

## Chapter 1

# God Making

## *Theopoetics and Anatheism*

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### PART ONE: THEOPOETICS

Why is “making” considered a sacred activity for gods and mortals alike? Making something out of nothing. Making something in the image of something else. Creators making creatures that remake their creators: in each other’s images, shapes and songs, paintings and poems, dreams and crafts. One great game of holy imagination played with bodies and souls, with hands, tongues, ears, and eyes. Art as divine-human interplay, again and again.

Theopoetics names how the divine (*theos*) manifests itself as making (*poiesis*). The term dates back to the early centuries, meaning both the making human of the divine and the making divine of humanity. As the poet scholar Ephrem of Syria wrote: “He gave us divinity, we gave Him humanity.” Or as Athanasius said in the fourth century: “God became human so that humans could become divine.” Catherine Keller puts it succinctly: “The term theopoetics finds its ancestor in the ancient Greek theopoiesis. As poesis means making or creation, so theopoiesis gets rendered as God-making or becoming divine.”<sup>1</sup>

Theopoetics carries an attendant claim that first creation calls for second creation—creation again (*ana*): a double act where humanity and divinity collaborate in the coming of the Kingdom. This play of recreation goes by the name of “ana-theism.”

Most wisdom traditions involve an original story of genesis—or cosmogony—which serves as a paradigm for their subsequent spiritual narratives. In what follows I will draw mainly on Abrahamic and Hellenic narratives to trace a short history of theopoetics before illustrating the notion of sacred play with reference to the work of three artists: Andrei Rublev, Antonello da Messina, and Sheila Gallagher. My overall suggestion is that certain expressions

of artistic imagination offer ways of responding to the call of creation that precedes and exceeds the abstract systems of philosophy and theology. Theopoetic imagination gives flesh to word and word to flesh. It works both ways.

a. The use of the term “*poiein*”—to make, shape, or form—occurs often in the Bible in relation to divine creation. This theopoetic motif features from the start in Genesis (1:1, 1:7, 1:27) where we read, famously, that “in the beginning God created (*epoiesen*) heaven and earth” (1:1), or, again, “let us make (*poiesomen*) man” (1:26). In Proverbs 8, we witness the great primal scene of God’s creation (*poiesis*) of Wisdom:

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

In the Wisdom of Solomon, the formative power of Sophia is even more explicit: “God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who by your Word (*logos*) made (*poiesas*) all things, and through your Wisdom (*sophia*) framed man” (9:1–2).

These early panegyrics of the play of Sophia echo the first book of Genesis where God creates humans in His image and likeness. The original Hebrew term “*yzi*” plays on the mirroring between (1) the divine Creator (*yotzer*) who creates (*yazar*) and (2) the human power to form and shape (*yetzer*) according to the secret alphabet of creation (*yetsirah*).<sup>2</sup> It is telling that the Lord did not make anything on the seventh day, leaving it free for humans to complete. The unfinished Sabbath is a gap calling for perpetual recreation—in imagination and action. And Adam and Eve, as first creatures shaped from earth (*adamah*), deployed their power of “good imagination” (*yezer hatov*) to engender a human race capable of fashioning a Kingdom in the image of their God.

This play of mutual recreation between human and divine is what we call theopoetics. It involves creatures cocreating with their Creator. In this view, God codepends on us so that the promissory word of Genesis may be realized in embodied figures of time and space, image and flesh, art and action. Or as Thomas Mann aptly observes in *Joseph and His Brothers*: “God created for himself a mirror in his own image . . . as a means of learning about himself. Man is a result of God’s curiosity about himself.”<sup>3</sup> But greater than curiosity was desire. For in forming the human, God bore witness to a gap within divinity, a sabbatical cleft or crack from which the life-drive of Eros could

emerge as desire for its other. God created because He desired a playmate, someone to consort with, as we know from Hosea and the Song of Songs. Or as the contemporary Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas put it: “God created man because two have a better time than one.” Creation is a love affair.<sup>4</sup> God is cracked about us. Theopoetics is theoerotics.

It is important to repeat that both Genesis and Proverbs declare that God is relation. Not a self-subsisting remote substance but a relationship between two—Yahweh and Sophia, Elohim and Adam—through the medium of a third (the breath of language). Indeed the fact that the Creator is also called by a plural name, Elohim, reveals that God is originally a community rather than some autonomous Supreme Being—“Let *us* make man.” Divine creating is divine speaking from the start, as evidenced in the Hebraic word play on the first and last letters of the alphabet in Genesis 1:1.<sup>5</sup> The first word of Genesis is dialogue, not monologue, and this is echoed in the opening of John’s Gospel, which declares that “in the beginning was the word (*logos*) and the word was with God.” The preposition “with” (*pros*) here actually means “toward” or “before,” revealing a relation of face to face or person to person (*prosopon*): a dynamic liaison that mirrors the inaugural scene of Sophia (a feminine noun) playing before the face of the Lord (Proverbs 8). These Jewish and Christian claims to the primacy of relation between persons are later reinforced in the Patristic figure of creation as a Trinitarian dance (*perichoresis*).<sup>6</sup> We shall return to this central point in our commentary of Rublev’s icon of the Trinity later.

In Jewish Scripture the motif of theopoiesis extends well beyond Genesis and the Books of Wisdom to the Psalms and Prophets. Think, for example, of Isaiah 29:16 where the human creature is described as the clay of the potter, the handicraft of the craftsman, the art of the artist. Or, again, recall the Rabbinical and Kabbalistic commentaries on the making of Golems—human-like figures shaped from clay according to the Book of Creation (*Sefir Yetsirah*). One such version tells of how Abraham and his teacher, Seth, were invited by God to study the *Sefir Yetsirah* for three years “until they knew how to create a world.”<sup>7</sup> But lest they succumb to the temptation of idolatry—like Enosh who worshipped his own clay image—humans were admonished not to replace God’s creation but only to repeat it so as better to appreciate the power of divine making. It was good to experiment with the divine letters of creation as art, exploration, and invention but not to actually substitute God with an idol. If one yielded to the temptation of literal imitation, the Golem risked becoming a monster who turned on its creator. So, to prevent such idolatrous destruction, the makers of Golems were exhorted to remove the “shem” (a parchment spelling *emeth*, meaning “alive”) from their creature’s lips so as to respect the difference between human and divine creation. The point was for humans to participate in divine *yetsirah/poiesis* in the right

manner—namely, abiding by the Way (*Torah*) of the Creator (*Yotzer*)—rather than setting themselves up as mini-Gods in their own right.<sup>8</sup> According to Hebraic wisdom, then, we are finite creatures called to collaborate with God in the completion of Creation.

