

17th century English Literature
Week 8 Article Summary

Ch. 2 “Early modern religious discourses of pain” in *Pain & Compassion in Early Modern Literature & Culture* by Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen

According to Dijkhuizen, Roman Catholics regarded the bodily pain of human as the integral part in participating the Passion of Christ. Through the literary works of Teresa of Avila, Luis of Granada, and Ignatius of Loyola, Dijkhuizen shows that Christ’s death on the cross was a real and physically agonizing experience which, by imagination and meditation, Christians should be affected and attempt to imitate Christ’s bodily pain in order to share the pain and eventually become a union. Since the pain of body is believed to lead the way to redemption and salvation, namely “true union” by the purging of the sin, the human body itself achieves a great importance. Dijkhuizen also points out that in Catholic meditation manuals Maria plays a significant role of the mediator by being both the co-sufferer with the humans and also the co-redeemer with Christ since her grief and pain made her to shed the former “self” and became united with the pain of Christ.

On the other hand, protestant writers in the early modern England, namely John Calvin, Martin Luther, Joseph Hall, and Lancelot Andrews focused on the inner pain of Christ and thought it was impossible to imitate his suffering. Calvin emphasizes Christ’s mental suffering more than the physical pain, remarking that only Christ can choose to suffer voluntarily. Martin Luther disapproves of identifying humans with Christ and argues self-sacrifice of Christ is for humans who “should weep for their own sinfulness” (55). Joseph Hall and Lancelot Andrews comprehend the suffering of Christ as something unique that can’t be accessible to the human being. Overall, the importance of the human body and physical pain was largely diminished by the protestant writers who saw Christians not as Christ, but as persecutors who actively participated in killing Christ.

Despite the distinct difference in perceiving the role of human body, leading protestant Calvin share the same idea of emphasizing the human dependency on God with Catholic Teresa of Avila. One reason for this ambivalence between Roman Catholic and Protestantism derives from the religious culture of early modern English as the cases of Henry More and Toby Matthew portrays how their political choices are based on religion and the aftermath of an exile. Another reason is because of English translation history centering around Luis of Granada's *Libro* which originally included the anti-Protestant prologue but through translation it was appropriated as Protestant editions. Among the protestant writers, Lancelot Andrews and John Hall's passion sermons depicts the ambivalence of Christ's body through the visceral terms and undecided attitude towards the role of Mary.

In line with unresolved ambivalence, John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563), a book about martyrdom and human suffering, manifests the suspicion of protestant writers and at the same time an inquiry to the human body and pain as the "site of spiritual experience" (88). As the foundational text of Protestantism in early modern England, Foxe agrees with Calvin and Luther that pain of human cannot replace Christ's Passion. Yet it is worth noting that the martyrdom discourse in which the martyr is considered as the imitator of Christ that inevitably consists of physical pain. Although martyrs in Foxe's books transcend the flesh by dying with serene faces, the bodily pain by torture and execution is the main factor which bring out the religious truth in them. A sign of truth charged by the bodily pain leads back to the very beginning of whether pain can be a medium to share the Passion of Christ.

Ch. 3 "Religious pain from Alabaster to Donne" in *Pain & Compassion in Early Modern Literature & Culture* by Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen

Introducing the genre of Passion poetry in English literary tradition, Dijkhuizen illustrates how fundamental assumptions of Protestantism and Roman Catholic clashed, as

devotional poetry in early modern England inherited the tradition of Passion poetry. Compared to the eighth-century poem, Christ's physical pain gains its significance through the later Middle Ages to the early modern England. The crucifixion and Christ's wounds become a medium for the onlookers to acknowledge own sinfulness in the mid thirteenth-century and the use of present-tense verbs enable readers to imagine themselves in the presence of the scene. During fourteenth-century and late fifteenth-century, Mary's compassion became a model exemplum for readers who are to be moved by the Passion. The relationship between Mary and Christ's suffering and the speaker of the poem is oftentimes portrayed as lovers, where erotic desire and pain are both expressed in the speaker's longing to suffer with Christ and feel the love of his sacrifice.

In relation to the religious tension, Dijkhuizen first mentions William Alabaster who provides useful example on reworkings of tropes of late medieval Passion poetry as a converted Catholic. Similar to the tradition, the speaker of his poems longs for his suffering body and to understand the way of God through his bodily pain. The trope of lovers also appears in Alabaster's work where the love of Christ is recognized as a type of pain which the speaker alone cannot fill and complete. Although the Passion can be "joyous" (98) since it is the promise of redemption, Dijkhuizen argues that Alabaster finds the paradox of this feeling "incomprehensible" (98) where the speaker's sorrow becomes the main ingredient for the failure of unity with God in the poems. However, the belief that Christ's pain can be shared by human ultimately leads to Alabaster's fulfillment, even if it unavailable in the realm of poetry.

Unlike William Alabaster, John Donne's perception of unfulfilled unity leads to uncertainty and doubt of Christ's Passion and human suffering. Dijkhuizen points out that while Donne identifies his bodily suffering to that of Christ and wants to be him, he also plays a passive role in inflicting the pain. Saying that "only God can do so", Donne condemns martyrs

who pursues the death and seeks the pain on their own. From this we can see that Donne values the workings of God in unexpected ways and time. Instead of physical pain, the speaker of his poems waits for spiritual experience that can transform his mental suffering into physical one. However, that experience does not visit Donne in poems and he concludes that “human can only hope” (110) to share Christ’s suffering when it is not actively sought after, leaving his failed realization unresolved.

Ch. 4 “Sad delight: Theology and Marian iconography in Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*” in *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* by Gary Kuchar

Through Aemilia Lanyer’s depiction of Mary as swooning in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Cucher argues that Lanyer focuses on the active role of Mary and through swooning, builds her authority. Swooning iconography of Mary instead of standing rigidly portray the human and physically distraught condition of her which, in the perspective of post-Reformation, was an intemperate mourning. Yet Cucher remarks that Lanyer is challenging the assumption that bodily manifestation of female grief is irrational. It is precisely because of Mary’s compassion towards Christ’s Passion which makes her participate in the role of co-redeemer and co-sufferer. Furthermore, Cucher connects Mary’s maternity and the imagery of childbirth, which generates great pain, to emphasize her role as Virgin Mother and also the gardener to collect the body of Christ with her tears.

As Mary’s protective actions signify the priestly authority, Lanyer also places her authority as poet-priestess through her relationship with Nature. Mary’s posture of kneeling, according to Cucher, indicates Mary’s priestly role which emphasizes her devotion and a physical reaction to the suffering. Lanyer expresses her poetic powers through the terms “sad delights” (136) in relation to Nature and Art. Cucher asserts that Lanyer is identifying herself

as a distinct female writer who achieves the power from Nature, compared to male poets who try to transcend Nature. For Lanyer, however, her authority as a female poet rests in the intimate relationship with Nature, parallel to God's protection for Mother Nature and Mary's protection for Christ.

Another case of Mary's participation in providence can be shown through her assertion to the message of Annunciation. Whereas Mary is depicted as passively agreeing to the angle for the birth of Christ in the post-Reformation, Lanyer illustrates Mary who anticipates the bearing of Christ and acknowledges its blessing. Mary's authority is constructed upon the suffering and an active acceptance of God's way. As Mary actually gives birth to Christ, her swooning in physical agony is no longer a sign of weakness but an authoritative action of priestess and a loving mother.