ABSTRACT

His Hidden Face: An examination of how artistic lament can address the evidential problem of divine hiddenness

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The philosophical problem of divine hiddenness questions the existence of a divine being on the basis of what seems to be a lack of evidence to support reasonable theistic belief. This question, which troubles both atheists and theists alike, is often cited alongside the problem of evil as a defeater for the Christian faith. This thesis explores how the practice artistic lament within the context of Christianity can act as a means of accessing God's comfort, voicing one's grievances, and possibly receiving supporting evidence to bolster the individual's belief in God. The three mediums of narrative, poetry, and music are explored throughout this thesis as examples of artistic lament, each presenting a unique value to the individual's search for evidence. Artists examined within this work include C.S. Lewis, Mother Teresa, Dostoevsky, George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Louise Glück, Samuel Barber, and Tchaikovsky. The argument of this thesis is that works such as these have the potential to facilitate a cathartic process of expression that may in turn produce supporting evidence for the existence of God, thus enabling the individual to at least partially overcome the problem of divine hiddenness.

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HIS HIDDEN FACE

AN EXAMINATION OF THE VALUE OF ARTISTIC LAMENT IN EXPLORING THE EVIDENTIAL PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

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DEDICATION

To all those who have walked beside me in faith.

INTRODUCTION

What is Divine Hiddenness?

The problem of divine hiddenness has long posed a matter of some perplexity for thoughtful theists attempting to provide a rational account for the existence of a divine being. The essential question is this: If there is a divine being that desires a relationship with its creation, why is there not more evidence for the existence of such a being? This question, often in conjunction with the problem of evil, has been prevalent in philosophical and religious discourse from the writings of the early church father Anselm of Canterbury[1] to the reflections of contemporary author and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel[2]. In its essence, the problem of divine hiddenness calls into question the rationality of theism by drawing upon certain characteristics often attributed by theists to the divine being, and argues that such characteristics would necessitate greater evidential provision to support the existence of such a being. The term "hiddenness" simply suggests that, for many individuals, at least some knowledge and aspects of the divine being remain unclear, obscured, or even beyond the reach of human understanding.

While the philosophical discussion surrounding the problem of divine hiddenness has largely circulated around the epistemological questions such as, "What ought the evidence look like if a divine being did exist?" or "How much evidence ought we expect

[1] Anselm, Thomas Williams, Anselm, and Gaunilo. *Monologion : and, Proslogion : with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Pub. Co., 1996).

[2] Jonathan Gorsky, "Elie Wiesel, Hasidism and the Hiddenness of God," *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 996 (March 2004), 133–143.

in order to justify rational theistic belief?", there has been a lack of attention to the emotional ramifications of divine hiddenness. Supposing the existence of a loving and relationship-driven divine being, the detrimental effects of the perceived hiddenness of the divine would manifest largely in the personal and emotional loss to the individual, and thus often be expressed in terms of emotional grievance and personal lament. While the evidential aspects of the problem of divine hiddenness do constitute an integral piece of the discussion involving divine hiddenness, discussion of the problem remains incomplete without consideration of the emotional effects that the problem of divine hiddenness commonly generates.

It is worth noting that, although this project will narrowly focus on the Judeo-Christian God and primarily sources of artistic lament that relate explicitly to this particular faith tradition, the problem of divine hiddenness remains relevant to virtually every religion in which some sort of relationship is expected to exist between humanity and the divine. Though the treatment of this problem in relation to each of these religious frameworks is outside the scope of this project, the feature of artistic lament as evidential support and cathartic practice can still be found applicable to these other versions of the argument from hiddenness. However, for the purpose of this project, the term "God" will often be used to represent the divine being, and the characteristics attributed to this God by the Judeo-Christian faith will be assumed. These characteristics, in accordance with the Biblical Scriptures, include omniscience, omnipotence, love, grace, justice, mercy, and the desire for some sort of relationship with his[3] creation. Such characteristics are

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[3] For the sake of consistency with many of the sources examined within this work and in congruence with traditional Judeo-Christian writings and theology, the masculine pronoun will be used in reference to God. The term "the Divine" will also henceforth be used to reference the Judeo-Christian God.

integral to the argument from hiddenness, because it is from these characteristics that the expectation of relationship comes, and moreover, that the seeming inconsistency of God's hiddenness creates a problem for the Christian theist.

The scope of this project will largely be to evaluate how the consideration of the emotional ramifications of divine hiddenness and its possible solutions can further develop the philosophical argument from hiddenness. When I refer to the "emotional" aspects of the problem, I am primarily addressing the feelings of abandonment, loneliness, suffering, and resentfulness that individuals often feel as a result of their unfulfilled expectations of relationship with the Divine. It is oftentimes these emotions, in conjunction with the seeming irrationality that exists between God's loving nature and his hiddenness, that yields a loss of faith for former believers, and presents a barrier to individuals seeking rational belief in God.

It will first be helpful to provide a brief overview of the philosophical argument in order to understand the problem of divine hiddenness as it has traditionally been considered. As the philosophical discussion surrounding divine hiddenness continues to develop, many proponents of theism have put forth various justifications for the phenomenon of divine hiddenness. Some individuals appeal to the necessity of God's hiddenness to maintain the good that is human free will, positing that without God's hiddenness, human belief would be coerced by the overwhelming evidence for God's existence and consequently his will, and thus human free will would cease to exist[4]. Others have put forth the argument that divine hiddenness allows for the experience of

[4] Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser, *Divine Hiddenness : New Essays* (Cambridge, UK : Cambridge University Press, 2002).

seeking God on a deeper level, an experience that carries valuable benefits such as the development of "morally significant freedoms[5]" that could not be obtained otherwise. In contrast, other individuals propose the argument from sin, suggesting that what appears to be God's hiddenness is rather just a feature of the detrimental effects of human sin on the ability to form complete relationship with a perfect God[6]. Traces of these justifications and others will be prevalent within the artistic sources examined within this thesis work, as the lamenter struggles to find a reason for her separation from God. Often without knowledge of the philosophical contexts of their musings, many of the artists referenced within this work draw upon justifications such as the free will argument or the sin argument to console themselves in the wake of their suffering, further placing these artistic laments in conversation with the philosophical arguments surrounding divine hiddenness.

Despite this multiplicity of possible justifications for the problem of divine hiddenness, the feature that many of these justifications often lack is a holistic approach to the problem. Parsing out the rational implications from the emotional implications will necessarily provide an incomplete view of the problem, and thus yield an incomplete answer. The purpose of this work is to examine sources relating to divine hiddenness that express artistic, emotional lament in an attempt to view the problem of divine hiddenness in a way that not only considers the rational ways in which a believer might struggle with the hiddenness of God, but also the emotional implications of this struggle. In exploring

[5] Michael J. Murray, "Deus Absconditus," *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K Moser (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 62–82.

[6] Ebrahim Azadegan, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Sin: The Noetic Effect of Sin." *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7.1 (2013), 69–90.

these sources, I will argue that artistic lament can function as a liturgical tool to overcome some of the emotional detriment caused by God's hiddenness, thus providing in some sense a type of emotional catharsis that can serve as further evidence for the existence of God.

Hiddenness, Evidence, and Lament

The term "divine hiddenness" can be accompanied by a degree of ambiguity that needs to be resolved within the framework of this thesis project. Within this work, "divine hiddenness" will be used to reference the widespread belief that, for many individuals, God's existence and presence is not as evident as it could be. Given the characteristics of God formerly mentioned, it might be expected that God would provide enough evidence for his existence to rationally justify belief in him for all individuals. The argument from hiddenness stems from two existing phenomena that trouble proponents of both theism and atheism. The first is that there exist individuals who are never provided with evidence for God's existence. The paucity of evidence for this group of people presents a concern to many proponents of the argument from hiddenness because it suggests that the punishment for nonbelief, which according to the Christian tradition is an eternity of separation from God in Hell, falls inculpably on these nonresistant nonbelievers. This result would appear to exist in contradiction with multiple aspects of God's character, most notably divine justice, mercy, and love, and therefore cast doubt on the existence that such a God exists at all.

The second troubling feature of the argument from hiddenness applies to individuals who, although they know God and have access to at least some evidence to support rational belief in his existence, seek closer relationship with God to no avail. The

work of this thesis will be primarily applicable to this group of sufferers, who hold some predisposition towards belief but are in search of greater knowledge of God's being and closer proximity to him in an emotional and spiritual sense. The artistic lament examined within this thesis will provide a means of partially overcoming the problem of divine hiddenness in a way that would likely only be found plausible by such individuals, that is, those who already hold some knowledge of the nature and existence of God. For this group, the lack of accessibility to a God who claims to be loving, just, and merciful while also desiring relationship with his creation would appear inconsistent with the nature of such a God. The suffering that God's silence or hiddenness causes, which for some goes so far as to lead the abandonment of one's faith, yields a type of harm to the individual that also appears to exist in contradiction with the nature of a loving and relationally-focused God.

One of the central features of the argument from hiddenness is a claim pertaining to humankind's evidential situation in relation to God. Clarification is also needed regarding the term "evidence" – the meaning of this term as it applies to the discussion surrounding divine hiddenness, and more particularly, as it applies to the argument of this thesis. In epistemological terms, evidence is commonly thought of as that which justifies belief. Thus, evidence is the information that allows a belief to become justified, as the individual considers the evidence and evaluates it as something that either strengthens or weakens his belief.

One important feature to note about evidence is that its strength differs depending on the belief and the individual in question. What this means is that for some individuals, a piece of evidence might raise the probability of a belief being true to a greater degree

than it would for another individual. This feature of evidence in part depends on how likely an individual held the truth of her belief to be in the first place, and also on how convincing the individual perceives that particular piece of evidence as. In reference to divine hiddenness and artistic lament, this is a key feature of evidence that helps to explain why the same piece of evidence may affect an individual who presupposes the existence of God differently than it affects an individual who does not presuppose the existence of God.

The last concept to be clarified within the context of this work is that of "artistic lament". The argument of this thesis relies upon various sources that are frequently referred to as "artistic lament", and the central claim of this work is that such displays of emotional expression have the ability to provide evidence for theism to an individual who earnestly relays his lament towards God in an act of faith. The categorization of this body of evidence as "artistic" serves the purpose of differentiating it from other styles of expression that rely upon logic and rationality alone, or from experiences or experimentation that represent unobjectionable fact rather than emotion and subjective interpretation. In focusing on sources of this kind, the intention is to introduce a body of evidence that is not common to the philosophical discipline, but may nonetheless speak to an important aspect of the argument from hiddenness. The use of the term "artistic" denotes a certain creative freedom in which the artist is able to imbue the work with emotional significance that may or may not be interpreted in the same light by the audience consuming the work. The subjectivity and variety of experience associated with such expressions is what renders them of interest in the context of this argument, because these sources can apply to a wide range of individuals and be interpreted in light of each

individual's own situation, they have the unique ability to function as a means of relating to God on a personal level, and thus gaining the sort of personal confirmation and reassurance that pure rationality or factual revelation often fails to fulfill.

The term "lament" also holds special significance within the context of this thesis work as well. Lament is meant to denote a certain attitude from the individual towards the object of the address, and for the purpose of this work, "lament" will be used to suggest an expression of emotional distress in which the lamenter brings forth a grievance before God with the expectation of some rectification or comfort as a result. Expectation is an integral aspect of lament as it relates to the efficacy of this practice as a means of providing evidence, because it is through the fulfillment of this expectation that lament can facilitate evidence-gathering to support the existence of God. In other words, if an individual issues his lament towards God with the reasonable expectation of a particular emotional comfort as a result, and then goes on to receive that comfort, the act of lament can, through a sort of emotional catharsis, provide the lamenter with evidence that supports the existence of God. However, such expectation is not without its limits. For instance, the expectation that God provide the petitioner with the capacity to love his enemies is far more reasonable and scripturally-aligned than, for instance, the expectation that God supernaturally grant the petitioner a new Ferrari or a great romance.

These claims about the efficacy of spiritual lament to strengthen the individual's belief in God is not an original proposition, but rather one founded in the pages of scripture and the theological foundations of Christianity. The practice of thoughtful and purposeful lament is seen throughout the Bible, from the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, to the songs of David, to the cry of Jesus on the cross, suggesting that it is an

integral component of spiritual well-being. The practice of lament within the context of spiritual formation facilitates the sort of reciprocal relationship that the Scriptures suggest is desirable to the Christian God, thus increasingly the likelihood that God's presence would be found in the midst of such interactions. Prominent Old Testament scholar and theologian, Walter Brueggemann, describes the importance of such lament for healthy spiritual formation as such:

> Where there is lament, the believer is able to take initiative with God and so develop over against God the ego strength that is necessary for responsible faith. But where the capacity to initiate lament is absent, one is left only with praise and doxology. God then is omnipotent, always to be praised. The believer is nothing, and can uncritically praise or accept guilt where life with God does not function properly. The outcome is a 'False Self,' bad faith which is based in fear and guilt and lived out as resentful or self-deceptive works of righteousness. The absence of lament makes a religion of coercive obedience the only possibility…The second loss caused by the absence of lament is the *stifling of the question of theodicy.* I do not refer to some esoteric question of God's coping with ontological evil. Rather, I mean the capacity to raise and legitimate questions of justice in terms of social goods, social access, and social power.[7]

The practice of lament serves to facilitate a relationship in which, though God is infinitely greater in power and ability, the believer has a sense of agency to the extent that the state of affairs might be influenced by the lament of the believer. Though lament is not a method by which God's omnipotence may be superseded by human will, it opens a conversation that allows the lamenter to engage with Divine providence and issue a complaint that not only allows for the release of negative emotion, but is accompanied by the expectation of alteration to the current state of social or emotional affairs. Thus, artistic lament represents the process of an individual engaging in this type of complaint through the medium of subjective and interpretative sources that rely upon emotion, creativity, and a personal context to find their meaning.

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[7] Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 36 (1986): 57–71. http://jot.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/11/36/57.

Brief Overview of the Philosophical Discourse on Divine Hiddenness

It will be helpful before going forward to first establish some background on the state of the argument from hiddenness and some possible responses to the problem that have been posited and will be referenced throughout this thesis work. Although divine hiddenness has been discussed in various disciplines, contexts, and cultures for thousands of years, the problem was largely brought forth into modern philosophical discourse by J.L. Schellenberg, in his works, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (1993) and *The Wisdom to Doubt* (2007). Throughout these books, Schellenberg argues that divine hiddenness presents a significant barrier to theistic belief, and perhaps even support for the veracity of atheism. Much of the contemporary writing on the problem of divine hiddenness has relied upon Schellenberg's framing of the argument, whether in an attempt to discredit Schellenberg's argument or to bolster it. As I have previously mentioned, Schellenberg suggests that the category of individuals that he classifies as "nonresistant nonbelievers" stands in contrast to the existence of a loving, omniscient, and omnipotent God. Schellenberg claims that the body of evidence that is available to such individuals is insufficient to justify rational belief, and that the failure of these individuals to come to a state of belief in God is incurred at no fault of their own. The analogy that Schellenberg relies on throughout his argument is that of a parent-child relationship, likening God's love and direction to that of a parent communicating with his child. Schellenberg compares God's lack of adequate evidential provision to the scenario of a parent whispering caution to his child playing in the street, indicating a sort of culpable negligence on God's part by virtue of the observation that the strength of the evidence does not appear to match the gravity that the situation demands. The seeming

injustice that results from this expectation of God's evidential provision, stemming from assumptions of the nature of God's loving and just nature, presents what Schellenberg considers to be a significant problem to be reconciled with Christian theism.

In further development of his argument, Schellenberg acknowledges what he terms "unrecognized evidence"[8]. According to Schellenberg, unrecognized evidence can further be broken down into five categories: overlooked evidence, neglected evidence, inaccessible evidence, undiscovered evidence, and undiscoverable evidence. For the purposes of this work, two of these subcategories remain especially relevant. The first of these is overlooked evidence, which Schellenberg describes as the body of evidence that is available and accessible to an individual, but goes unrecognized due to distraction by other factors. Schellenberg does not attach human culpability to the category of overlooked evidence, because he asserts that the distraction of the individual is simply a feature of the situation and not necessarily an act of willful ignorance. The second subcategory of unrecognized evidence that may prove helpful in classifying artistic lament is that of undiscovered evidence. As is suggested by the name, undiscovered evidence is simply a body of evidence that, though accessible, has yet to be discovered by an individual. Each of these categories will be helpful in considering where evidence from artistic lament might be categorized, and how, at times, such evidence might go unrecognized by an individual and thus fail to factor into one's evidential justification for belief.

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[8] J.L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt a Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

Despite the prevalence of Schellenberg's version of the argument from hiddenness in contemporary analytic philosophy, Schellenberg's hypothesis is not without its critics. Various philosophers have found fault with claims and assumptions that Schellenberg makes, proposing that such aspects weaken the strength of the problem of divine hiddenness and undermine its role as a defeater to theism. For instance, philosopher Michael Rea claims that Schellenberg's criticism of the Christian God is an attack on a "straw deity" owing to the fact that Schellenberg's version of God is overly anthropomorphic, and thus falsely assumes that God would seek a more reciprocal and interactive relationship with man than might actually be consistent with his nature. Instead, Rea argues that Christian theology maintains that God is transcendent in nature, a quality which would, in Rea's understanding, justify the kind of separation that Schellenberg proposes as creating a problem in the form of divine hiddenness[9]. Another objection to Schellenberg's argument is made by Jon Kvanvig, who asserts that the problem of divine hiddenness does not have any power to change the epistemic status of theism. Kvanvig rejects Schellenberg's claim that, not accounting for the problem of divine hiddenness, the epistemic strength of theism and atheism are counterbalanced, a claim that Schellenberg uses to support his primary argument that the phenomenon of divine hiddenness ultimately tips the scales in favor of atheism. Kvanvig also argues that there is no true distinction between the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness, but rather that the latter is a mere subdivision of the former[10]. This

[9] Michael C. Rea, "Hiddenness and Transcendence," In *The Hiddenness of God*, (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[10] Jonathan L. Kvanvig, ``Divine Hiddenness: What is the Problem?", In Daniel Howard-Snyder & Paul Moser (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), 149-163.

relationship, between the problem of divine hiddenness and the problem of evil, is particularly relevant to the work of this thesis, as many of the artistic laments that will be examined appear to speak to these problems as closely interrelated. For many individuals, the hiddenness of God is especially troubling *in light of* the existence of evil in the world. Human suffering often prompts mankind to call for a response, a justification, from God. The hiddenness of God in these moments of suffering exacerbates feelings of loneliness and separation that are often detrimental to the ability of the individual to form relationship with God.

Another critique of Schellenberg's argument, proposed by philosopher Charity Anderson, criticizes Schellenberg's demand for "sufficient evidence"[11]. Anderson points out that, for many pieces of evidence, there exist defeaters, or pieces of competing evidence, that effectively discredit another piece of evidence, thus negating its role in adequately justifying a belief. Anderson argues that the strength of evidence that Schellenberg demands may actually require God to not only provide sufficient evidence for his existence, but to provide enough defeating evidence *to defeat every defeater*, which is actually a much stronger evidential claim than Schellenberg himself acknowledges in his argument. Moreover, Anderson proposes the analogy of glimpses as a more accurate analogy for the mode by which evidence for God's existence is often relayed. The ephemeral nature of interactions between humankind and God suggested in Christian Scriptures as well as personal accounts within the Christian tradition imply that God's provision of evidence is often presented in such a way that the evidence remains ambiguous and is often fleeting. This analogy will be especially helpful in its application

[11] *The Wisdom to Doubt a Justification of Religious Skepticism*.

to artistic lament as kind of evidence that often appears in this same interpretive, ambiguous light.

Artistic Lament as Evidence

In conclusion, this thesis will explore how artistic lament can be directed unto God as one seeks to increasingly uncover knowledge about and build relationship with the Divine. While these sources are not always straightforward in addressing divine hiddenness specifically, they provide the sort of robust and practical examples that Eleonore Stump calls for in *Wandering in Darkness* when she criticizes the discipline of analytic philosophy for often creating "philosophical crash-dummies" instead of complex and realistic situations[12]. The fact that these sources are not examining the problem of divine hiddenness in a vacuum serves to their benefit rather than their detriment, because such sources more accurately reflect the complex and dynamic nature of the individual and thus better encapsulate the nuances of the problem itself. Furthermore, the participatory nature of these sources enables not only their creator, but also their consumer, to partake in a sort of communal lament facilitated through the common experience of engaging with the source itself. For some, interaction with these artistic sources of lament can trigger the sort emotional reaction that prompts the realization of the type of mediated experiences with the presence of God[13] that are present throughout the Bible.

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[12] Eleonore Stump, "Philosophy and Narrative," *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010).

[13] Michael Rea, "Narrative, Liturgy, and the Hiddenness of God," *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, Kevin Timpe (ed.), (New York: Routledge 2009), 76–96.

With these artistic pieces, I am not attempting to argue that they are always or unquestionably intended as expressions of lament concerning divine hiddenness. This interpretation may in fact never have been the intention of their creators, nor may it be the most widely held interpretation of them either. Rather, I am seeking to argue that these artistic pieces *could* be perceived in such a way as to suggest *for some* that they express lament over the hiddenness of God. Furthermore, with the inclusion of these specific sources and the exclusion of others, I do not seek to suggest that these particular sources constitute a sort of cannon of artistic lament concerning God's hiddenness, but rather, that the phenomenon of artistic lament as an expression and means of understanding God's hiddenness exists, and that these sources could serve as examples of what this phenomenon might look like. However, this work by no means points to an exhaustive list of sources that could serve this function, but rather relies on examples that can be helpful in furthering the argument and adding a new dynamic to the current philosophical discourse pertaining to the hiddenness of God.

CHAPTER ONE

Lament in Storytelling

Introduction

This chapter will explore the medium of narrative, through both fictional works and biographical accounts, as a means of expressing lament over the hiddenness of God. Such sources enable the individual to craft a narrative, either from the basis of the individual's own life experiences or within the context of a fictional story, in order to add a depth of expression and an element of personal reality into the lament. The importance of such examples within this discussion is vital, because the complex characters and situations provided through narrative accounts supplement the philosophical inquiry with an emotional consideration that philosophy alone often fails to fully explore. As I have already asserted, to talk about divine hiddenness in a merely abstract sense often yields an incomplete understanding of not only the problem itself, but also its possible solutions.

Each of these sources offers a unique and dynamic example depicting the journey of individuals in their search for knowledge of God. C.S. Lewis's novel *Till We Have Faces* explores this question in the genre of myth while the biographical account of Mother Teresa, pieced together from her own private writings, views the problem in a deeply personal and intimate light. In contrast, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* utilizes fiction and astute social commentary to investigate the nuances of divine justice and human suffering.

Throughout these sources, the problem of divine hiddenness is examined as it applies to one or multiple characters that remain the focus of the narrative. However, in

consuming these sources, the reader also receives the benefit of extensive biographical information, character development, and contextual descriptions that flesh out the nuances of these characters and render them in a more realistic light. While divine hiddenness is not necessarily an isolated topic within these works – as the protagonists are often dealing with a plethora of other conditions, questions, and problems – this format actually provides a more accurate reflection of the reality of the problem of divine hiddenness. These sources each examine the larger questions of God's justice and hiddenness as it applies to the individual life. One of the leading benefits of such examination is that the problem of divine hiddenness is inextricably entangled with many of the other guiding questions of the human experience, and in providing such questioning and lament in the context of the individual, it is made more relatable to the reader's own life.

Lastly, these sources are participatory in the sense that they are presented in the format of stories, diaries, and letters. These narrative accounts are meant to be read and inhabited by the reader, thus lending themselves to the personal reflection and interpretation of their consumer. These personal accounts, both fictional and biographical, voice the lament of another written out on the page, and the reader is consequently invited to participate as he engages thoughtfully with the text. In this way, these narrative sources create a reflecting pool into which the reader might gaze at the questions resting upon his own heart and find comfort in seeing them penned by the hand of another.

Till We Have Faces

C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* wrestles directly with the question of God's hiddenness in the life of the individual. In transporting these philosophical questions into the realm of fantasy, Lewis provides his reader with a welcome emotional distance from which to contemplate one's own internal struggles. The novel is set within the fantastic kingdom of Glome, and details the life of Orual, the hideous and stubborn daughter of the king, as she seeks justice for herself, her family, and her kingdom in the midst of personal suffering and skepticism regarding the existence and theodicy of the gods. Orual's accusation that the gods have remained hidden from her, and furthermore, that this hiddenness has caused her harm, reflects the philosophical accusations against divine love made in the contemporary argument from hiddenness.

