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The Reformation of Modern Poetry: Reform and Form

1. Introduction

The Brexit campaign and the result of the referendum have brought it to the fore once again: from an English perspective, (constant) reform is the norm. Institutions like the EU, which allegedly resist reform, are eyed with suspicion as are, of course, calls for a revolution. The English *via media* in socio-political terms, arguably, is the auto-stereotype of a dynamic society that embraces progress and fends off radical calls for a complete shake-up of the system by offering reforms. The efforts by the English to avert the schism that loomed large during the Reformation by carving out a *via media* may be unique within Europe but they follow a logic of neutralising discontent and defusing unrest by concessions, a default mechanism that informs the Bill of Rights as well as the Reform Bills of the nineteenth century. The idea that reform is a strategy of containment in itself is hardly surprising. What I am interested in is the specific echo of the Reformation that can be discerned in calls to reform English poetry throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. And in that vein, what fascinates me is the contention, expressed by the editors of this section in their call for papers, that the Reformation is "an enduring phenomenon in the literary and cultural sphere".

In what follows I will focus on two calls for a reform of poetry that are both informed by reflections on the Reformation: *The advancement and reformation of modern poetry: A critical discourse* (1701) by John Dennis and *England's Reformation from the Time of King Henry the VIIIth to the End of Oates' Plot* (1710) by Thomas Ward. While Dennis implicitly evokes the debates about English as a language fit to render poetry on a par with the Italian, French or Spanish tongue, a debate that is intricately intertwined with the Reformation, and explicitly talks about an improvement of poetry in his time, Ward presents his readers with a poem that serves as an example of what reformed poetry should look and sound like. So while both texts reference the Reformation in their titles the perspective is decidedly different, and I will tease out the crossroads and trajectories that a juxtaposition of these two texts makes visible. In doing so I wish to demonstrate that both texts testify to a quasi-religious conception of how literary texts are reformed. And this demonstration is guided by my interest in the very concept of reforming with its manifold repercussions of the Reformation as a socio-cultural and political shift.

2. Reformation Poetry? Iconoclasm and "the Fallen Materiality of the Words"

In order to historicise the two texts by Dennis and Ward it is adamant that we briefly reflect on the impact of the Reformation on English poetry in the sixteenth century in general and on sacred poetry in particular. During the period of confessionalisation sacred poetry played an important part in carving out the kind of poetic form that catered for the Protestant cause. Repercussions of this perspective can be found in Dennis's treatise when he suggests in chapter ten, for example, that "in their Sacred Poetry, in

which the Ancients, excell'd the Moderns, those places were greatest, and most Poetical that had most of Religion" (1701, 65). Poets who attempted to align poetic form and religious devotion created what John N. King, among others, has termed the "Reformation tradition" in English literature (see King 1990). That tradition, according to King, was forged by "many sixteenth-century English authors" who, "[u]nder the impact of the Reformation [...] grafted Protestant ideology onto literary and artistic conventions and techniques that predated and/or coexisted with the newly imported classical and Italianate standards of the Continental Renaissance" (*ibid*., 3). In grafting that ideology onto literary texts, poets were particularly careful to adapt their poetic diction: poems should align with "the vernacular Bible as a model for poetic imagery, genres, allusions, parables and rhetorical structures" and shun "apocryphal additions, Mariology, sacramentalism, and elements of the old church calendar" (*ibid*., 4).

Moreover, Protestant poets followed an agenda that Ernest Gilman has termed "a poetics of Reformation iconoclasm" (1986, 1): they debunked icons, mocked relics and derided devotional practices. The problems that came with this iconoclastic stance are obvious: poetry, which by its very nature depends on imagery, can hardly strip itself to the bare bones of a technical language devoid of metaphors, similes or allusions. That problem was imperative because "by nearly every precept of Renaissance aesthetic theory, the poet was encouraged to assume the deep affiliation of literary and pictorial art" (*ibid*.). Rather than attempting to write poetry that was barren, Protestant poets, according to Gilman, sought to replace the outward images of saints and other objects of devotion with inward images. The focus on inward or internal images suited the Protestant cause and the resulting style is what we have accepted to call the "plain style". In the debates about the appropriate style, for example when defending choices made in translated works, the "playne and homespun English cote" is often compared to the Italian, French or Spanish original which is "richly clad in Romayne vesture" (Arthur Golding on his translation of Trogus Pompeius's *Epitoma historiarum* qtd. in Mildonian 2007, 1406).

