which we see Nature” (*Great Harmonia* II: 86-87), though, as Davis cautioned, art could still only ever produce “a shadowy and evanescent” “*fac-simile* [sic]” (*Principles* 95-96).

One of Davis’s initially most ardent followers was Thomas Lake Harris (1823-1906), who achieved fame first as a medium and then as a proponent of his own esoteric system (see Versluis, “Nineteenth-Century Esoteric Spiritual Production”). Harris expressed similar sentiments in 1848 in the pages of the *Univercælum*, a short-lived New York periodical dedicated to propagating Davis’s Harmonial Philosophy. “God speaks to us through Art,” Harris proclaimed, “– in the Revelations of the Beautiful.” As such, all “True art is essentially Religious and Spiritual.” With Nature as a reflection of the Divine, “the visible world is the instructor of the Artist, and suggests through the senses the idea of perfection.” Anticipating a common later Spiritualist view of inspiration that built upon Swedenborgian influx, Harris declared that “visions of Beauty [...] flow from the *thoughts* of *ministering spirits*, and are mirrored upon the mind from the over-arching heavens” (“Inspirations” 49-50).

The framing of art as revelation for Harris, as well as Spiritualists more broadly, was part and parcel of a strong anti-cessationist commitment to

ongoing revelation and spiritual gifts. “It is said that God never inspires men now, though he once did in bygone ages. Foolish and impious thought. God is omnipresent – he is here,” Harris affirmed, echoing Emerson’s “Divinity School Address.” “God will always have in reserve some higher and more perfect revelation. Hereafter, when you and I tread the stars together, we shall look back to our present state as one of earliest and rudest childhood – but in that splendid futurity we shall be pupils and learners still” (“Inspirations” 51). The Christian scriptures were by no means invalidated – indeed, Harris was exceptionally Christocentric among Spiritualists – but they could not suffice as a static revelation for all time.

As Davis had established in *Principles of Nature*, the true artist understood that “the Universe is a symbol.” Not unlike the scientist, who discerned natural law from careful observation, “the *First* and *Ultimate* of all things are rational and irresistible inductions [...] from the prolific, fertile, and truthful experience and meditation of the *true artist*,” Davis explained (*Principles* 98). Indeed, Davis was clear on the compatibility of differing epistemological modes: the artist would “bring convictions to his mind corresponding to the conclusions drawn from all palætiological [sic] sciences” (*Principles* 94). Such was also affirmed by Cora Hatch (née Scott; 1840–1923) – arguably the most famous medium of the nineteenth century – who felt artistic beauty could serve as an antidote to scientific materialism. “Men of science who are strictly material in all their examinations,” she chided, “are never poetic” because “they separate Nature from the poet, science from poetry [...] and say nothing is beautiful which is not useful. [...] They worship the Universe, but forget that God made it” (217).

As has been documented by numerous historians of Spiritualism, Spiritualists were involved in all manner of reform (see, e.g., Braude, esp. 56–81). Beyond the obvious link between their progress-orientation and postmillennialist drive to perfect society, the advancement of the social order was inextricably connected to individual biological evolution and moral self-culture. Art served both as a driver of and a (heavily racialized) indicator of human development. For Davis and Spiritualists who followed his teachings, the personal appropriation of divine natural law and the reorganization of society along its principles became the truest exercise of religion. By revealing the gap between natural principles and life as it was currently lived, the artist invited reform. Davis could “perceive the great disconnexion [sic]

between Nature's established laws, and man's present ignorance, imperfection, and grossness" (*Principles* 97).

Telling, then, was Davis's vision of art in his reordered utopia. The final section of *Principles of Nature* describes a Fourierist reconfiguration of society involving individuals in various associations performing tasks for which they were best suited (Fourier's theory of "attractive labor"). Here, Davis sought to realize the theory of correspondence in practice, as this configuration mirrored the organization of the angel societies in the spiritual spheres. Davis expressed the intimate link between the appreciation of natural principles and true religion in his plans for the "clerical association." In Davis's scheme, clerics would cease petty sectarian bickering and instead "accumulate science, art, theology, and philosophy, which they [would] make perfect and practicable" (*Principles* 770-71). In 1859, Davis explicitly stated the future role of the arts, writing, "Poetry, pictures, and music will take the place of sermons, pulpits, and prayers" (*Great Harmonia* V: 255).

The highest forms of artistic expression in Davis's view possessed practical value for humanity and promoted moral self-culture. "Art refines and spiritualizes the feelings," he wrote in the *Great Harmonia*, "and opens the interior senses to the more glorious perception and appreciation of Nature's beauties" (*Great Harmonia* II: 87). Hatch, too, wished that America's population on the make and on the go would look away from "the counting-room and the coffeehouse" for but "one day in every month or every week to the enjoyment of beauty, intellectual and artistic," which would create "a better and truer nation" (213). Still, Davis felt there was cause to hope. With postmillennialist optimism he observed, "In this age, poetry – true poetry – is more universally understood and applied to practical purposes than formerly. As the soul, and the human race, approach the era of social and spiritual harmony, [...] the principle of Poetry which is music, and which is Harmony, is more easily comprehended and practiced" (*Great Harmonia* II: 85). In a two-way causal relationship, higher degrees of advancement produced more useful artistic forms, which in turn promoted human development.

“The Poet is the prophet, if he’s true”: Inspired Poetics and Spirit Poetry

As we have seen, the Spiritualist understanding of correspondence made nature a direct reflection of higher spiritual truths. To discern the inner workings of nature and convey these was an act of revelation. In accordance with the laws of progression and association, such discernment unfolded in tandem with individual moral self-culture and biologically inflected social evolution that drew individuals into sympathy with ever-higher degrees of spiritual truth according to their development. Within this framework, the Romantic notion of the “poet-prophet” took on a literal reality (cf. Spahr), representing a radicalization of the Transcendentalist “literary scripturism” described by Laurence Buell (see 166-90). Whether through generalized inspiration or direct channeling of spirits, Spiritualists sacralized poetry through its ostensibly otherworldly origins and its heady claims to transcendent truth.

Andrew Jackson Davis summed up the qualities of the poet in his influential *Great Harmonia*: the poet combined “the qualities of the Patriot, the Hero, and the Legislator, with a love of the Sublime and Beautiful.” His soul was illuminated by “genius,” which “unfolds serene thoughts.” The poet was also “a reformer,” for whom “sympathies of humanity expand his heart; and prophecies of future peace press his pen to utterance” (*Great Harmonia* II: 84). Davis’s remarks echo Shelley’s declaration that poets are both “legislators” and “prophets” (5-6) and Emerson’s claim that the poet’s “thought is law” (“The Poet” 400). For Davis, the poet’s elucidation of natural law was an act of reform that responded to local conditions.

As Davis explained, “Jesus instituted laws and customs above the popular conceptions of his time and country” (*Great Harmonia* II: 83). Thus, Jesus, too, in articulating the religion of nature (however misconstrued by subsequent sectarians) set forth new and better laws for humanity, which made him “the great Moral Reformer” (*Principles* 434). The work of the poet was essentially equivalent to that of Jesus, a position Emerson articulated when he placed Jesus among his “holy bards” (cf. “Divinity School Address” 133-35; “The Poet” 403).⁷ And like Romantic notions about heroic “great men,”

7 Cf. the Early Modern poet Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), who argued that the poet was “a maker,” who made “things either better than nature brings forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature” (99-100).

the true poet was someone who stood “above the multitude” (Davis, *Great Harmonia* II: 86) and embodied the spirit of a nation. For America, one of Davis’s exemplary figures was the “*beloved prophet-poet of New England*,” John Greenleaf Whittier, who “*hath many inspired utterances*” (*Arabula* 317). Notably, Davis made this comment in an eclectic “collection of new gospels” he had compiled in the layout of the King James Bible that contained excerpts from other “prophets,” such as Confucius and Emerson.

Indeed, the categorical sameness of different modes of revelation was on display when Davis wrote in 1855, “One man may be a Poet; another a Philosopher; another a Governor; another a Moralist; – that is to say, one may be a Christ, another a Shakespeare, another a Newton, and another a Plato, – but it is not the individual, it is the well-ascertained truthfulness of what they write, that constitutes the true object of affection and reverence” (*Great Harmonia* III: 376). With all sources of revelation potentially legitimate, only the inherent reasonableness of a given revelation lent it authority. This elevating of poetic inspiration simultaneously desacralized and resacralized the Christian Scriptures. On the one hand, the Bible possessed no special authority compared to the writings of Shakespeare or any author. But on the other, the Bible was affirmed to contain the very inherent truths that validated poetry as revelation.

With regard to Swedenborg, one of Davis’s spirit guides (Davis, *Magic Staff* 242–44, 248), Davis made a similar move to desacralize the Swedish seer’s writings as special revelations while simultaneously resacralizing them as akin to inspired poetry. Swedenborg, Davis explained, “saw into ‘Heaven and Hell’ *inferentially* and *analogically*, (not literally,) just as Milton saw the Prince of Darkness and the splendid compartments of pandemonium” (*Great Harmonia* III: 214). While lowered from the position that the New Church elevated him to, Davis’s Swedenborg still revealed divine truths in a way that also implicitly bolstered Milton’s ambiguous claim at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* to “justify the ways of God to Men” (Book I, 26).⁸

While artistic and revelatory potential was linked to collective social advancement, Spiritualists also tended to place a premium on the role of great

8 Conversely, Cora Hatch blamed Milton’s “deep imagination” for giving people “grand conceptions of a place of eternal damnation,” which was really “the image of his own soul” (214).

individuals to drive progress. “The true Reformer is superior to his age,” Davis wrote (*Great Harmonia* II: 101). As such, “poetical reformers” were rare indeed, not least of all due to the sin of imitation – anathema to the Romantic emphasis on genius and originality. It was a shame, Davis argued in shades of Emerson, “that modern poets strive to be a Homer, a Milton, a Burns, a Shakspeare [sic], and not themselves – not the representatives of their own intuitions,” which “closes up the avenues of spontaneous communion with nature” and “arrests the development of Genius and Wisdom in them,” rendering “them not true but false poets and mechanical rhyme-sters” (*Great Harmonia* II: 85; cf. Emerson, “American Scholar”; Emerson, “Self-Reliance”).⁹ Again, much like Emerson, who called for people to seek new conceptions of God for their own age (cf. “Divinity School Address”), Spiritualists called for a poetics, and thus a revelation, that would be ever-green and filled with vitality – forever surpassing old forms.

While for high-brow Transcendentalists like Emerson, it was always unclear just how literally one was to take the power of the “holy bard,” the sacred function of poetry within Spiritualism was underpinned by concrete theories of revelation and was constantly repeated in Spiritualist discourse. A striking example of striving to reconcile poetic genius with contemporary science comes from Samuel B. Brittan, a close associate of both Davis and Harris and a powerhouse in the world of Spiritualist publishing. In the introduction to *An Epic of the Starry Heavens* – a sprawling trance-poem delivered by Harris over twenty-two sessions across fourteen days – Brittan decried “that not only the medical faculty, but most men” regarded “the powers of the somnambule and the clairvoyant” as “nervous derangement” or “cerebral excitement.” Thus, “all modern spiritual experiences” and “the clearest proofs of the Divine origin, creative power, and exalted destiny of the human mind are ascribed to *disease!*” (Harris, *Epic* ii). Brittan pushed back against what he saw as a reductionist materialist perspective that left no room for modern spiritual experience.

At the same time, he rationalized such experience with empiricist language. Speaking of “[t]he remarkable powers of the human mind, as developed in men of genius, or [...] the seers and prophets of all ages,” he

9 Similarly, Harris lamented the genteel lack of authenticity in contemporary verse. “The modern theory which makes Poetry a polite accomplishment, reserved for the man of culture and elegant leisure,” was the outgrowth of “a period of mental and moral superficialism” (*Hymns* iv).

explained that during moments in which “the mind is profoundly engrossed with interior realities, it is proportionably withdrawn from all the objects which appeal to the senses, and as naturally receives influxes from the realms of the Invisible.” This “idea of inspiration” was consistent “with the laws and relations of the human mind” and could “only be rejected at the sacrifice of our better judgment.” Self-evidently, Brittan argued, “All original thoughts” and “creation of divine beauty and use” “emanate from that ideal realm – *from the Spiritual World*” and are “born in moments of profound abstraction, when by intense mental concentration the senses are deadened and the soul is quickened” (Brittan, Introduction iii). Here, the spiritual origin of true poetry was seamlessly linked to the budding language of psychology, upholding the Spiritualist synthesis of knowledge with the cultural authority of science while also critiquing the limits of hard materialism.

Thus, while Spiritualists like Brittan spoke of poetic genius in ways that resonated with broader Romantic currents, they did so in a way that was self-consciously scientific and that both naturalized and universalized revelation. Indeed, Brittan challenged “the materialist [to] tell us why the spiritual element enters so largely into the writings of all men of genius, if it is not that they are inspired” (Brittan, Introductioniii-iv). Leaning on the canon of great poets – implicitly making their works acts of revelation and simultaneously implying Harris’s place among them – Brittan further inquired, “Why does it [the spiritual element] predominate in the works of Dante, Shakspeare [sic], Milton, and all true poets, if it be not for the obvious reason, that in the hours of their greatest elevation they are essentially removed from the sphere of grosser life, and sublimated in thought and feeling by association with the hidden principles of nature and the intelligences of the immortal world?” (Brittan, Introduction iv). Authorized by spiritual science, poetic genius was associated with the higher spiritual reality and its denizens.