Often thought to be Lewis's most autobiographical novel and what he called "far and away my best book[1]," *Till We Have Faces* interfaces directly with these deeply important and spiritually troubling components concerning the nature of faith and evidence. Orual's character is framed in such a way that the reader is led to sympathize with her throughout the novel, and the composition of the book as a narrative crafted by Orual herself in the first-person point-of-view enables the reader to gain a sense of solidarity with Orual as the reader digests and interprets this expression. In this way, the individual is allowed to explore the nature of questioning and lament alongside Orual, and possibly resonate with certain aspects of the story that the reader may find applicable to himself.

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[1] Peter J. Schakel, "Till We Have Faces," In *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 281–293.

Orual's description of her evidential situation in relation to the gods mirrors what, for some theists, presents the most troubling aspect of the relationship between God and his creation. Orual's encounters with the cruel and faceless goddess Ungit and her son, the god of the Grey Mountain, are extremely limited. The evidence that Orual has at her disposal primarily consists of testimony from others regarding their prior experiences with the gods and superstitions connecting mysterious events to a divine presence[2]. Orual balks at the seemingly ignorant faith that the kingdom displays towards Ungit, borne mostly out of fear and superstition, and insinuates that such belief is, in many ways, an indicator of weakness and stupidity. Furthermore, like many theists, Orual is confronted with alternative philosophies, such as the skepticism and classical humanism espoused by her tutor, the Fox[3], that further leave her doubting the rationality of the gods' existence. Much of Orual's evidence concerning the existence of the gods comes from the testimony of others, such as Psyche's story of her experience with the god of the Grey Mountain[4]. However, Orual's own attempts at gaining supporting evidence for this encounter result in the destruction of Psyche's happiness as well as Orual's own[5], meanwhile the only first-hand evidence that Orual receives to corroborate theistic belief is a mere *glimpse* of the magnificent palace that Psyche described[6]. This glimpse presents what Anderson describes in her article as a sort of ambiguous and easily defeated form of evidence, and

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[2] C. S. (Clive Staples) Lewis, *Till We Have Faces : a Myth Retold* Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1967).

[3] *Ibid,* 8.

[4] *Ibid,* 111.

[5] *Ibid,* 172-174.

[6] *Ibid,* 132.

in Orual's case, her own prior skepticism regarding the existence of the gods quickly serves as a defeater for such a weak sign of divine presence. Until Orual's direct encounter with the enraged god of the Grey Mountain – after Psyche has already betrayed the god's command not to see his face – Orual's evidential situation in relation to the gods was arguably quite poor. This encounter of overwhelmingly convincing evidence arrives too late, in Orual's opinion, for her to form rational belief in the existence of the gods prior to making the irreparable mistake of convincing Psyche to betray the god of the Grey Mountain. Such a situation strikes Orual as a grave injustice on the part of the gods.

It is this evidential background that both sets the scene for Orual's complaint within the novel, and facilitates a connection to the plight of the Christian believer seeking evidence for God. Like Orual, many individuals find that their encounters with the Divine come in the form of second-hand and, at rare times, first-hand, testimony of mysterious and supernatural events connected to God's action in the world. Biblical accounts and stories of miracles can be viewed as such evidence, and though prevalent, such evidential forms remain open to criticism from those desiring more objective or personal forms of evidence. Orual's experience of a divine glimpse, her brief vision of the grey palace, mirrors the experiences that many Christians claim as supporting evidence for the existence of God. Glimpses of God through dreams and visions are one common method of God's revelation within the Christian tradition, instances which closely align with the sort of brief and easily defeated type of evidence that Orual receives when she glimpses at the god of the Grey Mountain's palace. This connection

helps enable the reader to further sympathize with Orual's situation, and serves to facilitate connections between Orual's evidential position and the reader's own.

Beyond the suggestions that *Till We Have Faces* seems to make regarding the nature of the human-divine relationship and the quality of evidence supporting the existence of a divine being, the novel also contains an interesting display of personal lament that serves an integral role in the protagonist's struggles with theism. Towards the end of the story, Orual experiences feverish delusions in which she finds herself standing in front of the gods, awaiting judgement. The gods force Orual to read her complaint and, in this moment, Orual realizes that the expression of her complaint, the uttering of her lament, also serves as the very answer that she is seeking[7]. As Orual recounts the events of her life within her compliant, attempting to levy blame upon the gods for their lack of presence in her life, she comes to realize that evidence was available to her all along, though she stubbornly chose to ignore or discredit the evidence. The culpability of Orual's unbelief and the repercussions of her subsequent actions suddenly falls upon her, although she has spent her entire life blaming the gods for the pain that she inflicted on Psyche. The power of this experience for Orual, the power of her lament over the gods' hiddenness throughout her life, brings about a release of emotional suffering that remains instrumental in Orual's reconciliation of the gods' presence within her life and her acknowledgement of personal fault.

Elements of how the novel resolves and the determinations that Orual makes regarding her own culpability and transformation can be interpreted as Lewis asserting his own subtle claims about the justification for divine hiddenness as the problem is

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[7] Ibid, 287.

paralleled in our own world. Orual's realization of personal fault, the evidence that she refused to acknowledge and the ways in which she undermined her own belief, could suggest that Lewis is, at least partially, attributing the problem of divine hiddenness to human ignorance and misinterpretation. If Orual is taken to represent the religious skeptic, then this judgement could be taken to suggest that the amount of evidence for God's existence is not the primary barrier to belief, but rather the lack of human willingness and diligence in gathering and interpreting the evidence that is available. In this example, we see a sort of counterargument to Schellenberg's claim about unrecognized evidence as a fault of the divine nature, with Lewis suggesting that the onus of this oversight is on the believer herself. Lewis espouses a version of this view in his book entitled *Miracles,* in which he asserts that:

> When you are looking at a garden from a room upstairs it is obvious (when you think about it) that you are looking through a window. But if it is the garden that interests you, you may look at it for a long time without thinking of the window…The fact which is in one respect the most obvious and primary fact, and through which you have access to all the other facts, may be precisely the one that is most easily forgotten—forgotten not because it is so remote or abstruse but because it is so near and so obvious. And that is exactly how the Supernatural has been forgotten[8].

In this way, Lewis appears to suggest that the existence of God is in many ways *so* obvious that it often goes overlooked, a phenomenon that he demonstrates throughout *Till We Have Faces*. According to this explanation, it is not necessarily because God is hiding away evidence of his existence that we miss signs of him, but rather, because human beings see God everywhere, consequently leading them to overlook the obvious evidence supporting his existence. This interpretation of the problem of overlooked evidence places the fault of ignorance primarily on the individual, as Lewis does for Orual in *Till*

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[8] C.S. Lewis, *Miracles,* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947), 44–45.

We Have Faces. In this implicit reply to the problem of divine hiddenness, Lewis suggests that it is not a lack of evidence that humankind suffers from, but rather a culpable ignorance brought about by one's own failure to properly recognize the available evidence as such.

In addition to the commentary that *Till We Have Faces* appears to be making about the nature of evidence as it relates to the problem of divine hiddenness, the novel also focuses on the utilization of lament as a means of strengthening one's belief in the divine. The artistic expression of the problem, steeped in the novel's development of character and plot, allows for a full and emotionally-informed consideration of one version of the argument from hiddenness. Orual's expression of lament is both relatable and cathartic. In narrating the novel through Orual's perspective, Lewis creates a connection between Orual and the reader as that of storyteller and listener. Orual is able to reveal her struggles, the harms inflicted upon her, and the thought processes behind many of her actions in such a way that the reader might be drawn towards her in sympathy. Moreover, the reader gains the sense that as Orual writes these words, to be passed on to a readership that she herself cannot quite identify, Orual is participating in a cathartic release of emotion. Amidst Orual's first-person narration of the events of her life, the reader witnesses Orual as narrator coming to a better understanding of her past and the workings of the gods around her. Orual eventually seems to find some peace in the release of her memories and emotions within the pages of her memoir, highlighting the efficacy of the written medium in bringing about understanding within the framework of the novel itself. This process, internal to the novel, possibly reflects the reader's experience with the work as well, as the novelistic medium draws the reader into an

experiential encounter with Orual's story in such a way that he is able to relate to her evidential situation and ultimately to find solidarity with Orual's lament.

The resolution that Orual settles upon at the end of the novel suggests that the actual expression of lament, the act of issuing her complaint before the gods, brings about an illuminating revelation of her own fault and the ways in which evidence throughout her life has gone unrecognized or misinterpreted[9]. By portraying this lament as such an integral component of Orual's spiritual reconciliation, Lewis appears to emphasize the importance of lament in the framework of religious belief. Orual is able to stand before the gods and issue her complaint before them, thus enabling her the type of "ego strength" that Brueggemann asserts is "necessary for a responsible faith"[10]. This prominent display of lament within the story brings to the forefront of the novel the role that lament plays in the process of spiritual development, and by incorporating this feature into the story, Lewis facilitates the connection of Orual's personal lament to the larger message of the novel as its own instance of spiritual lament. Through Orual's realization, the reader can be led to make similar revelations regarding his own situation, to empathize with Orual's emotional distress and physical struggles, and to similarly find the catharsis of lament in himself through the process of reading about and relating to Orual's journey.

Saint Mother Teresa

Turning from the genre of fiction to the examination of a historical, personal account, the biography and writings of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta provide an

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[9] *Ibid,* 294.

[10] "The Costly Loss of Lament".

alternative encounter with artistic lament over the hiddenness of God. Renowned for her extraordinary acts of faith and service as well as the foundation of the Sisters of Charity, a service-based Catholic religious order in the slums of Calcutta, Saint Mother Teresa is one of the most well-known and respected examples of Christian charity within the past century. However, despite her unwavering faithfulness, an examination of Mother Teresa's private writings reveals that the pious nun experienced an intense spiritual darkness for much of her life as the result of what she considered to be "an apparent absence of God from her life, and, at the same time, a painful longing for him." [11] Mother Teresa's struggles with the hiddenness of God resulted in intense internal suffering that remained a burden to her throughout her lifetime, and despite the unwavering conviction that she maintained regarding her faith and her missionary work in Calcutta, Mother Teresa reported experiencing excruciating emotional anguish as a result of God's hiddenness.

In 1937, prior to her profession of perpetual vows, Mother Theresa wrote a letter to the Jesuit Father Franjo Jambrekovi, her confessor in Skopje, making her first reference to the darkness that would become a pervasive component of her spiritual journey. The young Mother Teresa wrote of her darkness, saying:

> Do not think that my spiritual life is strewn with roses that is the flower which I hardly ever find on my way. Quite the contrary, I have more often as my companion 'darkness.' And when the night becomes very thick – and it seems to me as if I will end up in hell – then I simply offer myself to Jesus.[12]

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[11] Mother Teresa and Brian Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa : Come Be My Light : the Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta"* 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

[12] *Ibid,* 20.

In his commentary on this excerpt, Brian Kolidiejchuk, director of the Mother Teresa Center, observes that:

> It is difficult to grasp precisely what 'darkness' meant for her at this time, but in the future the term would come to signify profound interior suffering, lack of sensible consolation, spiritual dryness, an apparent absence of God from her life, and, at the same time, a painful longing for Him. Her brief description makes it clear that most of the time she was not enjoying the light and consolation of God's sensible presence but rather striving to live by faith, surrendering with love and confidence to God's good pleasure.[13]

In this early mention of her spiritual desolation, Mother Teresa briefly discusses the condition that will plague her for a majority of her life. Despite her assertion within the very same letter stating that, "I am happy – yes happier than ever. And I would not wish at any price to give up my sufferings," this condition will serve as the proverbial "thorn in the flesh"[14] for the remainder of Mother Teresa's lifetime. After professing her perpetual vows on May 24, 1937, Mother Teresa faithfully continued her work at St. Mary's, and in 1942, she made a remarkable private vow that governed the remainder of her spiritual life and her practical decisions. "I made a vow to God, binding under [pain of] mortal sin, to give to God anything that He may ask, 'Not to refuse Him anything.'"[15] This vow, stemming from Mother Teresa's desire to, "give God something very beautiful…without reserve,"[16] was known only to herself and a select number of her spiritual leaders throughout her lifetime. For the course of her remaining time serving in the Loreto order as principal nun of St. Mary's, Mother Teresa faithfully upheld this vow as she led the community and their young charges through the events of World War II,

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[13] *Ibid,* 21-22.

[14] 2 Corinthians 12:8

[15] *Come Be My Light,* 29.

[16] *Ibid,* 29.

the Bengal famine of 1942-1943, and the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India known as "The Day of Great Killing" with extraordinary faithfulness and courage[17].

The turning point in Mother Teresa's vocational call came in 1946, when she was on the train to her annual retreat at the Loreto convent in Darjeeling. Mother Teresa described this moment as "'a call within a call' to satiate the thirst of Jesus by serving Him in the poorest of the poor."[18] After this moment of spiritual discernment, Mother Teresa began to experience interior locutions[19] over the course of the next few months, which she identified as the direct the voice of Jesus himself, speaking to his "own little one", urging her to "*Come, come, carry Me into the holes of the poor. Come, be My light.*"[20] Such explicit contact from the Divine, though relatively rare in the Christian tradition, is not unheard of, particularly among the saints. Mother Teresa, recognizing the significance of this command, desired to act at once and, in accordance with her personal vow, fulfill the wishes of Jesus's call.

Despite the many logistical, spiritual, and institutional challenges that Mother Teresa faced in the early years of her work in the slums, by 1953 Mother Teresa's community consisted of 26 members dedicated to serving the poor, sick, and dying with a commitment to faithful humility[21]. Five years into her work in the slums, Mother Teresa

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[17] *Ibid,* 35-37.

[18] *Ibid,* 40.

[19] The mystical concept of interior locutions is believed by some religions, including the Roman Catholic Church, to be a spiritual communication from God to an individual through the introduction of outside thoughts, ideas, or visions that relay a Divine message.

[20] *Ibid,* 44.

[21] *Ibid,* 148.

finally shared the closely-held secret of her internal struggles with another of her spiritual mentors, Father Périer, writing:

> Please pray specially for me that I may not spoil His work and that Our Lord may show Himself – for there is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started 'the work.' Ask Our Lord to give me courage.[22]

Although her religious order was thriving and "many a soul [was being] brought to God,"[23] internally Mother Teresa wrote, "my own soul remains in deep darkness"[24]. Throughout the years, Mother Teresa expressed the extent and longevity of this internal darkness, "the feeling of absence of God,"[25] that remained largely unbroken in her letters to Father Van Exem, Father Périer, and her third confessor and friend, Father Picachy[26]. In October of 1958, after ten years of painful silence from God, Mother Teresa experienced a brief moment in which, "disappeared that long darkness, that pain of loss – of loneliness – of that strange suffering of ten years. Today my soul is filled with love with joy untold – with an unbroken union of love."[27] However, this moment of reprieve was short-lived, and Mother Teresa's struggle with her own internal darkness quickly returned. In a letter to Father Picachy in 1959, Mother Teresa pens one of her most poignant descriptions of her anguished emotional state, addressed to God directly, her letter reads:

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[22] *Ibid,* 149.

[23] *Ibid,* 152.

[24] *Ibid, 155.*

[25] *Ibid,* 164.

[26] *Ibid,* 178.

[27] *Ibid,* 177.

> Lord, my God, who am I that you should forsake me? The child of your love – and now become as the most hated one – the one You have thrown away as unwanted – unloved. I call, I cling, I want – and there is no One to answer – no One on Whom I can cling – no, No One. – Alone. The darkness is so dark – and I am alone. – Unwanted, forsaken. – The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable. Where is my faith? – even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness & darkness. – My God – how painful is this unknown pain[28].

Despite the intensity of this pain, Mother Teresa bore her suffering with considerable grace, maintaining that, "the smile is a big cloak which covers a multitude of pains."[29] By 1975, the Sisters of Charity included "over a thousand sisters in eighty-five foundations in fifteen countries,"[30] a vast difference from the lone nun who entered the slums in 1948. Throughout this time, despite the thriving of her religious order, Mother Teresa continued to experience the crippling internal burden of God's hiddenness. Though she maintained her joyous and gracious disposition, her letters to close friends and religious confidents painted an entirely different internal picture filled with acute loneliness and pain. Mother Teresa saw her internal suffering as a reflection of the outward conditions of those whom she so passionately helped, noting that: "The poor in the streets unwanted, unloved unclaimed – are the true picture of my own spiritual life, of my love for Jesus."[31]

In spite of her desperate internal condition, Mother Teresa's work among the poor and marginalized continued to thrive. In 1979, Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in India[32], and despite the advent of health struggles that would plague

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[28] *Ibid,* 187.

[29] *Ibid,* 176.

[30] *Ibid,* 267.

[31] *Ibid,* 232.

[32] *Ibid, 290.*

her for the next two decades, Mother Teresa continued to travel, serving the poor and exhorting others to always maintain "a big smile for all"[33]. In 1987, as Mother Teresa's health continued to fail, she was gifted with a sign of Divine communication when she was given a message through a priest in Rome, which he received by means of a similar internal locution as that of Mother Teresa's first calling. This message was simply, "Tell Mother Teresa, 'I thirst'"[34]. This message struck Mother Teresa as deeply significant, given her constant emphasis on satiating the thirst of Jesus by serving the poor. For Mother Teresa, this thirst was mirrored in her own unrequited desire to be loved and filled with the presence of God, and this connection between the thirst of Jesus and the thirst of her darkness impressed her as especially profound. After fifty-five years of faithfully upholding her vow never to refuse God anything, Mother Teresa passed away on September 5, 1997[35]. As if at least partially knowledgeable of the incredible legacy that she would leave, Mother Teresa often maintained that, "If I ever become a saint – I will surely be one of 'darkness.' I will continually be absent from heaven – to light the light of those in darkness on earth."[36] Ironically, although she knew darkness intimately well, the legacy that Mother Teresa left behind was one of astonishing light, grace, and love for her God and others.

Mother Teresa's experience with divine hiddenness remains a profound mystery with troubling spiritual implications for those that maintained absolute confidence in the vivacity of her spiritual life and religious devotion. Throughout her lifetime, Mother

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[33] *Ibid,* 304.

[34] *Ibid,* 310.

[35] *Ibid,* 333.

[36] *Ibid,* 338.

Teresa's actions and words reflected a boundless joy and faithful sincerity that rendered the revelation of her spiritual desolation all the more shocking. Furthermore, the former presence of such clear and explicit Divine communication prior to Mother Teresa's experience with hiddenness creates two dichotomous spiritual states that suggest that the nun was not unreachable nor ignorant of divine communication, but devoid of such revelation against her own wishes. The alignment of Mother Teresa's spiritual darkness with the foundation of the Sisters of Charity marks her spiritual journey with interesting temporal significance, appearing in a way to render her own emotional struggles as a personal sacrifice required in return for the success of her religious mission. The more that the Sisters of Charity thrived, the more prevalently Mother Teresa felt the absence of God in her spiritual life.

Mother Teresa's struggle with divine hiddenness presents a deviation from the complaint issued in most of the literature surrounding the topic, in that Mother Teresa did not attribute her inner turmoil to a lack of evidence supporting God's existence, in fact she never indicated any doubt over the existence of God at all. Rather, Mother Teresa's claims were focused on the emotional distance that she felt from God on a deeply personal level, and rather than inducing skepticism and doubt, Mother Teresa's struggle with hiddenness produced in her a heavy burden of continued piety despite the lack of spiritual light in her life. Mother Teresa expressed this tumult of emotions and the depth of her suffering only in the confines of her most trusted correspondence with spiritual advisors and the seclusion of her own private writings, with the explicit request that none of these expressions were ever to be published or consumed beyond their intended audience. The catharsis of lament within these writings and the spiritual sacrament of

confession were inextricably intertwined for Mother Teresa, and this relationship between expression and forgiveness introduces a unique and integral component into the value of artistic lament for devoutly religious individuals such as Mother Teresa. In such cases, it is often within the context of confession that feelings of abandonment and questioning are expressed towards God, and it is in this setting that expectation is so engrained within the lament. As the individual confesses her separation from God, she participates in a request that is accompanied by an acknowledgement of God's power to provide comfort, and at the same time an expression of faith in God's willingness to hear and answer the requests of his supplicants. This relationship is one built on faithful humility combined with particular confidence that God will not only take into account, but act upon, the cries of those who lament righteously unto him.

Another component of Mother Teresa's narrative account that renders it unique within this body of work is the form that it takes. Mother Teresa's story contains the real events of her life, her undisguised emotional suffering, and can be directly traced to specific circumstantial struggles throughout Mother Teresa's biographical journey. The connection that the reader is able to make with both Mother Teresa's story and with her struggle concerning divine hiddenness is in many ways similar to the type of connection that can be made between the reader and Orual. Each of these sources provides the sort of character development and mental consumption of plot conducive to readership. However, the reality of Mother Teresa's existence and the knowledge that she was a historical person who actually experienced the things that she writes about further imbues her testimony with a weighty significance for many readers.

Mother Teresa's account provides a particularly interesting layer to the discussion of divine hiddenness because her pious and unselfish dedication to the faith casts doubt on the argument against divine hiddenness on the sole basis of human culpability. The position that divine hiddenness is caused only by human sin, disobedience, and lack of faithfulness appears less plausible under the consideration of Mother Teresa's testimony. Mother Teresa's private struggle with the faith, particularly in light of her personal vow "under pain of mortal sin…'Not to refuse Him anything'"[37], exhibits a counterexample to this argument. Though it is in a sense possible that Mother Teresa could merely be another faithless and disobedient individual suffering from God's hiddenness as a consequence of her own wanton behavior, this seems unlikely given her heroic acts of faith and the accounts of close personal friends and individuals with whom she interacted during her lifetime.

Such suffering inflicted on a faithful servant of God is not unprecedented in the Christian tradition, and the story of Job contained in the Old Testament exemplifies an instance of this phenomenon. The Christian religion itself appears to deny this appeal to human culpability as a complete justification for God's hiddenness by the inclusion of such examples of Christian piety met with feelings of distance from God and spiritual desolation. Another similar account comes from the 16th century Christian mystic, Saint John of the Cross. The particular relevancy of St. John of the Cross's theology, which other writers have already explored to some extent in conjunction with the philosophical problem of divine hiddenness[38], are his writings on what he termed "the Dark Night of

[37] *Ibid,* 32.

[38] Laura L. Garcia "St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness," *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K Moser, (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 83-97.

the Soul". Mother Teresa and her spiritual confessors acknowledged the similarity of her spiritual suffering to those of St. John of the Cross, and though Mother Teresa saw the connection between the her own suffering and that of St. John's, she felt that her own spiritual desolation differed from St. John's essentially in its purpose[39]. While St. John of the Cross viewed his Dark Night as a crucible intended for higher spiritual understanding, Mother Teresa humbly saw her experience with God's hiddenness as a means by which she could fulfill her personal vow to refuse God nothing, no matter what was demanded of her. However, what is clear from such examples is that the hiddenness of God carries the potential to inflict immense personal suffering on the individual. Mother Teresa's description of her own excruciating emotional struggles as a result of God's hiddenness further exemplifies the ways in which divine hiddenness might pose a significant burden to not only to the unbeliever, but to the devout Christian as well. Furthermore, consideration of the suffering that Mother Teresa bore as a result of God's hiddenness merits pause in light of the spiritual tenets of Divine love, justice, and mercy – calling into question how God's hiddenness can exist in conjunction with these truths of the faith.