In the later Christian tradition we find similar calls to cooperate in the coming of the Kingdom by joining the Trinitarian dance of perichoresis, thereby repeating the original act of genesis. Such a collaborative theopoetics between the divine Logos and human action seeks to follow Christ the God-Man in completing the “New Creation” (Galatians 6:15). We read in Ephesians 2:10 that “we are the handiwork (*poiema*) created by Jesus Christ for good works . . . that we should live in them.” As such Christianity may be understood as the historical-cultural task of carrying on and carrying out this “poem.” Hence the notion of Christ as Lord of the Dance and Supreme Artist—echoed in the vibrant Christian traditions of image-making both in the iconography of Eastern Orthodoxy and in the religious art of the humanist Renaissance and after.<sup>9</sup> We will return to a discussion of this iconographic culture in part III and ask the question of how divine *poiesis* relates to human *praxis*.

b. It is worth noting here that when, in the Greek philosophical tradition, Aristotle seeks a term for the divine mind, he chooses *nous poietikos*—the mind that “makes.” And in his *Poetics* (*Peri Poietikes*)—though now talking of human not divine making—Aristotle describes poetic creation as a mirroring-emplotting (*mimesis-mythos*) of life: an art of recreation involving, in Paul Ricoeur’s words, a radical “refiguring” of our world. The term “*poiesis*” occurs in the very first line of Aristotle’s classic text and regularly thereafter, referring to the transformation of everyday haphazard events—one thing after (*meta*) another—into a meaningful configured plot: one thing because of (*dia*) another. And it is by means of such creative refashioning of our experience that we achieve healing catharsis: namely, a poetic distillation of our basic drives of “pity” (*eleos*) and “fear” (*phobos*) into compassion and serenity. In short, for the Greeks “poetics” involves a “creative redescription” of experience that replays our actions and sufferings in a storied way that issues in the pleasure and wisdom of art. Configured by the poetic work we, the audience, refigure our lived existence.<sup>10</sup> We refine our passions (*pathemata*) and are invited to become more serene and compassionate citizens of the polis.

c. Before concluding our preliminary note on theopoetics, let me recite what I consider to be a telling example from modern religious literature. Gerard Manley Hopkins was a Jesuit poet who combined a Scotist-Aristotelian aesthetics of singularity (*haecceitas*) with an Ignatian belief in the inherent divinity

of “all things.” He describes the moment of literary epiphany as a recreation of creation, or, as he puts it, an art of “aftering and seconding,” a motion of “over and overing” that replays secular experience as sacred.<sup>11</sup> Hopkins speaks of a retrieval of past time that, like Proust, repeats forward, proffering new life to memory, giving a future to the past. This poetic revisiting involves a detour through distance and disenchantment after which we may return to our first experience in a new light, in a second naiveté, over and over. Freud calls this temporal retrieval *nachträglichkeit*, and although he is speaking of “trauma,” the same après-coup structure is operative in poetic or holy “wonder”: both terms come from a “wound” of shock or surprise that explodes our normal sense of time and space. A sacred cleft. In Hopkins’s work, this wounding expressed itself in a series of dark sonnets that prefaced his poetic epiphanies:

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

Traversing such dark nights of the soul, the poet returns to a celebration of ordinary things as micro-theophanies:

Flesh fade, and mortal trash  
Fall to the residuary worm; world’s wildfire, leave but ash:  
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,  
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and  
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,  
Is immortal diamond.<sup>12</sup>

A Catholic author, Hopkins performs a sacramental reimagining of everyday experience. But this notion of holy repetition is not confined to any particular religion. It extends to every poetic movement of returning to “God after God.” God after the loss of God. As in the replay of a child’s game, “gone, back again” (*Fort/Da*). We learn young that what disappears as literal comes back again as figural—that is, as sign and symbol, as a second presence in and through absence. And by symbol here we do not mean untrue or unreal. The return of the lost one—in the case of religion the lost God—may well be the most “real presence,” theopoetically speaking. It may in fact be a more powerful and moving presence precisely because of the detour through separation and letting go. This involves a new notion of time—kairological rather than chronological—a time that traverses and reverses time, as in the Eucharistic formula: “We do this in memory of Him until he comes again.” Theopoiesis is a coming back again (*ana*)—creating again time after time. In a word: *anapoiesis*. Theopoetics is anapoetics.

## PART TWO: ANATHEISM

"Ana" is a prefix defined in the Shorter Oxford English dictionary as: "up in space or time; back again, anew." So understood, the term supports the deeper and broader sense of "after" contained in the expression "God after God." Ana opens a semantic field involving notions of retrieving, revisiting, reiterating, and repeating. But, as already mentioned, repeating forward not backward. It is not about regressing nostalgically to some prelapsarian past. It is a question, rather, of coming back "afterward" in order to move forward again. *Reculer pour mieux sauter*.

So it is in this sense that we use the term "ana-theism" as a "returning to God after God": a critical hermeneutic retrieval of sacred things that have passed but still bear a radical remainder, an unrealized potentiality or promise to be more fully realized in the future. In this way, ana-theism may be understood as "after-faith," which is more than an "afterthought" or "after-affect." After-faith is eschatological—something ultimate in the end that was already there from the beginning. And that is why the "after" of ana is also a "before." A "before" that has been transposed, so to speak, into a second after. As Sophia says when she plays before the face of the Lord, "Before he made the world I was there . . . rejoicing always in his presence" (Proverbs 8). And this Hebraic sense of ana-chrony is echoed in Jesus's claim: "Before Abraham was I am."

But let us be clear from the outset: anatheism is not a dialectical third term that supersedes theism and atheism in a sort of Hegelian synthesis or final resolution. True, anatheism contains a moment of atheism within itself as it does a moment of theism. Or to be more precise: anatheism precontains both—for it operates from a space and time before the binary of atheism and theism as well as after. The double "a" of anatheism holds out the promise but not the necessity of a second affirmation once the "death of God" has done its work. But it differs radically from Hegel's "negation of the negation," which sees the return as an ineluctable synthesis or sublation (*Aufhebung*). In contrast to such a theodicy, the "ana" of theopoetics is always a wager—a risk that can go either way. It is a matter of discernment and decision on our part. A replay of wisdom, again and again. The event does not take place behind our backs, irrespective of our agency, like Hegel's dialectic of Absolute Spirit. There is no "Ruse of Reason." Anatheism is not some predetermined theodicy leading to a Final Totality. It is not about Upper Case Divinity. *Au contraire!* Anatheism has nothing to do with Alpha-Gods or Omni-Gods. It is about reimagining—and reliving—the sacred in the "least of these." It is lower case from beginning to end. It flowers out of nothings and nobodies. Or as James Joyce puns, "In the beginning was the woid" (*Finnegans Wake*).

Anatheism concentrates, therefore, on unrealized or suspended possibilities that are most powerfully reanimated if one also experiences a moment of a-theism, the "a-" here being a gesture of abstention, privation, withdrawal, negation.<sup>13</sup> A moment that is less a matter of epistemological theory than a prereflective lived experience of ordinary lostness and solitude—a mood of angst or abandon, an existential dark night that everyone experiences at some moment in his or her life: even Christ on the Cross or weeping for Lazarus. This privative "a" of atheism is indispensable to anatheism. But in "a-n-a" we have two a's. And the second "a" is the "not" of the "not." The "yes" after the "no" that repeats the first "yes" of creation. The double "a-a" of anatheism. A reopening to something new. A twelve-step dance that never ends.

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

In short, theopoetic faith is a retrieval of something after you've lost it. It involves the repeating of the former as latter, of the earlier as later—a replay that surpasses the model of linear time in favor of a time out of time: an epiphanic moment (*Augenblick* or *Jetztzeit*) where eternity crosses the instant.<sup>14</sup> "Ana" is a prefix that seeks to capture this enigma of past-as-future, before-as-after.<sup>15</sup>

To say this is not, however, to deny that ana also involves historical time. Far from it. Infinite time is in-finite, as Levinas reminds us; it traverses finite temporality and cannot exist without it. As such, ana-theism in its current manifestation also coincides with a concrete historical situation that comes after the death of God, culturally, socially, and intellectually. It is marked by the announcements of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, by the atheist exposés of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the modern critique of Ideology,

and so on. As such it epitomizes a typical contemporary anxiety in the face of what Max Weber terms the “disenchantment” of the world, the desacralizing of society, and the general malaise of the abandonment of God. In this sense anatheism engages with our secular humanist culture. But not in any teleological manner, that is, in the sense that we were ignorant and have now seen the light, that faith was delusion and we are free at last! For anatheism, losing the illusion of God (as master superintendent of the universe) offers the possibility of reopening oneself to the original promise of the sacred Stranger, the absolute Other who comes as gift, call, summons, as invitation to hospitality and justice in every moment. In sum, as someone or something that was lost and forgotten—and needs to be recalled again.<sup>16</sup> And here we move from the historical formulation of the anatheist question—what comes after the disappearance of God?—to the more existential one: how do we experience this today in our concrete, lived existence?