Certainly, Harris aspired to the lofty role of poet-prophet. Widely acknowledged as one of Spiritualism’s most able poets, both naturally and under spirit influence, Harris claimed to be “inborn into the Spirit-World” and “enabled to occupy a mediatorial position between the world of causes and the world of ultimates.”¹⁰ His “poetic genius of an interior character”

10 For Harris’s self-understanding as a “pivotal man,” see Versluis, “Harris.”

linked “his mind and the children of immortal song, who are known as Lyric Angels.” Muse-like, these angels “quickened” Harris’s “organ of language” in order to render “forms of truth and loveliness in the external dialect of earth” (Harris, *Epic* xv-xvi). In this declaration, the correspondences of the universe and Romantic inspiration was married to phrenomagnetism – a combination of Mesmerism and phrenology highly popular with Spiritualists (Albanese 198-206) – in order to buttress Harris’s controversial claims to direct revelation, which transported him Dante-like through the “seven degrees in the holy Sphere / That girdles the outer skies” and across “The Electrical Ocean of the Solar System” (*Epic* 30). Moreover, the resonances with Dante were no coincidence; it was none other than the spirit of the great Italian poet who “induct[ed] the medium into rapport” with the poetic spirits who controlled Harris (Harris, *Epic* xvi). With Dante acting as Harris’s Virgil, *The Divine Comedy* was also in effect retroactively recast as a work of Spiritualist poetry.

But, importantly, the *Epic* also invokes John of Patmos, the author of the biblical book of Revelation, a central touchstone for prophetically inclined Protestants. Indeed, with its dense symbolism, suggesting layers of mystic meaning, Revelation is one of the most conspicuous sites of slippage between biblical canonicity and “devotional creativity,” to use Laurie Maffly-Kipp’s term (Maffly-Kipp vii).¹¹ In Harris’s case, creativity is the undisputed winner as

The rocky Patmos where I dwell recedes –
 The outward fades. Lo, in immortal trance
 I spring to light. A mighty Angel reads
 My heart, mind, gladness, wonder, at a glance
 “Fulfilled, O Son, thy trial hour,” he says.
 Upon my soul the immortal light-beam plays. (*Epic* 19)

As Harris’s ecstasies continue, he repeatedly “scripturalizes” (see Wimbush) upon Revelation, for instance invoking the seven seals and trumpets through a series of sevens in the poem, such as “Seven curtains of light wave to and fro / Where the seven great trumpets the angels blow” (*Epic* 30; see also 58).

¹¹ For an eighteenth-century example, see Jan Stievermann on Cotton Mather’s treatment of Revelation (Stievermann).

Such allusions authorize Harris's revelatory poetry in several ways. As mentioned, they link him to traditions of Christianity – namely Reformed Protestantism and Swedenborgianism – that privilege prophecy and the end-times return of gifts of the spirit. Harris points back to the part of the Bible that arguably best sanctions his prophetic claims while also firmly overstepping the bounds of the canon with his Swedenborg and Davis-like interplanetary and spiritual travels. Moreover, the emphasis on Revelation and its deeper, esoteric layers of meaning foreshadows his later forays into apocalypticism, such as when, at the short-lived Mountain Cove community (1851-1853) in (now) West Virginia, Harris and the Rev. James L. Scott declared themselves to be the two witnesses with tongues of fire mentioned in Revelation 11:3-6 (Albanese 268-69), or when he subsequently expounded upon the “celestial” sense of Revelation in *Arcana of Christianity* (1867).¹²

Indeed, the work of biblical interpretation was more art than a scholarly exegetical pursuit. As Harris suggested in *Arcana*, even if “the Scriptures were far more veiled than at present, and the letter of them almost obliterated [...] that mental and verbal artist, whom the Lord might qualify, would rise, through the contemplation of those ruins, to the conception of their original design” (9). The poetry of the Bible rendered it open to an intuitive and spirit-centered form of interpretation that conveniently sidestepped the challenges posed by Higher Criticism. While rationalists and liberals might chip away at the Bible's historical foundations, its true, spiritual essence – which was poetry – remained unscathed for those with the artistic affinity to appreciate it, a radical Romantic twist on Reformed hermeneutics (see Stievernann, this volume). Far from desacralizing it through relativization, Harris's reconstitution of the Bible as poetry made it the direct expression of the underlying cosmic order. As he expressed it in another of his epic poems, *A Lyric of the Morning Land* (1854),

The Bible is a Poem; not a line
But lives and talks in music to mankind;
And Nature is all poetry divine;
And Song the natural language of the mind. (14)

12 Harris's authoritarian communal living experiment alienated him from most Spiritualists. By the winter of 1858-59, Harris had publicly broken with Spiritualism, denouncing it as “Pantheism” (Britten 213-17).

Thus, through correspondence the poetry of the Bible reflected the secret poetic language of nature, which also constituted human beings themselves. Indeed, the analogy reflected the poet's likeness to God. As Harris declared in his *Epic*, "God is the Poet of poets," "God shines, and He moves, and He speaks, and He sings" (117). Poetry here went beyond the salutary moral and didactic function Davis ascribed to it and became imitation of God himself, who creates through lyric utterance.

Achsa W. Sprague (1827-1862), a prominent medium who came to Spiritualism following a miraculous recovery from a long-term illness (Braude 99-116), was also laudatory of the role of the poet as revelator. In a posthumously published collection of poems – some written in a normal state, others "in a state of high mental exaltation" and recorded by "an amenuensis [sic]," Sprague, speaking through the personification of "Genius," remarks in the collection's titular poem, "The Poet," that "The poet has been called a dreamer vain, / Who idly sings his still more idle strain." But, no mere fancy,

The world's true Poet teaches common things,
And makes a living power of what he sings;
Catches the Real for his corner-stone,
And builds his pyramid, with power unknown. (31)

Thus, as other Spiritualists, like Davis, asserted, the role of the poet was pedagogical and generative, capturing a glimpse of the divine essence and transmuting it through verse into something uplifting for humanity, especially those whose souls still slumbered.

It is the Poet's mission to descend,
And all the influence of his spirit lend
To those who still pursue the beaten way,
And think of nought beyond the present day. (32)

Indeed, in shades of Harris's apocalyptic utterances, Sprague affirmed, "The Poet is the prophet, if he's true," and possessed a "heart of fire and tongue of living flame" (32). Transcendentalist-like, the poet's utterances served to shock those mired in complacency and turn them from worldly concerns toward the divine.

Following the Davisian understanding of religion as the actualization of natural law, Sprague's rhetorical poet – and by implication herself as inspired medium – becomes the Spiritualist ideal of the priest whose creed is nothing but universal natural principles. His "inborn power," Sprague writes, works to bring forth "The hidden meaning of great Nature's laws." "The Poet is the Thinker; he must trace / Through nature up to see the Father's face" (34); "The Poet is the priest, to walk the sod, / And stand the type, the image of God" (33). In these lines, we begin to see how in Spiritualist discourse, the poet is not just the conveyer of divine truth in any limited or figurative sense but a proxy for God himself, supplanting traditional and mediated notions of the priesthood. Arguably not even Walt Whitman – perhaps by no coincidence an admirer of Spiritualist mediums (see Aspiz 162-79) – aspired to such exalted heights.¹³

In the translation of inner spiritual truth into words, Sprague's poet partakes in the divine itself and grows literally in likeness to God. Sprague, echoing the kabbalistic and Swedenborgian conception of humanity as a collective microcosm of God, declares in the voice of "Genius" to the poet,

Thou art a Poem in thyself,
One writing every day;
Line after line is every thought,
Ne'er to be swept away. (18)

Suggestive of the occult axiom that "thoughts are things," the creative act of the poet is nothing less than a more limited instance of the divine act of God's creation itself, literally realizing the world of spirit in the world and progressively bringing about the millennium. Tellingly, after its initial paean to the powers of poetic genius, Sprague's dramatic poem sees its poetry-loving heroine witness the public performance of an "Improviastrice," whose controversial utterances upon the stage explicitly connect the first part of the poem to the public work of the Spiritualist medium but, in the specific case of woman, also "proves undoubtably her right to preach" (Sprague 73). Though hardly less sweeping in their implications than Harris's poetry, Sprague's claims are stated more backhandedly, reflecting the

13 David Kuebrich argues that Whitman conceived of *Leaves of Grass* as a post-Christian scripture, pulling together various strands of Deism, mysticism, Romanticism, and biblical criticism (see 197-215).

diverging rhetorical strategies necessitated for men and women in nineteenth-century American religious culture (cf. Braude; and Owen).

While Harris and Sprague aspired to a spirit-centered realization of Romantic genius and inspiration, other Spiritualist poets like Lizzie Doten (1827-1913), while not claiming to be lacking poetic talents, “held conscious communion with disembodied spirits” that took an active role in her compositions (Doten xvi-xvii). Much like Harris, Doten claimed that her propensity for poetry is what drew these spirits to her in the first place. This stood in contrast to other mediums like Nathan Francis White, whose book of spirit poetry, *Voices from Spirit-Land* (1854), was touted as being “more remarkable” than Harris’s productions because of White’s “gentle-hearted, simple-minded” nature and lack of education (White ix).

Doten’s popular *Poems from the Inner Life* (1864) featured her own poems alongside others done under the influence of Poe, Shakespeare, Burns, and other unnamed spirits. As with Sarah Whitman and Poe (Richards), spiritual sympathy was central to how the composition of these poems was understood. Indeed, Robert S. Cox has noted how networks of sympathy and mutual affinity were central to Spiritualist cosmology and practice, serving the project of constructing imaginary communities of believers trans-historically as well as a spiritualized American nation (85-99, 136-45). So great was Doten’s sympathy with these authorial spirits that her own voice could become subsumed by theirs, leading her to compose in their distinctive dialects. For instance, in a posthumous Robert Burns poem, Doten writes that once “Heaven and Earth awa’ have passed,” “lang syne saints,” such as “Calvin, Knox, and Luther,” “Shall find baith de’il and hell at last, / Mere pious feints” (101), an affirmation of Spiritualist doctrines of universal salvation.

While “[t]he influence of Burns was pleasant, easy, and exhilarating, and left me in a cheerful mood,” Doten wrote (xx), Shakespeare was another matter. He “seemed to overwhelm and crush me. I was afraid, and shrank from it” (xix). Heading off potential criticism that her Shakespeare poems failed to “come up to the productions of his master mind,” Doten explained they were “only intimations of what might have been, if he had had a stronger and more effectual instrument upon which to pour his inspirations” (xix). Because Doten was only able to muster a certain amount of sympathy with Shakespeare’s overbearing spirit (that is, through the laws of association), the outward poem is only able to approximate its higher referent in

the spirit land. Indeed, bringing inspiration full circle, Doten speculated that “while in the flesh,” Shakespeare “spake wiser than he knew, being moved upon by those superior powers who choose men for their mouth-pieces.” Thus, as Doten now served to translate Shakespeare’s poetry – however imperfectly – Shakespeare had done in service of spirits of the past (xx). Interfaced within a hierarchical network of spiritual affinities, Doten’s poet-prophet was less the great man envisioned by Davis or Harris, becoming the instrument rather than the interpreter of higher spiritual realities. Her very personhood was a porous boundary.

In addition to creating a sense of imagined community with the past, spirit poems deployed the cultural authority of canonical poets in order to advance Spiritualist doctrines. Thus, through an intertextual reference to *Hamlet*, spirit-Shakespeare corrects his earlier writing:

“To be, or not to be,” is not “the question;”
 There is no choice of Life. Ay, mark it well! –
 For Death is but another name for Change.
 The weary shuffle off their mortal coil,
 And think to slumber in eternal night.
 But, lo! the man, though dead, is living still;
 Unclothed, is clothed upon, and his Mortality
 Is swallowed up of Life. (Doten 86)

Hamlet’s morbid soliloquy, with its skepticism about the afterlife, is dramatically transformed now that Shakespeare has allegedly obtained positive proof of immortality – a central claim that Spiritualists made about their practice. Shakespeare has learned

That spirit is immortal, and no poisoned cup,
 Or dagger’s thrust, or sting of deadly asp,
 Can rob it of its Godlike attribute.
 This mortal garb may be as full of wounds
 And bloody rents as royal Cæsar’s mantle;
 Yet that which made it man or Cæsar liveth still. (Doten 87)

Though the original bard was prophetically inspired, spiritual progress leads him to affirm human divinity and the persistence of individuality beyond death.