In terms of the larger philosophical debate, Mother Teresa's struggle with the hiddenness of God is distinct from the type of hiddenness that the argument typically focuses on, because she does not necessarily lament a lack of *evidence* for God's existence or the absence of his material involvement in her personal life. On the contrary, Mother Teresa constantly references her observations of the work that God is doing around her on a daily basis. Rather, Mother Teresa's lament identifies the emotional

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[39] *Come Be My Light,* 218.

distance from God as the cause of her suffering and loneliness. It is not a lack of evidence that comprises this kind of hiddenness, but a lack of love. This experience suggests that it is possible to struggle with the emotional aspect of the hiddenness problem without struggling with the problem's evidential aspects. Though Mother Teresa felt the spiritual absence of God in her life, her great reverence for and constant desire to partake of Holy Communion suggests that she craved the physical presence of Christ to compensate for the emotional absence that she felt. Mother Teresa's contemporaries noted that she would often make the remark, "How beautiful to have received Jesus twice today"[40] on days in which she was able to take Communion more than once. Such a focus on the comforting value of the Eucharist will also be a theme present in the works of Gerard Manley Hopkins and George Herbert, poets examined within the following chapter. The prevalence of this practice in the lives of those suffering from the problem of divine hiddenness suggests that the practice of this sacrament appears to provide a unique comfort to religious individuals experiencing the hiddenness of God.

Though it may seem from an examination of her correspondence that Mother Teresa was very open about her internal struggles, the reality is that she kept the secret of her darkness quite closely, confiding in only a handful of trusted friends and confessors throughout her lifetime. Many of Mother Teresa's surviving accounts of her emotional struggle were written in the form of letters, often meant to be confessions solely to her religious superiors. It was Mother Teresa's explicit instruction within many of these letters that they be burned after being read. Mother Teresa felt that these correspondences

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[40] *Ibid,* 213.

were a highly personal matter, and she was deeply afraid of receiving undue public credit for both her suffering and her success[41].

Despite Mother Teresa's desire for privacy, these letters which reveal the depths of her internal state remain illuminating and comforting for many. For the reader, an insight into such intimate and honest accounts of hiddenness and lament can create a space for personal lament in the act of reading Mother Teresa's private reflections. The vulnerability of Mother Teresa's letters allows the reader a glimpse into the depths of her suffering and the intricacies of her faithfulness in spite of this suffering. In this experience, the reader might find that he shares similar feelings of abandonment, suffering, or distance from God as those expressed by Mother Teresa, and the intimacy of her letters might enable this shared experience to act as a comfort for the reader. Paired with the background knowledge of Mother Teresa's own incredible philanthropic and religious accomplishments, this glimpse into the nun's internal suffering and the desperate nature of her lament to God creates a sort of consoling experience for many readers who find comfort in the fact that even a religiously devout figure such as Mother Teresa can feel the suffering of spiritual abandonment. If in fact the reader does share a similar experience of God's hiddenness as that expressed by Mother Teresa, knowledge of her faithfulness in the midst of this suffering might act as a beacon of hope to the reader, and serve as a reassurance of God's faithfulness in the lives of humankind.

It is worth noting that this ability to share in the suffering of another through letters and correspondence is a concept that Mother Teresa herself promoted, particularly among her religious order. In a letter to Archbishop Périer, Mother described a system of

[41] *Ibid,* 4.

correspondence that she set up between her followers in the Sisters of Charity and sick individuals around the world. In her letter, Mother Teresa explains the relationship as such:

> I have started with the sick a spiritual relationship. Every Sister has a second self – to pray & suffer for her - & the Sisters will share her good works & prayers with her. – Spiritually they are children of the Society – so I have some in England, Brussels, Antwerp, Switzerland, Calcutta who have joined, men, women, children.[42]

From this practice, it appears that Mother Teresa believed in the ability to share suffering and facilitate spiritual connection through these correspondences between her Sisters and sick supporters around the world. Interestingly enough, this relationship of vicarious suffering is also present in Lewis's novel *Till We Have Faces*, as Orual's suffering throughout her life is an assumption of the suffering that Psyche otherwise would have undergone throughout her punitive trials[43]. In each of these situations, one fictional and one historical, the transfer of emotional and even physical suffering is facilitated and shared among individuals, enabled by a sort of spiritual connection and solidarity. It is perhaps a similar connection that imbues these narrative accounts with the ability to assume and process the suffering of the reader as well, and throughout this issuing of lament by both protagonist and reader, each party is answered in part by the mere fact that there is another voice returned to them, iterating the same cry. The sense of emotional and spiritual comfort that is gained throughout this process can serve as a reassurance for the reader that her lament is not alone, but joined by a collection of similar voices. Such reassurance can, for some, serve as confirming evidence that God hears, and answers, these cries in part with the comfort of community. Thus, this

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[42] *Ibid,* 153.

[43] *Till We Have Faces,* 300.

experience might serve to further the lamenter's evidential situation through the provision of an altered state of affairs. Namely, the presence of others to help one bear the burden of suffering.

The Brothers Karamazov

We now turn to examine our last source portraying the problem of divine hiddenness through narrative storytelling: Fyodor Dostoevsky's 19th century Russian novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*[44]. This account differs from the previous two that we have examined in that, as a work of realistic fiction, *The Brothers Karamazov* brings us to a third type of narrative that allows for exploration of the problem of divine hiddenness with the flexibility of fictional innovation, but unlike Lewis's novel, remains set in the midst of our own world, thus remaining closer to the reader's reality. The novel takes place in a small Russian town, utilizing the lives of three brothers to examine questions of family, society, human nature, and faith. The last of these, faith, is the component that renders this work of particular significance in posing the question of how artistic lament can help alleviate the problem of divine hiddenness. The personal struggles of the characters within the novel, their dialogue and thought processes as revealed to the reader by a third-person, limited narrator, bring us in proximity with the essential questions of evidence and rational belief that remain at the forefront of the argument from hiddenness. In particular, *The Brothers Karamazov* wrestles with the tension between human expectations of God concerning what the evidence supporting his existence might look like, and the reality of God's presence in human lives. However, like the other examples of narrative lament that we have examined within this chapter, the question of divine

[44] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Translated by Constance Garnett, (Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003).

hiddenness is entangled with a variety of other struggles and existential questions with which the novel's characters are forced to wrestle.

The plot of *The Brothers Karamazov* revolves around the tumultuous relationships of the members of the Karamazov family as well as their close friends, love interests, and other members of their provincial town. The primary conflict of the novel exists between the foolish and prodigal patriarch of the family, Fyodor Karamazov, and his fiery and reckless eldest son, Dimitri Fyodorovitch Karamazov. The two men have a profound hatred for one another, and Dimitri particularly resents his father for denying him his inheritance and attempting to woo the woman that he loves, Grushenka, away from him. Fyodor's middle son, Ivan Fyodorovitch Karamazov, stands in contrast to his elder brother as a deeply philosophical and intellectual figure, well-respected by everyone in the town. Ivan maintains a civil, albeit strained, relationship with both his father and eldest brother, and is guided primarily by calculated reason, as opposed to Dimitri's passionate outbursts. The youngest Karamazov, Alexey Fyodorovitch (Alyosha), differs almost entirely from his father and brothers in disposition and character. Alyosha, a deeply religious and exceedingly gentle young man, is the primary protagonist of the novel, navigating the complications of his familial relationships and pondering questions of faith and human nature as he struggles to care for each of his family members despite their tense and, at times, violent relations with one another. Fyodor's fourth son, Smerdyakov, is the illegitimate child borne from Fyodor's sexual violation of the town's poor, mentally retarded village woman, nicknamed "Stinking Lizaveta". Smerdyakov works in his father's household as the cook, suffers from sporadic and debilitating seizures, and considers only Ivan to be his intellectual equal and, as a result, remains

highly attracted to and influenced by Ivan's nihilistic philosophy. When Fyodor Karamazov is murdered and Dimitri is the suspected killer, the novel's plot is plunged into greater complexity and the nature of the Karamazov family's unique situation is explored.

The question of God's existence is one of the central themes throughout *The Brothers Karamazov*. Much of the discussion between Ivan and Alyosha revolves around this point, and the two characters present starkly contrasting frameworks for viewing matters of faith and religion. Ivan, the skeptical intellectual, and Alyosha, the innocent and faithful religious devotee, fundamentally disagree on this central point, and it is this disagreement that prompts some of their most introspective dialogue and impassioned lament concerning the subject.

Each of the Karamazov men pose the question of God's existence at one point or another during the course of the novel, and the answer that each man finds in conjunction with his actions and his fate presents an interesting suggestion about the weighty consequences that an individual's belief in God holds. For the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov,* the truth of God's existence is not only important in an introspective, faith-driven sense, but also as an attempt to establish a standard of morality. As Fyodor puts it in one of the opening scenes of the novel, "'If there is a God, if He exists, then, of course, I'm to blame, and I shall have to answer for it. But if there isn't a god at all, what do they deserve, your fathers?"[45] Ivan later reiterates a similar sentiment towards God's existence when he fatefully exclaims to Smerdyakov that, in light his own lack of faith, "everything

[45] *Ibid,* 129.

is lawful"[46]. For the Karamazov men, the veracity of theism determines not only one's religious obligations, but one's social and legal obligations as well. For Fyodor and Ivan, their disbelief in the existence of God yields a sort of untethered morality that breeds in Fyodor a wanton recklessness and disregard for normative obligations, while in Ivan a deep skepticism and disdain for the condition of the social world. Ivan expresses his point of view in a discussion with Alyosha that contains a sort of lament over the problem of unjustified evil in the world and the seeming lack of supernatural justice and mercy that allows such evil to reign freely. Ivan's complaint against God and his primary reason for denying the Christian faith is motivated by what Ivan views as a failure on God's part to live up to the loving, merciful, and just characteristics of his proposed nature. In this way, Ivan's expression of the problem of divine hiddenness mirrors that of the contemporary philosophical discourse, and yet, Ivan's complaint is elicited in the midst of a complex fictional story in which the nuances of personality and plot bear light on his expression of discontent.

The two chapters that will be of particular focus in in our discussion of divine hiddenness are positioned in the first third of the novel, prior to Fyodor's murder and amidst the reader's introduction to the prevalent themes and characters that comprise *The Brothers Karamazov.* These chapters, entitled "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor", relay a conversation between the skeptical Ivan and the faithful Alyosha. In this section of the novel, Ivan presents an intellectual inquiry into the existence of God in conjunction with the problem of evil in the world. Ivan's conversation with Alyosha in these two chapters, though maintaining a somewhat sardonic tone, also suggests a certain anger

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[46] *Ibid,* 568.

and, to some degree, a desperation concerning God's nature and the problem of evil. Although Ivan attempts to assume an almost jesting levity throughout the questions he poses in this conversation, the severity of his assertions and his later descent into madness and torment by the Devil suggest that deliberations concerning God's nature, and particularly his justice, remain all too serious for Ivan. For this reason, Ivan's speeches in "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor" might be interpreted as a sort of lament and a request for understanding in the midst of God's hiddenness and the problem of human suffering.

Throughout the dialogue which ensues between Ivan and Alyosha, Ivan presents a series of real-life examples as he seeks to complicate and dispute Alyosha's faith. The first of Ivan's examples revolves around the story of an executed Frenchman named Richard. Raised without proper human care or socialization, Richard resorted to stealing food from pigs to survive. Eventually, Richard kills and robs a man and is then sentenced to death for his crimes. While awaiting his execution, Richard hears the teachings of Christianity and adopts the faith, repenting of his sins. On the day of Richard's punishment, as he walks towards the scaffold to his death, Christians standing in the crowd cry out to him, "'Yes, yes Richard, die in the Lord, you have shed blood and must die in the Lord. Though it's not your fault that you knew nothing of the Lord when you envied the swine their food and were beaten for stealing it…but still you have shed blood and must die…This is your happiest day, for you are going to the Lord."[47] For Ivan, this story illustrates not only another example of the presence of evil in the world, but also the absurdity of the Christian religion as that which condemns immoral acts on the basis of

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[47] *Ibid,* 221.

Christian teachings, despite the fact that some individuals have never had the opportunity to learn of the faith or its moral requirements. In this way, Richard represents a literary example of what Schellenberg might call a “nonresistant nonbeliever”, meaning an individual who is not actively resisting belief in God’s existence, but nonetheless has not come to believe in God due to a lack of evidence to support that belief. Richard is called upon to answer for his crimes, committed out of ignorance and visceral desire, with the punishment of death. His actions are condemned, and yet the society and institutions that allowed him to fall into sin without any knowledge of the Gospel bear no criticism, particularly that which is supposedly most concerned with Richard’s moral actions and salvation: the Church.

Through the story of Richard, Ivan poses the question of God’s justice in light of the problem of divine hiddenness. Despite being alone in the world and without moral or religious instruction, Richard is condemned for his sins and sentenced to die. The shortened and tragic life of Richard is in many ways a result of his heathenism, and yet, in the words of the pious Christians calling out to Richard, Ivan implicitly states the heart of this injustice: “’Though it’s not your fault you knew nothing of the Lord…still you have shed blood and must die.’” The distribution of punishment paired with the admission of innocence, at least for Richard’s spiritual failings, yields what Ivan insinuates to be an unjust paradox within the Christian faith. For Ivan, this failure on the part of God and Christians to meet his expectations of proper justice and mercy undermines the value of such a religion and such a God – deeming faith an unworthy proposition.

It is in light of this deliberation on the problem of divine hiddenness that Ivan proceeds to describe to Alyosha a series of other examples of evil perpetrated in the world, particularly evil deeds committed against children. Through these examples, Ivan seeks to make his point that, even if God does exist, the world that he created is so full of evil and suffering that the God who created it must not be worthy of worship. Ivan states that, "It's not that I don't accept God, Alyosha, I just most respectfully return him the ticket."[48] Through these examples, Ivan seeks not only to question the existence of God, but even more so, to question the justice of God and the worthiness of the Christian faith. Ivan holds that, "I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, *even if I were wrong.* Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it". For Ivan, the forgiveness extended towards others, even those as cruel and depraved as the Turkish soldier[49], is too high a price to pay for the eternal peace and beatitude – the harmony – promised by the Christian faith. Ivan holds that it is not only wrong to forgive such grave moral injustices, but that it is not within our power. Even if the mother can forgive the general who ordered her son to be chased down and devoured by a pack of hounds[50], it is only within her right to forgive those actions for herself, but not on behalf of her son. Her son's life is taken from him, thus leaving him no opportunity to forgive the general who commanded his death, even if the son could find the grace to do so.

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[48] *Ibid,* 227.

[49] *Ibid,* 221.

[50] *Ibid,* 225.

The lack of retribution given for these grave injustices constitutes, for Ivan, enough evidence to prove that God, if he does exist, is not a being worthy of human worship or even acceptance. Ivan maintains that even if he were to one day witness the moment when "everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: 'Thou art just, Oh Lord, for Thy ways are revealed'"[51], that even this will not be enough to justify the wrongs perpetrated against the innocent children that he describes in his stories. Through the use of these stories, Ivan seeks to demonstrate that even the promised day of divine judgement comes, it cannot properly absolve the suffering of the tortured children who were robbed of the opportunity not only to live, but to offer forgiveness to their transgressors. This injustice, irresolvable in Ivan's framework, presents enough evidence for him to justify the rejection of God and the world that God has created in favor of a philosophy of atheistic nihilism in which all actions are permitted.

After receiving with shock Ivan's criticism of the injustice of suffering, Alyosha puts forth the person of Christ as the perfect counterexample to Ivan's argument. Crying out, "But there is a Being and He can forgive everything, all and for all, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything. You have forgotten Him, and on Him is build the edifice, and it is to Him they cry aloud, 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed!'"[52] Ivan's reply to this argument takes the form of a poem called "The Grand Inquisitor", which he proceeds to relay to Alyosha. Once again, Ivan identifies the unmet expectations of humankind as the primary factor for his denial of God, though this time

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[51] *Ibid,* 226.

[52] *Ibid,* 227.

rejecting the person of Christ as one who fails to meet the desires that humankind has for a savior.

Positioned in 15th century Spain during the Inquisition, a brutal series of forced conversions and killings targeting anyone who did not conform to the teachings and desires of the Catholic church, Ivan's story presents the scenario of the return of a Christ who is utterly disdained and rejected by the very church that is supposedly founded in his name. The story of the Grand Inquisitor, in its essence, can be interpreted as an expression of the problem of divine hiddenness. The Inquisitor's primary criticism of Christ concerns Christ's failure to provide the types of evidence, comfort, and direction that humankind innately desires, thus failing to exist as a God to whom humankind can submit themselves. The Inquisitor argues that when Christ was tempted by Satan in the desert, he denied the exact powers that man most earnestly desired the Savior to possess. From Christ's want of man's love and devotion through free will, he rejected Satan's offer of material bread, divine miracles, and earthly authority. The Inquisitor posits that in this rejection, Christ loved man not only more than he deserved, but more importantly, more than mankind could *bear*. As a result of such weighty freedom, man rebelled against the burden of his own conscious and turned to an institution, the Roman Catholic Church, to provide the earthly powers that Christ so mistakenly rejected during his temptation in the desert.

The combination of this unbearable freedom and the unjustified suffering that Ivan describes in "Rebellion" paints the picture of a humanity trapped in a desperate condition, willing to submit to anything to unburden themselves from the weight of their own agency. The Inquisitor asserts that, "They will cry aloud at last that the truth is not in

Thee, for they could not have been left in greater confusion and suffering than Thou has caused, laying upon them so many cares and unanswerable problems"[53]. In response to Alyosha's cry that Christ is a figure willing and able to accept the sins of humanity and capable of forgiving them all, even the Turk soldier and the cruel general, Ivan's poem "The Grand Inquisitor" replies that, though possible, this option too has been scorned by humankind. In want of comfort, of bread and mystery and earthly authority, the masses are desperate to lay their freedom at the feet of the Church and submit themselves to any authority, if only so that they are not forced to fully confront the weight of their own moral destiny. In reply to Alyosha's proposition that Christ answers the problem of human suffering, Ivan relies on the assertion that, even if the incarnate God did exist as the sinless and all-forgiving figure that Alyosha puts forth, this is not the figure that humanity really *wants*. In failing to provide the types of evidence that man desires – bread and miracles and "Caesar's purple"[54] – Christ failed in his mission. Where he sought to provide freedom and absolution, he created only a desperate desire for subjugation. In his high estimation of humankind, Christ failed to realize that men will do anything to free themselves of freedom itself –"for nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man and a human society than freedom."[55]

Ivan's tales of human suffering in "Rebellion" and his critical portrait of the figure of Christ in "The Grand Inquisitor" put forth an argument for atheism on the basis of both the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness. The crux of Ivan's

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[53] *Ibid,* 236.

[54] *Ibid,* 239.

[55] *Ibid,* 234.

argument rests on the claim that God, even if he exists, is not the kind of Divine Being that deserves worship. Though lack of evidence comprises a portion of Ivan's argument against theism, the primary feature of the argument rests on the assertion that God fails to meet humankind's expectations of him. This failure results in a culpability which Ivan levies not on human misunderstanding or inaccurate expectations, but rather, on Christ's failure to appear with proper majesty.

In addition to Ivan's assertions throughout "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor" concerning the ways in which the figures of God and Christ fail to meet human expectations of Divine justice and majesty, Dostoevsky also explores expectations of relationship throughout the novel, with particular attention to the father-son relationship. Throughout the story, the paternal failings of Fyodor Dostoyevsky remain painfully evident, culminating in the defense attorney's speech, as he proclaims that, "such a father as old Karamazov cannot be called a father and does not deserve to be. Filial love for an unworthy father is an absurdity, an impossibility. Love cannot be created from nothing: only God can create something from nothing"[56]. In this harsh critique of Fyodor's failure as a parent, Dostoevsky points to the nature of this relationship and the social expectations of fatherhood. However, as is evidenced by Dimitri's ultimate conviction at the end of the novel, Dostoevsky's work can also be viewed as a commentary on the moral bindings of the father-son relationship in an earthly sense. Dimitri's conviction at the end of the novel implies that Dostoevsky does not support the defense attorney's interpretation of the limitations of fatherhood, but rather, that Fyodor's failings do not disqualify him from the position of father to his sons.

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[56] *Ibid,* 674.

Though as it turns out, Dimitri is not guilty of his father's murder in a literal sense, he is indeed guilty of his father's murder in a spiritual sense, wishing for his father's death in his heart. As the evidence remains highly ambiguous throughout the novel and Dimitri eventually accepts the blame for his father's murder, it appears that even Dimitri recognizes the grave implications of such a desire, even if he never went so far as to act upon it. Moreover, it is not only Dimitri who bears his father ill-will, but the skeptical Ivan as well. Ivan's descent into madness during the latter half of the novel can be interpreted as the manifestation of the havoc wreaked upon his soul by not only his theological skepticism, but also the hatred he bears towards his own father.

Commenting on this dynamic within *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dr. Ralph Wood, University Professor of Theology and Literature at Baylor University, writes that:

> Though he had published *A Raw Youth* in 1875, Dostoevsky felt that he still had not written a truly great work. And so in December of 1877, he announced that he was suspending his newspaper column to write a novel about the primal human relation (parents and children) and about the primal human crime (parricide). These were themes that had haunted him for years. Like Sophocles before him and Freud after him, Dostoevsky saw it as the paradigmatic human relation: parents are the authority figures whom all children must in some sense slay in order to establish their own individuality. Yet, as we have seen, Dostoevsky takes a radical further step. He holds that the parental relation is also a paradigm of the God relation. Our parents stand in proximate relation to us as God stands in ultimate relation to us: they are the immediate source and ground of our being, however arbitrary or unjust their actions may seem, just as God is the absolute and final Source of our being, however mysterious and capricious his will may seem. To slay the parent, whether in desire or in deed, is to kill God. Parricide always equals deicide in Dostoevsky's work[57].

The work described in these lines eventually takes the form of *The Brothers Karamazov,* and explores these relationships of father and son and the spiritual implications of parricide. In conjunction to the argument from hiddenness, Dostoevsky's connection between the parent-child relationship and the individual's relationship to God suggests

[57] Ralph C. Wood, "An Introduction to the Life of Fyodor Dostoevsky," (Class handout, 2019), 7.

that in many ways his commentary on the wrongs of the Karamazov sons against their father are also wrongs committed against their God. Ivan, Dimitri, and Smerdyakov each wish their father dead, and though only one of the sons physically commits the murder, all three are in some way complicit. Although Fyodor did not present the type of father one might expect, as the prosecutor so assertively points out, he was still the father of his four sons by virtue of a higher natural order, thus rendering the parricide that each of these three sons commits in his heart as no less than deicide within Dostoevsky's framework.

The relationship between father and son remains a central component of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the expectations that accompany this relationship are explored in such a way as to have relevant implications for the novel's commentary on divine hiddenness. God as father is a consistent theme throughout the Bible, and Schellenberg explicitly draws upon this analogy in making his argument for the injustice of God's hiddenness[58]. If God is father, and he does not act as one would expect a father ought to act – if, for example, God does not provide the type of evidence and loving comfort that we as his creation might expect – then we no longer are bound by any aspect of this relationship to treat him as father, to worship or obey him. We are not required, it seems, even to believe in him. Dostoevsky appears to reject this argument, not only as it applies to Fyodor and his sons, but also as it applies to the relationship of the novel's characters to their Heavenly Father. In suggesting that Ivan, Dimitri, and Smerdyakov are not justified in their respective failure to honor their father despite his failings, Dostoevsky

[58] J. L. Schellenberg and Michael L. Peterson, "The Hiddenness Problem and the Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2010), 45–60.

also implies that we are not justified in failing to honor and respect God even when he does not meet our expectations of him. While Dostoevsky seems to uphold the parent-child analogy as integral to understanding of humanity's relationship to God, he does not appear to excuse the hiddenness of God, the failure of God to nurture and comfort his creation, as an adequate excuse for unbelief. Thus, Dostoevsky's perception of faith appears to reject Schellenberg's appeal that God's lack of clear presence in the lives of humanity provides justifiable grounds to deny his existence.