Next to the imagery and the style of writing, we also need to reflect briefly on the formal experiments that the Reformation gave rise to, in particular in George Herbert's devotional poetry. These experiments with form are, in Robert Whalen's reading, indicative of Herbert's "sacramental Puritanism" and arguably the most radical acts of "reforming" poetry in the seventeenth century (2001, 1303). In embracing Neo-platonic ideas, Herbert's notion of reforming poetry, or writing poetry that reconciled the centrality of spiritual inner life with sacramental popular performance, was bifocal: it brought out the eminence of inner voices and it also highlighted the material shape of words on the page. As Susan Stewart has argued convincingly, poems like George Herbert's "The Altar", shaped like a pedestal, or "Easter Wings", shaped like an angel, come closest to pure Platonic form because they transcend individual voices and "refute the aural dimension of poetry" (2002, 35):

> Practices of pattern and concrete poetry remove the poetic from its attachment to particular voices and bodies to create a poetry that is objectlike or artificial. Such poems – in the Hellenistic age, in the Renaissance, and revived under Modernism – are the most visual and objectifying of all poetic forms. It is indeed not surprising that the final "glimpse" of the experience of imagery such a poem produces is a geometrical abstraction, a pure Platonic form that overrides the fallen materiality of the words. (*ibid*.)

Interpretations of Herbert's "Easter Wings" are legion, and I cannot meaningfully engage with the current debates. For the sake of my argument let it suffice to say that we can identify in Herbert's experiments with the shape of the poem an almost paradoxical take on the materiality of words and language that forces readers not only to reflect on the choice of words, images and semantic fields but also on their formal arrangement in space and hence time. Herbert's experiments in and with form are radical in that they refute the simplistic notion that form and content – or form and meaning, if you will – can be separated. Experiments in the shape of the poem are not self-serving; they are intricately tied to the semantics of the poem.

As T. S. Eliot has pointed out, Herbert's diction is also worth noting. Eliot claims that Herbert was indebted to his poetic predecessors, in particular John Donne, for his "cunning use of both the learned and the common word, to give the sudden shock of surprise and delight" (1962, 26). This juxtaposing, Seamus Heaney attested in his *Redress of Poetry* of 1995, "exemplified the body heat of a healthy Anglican life": According to Seamus Heaney, Herbert's "daylight sanity and vigour, his *via media*, between preciousness and vulgarity, promoted the ideal mental and emotional state" (1995, 9).

3. The Invention of English Criticism? "God's Word" vs. "Human Being Speaking to God"

But is that so? After all, Herbert's poetry also addresses the anxiety that the poet with his "cunning use" of language was obscuring God's truth rather than revealing it, a thought expressed most poignantly, perhaps, in "Jordan (I)" with the lines: "Must all be veiled, while he that reades, divines, / Catching the sense at two removes?" (2004, 50). That anxiety, arguably, is at the heart of all poetic endeavours in the realm of religious poetry, and it is mirrored, in the wake of socio-cultural developments, in the reader whose response is akin to what we call criticism. In this act of communication, the poet's voice, serving devotional, or perhaps even missionary, purposes, was measured against the word of God. What can poetry do that the scriptures cannot? And what exactly is the relationship between the poet's voice and the word of God?