Through Doten, even the gloomy and dark poetry of Poe takes on a cheery, hopeful tone, such as in “Resurrexi,” in which Poe’s spirit riffs on “The Raven”:

FROM the throne of Life Eternal,
From the home of love supernal,
Where the angel feet make music over all the starry floor –
Mortals, I have come to meet you,
Come with words of peace to greet you,
And to tell you of the glory that is mine forevermore. (104-05)

The pedagogical and prophetic function of such spirit poems simultaneously relies on the canonical status of authors like Shakespeare and also reifies this status by repeated citation. The Spiritualist treatment of great literature as scripture gave such canonization a pointedly twofold sense, muddying the boundary between biblical and literary canon. Such conflation was on display when Samuel B. Brittan read excerpts from the spirits of Sir Walter Scott and Shakespeare at a Spiritualist evening lecture after making the point that inspiration expressed itself in various forms; for Moses, it was in the form of a code of laws, whereas for David, it was in music and psalms (Brittan, “Lectures” 5). While making his larger point about the universality of inspiration and miracles, Brittan’s recitation of these literary spirit communications at the end of his lecture also suggests a quasi-liturgical use that helped reinforce their sacred meaning to Spiritualists.

The revelatory quality of literature was also a function of readers. As with the sympathetic connection of the poet-prophet to the world of spirit, it was affinity that conveyed the truth of his message to others. “Like Ezekiel in his vision,” Doten explained, Poe “beheld the wondrous ‘living creatures, and the wheels,’ and as they were represented, so did he describe them; but the mind of the reader must be in a similar state of illumination in order to clearly understand his meaning” (148). In a similar vein, Davis queried, “Who can perfectly comprehend Shakspeare’s [sic] gentle muse without being similarly organized and situated – without having the same avenues of his soul opened in the same manner, to the same sources of inspiration?” (*Great Harmonia* II: 85). In Harris’s *Epic*, Brittan deployed this theory against Spiritualism’s materialist detractors. Just as “it is as truly the privilege of the eagle to *soar*, as it is the province of meaner things to *crawl*,” the “dusty speculations of material philosophers” were “entitled to no

credence,” because they “are incapable of any similar experience” (Brittan, Introduction xiv). The particular constitution of certain individuals made them either more or less suitable for this Spiritualist take on experiential religion.

In many ways, the Spiritualist emphasis on affinity between prophet and recipient represents a modified version of the pneumatological understanding of exegesis among eighteenth-century Reformed Protestants like Cotton Mather (1663-1728), which Jan Stievertmann describes in this volume and elsewhere. As Harris urged in the preface to his *Epic*, “Breathe gently, Reader; attune thy heart to pure and loving thoughts while perusing this spiritual utterance, for thus alone the interior life [...] shall find entrance into thine own interiors” (xvi). Through meditative breathing exercises reminiscent of Swedenborg (Schmidt 202), one could blend one’s sentiments with that of the author and thus better appropriate his mystical teachings.

The Spiritualist example starkly underlines how the tension between spirit-centered forms of biblical interpretation and “canonical restraint” (Holland, esp. 24-30) could boil over once ecclesiastical control was removed through disestablishment. Strong affinity for a given poet could lend his or her work a scriptural status and, when combined with a progressive-evolutionary view of revelation, such as that described above with Davis or Harris, necessitated ever-new revelations befitting the age and the development of the people therein. Indeed, the need for novel revelations that would continue to resonate as society advanced also suggests why poets supposedly continued to produce new works beyond the grave.

“The Spiritual Harp” – Harmony and Spiritualist Hymns as Sacred Practice

The Spiritualist emphasis on sympathy between individuals was part of their belief in the harmonic nature of the universe. While Robert S. Cox argues that Adam Smith’s writings, especially *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), were influential for informing Spiritualist view of sympathy (25-30; see also Lobsien), probably even more significant were the ideas of the French socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837). With his views on “association” and “harmony,” Fourier posited that the universe, through a system of universal analogy, corresponded to the harmonic series, supposedly replicated everywhere in nature. This theory possessed obvious synergies with

Swedenborgian ideas of correspondence and spiritual affinities between the angels (Gabay 180-81). Fourierist or “Associationist” ideas proliferated in the United States during the 1840s, including the Transcendentalist Brook Farm, and were heavily promoted in *The Social Destiny of Man* (1840) by Albert Brisbane, who, as already mentioned, attended Davis’s early lectures and reported favorably on them (see Gabay 170-75; Albanese 174-75, 208-09). Indeed, the Brook Farmer, George Ripley, and Fourierist promoter Parke Godwin both gave Davis’s *Principles of Nature* glowing reviews for its utopian aspirations (Albanese 209).

In *Principles of Nature*, Davis praised Fourier’s teachings as “the most useful, most truthful, and most exceedingly sublime, even as seeking a level with, and being confirmed by, the teachings of Jesus.” In particular, he extolled Fourier’s “unparalleled discourses concerning the unspeakable harmony that pervades the Universe” in which “each planet occupies a position [...] as the notes of a well-tuned instrument.” The same was true of humanity. “[E]ach note needs only to be properly placed, in order that the whole race may, like a perfectly-tuned instrument, move in harmony, melody, happiness, and unity of action” (585-86). More than mere metaphor, musicality pulsed at the heart of the cosmic order and provided the score for organizing human society.

Harris similarly sacralized music, declaring that “God reveals his laws through music. The laws, the order, the harmony of heaven is all revealed to him who can interpret the oratories of Haydn and the symphonies of Beethoven” (“Inspirations” 50). Indeed, Harris also remarked that “Charles Fourier deduced his stupendous system of social order from his analysis of the lyrical harmonies.” Thus, like inspired poetry, “music becomes a revelation” as “the LYRIST feels the universe to be an expression of Harmony. He transfers to human tongue those infinite melodies evolved by worlds in their motion, by angels in their communion” (“Inspirations” 50). As Leigh Eric Schmidt has noted, the Swedenborgian belief in the angels’ celestial speech as a medium for pure, unmediated truth and the exaltation of the ear and musicality found ready reception among Romantics and Spiritualists alike, especially Davis, who explained his own clairaudience through a system of spiritual acoustics called “psychophonetics” (208-19, 229-30; see Davis, *Views of Our Heavenly Home* 14-17). Moreover, Schmidt locates Harris’s emphasis on the musical harmony of the universe as a precursor to

later New Age-style spirituality, with its emphasis on being “in tune” with higher realities (237-38).

James Martin Peebles (1822-1922) and Joseph Osgood Barrett (1823-1898), prominent Spiritualists and authors of *The Spiritual Harp: A Collection of Vocal Music for the Choir, Congregation, and Social Circle* (1868), also rhapsodized about the religious nature of music and its embeddedness in the cosmic order. Placing music at the heart of the universal religion, they wrote, “Religion springs to form from the hearts of the musical seers of all ages. Music envelops every surrounding object with Æolian vibrations. The leaves, the tips of grass, the winds, the sunbeams, the very fibres of wood and rock, all things respond” (Peebles and Barrett 3). Music was both revelatory as well as mode of harmonic attunement with reality itself.

Given the significance that popular Spiritualist thinkers attached to it, it is unsurprising that music featured prominently in the central Spiritualist practice: the séance. Strains of spectral music and floating instruments played by invisible hands appeared early in the history of the movement. Séance sitters might be treated to a levitating guitar, for instance, a folksy instrument that speaks to the popular character of Spiritualism. It stands to reason that spirits would often choose to communicate in the sacred language of the universe, but they also did so in ways that appealed to popular tastes, something that contrasted with the more refined sensibilities of Transcendentalists.

Aside from performances from the spirits, Spiritualists made ritual use of music, mirroring broader evangelical practices. Davis’s instructions for conducting séance circles, for example, recommended music as a way of establishing rapport with spirits: “Let music, elevating and gladdening, also enliven and lift up your hearts, to the end that spirits may participate in the melody of your souls, and echo in heaven the harmony of earth” (*Philosophy* 97-98). At least one regularly meeting circle in Philadelphia reported following Davis’s instructions and, moreover, claimed that the spirits had instructed them to “[r]ead Davis’s Revelations and sing” (Anonymous 3-4, 13), a suggestion that not only provided a liturgical role for music but for Davis’s writings, too, speaking to their quasi-scriptural use. Indeed, this suggestion appears to have prompted the circle to publish the hymnbook, *Spirit Voices*. Uriah Clark’s *Plain Guide to Spiritualism* (1863) similarly suggested “uniting in some kind of religious or musical exercises,” since “a condition of harmony is induced favorable to manifestations” (172-73). In

introducing *The Spiritual Harp* – a popular collection that later became the basis for the National Spiritualist Association’s official hymnbook (*Spiritualist Hymnal* n.p.) and which evoked the influential evangelical title *The Sacred Harp* (1844) – Peebles and Barrett proclaimed that “The angels, charmed when sweet melodies rise like ocean ripples from joyous souls, cannot help approaching us. As our music quiveringly touches and trembles the finer chords of their souls, we hear an echo far sweeter, and in turn we pause and listen, the auditors now of heavenly choirs” (3). This salutary effect of music on spirits also hearkened back to Swedenborg, who observed that spirits “almost fell into a collective ecstasy” when listening to singing (*Spiritual Diary* §2231). With mutual sympathy and harmony between séance sitters as well as spirits made essential for spirit communion to occur, singing provided a means for setting the right conditions.

The advice to sing and perform religious exercises speaks to a desire for séances to be, in Davis’s words, “conducted with a religious dignity and harmony” (*Philosophy* 97). Though certainly not all spirit-music was harmonious and elevating – the famous Koons’s spirit room in Ohio featured a raucous spirit band that could reportedly be heard a mile away (S. Brown 192-95) – Spiritualist practice was heavily influenced by the dominant Protestant culture (see Fessenden) while simultaneously seeking to construct itself as a rational alternative to the perceived excesses of evangelical emotionalism (Carroll 127-29). Nonetheless, Spiritualists shared with evangelical Protestants a propensity for hymn singing as a means of creating emotional states conducive to religious experience.¹⁴ The role of singing in cultivating harmony within the circle helped foster a sense of in-group belonging, much like a traditional church congregation, despite Spiritualism’s reputation as an individualistic seeker religion (see Carroll 130-32). As one Spiritualist wrote in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, a major Spiritualist periodical, “the singing of hymns or songs is of no less consequence to spiritual gatherings than to Methodist or Baptist meetings,” since “music, and particularly singing, is conducive to those conditions of harmony which make more easy [...] the access of the disembodied spirits to those remaining in the flesh” (Haskell 2). To this end, Spiritualists produced a wide variety of hymnbooks.

¹⁴ In this regard, both relied heavily on burgeoning new print technology (see C. G. Brown 41; Nord).

Popular titles like Ester C. Henck's *Spirit Voices: Odes, Dictated by Spirits of the Second Sphere, for the use of Harmonial Circles* (1854) offered a wide variety of songs, conveniently indexed by title, topic, first line, as well as tune (see Carroll 122-23). The preface to Henck's volume reaffirmed the common sentiment that "that singing is an essential aid in the promotion of harmony," which was why the spirits had instructed her that "these odes should be published for the *use of circles*" (3). As Seth Perry observes, with visionary experience more broadly, immediate revelation often came with the injunction to record the message and share it with others (86-109). Thus, through their repeated ritual use in the séance, spirit songs routinized communications from the spirit land.

Henck's spirits offered tunes that reinforced core Spiritualist doctrines, particularly spirit communication, with titles such as "Ministration of Angels" (9-10), "Beauties of Spiritual Communion" (15-16), and "Breathings from the Spirit-Land" (30-31). "Beauties of Spiritual Communion," a piece written in traditional church meter, extolled the séance circle as a place of peace and spiritual edification:

Come to the circle bright,
Lay all thy cares aside,
Imbibe the living light,
The sparkling water's tide;
The sun of Wisdom glows,
Above the circle fair;
The stream of Knowledge flows,
Adown the gentle air. (15)

Henck's hymnbook did not offer anything in the way of musical notation; however, it did list popular tunes, such as "Canadian Boat Song" (53), that some (but not all) of the numbers could be sung to.

Maria F. Chandler's collection *The Spirit Harp: A Gift, Presenting the Poetical Beauties of the Harmonial Philosophy* (1851), which republished poems from the *Univercælum* and the *Spirit Messenger*, another Spiritualist journal with heavy Davis leanings, had the same deficit. The preface lamented that, while the Harmonial Philosophy had produced "profound, scientific disclosures of illuminated minds," there was a dearth of "the *poetry* of such a divine Philosophy" (iii), an observation that spoke to the highly rationalist character of much Spiritualist writing despite its theorization of

art. With an assortment of pedagogical and sentimental poems, such as “Lesson of Nature” (4) and “My Spirit Bride” (64), the collection stated the dual aim of conveying “the simpler elements of truth [...] through this medium” rather “than by means of any labored argument” as well as of “subserve[ing] the purpose of a *singing book*.” Only some of the poems were suited to this purpose, however; nonetheless, the book promised “a considerable number which may be appropriately used in singing” by being put to “the cheerful and inspiring melody of popular airs” (iv).

These works’ lack of music was apparently frustrating enough to impel the editors of *The Spirit Minstrel; a Collection of Hymns and Music, for the Use of Spiritualists, in Their Circles and Public Meetings* (1853) to cite *Spirit Voices* and *The Spirit Harp* as justifications for their own volume. While the other two “furnish us some beautiful poetry, [...] there are such marked defects as to preclude their general use,” such as the “inordinate length” of some of the *Harp*’s pieces and “the fact that we have no music, and hence are obliged to use the cumbersome works of common church music” (Packard and Loveland 2). This volume, printed with a more useable horizontal layout, with one song per page, sought to rectify these faults by offering musical notation, though many of the tunes were still adaptations.