The particular capability of *The Brothers Karamazov* to function as the type of cathartic, artistic lament lies in its ability to carry the reader through not only an interaction with the novel's plot, characters, and themes, but also to prompt the type of introspection that each of Dostoevsky's characters undergoes within the story. In engaging with this work, the reader is confronted with the same questions that each character wrestles with during the course of the novel, and consequently, the reader is encouraged to internalize and reflect upon the application of the novel to the events of one's own life. Through Ivan's criticisms of God and Christianity in "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor", the reader is allowed room for religious doubt and questioning. In Fyodor's complicated relationship with his children, the reader is able to reflect on the nature of God's role as Creator and Heavenly Father, and encouraged to consider the ways in which the hiddenness of God does and ought to affect this relationship. In portraying both the skeptic and the faithful, the sinful and the redeemed, Dostoevsky creates a diverse cast of characters with which his readership is likely to find some sense of similarity and empathy. Moreover, the complexities of Dostoevsky's characters, the dichotomy present within each of them, offers a realistic sketch of the human condition in

which an individual is rarely entirely wicked or wholly good, but more often some mixture of the two. In these ways, *The Brothers Karamazov* represents a work of artistic creation in which the reader is invited to examine the nature of faith and expectation.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the problem of divine hiddenness viewed through the lens of narrative storytelling. From the doubt of Orual to the suffering of Mother Teresa to the skepticism of Ivan, I have argued that each of these works contains an element of artistic lament that in some way speaks to the hiddenness problem and offers the reader a means of expressing one's emotional suffering over the hiddenness of God. I argue that this process bears the potential to bring the individual comfort, healing, and understanding, and in this way act as an experience which may bolster the individual's belief in the existence of God. In the next chapter, we will move to explore the ways in which poetry can serve a similar purpose, acting as a medium of artistic lament that enables the reader to find spiritual comfort and a strengthening of one's faith by means of a connection to the themes expressed within these poetic works.

CHAPTER TWO

Lament in Poetry

Introduction

Now we turn from the genre of narrative to examine divine hiddenness and lament through the lens of poetic verse. Poetry, often considered to be a more abstract and artful form of expression than prose, allows for a different kind of emotional exploration than the narrative accounts discussed in the previous chapter. While often not providing the same kind of complex character development and sequence of events that the reader receives within narrative, poetry allows for a different means of expression that is arguably closer to the lyrical beauty of music than to the practical detail of narrative. The focus of this chapter will specifically be on the poetry of George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Louise Glück. This chapter will also draw from the biographical information of Hopkins and Herbert as well as secondary sources to further contextualize these poetic works. From the examples provided within these verses, I will argue that the subjective and artistic nature of these poems, combined with their apparent existential significance to the writers themselves, renders these writings a useful medium through which lament might be expressed to God, and ultimately, comfort and evidence for God's existence might be rendered.

These poetic sources offer examples of lament in an artistic form consistent with the other examples in this thesis, though still utilizing language as the means by which humanity's complaint is offered unto God. The subjectivity of poetry as a genre renders it difficult to extrapolate a universal meaning from the poems that we will discuss, and yet,

at the same time, marks them as widely relatable. The speaker, the poet, and the reader can each imbue his own meaning into the work without any one interpretation necessarily invalidating the other. Furthermore, the participatory nature of poetry, its spoken and lyrical elements, creates a physical and audible quality to this medium that is often associated with traditional features of lament. Each of these poets wrestles with questions of divine hiddenness throughout his or her writings, and furthermore, the emotional suffering experienced by the soul crying out for God to reveal himself in the life of the individual. In my examination of the work of these three poets, I will seek to highlight particular moments in which their poems seem to be speaking to the problem of divine hiddenness. Moreover, in my analysis the poetry of Herbert, Hopkins, and Glück, I will outline a trajectory of spiritual healing as demonstrated by the shifts in the tone traced throughout their poetic works, thus illustrating the way that these poems might facilitate a means of at least partially overcoming the hiddenness of God. In my focus on the lives and work of these three poets, I will introduce into the conversation sources that add new dimensions to the discussion of God's hiddenness, as these works eloquently explore the ways in which God's hiddenness affects man in his search for meaning and understanding.

George Herbert

The first selection of poetry that we will examine within this chapter are the works of George Herbert, the early seventeenth-century Anglican priest and poet. Herbert's poetry provides numerous examples of explicitly religious poetry, originally composed by Herbert with the purpose of exploring his own spiritual questions through the artistic medium of poetry. As a man whose own life was committed to questions of

faith and religion, Herbert was constantly preoccupied with the mysteries of the faith and the intersection of religion, nature, and humankind within his poetry. Herbert's works draw heavily from Biblical analogy, the natural world, and the poet's own emotional struggles to articulate the existential questions with which Herbert wrestled during his lifetime. For many readers, these poems could serve as an expression of the reader's own thoughts and feelings as they were reflected in Herbert's words, and it is this sense of relatability that allows Herbert's poetry to fall into the category of artistic lament.

George Herbert was born in 1593, as the sixteenth century was coming to a close and during the midst of a religiously tumultuous for the Britain[1]. The son of the wealthy and educated Richard and Magdalen Herbert, George was raised in a home where the arts and religious piety were highly encouraged, and these two pursuits George would continue to hold dear throughout his lifetime[2]. George Herbert was elected as a scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge in 1609, during which time he began to compose religious poetry[3]. After graduating with his Bachelor of Arts, Herbert continued to serve in a variety of scholarly positions at the University, eventually gaining the coveted position of University Orator in 1620. However, this position left Herbert somewhat divided between his sense of calling to the Church, and the courtly duties that were required of him as University Orator[4]. Eventually, in 1627, Herbert transitioned out of the role of University

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[1] John Drury, *Music at Midnight : the Life and Poetry of George Herbert,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[2] *Ibid,* 54-55.

[3] *Ibid,* 81-85.

[4] *Ibid,* 114.

Orator to focus on his religious calling[5], taking holy orders in the Church of England in 1629. That same year, Herbert married Jane Danvers and moved to a become the rector of two small villages outside of Salisbury[6]. Herbert enjoyed the slower tempo of his domestic, country life and faithfully attended to his duties as priest, concerning himself with the spiritual lives of his parishioners[7]. During this time, Herbert composed his only prose work, *A Priest to the Temple,* the title of which would inspire the title posthumously bestowed upon Herbert's book of collected English poetry, *The Temple.* Despite Herbert's seeming contentment during these years of provincial priesthood, he continued to struggle with the health problems that had plagued him throughout his lifetime[8]. This lifelong battle with poor health served as a particularly significant crucible for Herbert, and his constant bouts of illness inspired many of his more despairing poems, as he reflects on the fragility of life and the inevitability of death, subjects which Herbert was constantly reminded of due to his own constant sickness. Eventually, Herbert succumbed to his health struggles and died of consumption in 1633, a mere three years after taking his holy orders.

None of Herbert's English poetry was ever published during his lifetime, and upon his death, he entrusted his collection of English poems to his close friend, Nicholas Ferrar. These verses would soon make up Herbert's *magnum opus, The Temple.* Herbert entrusted his poetic writings to Ferrar along with a letter, which reads in part[9]:

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[5] *Ibid,* 171.

[6] *Ibid,* 201-203.

[7] *Ibid,* 237.

[8] *Ibid,* 248.

[9] *Ibid,* 251.

> Sir, I pray deliver this little book to my dear brother Ferrar, and tell him that he shall find in it a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul…if he think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public; if not, let him burn it; for I and it are less than the least of God's mercies.

This letter provides important insight into Herbert's own view of the function of his poetry. If others could be helped by reading this intimate portrait of Herbert's inner thoughts and dialogues, then he was willing to allow his work to be made public, but if not, he appeared unconcerned with gaining lasting fame from the publication of his works. Despite Herbert's own seeming indifference towards the publication of his English poetry, Ferrar quickly recognized the simple brilliancy of Herbert's work and published the collection within a year of Herbert's death[10].

This understanding of Herbert's own life trajectory and religious devotion is key to gaining proper insight into his poetry because, much like Mother Teresa, Herbert is an individual not so much marked by doubt as by suffering. Herbert's poetry does not ever reach a determination that God's hiddenness negates his existence, but rather, portrays the suffering and lament of an individual who yearns for comfort from a God who often remains silent. One of the key features of Herbert's poetry is the use of nature as a metaphor and tool by which the poet communicates observations about God and God's relationship to humankind. This use of nature analogies will be a prevalent theme within not only Herbert's poetry, but Hopkins and Glück's work as well.

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[10] *Ibid,* 279-282.

Demonstrating this reliance on the metaphor of nature to express human emotion, Herbert's poem entitled 'Life'[11] portrays the death of a flower and focuses on how the frailty of flowers mimics the finite nature of the human life. Herbert writes:

> I made a posy, while the day ran by:
> Here will I smell my remnant out, and tie
> My life within this band.
> But time did beckon to the flowers, and they
> By noon most cunningly did steal away,
> And wither'd in my hand.
>
> My hand was next to them, and then my heart:
> I took, without more thinking, in good part
> Time's gentle admonition:
> Who did so sweetly death's sad taste convey,
> Making my mind to smell my fatal day;
> Yet surging the suspicion.
>
> Farewell dear flowers, sweetly your time ye spent,
> Fit, while ye liv'd, for smell or ornament,
> And after death for cures.
> I follow straight without complaints or grief,
> Since if my scent be good, I care not if
> It be as short as yours.

Though the message of the poem is a solemn one, regarding the brevity of life and the assurance of death, the tone of the piece is not that of despair, but of hope. Herbert maintains that although life may be short, it is not lost if his "scent be good". It appears that for Herbert, the length of a life is not a measure of its value, but rather the way in which that life gives off the pleasant scent of beauty, presumably by means of worship and obedience towards God. For Herbert, in his often precarious state of health, this sentiment likely would have served as a great source of comfort.

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[11] George Herbert, *George Herbert: The Complete English Works,* Edited by Ann Pasternak Slater, (London: Everyman's Library, 1995), 91-92.

Just as Herbert compares mankind to the life of a flower in his poem 'Life', he once again echoes the same analogy in his poem entitled 'The Flower'[12], writing in the last stanza that:

> These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
> To make us see we are but flowers that glide:
> Which when we once can find and prove,
> Thou has a garden for us, where to bide,
> Who would be more,
> Swelling through store,
> Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

In making this comparison between humankind and flowers, Herbert seeks to underline the fragile dependency that man has on the will and providence of God. This relationship places man in a vulnerable position, one in which the ways and workings of God are often obscured. This sentiment, Herbert once again echoes in his poem 'Employment (I)'[13], where he writes:

> If as a flower doth spread and die,
> Thou wouldst extend me to some good,
> Before I were by frost's extremity
> Nipt in the bud;

The final stanza of the poem ends with a plea of humility, reading:

> I am no link of thy great chain,
> But all my company is a weed.
> Lord place me in thy consort; give one strain
> To my poor reed.

These lines reinforce the position that mankind is entirely subject to God's will, at the mercy of God's desires and unable to find meaning apart from a life hidden with God. It is in light of such dependency that Herbert's struggles with God's hiddenness appear so bleak. In his poem 'Denial'[14], Herbert writes:

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[12] *Ibid,* 163.

[13] *Ibid,* 55.

[14] *Ibid,* 77.

When my devotions could not pierce
Thy silent ears;
Then was my heart broken, as was my verse:
My breast was full of tears
And disorder:

My bent thoughts, like a brittle bow,
Did fly asunder:
Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,
Some to the wards and thunder
Of alarms.

As good go any where, they say,
As to benumb
Both knees and heart, in crying night and day,
Come, come, my God, O come,
But no hearing.

O that though shouldst give dust a tongue
To cry to thee,
And then not hear it crying! All day long
My heart was in my knee,
But no hearing.

Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
Untun'd, unstrung:
My feeble spirit, unable to look right
Like a nipt blossom, hung
Discontented.

O cheer and tune my heartless breast,
Defer no time;
That so thy favours granting my request,
They and my mind may chime,
And mend my rhyme.

Here, the reader is presented with an insight into the extent to which Herbert's yearns to feel God's presence. This poem, struggling with the hiddenness and silence of God, is particularly crippling considering the portrait of utter spiritual dependency that Herbert paints throughout his other poems. In light of the earnest desire for God's presence and love, much like that which Mother Teresa portrayed throughout her letters, Herbert's lament in 'Denial' is especially troubling. For one to desire God so fully, and yet still writhe in the darkness of his absence, seems especially cruel. However, it is clear that Herbert's lament is not the expression of a lack of faith, but the utterance of a plea made

with the expectation that God will hear his broken words. 'Denial' is not a mere complaint, but a lament in the important sense that it expresses expectation rooted in the loving character of God. Though Herbert cries out against God's "silent ears", his plea is for God to "cheer and tune my heart" so that "my mind may chime, / And mend my rhyme." While Herbert is certainly lamenting God's hiddenness within these lines, he is doing so as a plea for reconciliation. Herbert desires God's "favours" so that his heart will no longer feel so disconnected from God. In doing so, Herbert offers up a lament with the hope of God's intervention in the midst of his darkness, expressing within his lament a faith in God's love and care for creation. Moreover, with his plea for God to "mend" his rhyme, Herbert offers up his poetry to God not as a stagnant and immutable request, but as an interaction with God that is ever-changing, open to participation on both sides of an ongoing conversation.

In addition to his reflections on God's silence within 'Denial', Herbert also touches on the hiddenness of God throughout his poem entitled 'Decay'[15], in which he considers the absence of God relative to the times of the Old Testament. Herbert writes:

> Sweet were the days, when thou didst lodge with Lot
> Struggle with Jacob, sit with Gideon,
> Advise with Abraham, when thy power could not
> Encounter Moses' strong complaints and moan:
> Thy words were then, *Let me alone.*

In this opening stanza, Herbert recounts the apparent presence of God as relayed throughout the stories of the Old Testament, setting up the contrast between God's level of involvement with humanity during those times of old, and his seeming absence in the present day. In the last two stanzas of the poem, Herbert goes on to write:

> But now thou dost thy self immure and close
> In some one corner of a feeble heart:

[15] *Ibid,* 96.

> Where yet both Sin and Satan, they old foes,
> Do pinch and straiten thee, and use much art
> To gain thy thirds and little part.
>
> I see the world grows old, when as the heat
> Of thy great love once spread, as in an urn
> Doth closet up it self, and still retreat,
> Cold sin still forcing it, till it return,
> And calling Justice, all things burn.

In the latter half of the poem, Herbert paints the picture of God withdrawn from the physical interactions with mankind, to the occupation of only a portion of man's heart, constantly battling man's overwhelming desire to sin. However, in this framework, Herbert appears to shift at least part of the blame for God's absence onto man's sinfulness, a sentiment that he echoes in his poems 'Sin (I)'[16], 'Church lock and key'[17], and 'Repentance'[18]. For Herbert, it appears that part of the explanation for God's lack of overt involvement in the world lies not as a fault of God himself, but as a result of man's choice to love and prize lesser things above God. In this way, Herbert at least partially appeals to the explanation of human sin as a justification for the hiddenness of God. However, though for Herbert sin might partially be responsible for mankind's separation from God, it is also clear that this separation still results in considerable anguish for the individual, bordering on utter hopelessness. It is this sentiment that leads Herbert to lament his suffering unto God throughout his poetry, a practice that serves to in some way relieve the poet of a portion of his anguish, as demonstrated by the often hopeful end that Herbert's poems eventually assume.

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[16] *Ibid,* 43-44.

[17] *Ibid,* 63-64.

[18] *Ibid,* 46.

Despite the efficacy of poetry in ameliorating Herbert's suffering, he also makes it clear that poetry can only capture the severity of his emotional turmoil *to an extent.* In his poem 'Grief'[19], Herbert points out the limited nature of poetry in serving as a means of expression, writing:

> Verses, ye are too fine a thing, too wise
> For my rough sorrows; cease, be dumb and mute,
> Give up your feet and running to mine eyes,
> And keep your measures for some lover's lute,
> Whose grief allows him music and a rhyme:
> For mine excludes both measure, tune, and time.
> Alas, my God!

Here, we receive a picture of Herbert crying out against the ways in which poetry remains an unfit medium for him to fully express his grief, noting that though poetry might be fine for declarations of love and beauty, the sorrow that he carries is not a thing of "measure, tune, and time".

However convinced Herbert seems here of the constraints of his poetic endeavors, he also expresses quite clearly in his poem 'The Quiddity'[20] that his poetry is a means of communion with God and a point in which he feels closest to the Divine presence. Herbert begins the poem with the line "My God, a verse is not a crown", and continues throughout the following lines to create an image of his poetry through an apophatic process, continuing to speak of his poems in terms of what they are not. In the final stanza, Herbert finally asserts what he deems the value of his "verse", writing:

> But it is that which while I use
> I am with thee, and *Most take all.*

In these lines Herbert reveals that in writing poetry, he feels closer to God. It is unclear exactly what the ending phrase "*Most take all*" means for Herbert, but it can be

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[19] *Ibid,* 160.

[20] *Ibid,* 67.

interpreted to suggest that it is through his poetry, Herbert is best positioned to participate in the life of the Church and the Kingdom of God, thus most taking and best knowing the nature of God through poetry. In this interpretation, poetry serves to draw Herbert closer to a better understanding of a hidden God as he explores his relationship to God, nature, and his own emotions through the process of composing poetry.

From this examination of a small selection of poetry by George Herbert, we have seen the example of poetic lament set forth as the poet explores various questions of faith, suffering, and the hiddenness of God. Herbert's poetry touches on many themes, including the analogy of man to nature, the absence of God from the lives and hearts of those who desire him deeply, and the limitation of the poetic medium in fully capturing the emotional complexity of humankind. Herbert utilizes his poetry as a means of expressing his innermost thoughts and feelings unto God in a way that appears to help facilitate the advent of understanding and comfort. Although Herbert remained a devoutly religious individual, his poetry makes clear that he was not without his questions and struggles. It is indicated throughout his poetry that Herbert wrestled with the hiddenness of God, and sought to overcome his questions and loneliness partially by means of composing poetry.

Herbert was aware that his poems might serve to help comfort his readers as they had for him, indicated by his instructions to Nicholas Ferrar regarding the fate of his English poems. The power of such poetry, of a deeply introspective and lyrically beautiful nature, to comfort poet, reader, and listener alike is determined primarily by its relevance to the individual. However, it is possible that a reader feeling similar fears, hopes, and struggles as those which Herbert expresses within his poetry might find

consolation in the reading and recitation of these words. If taken not as a passive medium, but an active art form, poetry like Herbert's has the capability to help the individual confront and process emotional struggles. The inherent nature of poetic verse, its verbalization of human emotions, senses, and experiences, can lend a voice to the individual's innermost thoughts and feelings in such a way as to facilitate a deeper understanding of the emotions that prompt such expression. The legacy that Herbert's poetry left behind and the praise that it has received for subsequent generations suggests that Herbert's work is particularly effective in touching the hearts of many and putting into words the struggles experiences Herbert's audience as well as himself. Reading, reciting, and contemplating poetry such as the verses that we have just read has the potential to place the individual in a position to receive comfort and confirmation of God's existence by means of a process of faithful expression and supplication towards God. Herbert's poetry, though expressing doubt and discontent within its verses, consistently settles upon the determination that God is good and that God is present. In this way, Herbert appears to find reassurance of his faith despite times of doubt within the process of composing these poems. It is possible that the reader experiencing doubts and dissatisfaction like that of Herbert might come to a similar determination, facilitated by the process of encountering Herbert's poems. Such a process exemplifies the potential of artistic lament in bolstering the belief of a struggling believer.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

We now turn from our examination of George Herbert to focus on the work of Victorian era poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. An inheritor and admirer of Herbert's poetry, Hopkins is similar to Herbert with his focus on nature, religion, and his own

emotional and spiritual struggles as frequent subjects of his compositions. However, Hopkins' conversion from Anglicanism to the Roman Catholic Church and his life's work as a Jesuit marks his religious journey as arguably more tumultuous than Herbert's. Hopkins considered his faith the cornerstone of his purpose in life, and utilized poetry as a means by which he contemplated, worshiped, and lamented unto God. Though Hopkins published few of his poems during his lifetime, the publication of Hopkins' poetry posthumously led to the recognition of Hopkins' writings as some of the most masterfully profound and religiously significant poetry of the 19th century.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in 1844 at Stratford in Essex to an upper middle class family. The eldest of eight children, Gerard grew up amidst a lively and active household, in which both his mother and father were accomplished in art, music, poetry, and languages. The Hopkins family were devout members of the Church of England, a fact that rendered Hopkins' later break with the Anglican church all the more painful[21]. It was during Hopkins' time at Oxford that he began to wrestle with his fascination concerning the Catholic church. Hopkins found the solemn ritual and reverence for sacrament practiced by Catholics particuarly appealing, and he began to participate in religious disciplines such as rigid fasting and self-flagellation even before his conversion to Catholicism. Hopkins was eventually received into the Catholic church in 1866, and this act marked a turn in Hopkins' life away from the academic pursuits at Oxford and close familial ties, to a life fully devoted to Christ. However, Hopkins' conversion did not come without a price. As a practicing Catholic, Hopkins was

[21] Ralph C. Wood, "Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89)," (Class handout, 2019), 1.

ineligible to receive a fellowship at Oxford or even to continue his education there[22]. Moreover, Hopkins' devoutly Anglican family felt his conversion to Catholicism to be an impassible difference between Gerard and themselves, and although Gerard remained close to his family throughout the rest of his life, this fundamental difference left him a partial stranger to his family in many important ways. In addition to this source of internal suffering, Hopkins also struggled with poor health during the course of his life, and much like Herbert, was constantly battling various illnesses that left him weak and ineffective for weeks on end.

Soon after his conversion to Catholicism, Hopkins elected to join the most stringent of religious orders, the Society of the Jesuits, and embarked on a spiritual journey that would take him from the halls of Mount St. Mary's College in Stonyhurst[23] to the slums of Dublin. When Hopkins first decided to commit himself to the religious life, he vowed to stop writing poetry and, in an act of passionate religious devotion, burned all of the poems he had written up to that point. This event, Hopkins later termed the "Slaughter of the Innocents"[24]. Despite this early renunciation of his poetic pursuits, Hopkins eventually returned to writing poetry, a great consolation to him as he continued to serve faithfully in the Jesuit order, many times under the strain of unending work and the struggle of poor health[25].

It was during a particular bout of hardship that Hopkins produced some of his darkest and most profound poems. This grouping of six poems, often called the "Terrible

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[22] *Ibid*, 5.

[23] Paul L. Mariani, *Gerard Manley Hopkins : a Life* (New York: Viking, 2008).

[24] *Ibid,* 69.

[25] *Ibid,* 339-340.

Sonnets", the "Sonnets of Desolation", or the "Dark Sonnets", is especially relevant to the discussion of divine hiddenness. These poems are thought to have been written in 1885 during one of Hopkins' particularly bleak years in Ireland, and their dark content appears to assume a deeply personal nature for Hopkins, as they were never sent to Bridges or any of Hopkins other correspondents, but found among Hopkins' belongings following his death[26]. It is within these verses that Hopkins struggles most clearly with the hiddenness of God, with feelings of dejection, abandonment, rejection, and grief that appear to cast his soul into the depths of despair. Here, within the Terrible Sonnets, we receive the picture of a soul in turmoil, longing for significance and comfort amidst a world in which God's presence is not keenly felt. Hopkins himself paints a desperate picture of his mental state during this time, remarking in a letter to his close friend and fellow poet, Robert Bridges, that[27]:

> I shall shortly have some sonnets to send you, five or more. Four of these came like inspirations unbidden and against my will. And in the life I lead now, which is one of a continually jaded and harassed mind, if in any leisure I try to do anything I make no way – nor with my work, alas! But so it must be.

Hopkins never sent Bridges the promised sonnets, but within their correspondence during that time he continued to speak of his anguished mental state, writing that he often suffered "fits of sadness [which]…resemble madness."[28]

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[26] Peter Whiteford, "HOPKINS'S REMARKS ON HIS 'TERRIBLE POSTHUMOUS SONNETS,'" *Renascence* 70, no. 3 (July 1, 2018), 187–217. http://search.proquest.com/docview/2198414234/.

[27] Paul L. Mariani, *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

[28] *Ibid,* 210.

The first of the Terrible Sonnets that we will explore[29] is Hopkins' composition, 'To Seem the Stranger'[30]. This poem focuses less on Hopkins' perceived separation from God so much as his separation from his family, his homeland, and his sense of efficacy in his role as a convoy of the "word / Wisest" of Christ. The first three quatrains of the poem sequentially detail the three degrees of separation that Hopkins grieves, as he laments that "To seem the stranger lies my lot in life." However, in the fourth and final stanza Hopkins echoes his despair in perhaps the strongest terms, lamenting the inefficacy of his work as a Jesuit priest and a feeling of desperation over the lack of conversion that he has seen among his family, his native country of England, and the individuals to whom he has ministered during his time as a Jesuit priest. Hopkins writes, leading off from the third stanza:

> Kind love both give and get. Only what word
>
> Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
> Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,
> Heard unheeded, leaved me a lonely began.