Paula Backscheider, who has focused on the impact that women poets had on the literary sphere in the eighteenth century, has argued, I think convincingly, that this debate is particularly relevant when women poets want to make their voices heard. Reforming poetry evidently is a process that factors in gender inequality, and yet at the heart of the debate is the more general concern that the idea of human beings speaking to God involves a degree of hubris. Using Nahum Tate's dedication to Princess Anne in his *Miscellanea Sacra* as proof that Tate and his contemporaries were longing for "psalms that were better poetry" and solicited support for a "more accessible, appealing language", Backscheider argues (2005, 142):

> Tate's dedication to Princess Anne in 1698 gave his timely purpose: "The Reformation of Poetry, and restoring the Muses to the Service of the Temple, is a glorious Work." The most important aspects of this pivotal moment […] were the rise of individualism and subjectivity in the general populace. Perhaps the most dramatic contribution of Isaac Watts and other turn-of-the-century hymn writers was to shift the voice from God's word to humankind to the human being speaking to God. (*ibid*., 143)

It is with this background, which conceptualizes poetry as a human voice speaking to God, that we need to approach the notions of reforming poetry in Dennis's and Ward's

treatises. Both Dennis and Ward establish, in their efforts to reform poetry, a connection between the political and the poetical. In grappling with new forms of thinking through the Reformation with poetry they delineate a productive type of containment, one that makes claims of direct communication and opens up a space for new voices in the process.

4. Reformation/Reform: "Gothic and Barbarous Manner"

Before we can attest whether the treatises by Dennis and Ward continue the "Reformation tradition" or break with it, we should note that both treatises tap into the debate of comparing the accomplishments of the ancients with the achievements of the moderns. Dennis in his *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry: A Critical Discourse* outlines the ingenuity and the superiority of classical writers and explicitly downgrades English poets. Dennis, who "in the first decade of the eighteenth century [...] was England's leading critic," had left his mark as early as 1693 with the publication of his *Impartial Critick* (see Pritchard 2004, n.p.). As we will see, Dennis's criticism, his praise of the ingenuity and the superiority of classical writers, is neither original, nor is it new – the debate harks back to the veneration of classicism in what we call the Renaissance. That debate was invigorated and qualified by the Reformation. As Gavin Alexander has pointed out, "the Reformation gave an edge to questions about rivalry and dependence. England now had much more to prove" (2004, xi).

While Dennis refutes Sidney's veneration of English poets, he subscribes to his verdict, expressed in his *Defence of Poesy*, that the "final end [of poetry] is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of" (2002, 219). Evidently, Dennis's task of improving poetry is ultimately tied to seeking salvation. This is foregrounded clearly in his dedication to John Sheffield, 3rd Earl of Mulgrave. Here, Dennis compares the state of poetry in France with the state of poetry in England:

> My Lord, these Alterations happen'd in France, while the French reform'd the Structure of their Poems, by the noble Models of ancient Architects; and your Lordship knows very well, that the very contrary fell out among us; while, notwithstanding your Generous Attempt to reform us, we resolv'd, with an injudicious Obstinacy, to adhere to our Gothick and Barbarous Manner. For, in the first Place, our Stage has degenerated, not only from the Taste of Nature, but from the Greatness it had in the Time of Shakespear, in whose Coriolanus and Cassius, we see something of the Invincible Spirit of the Romans; but in most of our Heroes which have lately appear'd on the Stage, Love has been still the predominant Passion, whether they have been Grecian or Roman Heroes; which is false in Morality, and of scandalous Instruction, and as false and absurd in Physicks. (*ibid*., Dedication, n. pag.)

Not unlike Sidney, the idea of reforming poetry, the idea of arriving at a "reform'd […] structure of [English] poems", is embedded in a larger moral economy. Resisting reform is depicted as a deliberate act of "Obstinacy", as an attempt to "adhere to our Gothick and Barbarous Manner". Undoubtedly, we are still a long cry from the Gothic revival. For Dennis and his contemporaries, a Gothic manner and Christian virtues – virtues that are encoded in conduct and comportment – are irreconcilable. Instead, a reformed poetry would feature characters on stage, characters modelled on the "Invincible Spirit of the Romans", and, hence, the English should embrace tragedy as the genre of their choice instead of melodrama, which features "Love [as] the predominant Passion" (*ibid*.)