Many of the songs in *The Spirit Minstrel*, as well as other collections like Harris’s *Hymns of Spiritual Devotion* (1858), underline another issue that remained controversial in Spiritualist hymnody, namely the doctrinal content of the hymns. Hymns in *The Spirit Minstrel*, for example, extolled the virtue of “He who the Christian’s course hath run” (Packard and Loveland 16) and republished evangelical hymns with slightly modified or abridged lyrics, such as “Hail to the brightness of Zion’s glad morning!” (15). By contrast, John Adams’s *The Psalms of Life: A Compilation of Psalms, Hymns, Chants, Anthems, &c. Embodying the Spiritual, Progressive and Reformatory Sentiment of the Present Age* (1857) represented an explicit attempt to break with the theology of the past and the “Psalms and Hymns [...] written for a previous generation.” The collection purported to enact “the great law of ‘Progression,’” which “inevitably applies itself to our Religious and National Lyrics.” Adams faulted other compilers for “editing and re-editing the self-same ‘Psalms and Hymns,’ – changing the dishes, but presenting the same food” (iii). The collection thus sought to supply “the poetical fervor of our own times” but without completely forsaking “the sweet and fervid devotional songs of our fathers” (iv). The resulting

volume was an eclectic mash-up of songs with lyrics taken from William Lloyd Garrison and Thomas Lake Harris, for example, as well as Goethe and Hosea Ballou. One tune offered alternative lyrics from both Octavius Brooks Frothingham, the second-generation Transcendentalist and president of the Free Religious Association, and the famous proto-evangelical hymnodist Issac Watts (17). The highly unusual pairing of an unorthodox, rationalist religious liberal with an eighteenth-century Puritan speaks to Spiritualism's ambiguous relationship to Christianity, with its simultaneous impulse to move beyond old forms but also embeddedness in the same cultural frameworks that made hymnody seem like an indispensable part of religious practice, albeit with a new metaphysical justification.

Peebles and Barrett's *Spiritual Harp* also promised that, alongside original poetry and Spiritualist classics like Lizzie Doten and Harris, the selected poetry included had been "culled with the most studious fidelity, and carefully criticized till every theological taint is expunged" (3). Thus, the American Tract Society's tune "I have a Father in the promised land" became "I have a father in the spirit-land," the switching to the lowercase *father* suggesting the domestic reunions envisioned by Spiritualists in the hereafter rather than the powerful sovereign of Christianity (120). (The refrain repeats with "mother" and "dear children.") Much more palatable to Spiritualist sensibilities was the bond between loving family members than the God of orthodox Christianity, who, as Bret E. Carroll observes, tended to operate more at a distance as an abstract principle in Spiritualist practice, whereas as ministering spirits were more strongly emphasized (see Carroll 85-119).

Usability was front and center for Peebles and Barrett. In addition to musical notation and a clean layout, the collection was meticulously organized by topic and type, such as chants, and featured several indexes. The most interesting usage the authors envisioned was the so-called "Spirit Echoes" (Peebles and Barrett 271-89). These Echoes were short aphorisms taken from an eclectic variety of sources, including Jesus, the Hindu Rishis, the Persian Zend Avesta, Andrew Jackson Davis, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alexander Pope, Cicero, Moses, Gerrit Smith, Walt Whitman, and many more. Through a practice of recitations based off of Davis's methods of instruction for his "Children's Progressive Lyceum," the Spirit Echoes represented an attempt at a sort of Spiritualist liturgy and could be read by a speaker in-between songs (Peebles and Barrett 3). Incidentally, Peebles and Barrett,

along with Emma Tuttle, also produced a guide for Children's Lyceums, which included such readings on themes like "The Angels" and "Courage," interspersed with singing (Peebles, Barrett, and Tuttle 66-131). Though Spiritualists were quick to disavow ritual, these efforts speak to a much more pronounced attempt to organize than with Transcendentalists.

Despite the pains Adams, Peebles, and Barrett took to expunge orthodox Christian doctrines from their hymns, some Spiritualists were not satisfied with the degree to which Spiritualist hymnody seemed dependent on evangelical models. Writing in 1888 in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, W. G. Haskell complained "that quite a large proportion of the hymns so used by our people are by no means consistent with the philosophy of Spiritualism." Superficial edits, such as "the elimination of a manifestly objectionable word," did not change that these songs were "quite largely those of the churches" and were "often deeply tinged with sentiments which plainly imply the positions of orthodoxy." Such doctrinal intrusions undercut the very purpose of hymns as Spiritualists understood them by introducing "a feeling not conducive to harmony, because of my mental protest against the sentiments they utter." Nevertheless advocating hymnody in general, Haskell called for "a competent compiler" to put together a "neat, compact, pocket-sized book" that might include "truly spiritual sentiments" from poems like "Whittier's, Tennyson's, Longfellow's, Pope's 'Universal Prayer,' etc." Haskell's choices here speak to Spiritualist notions of the poet-prophet that certainly challenged Protestant biblicism but also was unwilling to part ways with familiar forms, namely hymn singing.

Conclusion

There were profound eschatological implications in the Spiritualist insistence on the revelatory power of poetry and the ability of music to connect the living with the dead and to harmonize humanity with the universe. In a Spiritualist version of the Millennium, all streams of knowledge would harmonize, and all social discord would cease. As humanity internalized natural principles to a greater degree through a synthesis of art, science, and philosophy, communion with angel friends in the spirit-land would become seamless. Davis described his ecstatic vision of this "HARMONIAL AGE" in his autobiography as a moment when all streams of knowledge converged and society would become the perfect reflection of the spiritual world, forever leaving behind all discord:

Poets are no dreamers! Prophets are no impostors! Seers are no visionists! Philosophers are not insane! No, no! Poets all have sung of an "Elysium." Prophets have foretold of a "New Jerusalem." Seers have seen an "Era of Universal Unity." Philosophers have ciphered out a "New Atlantis." The Millennial day, the Utopian period, the reign of Justice, the age of Happiness – all! Yes, all – is but one declaration of Father-God through the several inspired offspring of Mother-Nature. (*Magic Staff* 382-83)

This was the dawning moment when all art, religion, science, and forms of culture would melt into "Unity," fulfilling "God's design and [...] Nature's desire" (*Magic Staff* 383). Though ultimately retaining the Bible as a master-text through reference to Revelation, reflecting the strong strand of millennialism in American Protestantism more broadly, Davis read its prophetic framework into the writings of the world's poets, visionaries, and philosophers, collapsing the distinction between them. The Christian eschaton, thus, became but one expression of the same impulse that had set alight the tongues of poet-prophets everywhere, while, at the same time, making the Bible the implicit model for this universalistic understanding of revelation and sacred poetics. Poetry became as valid of a means as scientific investigation for uncovering the underlying laws of nature and putting them into practice in society – something that would harmonize humanity with the underlying musicality of the universe.

Thus, within Spiritualist discourse, the sacralization of literature and especially poetry espoused by socially more elite Transcendentalists took on a radically literal aspect when combined with a Swedenborgian and Fourierist inspired metaphysics that emphasized eternal progress and posited a harmonious connection between the natural and spiritual worlds as well as between individuals. To this end, hymnody, too, served as a means to align the sentiments of Spiritualists with each other as well as with the spirits they communed with. Spiritualists as a rule may have been critical of the evangelical Protestants who made up the mainstay of America's religious culture, but they shared with them a belief in the importance of sacred music for instilling the appropriate emotional state for true piety and a connection with the divine.

Though empiricism and the practice of a "scientific" religion was crucial for Spiritualist self-understandings as a viable alternative to both orthodox Christianity and scientific materialism, equally important was their

appropriation of Romantic theories of art and literary aesthetics. Poetry became one more way of expressing the sacred truths of nature for a new era – a unification of different streams of knowledge – while music, both drawing on and rejecting evangelical models, unified Spiritualists as a community of believers, adding a structure to their practice that Transcendentalists eschewed and placing them in sympathy with the musical language of the angels and God.

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“Hello from the Other Side”: *Muslim Versions* and *Nasheed Covers* as Sacralizations of Pop Songs¹

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Hello from the other side
I must've cried a thousand times
Wanna tell you I'm sorry for everything that I've done
When I call, I know that you'll always be there.

In written form, these appear to be the words of British singer-songwriter Adele. They are, however, those of Omar Esa, a Muslim British Pakistani, who, with an album and two singles having charted number one on iTunes worldwide, is one of the most famous contemporary voice-only *nasheed*² artists (Esa, “About Omar Esa”). In addition to producing original songs, so-called *nasheeds*, and Islamic media for children, he is known for his vocals-only cover versions of pop songs, which he calls *Muslim versions*, sometimes also referred to as *nasheed covers* – or any combination of these terms.³ Not even two months after the release of Adele’s smash hit “Hello,” which has been viewed more than 3.2 billion times on YouTube since its release in October 2015, he released a vocals-only *Muslim version* of the

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- 1 This chapter results from work in project P5 “Holy Scriptures and War: How Do Practices of Interpretation Contribute to the (De-)Legitimation of Political Violence?,” funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation) within Research Unit 2828 “De/Sacralization of Texts” (Project Number 39844141). – I would like to thank Jonas Otterbeck, Christoph Günther, and Mark A. Anyorikeya for their valuable feedback on this chapter.
 - 2 In this chapter, I generally follow the Arabic-English transliteration rules of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, the main exception being the reproduction of the Anglicized spelling of *nasheed* with the plural *nasheeds*, instead of the correct transliteration *nashīd* with the plural *anāshīd*, to reflect the language both producers and recipients commonly use. I apologize for any minor inconsistencies in transliterations.
 - 3 Esa, in general, uses the label *Muslim versions* for his cover versions of pop songs and *nasheeds* for his originals. He sometimes mixes these labels, for example when he writes in a comment on YouTube about his “duty to do a Muslim version of this song into a nasheed” (Esa, “Hello”).

song that today has more than 5.7 million views on YouTube (last accessed 28 April 2025). While the textual difference is not obvious at a first glance, the sonic difference becomes directly apparent at a first listening in, as no instruments are used, only his voice.

Esa explains his reasons for having made this cover version in a comment posted together with the video on YouTube. There are two lines of argument: first, he wanted to give Muslims an alternative to this extremely popular and omnipresent song that was “played on tv, on radio, shopping centres, even from people[’s] cars.”⁴ Because he had also “seen and heard a lot of Muslims speak about this song,” he felt it was his “duty to do a Muslim version of this song into a nasheed and talk about the most important relationship in a Muslim[’s] life, Allah!” The second line of argument concerns relationships between unmarried men and women, which he considers un-Islamic. Esa here brings together a specific moral-religious stance on pre- or extramarital relationships and on music that is sounded out in a vocals-only *nasheed* format. While Adele does generally not refer to her music in religious terms,⁵ Esa gives his version of “Hello” a moral-religious reframing.

Using Esa’s cover versions as a case study, I will conceptualize *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* as sacralizations of pop songs. As the term *nasheed* is essential here, I will first outline some historical developments and recent trends in this Islamic genre that artists like Esa make use of. I will then offer general definitions of sacralization as applied in this chapter, based on which I will develop a conceptual framework of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* as forms of sacralization. Sacralization, in this context, needs to be understood as a religious-aesthetic practice and experience by producers,⁶ on the one hand, and recipients, on the other. It is closely linked to the process of production and moral-religious reframing that I call *halalization*, in which producers apply textual, sonic, and visual techniques to transform unlawful (*haram*) pop songs into what they view as lawful

4 Instead of in-text citations, I provide an overview of Omar Esa’s *Muslim versions* at the end of this chapter.

5 The exception to the rule is her single “Oh My God” released in 2021. Various newspaper articles highlighted the Christian imagery and undertones of this song (see, e.g., Rusk).

6 In this chapter, I use the term producers in a broader sense as a complement to recipients, not in the narrower sense of record producers.

(*halal*) *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*. I argue that the process of *halalization* is also one of sacralization, as it is a way for producers to practice and promote Islam or, in other words, to access the sacred and make it accessible to others. It is also a prerequisite for sacralization to occur on the recipients' end. However, not every recipient undergoes this type of experience when listening to *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*. While all recipients experience their aesthetic qualities in one way or another, some experience them in a way that is religiously charged, making it, I argue, a form of sacralization. These recipients recognize the added moral-religious value of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* and integrate them into their daily religious practice.

In the next step, I will apply this conceptual framework to Esa's six most popular *Muslim versions* and focus on the *halalizing* and sacralizing techniques applied to pop songs during the production process, arguing that the outer transformation of their thematic content and aesthetic form reflects an inner transformation of their moral-religious content. This line of argument is supported by users' comments on YouTube; these present sacralization as a reception process that unfolds in religious-aesthetic experiences and practices among recipients. In this chapter, I will only be able to offer glimpses into the mechanisms at work here. I will show, however, that the reception process is significantly influenced and steered by the production process as well as by the moral-religious credibility and authenticity of the producer. In Esa's case, his cover versions of pop songs are a means not only to show that his productions conform with Islam but also to disseminate and reinforce his understanding of what qualifies as Islamic.