The last line of the poem expresses Hopkins' dismal remark that he has been "Heard unheeded", leaving him but a "lonely began". The failure of his work to breed what he perceived as real spiritual conversion left Hopkins feeling a stranger to hearth, homeland, and his own self, portraying the onset of a downward emotional turn that can be traced throughout the remainder of the Terrible Sonnets. Although 'To seem the stranger' deals sparingly with the hiddenness of God, it sets the scene for the kind of

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[29] The order in which the Terrible Sonnets were composed can only be guessed at, and so the order in which I will explore them is a function of my own interpretation of these works with the purpose of outlining what I perceive as the trajectory of Hopkins' emotional state during this time. However, this is by no means an assertion that this is the order in which they were historically written nor the order in which they must be read.

[30] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 166.

desperate isolation that Hopkins felt during this time, and frames the remainder of Hopkins' Sonnets of Desolation in the reality of the poet's struggles during this season of his life.

Now we move along the downward pitch of the Hopkins' collection of Terrible Sonnets to examine the three that are perhaps most steeped in darkness, 'I wake and feel', 'No worst', and 'Carrion Comfort'. These three works struggle most clearly with the hiddenness of God and Hopkins' suffering as a result of God's silence during this time in his life. In 'I wake and feel', Hopkins opens the poem with a possible reference to the beginning of Dante's *Inferno*, setting the scene amidst the dark and confusing night indicative of a type of spiritual darkness which imperils the speaker. The first quatrain of the poem reads:

> I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
> What hours, O what black hours we have spent
> This night! What sights you, heart, saw, ways you went!
> And more must, in yet longer light's delay.

In these first four lines, Hopkins sets up a scene portraying an utter privation of light, a writhing suffering that is only bound to continue "in yet longer light's delay". This darkness appears to be not merely a literal night, absent of the light of the sun, but a Dark Night of the Soul, absent the light of the Son as well. In the second stanza, Hopkins directly cries out his lament, writing:

> With witness I speak this. But where I say
> Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
> Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
> To dearest him that lives alas! away.

These lines ring out with a prolonged suffering that lengthens from hours into life without end, falling upon deaf ears. Hopkins points out that his cries, "like dead letters sent" are directed towards "dearest him that lives alas!", likely referencing the resurrected Christ. As Paul L. Mariani, Hopkins scholar and Emeritus Professor Modern British Poetry at

Boston College, points out, “The image of ‘dead letters’ is a nightmarish simile which is unsettlingly modern; the speaker pictures himself as a lover sending love letters to his beloved who has left no forwarding address. The lines of communication are cut, and the countless letters pile up unread to gather dust in some dead-letter bin.”[31] This image emphasizes the desperate nature of Hopkins’ situation and the seeming futility of his “cries countless”, as he feels the haunting sense that they will inevitably fail to reach their destination. Moreover, the last word of the poem after the exclamation of “alas!” alters the meaning of the phrase, Christ lives not only “alas!”, but he also lives “away”, suggesting a distance between Hopkins and the recipient of his cries that perhaps renders them “dead letters”, ineffectual and unable to end the suffering of his internal darkness. The tercet that follows speaks further of Hopkins’ desperation, reading:

> I am gall, I am heartburn. God’s most deep decree
> Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
> Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Within these lines, Hopkins appears, at least partially, to attribute his suffering to “God’s most deep decree”, finding that his darkness, the pain of his unheard cries, is by some means the will of God himself. This line possibly echoes Hopkins’ feelings towards his own ineffectual life, as he writes in a letter in 1883, “I see no grounded prospect of my ever doing much not only in poetry but in anything at all. At times I do feel this sadly and bitterly, but it is God’s will”[32]. Within this third stanza of ‘I wake and feel’, Hopkins appears to accept the sad reality of this source of his suffering, similarly to his complaint in ‘To seem the stranger’, Hopkins once again is fearful of his own insignificance as both

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[31] *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* 220-221.

[32] *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works,* 373.

poet and priest. Hopkins' assertion that "my taste was me; / Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse" is heavily weighted with Eucharistic language. However, instead of tasting the body and blood of Christ, Hopkins tastes only himself, only the "curse" of his own sin, suggesting that in his darkness he can no longer feel the comfort of his salvation. The final stanza of 'I wake and feel' further emphasizes the severity of Hopkins' spiritual suffering, as he writes:

> Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
> The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
> As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

In these lines, Hopkins makes the cold comparison of his spiritual darkness to that of the "lost", those without the knowledge and love of Christ. This analogy is a highly significant one, as Hopkins likens the absence of God in his darkened soul to the total absence of God in the hearts of the lost, though admitting that their pain is "but worse".

This tone of desperation that we see within 'I wake and feel' will continue within 'No worst'[33], as Hopkins further deepens the imagery of his spiritual desolation. Quite possibly the sonnet that Hopkins referenced in a letter as that which was "written in blood"[34], the poem reads:

> No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
> Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
> My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief-
> Woe, wórld-sorrow; on an áge-old ánvil wínce and síng –
> Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
> Ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.'
> O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
> May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
> Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! Creep,
> Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all

[33] *Ibid,* 167.

[34] *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* 224.

Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

Once again, Hopkins gives the picture of his soul in a state of utter despair, "pitched past pitch of grief" in such a trajectory that only continues to decline. The darkness, the hopelessness, of these lines is highlighted as Hopkins cries out, "Comforter, where, where is your comforting? / Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?". Here, Hopkins poses an essential question as he issues forth his cry. Where is the promised comfort of the Holy Spirit, eternally going forth? Where is Mary, who's "intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation"[35]? Hopkins lacks the feeling of comfort promised to him by the God to whom he has dedicated his life, and his anguish throughout these lines appears to be derived from that perceived abandonment.

In the latter half of the poem, Hopkins decries the complex nature of the human mind, that which "has mountains; cliffs of fall / frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed". From these depths and cliffs Hopkins insinuates that he himself has travelled and perhaps, much to his own peril, travels still. In the midst of his journeys of anguish, Hopkins deeply desires the comfort of his faith to anchor his wandering soul. However, the only comfort which Hopkins finds within the lines of 'No worst' is the ominous declaration that, "all / Life death does end and each day dies with sleep". This final line echoes the dark adage that death must come to all men, in its certainty it appears the only comfort Hopkins can find amidst the "whirlwind" of his despair. Moreover, in this instance, Hopkins' appeal to death as a consolation does not appear to be rooted in a Christian expectation of eternal beatitude upon reunion with God in Heaven, but in a sort of morbid anticipation of the cessation of his earthly suffering at the end of his mortal life.

[35]"The Profession of the Christian Faith," *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012.

Within this poem, Hopkins' lament is ushered forth from a place of utter desolation, suffering from the hiddenness of God and the weight of his own grief. In many ways, 'No worst' appears to be the valley floor of Hopkins' spiritual darkness during this time, marked by an utter despair and lack of comfort. With his poem, 'Carrion Comfort', Hopkins appears to begin an upward trajectory, out of the depths of his despair and towards an acceptance of his suffering and the renewal of his faith. Though by no means a cheery composition, 'Carrion Comfort' expresses Hopkins' stalwart resolve *not* to give into his despair, with the first stanza reading:

> Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
> Not untwist – slack they may be – these last strands of man
> In me ór, most weary, cry *I can no more.* I can;
> Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.

The repetition of the word "not" throughout these first four lines, and the denial of Hamlet's perseveration whether "to be or not to be" shows Hopkins' determination to continue on, not free from despair, but living on in spite of it. However, the next three stanzas explore the extent of Hopkins' suffering in light of God's providence, posing the question of theodicy throughout these anguished lines.

> But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
> Thy wring-earth right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan
> With darksome devouring eyes my bruiséd bones? and fan,
> O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee?
>
> Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
> Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
> Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, cheer.
>
> Cheer whóm though? The héro whose héaven-handling flúng me, fóot tród
> Me? or mé that fóught him? O whích one? is it eách one? That níght, that year
> Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.

Hopkins appears to be speaking directly to God within these verses, asking why God has abused him so, allowed him to suffer to the point of such darkness and pain. The last line of the sonnet is rich in Biblical allusions and desperate in its cry. Hopkins identifies

himself as a wretch, wrestling with a stranger under cover of darkness like Jacob in the Bible[36], marked by suffering as Jacob was touched at the hip, forever changed by this altercation. Moreover, the poet's emphatic declaration in the last line underscores the significance of his contender, it was God with whom Hopkins wrestled in the darkness, and it was God who struck both awe and fear into his heart. With this final cry of "(my God!) my God", Hopkins alludes to Christ's desperate cry on the cross[37], calling out to the Father as he bears the sin of the world in agony. In using this particular phrasing, Hopkins seems to be implying that he feels a distress which echoes that of the crucified Christ's, lamenting the abandonment of his Heavenly Father.

From this dark place, we begin to see a kind of uptick within Hopkins' Sonnets of Desolation, beginning with his poem entitled 'Patience, hard thing'[38]. Within this poem, Hopkins speaks less of his suffering, and begins to look forward to a discipline that can ease his pain, identifying 'Patience, hard thing!' as that which he must practice in order to cease his endless pain. In the final sestet of the sonnet, Hopkins admits the difficulty of patience, writing:

> We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills
> To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills
> Of us wé do bid God bend to him even so.
>
> And where is he who more and more distills
> Delicious kindness? – He is patient. Patience fills
> His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know.

Here, Hopkins admits plainly the struggle of patiently waiting for God, utilizing the grueling imagery of hearts which "grate on themselves" as the process which serves to

[36] Genesis 32:22-32.

[37] Matthew 27:46.

[38] *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works,* 170.

"bruise them dearer". However, it is in this crucible that Hopkins seems to see the "rebellious will" being bent further towards God. Within this sonnet, it appears that patience, and even more so, the internal struggle that patience produces, is for Hopkins a kind of sanctification in which man is brought closer to God. This viewpoint holds consistent with St. John of the Cross's theology surrounding the Dark Night of the Soul, in which St. John purports that the suffering of God's hiddenness serves to enable further spiritual enlightenment. In the last tercet, Hopkins once again questions the absence of God, remarking, "And where is he who more and more distills / Delicious kindness?", yet in this iteration of Hopkins' cry, he produces a kind of answer, asserting that "He is patient". In this determination, Hopkins appears to find that patience is not only of God, but *is* God in that it is *qua* God's nature. Therefore, in forcing man to be patient in the darkness of his silence, God is drawing the believer closer to him, imparting his nature on man through the trial that must be suffered with patience.

With our examination of 'Patience, hard thing', we begin to see what seems to be the process of Hopkins finding his way out of his valley of despair. With his final Dark Sonnet, 'My own heart'[39], Hopkins appears well on his way to, if not full spiritual recovery, at least a pathway towards the light of consolation. This poem is more inwardly-directed than the other five Terrible Sonnets, and portrays Hopkins pleading with *himself* to find comfort and rest from his own suffering. The first three stanzas of the poem read:

> My own heart let me more have pity on; let
> Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
> Charitable; not live this tormented mind
> With this tormented mind tormenting yet.
>
> I cast for comfort I can no more get

[39] *Ibid,* 170.

> By groping round my comfortless than blind
> Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
> Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.
>
> Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
> You, jaded, lét be; call off thoughts awhile
> Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size

Rather than lamenting his unbearable pain and questioning God's lack of presence in his life, in these lines we see Hopkins shift the direction of his cries towards his own consciousness. Hopkins begs his "Soul; self" to "call off thoughts awhile / elsewhere" so that comfort may have room to take root, and joy may enter his heart once again. Within these lines, Hopkins seems to shift the responsibility of his suffering from God's silence to his own anxiety, and in the final stanza Hopkins' appeal to God takes on a much more benign tone than in any of his other Sonnets of Desolation, remarking:

> At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
> 'S not wrung, see you; unforeseentimes rather – as skies
> Betweenpie mountains – lights a lovely mile.

The playfulness of these lines, Hopkins' use of fabricated words such as "unforseentimes" and "betweenpie", marks the return of the inventive and winsome use of language present in some of Hopkins' more uplifting poetry. Moreover, the renewed references to the beauty of nature, in "skies" and "mountains" and "lights a lovely mile", recalls Hopkins' particular appreciation for nature and his ability to see life as that in which, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."[40] In the stanzas of 'My own heart', Hopkins appears to turn away from the desperate loss of hope in which the only comfort lives in the knowledge that "Life death does end and each day dies with sleep"[41]. Rather, in these verses, Hopkins reinvigorates his search for comfort in the act of

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[40] *Ibid,* 128.

[41] 'No worst', *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works,* 167.

patiently awaiting God's presence, seeking consolation in him "whose smile / 'S not wrung".

Throughout this portrait of the spiritual suffering portrayed in the poetic works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, we have examined the efficacy of artistic lament in bringing spiritual comfort to the individual. In this interpretation of Hopkins' Sonnets of Desolation, the trajectory of Hopkins' writing implies that perhaps the poet sought to overcome his internal anguish by means of poetry. Starting with 'To Seem the Stranger' and ending with 'My own heart,' Hopkins seems to trace his despair from its root cause of loneliness and doubt to a realization of personal contentment and faith in God. For Hopkins, the writing of these poems not only recounts that process, but also might have served to *enable* his spiritual healing as well, as Hopkins was able to commit to words the anguish of his heart. The capability of poetry to facilitate this kind of cathartic process need not necessarily be limited merely to Hopkins' poetry, but can arguably be traced throughout many of the most renowned poets from Lord Byron to T.S. Eliot[42]. Similarly, by participating in the reading of poetry, the poet's audience might find themselves experiencing this same kind of catharsis as they inhabit the perspective of the poet. The encounter with Hopkins' poetry allows the participant an intimate glimpse into the pain which Hopkins bore during this time of his life, and points to God's absence from the poet's life as a source of his suffering. Though some scholars describe Hopkins' time in Ireland as one steeped in deep depression, Mariani titled the chapter focused on Hopkins' Terrible Sonnets as "Dark Night of the Soul"[43], a telling analysis of what Mariani

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[42] Prajna Pani, "Reflections on the Existential Philosophy in T.S Eliot's poetry, (Report). "*Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2013), 301–316.

[43] *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* 197-248.

identified as the true nature of Hopkins' suffering. Careful examination of these poems reveals that Hopkins did not writhe under the pain of mere depression, but bore a soul wrought with sorrow and a spirit which lacked Divine comfort. Though the physical and practical struggles that Hopkins battled were surely burdensome, the pain which he despairs of most is internal. The prevalence of Hopkins' observations that his cries fail to reach the sympathies of God suggest that Hopkins felt a keen absence of the Divine presence during this time, struggling under the weight of God's hiddenness and crying out amidst his silence.

Hopkins' expression of his pain in the form of poetic verse enables the nature of his lament to take on a distinct artistry which facilitates its widespread applicability. Furthermore, Hopkins himself wrote his poetry not to be read, but to be spoken, if not almost sung. This feature emphasizes the participatory nature of one's encounter with Hopkins' works. The individual is, ideally, supposed to recite these lines with the particular stresses and rhythms which Hopkins so carefully marked out, and in doing so partake of Hopkins' lament. In his article, "Lyric Theodicy: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Problem of Existential Hiddenness"[44], scholar Ian DeWeese-Boyd argues for the ability of Hopkins' poetry to facilitate a sort of "catharsis of lament" which DeWeese-Boyd identifies as key to overcoming the type of "divine absence" from which Hopkins suffers. Moreover, this function of Hopkins' poetry extends not only to the poet himself, but potentially to the sympathetic reader as well. Hopkins' works present the reader with the opportunity to voice his distress to God, thus drawing closer to God in this act.

[44] Ian DeWeese-Boyd, "Lyric Theodicy: Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Problem of Existential Hiddenness," *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*, edited by Adam Green and Eleonore Stump, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 260–277.

DeWeese-Boyd distinguishes the solution of theodicy from the provision of lament, the latter being that which he identifies as a feature of Hopkins's poetry. DeWeese-Boyd's argument is that Hopkins's lyrical poetry follows the Biblical style portrayed throughout Job and Psalms, and although expressing dissatisfaction with God in relation to a particular state of affairs, it is also a show of belief in God; a plea for him to intervene out of his mercy and goodness. In encountering Hopkins's poetry, DeWeese-Boyd suggests that the reader participates in Hopkins's lament and finds solace in the struggle of a fellow believer with God's absence. In this way, Hopkins' poetry can serve as a means of contemplating the problem of divine hiddenness, and possibly function as an expression of the reader's own artistic lament through the act of reciting this poetry. Furthermore, Hopkins' own spiritual revival as traced through the course of the Dark Sonnets suggest that the contemplation and expression of this internal suffering has the potential to assist the lamenter in finding comfort and working towards bridging the separation between the sufferer and the Divine presence, thus serving as a partial solution to the problem of divine hiddenness.

Louise Glück – The Wild Iris

The last selection of poetry that we will examine is a Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of poems by contemporary poet and United States Poet Laureate, Louise Glück (1943-present). Glück's assortment of poems were published in 1992 under the title, *The Wild Iris*[45]*,* and they rely on the metaphor of flowers in a garden to create dialogue between mankind, creation, and an omnipotent creator. Glück's poetry presents a fascinatingly abstract way of talking about problems of suffering, evil, growth, life, and

[45] Louise Glück, *The Wild Iris,* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1992).

death, drawing heavily from analogies within nature to express questions of divine hiddenness and theodicy from a range of perspectives. Every poem is composed in free verse, written with simple and sparse language, imbuing the work with a casual sense of relatability and rendering it accessible to the reader. Furthermore, Glück's shift in perspective allows the point of view to vary between the human-like gardener-poet, the flowers of the garden, and a seemingly omniscient, godlike figure[46]. This format allows for a kind of speculative discourse concerning what God's justifications might be in response to human complaints of loneliness and abandonment. Moreover, *The Wild Iris* presents a lament that, unlike the sources that we have examined thus far, is not overtly religious and therefore can appeal more readily to Christians and non-Christians alike.

Numerous poems within this work appear to be told from the human perspective of a gardener-poet, often addressed towards the omniscient Creator and drawing deeply from metaphors found within the garden. This point of view aligns most closely with what the reader would likely identify himself with, and contains various laments about God's hiddenness, the problem of evil, and the inevitability of death. One of the first poems in the collection, entitled 'Matins (I)'[47], refers ambiguously to both the morning prayer service which marks the first of the canonical hours, and also to the term used for the morning song of birds. The duality of this title brings to the reader's mind both themes of nature and religion, reinforcing the use of nature as a metaphor and means for

[46] Though it is not explicitly stated that Glück is making reference to the Judeo-Christian God with her use of this perspective, for the purpose of this thesis work, this character will be interpreted as such.

[47] *Ibid,* 3. The title of the poem is not distinguished numerically as 'Matins (I)' in the text, but simply 'Matins'. My addition of a Roman numeral after the title is for the purpose of distinguishing between the three different poems entitled 'Matins' that I will analyze within this work. In total, there are seven poems under the title of 'Matins' throughout *The Wild Iris,* possibly alluding to the Christian belief in seven as the number representing perfection.

lament over the hiddenness of God. Moreover, the poem's title as an overt reference to prayer strengthens the interpretation that the poem is one directed towards God. The poem reads:

> Unreachable father, when we were first
> exiled from heaven, you made
> a replica, a place in one sense
> different from heaven, being
> designated to teach a lesson: otherwise
> the same – beauty on either side, beauty
> without alternative – Except
> we didn't know what was the lesson. Left alone,
> we exhausted each other. Years
> of darkness followed; we took turns
> working the garden, the first tears
> filling our eyes as earth
> misted with petals, some
> dark red, some flesh colored –
> We never thought of you
> whom we were learning to worship.
> We merely knew it wasn't human nature to love
> only what returns love.

These lines suggest that this poem is inhabiting the perspective of humanity, thrown out of the "replica" of heaven, perhaps referencing the Garden of Eden, and immersed in darkness and confusion. In these lines, Glück inhabits the plight of humanity and the pain which results from the separation between God and man. The address of "unreachable father" creates the sense of an already painful inability to properly communicate with the Divine, suggesting that God is hidden or silent in the midst of the poet's suffering. In the lines, "designated to teach a lesson…/ …Except / We didn't know what was the lesson. Left alone, / we exhausted each other. Years / of darkness followed", the speaker expresses a lack of knowledge that exists not as the result of human fault, but rather a failure to be given such knowledge. Mirroring the Genesis account of man's first fall to sin, the speaker appears to lament the darkness and separation that resulted from Adam and Eve's indulgence towards temptation in the Garden of Eden, and the ignorance that led to that temptation. The poem goes on to note that, "We never thought of you / whom

we were learning to worship. / We merely knew it wasn't human nature to love / only what returns love." In these lines, the poet relays a kind of continued ignorance, as humankind is left to "[work] in the garden" without the guidance of the Divine. Although there is worship taking place within the poem, it is worship without knowledge or relationship, a blind and apparently desperate kind of faith. The final two lines of the poem make an ambiguous observation about the nature of the Divine love, possibly meaning that it is human nature to love God, although he does not return that love in kind. The darkness and feelings of abandonment expressed throughout 'Matins' seems to lament mankind's original separation from God, and expresses a sort of resigned love for the Divine, despite the suffering that God's hiddenness and silence has obviously inflicted.

The next two poems told from a seemingly human perspective are each entitled 'Matins', just like the first. Each of these poems utters a sense of anger and confusion towards another individual, possibly God himself, positing questions that appear to go unanswered. In 'Matins (II)'[48], the poet opens with a plea for forgiveness that masks an apparent frustration. The first several lines read:

> Forgive me if I say I love you: the powerful
> are always lied to since the weak are always
> driven by panic. I cannot love
> what I can't conceive, and you disclose
> virtually nothing: are you like the hawthorn tree,
> always the same thing in the same place,
> or are you more the foxglove, inconsistent, first springing up
> a pink spike on the slope behind the daisies,
> and the next year, purple in the rose garden?

The poet makes a harsh admission in the first four lines that she does not truly love that to whom her lament is addressed, citing a Nietzschean kind of power dynamic as the reason

[48] *Ibid,* 12.

for her deceit as well as a failure on the part of the addressed to be properly transparent. The complaint, in its essence, is that the higher power has "[disclosed] / virtually nothing". This complaint is then illustrated by a series of questions directed toward the subject of the poem, asking if he is like the "foxglove" or the "daisies" or the "rose", unsure what the very nature is of the one whom she addresses. The latter half of the poem elaborates on the poet's dissatisfaction over her own state of ignorance, commenting:

> …You must see
> it is useless to us, this silence that promotes belief
> you must be all things, the foxglove and the hawthorn tree,
> the vulnerable rose and tough daisy – we are left to think
> you couldn't possibly exist. Is this
> what you mean us to think, does this explain
> the silence of the morning,
> the crickets not yet rubbing their wings, the cats
> not fighting in the yard?

In these lines, the poet remarks that the hiddenness of the subject, the hiddenness of God, makes it impossible to believe in him. If he is in all things, it feels as if he is in nothing. Once again posing a question, the poet asks if this is God's intention, if this kind of negating ambiguity is what God actually desires, and moreover, if this is the explanation for the unnatural silence that the poet identifies around her; the lack of inertia which she seems to find unsettling. Throughout these lines, the poet justifies her lack of love for and belief in the Divine by attributing these features of her emotional state to the hiddenness and mystery of God, lamenting her unbelief as a result of God's lack of presence.

Much like the previous two poems we have examined, 'Matins (IV)'[49] laments the absence of the Creator, an absence which causes the speaker considerable pain. However, 'Matins (IV)' removes the onus of blame from the higher power to the poet herself,

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[49] *Ibid,* 13.

expressing a resigned sort of anguish with her words, "I am / at fault, at fault". The poem reads:

> I see it is with you as with the birches:
> I am not to speak to you
> in the personal way. Much
> has passed between us. Or
> was it always only
> on the one side? I am
> at fault, at fault, I asked you
> to be human – I am no needier
> than other people. But the absence
> of all feeling, of the least
> concern for me – I might as well go on
> addressing the birches,
> as in my former life: let them
> do their worst, let them
> bury me with the Romantics,
> their pointed yellow leaves
> falling and covering me.