This is why anatheism calls not for new theories as such but for new “examples” and “testimonies” of the anatheist moment in art and action. It is why anatheism needs theopoetics: scriptural, literary, visual enactments of lived abandonment turning into advent (what Socrates called *periagoge*, what Augustine called *conversio*). The negative moment of letting go is, let me repeat, indispensable to a proper appreciation of anatheism. Without it we have cheap grace—God as comforting illusion, quick fix, opium of the people. I often think here of Dostoyevsky’s sense of faith through radical alienation (“true faith comes forth from the crucible of doubt”) or the “dark night of the soul” depicted in the mystical poetry of John of the Cross or Gerard Manly Hopkins; or of Christ’s radical sense of abandonment on the Cross. These are all concrete moments of emptying (*kenosis*) that open the possibility of a return to the inaugural moment of anatheism: the wager of yes to the Stranger. This primal wager is first and foremost an existential one—not a purely logical one à la Pascal (which is more a wager of knowledge than of flesh, of belief than of faith). The anatheist wager—to turn hostility into hospitality, fear into love, angst into art—signals the inaugural moment of all great wisdom traditions. And with respect to Abrahamic theopoetics specifically, it invites us to recall certain “primal scenes” of hospitality illustrated in many great works of religious art throughout the centuries: e.g., Abraham and Sarah as they encounter the strangers at Mamre; Mary faced with a stranger called Gabriel; the disciples meeting a stranger at Emmaus.<sup>17</sup>

### PART THREE: ANATHEISM AS THEOPOETIC ART

Let me now turn to some examples of theopoetic art. Elsewhere (*Anatheism* and *Reimagining the Sacred*), I have explored the role of anatheism in a

number of literary writings, from Hopkins and Proust to Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Here I propose to look at three paintings that I believe powerfully illustrate this phenomenon—Andrei Rublev’s *Trinity*, Antonello da Messina’s *Annunziata*, and Sheila Gallagher’s *Pneuma Hostis*. My suggestion is that works of artistic imagination are more likely to express the superabundance of meaning seeded by the ongoing process of theopoiesis than the purely conceptual systems of speculative metaphysics and theology (though both have a role). The polysemantic excess of theopoetics epitomizes the continuous creation of God that, in Teilhard de Chardin’s words, “prolongs itself in history and culture.” It is all part of the ongoing incarnation of God through word-image-flesh. Art is more embodied than dogma, more persuasive than argument. Orthopoiesis—like its twin orthopraxis—precedes orthodoxy, for doctrine is always a derivation of *poiesis* and only retains its pedagogical force by acknowledging its creative origin in the latter.<sup>18</sup> Put simply, images are more powerful than abstractions because they are more sensible, tangible, note down to earth. They invite us to a “carnal hermeneutics” of sight, sound, taste, and touch. They move and mobilize our being. And here we recall that the Latin word for Sophia is *sapientia*, reminding us that primal wisdom originally comes from *sapere*, to savor and taste. The savvy of imagination precedes all speculative *savoir*. And it is important to recall that theopoetic imagination is not confined to high art but commonly manifests itself in ordinary cultural practices around icons, liturgies, paintings, and moving images.

#### a. Andrei Rublev’s *Trinity* (1425)

We begin with an icon. When Rublev painted the *Trinity* in 1425 he did not try to represent Father, Son, and Spirit as abstract divinities but as three human-like persons sharing a meal at a table. To be moved by the Trinity, Rublev realized, we need to be able to sense it, see it, and touch it (Oriental Christians touch icons with their foreheads, lips, and hands). To this end, he resolved to embody the mystery of divine relation in a work of art where paint, volume, form, and style combine to configure something invisible as visible. He made an image that retold a story in a revolutionary way, bearing out the teaching of Church Father, John of Damascus, that we “need the Gospel in one hand and the painted expression of the same in the other, because the two have equal value and should receive equal veneration” (Epistles, II, 171).

Rublev was a Russian Orthodox monk who portrayed the three persons of the Trinity as the three visitors to Abraham and Sarah in Mamre (Genesis 3). The primal biblical scene exemplifies divine relation as a drama of lived hospitality where Abraham responds to the strangers from the desert not with hostile fear but by hosting a lavish meal. In the sharing of food from an open

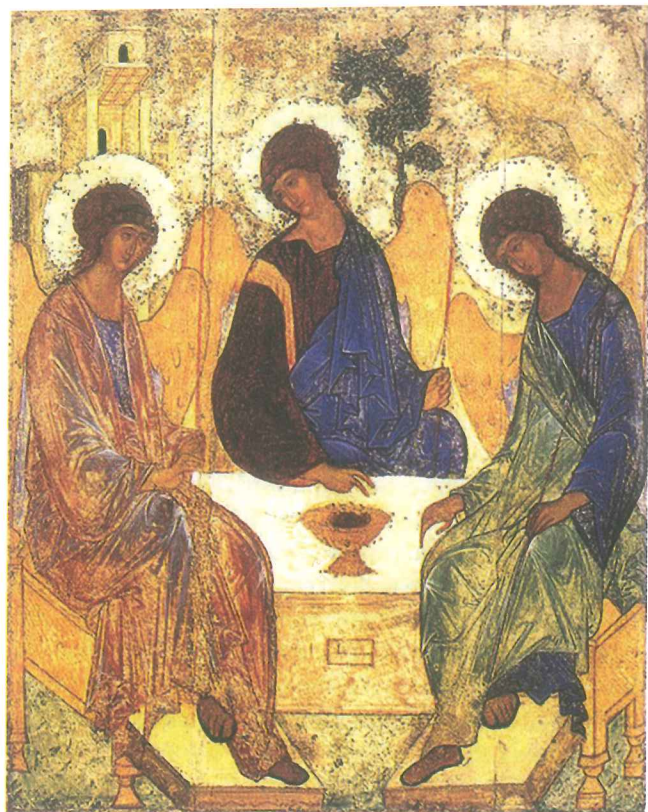


Figure 1.1. Andrei Rublev (1360–1430), *Angels at Mamre (Holy Trinity)*, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. (Public Domain)

bowl—depicted at the center of Rublev’s icon—the event marks a space, a chalice, a womb, where a future child will be born: Isaac.

Rublev revisits the inaugural drama of Abrahamic hospitality to manifest the mystery of a Triune God. In the making and sharing of food, the divine becomes human and the human divine. Once they participate as guests in the feast, the “three” strangers, Genesis tells us, become “one.” Three in one and one in three. The impossible made possible.