The analysis of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* as sacralizations consequently also contributes to a better understanding of the reciprocal relationship between Islamic norms and practices, a recent discourse within the academic study of Islam. Scholars interested in "Lived Islam" or "Everyday Islam" (Akca, Abuali and Sürer 309) have conceived of them as two "unconnected" and "opposed" fields (Fadil and Fernando 70). Anthropologists Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando have thus rightly criticized the underlying misconception of everyday practices exclusively "as moments of disruption, of *not conforming* to religious norms" (69). The study of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*, rather, demonstrates that everyday practices can be active attempts by both producers and recipients to conform to Islamic norms, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between religious

norms and practices. While Islamic norms serve as a moral-religious framework that shapes the practice of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* in their content and form, these very practices reinforce Islamic norms by disseminating them to a broad audience.

Nasheed as an Islamic Genre

By using the label *Muslim version* or *nasheed cover* and calling themselves *nasheed* artists, the producers refer to an Islamic genre to mark their cover versions as much as themselves as Muslim. The Arabic term *nasheed* or, in its correct transliteration *nashīd*, today denotes “a piece of oratory, a chant, a hymn and a form of vocal music” (Shiloah, “Nashīd” 975). Its origins lie in the recitation of poetry, which was already widespread in pre-Islamic times (see Shiloah, *Music* 5). The term gradually took on a broader musical meaning, eventually designating different musical forms (5). Throughout Islamic history, the legality of music has been contested time and again, and it continues to be the subject of debate. This is because the Qur’an does not explicitly address this topic, and the hadith, written accounts of what the Prophet Muhammad said, did, or approved of, do not provide a clear answer due to their ambiguity (32). “Muslim legists, litterateurs, Sufi⁷ thinkers, and others” thus participated in the controversy on the legitimacy of music in Islam, known under the Arabic term *samā’*⁸ (Nelson vx, 32). Their views ranged from complete condemnation to full admission of music and dance as part of Sufi religious practice (*dhikr*), with all sorts of positions in-between, such as allowing only cantillation accompanied by a specific type of frame drum without discs (see Shiloah, *Music* 31, 42). The Islamic studies scholar Jonas Otterbeck points out that, despite this variety of views, there has been a consensus on two issues: first, the lawfulness of sonic expressions connected to religious rituals, which are not always labelled as music, and, second, the unlawfulness of “music inciting to sin,” which Otterbeck compares to the idea of ‘sex and drugs and rock and roll’ (179). Sounds considered lawful or *halal*, even according to more restrictive positions, include, for example, the call to prayer (*adhān*), Qur’anic recitation, and songs that praise God or the Prophet Muhammad, sometimes with further

7 Sufism, often referred to as Islamic mysticism, is a stream within Islam that seeks a personal engagement with and closeness to God (Voll and Ohtsuka).

8 The term *samā’* is also generally used for Sufi music.

restrictions relating to the topics of their lyrics and instrumentation (17). While musical instruments, particularly string and wind instruments, have often been considered unlawful (*haram*), the frame drum *duff*⁹ has held a special place in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (17). However, even the legitimacy of the *duff* was challenged by some Muslim scholars, who sought to restrict its use to girls and women playing it at certain occasions and viewed music, in general, as “the instigator of fornication, wine drinking and other blatant sins” (182). Influenced by Greek musical philosophy that was incorporated into Arabic musical theory, the impact of music on the listener was heavily debated (see Weinrich).

This impact also explains why religious-political and Islamist groups and movements began to strategically use *nasheeds* in the twentieth century (see Said 45; Tammam and Haenni 93-94) and, in the 1990s, jihadi groups followed (Said 78). At the same time, a kind of Islamic pop culturalization took place, as artists started to release albums with a new type of *nasheed* that Otterbeck calls “pop-nasheed” (see, e.g., Otterbeck and Skjelbo 6). They can be viewed as a response to “global popular music” and “the call for a contemporary Islamic music culture” that qualified as *al-fann al-hādif*, “purposeful art,” or *al-fann al-naẓīf*, “clean art,” a debate that emerged among Sunni and Shi’i circles in the 1980s over how to use art to promote Islam (4, 6). According to Otterbeck, this development went along with a change in meaning of the term *nasheed* from “a type of traditional, devotional, Islamic song genre” to “an overall genre label for a wave of new Islamic popular music” (5). Even though the term has also been applied to Christian or secular songs, it is clearly anchored in Islamic discourse (16.).

Today’s most popular *nasheed* artists include Lebanese-Swedish singer Maher Zain, Azeri-British Sami Yusuf, and South African Zain Bhikha. While Zain Bhikha only uses beatboxing, offering some of his *nasheeds* both as a vocals-only and a “drum version,” Maher Zain offers different versions ranging from vocals-only to full instrumentation (Otterbeck and Skjelbo 8, 11). Sami Yusuf first recorded exclusively vocals-only versions, later adding fully instrumentalized versions (14). Their use of instruments has, however, been subject to contestation. In online repositories, legal opinions (*fatwas*) can be found according to which “it will be impermissible to listen to the Nasheeds of Maher Zain even though it may contain vocals

9 Also spelt *daf* or *daff*, but the spelling *duff* is widely used in English.

only,” because “most of [his] Nasheeds [...] contain music” (Desai and Desai). It is equally unlawful (*haram*) to listen to Sami Yusuf’s records, since he or his band make use of instruments such as the “piano, violin, guitar and others” (Patel). To my knowledge, there is no comparable online *fatwa* on British-Pakistani Omar Esa, who neither uses instruments nor beatboxing. His records in a vocals-only format seem to be generally accepted as lawful (*halal*), which demonstrates that the production process is also a way of steering the reception process.

Conceptualizing *Nasheed Covers* and *Muslim Versions* as Sacralizations

The ongoing debate over the legality of instruments in Islam shows that discourses on the *halal* and the sacred intersect in terms of “the constant negotiation of that-which-should-not-be-negotiated” (Gissibl and Hofmann 16). The “instability of the sacred [...] necessitates the constant re-attribution and the ritualized acknowledgment of its sacrality and significance” (16). I argue that, by producing *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*, artists such as Omar Esa engage in such a re-attribution and ritualized acknowledgment of the sacred. By giving pop songs a moral-religious reframing, they perform one of the multiple possible forms of sacralization. Such a broad understanding seeks to overcome the limitations associated with the notion of the sacred, which developed around 1900 in a Christian European context, by encompassing “multiple sacralities across time, societies and social groups” (17).

The term sacralization is commonly defined as “the social attribution of sacredness” (Paulmann 293) or “the process of highlighting, of setting alone” (Herbers and Steiner 9; my translation). The latter definition goes back to the sociologist Émile Durkheim, who described “sacred things” as “things set apart”¹⁰ and religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices” shared by a “moral community” (47). Following Durkheim and the “Strong Programme” approach, the sociologist Gordon Lynch concludes for sacred texts: “A text is not sacred simply because it has a higher status as a source of knowledge, pleasure or aesthetic quality. Rather it is sacred primarily

10 Durkheim, in fact, defines them as “things set apart and forbidden” (47). The idea of the sacred as the forbidden is also expressed, for example, in the Arabic term *al-haramayn* for the two cities Mecca and Medina (see Lewis).

because of its integral role in social relations and practices which sustain a sense of moral order and community through a sacralized system of meaning” (Lynch). The example of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*, however, shows that their “role in social relations and practices” and their “aesthetic quality” cannot be separated from each other. Rather, they are mutually dependent, for their setting apart unfolds in both social and aesthetic terms.

In this chapter, sacralization is to be understood as a religious-aesthetic practice and experience by both producers and recipients. It is closely linked to the transformation of the aesthetic qualities or form and the thematic content of pop songs, which I call *halalization*. *Halalization* here describes a process of production and moral-religious reframing, in which producers apply certain techniques to transform pop songs into *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*. It could also be called “sacrality management,” a term used by the historian Gerd Schwerhoff for “the targeted design or redesign of religious spaces” (41; my translation), which the historian Johannes Paulmann expands to “times, things, and ideas” (297). The concept of “sacrality management” also suggests a close relationship between *halalization* and sacralization, processes that, as I argue, are congruent in the case of producers and partially overlapping in the case of recipients. On the one hand, producers sacralize pop songs by *halalizing* them, that is by thematically and aesthetically transforming them into *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*. For them, this is not only a means to sell cover versions of pop songs but to access the sacred and make it accessible to others. It is a way of “performing piety” (van Nieuwkerk) and promoting Islam, as Esa’s expression “nasheed (dawah) work” indicates, which he adds to all his releases on YouTube to denote the invitation to and promotion of Islam (*da’wa*) through his *nasheeds*. For recipients, on the other hand, *halalization* is both a prerequisite and part of sacralization. It is a prerequisite with regard to the prior *halalization* of pop songs on the producers’ end, and it is part of sacralization, as recipients accessing the sacred through *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* must also recognize their thematic and aesthetic transformation and thus their added moral-religious value. Not every recipient, however, has this type of experience when listening to *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*. Whilst all recipients have aesthetic experiences, some undergo a specific type of aesthetic experience that is religiously charged and can qualify as sacralization, as I will describe in more detail later.

Analysis of Omar Esa's *Muslim Versions*: Sacralization as Production

Because *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* are a means to access the sacred and to make the sacred accessible, I will, in this section, look at and listen to the techniques applied to *halalize* and sacralize the lyrics, sounds, and videos of pop songs to transform them into *Muslim versions* with an added moral-religious value. The analyzed sample consists of Esa's six most popular *Muslim versions* on YouTube, each having at least 1.3 million views (see Fig. 1). Overall, his original *nasheeds*, which he releases in English, Urdu, and Arabic, are, by far, his most popular productions, with "Jum-mah Mubarak" having more than 78 million views (last accessed 28 April 2025). But his *Muslim versions* of the Hindi-language Bollywood song "Tum Hi Ho" ("You Are the One"), originally by Arijit Singh, and Adele's "Hello" have also been remarkably successful: with 7.4 million and 5.7 million views, respectively, they come in fifth and sixth place of his most viewed videos on YouTube (last accessed 28 April 2025).

As sacralization is "a fundamental way of doing differences" (Gissibl and Hofmann 16-17), *nasheed* artists, in particular voice-only artists like Omar Esa, are invested in clearly demarcating themselves from *haram* pop music. This is what Esa calls doing things "the Halal way," because "haram is easy but Halal is hard, but the reward of Halal is In'shaa'Allah [if God wills] eternal heaven and a life away from this wretched and fake world" (Esa, "Halal Way"). Accordingly, he refers to his covers of pop songs as *Muslim versions*. "Muslim" can be understood in relation to three different dimensions: first, the producer; second, the recipients; and third, the medium. To be precise, Esa's cover versions are produced by a practising Muslim *nasheed* artist for a presumably mainly Muslim (socialized) audience as media that he calls *Muslim versions*. These *Muslim versions* both conform with and reinforce a certain moral-religious understanding of what qualifies as Islamic. In other words, they are produced to be "perceived and accepted as Islamic, often with the specific intention of celebrating Allah, Muhammad, Islam or Islamic values and lifestyles in lyrics, images and, [...] sounds" (Otterbeck 4).

Fig. 1: Esa's Six Most Popular *Muslim Versions* on YouTube (last accessed 28 April 2025)¹¹

Title	Views	Release Date	Original Artist
Tum Hi Ho ¹²	7.4 million	17 May 2016	Arijit Singh ¹³
Hello ¹⁴	5.7 million	3 Dec 2015	Adele ¹⁵
My Heart Will Go On ¹⁶	3.0 million	8 May 2018	Céline Dion ¹⁷
See You Again ¹⁸	1.6 million	20 Oct 2016	Wiz Khalifa feat. Charlie Puth ¹⁹
Happy ²⁰	1.4 million	26 Aug 2014	Pharrell Williams ²¹
Aisha (radialla'anha) ²²	1.3 million	15 Feb 2014	Khaled, ²³ Outlandish

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- 11 The titles provided in Fig. 1 are shortened. They all have an addition that makes them recognizable as vocals-only cover versions, which Esa seems to have standardized over time. While the titles of “Aisha (radialla'anha)” and “Happy” include the hints “Vocals Only” or “Omar Esa Version,” the releases since 2015 are labelled with an addition following this format: “Adele – Hello (Muslim Version by Omar Esa) | Vocals Only.”
- 12 Artist: Omar Esa; nasheed composition: Omar Esa, Ramzi Sleiman; original composition and lyrics: Mithoon, Omar Esa.
- 13 Artist: Arijit Singh; songwriter: Mithoon; producers: Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Mukesh Bhatt.
- 14 Artist: Omar Esa; nasheed composition: Omar Esa, Ramzi Sleiman; original composition and lyrics: Adele Adkins, Greg Kurstin, Omar Esa, Ramzi Sleiman.
- 15 Artist: Adele; songwriters: Adele Adkins, Greg Kurstin; producer: Greg Kurstin.
- 16 Artist: Omar Esa; lyrics: Omar Esa, Will Jennings; nasheed composition and production: Omar Esa, Ramzi Sleiman, James Horner; producer: Salim Patel.
- 17 Artist: Céline Dion; composer: James Horner; lyricist: Will Jennings; producers: Walter Afanasieff, James Horner, Simon Franglen.
- 18 Artist: Omar Esa; nasheed composition: Omar Esa, Ramzi Sleiman; original composition and lyrics: Omar Esa, Justin Franks, Charlie Puth, Cameron Thomaz, Ramzi Sleiman.
- 19 Artists: Wiz Khalifa feat. Charlie Puth; songwriters: Cameron Thomaz, Charlie Puth, Justin Franks, Andrew Cedar; producers: Charlie Puth, DJ Frank E, Andrew Cedar.
- 20 Artist and lyricist: Omar Esa; nasheed composition: Omar Esa, Ramzi Sleiman; original composition: Pharrell Williams.
- 21 Artist, songwriter, and producer: Pharrell Williams.
- 22 Artist and songwriter: Omar Esa; original composition: Cheb Khaled, Outlandish; producers: Omar Esa, Ramzi Sleiman.
- 23 Artist: Khaled; songwriters: Jean-Jacques Goldman, Khaled; producer: Jean-Jacques Goldman.