The poet writes of a lack of intimacy between her and the recipient of her address, questioning whether there has ever been any reciprocation of her efforts. If the poem is taken as that directed towards God, these lines lament feelings of loneliness and disconnect that yield desperation to the point of death. The speaker writes that she feels "the absence / of all concern" for her own wellbeing, that she may as well direct her complaints towards the birches as towards God, because the trees are just as likely to utter a response or present a reaction. The frustration and despair expressed in these words depicts a plea for relationship and comfort from a silent God, and suggests a quiet sort of resignation concerning God's absence.

The last poem that we will examine from the human point of view is one of the several poems[50] within *The Wild Iris* entitled 'Vespers'[51]. This term most commonly refers to the evening prayer service held by the Christian church at the sixth canonical

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[50] In all, there are ten separate poems entitled 'Vespers' within *The Wild Iris.*

[51] *Ibid,* 38.

hour of worship, the opposite daily bookend to the morning ‘Matins’ prayer service. Once again, the poem’s title of ‘Vespers’ invokes a distinctly religious tone within the poem, framing the work as an utterance of prayer. In ‘Vespers’, Glück writes:

> More than you love me, very possibly
> You love the beasts of the field, even,
> possibly, the field itself, in August dotted
> with wild chicory and aster:
> I know. I have compared myself
> to those flowers, their range of feeling
> so much smaller and without issue; also to white sheep,
> actually gray: I am uniquely
> suited to praise you. Then why
> torment me? I study the hawkweed,
> the buttercup protected from the grazing herd
> by being poisonous: is pain
> your gift to make me
> conscious in my need of you, as though
> I must need you to worship you,
> or have you abandoned me
> in favor of the field, the stoic lambs turning
> silver in twilight; waves of wild aster and chicory shining
> pale blue and deep blue, since you already know
> how like your raiment it is.

Throughout these lines, the poet utters emotions of distress and insecurity, stating that God appears to love the flowers of the field more than her. This claim appears to draw from a Biblical reference, in which Jesus proclaims, “’Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!’”[52] In this poem, Glück seems to be calling out to God indignantly, criticizing God’s lack of providence in light of Christ’s promise. Moreover, Glück’s comment that “I am uniquely / suited to praise you. Then why / torment me?” echoes Saint Anselm of Canterbury’s cry that, “I was created so that I might see you, but I have not yet done what

[52] Luke 12: 27-28.

I was created to do."[53] The poet goes on to pose the question of why she must suffer so – is this suffering what is required for her to need God, and in consequence give him the praise he desires? In contrasting her own pain with the seeming ease of the flowers of the field, the speaker determines that God must have failed in his promise to care for humanity more than he cares for the lilies. Or, the poet poses, has God abandoned her? In favor of his creation, of the beauty of lambs and twilight, wild aster and chicory, has he found the praise that he desires over that of human devotion? The poet's questioning in these lines, the lack of provision that she perceives in her life, yields a heartbroken lament, suffering from a sense of desertion by a God who has promised to love and care for her. Discerning more care for the flowers than for herself, the poet writhes under the torment of abandonment and the comparison of her own suffering to the beauty of God's floral creations.

In response to these cries of lament from the human perspective, Glück includes a series of poems within *The Wild Iris* that appear to inhabit the voice of the omniscient, godlike character to whom the previous selection of poems might make their address. Throughout these verses, Glück appears to be offering a reply to these complaints of suffering and abandonment, presenting within the perspective of this poet an expression of emotion, criticism, and partial explanation for the distance and injustice that the gardener-poet feels. These verses provide an interesting insight into some possible justifications for human suffering and separation from God, and allow the reader to feel as if he is engaging in a dialogue with the Creator, in many ways, suggesting that the speaker's lament is not falling upon deaf ears. Interestingly, each of the poems from this

[53] *Proslogion,* 4-5.

perspective in *The Wild Iris* are titled not after flowers or prayers, but after larger forces of nature that are more abstract, such as 'Clear Morning' and 'End of Winter', perhaps in this way alluding to the perspective of these poems as a higher, overarching power.

The first poem from the omniscient narrator's perspective that we will explore is entitled "Retreating Wind", and describes the creation of humankind and God's opinion of humanity's suffering. In this work, Glück writes:

> When I made you, I loved you.
> Now I pity you.
>
> I gave you all you needed:
> bed of earth, blanket of blue air –
>
> As I get further away from you
> I see you more clearly.
> Your souls should have been immense by now,
> not what they are,
> small talking things –
>
> I gave you every gift,
> blue of the spring morning,
> time you didn't know how to use –
> you wanted more, the one gift
> reserved for another creation.
>
> Whatever you hoped,
> you will not find yourselves in the garden,
> among the growing plants.
> Your lives are not circular like theirs:
>
> your lives are the bird's flight
> which begins and ends in stillness –
> which *begins* and *ends,* in form echoing
> this arc from the white birch
> to the apple tree.

Within these lines, the narrator asserts a sort of pitying disdain for what humankind has become, suggesting that he thought that man's "souls should have been immense by now", yet instead they are "small talking things". The narrator holds that he has given mankind everything that he needed, all of the creation that was required for man to thrive, and yet man still longs for "the one gift / reserved for another creation", to be "in the garden, / among the growing plants" with lives that are circular. However, man's longing

for these things can only lead him to a state of unhappiness. This longing to be other than what one is has shrunken the souls of humanity and yielded discontent, and it appears that this poem is the Creator's way of absolving himself of this discontent, shifting the blame onto man's impossible desires and the denial of the Creator's true nature. Within 'Retreating Wind', Glück exhibits an instance of reply to the lament of humankind, a commentary, if not an explanation, from the Divine perspective addressing why man suffers as he does, ever-desiring that which was never within his reach to begin with.

The next poem that we will examine, once again from a seemingly Divine perspective, is entitled 'Midsummer'[54]. This work inhabits the perspective of the Creator, addressing his creation's complaints with a critical eye towards the validity of these laments, this time turning the blame back around to a humankind's fundamental misunderstanding of the Creator himself. The poem is somewhat ambiguous in its address, possibly directed towards humankind, possibly directed towards flowers, or perhaps meant to apply to both. However, if taken to address human beings, at least in part, the Creator offers a series of explanations to account for his perceived distance and apathy towards mankind. The speaker begins by posing a question:

> How can I help you when you all want
> different things – sunlight and shadow,
> moist darkness, dry heat –

The Creator then goes on to point out the disparity between human nature and human desires, correcting misconceptions along the way that humans "think something could fuse [them] into a whole" and desire to be "unique", "single in the eyes of heaven". Such is not the case, the speaker corrects these misconceptions, remarking "you were /my embodiment, all diversity / not what you think you see". In the final two stanzas of the

[54] *The Wild Iris,* 34-35.

poem, the Creator identifies what the primary cause of this misunderstanding is, asserting that:

> your incidental souls
> fixed like telescopes on some
> enlargement of yourselves –
>
> Why would I make you if I meant
> to limit myself
> to the ascendant sign,
> the star, the fire, the fury?

In these lines, the speaker appears to be attributing a part of humankind's suffering to their anthropomorphic view of God, the tendency of humanity to incorrectly limit God, searching for an "enlargement" of themselves, rather than an image of what the Divine Being actually is. From the point of view of the higher power represented within the poem, this misconception breeds the dissatisfaction and abandonment that humanity complains of. From an improper understanding of themselves and an improper understanding of God, humankind forms their complaint, though it may in fact be unfounded. Through this explanation, Glück's poem appears to offer at least a partial explanation for the problem of divine hiddenness and the suffering of mankind in light of God's distance. If indeed humanity is searching for a version of themselves, scanning the skies for a limitation of the actual God, this may partially explain the disconnect that occurs between human beings and the Divine and their failure to properly identify signs of God's presence.

The last poem from *The Wild Iris* that we will examine from the omniscient, godlike point of view is entitled 'Sunset'[55], and offers a gentler reply to man's complaint than was offered in the previous two poems. 'Sunset' urges man to find the love and

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[55] *Ibid,* 57.

voice of God not in “signs / [he] cannot read with any accuracy”, but in “the breeze of the summer evening”. The poem in its entirety reads:

> My great happiness
> is the sound your voice makes
> calling to me even in despair; my sorrow
> that I cannot answer you
> in speech you accept as mine.
>
> You have no faith in your own language.
> So you invest
> authority in signs
> you cannot read with any accuracy.
>
> And yet your voice reaches me always.
> And I answer constantly,
> my anger passing
> as winter passes. My tenderness
> should be apparent to you
> in the breeze of the summer evening
> and in the worlds that become
> your own response.

Throughout these verses, the reader receives a more sympathetic explanation for the silence of God, as the speaker responds that he always hears the cries of his creation, and answers constantly. However, it appears that these answers are most present in the subtleties of nature, even in something as simple as a mere breeze. The ambiguous nature of this evidence leaves it easily overlooked or misinterpreted, a fact which the Creator himself seems to acknowledge in the line, “I cannot answer you / in speech you accept as mine.” Moreover, the speaker accuses humanity of having “no faith in [their] own language”, a fault which leads mankind to look for the Divine in signs that the human mind can neither interpret nor comprehend. In its tender correction and criticism, ‘Sunset’ can be read as a reply from God to humanity concerning mankind’s search for evidence of the Divine. While man looks for God in signs he cannot interpret and utters cries for which he mutes the answers, the Creator suggest that he imbues himself in the simple kindnesses of nature and in “the worlds that become / your own response”. Thus, the

failure of humankind to recognize these signs of God accounts what man might perceive as the silence of God, suggesting that the problem of divine hiddenness is not an issue of communication, but interpretation.

The last poem that we will analyze from *The Wild Iris* is one which inhabits the point-of-view of nature itself, critiquing the complaint of humanity from a sort of unbiased, third party perspective. This poem, entitled 'Violets'[56], offers a kind of consolation from the perspective of flowers, drawing from the humility and steadfastness of flowers and trees to imply an understanding that man often fails to reach. The poem reads:

> Because in our world
> something is always hidden,
> small and white,
> small and what you call
> pure, we do not grieve
> as you grieve, dear
> suffering master; you
> are no more lost
> than we are, under
> the hawthorn tree, the hawthorn holding
> balanced trays of pearls: what
> has brought you among us
> who would teach you, though
> you kneel and weep,
> clasping your great hands,
> in all your greatness knowing
> nothing of the soul's nature,
> which is never to die: poor sad god,
> either you never have one
> or you never lose one.

The address of the poem to "dear / suffering master" can be interpreted as an address to the gardener-poet who has expressed feelings of distress, loneliness, and suffering in various other poems throughout the work. In these lines, the flowers seek to comfort the gardener-poet, admitting that "something is always hidden" in their world, and pointing out that the human is "no more lost / than we are". The voice of the flowers appears calm,

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[56] *Ibid,* 21.

accepting the hardships that humans lament over with grace and the peace of one who knows that “the soul’s nature / … is never to die”. The violets point out that, though man is “master” and a creature of “greatness”, he lacks a fundamental understanding of the cycles of nature which he is eternally subject to. The final statement of the poem is an unsettlingly ambiguous one, as the flowers pityingly comment, “poor sad god, / either you never have one / or you never lose one”. It is not clear whether the subject to be had or lost is the soul itself, a god, love, or some other force. What is clear though is that the violets seem to have a knowledge and understanding of the soul and the nature of hiddenness that the gardener-poet does not possess, and this knowledge allows them a kind of peace that the human perspective is not afforded. This unique vantage point from which to view the suffering of humankind calls into question the validity of the gardener-poet’s complaint, much like the responses of the omniscient God-like figure, and offers a partial explanation for human suffering as a result of man’s ignorance and misunderstanding.

The poetic work of Louise Glück within *The Wild Iris* employs the language and metaphor of a garden to comment on the nature of human suffering, existential questioning, and the relationship between humanity, the Divine, and the natural elements. Much of Glück’s poetry throughout *The Wild Iris* can be taken to portray a conversation between a human figure and a God-like figure, interspersed with commentary from the flowers of the garden themselves. This framework provides both human lament, but also a unique sort of reverse-apologetic on the part of God towards his suffering creation. While the gardener-poet complains of God’s silence, her own suffering, and the disappointments of her life, God responds by pointing out his provision, the poet’s

misinterpretation of evidence, and the poet's misconceptions concerning the nature of God. This dialogue presents a conversation that inhabits both the human and the Divine perspectives, and offers possible justifications for the problem of divine hiddenness. Moreover, the viewpoint of the flowers in the garden interjected in the midst of these dialogues creates a contrast between the consistency and steadfast acceptance of nature and the anxious and confused cries of the gardener-poet. Through the use of these three separate voices, Glück demonstrates poetry that can be seen as a kind of lament uttered towards God, decrying the silence of the Divine Creator in the midst of human suffering. The replies offered by the omniscient-godlike character within the text, if taken to represent the perspective of the Christian God, give the reader a sense that God hears the poet's cries, and responds to them in kind. The creation of this type of conversation enables the feeling of relationship to exist between the lamenter and God, facilitating a partial reconciliation based on an understanding of God's response. In this way, the poetry within *The Wild Iris* presents an effective example of artistic lament concerning the hiddenness of God, and exists in such a way that the reader might be able to read or speak these poems to his own spiritual advantage, uttering the cries of the gardener-poet and understanding the replies of the god, taking on the criticism of the flowers and finding a sense of relief in these words.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have explored the medium of poetry as a means of artistic lament over the problem of divine hiddenness. In the poetry of George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Louise Glück, we analyzed examples of poems that could be interpreted as instances of lament over God's silence or hiddenness, and explored the

contributions that these verses make to the conversation surrounding the problem of divine hiddenness. In the poetry of Herbert and Hopkins, there exists a distinctly religious plea which, though suffering from God's silence, never admits doubt in his existence. For each of these poets, the lament of their poetry was written for an extremely limited audience, published posthumously, and likely intended more as a private release of emotion than as a work to be consumed by an audience. Through the verses of these two religious poets, the process of lament appears to bring a degree of relief, as the poet experiences a revival of faith by means of expressing his discontent unto God. In the poetry of Louise Glück, there is less reliance on an explicitly religious framework, as Glück's godlike figure is never explicitly named as the Christian God. However, this ambiguity allows for wide interpretation of who this perspective is meant to represent, and if taken to reference the Christian God, these poems speak directly to the problem of divine hiddenness.

The works that we have examined within this chapter, though of a deeply personal nature, have the potential to function for the reader much as they seem to have functioned for the poet, as a sort of expression of internal suffering and a release of emotion. Through this process, of reading or speaking these poems, the reader can be led to sympathize with the poet's lament, perhaps adopting it as his own. In this way, poetic verse can facilitate the open dialogue between humankind and God that expresses grief, loneliness, but also faith. In this act, the individual is drawing closer to God through the practice of lament, harboring the expectation of God's provision and comfort within his plea, and in a sense, expressing an implicit faith in God's existence by the very act of creating an address directed towards him. Through this process, the reward of emotional

relief and consolation can serve to bolster the individual's belief in God, thus helping to overcome the problem of divine hiddenness through this form of artistic lament.

CHAPTER THREE

Lament in Music

Introduction

In this final chapter of analysis, we will explore how the medium of music can provide an expression of artistic lament that enables the individual to confront and process his emotional distress over the hiddenness of God, and in this way provide a partial solution to the evidential problem of divine hiddenness. Similar to the prose and poetic sources that we have examined thus far, music presents an opportunity for the individual to express a depth of emotion that often marks the release of deeply-held thoughts and feelings. For this reason, music is a helpful tool for expanding the types of resources that the individual might have available to commune with the Divine and gain a source of comfort in the midst of God's hiddenness. The musical sources that we will explore in this section of the thesis will be drawn from Barber's *Adagio for String* and Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6.* Throughout these compositions, I will seek to point out the ways in which the musical and lyrical components of these pieces might allow the listener to find emotional and spiritual solace in the experience of listening to these works. I will then argue that it is this ability of music that allows it to serve as a means of connecting with God and providing evidence for his existence by means of a restorative emotional experience, exhibiting worship in the midst of lament.

The use of music as a means of communing with God is not unprecedented, but rather, it is rooted in almost every major religious tradition. For Christianity, music has long been a feature of liturgical worship, from the Catholic Gregorian chant to the

Eastern Orthodox evening prayer service, music and worship are often viewed synonymously in the history of the Church. Moreover, music is by necessity a participatory experience, as the listener must at minimum hold themes and melodies in her head in order to follow the progression of the notes. This process, though many times an almost entirely subconscious one, demands the engagement of the listener with the piece of music in a way that constitutes an active interaction of the individual with the experience of the music that she is consuming.

While music, like poetry and narrative, is a highly subjective medium, there are certain musical elements that provoke a common emotional reaction from a majority of listeners. For instance, a decrescendo accompanied by a ritardando, the notes decreasing in both tempo and volume, commonly causes listeners to feel a calming or sad element to the music, while a faster tempo combined with a flurry of sixteenth notes often provokes feelings of anxiety or excitement in the listener. While such reactions are not universal and are highly dependent on the context of the piece itself, there are specific neurological and emotional reactions that remain prevalent in listeners' experiences with particular recurrent musical elements. Moreover, the brain processes music with not only memory, but with expectation as well. Part of the reason that certain melodic progressions and themes overwhelmingly strike listeners as pleasant or unpleasant is because of the way that the brain anticipates the development of the music before hearing the notes. For instance, certain intervals such as thirds or fifths are common in major chord progressions, and often fit the listener's expectations of what note will complete the sequence, thus eliciting satisfaction in the listener's neurological reaction to the musical

progression.[1] While this thesis will not dwell extensively on this science behind how the brain reacts to musical stimulation, it is worthy to note that the auditory process does not rely solely on subjective reactions, but in many cases produces consistent tastes on the basis of a general neurological preference ingrained in the human psyche.

In examining these musical pieces, I will primarily rely on a brief biographical description of each piece's composer, as well as commentary from secondary sources providing insight into the musicality of the piece, and lastly on some of the prevalent historical reactions to these pieces. Through these lenses, I hope to provide context to my selection of these musical works as relevant to the problem of divine hiddenness. However, the reactions that I will discuss constitute only one interpretation of these pieces, not necessarily a universal reaction. Like the other examples of artistic lament that we have explored, these musical works are subjective modes of expression and alive with meaning, thus they can often elicit multiple reasonable interpretations. Music, more so than the previous two mediums that we have explored, is a malleable art form, instilled with nuance that changes between every performance, largely dependent upon the listener's circumstances, mindset, and emotional state to find its meaning for the individual. For this reason, music is both an ideal topic of examination for this thesis, but also one of the hardest mediums to discuss in concrete terms. With this in mind, I have chosen pieces that are commonly felt among listeners to express heavy emotion, primarily grief, and have connected these pieces to the genre of lament by means of the historical circumstances of their composition as well as the components of their musicality. I will further note that, as much as my description of these pieces attempts to

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[1] Elizabeth Landua, "This is your brain on music," *CNN health*, January 23, 2018. Accessed February 23, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/2013/04/15/health/brain-music-research/index.html

capture the depth and breadth of their respective messages, the best way to glean a true understanding of these pieces is to listen to them. Music can, of course, be written about. However, such commentary remains necessarily reductionist. For this reason, I highly recommend that my reader listen to these pieces for himself, as such an experience will be highly rewarding and bring about a deeper understanding of the music than words can express.

Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings"

The first piece that we will turn to in our discussion of music as artistic lament is Samuel Barber's composition, "Adagio for Strings"[2]. From the very offset of its premiere in 1938, "Adagio for Strings" has been beloved as one of the most heart-wrenching compositions of the twentieth century. With a hauntingly simplistic melodic line that slowly ascends up a progression of notes in B-minor, "Adagio" employs an almost methodical striving towards an ever-unfulfilled end. These musical elements of the piece, along with perhaps a more elusive and ineffable quality which renders the music so widely relatable, almost immediately marked the work as an expression of haunting and poignant grief. Throughout some of the most tragic events of the twentieth century, it was *Adagio for Strings* that sounded across the nation on radios and in concert halls, a tribute to the collective sadness of a nation, drawing individuals together in mourning. The piece made an appearance during the funeral of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and again at the death of renowned scientist Albert Einstein. Following the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, Jackie Kennedy selected *Adagio* to be played by the National Symphony Orchestra, to an empty concert hall, in his honor. Moreover, the use of *Adagio*

[2] Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, *Romantic Favorites for Strings,* "Adagio for Strings, Op. 11", Alliance, (2004).

by filmmaker Oliver Stone in his seminal Vietnam War movie, *Platoon* (1986), once again underscored the music's inherent ability to capture and express feelings of despair[3].

Barber's original intention in composing *Adagio* was not necessarily to write a standalone piece, but rather, *Adagio* actually comprises the second movement of Barber's String Quartet, Op. 11. However, Barber himself described this second movement as "a knockout" in and of itself, and the piece has often been performed without the accompanying first movement, its solitude perhaps befitting of its musical singularity[4]. Barber's original inspiration for the piece came during a summer spent living abroad in Austria with his fellow composer and lifelong companion, Gian Carlo Menotti. Barber came across a passage from Virgil's *Georgics*[5] which inspired the composition of the piece that would soon become *Adagio for Strings.* The particular passage from Virgil reads:

> A breast-shaped curve of wave begins to whiten
> And rise above the surface, then rolling on
> Gathers and gathers until it reaches land
> Huge as a mountain and crashes among the rocks
> With a prodigious roar, and what was deep
> Comes churning up from the bottom in mighty swirls

The strong nature metaphors utilized throughout this passage, particularly the image of ocean waves churning up from the deep and crashing to shore, appear to coincide with the rise and swell of the melody that remains prevalent throughout *Adagio.* Moreover, the fact that Barber's inspiration for composing the piece was drawn from a passage of

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[3] Keller, Johanna. "An Adagio for Strings, and for the Ages." *The New York Times,* 5 March 2010. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/arts/music/07barber.html

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Virgil., Smith Palmer. Bovie, and Virgil. *Virgil's Georgics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

poetry written thousands of years before his own lifetime bespeaks the efficacy of art as a catalyst for the expression of emotion, and Barber's iteration of this emotion in the form of *Adagio for Strings* exemplifies the unique manner by which varying individuals reflect and process art.

In terms of the elements that comprise *Adagio for Strings,* much of the emotional angst within the music is rendered by virtue of the harmonic tension that underlies the melodic progressions. The melody ascends in a series of diatonic steps, exuding a sense of yearning throughout its perseverant climb. The violin, viola, and cello each take their turns carrying the recurrent melodic theme upwards, each iteration resulting in an unsatisfying lack of resolution within the music. In the third rendition of this ascension, as the melody is carried by the cello section, the upper strings rise in dynamic level and pitch, culminating in an almost unbearable tension as each section strains against the upper register of its respective instrument to emit a seemingly desperate series of chord progressions. However, even in this climactic moment, the musical plea appears to go unanswered, as the strings passively sink back down in a fading lack of fulfillment, left without a musical resolution. The chords that follow, played in unison, provide a sort of salve to the listener's ear following the musical stress of the work's shrill, climactic moment, and as the same melodic progression once again resumes, the listener is struck by a resigned sort of perseverance as the notes continue. Eventually, the piece fades out entirely, the soft harmony of the lower strings creating a sort of gradual decline as the chords gently swell, the striving of the ten minutes of heart-wrenching effort is eventually laid to rest.

This interpretation of *Adagio*, though a largely subjective one, is not without its technical backing. In his book entitled, *The Saddest Music Ever Written,* composer and music scholar Thomas Larson reveals some of the musical mechanics which underpin the tragedy of *Adagio for Strings.* Larson writes:

> We might say that this three-note figure – B-flat – A – B-flat establishes B-flat as the tonic note or home key. But when Barber moves the melody up the B-flat minor scale, he does so *not* over the tonic chord, B-flat minor, which we'd expect, but *against* the dominant chord, F major. This creates a kind of floating harmony. Some listeners hear two keys at once (biotonality). I hear the plainsong melody struggling to harmonize with the F major chord. In a sense, it feels stuck on the dominant, wending its way towards the "missing" tonic[6].

Larson's commentary provides the musical explanation for the gaping sense of absence that the music conveys – the "'missing' tonic" that he describes perhaps accounting for the inherent grief which *Adagio* exhibits. This feature, in addition to the lack of resolution that remains present in every rendition of the melodic chord progression, yields itself readily to the common interpretation of the piece as an overt expression of sadness bordering on despair.