Dennis's complaint about the English "adher[ing] to the Gothick and Barbarous Manner" also evokes the rivalry between European languages that Gavin Alexander has addressed: in a race for cultural dominance, backward Gothic manners have to be overcome by embracing a new style that is informed by classical thinking:

> But it may perhaps be alledg'd, that the Reason why the French has got the Advantage of our Language, is partly from their Situation on the Continent, partly from the Intrigues and Affairs which they have with their Neighbours, and partly, because their Language has more Affinity with one of the Learned Languages. But to this I answer, That the Germans are as advantageously seated as the French, for diffusing their Language; and the Spanish Tongue is rather nearer related to the Latin than is the French; and all the World knows, that towards the Beginning of the last Century, the House of Austria, was full as busie with their Neighbours, as the House of Bourbon is now; and yet then neither the German nor the Spanish Tongue made any considerable Progress. (*ibid*.)

From the perspective of Dennis's poetics, the French language has made progress, while the Spanish, the German and the English have not. This verdict is certainly counter-intuitive. If progress in poetry, or the use of language generally, is described in the terms of a reformation, and if that use of the concept "reformation" is connected, however loosely, to what we have come to term the Reformation with a capital "R", that is confessionalization, then Dennis's poetics creates a schism that is at odds with Anglican historiographies that conceptualize the Reformation as progress. In order to explain this conundrum we need to scrutinize Dennis's notion of progress: first, progress is not simply found in the "Reformation tradition"; Dennis does not advocate Herbert's *via media*. Equally, Dennis does not simply embrace neo-classical notions of the concord of instruction and delight along the lines of "aut prodesse – aut delectare." Rather than campaigning for the union of reason and imagination, he foregrounds the unity of instruction and reason:

> For, tho' Gentlemen study to please themselves, yet if they are Men of Sense, they will not be for empty Pleasure, but will endeavour to be instructed and delighted together. Besides, when Gentlemen begin to study the Poetry of any Language, the first thing they understand is the reasonable Part of it. For the Fineness of the Imaginative Part, which depends in great measure upon Force of Words, and upon the Beauty of Expression, must lie conceal'd from them in a good Degree, till they are perfect in the Language. Thus the Poetry of that Language, which is most reasonable and most instructive, must, in all likelihood, have most Attraction for the Gentlemen of neighbouring Nations; and we have shewn above, that that is the most reasonable, and most instructive Poetry, which is the most Regular. (*ibid*.)

Setting aside for the moment the fascinating undertones of an eighteenth-century text calling the reformation of poetry a mission, its aim being the conversion of Gentlemen of neighbouring nations via attraction, Dennis's line of argument fits our sense of what the classical movement was all about. His degradation of pleasure and his explicit stance against a harmoniously confused union of reason and imagination fit a stereotypical perception of the Reformation as an intellectual movement. While Herbert and his generation were keen to establish a sensuality in poetry centred on a post-iconoclastic imagery, Dennis outlines a poetics of the *clara et distincta* with "the most reasonable, and the most instructive Poetry" at its core.

With the insistence on reasonable poetry, Dennis also evokes a paradigm that revolves around his use of the word "regular". As Lorraine Daston and Peter Gallison have shown, "reasoned images" are at the heart of a transformation of truth claims in the eighteenth century: "For naturalists who sought truth-to-nature, a faithful image was

emphatically not one that depicted exactly what was seen. Rather it was a reasoned image, achieved by the imposition of reason upon sensation and imagination" (2015, 98). Dennis's insistence that poetry should be regular feeds into this discourse: poetry is best when it adheres to rules that govern this imposition of reason upon sensation and imagination. Arguably, then, Dennis's call for a "most Regular" form inscribes regularity as a concern of the reformation. And in doing so, Dennis implicitly rewrites the progress of 'Reformation' as a process of normalization.