Sacralizing Lyrics

Esa's most popular *Muslim versions* exclusively deal with themes that are considered morally and religiously appropriate. In this regard, they qualify as *al-fann al-hādif*, "purposeful art," or *al-fann al-naẓīf*, "clean art," according to which "lyrics should be decent, preferably offering praise to Allah, Muhammad or an Islamic lifestyle" (Otterbeck 49). By far the most prominent theme in Esa's top-six *Muslim versions* is, indeed, praise to God. It appears in all of them and is dominant in "Tum Hi Ho," "Hello," and "My Heart Will Go On." This is not surprising, since in all three cases the original lyrics are about love for another person; they were rewritten to describe love for and praise to God.

In the Hindi-language song "Tum Hi Ho," which is Esa's most viewed *Muslim version* on YouTube and translates as "You Are the One," the textual changes are comparatively minor, apart from an added bridge in English. These slight changes suffice, however, to completely change its meaning, as the first three lines of the chorus illustrate:

<u>Singh</u>	<u>Esa</u>
Kyunki tum hi ho	Ab tum hi ho
Ab tum hi ho	Basa tum hi ho
Zindagi ab tum hi ho	Ya Rabbi basa tum hi ho
Because you are the one	Now you are the One
Now you are the one	Only you are the One
My life, now you are the one	Oh my Lord, only you are the One

The added Arabic expression "yā rabbī" ("oh my Lord") in Esa's version also alters the meaning of the previous sentences. "The One" no longer refers to a beloved person but to God, implying the Islamic concept of "oneness" (*tawḥīd*) that is further emphasized by the added word "only" ("basa"). A similar shift in meaning can be found in "My Heart Will Go On"; however, with more significant changes made to the lyrics. While some lines of the original lyrics have been retained, others have been completely replaced, as the following example shows:

Dion

Every night in my dreams
 I see you, I feel you
 That is how I know you go on
 Far across the distance
 And spaces between us
 You have come to show you go on
 Near, far, wherever you are

Esa

Every night in my dreams
 I pray that I see you
 That is what I ask, Allah
 Far across the distance
 And spaces between us
 I want to see your face
 Near, far, rasūl Allah

In their dreams, the lyrical subject tries to overcome the distance to God (“Allah”) and the Prophet Muhammad, “*rasūl Allah*” (“messenger of God”), which rhymes with the word “far.” Dreams play a special role in Islam with its long-standing tradition of dream interpretation, as the soul is believed to be “taken back into the presence of God” in dreams (van Nieuwkerk 30-31). The line “I want to see your face” refers to the Qur’anic expression “the face of God” (*wajh Allah*), opening up a new dimension, as Muslims hope to enjoy its sight in the hereafter (Elias). This reference to the afterlife is spelt out towards the end of Esa’s *Muslim version*, where the expressions “that day” and “*janna*” are used, pointing to the day of the last judgment (*yawm al-qiyāma* or *yawm al-dīn*) and “paradise,” which the speaker prays to be allowed into.

Transcendence, distance from, and proximity to God are also prevalent in “Hello,” with the lyrical subject asking God for forgiveness and being grateful for having been granted a second chance.

Adele

I’ve forgotten how it felt before the world fell at our feet
 There’s such a difference between us
 And a million miles
 Hello from the other side
 I must’ve called a thousand times
 To tell you I’m sorry for everything that I’ve done
 But when I call, you never seem to be home

Esa

See my past was just a lie, now my present’s just a cry
 But I was gifted another chance
 By you Allah

Hello from the other side
 I must've cried a thousand times
 Wanna tell you I'm sorry for everything that I've done
 When I call, I know that you'll always be there

The phrase “Hello from the other side” here takes on a completely new meaning, referring to this world (*dunyā*). In Adele’s original, by contrast, it is meant as “the other side of becoming an adult” (Hiatt). In her own words, “Hello” is thus equally about a person who once was dear to her and about “reconnecting” with herself. In this regard, Esa’s version is, in fact, not very different, as the speaker tries to reconnect with himself by reconnecting with God. It becomes clear against the backdrop of Esa’s biography that the fictional speaker is identical with him. His “past” as a former pop and R’n’B singer, who was not practising Islam, “was just a lie.” But he was “guided by Allah [...] to leave that world and start recording nasheeds” (Esa, “About Omar Esa”). These biographical analogies still leave room for listener identification. The intermediary of the lyrical subject thus allows Esa to reach out to recipients with similar life stories and show them pathways to Islam, allowing them, in turn, to relate to him.

In the bridge of Esa’s version of “Hello,” the theme of romantic relationships is introduced, seeming, at first, rather detached from the rest. As Esa explains in a comment posted along with the video, “out of wedlock relationships between a guy and a girl [...] are not from Islam.” In the bridge, he thus asks his fellow “brothers” and “sisters” to either get married or wait and trust in God:

Brother, if you love her, then ask for her hand
 Sister, if you honour yourself, marry him
 And if you’re still searching for that special love
 Don’t worry cause we have Allah

Esa here not only imagines his audience to be Muslim adolescents, who still need moral-religious guidance, but he also *halalizes* – or even sacralizes – relationships in the form of marriages as opposed to pre- or extramarital relationships. This is noteworthy with respect to common associations with music throughout Islamic history. In the description of a video on “Muslim marriage apps” posted on his Instagram account, Esa reiterates this link between music and unregulated contact between men and women: “Also some

of these marriage apps do events where people can meet each other, astagfirAllah ["I ask forgiveness of God"] these events are set up like night clubs, I've seen it with my own eyes. Dim lights, music, free mixing" (Esa, "Muslim Marriage Apps"). In this video, he further states that "fornication is the biggest haram." In his *Muslim version* of "Hello," Esa thus advocates for marriage as the *halal* form of romantic relationships.

Against this backdrop of "halal love" (Esa, "Halal Love"), his cover of the song "See You Again" that is dedicated to his wife Sharmin Begum not only represents an expression of his love but also a moral-religious imperative. The newly written first verse shows that Esa waited for God to give him a wife with whom he could practise his faith:

I remember all the nights I used to pray
Talking to my Lord, I used to say
Please give me a wife who'll change my life
Now I've found my best friend, my all
She makes me a better man, and completes my faith
Now we wake for fajr
And we pray together

It is immediately noticeable that Esa does not praise the looks of his wife, which would be a taboo (Otterbeck 94); rather, he describes her as his "best friend" and his "all" who makes him "a better man, and completes [his] faith." In their marriage story shared on YouTube, Begum talks about her "traditional, Bengali, practising" background (Esa, "Match Made in Jannah!" 00:16:24; 00:33:18), while Esa highlights that he has come from a non-religious past (00:16:39). A Facebook post shows Begum's significance in Esa's religious journey, as she gave him a Qur'an as a wedding present, "the best gift that anyone could ever receive," and even taught him how to read it (Esa, "Gift"). This is also reflected in the lyrics of "See You Again," according to which they both "wake for *fajr*" and "pray together," referring to one of the five daily Islamic prayers, which is performed at "dawn." Their relationship is thus rooted in their shared faith.

Another *Muslim version* about a woman is "Aisha." The Islamic eulogy "radialla'anha" added to the title translates as "may God be pleased with her" and is commonly used, in the male or female version, for the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*ṣaḥāba*). It clarifies that Aisha is not just any woman but his "third and favourite wife" (Watt). In the lyrics, she is

presented as “the special one” and “the mother of believers,” a term that refers to sura 33, verse 6 of the Qur’an, according to which the wives of the Prophet Muhammad are “their mothers” (*ummahātuhum*). As the third verse shows, Aisha serves as a role model for (Sunni) Muslim women:

She was the first woman scholar of our Islam
 She was amongst the greatest givers of hadith
 She was our mother

Whereas the woman called “Aisha” is, first and foremost, described as “so sweet, so beautiful” in Outlandish’s version,²⁴ and even sources on the Prophet Muhammad’s wife often underscore her outstanding beauty (Watt), Esa’s *Muslim version* instead emphasizes her religious merits. It is assumed that her exceptional role was also due to the position of her father and later caliph Abu Bakr within the early Islamic community. This kinship is mentioned in the second verse, which reads as a short introduction to Islamic history:

She was the wife of Muhammad
 Peace be upon him, we love him so much
 Her amazing father was Abu Bakr
 Radialla’anhū, known as the truthful one

The introduction to and promotion of Islam (*da‘wa*) through *nasheeds* and *Muslim versions* are clear objectives of his “nasheed (dawah) work,” as Esa puts it in a description added to all his releases on YouTube. This becomes particularly evident in the last example analyzed here, as the chorus of “Happy” shows, in which the line “Because I’m happy” is adapted from the original, reframing it, however, in moral-religious terms:

24 The version by Outlandish is, in fact, itself a cover. The original, “Aïcha,” was written by the French singer-songwriter Jean-Jacques Goldman and performed by the Algerian artist Khaled. Esa’s cover refers to Outlandish’s version, as the title “Omar Esa – Aisha (radialla’anha) [Outlandish] | Vocals Only” makes clear.

Because I'm happy
I'm a Muslim, that's what makes me happy and that's the truth
Because I'm happy
Cause I have the noble Qur'an and that's where I get my rules
Because I'm happy
Because my Lord is merciful, and he is the forgiving one
Because I'm happy
And I have the sunna, which dictates what my life should do

As the video will clarify, the subjects are young men who are happy because they are “Muslim” and have the “Qur'an” and the “*sunna*,” that is the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, as normative guidelines in life, in addition to a “merciful” and “forgiving” God. The message conveyed here is that happiness needs certain rules and boundaries. Islam offers such a moral-religious framework within which one can find happiness.

The image of the “happy Muslim” has, however, also a political side to it that must be seen against the backdrop of the political developments at the time when Esa released his *Muslim version* in August 2014. The ongoing civil war in Syria and the proclamation of a caliphate by the so-called Islamic State led to the rise of anti-Muslim racism, especially in countries where Muslims are a minority. “Happy” thus, first and foremost, represents an effort by a British Muslim to act against anti-Muslim racism and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, as the following lines show:

We are taught to love and respect all
Don't believe what you hear about Islam
[...]
Just because we're Muslim doesn't mean we're angry
But when we see our fellow Muslims that are suffering
We just wanna help, cause we're one big family

The idea of activism and solidarity among the global Islamic community (*umma*) is here reinforced. What “we just wanna help” exactly means, however, is not specified. One form of what Esa understands by this could be recently observed on his YouTube channel. As a response to the conflict in Israel and Palestine, he released several pro-Palestinian *nasheeds*, for example “Children of Gaza” and “Israel Has a Right to Defend Itself,” a title that is to be taken ironically, with the former having more than 1.2 million

views and the latter more than 750.000 (last accessed 28 April 2025). In the description of these videos, there is an appeal for donations for children in Gaza, together with a link to a religiously-framed fundraising campaign he organized (see Esa, “Omar Esa’s Fundraising”). The examples of the *nasheeds* “Children of Gaza” and “Israel Has a Right to Defend Itself” as well as the *Muslim version* of “Happy” thus reveal that Esa’s “nasheed (dawah) work” has an outspoken political activist dimension that is based on his understanding of Islam and solidarity amongst Muslims.

Sacralizing Sounds

The changes on the textual level are sounded out in two striking sonic differences between the original pop songs and Esa’s *Muslim versions*, contributing to their *halalization* and sacralization: first, the absence of instruments and, second, the absence of female voices. While he is outspoken about his position on instruments, there are, to my knowledge, no statements or online posts on women’s voices. As has been outlined, Muslim jurists and theologians have frequently associated music with alcohol and fornication (see Otterbeck 182; Shiloah, *Music* 35). This is also due to the pre- and early Islamic *qayna* tradition, in which “a slave or freedwoman trained in the art of singing” performed Arabic art music either at “the court” and “the home of the urban or tribal elite” or at “the taverns or pleasure-houses,” serving wine and entertaining customers (Nelson 34). The *qayna* tradition might also explain why gender has played such a significant role in the Islamic discourse on the legality of music and led to restrictions for women’s voices. Some orthodox Muslim scholars have categorized them as *haram* when “audible outside the inner family and their houses” (Sagir 9).