It is clear that, in this understanding of *Adagio for Strings*, there is a sense of incompleteness within the musical components of the piece itself. The plaintive cry of the instruments as the song progresses and its lack of resolution suggests an inherent tonic dissatisfaction within the framework of the piece. There seems to be something ever-beyond the grasp of the music's ability, which on a practical sense we have already identified as the melodic resolution of the notes themselves. However, on a more abstract level, the piece feels almost as if it cries out in want of some kind of knowledge, understanding, or action that remains consistently unattainable. It's as though the music

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[6]Thomas Larson and Samuel Barber, *The Saddest Music Ever Written : the Story of Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings"* 1st Pegasus Books cloth ed. (New York, NY: Pegasus Books, 2010).

seeks something that is necessary in order to find its completeness, yet that which it seeks ever-eludes even the most ardent efforts of its progressions. It is from this element of *Adagio* that I argue the piece finds its relevance to the discussion surrounding divine hiddenness. If taken to be a musical lament concerning some unobtainable fulfillment, it would seem that the composition could well apply to the individual's search for knowledge of and fulfillment in God, which similarly appears to remain an unattainable experience for the sufferer of divine hiddenness. The strong themes of grief that many listeners associate with *Adagio* coincide with this interpretation of the music, as grief and lament are often linked in a causal relationship.

The connection between *Adagio for Strings* and religious lament is one that Barber himself recognized within the music, demonstrated by his later adaptation of *Adagio* as a choral rendition of the liturgical text, "Agnus Dei". In 1967, 29 years after the original premiere of *Adagio for Strings,* Barber reconfigured the piece to usher forth the same haunting scales and harmonies, but this time sung by a four part choral arrangement and set to a section of the liturgical text known as "Agnus Dei", which means "Lamb of God". The chant is a plea to Christ as the Lamb of God, begging him to have mercy on the petitioner and take away the sins of man. The accompanying text reads[7]:

Agnus Dei,	Lamb of God,
Qui tollis peccata mundi,	Who takes away the sins of the world,
Miserere nobis.	Have mercy on us.
Agnus Dei,	Lamb of God,
Qui tollis peccata mundi,	Who takes away the sins of the world,
Miserere nobis.	Have mercy on us.
Agnus Dei,	Lamb of God,
Qui tollis peccata mundi,	Who takes away the sins of the world,
Dona nobis pacem.	Grant us peace.

[7] The Dale Warland Singers, *Cathedral Classics,* "Agnus Dei – Samuel Barber," (American Choral Catalog, 1994).

In Barber's rendition of this plea, the four vocal parts of the Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass usher forth these lines amidst the ascending scales that we have already discussed, emphasizing the sense of striving towards God. This transformation of *Adagio* into an explicitly religious work is an interesting development in the life of the piece, as it seemed to carry a sense of musical lament long before Barber paired this text with the music. Through the petitioner's words, we get the sense of a plea unto God, and an expectation of an altered state of affairs, namely the bestowing of God's mercy and the advent of peace for the petitioner. In this way, this lyrical addition to *Adagio* draws out the deeper meaning that many listeners found in the instrumental version as well, a sense of grief and striving and yearning for something that has yet to be fulfilled. It appears that Barber saw these emotions within the music as well, and connected his original composition to an overtly religious piece of text, further bolstering the interpretation of *Adagio for Strings* as a lament unto God.

However, if *Adagio* is taken as a lament concerning the hiddenness of God, it does not appear to be a hopeless one. The gentle, yet resolute, perseverance of the music, even after the pinnacle moment of desperation, suggests the kind of stalwart, though suffering, faith that Mother Teresa and Alyosha exhibit, and Orual yearns for. Ultimately, the piece ends on a dominant, though unresolved, chord. This persistence bespeaks a sort of hopefulness despite the struggle – in the midst of the music's inevitable failure, there is a quiet kind of comfort present. The music itself appears to be not merely an expression of sadness, but also assumes a kind of restorative quality.

Larson, in his comments regarding the comforting nature of the piece, writes: "sad music *intensifies* sadness, and in that intensity, solace is somehow provided"[8]. It is perhaps this intensifying quality of *Adagio* that has rendered it a timeless expression of communal grief, empowering it with a unique ability to both encapsulate and convey the suffering of many, and in hearing this suffering, allowing for at least a partial release of the pain that bears down on the sufferer's soul. In this way, *Adagio for Strings* has the potential to function as a means of artistic lament for the individual suffering from the hiddenness of God, as the yearning nature of the music seems especially suited to the cries of a believer longing for comfort and assurance of God's love and existence. As the active listener follows along the trajectory of the music, his grief and suffering, "churning up from the bottom in mighty swirls"[9], there is an opportunity for restoration in the experience of expression, similarly to that which we have examined by means of narrative and poetry. As the listener projects his own suffering and instills this suffering into his encounter with the music, he is arguably in a more receptive position to receive comfort for this pain by virtue of the experience of hearing the piece and actively engaging with the message that the music seeks to convey.

This process of finding an expression of suffering within the music, of identifying with its message and participating as listener, musician, or even composer, is one in which the individual might be led to form his own lament in kind with that of the piece itself. The importance of such an experience and its evidential value in regards to providing support for God's existence lies in the opportunity that this process facilitates

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[8] *The Saddest Music Ever Written,* 8.

[9] Virgil, *Georgics:* III, 243.

for the individual to experience a healthy release of emotions and an openness towards receiving confirming evidence for God's existence. This confirming evidence may be as particular to the individual as a sense of comfort found by listening to the piece, or as significant as an alteration in the individual's state of affairs as a result of his plea. The importance of this process is that it creates a dialogue between humankind and God, an opportunity for relationship that in turn builds the individual's connection to the Divine. Music specifically allows for this type of expression to occur without the necessity of words, which remains an especially important feature of this medium of artistic lament, as it would make sense for a God whose being is beyond human comprehension and language to communicate with humanity through alternate means of expression, such as music.

Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 6* (*Pathetique*)

The next piece that we will examine as an example of musical, artistic lament is the final symphonic composition of renowned 19th century Russian composer, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. This brilliant work of musical artistry was the last piece to ever premiere during Tchaikovsky's lifetime, and was speculated by many to represent an especially significant connection to Tchaikovsky's sudden death and internal struggles. Though there has been much ink spilled concerning the ties between *Symphony No. 6* and Tchaikovsky's possible suicide and repressed homosexuality, whether or not these conjectures are true holds little bearing on the fact that the music bespeaks a unique and utter anguish. Tchaikovsky began composing his final symphony in 1893, after destroying his most recent composition, *Symphony in Eb Major*, because of his own

dissatisfaction with the latter work. Tchaikovsky's describes his intention behind this abandoned symphony as follows:

> The underlying essence…of the symphony is *Life.* First part – all impulsive passion, confidence, thirst for activity. Must be short (the Finale death – result of collapse). Second part love: third disappointments; fourth ends dying away (also short).[10]

Though it is uncertain how much of this storyline made its way into Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6*, it is clear that Tchaikovsky abandoned the work because of an abiding sense that the piece was not as great as he had intended. In a letter to his nephew, Vladimir "Bob" Davydov, Tchaikovsky expresses his discontent with *Symphony in Eb Major,* writing:

> These past few days, I have been considering and reflecting on matters of great importance. I looked objectively at my new symphony and was glad that I neither orchestrated nor launched it; it makes quite an unfavorable impression. I mean, the symphony was written just for the sake of writing something – there is nothing attractive or interesting in it. I have decided to throw it out and forget it. The decision is irrevocable and I am glad I made it. But, does this mean that I am completely dried up? This is the question that has been worrying me for these last three days. Maybe I could still summon up inspiration to write programme music, but pure music – i.e. symphonic and chamber music – I should not write any more.[11]

It was in the wake of this crisis of self-doubt that Tchaikovsky found himself composing *Symphony No. 6*, which came to him with such fervent inspiration that it seemed the utter antithetical to the unfulfilling and unremarkable failure which he attributed to his previous symphony. Tchaikovsky's fear that he would never again write "pure music" was unfounded. In another letter to Bob, Tchaikovsky provides some insight into his mindset when composing *Symphony No. 6*, writing:

> While on my travels I had an idea for another symphony – a program work this time, but its program will remain a mystery to everyone – let them guess. But

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[10] Timothy L. Jackson, *Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[11] Marina M. Rystareva, *Tchaikovsky's Pathétique and Russian Culture* (Farnham, Surrey UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

> the symphony will be called "Program Symphony" (no. 6) … This program is imbued with subjectivity. During my journey, while composing it in my thoughts, I often wept a great deal[12].

It is clear from Tchaikovsky's words that he was much affected during his composition of *Symphony No. 6*, the very thought of the music often bringing him to tears. Tchaikovsky's comment that the symphony was "imbued with subjectivity" is also an interesting one, especially as it relates to the use of *Symphony No. 6* as an artistic lament. From this designation, it can be deduced that Tchaikovsky knew and intended his work to be one accompanied by a wide variety of interpretations, and to relate broadly to the experience of the individual listener rather than adhere to a predetermined storyline. Thus, the interpretation of *Symphony No. 6* as a lament which can be adapted to fit the pleas of the individual holds up in light of this intention on the part of the composer.

Another feature of the work which commonly suggests its emotionally-laden capacity is the alternative name for the symphony, *Pathétique*, by which the piece is most frequently referenced in contemporary circles. It is unclear exactly whether it was Tchaikovsky himself or his brother, Modest, who gave the symphony this name[13]. However, it is widely accepted that Tchaikovsky did acknowledge and approve of the secondary title, feeling it fitting for his highly *pathos*-driven work. While the title *Pathétique* draws a close corollary to the word "pathetic" in the English, this translation of the title arises from the French, while actually the original Russian title was *Pateticheskaya,* which better translates to "charged with strong emotion"[14]. This is an

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[12] *Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6,* 13.

[13] Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky's Last Days : a Documentary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[14] Andrés Oroco-Estrada, "Secrets, Rumors, and Lies: Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, Pathétique," Houston Symphony, 2020. https://houstonsymphony.org/tchaikovsky-pathetique/

important distinction to keep in mind, so as not to overreach the implications of the work's title as a direct corollary to Tchaikovsky's untimely death or merely an expression of the "pathetic". Rather, the relationship of the piece to its title of *Pathétique* is meant to denote an expression of *strong* emotion, but not necessarily *pathetic,* or even negative, emotion. To categorize the work merely as such would be a gross oversimplification of its complex and sophisticated expressive framework. With this in mind, we approach Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* knowing that Tchaikovsky imbued much of his own passionate internal turmoil into the piece, possibly with the intention of finding a sympathetic ear among his listener. For this reason, *Symphony No. 6* was not written to exist as a stagnant work of art played before a placid concert hall, but a living and breathing expression of intense emotion.

It is this highly personal element of *Pathétique* that perhaps makes its sub-stellar debut all the more tragic. Despite Tchaikovsky's obvious personal investment in the piece, its first performance elicited a rather lackluster reaction from the original audience members, one commentator noting that the "audience reaction was ambivalent if not hostile"[15]. Many of Tchaikovsky's own friends and musical contemporaries found aspects of the symphony confusing or simply unremarkable, a fact that surprisingly did not greatly upset the often sensitive composer. Despite the failings of the piece's debut, Tchaikovsky still maintained that it was "the best, and in particular, the most sincere of all [his] creations"[16].

[15] *Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6*, 18

[16] "Secrets, Rumors, and Lies: Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, Pathétique".

It was not until the second performance of *Symphony No. 6*, which fell just over two weeks after the original release of the work, that Tchaikovsky's composition was regarded as a true masterpiece. This shift in attitudes is especially significant, seeing as the only major change that occurred during this hiatus was, in fact, the sudden death of Tchaikovsky himself. This event immediately imbued a certain element of tragedy, mystery, and grief into the acclaimed composer's final work, and many listeners subsequently began to hear the piece as Tchaikovsky's own requiem, composed knowingly in the face of his imminent demise. Whether or not this is a valid interpretation of the symphony is debated among scholars. There is some evidence for *Symphony No. 6* as a kind of requiem owing to the fact that there are quotations of the Russian Orthodox Requiem present throughout the first movement of the piece. Moreover, shortly after composing the symphony, Tchaikovsky refused the request of his close friend, Konstantin Romanov, to write a musical setting to Apukhtin's poem "Requiem", replying that, "my last symphony (especially the finale) is suffused by a similar mood"[17].

However, the official cause of Tchaikovsky's death was cholera, not an unlikely fate given that St. Petersburg had recently suffered an outbreak of the disease[18]. Despite this plausible explanation, the rapidity with which Tchaikovsky succumbed to his illness, his tendency towards depressive bouts, and the recent release of his emotionally-wrought *Symphony No. 6* led many speculators to believe that the diagnosis of cholera was a cover-up for a death by suicide. Such speculations have led many commentators to thus

[17] "Secrets, Rumors, and Lies: Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, Pathétique".

[18] "Secrets, Rumors, and Lies: Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, Pathétique".

refer to the piece as a "musical suicide note", which though perhaps possible, is not clearly substantiated by the historical evidence surrounding Tchaikovsky's death. Rather, it appears that although Tchaikovsky was not untouched by deep emotional anguish, as we see clearly throughout *Pathétique*, his death was likely due to natural causes.

Now, we turn from this historical and biographical exploration of Tchaikovsky's composition to examine the musical elements of the piece. It is worthy to note that the feature of *Symphony No. 6* which Tchaikovsky himself found to be most innovative aspect of the piece was the *form* of the symphony, more so than its content[19]. This innovation perhaps reflects the extent of Tchaikovsky's disenchantment with the compositions of his day, including his discarded symphony, *Life*, and his need to compose something greater than he had yet produced during the course of his illustrious career. The result of this desire for the original yielded a symphonic structure that subverted audience expectations, and it is perhaps this element of novelty that could have contributed to the initially negative public reception of the piece.

What is truly revolutionary about the form of *Symphony No. 6* lies primarily in its fourth and final movement. In classical symphonic structure, the fourth movement of a piece is typically the sum of a symphony's previous three movements, but more than just a summary, it serves as the musical conclusion to a story that has been relayed throughout the preceding parts of the piece. The fourth movement provides the listener with the closure that he seeks; the triumphant victory, the epilogue in which the hero completes

[19] This assertion makes a distinction between the form and the content of the music. Musical content refers to the mechanics that comprise the symphony, meaning elements such as key signature, rhythm, chords, notes, melodies, and harmonies. It is these constituent parts that knit together to give the symphony its sense of form, which refers more so to the overall structure of a symphony – the attitudes adopted by each of its four movements and the musical arc in which the symphony rises and falls. An apt analogy might be made likening a symphony's form to the wooden frame of a house, and the content of a symphony to the brick, plaster, windows, and doors that fill in this frame and give it substance.

his quest by means of a loud, allegro, spectacular finish. From this structure, it is easy to deduce why Tchaikovsky's fourth movement utterly fails to fulfill this expectation. With its romantic, adagio tempo and its slow fade into silence, the finale completely fails to satisfy the audience member's desire for completion. Tchaikovsky not only refuses to give his audience a happy ending, he gives them a decidedly *tragic* one, unprecedented in its symphonic genre. In a letter to close friend and confident, Konstantin Romanov[20], Tchaikovsky writes of his profound inflection throughout *Symphony No. 6* in conjunction with this distinctive final movement, stating:

> Without exaggeration, I have put my whole soul into this symphony, and I hope that Your Highness will approve of it. I don't know whether the symphony is original in terms of its musical material, but as far as its form is concerned, it does display an original feature in that its finale is written in adagio tempo, rather than allegro, as is normally the case[21].

Apart from its distinctive ending, *Symphony No. 6* has a number of other notable musical components that contribute to its distinctive lament. In his commentary on the piece, acclaimed twenty-first century composer, Leonard Bernstein[22], calls the work "the essence of late romanticism"[23]. In Bernstein's analysis of the work, he goes on to note that, "there are several distinct elements that unite the material in this work, and the chief one is the constant use of simple scales – up, or down – but mostly down, which is natural I suppose in a so-called 'pathetic' piece". Bernstein goes on to underscore the

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[20] Member of the Russian royal family; grandson of Tsar Nicholas I.

[21] "Secrets, Rumors, and Lies: Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, Pathétique".

[22] It is worth noting that for both *Adagio for Strings* and *Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique),* I listened to and cited recordings in which Leonard Bernstein conducted the New York Philharmonic's performance of these pieces. This was an intentional choice on my part, hoping to maintain a continuity of musical quality and interpretation throughout these works.

[23] Leonard Bernstein, "Bernstein on Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 6, op. 75, 'Pathétique'", *The 1953 American Decca Recordings,* (Universal Music Group, 2004).

importance of these descending scales in creating the mournful tone of the work, what he later terms “a heart-breaking dirge”. However, Bernstein goes even further as to say that these scales are the feature which serve to connect what he otherwise identifies as a symphony that rejects many of the more conventional components of its genre, including the feature of theme development upon which most symphonic structure relies. This use of continuously descending scales, interestingly enough, seems to use the utter antithesis to Barber’s implementation of *ascending* scales throughout *Adagio,* yet, each composer uses these opposite elements to create a similar effect of yearning dissatisfaction. Moreover, the pieces are united by another key component – their key signatures, which both reside in the mournful key of B minor – a key often associated closely with grief.

It will now be helpful to substantiate my claims about the musical lament of *Symphony No. 6* by providing a brief musical overview of the work and its four movements, during which I will attempt to extrapolate from these elements the basis of my argument. The symphony opens with the creeping bassoon solo, emerging out of what appears to be an inaudible nothingness. This opening solo descends over a chromatic bassline, which soon gives way to a faster bassoon solo that is quickly overtaken by the violins and transferred up the musical register, assuming a sort of nervous quality. Descending scales permeate this section of the piece, the trumpets interjecting constantly with startling fanfares. Eventually, the music trickles out into silence, and muted cellos and violins bring forth a second theme that is marked “tenderly, very singing, expansively”, this theme, too, eventually fades away into nothingness, marked with the impossibly soft dynamic notation, *pppppp.* After a few seconds of silence, the sound re-emerges, crashing down upon the listener. The first theme returns,

with the violins reiterating their nervous melody, interspersed with a fugue marked "force", or "ferocious". As the music declines in volume, the brass section begins their quotation of the Russian Orthodox Requiem which likely would have been immediately recognized by most of Tchaikovsky's original audience. The vocal accompaniment to the line which Tchaikovsky quotes in this movement sings, "With thy saints, O Christ, give peace to the soul of thy servant". The strings seem to swell up in response to this plea, fragmented by pieces of the nervous first theme interspersed above. Despite its powerful return, this first theme fails to find musical completion, as its climactic point collapses and a series of descending scales ensue. The second theme returns, marked "con dolcezza" ("with sweetness") before the music fades away, with the haunting anxiety of the first theme underscoring this sweet ending as the strings play it in pizzicato.

The second movement of *Pathétique* opens with a somewhat traditional waltz, as is the expectation in classic symphonic structure. However, Tchaikovsky alters the waltz by composing the movement in 5/4 time rather than the expected 3/4 time, giving the music the sense that it is "missing a beat". This alteration is what led commenters to call this movement the "limping waltz". Despite this atypical meter, the waltz feels complete in its utterly romantic sincerity. With long, sweeping musical lines in the string section and steadily pulsing bass undertones, it presents a deceptive reprieve from the turmoil of the first movement. Marked "con dolcezza e flebile" ("faintly and with sweetness"), Tchaikovsky provides his listener with a sense of beauty in the second movement that renders the fading musical failure of the fourth movement all the more tragic.

The third movement of *Symphony No. 6* also follows conventional symphonic structure in that its sound embodies a militant march. Much like the previous two

movements, downward scales pervade this section of the piece, forceful in both dynamic level and rhythmic certainty. The march is passed through the strings, the brass, and finally assumes its full force as the clarinets and horns join the group at an overwhelming fortississimo. Once the march has reached its climax, the movement reiterates some of the other musical ideas, and finishes with yet another series of downward scales.

The sense of finality and militant victory achieved by the third movement leads the listener to gain a false sense of completion, one which the fourth movement rips away in a devastating unravelling of the symphony's previous themes. The movement opens with yet another descending scale, passed between the first and second violins to form a sort of disjointed, downward trickle. This opening theme ushers in the return of the dripping romanticism present in the second movement's limping waltz, but with a decidedly more tragic underpinning. As this first melody dies away, a bassoonist enters with a solo reminiscent of the opening section of the first movement. In this second theme, a crescendo brings the melody to a climax, with the wind part marked "con espressione" ("with expression") and the string part marked "con lenezza e devozione" ("with soothing piety/devotion"). The term "devozione" denotes an overtly religious association, with the concept of piety presenting an interesting choice of musical directive from Tchaikovsky. This unique instruction perhaps insinuates that the development of this theme ought to mirror a kind of humble, spiritual plea towards the Divine. Eventually, the descending scales build, growing in volume, strength, but also in tension, until finally a pithy descending scale led by the percussion brings the section to a halt. Eventually, the primary theme of the movement returns, this time with heightened intensity and passion, emoting an almost tangible anguish. As the symphony draws to its

utterly anti-climatic close, the "con devozione" theme returns once more, in a final show of piety, before the music fades away, leaving behind an aching sense that the work remains unfinished; its most desperate desires unattained. Not only does the musical trajectory of the fourth movement seem to link it strongly to the subject of artistic lament, but Tchaikovsky actually designated the movement as *Adagio lamentoso,* meaning "slow lament"[24]. The fourth movement as a whole is intended to embody the genre of lament, and in light of this designation, in addition to Tchaikovsky's marking of "con devozione", it is not merely plausible, but supported by the composer's own musical markings, that the fourth movement in particular is meant to be a lament unto God concerning a kind of tragic suffering.

From this brief overview of the musical elements of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)*, I hope to demonstrate the way in which this work can function as a piece of artistic lament, particularly one that speaks to the problem of divine hiddenness. It is worthy to note that Tchaikovsky himself struggled immensely with questions concerning the rationality of belief, finding himself incredibly drawn to the character of Christ, but persistently doubtful as to the existence of God. It was from this state of mind that Tchaikovsky composed his final symphony, struggling to find faith in the midst of his skepticism. One commentator referred to Tchaikovsky as "the doubter who longed for faith", and in her analysis of *Symphony No. 6* entitled *Tchaikovsky's Pathétique and Russian Culture,* musicologist Marina Ritzarev describes Tchaikovsky's complicated spirituality as such:

> The general picture is that, being a rationally and critically thinking man, he was more of a doubter, though he did try hard. He was too much a product of the

[24] *Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6.*

> Age of Reason to be a wholehearted believer, but at the same time he was also too much a product of the Romantic era with its devotional longings. His at times desperate need of support from some metaphysical being only got stronger as he grew older, lost relatives and friends, and increasingly had to struggle with his own fear of death. Perhaps the best way to put it is that his desire to believe was greater than his ability to do so. He needed belief to support his spirit, but the belief he needed demanded the type of support that could not satisfy his rational mind[25].

In this analysis, we receive a picture of a man almost in limbo, attempting to reconcile his doubt with his need to both hold reasonable beliefs, but also take comfort in some Being which transcended his reason. From this angle, Tchaikovsky is cast in a light much like that of Dostoevsky's Ivan, incidentally a character with which Tchaikovsky doubtlessly would have been familiar, as he was an avid reader and a great admirer of his acclaimed contemporary, Fyodor Dostoevsky[26]. Both men shared a penchant for a kind of Christocentric faith in which their affection for and admiration of the person of Christ partially overcame their struggle to rationalize the existence of God. In addition to Dostoevsky, Tchaikovsky was also a lover of Russia's other great 19th century novelist, Leo Tolstoy. In a letter reflecting on his experience reading Tolstoy's *Confessions*, Tchaikovsky wrote:

> Every hour and every minute I thank God for giving me belief in Him. With my faint-heartedness and ability to despair from every single blow, to the desire for non existence, what would I be if I did not believe in God and did not give myself to his will[27]?

While this grateful self-analysis may appear to plant Tchaikovsky firmly on the side of theism, in another letter to the Grand Duke, the same Tchaikovsky writes of his

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[25] *Pathétique and Russian Culture,* 23.

[26] *Pathétique and Russian Culture,* 26.