Dennis also hints at how this normalization is put into practice. In part II of the treatise, he suggests that overcoming the "Gothick and Barbarous Manner" will naturally follow when poets turn to the scriptures for inspiration:

> […] we shall make it our business to convince the Reader, with all the brevity that the Importance of the affair will admit of, that the Moderns, by joyning Poetry with the true Religion, will have much the advantage of the Ancients in the main, tho they may fall short of them in some particular Poems. (1701, 133)

What can "joining Poetry with the true Religion" mean in practice? How can poets or writers more generally follow Dennis's counsel? I think it is fair to say that Dennis is not thinking simplistically about bringing religious content into existing poetic forms, thus drawing a clear line between form and content. Instead, I think we should use Jopie Prins's notion of historical poetics to facilitate understanding Dennis's objective. For Prins, "historical poetics [...] depends on thinking more about genre" with genre being "a mode of recognition instantiated in discourse" (2016, 37). In generic terms, then, what Dennis aims at, is a perspectival shift, a blending of religious discourse and those discourses that classical poetry traditionally gave rise to. By "joining" these two discourses, Dennis hopes to arrive at a new manner of writing, a new style and ultimately a new genre.

5. Reformation/Revision: "the Maggot, Reformation"

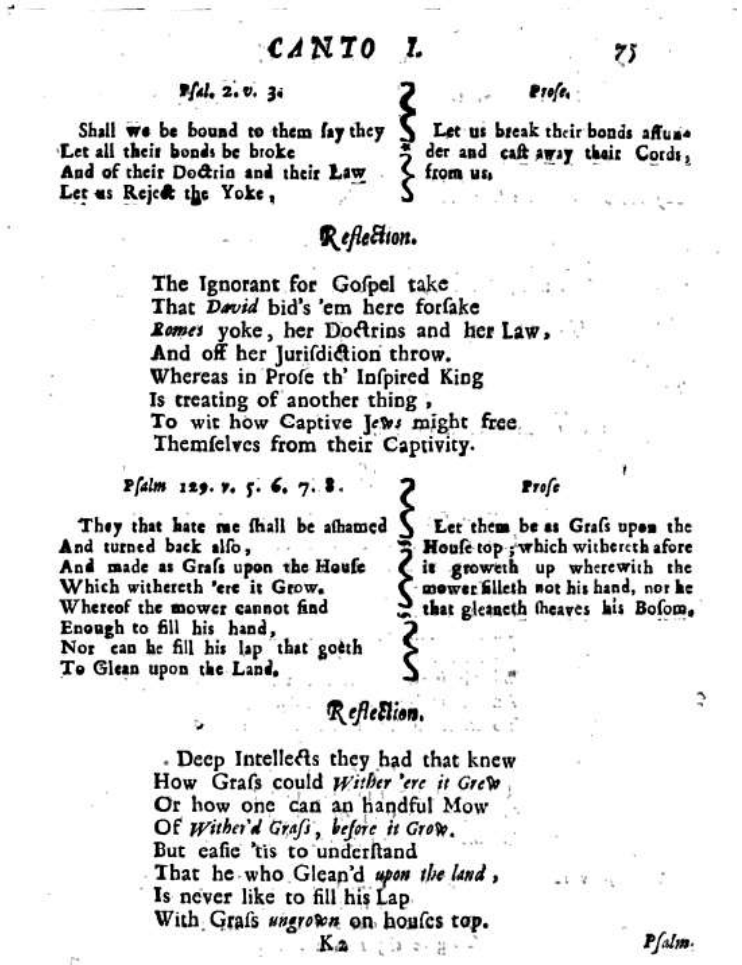
With Dennis's trajectory of poetry as being reformed by becoming more regular, and with his hopes that the concurrence of poetry and religion will inevitably instigate this trajectory, let us turn to Thomas Ward's *England's Reformation from the Time of King Henry the VIIIth to the End of Oates' Plot* (1710). Thomas Ward (1652-1708) was a Roman Catholic convert whose *Errata to the Protestant Bible* (1688) was continuously in print throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The posthumously published *England's Reformation*, a revisionist account of the Reformation, was his most popular work. The argument at the beginning of the first canto makes perfectly clear where Ward's allegiance lies. He refers to "the true Religion's Alteration", to abbeys falling, bloodshed, "sacrilege, and theft", and feuds bred by Marian exiles. Ward's view of the Reformation is a Gothic tale of bloodshed and cruelty, caused, in the eyes of Ward, by Henry's act