Rublev’s icon features three persons circling around a table, each offering its place to the other in a gesture of endless hospitality. Their roles as father, son, and spirit are not depicted in terms of hierarchy or priority but as equal partners in an open-ended dance. The Trinitarian circle is not self-regarding but opens onto a fourth person—an empty place at the base of the table where a new stranger is invited, an outsider welcomed, a guest hosted: humanity in the person of each viewer of the painting itself. That is why a small rectangle

still marks the lower part of the circle where a mirror once looked out at the spectators looking in. A mirror revealing that we are the reflection of divinity, made in its image and likeness—the fourth dancer invited to the dance is each one of us.<sup>19</sup>

This dance motif is captured in the original Greek term for the Trinity, “perichoresis,” meaning to dance around. The three persons circle around (*peri*) a receptacle (*chora*), which may be read as a bowl of hospitality, a Eucharistic chalice, or a womb of nativity (Sarah prefiguring Mary for the Christian monk, Rublev). This latter reading is particularly significant: in early Christian churches such as the Monastery of Khora in Constantinople we find frescoes and mosaics depicting Mary bearing Jesus in her womb with the inscription *Chora tou Achoratou*—the Container of the Uncontainable.<sup>20</sup> The *chora* at the center of the dance represents the core of finitude at the heart of infinity—the chalice-womb of bread and wine that hosts the human to come, the child to be born again and again. *Chora* thus marks a space of possibility for endless nativity, a site of eros and recreation, of play and feasting. A feminine space where the three persons of the Trinity give birth to each other and to a fourth: each human who participates in the dance. As the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart puts it: “Do you want to know what goes on in the core of the Trinity? I will tell you. In the core of the Trinity the Father laughs and gives birth to the Son. The Son laughs back at the Father and gives birth to the Spirit. The whole Trinity laughs and gives birth to us.”<sup>21</sup>

But let us return to the painting. If the devil is in the detail so is the divine. We have noted that the three persons are not presented doctrinally as Pater, Filius, and Spiritus but as strangers who share food at the table of Abraham. Moving in a circle, they wear three different colored robes—gold for the wholeness of the father, blue for the sea and sky of the son, green for all that grows in the Spirit. The painting resonates with similar iconographic trinities of the three Magi at Christ’s nativity and the three persons at the Inn of Emmaus where Christ as risen stranger (*hospes*) shared bread with his disciples. The intericonic play between these great scenes of visitation suggests how Rublev’s perichoresis operates as a visual palimpsest, soliciting multiple successions and repetitions. Each viewing of the Trinitarian image signals a new visitation, a new reading of the original scene. Hence the importance of the rectangular mirror-frame at the base of the table—as portal welcoming each spectator to the meal—inviting not just vision but participation, not just seeing but movement and being moved, touching and being touched, hosting and being hosted. “Eternal beatitude,” as Anne Carlson puts it, “will be where to look and to eat are the same state.”

If we take the portrait of God in Rublev’s icon to heart, we have to admit that “in the beginning was the Relationship.” Far from being a picture of divine self-sufficiency—a self-loving-love, a self-thinking-thought, a

self-causing-cause—the love between three persons expresses the desire for a fourth. There is a free place at the table, indicated by the pointing hand of the green-garbed Spirit and the inviting mirror-image—welcoming us to take part in the ongoing work of *theopoeisis*.<sup>22</sup>

This radical openness to the other, the stranger, the guest, signals the ecumenical promise of Rublev's art, now displayed throughout the world in Christian churches of various denominations, as it replays two primal scenes of Abrahamic and Trinitarian hospitality. It is a summons to move beyond closed denominational circles to an open embrace of the new, the seemingly "impossible" beyond one's accredited possibilities. Hence the hermeneutic importance of reading the chora-chalice at the heart of perichoresis as both Sarah's and Mary's womb receptive, in each case, to an "impossible" child: Sarah is barren, Mary is a virgin. Or more exactly, the *chora* is that crack or cleft in the divine that incubates a divine possible (*dunamis*) beyond the impossible (*adunaton*) of the humanly possible. A point signaled in the fact that the same phrase used in the Septuagint to describe Sarah's exchange with the Strangers at Mamre (Genesis 18:14) is used to describe Mary's exchange with Gabriel in Luke 1:30. "Nothing is impossible to God." Hearing the respective annunciations of a future child, Sarah laughs and Mary says Amen. In both inaugural scenes, an unexpected child is conceived: Isaac to Sarah, Jesus to Mary. Both miraculous natalities reside at the heart of the Trinitarian dance. But if Rublev's image of hospitality to strangers is an anatheist bridge between Jewish and Christian narratives, it also extends to non-Abrahamic wisdom traditions celebrating triple divinities and trimurtis equally welcome at the table. Perichoresis serves as portal to interreligious hospitality.<sup>23</sup>

Rublev's icon, I am proposing, offers a theopoetic artwork that reveals the Trinitarian mystery of creation in a manner that goes deeper than any treatise of speculative theology—and is more affective and effective in its testimony of divine *poiesis*.

#### b. Da Messina's *Annunciata* (1474)

Antonella da Messina's painting features another anatheist visitation. This time a girl alone in a room. There are no doves, no rays of light, no doorways, arches, or lilies. No celestial sky or gilded halo. No Father, Son, or Holy Ghost. Not even an angel. Only her and us. In the moment.<sup>24</sup>

This painting embodies Luke's phrase about Mary at Nazareth when confronted with Gabriel—she "was troubled and pondered (*dialogizomai*)."<sup>25</sup> Here we see her pondering. "Will I or won't I?"—or *Trasi e nesci* as they say in Sicily where the image hangs today in the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo. She hovers on the threshold.



Figure 1.2. Antonello da Messina (1430–1479), *Virgin Annunciate*, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, Palermo. (Public Domain)

Da Messina paints a line running from the top of the girl's blue mantle along the bridge of her nose straight down through the V of her shawl and the knuckles of her hand to that light/dark dividing edge of the lectern. The lectern has two sides: one illuminated, one shadowed, bearing a book with a page lifting and falling. Like her gown opening and closing, a hint of carnal red between the folds of chaste blue.

Openings and closings in an "anatheistic instant." *Ana-theos*: meaning both after God and before God. Too early and too late. So what exactly is she pondering? And why must we, observers of the painting, wait like the page suspended in midair as she responds to what calls her in the flesh, from writing to touch, from parchment to skin? Infinitesimal suspension mirroring, in turn, her hands: one opening toward the viewer—the messenger, the painter,

you and me—the other hand closing her mantle, protecting, hiding, withholding. And her eyes—riddling as Mona Lisa’s—averted as they “ponder”: the right turning inward, withdrawing into shade, as the left brightens slowly, maybe, into a smile of “yes.”

Luke’s Gospel tells us little, which is why we need artists and poets. Artists like da Messina—and his contemporaries Botticelli and Raphael—who dared paint this most daring of scenes. And poets like Levertov, Hudgins, Semonovitch, who write and have us read again:

God waited  
She was free  
to accept or refuse, choice  
integral to humanness.  
Denise Levertov

And though she will, she’s not yet said,  
Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord . . .  
(as she) refuses, accepts, refuses, thinks again.  
Andrew Hudgins

She hears a flutter of wings. His coat hits the floor . . .  
He said, Imagine  
How it will be when you are with me . . . Who’d touch  
A girl like that mid-day. Mary chose grace over fear. Not to call it—but  
Joy. Not to call it but God. Strange. Not to call him  
Known but not . . . And that was God. So perhaps,  
It was always so? She’s half thinking now, only half, the white wine lily  
Door open drapes  
Refolding gasp through me down the day is cool

Kascha Semonovitch

Like these poets, da Messina invites each of us to be an *angelus*—a messenger where human meets divine (messenger in Hebrew means “one going,” “one sent”). The painting captures the girl on the threshold, oscillating between light and shade, declining and consenting. We might call her the Nazarena because Mary is too late (she has left the maiden child behind) and Madonna is too soon (she is not yet the Mater of all beings). Neither daughter nor mother, neither servant nor spouse, she hangs between. Nazarena is her middle name. Nazareth: her home without home, her hidden place of strangeness. (Nazareth comes from the verb *nasar*, to keep secrets, as in Isaiah’s “secret things” [Isaiah 48:6].)