Esa would not go that far, as some of his original *nasheeds* and videos show, such as the one in which several married couples, including him and his wife, answer questions on their marriage (Esa, “Match Made in Jannah!”). As far as I can see – or rather hear – women generally talk but do not sing in his productions. In Esa’s *Muslim versions* analyzed here, however, no female voice appears, although two of them are originally sung by female artists (“Hello” and “My Heart Will Go On”) and two more are dedicated to women (“Aisha” and “See You Again”). In “See You Again,” for example, Esa’s wife can be seen but not heard. This is, in part, due to the music video genre, which is “a short, almost mute form whose purpose is to showcase the star, highlight the lyrics, and underscore the music” (Vernallis

16). But this cannot be the only reason, as it is also the case in “Happy,” where men can be heard talking but no women.

Whilst these conclusions are drawn from my observations, Esa openly expresses his position on the matter of instruments. He emphasizes that he creates all sounds with his own voice, true to his motto: “Anything music can do, so can the voice – my voice is my instrument” (Esa, “About Omar Esa”). He further explains in a description added to all his *Muslim versions* that he neither uses synthesizers nor beatboxing nor the *duff*, even though he thinks the latter “is permissible in Islam.” In a Facebook post, he writes on its use: “I will In’shaa’Allah [if God wills] one day potentially use the duff, but at the moment I am happy thanks to Almighty ALLAH [...] with my voice only nasheeds ☺” (Esa, “Beatboxing or Duff”).

Esa, however, clearly rejects beatboxing for two reasons: first, he personally dislikes it and thinks “it takes away from the essence of a nasheed”; second, he considers beatboxing to be *haram* after having engaged with the matter more intensively and talked to Muslim scholars about it. He underscores his view with an example in which he claims that the Muslim theologian and jurist Abu Hanifa rejected the use of pencils as drums, when “just sitting down thinking, tapping your pencil on the table,” as Esa puts it. This shows that sound can be considered problematic even when it is not produced by an instrument but by a tool that is – intentionally or not – used and sounds like one, an argument Esa applies to beatboxing. He stresses that he, nonetheless, regards artists using beatboxing or instruments not only as *nasheed* artists but also as his “brothers” (Esa, “Beatboxing or Duff”). He seems to have resolved the apparent paradox of declaring beatboxing and instruments, apart from the *duff*, unlawful, while accepting people using them as fellow *nasheed* artists. One interpretation of this is that he is aware of the danger of expressing religious attitudes that might be perceived as ‘too extreme’ and damaging to his career. Another explanation relates to the concept of sin in Islam: in an Islamic moral-religious understanding, sin is widespread and omnipresent, “even among saints and prophets, let alone among the common believers” (van Nieuwkerk 55). It is thus important that believers constantly repent to correct their sins, renew their faith, and approach God (van Nieuwkerk 56).

In the end, Esa himself comes from a professional background in pop and R’n’B music, which he now calls *jāhiliyya* (“ignorance”) or *fitna* (“temptation”) (Esa, “An Interview” 00:01:24; “Match Made in Jannah!” 00:16:39),

the latter being a Qur'anic term that most frequently denotes "a test which is in itself a punishment inflicted by God upon the sinful, the unrighteous" (Gardet), and which he tries to make up for through his "nasheed (dawah) work." In this regard, the absence of instruments in Esa's *Muslim versions* signals, in sonic terms, a break with his past, in which he did not just not practise Islam but rather acted 'un-Islamically' by producing pop music that he now clearly considers *haram* and that seems to be no longer available online today. In other words, vocals-only *Muslim versions* are part of Esa's aesthetic and moral-religious repentance. Through this format, Esa refers to Islamic sonic practices such as Qur'anic recitations and the call to prayer (*adhān*) that are considered *halal* even according to the most restrictive views on the legality of music in Islam (see Otterbeck 17). This sonic religious reference is reinforced by the use of digital reverb, evoking associations with the acoustics of mosques, and even made explicit in Esa's version of "Happy," in which a short extract from the *adhān* is elegantly woven into the vocal composition (00:02:06).

The original pop songs, however, do not lose their recognizability through this sonic transformation into vocals-only versions, the most striking example being the famous flute intro of "My Heart Will Go On" that Esa turns into a vocalization on the vowel "a" that follows the original melody, yet in another key. In his version of "Hello," overdubbed humming voices replace the piano as accompaniment, again following the harmonic progression in another key, and in "Happy," a complex, overdubbed vocal arrangement mimics the soul-like instrumental accompaniment of the original. The biggest sonic differences occur in "See You Again," where the chorus and the vocal breaks are kept, but the piano intro completely disappears and the rap parts are replaced by newly composed verses with a main melody, accompanied by overdubbed voices, including short, rhythmic "dum's" and "uh's" that seek to maintain the original flow.

Despite these modifications that make Esa's *Muslim versions* stand out, they still clearly resemble the originals. His version of "Hello," for example, not only follows the form of Adele's original but also has the same tempo of 79 beats per minute, which leads to the question of how Esa is able to produce *Muslim versions* of pop songs that he considers *haram* without listening to them. In a YouTube comment posted with the video on YouTube, he explains:

I can't go outside without hearing this song, it's played on tv, on radio, shopping centres, even from people[']s cars lol, it's everywhere. So as I write and compose nasheeds, I can pick up melodies that I hear very quickly Alhamdulillah ["praise be to God"], so because I have heard this song in many places without me knowing they will play this song, I picked up the melody and heard the lyrical content behind the original song, I don't know the full meaning of the song and this is because I don't listen to music, so I have not sat down and studied this song or anything SubhanAllah ["glory be to God"]. It's better to be clear on these matters, so no assumptions are made.

This demonstrates that Esa is fully aware of the danger of being accused of listening to *haram* pop songs when making *Muslim versions*. He uses the semantic difference between the verbs "to hear" and "to listen" to argue that he has only accidentally "heard this song" but has never actively listened to it, as he does not "listen to music." He further explains that he "can pick up melodies [...] very quickly," as he "write[s] and compose[s] nasheeds." What he leaves out here is his professional past as a pop and R'n'B singer, who also received formal musical training at a community college and a university in England (Esa, "From Music to Nasheeds" 00:05:41; 00:06:55). This must have helped him tremendously in picking up the melody of "Hello" just by hearing it occasionally. Other than that, there are further possible explanations for how he learnt the melody: first, he might have listened to another vocals-only version, as he did with "See You Again." Second, the artist, songwriter, and music producer Ramzi Sleiman, who assisted him both in writing the lyrics and composing the *Muslim version* of "Hello," "sat down and studied this song." Whatever the reason may be, the recipient's conviction that Esa has, indeed, never actively listened to it is extremely important for his credibility and authenticity as a vocals-only *nasheed* artist.

Sacralizing Videos

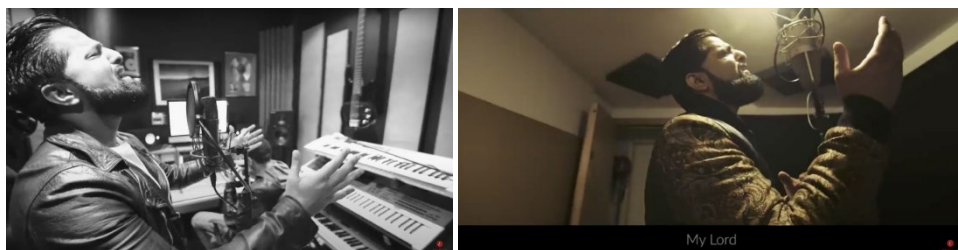
The portrayal of Esa as a pious Muslim vocals-only *nasheed* artist is also the main visual function of his music videos, which are largely disseminated through YouTube. Music videos, in general, "derive from the songs they set. The music comes first [...] and the director normally designs images with the song as a guide" (Vernallis x). They serve different functions like "showcasing the star, reflecting the lyrics, and underscoring the music"

(Vernallis 4). There are various approaches to and typologies of music videos (see Menge; Springsklee). What many of them have in common is the premise of a “duality of performance and narrative structures” (Springsklee 137; my translation) that leads to the differentiation between two basic types of music videos (see Rauh; Menge; Shore; Vernallis). These two basic types are, however, not mutually exclusive; they can be mixed (Springsklee 137) and represent two ends of a continuum (Vernallis 4). I will here use the terms performance and narrative videos to distinguish Esa’s most popular *Muslim versions* along the lines of what is visually dominant, either the performance of the artist or the narration of a story.

The first thing that catches the eye is that videos showcasing performances clearly outnumber ones with a narrative structure. “Hello,” “Tum Hi Ho,” “My Heart Will Go On,” and “Aisha” can be categorized as performance videos, with “See You Again” being a performance video that draws on narrative elements, whereas “Happy” is the only one that narrates a story in the stricter sense. Among the performance videos, “Hello,” “Tum Hi Ho,” and “My Heart Will Go On” show studio performances that are most probably shot in the music studio RDS Music, where all of Esa’s *Muslim versions* analyzed here were recorded, mixed, and mastered. On the one hand, there is a financial aspect to it, since studio performance videos can be produced on relatively low budgets (Pape and Thomsen 211). On the other hand, these videos also convey the impression of looking behind the scenes, of getting an exclusive insight into how Esa is recording – though he is actually performing – to ensure recipients that the *Muslim versions* they consume are, indeed, vocals-only and *halal*. They follow a certain aesthetics, in which light, mainly from above, evoking transcendental or divine associations, moved facial expressions, elevating gestures, and slow, heavy body movements bear moral-religious meaning (see Fig. 2). As anthropologist Karin van Nieuwkerk points out, “in the Middle East, more generally, the relationship between movement and morality is apparent,” implying that “lightness of movements stands for lightness in morals” (255). The pious moving body, on the other hand, seems to “embody the religious values of calmness [...] and patience,” for which the Arabic terms *sakīna* and *ṣabr*, respectively, are used in the Qur’an (254). In several instances, Esa reflects the lyrics in his gestures, for example when he forms a heart with his hands together with the word “love,” stretches out his right arm to embody the “straight path,” or extends his right index finger to symbolize the “oneness”

of God (*tawhīd*) to underline “you’re my one and only” in the English-language bridge of “Tum Hi Ho.”

Fig. 2: Esa’s Studio Performance Videos. Screenshots from “Hello” (left) and “Tum Hi Ho” (right)



“Aisha” stands out from the performance videos insofar as the setting is a cozy, home-like looking private room. Islamic and Arab attributes like prayer rugs (*sajjāda*) and incense burners (*mabkhara*) act as religious and regional signifiers. The smoke rising from the incense burners creates an almost mystical atmosphere and can be interpreted as an allegory for Aisha, the Prophet Muhammad’s wife, to whom this *Muslim version* is dedicated. She is believed to have said that the Ka’ba, the most important Islamic site, should be purified with perfume, which emphasizes “the importance of scent” in Islam (Bursi 214). Whether intended or not, the incense burners also mark a noteworthy counterpoint to the hookah shown in the opening scene of the “Aisha” video by Outlandish, again underscoring the *halalization* and sacralization of Esa’s *Muslim versions*. While Esa otherwise often wears a white shirt together with a black leather jacket, he here wears a sweater and no shoes, suggesting that this would be his home. As becomes clear from the video’s credits, it belongs, however, to the parents of one of his friends. Watching Esa perform “Aisha” in an intimate, home-like setting equipped with Islamic attributes still creates the impression among spectators to get an insight into his private life. “Aisha” thus also serves the narrative function of blurring the lines between Esa as a practising Muslim in private, on the one hand, and a vocals-only *nasheed* artist, on the other, so that recipients can no longer distinguish between him as a private person and his persona as an artist.

The video that is, at a first sight, most difficult to grasp is “See You Again,” a performance video that, at the same time, contains a story of its own.

Measured by the amount of time invested in either performance or storytelling, it still clearly qualifies as a performance video. It is shot in a rather out of place setting: a sightseeing bus in London, where Esa is shown sitting alone. He again embodies the lyrics through facial expressions, gestures, and body movements, for example, by hinting at an Islamic prayer position during the line “now we wake for *fajr* and we pray together.” During the bus tour, famous sights such as the Houses of Parliament, The Shard, and the London Eye pass by the eye of the spectator, until the tour is interrupted close to Piccadilly Circus. The next scene is shot in a perfume shop, where Esa buys a present for his wife, to whom “See You Again” is dedicated. The shop is called “Orchid Fragrance” and located almost four miles away from Piccadilly Circus, on Cannon Street Road in the district of Whitechapel, which has a strong British-Bangladeshi community that shapes the cityscape. This is noteworthy as Esa’s wife Sharmin Begum is herself of Bengali descent. In the shop, one can also briefly see two boards with Arabic calligraphy, one of them being the Islamic creed (*shahāda*) that marks this shop as a space where Islam is practised and the products offered are *halal*. The bus tour continues, with images from the perfume shop reappearing in-between, diffusing the order of events. Towards the end of the video, Esa can be seen at a platform at the underground station Charing Cross, suggesting that he would next take the tube to Uxbridge station. While he is walking back home, his wife, a woman in black clothing, wearing a hijab and an abaya, is preparing two cups of tea or coffee with milk in the kitchen, obviously waiting for him. Esa rings the doorbell, and she goes to open the door, where he is standing, holding his present in front of his face. He moves it aside and smiles at her. As the woman is only filmed from behind and from the side, with her hands being the only visible parts of her body, one cannot be completely certain that she is, in fact, his wife, but both the video’s narration and Esa’s moral convictions clearly suggest so. As in the lyrics, it is not her physical appearance that is praised but her commitment to Islam, expressed through her modest way of dressing and her embracing the role as a caring wife. In this regard, the sightseeing bus tour that, at first, seems out of place in the context of a love song also fills a potential visual void. It circumvents visual aesthetics commonly used in music videos of love songs that often publicly – in terms of their dissemination – display affection and sexualize women. Esa thereby keeps the depiction of his wife, the love

expressed for her, and, ultimately, his *Muslim version* of “See You Again” *halal*.