> […] in spite of *Pope and Fate*
> [to] Behead, Ripp, and Repudiate
> Those too-too long liv'd things, his Wives,
> With Axes, Bills, and Midwives Knives:
> When he the Papal Power rejected,
> And from the Church the Realm Dissected,
> And in the Great St. *PETER*'s stead,
> Proclaim'd himself the Churches Head.

When he his Ancient *Queen* forsook,
And Buxom *Anna Boleyn* took,
Then in the *Noddle* of the Nation
He bred the Maggot *Reformatio*n. (Ward 1710, 1-2)

Unfortunately, I cannot explore the wonderful metaphors that Ward chose for his attack on the Reformation. And equally I cannot engage meaningfully with the debate whether his revisionist perspective is founded (see Marshall 2009, 564-566). Instead, I will limit myself to discussing whether the form of Ward's poem about the Reformation resonates with Dennis's concept of the reformation of poetry.

A glimpse at the first edition of Ward's text exemplifies that Ward was very much interested in having his text organized spatially by the printer (see Fig. 1). Ward's poem in four cantos is a generic hybrid: Ward uses the whole page to bring into contact different kinds of text that run parallel and urge readers to triangulate between them. What is more, the text at the centre of the page also changes generically: while some passages are rendered as dramatic dialogue, for example between the King and Cranmer, the main part of the text is a long poem in iambic tetrameter. That poem is also interspersed with prose sections that reference liturgy, for example "the form of ordaining priests […] divised by King Henry Vth" which polemically asserts that Anglican Bishops are nothing but "Vassals to the King."



CANTO I. 75

Pſal. 2. v. 3. Proſe.

Shall we be bound to them ſay they
Let all their bonds be broke
And of their Doctrin and their Law
Let us Reject the Yoke,

Let us break their bonds aſſunder and caſt away their Cords, from us.

Reflection.

The Ignorant for Goſpel take
That *David* bid's 'em here forſake
Romes yoke, her Doctrins and her Law,
And off her Juriſdiction throw.
Whereas in Proſe th' Inſpired King
Is treating of another thing,
To wit how Captive Jews might free
Themſelves from their Captivity.

Pſalm 129. v. 5. 6. 7. 8. Proſe

They that hate me ſhall be aſhamed
And turned back alſo,
And made as Graſs upon the Houſe
Which withereth 'ere it Grow.
Whereof the mower cannot find
Enough to fill his hand,
Nor can he fill his lap that goeth
To Glean upon the Land.

Let them be as Graſs upon the Houſe top; which withereth afore it groweth up wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that gleaneth ſheaves his Boſom.

Reflection.

Deep Intellects they had that knew
How Graſs could *Wither 'ere it Grew*
Or how one can an handful Mow
Of *Wither'd Graſs, before it Grow.*
But eaſie 'tis to underſtand
That he who Glean'd *upon the land*,
Is never like to fill his Lap
With Graſs *ungrown* on houſes top.

K 2 Pſalm.

Fig. 1: Thomas Ward, *England's Reformation* (1710), 75

Each canto ends with a section called "reflection". Here, Ward juxtaposes or rather intersperses his poem with psalms from the King James Bible and metrical psalms in the translation of Sternhold and Hopkins – arguably a pre-reformation text, first printed in 1562.[1]

The psalms from the King James Bible are copied truthfully and referred to with the generic marker "prose", while the metrical psalms are referred to by number and verse. With Dennis in mind, Sternhold and Hopkins's versification is clearly "Gothick and Barbarous": the embracing rhyme, the "medieval" metre – iambic tetrameter – is consistent but executed clumsily in many parts. In contrast, Ward's own poem at the centre of the page is definitely "more classical": couplet rhymes rendered in iambic tetrameter; it is certainly more "regular" in the sense that Dennis uses the word.