So we may ask again, what *is* she thinking? What is she imagining as the page turns? What story from Torah or Talmud has lit her mind and body to prepare her for the message? Is it Eve possessed by “the lust of the eyes”?

(Augustine’s *concupiscentia oculorum*)? Is it Sarah receiving strangers who promise an impossible child? Is it Rachel courted by Jacob at the well? (The same place where the Samaritan woman plays guessing games with Jesus.) Or Susanna surprised by sly elders in her solitude? Who knows what thoughts pass through the Nazarena’s mind? She never tells. She never writes it down, in book or diary or letter or note. She only reads, pages and faces—pages as faces, faces as pages. Carnal hermeneutics of hand and scent, of ear and eye. Making sense of her senses. Faith beyond words, faith as *fiançailles* and *fidens*. Trust over terror. (Rilke is right: every angel is terrible.) Grace over fear.

Nazarena is neither first nor last. After Sarah and the biblical matriarchs and before Teresa and the theocratic mystics (Margarete Porete, Margaret Mary Alacoque, the Beguines, Etty Hillesum), this woman from Nazareth is always too early and already too late. Her time is out of time, before hours and after hours, uncanny, traumatic, *nachträglich*. Ana-chronic. Ana-theistic.

The Nazarena’s double response—hosting the stranger’s impossible love—is perhaps our condition too? Is Da Messina’s image not reminding each of us that we too dwell in a moment of A-N-A: a time where the first “A” of *a-dieu* (abstaining, absenting) passes through flesh into a second “A” of *a-dieu* (attending, arriving)? Da Messina’s painting moves between the double A of *ab deo* and *ad deum*, hovering in the interim, the no-man’s-land between here and there. So we might even say that the “N” at the heart of A-N-A is the Nazarena herself, in flesh and blood, in cloak and book, in hands and eyes and mouth and look. She is the “N” of the *Nunc* between before and after. Our lady of *mi-lieu* who dwells among us. Between the two A’s of already and advent. Between the *deus absconditus* and the *deus adventurus*. The Now of the Nazarena. Eternally present. *Hic et Nunc, Nunc aeternus. Verbum caro factum est.*

### c. Gallagher’s *Pneuma Hostis*

A final word on the work of contemporary artist Sheila Gallagher (also writing in the volume). *Pneuma Hostis* was first shown in Gallagher’s 2013 New York show entitled *Ravishing Far/Near*: a phrase borrowed from the French mystic, Margaret Porete, who was burned at the stake for believing she was part of a divine love affair. *Pneuma Hostis*—meaning “Spirit Host-Guest”—is a flaming halo created out of gold-leafed cigarette butts. It is a circular maze mandala in the form of a commercial Lasco window fan, modeled on the one installed in the artist’s Boston studio to clear smoke and toxic fumes from her work space. The used butts—is there anything lower?—are combined with fan blades in the shape of a gold host—is there anything higher? And this *combinatio oppositorum* sets in motion a dance between life and death, inhalation and exhalation, celestial sky and downtrodden earth,



Figure 1.3. Sheila Gallagher (b. 1967), *Pneuma Hostis*, DODGEgallery New York. Reproduced with permission from Sheila Gallagher.

the addict and the saint.<sup>25</sup> Gallagher's image is polycoded in both form and matter. It offers the viewer multiple possible readings. Here are some from an anatheist perspective.

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

*Pneuma Hostis* is hostess to the holy in the very least of things. It is the chiasmic crossing of the saintly and the secular, a maze of ladders moving

upward and downward, sideways and backward. Like the ladder of Jacob's dream featured alongside *Pneuma Hostis* in Gallagher's New York show: another open-ended structure equally woven from gold-leafed butts that extends the Christian Eucharist to the Jewish narrative of Genesis.<sup>26</sup> And this intericonic play between the two works of circle and ladder performs the primacy of relation over self-enclosed substance, of open allusion over hermetic enclosure. *Pneuma Hostis* invites us to enter and leave its space, just



Figure 1.4. Sheila Gallagher (b. 1967), *Jacob's Ladder*, DODGEgallery New York. Reproduced with permission from Sheila Gallagher.

as *Jacob's Ladder* invites us to ascend and descend. Both works solicit movement and migration, not security or stasis. They beg for visual interpretation, again and again.

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

Gallagher's image play is material as well as formal. From a Christian perspective, one could say that *Pneuma Hostis* monstrates the Mater of matter: at once *mater dolorosa* and *mater beatifica*. Or as the Greek Fathers put it: Mary's host-womb is both *theodochos* (bearer of the God who comes to it) and *theotokos* (bearer of the God who comes from it). Gallagher is no stranger to theology. Her gold-leafed maze carries more in less, an inexhaustible extra coiled in its flesh. It is a *chora* that serves as a chorus (same Greek root) mediating between the gods invoked on stage and the audience that beholds them.<sup>27</sup> In provoking a multiplicity of readings, Gallagher's icon serves as a matrix for visitors always on the way, inviting viewers back again and again, performing a play of anatheist welcome. It is as if Gallagher is offering us a cracked golden bowl—half-full, half-empty—where opposites mix. A meeting place between same and other, plenty and lack, grace and sin. Gallagher writes:

The image points to the crossing of the sacred and the profane. This is a central notion of anatheism which informs the idea of returning to God "after" (*ana*) God, of rediscovering the holy in happenstance, the iconic in the ordinary, the highest in the lowest. Here the sacramental mingles with the banal, and transcendence can be found in the most base of everyday things. In short, anatheism is a way of retrieving the sacred in the "least of these"—even in discarded smoked-out butts.<sup>28</sup>

Using terms of mystical theology, familiar to Gallagher, we might say that she combines the apophatic medium of *pneuma* (smoke, breath, air, spirit) with the kataphatic medium of *hostis* (matter, flesh, the communion bread of touch and taste). She plays ingeniously on the double entendres of her twinned title: Greek *pneuma* as natal and terminal breath; Latin *hostis* as guest and enemy. So doing, the artist mixes word-play with image-play in a way that is wry but not whimsical, mischievous but not facetious. Iconostasis and iconoclasm in one and the same breath. Gallagher's host testifies to the

wrestle between hostility and hospitality at the heart of every religion. She is bold. She does not shy from the wagers involved:

We hear the age-old ambivalence of religion as both sacrificial violence and salvific healing. What are we to make of this double legacy today, when wars are still waged in the name of One True God? And where so many still search and work for healing and peace? No work of art ever stopped a tank, as Seamus Heaney said. But he added: "The end of art is peace." Might that this little image of alchemical play be an intimation of such peace.<sup>29</sup>

Theopoetics makes peace as well as art. Gallagher's anatheist image brings *poiesis* and *praxis* together.

## CONCLUSION

So let me conclude by repeating the question motivating my reflections: why do we need art to recover God after God? Why look to poetry and painting before doctrine and dogma? Why is Creation a matter of making more than teaching? Because I believe poetics is the first bridge between word and flesh. Theopoetic imagination is a Janus-face looking back to Creation and forward to the Kingdom. It is a medium and membrane that moves us, touches us, and reminds us that abstract doctrinal disputes dividing religions for centuries are but distractions from the real work of theopoetics: us making God and God making us. When it comes to divinity, *poiesis*, not *theoria*, has the last word. In the beginning God creates Sophia. In the end Sophia recreates God.