The last example is “Happy,” which qualifies most as a narrative video among those analyzed here, as it has a framing story. Performance is still an important element, but it is not solely focused on Esa anymore, as other people participate in the performance, an idea that is adopted from Pharrell Williams’s original. The most striking difference between the people performing is the absence of dance and women in Esa’s version,²⁵ which relates to questions on the Islamic legality of dance and music, especially when it comes to women, and reveals Esa’s understanding of *halal*. The video cast in Esa’s *Muslim version* are young men, mostly of Colour, whom Esa calls “happy British Muslims.” The video is shot in different public spaces such as parks, streets, and bridges. The framing story appears to be set in Regent’s Park in London. Esa is sitting on a bench, reading an English translation of the Qur’an, when a young white man, staring at his smartphone, approaches and sits down next to him. When he recognizes what Esa is reading, he asks him: “Hey, mate, ain’t that the Qur’an? [...] You’re one of them Muslims, isn’t you?” When Esa affirms, he shakes his head and says: “Man, you guys are so angry.” Esa asks him for his name and tells him: “David, my friend, we’re not angry, trust me. In fact, we’re really happy, and I’m gonna show you why.” The performances of and the lyrics lip-synched by these young British Muslims provide the answers. At the end of the second verse, after the words “don’t believe what you hear about Islam,” a short extract from the Islamic call to prayer (*adhān*) can be heard (00:02:06). Esa looks surprised, which is sonically underlined by a sound effect known as “DJ stop,” an ironic element given that Islamic prayer times are fixed. He enters a brick building that apparently is a mosque, suggesting that he goes to prayer. According to a text displayed, he returns after ten minutes with the words “I smile.” The story ends with Esa standing in Regent’s Park, holding the Qur’an translation in his hands. David walks up to him and asks for a copy. Esa hands him his own, David thanks him, and leaves. As I have outlined for the lyrics, “Happy” needs to be understood as an attempt by a British Muslim to counter anti-Muslim racism and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims; however, it also brings to

25 There are various “Happy Muslims” versions on YouTube that include dance and women.

the fore his *da'wa* work to promote Islam that is symbolized by his handing over an English Qur'an translation to a white non-Muslim. Esa's *Muslim versions* thus not only represent performances and expressions of his piety but are also part of his *da'wa* work, reflecting his understanding of Islam as a moral-religious framework.

Sacralization as Reception

Since *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* are not only produced but also received, there is a second layer to their sacralization. Comments posted below Esa's *Muslim versions* on YouTube suggest that all recipients experience their aesthetic qualities, yet some undergo a specific type of aesthetic experience that is religiously charged, arguably turning it into a form of sacralization. This depends on the listener's individual disposition and respective religious practice. Especially among Muslim recipients who have embraced Esa's *Muslim versions* as part of their everyday religious practice, "listening to sound creates sacred affect and identity" (Kapchan 67), as these comments posted under "Hello" exemplify:

Thank you for doing what you do. Your songs do help me feel closer to Allah and Islam.

This brother omar esa [...] inspires people thru love for ALLAH swt n his messenger pbuh he has certainly thru his voice n his vlogs made me think why r we on dis dunya [world] n he makes me smile mashaAllah may ALLAH swt be pleased with him n grant him success in his path my duas [prayers of supplication] r with him n his fam may ALLAH swt guide us all ameen.²⁶

These reactions to Esa's voice and songs exemplify how "sound encode[s] sacred affect" (Kapchan 65), which also means that sacralization is closely linked to the producers' *halalization* of a pop song, on the one hand, and the recipients' recognition of this *halalization* process, on the other, which is based on their understanding of Islam, as the following comments show:

26 Further clarification of abbreviations and expressions used: swt (*subhānahu wa ta'ālā*): "the most glorified, the most high," Islamic honorific for God; pbuh: "peace be upon him," Islamic honorific for the Prophet Muhammad; mashaAllah (*mā shā' Allāh*): "whatever God wills."

yep am cryin. These lyrics are so much more meaningful. I will never say goodbye...Allah forgive us all.

(Posted under Esa's *Muslim version* of "Hello")

mashallah....now this song is perfect....no music and no bad meaning [...] now its totally safe.

(Posted under Esa's *Muslim version* of "Tum Hi Ho")

Comments like these indicate that recipients have a pre-existing understanding of what qualifies as *halal* or *haram*, both in terms of the thematic content ("These lyrics are so much more meaningful"; "no bad meaning") and in terms of the aesthetic form ("no music").

Although Christian recipients do not explicitly refer to the *halalization* of pop songs, they can nevertheless have aesthetic-religious experiences that are based on their thematic and aesthetic transformation:

The 196 people who disliked this don't have faith in God. I'm Christian but I believe no matter the religion we as humans have one God, this is amazing and I'm glad someone made a version like this! God bless you!

As a Christian woman raised in the religion this is my first time while surfing youtube on various songs worshiping the creator. You sir sing with a passion that is incredible you are breath taking many blessings and I truly have enjoyed this version. I have this as my #1 play list Worship Track. Again thank you may you continue to be blessed [now] and always.

Interestingly, Esa's *Muslim version* of "Hello" even resonates with people that do not believe in God and thus do not undergo religious-aesthetic experiences but acknowledge Esa's performance of piety and his moral-religious credibility and authenticity:

I'm an atheist, but I love this song, especially the way he is singing and almost crying for his God.

The diversity of comments and audiences shows that Esa's *Muslim versions* have a wide appeal. But for sacralization to occur on the recipients' end, the aesthetic experience of reception must be religiously charged. To highlight

this active role of recipients, I prefer to speak of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* as multidirectional sacralization processes, rather than sacralized end products.

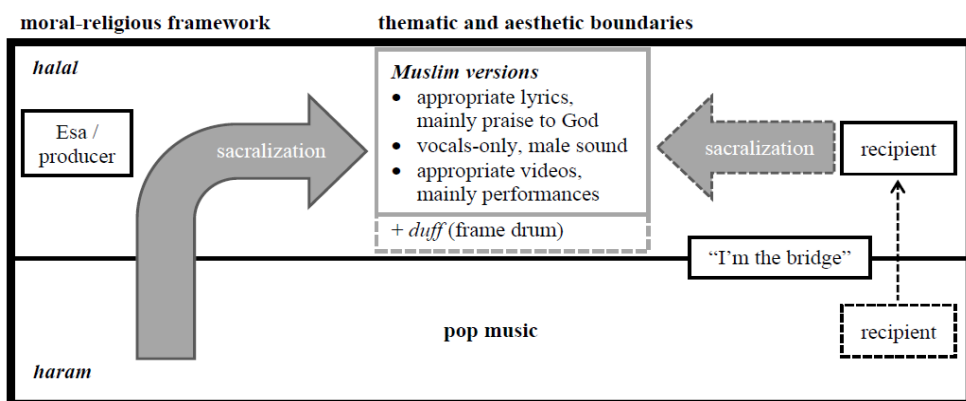
Conclusion: “I’m the bridge, in shā Allāh”

In this chapter, I have presented the Muslim, British-Pakistani *nasheed* artist Omar Esa as a case study to conceptualize *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* as sacralizations of pop songs. By using these labels and calling themselves *nasheed* artists, producers like Esa explicitly refer to the Islamic *nasheed* genre to mark their cover versions as well as themselves as Muslim. In this context, I have presented sacralization as a religious-aesthetic practice and experience by both producers and recipients. It is closely tied to the process of *halalization*, in which producers apply textual, sonic, and visual techniques to transform unlawful (*haram*) pop songs into what they consider to be lawful (*halal*) *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*, thereby attributing a moral-religious reframing to them. Since *halalization* is a way for producers to access the sacred and make it accessible to others, I have argued that *halalization* and sacralization are congruent processes on their end, yet they only partly overlap on the recipients’ end. For them, *halalization* is both a prerequisite and part of sacralization. The producers’ prior *halalization* of pop songs is a prerequisite for recipients to be able to have religious-aesthetic experiences and access the sacred through *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*. At the same time, *halalization* is part of the sacralization process, as recipients are the ones acknowledging their moral-religious value and, in the case of Muslim recipients, their permissibility according to their understanding of Islam. However, not all recipients experience the same when listening to *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions*. This is why I have suggested conceptualizing them as forms of sacralization to underscore the active construction process.

In the following step, I have applied this conceptual framework to Esa’s most popular *Muslim versions*, focusing on the *halalizing* and sacralizing techniques applied to their lyrics, sounds, and videos to make them morally and religiously appropriate. Their outer, thematic as well as aesthetic transformation is thus reflective of an inner transformation of their moral-religious content. At a textual level, the by far most prominent theme is praise to God. It appears in all six *Muslim versions* and is dominant in four of them. Further topics addressed are praise to the Prophet Muhammad and his wife

Aisha, the representation of marriage as “halal love” (Esa, “Halal Love”), love for his wife, and the introduction to and promotion of Islam (*da‘wa*). At a sonic level, the absence of instruments and female voices are the most striking differences that make Esa’s *Muslim versions* clearly stand out while still resembling the original pop songs. The sonic demarcation reflects Islamic debates on the legality of certain types of sounds and is in line with stricter views on this matter. At a visual level, performance videos are dominant: they portray Esa as a pious vocals-only *nasheed* artist to ensure recipients that the *Muslim versions* they consume are, indeed, vocals-only and *halal*. A brief analysis of YouTube comments has suggested that sacralization is also a religiously charged reception process. Since I could only touch upon the mechanisms of sacralization both as a production and a reception process, I have summarized the framework and its application to Esa’s *Muslim versions* in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Esa’s *Muslim Versions* as Sacralizations of Pop Songs



For artists like Esa, original *nasheeds*, *nasheed covers*, and *Muslim versions* are a means not only to show that their productions conform to Islamic norms but also to disseminate and reinforce their understanding of Islam. As Esa explains for “Hello,” he wants “Muslims to have an alternative version to this song.” He sees himself as a “bridge,” trying to help recipients move from unlawful to lawful behaviour (see Fig. 3), with the Qur’an as the “ultimate goal for every Muslim” (Esa, “From Music to Nasheeds” 00:14:39). Comments such as the following one posted below his *Muslim version* of “Tum Hi Ho” suggest that he is, at least in part, successful: “I felt

as if music was engraved on my heart and I wouldn't be able to live without it astaghfirullah ['I ask forgiveness of God']. My heart was blind. [...] My ears are no longer toys for the devil. [...] It's people like you that make the journey so much easier for me and those like me."

This recipient apparently has a pre-existing understanding of *halal* and *haram* types of sounds that is similar to Esa's, which is in line with recent findings that listeners prefer "artists whose musical and lyrical content aligns with their moral worldviews" (Preniqi, Kalimeri and Saitis 2). While these mechanisms still need to be studied in more detail, my analysis has shed light to the interrelation of Islamic norms and practices and has shown how Esa's moral-religious framework shapes his *Muslim versions* by setting thematic and aesthetic boundaries based on moral-religious ones (see Fig. 3). At the same time, Esa's *Muslim versions* reinforce the very norms they are based on by disseminating a specific understanding of Islam to a broad audience, presumably mostly Muslim adolescents that are socialized with pop culture. The study of *nasheed covers* and *Muslim versions* as sacralizations of pop songs has thus brought a central function of religion to the fore, which, on the one hand, "must clearly mark a difference to daily life [...] and symbolize the non-everyday. On the other hand, it is its task to anchor its interpretations firmly in everyday life" (Schwerhoff 38; my translation), which underscores the importance of daily religious practice in establishing and reinforcing religious norms.

Overview of Omar Esa's *Muslim Versions*



Aisha (radialla'anha): "Omar Esa – Aisha (radialla'anha) [Outlandish] | Vocals Only." *YouTube*, uploaded by Omar Esa, 15 Feb. 2014, youtube.com/watch?v=RkjNt0hasR4.
28 Apr. 2025.



Happy: "Pharrell Williams – Happy (Omar Esa Version)." *YouTube*, uploaded by Omar Esa, 26 Aug. 2014, youtube.com/watch?v=F24mO1AKqV8.
28 Apr. 2025.



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28 Apr. 2025.



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The volume focuses on the changes which texts undergo with respect to their sacred status when they are reworked and recontextualized through music and poetry. In a series of case studies, the chapters explore processes of selection, canonization, and transformation, which are triggered, for example, by musical settings, translations into poetry, and literary renderings. These processes endow texts with a special aura, authority, or normative value, which may influence the way in which they are perceived. Among the examples treated in this volume are the insertion of songs and music into seventeenth- and eighteenth-century funeral sermons, the verbal strategies of poeticizing English Psalm translations, and *nasheed* covers, i. e. Muslim versions of pop songs, loosely based on the Qur'an and Islamic teachings.

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