At odds with the classical form is the style of Ward's poem. As has been pointed out by critics ever since its publication in 1710, Ward takes his cues from Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* and adopts a burlesque style. John Tottie, Archdeacon of Worcester, complained in 1766, for example, that Ward's "Doggrel Hudibrastick Verse [...] is calculated to do more Mischief than all the Roman Catechisms and Expositions, as Ridicule and Buffonery are the best Vehicle for bold and impudent Falsehoods" (15 fn). The following lines, Ward's reflection on psalm 2, verse 3, exemplify the hudibrastic style:

> The Ignorant for Gospel take
> That *David* bid's 'em here forsake
> *Romes* yoke, her Doctrins and her Law,
> And off her Jurisdiction throw.
> Whereas in Prose th' Inspired King
> Is treating of another thing,
> To wit how Captive *Jews* might free
> Themselves from their Captivity. (1710, 75)

Ward's argument here is clear. He rejects metaphorical readings, and with the backdrop of fourfold exegesis, argues in favour of a historically informed literal meaning. This is nothing less than a rejection of poetry altogether if we do not take into account that "prose" here refers to the King James Bible, which by the standard of contemporary readers was written in archaic prose that most certainly, in the eyes and ears of those contemporary readers, did have a homespun poetic quality to it. What is striking, however, is the style used to make his argument. Ward, we must assume, chose the burlesque not only to appeal to the spirit of his age but, more importantly in the context of my argument, also to debunk prevailing notions of reforming poetry. To put it bluntly: for Ward, the decorum best suited to speak about the Reformation in writing was doggerel rhyme.

6. Conclusion

We cannot discern with certainty that Ward does not share Sidney's general conviction that poetry can "draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls […] can be capable of" (2002, 219). It is noteworthy, however, that Ward, when treating the Refor-

1 Originally published by John Day of London in 1562, the "much maligned but immensely popular" psalter in the translation of Sternhold and Hopkins was the first complete English language version and it remained the standard version in England with "more than 600 editions [...] through to 1828" (Norton 2000, 116; see Zim 124-126).

mation as a subject, opts for a crude style, a style that is reminiscent of the style that Dennis identified as "Gothick and Barbarous". While it may seem that Ward, complaining about semantic distortions of the scriptures that result from the act of versification, opts for a return to literal Bible studies, the exactitude with which he juxtaposed different poetic forms in his *England's Reformation* testifies to a genuine interest in finding out how poetry differs from prose. And while he seems to suggest, with his hudibrastic style, that poetry is best reserved for political satires, he inadvertently also teases out the contribution of poetry to devotional and, arguably, liturgical practice. The poetry lifted from the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter exposes Ward's own crude attempts as just that: deliberately failed attempts at finding a poetic voice.

We should thus not draw the conclusion that Ward discredited poetry as a genre fit for devotion. Instead, he has, perhaps inadvertently, pointed to at least two unresolved issues about reforming poetry in the light of the Reformation. First, the versification of religious texts is always prone to give readers "wrong ideas" about the word of God, or at least it opens up a level of ambiguity that allows more easily for all kinds of ideas to take hold. And that level of ambiguity may also always jeopardize a focused meditative seclusion, a conversation with God, that is the nucleus of Protestant spirituality. Second, the versification of religious texts may serve a sinister purpose, at least in the eyes of a Roman Catholic: it may be part and parcel of a propagandistic move to paint the Reformation as a success story of progress, a story in which the Anglican faith is superior to a retrograde Roman Catholic faith.

Ward's and Dennis's agendas are almost diametrically opposed, and as such both texts exemplify that poetry is a contested space, testifying to a proto-religious (or perhaps quasi-religious) conception of how literary texts are reformed or perhaps best not to be reformed. Admittedly, making sense of how poetry, and literature at large, have been reformed and are being reformed in the light of the Reformation is a vexing task. But I hope to have shown that the very concept of a reformation is a charged concept in the domain of poetry and poetics, opening up the gaping wound that the schism had caused.

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