## NOTES

1. Keller, "Theopoetic Becomings: A Brief, Incongruent History" in *Intercarnations*. A revised edited version of this essay is published in this volume. Keller traces the origins of theopoetics from the participatory mysticism of Patristic authors and the cosmo-theology of Cusanus to a third-millennium Process Cosmology inspired by Whitehead's notion of God as "Eros of the universe"—"Poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness." Developing a radical notion of "cosmic theopoiesis," Keller comments on Whitehead's statement that "as God creates the world, the world creates God," thus: "Theopoiesis takes on a new and risky double meaning: we are at once making ourselves God—and making God." For Keller, theopoetics is also cosmopoetics: world-creating as well as person-creating and thing-creating, in such a way that it is less a matter of theist believing or atheist disbelieving than an ana-theist "making and materializing of God . . . a *doing* God . . . doing the prophetic justice, the love thing." In her recent groundbreaking work *Cloud of the Impossible*, Keller develops further theopoetic insights by Cusanus

and Whitehead concerning the “creatable-creating” character of God in dialogue with ideas of infolding-exfolding from Leibniz, Deleuze, and the contemporary physics of “planetary entanglement” (see especially 209–10 and 306–16).

2. It is worth noting here that there are three main terms used to designate “creation” in the Hebrew Bible: *poiesis*, *ktizis*, and *bara*. It would require another work to explore the different nuances of these usages.

3. Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 37. On the theme of divine-human mirroring see Hildegard of Bingen, who has God say that he “created mirrors in which he considers all the wonders of his originality which will never cease” (*Book of Divine Works*, 128); and see Bonaventure who claimed that on the soul’s journey to God “we must present to ourselves the whole material world as the first mirror through which we may pass over the supreme (Artisan)” (*The Soul’s Journey to God*, 63). I am grateful to Richard Rohr for these quotations and to Emmanuel Falque for his insights into the idea of divine-human mirroring in both Bonaventure and John Scotus Eriugena in *God, Flesh and the Other*. Eriugena’s notion of “theophany”—God’s theopoetic self-creating in and through his creatures—is expressed in the following formulae in Eriugena’s *De Divisione Naturae*: “God and the creature do not constitute two distinct realities but constitute a single and same reality because it is by a mutual concurrence that the creature subsists in God and that God is created . . . in the creature, manifesting Himself there” (63); or again: “Because the divine Nature . . . becomes visible in everything that exists, it is not incongruous to say that it is created in everything that exists” (64). In short, theophany is theopoetry to the degree that for God to create is to be created in and by His creatures. God thus sees himself “as in a mirror, carrying in Himself all existing beings.” God-mirroring is God-making in and through creation (65 f).

4. Emmanuel Levinas in Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*. See also Aviva Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*. Just as a certain Jewish teaching claimed that the Torah (Law) existed before the Creation of the world, so too the spirit of loving Wisdom (Sophia) may be said to serve as an originary act of divine procreation (Proverbs 8). This finds a Christian variation in Paul’s claim in Ephesians 1:4 that Christians exist in a loving relation with Christ—often associated with Sophia—before the foundation of the world, and ever since in the work of ongoing creation, incarnation, and salvation (Romans 8). This notion of a primal Cosmic Creative Christ is revisited in Colossians 1:15: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth.” The Trinitarian relationship of Father-Son-Spirit as a primordial dance of mutual cocreation finds expression in the Patristic notion of perichoresis which first arose in third- to fourth-century Cappadocia, a theme we explore in the final part of this essay. See here Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*: “This flow of love goes full circle. The ‘Son’ also creates the ‘Father’ precisely as Father.” And Rohr does not hesitate to explore the gender fluidity of the persons of the dance, to include “mother” and “daughter,” reminding us that the Pauline view of creation in Romans 8:22 (“From the beginning until now, the entire creation has been groaning in one great act of giving birth”) is “very feminine”—in keeping with the feminine

Sophia of the Books of Wisdom. Which is why, Rohr notes, “men were historically so opposed to it.” (“One Great Act of Giving Birth: The Cosmic Christ” [November 2, 2016, *Mediations@cac.org*]). Regarding the notion of continuous mutual creation, Rohr enlists a number of great Christian mystics, including Hildegard of Bingen (“Humanity is called to assist God . . . to co-create”), Thomas Merton’s notion of creation as a “general dance” between God and man, and the words of Teilhard de Chardin, “The world is still being created, and it is Christ who is reaching his fulfillment in it. . . . In ecstasy through all nature (we are) immersed in God.” As God creates us in his image we recreate him in ours, again and again, as witnessed in the multiple figures of speech and imagination invented by humans to represent God—for example, as nursemaid, shepherd, eagle, lion, father, burning bush, and still small voice. See also Numbers 12:8 where Moses is reported as seeing the “image” (*doxa*) of the Lord.

5. See Zornberg’s rich hermeneutical-Rabbinical reading of Genesis as a language of eros in *The Beginning of Desire*; and Emmanuel Falque’s claim, in his hermeneutic reading of Genesis 1, that “in the beginning was sexual difference” in *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, 140. See also Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic reading of the role of nuptial metaphoricity and theoerotic creation in the *Song of Songs* in “The Nuptial Metaphor” in *Thinking Biblically* (with André La Cocque).

6. *Perichoresis*, or the divine dance of Trinitarian relation, was there from the beginning. In Christianity, Sophia—which Proverbs claims was created in the beginning—has sometimes been identified with Christ as the second person of the Trinity (i.e., the famous Hagia Sophia basilica in Constantinople). Sophia has also been associated at times with the “Word” (*Logos*)—for example, in the Wisdom of Solomon (9:1–2) as we noted above, where *logos* and *Sophia* are used synonymously as equiprimordial powers of creation (of the world and humanity): a theme echoed in certain later commentaries on the Prologue of John’s Gospel. It should be noted, however, that in the Nicene Creed (381 AD), the Church Fathers spoke of the Father “engendering,” rather than “making” the Son—“*genitus non factum (poietenta)*.” And the later controversy over the “*Filioque*” (seventh to ninth centuries), which hierarchically subordinates the third person of the Trinity (*pneuma*) to the Father “and” (*que*) the Son, further diluted the radical equity of face-to-face (*prosopon*) relations between the three divine persons. It is very revealing, nonetheless, that the term *pros* features in the opening sequence of John’s Prologue—“The Word was with (*pros*) God”—indicating that the Word-Logos-Christ-Son plays “before/in front of/face to face with” the Father (*prosopon* means face). I am grateful to John Manoussakis for his readings of Sophia and *prosopon* in “Toward a Fourth Reduction” in his *After God*. I am also indebted to Richard Rohr for his insistence that the human person sees itself as participating in divine creation, in perpetual personal face-to-face relation, and not as some isolated autonomous self. We are “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world” (see Ephesians 1:4). For more on this understanding of *prosopon/persona/person* see also the opening chapter of Kearney, *The God Who May Be*.

7. Cited Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 55.

8. On the Talmudic and Kabbalistic readings of the Golem, see *Ibid.*, ch. 1, section 3. See also Gershom Scholem's illuminating account of the Jewish literature of Golem-making in the *Mystical Symbols of Judaism*:

Just as the human mind remains infinitely inferior to the all-encompassing divine intelligence of God, so does the Golem's intelligence lag behind the human. . . . Still, the Golem remains a representation of man's creative power. The universe, so the Kabbalists tell us, is built essentially on the prime elements of numbers and letters, because the letters of God's language reflected in human language are nothing but a concentration of His creative energy. Thus by assembling these elements in all their possible combinations . . . the Kabbalist who contemplates the mysteries of Creation radiates some of this elementary power into the Golem. The creation of the Golem is then in some way an affirmation of the productive and creative power of man. It repeats, on however small a scale, the work of creation. (cited *Ibid.*, 59)

Scholem does not hesitate to note the implications of this for contemporary cybernetics and the new technology of virtual simulation and cloning. He concludes that we should explore the power of making (*poiesis*) to experiment with "creations of imagination and mind" (*tetsirah mahshartith*) but not to substitute ourselves for God.