[27] *Pathétique and Russian Culture,* 24.

pervasive doubt in conjunction with his hesitancy to compose the requiem piece mentioned earlier, asserting:

> There is another reason why I am little inclined to compose music for any kind of requiem. I am afraid of indelicately hurting your religious feelings, but in a requiem, a lot is said on *God, the judge, God-punitive,* the *God-avenger* (!!!). Excuse me, Your Highness, but I will not dare to hint that I don't believe in such a God, or, at least, such a *God* cannot cause in me such tears, such a delight, such reverence for the Creator and our experience of all the good that would inspire me[28].

It appears from these letters that Tchaikovsky found it difficult to reconcile certain aspects of God's character with the ideal version of a Divine Being that he held in his mind. Judging from his refusal to write music for a formal requiem, and yet his decision to include strong requiem motifs throughout his *Symphony No. 6*, it can be said that Tchaikovsky composed a pseudo-requiem which perhaps expressed some of his own spiritual angst concerning the tension that existed between his desire for belief and his aversion to the seeming cognitive dissonance present within the character of God.

From this exploration of the historical and musical particularities of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6*, we have considered another example of artistic lament applied to the problem of divine hiddenness. The tragic circumstances surrounding the composition of the piece paired with the insight we have gleaned into Tchaikovsky's own mental state and thought process while composing the symphony provide support for the argument that *Pathétique* was created as a highly emotionally-infused work, wrought with sorrow and bespeaking a deep internal pain. Moreover, the musical markings and melodic themes present throughout the piece overtly suggest religious elements as well as the intention of lament, further bolstering the interpretation of *Symphony No. 6* as artistic lament that considers theological and spiritual questions. In terms of its cathartic quality,

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[28] *Patétique and Russian Culture,* 29.

reports from Tchaikovsky's friends and family suggest that, rather than being overcome with depression during his time composing the symphony, Tchaikovsky actually found a release from the depressive bout he had suffered during the winter of 1892-1893 through the process of writing *Symphony No. 6.* In the months preceding the work's premiere, friends reported that Tchaikovsky seemed healthy, optimistic, and was making plans for the future[29]. This attitude leading up to the work's release is part of what rendered Tchaikovsky's sudden death after the October premiere especially puzzling. However, this information does seem to suggest that Tchaikovsky found a certain degree of emotional restoration by means of composing his *Symphony No. 6*, hinting at the work's cathartic quality for the composer himself, if not the audience as well.

Apart from the intrigue and plethora of theories that surround Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique,* a large part of the work's enduring quality is owing to its musical ingenuity and audible beauty. The sweeping melodies, though tragic, embody the spirit of high romanticism, and the slow, gasping fade of the fourth movement emotes a kind of desperate failure which many audience members find to be the essence of a musical suicide. It is difficult to imagine a careful listener experiencing *Symphony No. 6* without feeling an element of intense emotional expression, a feature which renders the music such an effective means of artistic lament. Moreover, the religious markings and references throughout the piece further suggest that the work, at least in part, serves to express questions concerning the mystery of God's nature. For this reason, *Symphony No. 6* supplies an effective example of artistic lament that can be used to express the individual's feelings of emotional anguish over the hiddenness of God.

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[29]"Secrets, Rumors, and Lies: Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, Pathétique".

The value that a work such as Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique* holds within this discussion of divine hiddenness lies in the music's ability to allow for a wide range of emotional expressions. Tchaikovsky's final piece explores joy, grief, abandonment, anger, and despair throughout its haunting melodies and complex themes. Much in the same way that Barber's *Adagio* expresses a yearning sense of unfulfilled angst, Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* completes this emotional journey without the necessity of language, allowing the listener to interpret the piece in light of her own personal journey. Moreover, the religious themes throughout the symphony draw the listener into a piece that contemplates questions of God's presence in the life of the believer, and elicits questions concerning God's nature and presence in the life of the individual. The fading desolation of the symphony's final movement suggests a kind of despair, bringing the end of the piece to an unfulfilling halt. This lack of completion and rejection of conventional symphonic expectation perhaps commenting on the subtle, quiet, and often surprising nature of God's communication with his creation. Just as *Symphony No. 6* seemed to function for Tchaikovsky as a means of deliberating and lamenting his own suffering and struggles with faith, the listener, too, is invited to participate in a similar process as she encounters the piece. For this reason, *Pathétique* remains a compelling means of emotional expression, and because of its musical beauty and emotional complexity, it holds the potential to serve the listener as a conduit for artistic lament and facilitate a deeper understanding of human suffering in the midst of God's hiddenness.

Conclusion

During the course of this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate the efficacy of music as a means of artistic lament, and to illustrate the ways in which such laments

might be applied to the problem of divine hiddenness in gaining emotional evidence for the contemplative listener or performer. In my analysis of the works of Samuel Barber and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky I have provided examples of music that can be interpreted and utilized for such a function. From the gentle climb of *Adagio's* musical melody to the painful lament of *Patétique's* final movement, these works offer a means of contemplation and expression of the listener's own suffering, as well as a vehicle by which such suffering might be carried out of one's own mind and ushered forth into an audible existence, though not always explicitly. In choosing to incorporate pieces that were not of an overtly religious in composition, I left this genre open to use from the devout and the secular alike, and sought to provide a selection that might be available to a wide swath of consumers. Though my interpretations of each of these pieces are by no means a claim of objective truth, they do provide a sort of roadmap of how artistic lament via music might take place, and the ways in which works of music might allow the individual to self-express his emotional turmoil to God, even when such turmoil includes feelings of doubt in God's very existence. For this reason, music operates as a helpful means by which an individual might find solace in her suffering, and connect better with the nature of the Divine by means of this expression. This connection could serve to bolster an individual's epistemic position in relation to belief in God's existence, thus helping to ameliorate the problem of divine hiddenness.

CONCLUSION

The problem of divine hiddenness is most commonly portrayed, rightly so, as a problem of evidence. However, the nature of evidence is complicated, and not always easily quantifiable or even identifiable. The aim of this thesis work has been to introduce a set of alternative means of evidence-gathering in order to explore the problem of divine hiddenness and its more emotional implications. While many of the questions posed throughout these sources appear to revolve largely around God's love and justice more so than his existence, such questions remain intertwined with one another. The implications of whether or not God loves and desires relationship with humanity bears heavily on what the *nature* of God is, and thus whether the God who we claim to worship is really God at all. For instance, the individual experiencing the hiddenness of God may find himself travelling along the following lines of questioning:

(1) Even if God exists, does he love me?
(2) If God does not love me, then what kind of God is he?
(3) If God is not the kind of God that I thought he was (i.e. a loving God), then is he really even God?
(4) If God is not God, then does he exist?

It is this kind of questioning which yields something like Schellenberg's argument, in which he asserts that a perfectly loving God would necessarily "always be open to a personal relationship with any finite person". However, Schellenberg purports that there are individuals who are nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief regarding God's existence, and from this claim Schellenberg concludes that God does not exist[1]. The crux of this argument largely rests upon the belief that God is perfectly loving, and the subsequent

[1] J.L. Schellenberg, "Divine hiddenness: part 1 (recent work on the hiddenness argument)," *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 4 (April 2017): 1.

expectations of relationship that accompany our concept of a loving God. However, if it is lack of love that remains a central premise of the argument from hiddenness, then it follows that emotional expressions of abandonment and discontent would remain a relevant portion of our discussion concerning the hiddenness of God. Thus, though the rational components of the argument from hiddenness remain key, the answers can and, I argue ought, be informed by the emotional aspects of the problem.

In an attempt to explore some of the emotional expressions of the hiddenness problem, I have turned to a group of sources not typically included in the philosophical discussion of divine hiddenness. These sources, which I have categorized as "artistic lament", include narrative, poetry, and music as possible modes of emotional expression concerning God's hiddenness. My argument is that these sources provide a vehicle for the individual to not only give voice to her suffering, but moreover, to receive comfort as a result of this expression. My argument is that such modes of expression allow the believer to attain a sort of dialogue with God in which the pleas of humanity are heard and considered by the Divine, thus painting God as a being who is not only all-powerful and just, but also merciful and loving towards his creation. If the believer feels that she cannot express her emotions and her complaints unto God, not only is he hidden, but totalitarian. Such a being, once again, appears neither loving nor just, and this contradiction in theodicy undercuts the existence of the God who we perceive ourselves to worship. However, I argue that artistic lament provides more than merely a means of expression, but additionally can facilitate the gathering of evidence through the process of this lament. If the individual approaches lament with the attitude of reasonable expectation, hoping for some level of comfort or understanding to be provided that is

consistent with God's character, it is possible that such an expression of lament can help position the individual to obtain this kind of experience. This confirming experience would likely provide some measure of emotional comfort to the individual, and thus the efficacy of this process would likely yield a unique body of evidence, found primarily within an alteration to the individual's own internal emotional state.

It is important to note, however, that such evidence does not levy the same strength universally among varying individuals. A piece of evidence may bolster one individual's beliefs to a greater or lesser degree than it will for another individual, such is inevitably the case, especially with the kind of emotional evidence discussed throughout this thesis work. In particular, the sources that I have explored all come from, to varying degrees, a Christian background. This feature renders these sources more likely to appeal to individuals with some positive predisposition towards the Christian faith, particularly those who already profess themselves to be believers. This is particularly true of artistic lament due to the fact that, as I have defined it, such a practice necessitates an attitude of expectation predicated on an appeal to the character of God, both of which are unlikely components to find apart from those who do not already declare at least some propensity towards Christianity. Though this predisposition towards Christianity is not a necessary feature of artistic lament, it does remain unlikely that this type of evidence would levy the same weight with an atheist as it would with a devout or even struggling Christian.

The purpose of exploring sources in each of these three disciplines – narrative, poetry, and music – is partially motivated by the fact that each of these categories has been and is currently still employed as a means of liturgical worship. In the Bible, the reader is presented with numerous narrative accounts from the story of Esther to the

narration of Jesus's life throughout the Gospels. These accounts serve the purpose of instructing the believer in the ways of the faith, but also provide a means of better understanding the character and nature of God and his dealings with the individual believer. In terms of poetry, there are five books of the Bible that were written in Hebrew poetic verse: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solemn. Moreover, the Psalms were written as lyric poetry, with the intention of being set to music so that they might facilitate religious worship. In this way, the Bible itself provides a strong argument for the efficacy and importance of artistic lament in the spiritual life of the believer, and exemplifies such works, portraying also the success of this method in bringing about some altered state of affairs. In the life of David, the poet-king's heartfelt Psalms were heard by the Lord and David was blessed with an illustrious reign and great victory in battle. In the tale of Job, the cries of the faithful sufferer were eventually answered and the Lord's blessing was bestowed upon Job and his household. Such accounts suggest that artistic lament provides a means of not merely monologue, but dialogue, with God. The modeling of this process throughout the Bible sets a precedent that has since been carried out within the Christian tradition, through religious music, poetry, and narrative that has continuously emerged out of the Church since its early formation. Though not all of the sources that we have examined in this work have been explicitly connected to the Church in a formal manner, each of them in some way contributes to this project in a form that is at least loosely patterned after Biblical lament.

On the basis of this foundation, I argue that each of these mediums contributes a unique means of communing with the Divine, and thus yields particular value in the individual's search for evidence supporting God's existence. In regards to narrative, I

posit that this form allows for the consideration of the problem of divine hiddenness amidst a contextually dynamic backdrop of characters with nuanced personalities, histories, and individual agency. This complexity positions the problem of divine hiddenness in a more realistic and, I argue, emotionally-informed light than it is often discussed within analytic philosophy.

The first example that we discussed, C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces,* encounters the problem of divine hiddenness in a blend of fantasy and myth, utilizing the fictional character Orual and her struggle with the hiddenness of the gods as a means of exploring the evidential as well as the emotional implications of the problem. Orual's experiences throughout the novel create a unique backdrop against which to reflect on how an individual might receive, misinterpret, and subsequently dismiss evidence based on the presence of defeaters or unmet expectations. Many of Orual's early encounters with the gods fall into such categories, and her skepticism leads her to mistakenly reject the gods' existence, thus causing herself and her sister a considerable amount of suffering. Due to what Orual perceives as the injustice of this situation, she then proceeds to issue a lament to the gods, complaining primarily of their hiddenness from her. The function of this lament, which serves as both question and answer for Orual, presents interesting considerations for the argument from hiddenness, largely attributing the hiddenness of the gods to Orual's own errors of interpretation, and not necessarily the relative strength or weakness of her evidence. This interpretation of the problem exemplifies one of the common responses to Schellenberg's framing of the argument from hiddenness. This response claims that the evidence for God's existence may in fact be present, but in some instances it goes overlooked, is misinterpreted, or is eventually defeated by other pieces

of competing evidence to an extent in which the individual feels that he no longer has enough evidence to justifiably believe in God's existence. While Schellenberg acknowledges that there may indeed be a body of evidence for the existence of God that is overlooked, the difference between Schellenberg and Lewis appears to lie in their placement of culpability: while Schellenberg places the blame for this phenomenon on God, Lewis places it on the individual. This shift in culpability allows for God to maintain his characteristic goodness and justice, while still explaining the problem of divine hiddenness on the basis of human error.

The second narrative source that we explored, the biographical account of St. Mother Teresa, portrays an alternative form of storytelling as relayed primarily through Mother Teresa's self-testimony, revealed in letters to her spiritual confessors and personal diary entries. In this intimate form of communication, the reader receives an honest portrait of the faithful nun's internal anguish, as she admitted lacking the consolation and spiritual comfort of God's love despite her steadfast pursuit of his will throughout her life of religious devotion. Mother Teresa's account is particularly valuable to this discussion in that it provides not only a detailed picture of a real, historical figure who suffered from the emotional implications of God's hiddenness, but moreover, a figure renowned for her devout lifestyle and incredible dedication to charity. Mother Teresa's testimony seems to complicate the argument that divine hiddenness only befalls the faithless or those lacking in true spiritual motivation, but rather, suggests that this remains a problem for highly religious individuals as well. Moreover, in the case of Mother Teresa, there is a distinction to be made between a struggle coming to terms with God's existence and an absence of God's love, only the latter of which Mother Teresa

professed to wrestle with throughout her lifetime. Through the example of Mother Teresa, the question of evidence is further complicated, in that the evidence that she lacks is largely emotional confirmation of God's love. It seems that, in such a situation, artistic lament would prove especially vital, as this expression is a key component of relationship between a loving God and his creation.

The last work that we examined as an example of artistic lament in narrative form was Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov.* In this work, we discussed divine hiddenness in the context of Ivan's struggle with the problem of evil and his harsh skepticism regarding the Church and its followers. Moreover, Dostoevsky sets up the determination of God's existence as a weighty proposition within his novel, and each character's encounter with this question directly effects their moral framework and subsequent action. The particular value that *The Brothers Karamazov* holds within our consideration concerning the problem of divine hiddenness is its commentary on the element of expectation present throughout humankind's search for God. Dostoevsky utilizes Ivan's lament to criticize the nature of God and the person of Christ, identifying God's failure to meet human expectations of him as the primary reason for humanity's rejection of God. This portrayal reflects the believer's reality, in that the problem of divine hiddenness is included as only one aspect of the characters' lives, surrounded by the context of various other complex problems and emotions that the characters are faced with. In this way, the reader is able to follow along with this spiritual journey of Dostoevsky's characters in a more realistic light, and examine the complex relationships between God's hiddenness, his justice, his love in conjunction with the prevalent questions of human nature and relationship that are also explored throughout the novel.

In the second chapter of this thesis work, we turned towards an examination of poetry as another relevant form of artistic lament. Throughout this chapter, we analyzed the works of George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Louise Glück as examples of artistic lament that pertain to the question of God's hiddenness and express emotional distress over humanity's sense of separation from the Divine. Each of these poets relies heavily on metaphors in nature to illustrate the disparity between God and his creation, and to ponder questions of God's provision, or lack thereof, in the life of the poet. Moreover, all three of these writers express some level of dismay regarding the ineffable nature of their complaints and the limitations of language in expressing their emotional distress unto God. In terms of their explanations for the hiddenness of God, Herbert, Hopkins, and Glück each seem to come to slightly different conclusions regarding this matter. Herbert justifies, at least in part, God's hiddenness as the result of human sin. Meanwhile, Hopkins seems to view his suffering and emotional turmoil as a kind of crucible which brings the individual closer to God. In his poem entitled, "Patience, hard thing", Hopkins identifies the virtue of patience as both that which is obtained during the process of yearning for God's presence, as well as a characteristic that is inherent to God himself. Thus, in the act of seeking God, the believer cultivates within himself a component of God's character, arguably bringing the believer closer to God by means of this practice. Moreover, throughout Hopkins six "Sonnets of Desolation", there appears to be a trajectory in which Hopkins finds a measure of reprieve from his intense internal anguish by means of writing poetry, bolstering the argument for artistic lament as a form of restorative catharsis.

In our final source from this chapter, Louise Glück's book of poems entitled *The Wild Iris,* we see the poet utilize perspectival difference to exercise an imaginative exchange between a gardener-poet, a Divine Creator, and nature. Throughout *The Wild Iris,* Glück engages in a practice of lament from the perspective of humankind which is then responded to by the Divine Creator as well as by creation itself. This thought exercise portrays a valuable means of conjecture contemplating the reasoning behind God's hiddenness and humanity's resultant emotional suffering, and offers the reader a series of possible replies which may serve to ameliorate her suffering. In these replies, the omniscient Creator identifies humankind's overly anthropomorphic perception of the Divine Being and their tendency towards misinterpreting evidence of the Creator's existence and love as the reason behind humanity's suffering. This attribution of fault appears to place such evidence into a category of evidence that Schellenberg's argument does not consider, but seems to remain a prevalent suggestion throughout the sources in this thesis. This category, which I would term misinterpreted evidence, could be added to Schellenberg's six categories of unrecognized evidence as being that which is not always obtained or comprehended, but still remains in support of the existence of God.

The final chapter of this thesis work focused on music as a means of artistic lament expressing the problem of divine hiddenness. By far the most abstract form of lament that we examined, music can be viewed in some ways as an attempt to overcome the limitation of language in expressing the complexity of human emotion and desire for a God who remains transcendent and, oftentimes, shrouded in mystery. The subjectivity and mutability of music as a source of evidence renders it somewhat difficult to interpret. However, throughout this chapter we examined historical, biographical, and technical

context that bolstered the argument for these particular pieces as pertinent to the discussion of divine hiddenness. The first piece that we explored, Samuel Barber's renowned 20th century composition, "Adagio for Strings", portrayed a musical striving emitted throughout a series of ascending scales that consistently failed to reach harmonic completion, suggesting a pervasive sense of disappointment and lack of fulfillment throughout the piece. The public reception of "Adagio" almost immediately recognized the work as an expression of communal grief, and since its composition it has sounded across America in times of great tragedy. In terms of the musicality of the piece, the simple melody portrays a constant motion towards an end that seems always just beyond the reach of the notes, a process that can be interpreted as mirroring that of the individual yearning towards a hidden God. Moreover, Barber's adaptation of "Adagio for Strings" into the choral composition entitled "Agnus Dei" transforms the formerly instrumental work into an overt plea for God's mercy and peace set to a piece of Christian liturgical text. These elements of lament present within "Adagio for Strings" render it an apt example of artistic lament, and the religious themes of its choral adaptation suggest that the music itself bespeaks a yearning for God's comfort and providence.

The second piece that we examined as a source of musical, artistic lament was Tchaikovsky's passionate and tragic final symphonic composition, *Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique).* The nature of Tchaikovsky's mental, emotional, and physical state during his composition of this work renders it of particular interest in this discussion surrounding divine hiddenness, as the subversion of classic symphonic form and the proximity of the piece's premiere to Tchaikovsky's own death sets the work in an intriguing emotional context. The failure of the work's fourth and final movement to

come to a point of musical completion and victorious triumph has led many listeners to speculate that *Symphony No. 6* represents a kind of musical suicide note. However, it is this same passionate evocation of emotion renders the work of increased potential as an example of artistic lament. The quotation of musical passages from the Orthodox requiem mass as well as Tchaikovsky's own religious struggles suggest that at least some of the composer's overwhelming passion was caught up in questions of faith and God's existence. Moreover, Tchaikovsky's explicit marking of the fourth movement as "adagio lamentoso", or "slow lament", indicates that the atypical, final movement of the piece was originally intended as an expression of lament.

Through our examination of these two prominent musical compositions, we explored instances of artistic lament carried out by means of music, and analyzed the context in which these pieces were originally composed and critically received. The value of these sources lies specifically with their ability to express emotion in terms that differ from and, perhaps in some ways, surpass the ability of language to capture these feelings. The medium of music remains unique in its ability to remain accessible to the listener without the necessity of common language, culture, or even musical background. Thus, music exhibits the most abstract, but also possibly the most widely relatable, form of artistic lament that we have examined. Moreover, there is an inherent component of expectation present within the process of listening to music that, in many ways, mirrors the element of expectation present within the practice of lament. Similar to the way in which the listener completes melodies and anticipates musical patterns in his head throughout a thoughtful encounter with a work of music, an integral element of the

process of lament lies in the supplicant's expectation of God's provision in light of his character.

Throughout our exploration of each of these three mediums, I have argued that these sources can be interpreted as examples of artistic lament pertaining to the problem of divine hiddenness. In my analysis of this narrow selection of narrative, poetry, and music, I have illustrated how these examples might facilitate the practice of emotional release and further understanding, as the lamenter hypothesizes possible explanations for God's hiddenness, and at times even finds an element of emotional comfort or an altered state of affairs by means of lament. Moreover, each of these three mediums present components of an active faith, as they are all, to some degree, participatory modes of expression in which the lamenter is engaging in a mental and, at times, physical act directed towards God. Through this exercise, the lamenter is given the opportunity to express a sentiment of dissatisfaction or suffering unto God, which provides a sense of agency to the believer and opens a dialogue between humanity and the Divine. This process potentially bolsters the believer's understanding of God's justice and draws the individual closer to God in a relationship in which the believer is heard and loved, rather than dominated and dictated. This view in which the state of affairs is not necessarily fixed does not reduce the omnipotence of God, but rather calls upon other attributes of his character – his justice, mercy, and love – to listen to the cries of humanity, and take pity on the suffering of the faithful lamenter, ushering forth emotional comfort and perhaps even situational change as a result.

During the course of this thesis work, I have sought to explore the problem of divine hiddenness and its implications for the emotional state of the individual, with a

particular focus on persons already predisposed towards the Christian faith. With my examination of these sources taken from three separate mediums of artistic lament, I have explicated examples whereby the process of lament can be discerned and interpreted as giving some measure of emotional comfort and perhaps a source of evidential strength to the struggling believer. After all, if humankind is made in God's image, it would follow that the creation might also seek to create, in likeness but not equality, to that of the ultimate Creator. Perhaps it is this desire, often expressed artistically through forms such as those we have discussed, that inspires us to reach towards God with expressions of longing that is both inspired and imaginative. This phenomenon is perhaps best encapsulated by the following stanza from J.R.R. Tolkien's poem "Mythopoeia", which reads[2]:

> The heart of man is not compound of lies,
> but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,
> and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,
> man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
> Disgraced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
> and keeps the rags of lordship one he owned,
> his world-dominion by creative act:
> not his to worship the great Artefact,
> man, sub-creator, the refracted light
> through whom is splintered from a single White
> to many hues, and endlessly combined
> in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
> Though all the crannies of the world we filled
> with elves and goblins, though we dared to build
> gods and their houses out of dark and light,
> and sow the seed of dragons, 'twas our right
> (used or misused). The right has not decayed.
> We make still by the law in which we're made.

Tolkien's words seem to get at a key component of humanity's search for understanding of the Divine, in that as his creation, "the refracted light", our own efforts to create can

[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Mythopoeia", http://home.agh.edu.pl/~evermind/jrrtolkien/mythopoeia.htm.

possibly reflect God himself. Through these sources of artistic lament, I have argued that such efforts provide a means of expressing emotion and receiving comfort and the opportunity for rectification consistent with the character of God. However, such efforts also reflect a key feature of humanity as the *kind* of beings with whom God might desire relationship, the kind who “make still by the law in which we’re made”. It is possible that evidence for God can actually be found within such efforts of human creation, reflecting the character of God as Creator and drawing the individual closer to God throughout this process. Perhaps, it is through such efforts that the problem of divine hiddenness might be at least partially overcome, as through humanity’s artistic expression we might catch a glimpse of his hidden face.

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