9. Since, for Christians, God became human in the person of Christ, images are permitted and even encouraged, for there is now said to be a legitimate analogy or *similitudo* between the finite and the infinite, modifying Deuteronomy's prohibition ("Thou shall have no graven images"). Image becomes the mediator or chiasm between word (*logos*) and flesh (*sarx*). See Mark Hederman's essay in this volume and, on the notion of Christ as artist-dancer-player, see my hermeneutic analysis of the mystical tradition of *deus ludens* in Kearney, *La Poétique du Possible*, 269–72. The notion of divine play has had an important role in the popular religious culture of Christianity down through the centuries, involving public liturgies, pageants, processions, Passion plays, and rituals—Corpus Christi, Easter Saturday, All Souls, Christmas, the Epiphany, and so on—still common in many Latin Catholic cultures to this day. We also find the idea of divine play in the notion of Christ as "Holy Fool" and "Lord of the Dance," where in certain sacred moments in the liturgical calendar—for example, Shrove Tuesday and the Feast of Saint John (June 21 summer solstice)—the faithful are invited to don masks and costumes in a time of Carnival where the normal rules of time, space, gender, class, and behavior are traversed and reversed, in a divine comedy play where the conventional logic of noncontradiction no longer obtains. This gives popular currency to Samuel Coleridge's definition of poetic imagination as "the yoking together of opposite and discordant qualities." On this notion of Carnival as sacred reversal of time and space, see Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. See here also Simon Critchley's fascinating reflections on Oscar Wilde's account of Christ as supreme artist in *Faith of the Faithless*, echoing similar accounts in the work of William Blake, for example: "Jesus and His Apostles and Disciples were all Artists . . . A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect; the man or woman who is not one of these is not a Christian. The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art. Art is the Tree of Life . . . The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination; that is God Himself, the

Divine body (Hebrew) Jesus; we are His Members. It manifests itself in His Works of Art. . . . Prayer is the study of Art. Praise is the practice of art" (*Engraving on the Laocoon*). It is important to reiterate that theopoeisis is not confined to works of high art but is also to be found in the most basic forms of everyday sacred making—of food into feast, of sound into chant, of wool into sacramental clothing, of wood and stone into sacred architecture and furniture (from simple Shaker cabinets to holy chapels and cathedrals). In such common sacred practices, making God is a making good and beautiful of everyday existence. Religious culture as popular culture. The sacred in the profane.

10. See Ricoeur on Aristotle's account of poetics as catharsis and narrative emplotment in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, ch. 2. Aristotle's philosophy has exerted a considerable influence on Western Christian intellectual culture; but his potential impact on a Christian aesthetics of *poiesis* has often been overshadowed by the Platonic critique of imagination as a mimetic and mendacious act subordinate to transcendental reason (*nous*). For Plato the power of making (*technē demiourgikē* in *Protagoras*) belongs properly to a quasi-divine maker or demiurge half way between the eternal Forms (which are not made but exist outside time) and human mortals who are condemned to replicate mere copies and imitations, removing themselves further from the original truth of the Ideas which remain timeless, immaterial, and immutable. See my account of the Platonic and Aristotelian theories of imagination in "The Hellenic Imagination," *Wake of Imagination*, and my analysis of narrative catharsis in "Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis" in *Paragraph*, vol. 30, no 1; "Writing Trauma" in *Giornale de Metafisica*; and "Narrative Matters" in *On Stories*.

11. See my discussion of Hopkins's anatheist poetics (A, 11–12); in "God after God: an Anatheist Attempt to Reimagine God," in *Reimagining The Sacred*, 6–18; and in my recent essay: "Secular Epiphanies: The Anatheistic Hermeneutics of Gerard Manley Hopkins"; and "Épiphanies: Hopkins, Scotus, Joyce."

12. Hopkins, *That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire*.

13. See my analysis of Ricoeur's "Religion, Atheism, Faith" (A, 71–81).

14. For philosophical interpretations of this epiphanic moment see Kierkegaard's treatment of the "Instant" (*Augenblick*) and "Repetition" (*Wiederholung*) and Heidegger's ontological readings of these terms in *Being and Time* as well as the later deconstructive readings by Derrida and Caputo. See also Walter Benjamin's related reading of the Messianic *Jetztzeit* and Giorgio Agamben's reading of the eschatological "time that remains."

15. For kairological and eschatological notions of ana-time see Manoussakis, *The Ethics of Time*.

16. On the critique of onto-theology as a double forgetfulness of Being and God see the deconstructive readings of Heidegger, Derrida, and Caputo and my own hermeneutic treatment of this theme in Kearney, *Poétique du Possible* and *The God who May Be*.

17. On celebrated theopoetic paintings of hospitality and strangers, in addition to those analyzed in this essay, see Botticelli's *Cestello Annunciation* (1490), Rembrandt's famous etching series of Emmaus, and Chagall's *Abraham and the Strangers*. On the notion of artistic making (icon making and bell making) as a divine call to

human cocreation see Jana Trajtelova and Anthony Steinbock, "Transcendence as Creativity: Vocation in Andrei Tarkovsky" in *The Yearbook on History and Interpretation of Phenomenology*. Theopoetic art is exemplary of human-divine cocreation but it is not exclusionary (or elitist). Everyone is called to participate in the art of ongoing *poiesis* in many different mansions, great and small, sacred and secular, miraculous and banal. Every time one creates, one is participating in the recreation (or decreation) of the Kingdom.

18. On the derivation of intellectual concepts from imagination, see Kant's argument for the primacy of transcendental productive imagination in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Schelling's claim that philosophy and theology are derived forms of an "unconscious poetics of nature," and Nietzsche's argument that metaphysics is a form of masked mythology—"an army of mobile metaphors"—that has forgotten its own mytho-poetic origin (a point later developed by philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida, and Ricoeur).

19. Cf. "Don't try to start with some notion of abstract Being and then conclude, we also found out [through Jesus] that such a being is loving. No, Trinitarian revelation *begins* with the loving—and this is the new definition of being. Most start with the One and then have trouble making it into the Flow between the Three. How about starting with the Three, and know that this is the shape of true Oneness? There is now a hidden communion, an Absolute Friendship at the heart of everything. The final direction of history is inevitably directed toward resurrection as Alpha becomes Omega (see Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), as both Bonaventure and Teilhard de Chardin would put it. Resurrection is no longer a one-time anomaly in the body of Jesus, but the pattern of the universe. . . . The Trinitarian flow is like the rise and fall of tides on a shore. All reality can be pictured as an Infinite Outflowing that generates an Eternal Infolding. This eternal flow is echoed in history by the self-emptying of the Incarnation and the Holy Spirit's seducing us back to God. As Meister Eckhart and other mystics say in other ways, the infolding always corresponds to the outflowing. I love the German word for Trinity, *Dreifaltigkeit*, which literally means 'the three infoldings.' The foundational good news is that creation and humanity have structurally been in this flow from the very beginning (Ephesians 1:4, 9–10; Romans 8:21–25, 29). We are not outsiders or mere spectators but inherently part of the divine dance, while ever being drawn deeper into the Divine Two-Step. Jesus said, 'I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be' (John 14:3). Some mystics who were on deep journeys of prayer took this message to its consistent conclusion: creation must then be seen as 'the fourth person of the Blessed Trinity.' Once more, the divine dance isn't a closed circle; we're all invited in. . . . This fits the 'dynamic' metaphysical principle that 'the inter-weaving of the three [always] produces a fourth.'" Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*, 89. This may sound like heresy—especially to a contracted heart that wants to go it alone. But this is the *fourth place* pictured and reserved as a mirror in Andrei Rublev's fifteenth-century icon of the Trinity (see Rohr, *The Divine Dance*). For further philosophical analysis of the "fourth dimension" of the divine-human relation, see Manoussakis, "Toward a Fourth Reduction" and Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday" in *After God*, 21–38.

20. On the depictions of the divine mother and son as "*chora achoratou*," see "God or Khora?" in Kearney, *Strangers Gods and Monsters*, 191. See also the ritual formulations of Mary as maker of her Maker, for example, "Blessed are you, O Virgin Mary, who bore the Creator of all things: You became the Mother of your Maker" (*Entrance Antiphon of the Catholic Feast of the Virgin Mary*, October 8).

21. Meister Eckhart, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, 129. In *The Divine Dance*, Rohr explores the liberating gender implications of the perichoretic dance between the three persons: "God has done only one constant thing since the beginning of time: God has always, forever, and without hesitation loved 'the Son'—and yes, you can equally and fittingly use 'the Daughter'—understood in this sense as creation, the material universe, you, and me. The quality of the relationship toward the other is the point, not gender or even species. God cannot not love God's self in you (see 2 Timothy 2:13)! The 'you' that holds the indwelling Spirit, which many of us call the soul, is always considered eternal and intrinsically good because of its inherent connection to God." The fact that the word for originary divine Wisdom (*Sophia*) is feminine in Greek and that the word for the originary divine Spirit (*Ruach*) is feminine in Hebrew is also highly relevant. Not to mention the fact that the chora/chalice/womb at the heart of the perichoresis is inherently feminine.

22. Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 28–31. The term *perichoresis* is translated into Latin as *circumincessio*. This word can be spelled with a "c" meaning *cessio-cedo* (ceding, releasing, letting go, offering one's place to the other); or it can be spelled with an "s" meaning *sessio-sedo* (sitting, assuming one's place, immanence). This movement of persons around the *chora* thus performs an act of inflowing-outflowing, ebbing-flowing, approaching-departing, *kenosis-hypostasis*: a two-step dance in which divinity invites humanity to join. And this ingenious wordplay between *cedo* and *sedo*, of one step forward and one step back, finds a telling linguistic equivalent in the double entendre of the age-old greeting *adieu*. The double a-dieu with which the persons greet each other may be said to dramatize what we call the two a's of ana-theism. First, *a-dieu* as welcome (as in original Latinate usage, *ad-deum*), meaning an opening toward (*ad*) the other. And second, *a-dieu* says goodbye (as in later usage, *ab-deo*, meaning a releasing or letting go). Emmanuel Levinas explains this by saying that the original act of Creation is an act of love which leaves open a gap for the coming and going of the other—a gesture captured in the simple phrase "after you"/*après-toi*. This is the "aftering" of ana which is the first word of hospitality. As at a meal where one offers food to the guest who becomes a host to another guest in turn; or as in a dance where one retreats to let the other move in—ceding one's space so that the partner can succeed one in a circular movement, a mutual participation where, in Yeats's words, we can "no longer tell the dancer from the dance" (*Among School Children*). It is this perichoretic dance around (*chorein*) the still point of the turning world which opens onto the fourth person, again and again, dying to itself and rising again, passing away and rebirthing in an ceaseless motion of beginning. *Kenosis* and *anabasis*. Forever arriving and departing in the persona-strangers (*hospes*) who ask for bread and water, and receive it in turn. Christ identifies himself as this *hospes* five times in Matthew 25, just as he reveals himself eschatologically as Lord of the Dance. Emmaus meets eschaton in the banquet of the Kingdom.

23. On the interreligious power of nontextual icons and rituals see also Mark Hederman, "Cinema and the Icon" in *Anchoring the Altar*; and the recent work of Marianne Moyaert, "Toward a Ritual Turn in Interreligious Theology" in *Harvard Theological Review* (2017).

24. See an earlier version of this reflection entitled "Annunciation" in the *Giornale di Metafisica*, alongside a companion piece on the same painting by Jean-Luc Nancy entitled "L'Annoncée" (included in translation in this volume). Nancy's reading is more atheist than anatheist but we both share similar insights into the "deconstructive" power of the painting.

25. See Gallagher, "Artist's Note on Cover Art" in *Reimagining the Sacred*, 259–60.

26. This motif of upper/lower reversals also recalls the Christian-Jewish interplay between Moses lifting the bronze serpent from the pit of the earth and Christ's invocation of this Mosaic story as paradigm of his own fourfold kenosis of self-emptying—into flesh (incarnation), water (in the Jordan), Hades (on the Cross), and death (in the tomb)—before rising again.

27. On the relationship between chora and chorus see Hederman, *Anchoring the Altar*, 108 f. As chora-chorus between the divine and the human, between the holy altar-stage and the secular mundane audience, the mater-host might be said to play the role here of the "fourth" at the core of the perichoretic circle. As such, she plays the hostess who invites strangers to the Eucharistic table, as Sarah did at Mamre, as Mary did at the manger of Bethlehem, as the *hospes* did at the Inn of Emmaus (think of Rembrandt's extraordinary etchings).

28. Gallagher, "Artist's Note," *Reimagining the Sacred*, 259.

29. *Ibid.*, 260. See also Gallagher's recent extension of her art into collaborative multimedia performances such as *Twinsome Minds: Recovering 1916 in Images and Stories* (Twinsomeminds.com), "Brigid of Murroe," and the "Exchanging Stories, Changing History" creative video project (Guestbookproject.org). Gallagher's embrace of digital media and animated moving images demonstrates how theopoetic making is at work in the most interdisciplinary and public forms of contemporary technology. Anatheism in action: in image, word, and movement.

## Chapter 2

# Theopoetics

## A Becoming History

Catherine Keller

To make God: quite a project.<sup>1</sup> However one translates the ancient *theopoesis*, becoming divine or making divinity, a fresh materialization of meaning seems to be proceeding in its semantic field. In the experiments of theopoetics, it seems to elude, with no defensive maneuver, propositions as to the existence or the death of God.

Indeed, theopoetics as a discursive strategy carries some surprisingly layered, if marginalized, history, both ancient and recent. Of course, humanists might immediately be suspicious—I would be—that theopoetics is a rhetorical sleight of hand: a way to disguise good old God with an aesthetic aura, and then to sneak Him back in under the disarming guise of metaphor. Or is it the opposite ploy, which is what some colleagues in theology suspect: atheism masquerading as theos? Without answering any such charges, let me just note that whether for purposes of defense or of sabotage, *theopoetics* occupies semantic God-space. And it does so with the aura of art, of a creativity that at once conjures and deconstructs "the creation." Divine creation—God's making—becomes an irremediably ambiguous signifier: is God making or getting made? For when poetics comes charged with the ancient meanings of *poiesis*, "making" imports a materiality of making in excess of poetry.

Yet most recent uses of theopoetics remain oblivious to their, in fact, ancient root. They arise, as we shall see, from another boundary-discourse, that of mid-twentieth-century American radical theology and its foundational drama: the death of God. As metaphor and rhetorical device, the death of God helps in the crossover to secular discourses, to ethical atheisms, and/or to radical politics. It links up in complicating ways with recent interdisciplinary discourses of the postsecular, of political theology, and of religious diversity. It morphs, for example, with Richard Kearney into "anatheism"—meaning