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“Confessing Queer Failure in the Revival of a Romantic Drama: A Girardian and Queer Theology Analysis of Michel Marc Bouchard’s *Lilies*”

On his first visit to the U.S. last Fall (2015), Pope Francis stunned many in a reflection he offered at an evening prayer service at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. Organized primarily for nuns, brothers and priests, the pontiff, in speaking about the importance of religious vocation raised the surprising topic of failure. The attendees’ ministries, he reasoned, ought not be viewed from the standpoint of earthly success; their “true worth,” he contended, “is measured by the value [they have] in God’s eyes.” Alluding to a definitive model for Christians, Francis gestured toward the example of the cross: “If at times our efforts and work seem to fail and produce no fruit,” he offered, “we need to remember that we are followers of Jesus Christ, and his life, humanly speaking, ended in failure, in the failure of the cross.”¹ While I do not pursue a rhetorical exegesis here on what Francis wholly means by this statement (nor do I consider it necessary for my task at hand), I do build upon this statement’s premise; that is, that *the Catholic spiritual economy positions failure at its center, and understanding this failure remains essential in grasping what I term the “queer Catholic imagination.”*² This essay

¹ Pope Francis, “Untitled,” (Homily, Vespers Service at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Sept. 24, 2015). For the full text of the reflection, see Emily Shapiro, “Read What Pope Francis Said at New York’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral,” ABC News, Accessed January 5, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/read-pope-francis-yorks-st-patricks-cathedral/story?id=34023376>.

² In a general sense, I am referring here to Catholicism’s formulation of soteriology describing how human beings are inheritors of wounding Original Sin (with its ontological and historical consequences). The “economy of salvation” therefore, consists in the abounding of “sanctifying grace,” and that most especially in reference to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Reconciliation with God and the human family, therefore involves: (1) expressing contrition for sin, “a sorrow . . . and detestation for the sin with the resolution not to sin again” ; (2) confessing the sin

explores the failure of the queer Catholic imagination as the driving force behind Jean Michel Bouchard's play, *Lilies* (1984) tracing the ways that such failure functions as a critique of Catholic institutional power / knowledge and the latest queer temptation that in the face of "reproductive futurism" (Edelman) there is "no future." An extended goal of this work (not pursued here) is to consider Edelman's critique of reproductive futurism; analyzing his use of Lacanian theories on love and his queer valorization of the Freudian death drive; however, my enquiry here focuses on the figure of the priest Bilodeau as it is this role which paradoxically represents the church *and* embodies some important ways that the queer Catholic imagination unfurls queerly Catholic possibilities of freedom and forgiveness. I loosely make use of René Girard's anthropological and literary theory concerning mimetic rivalry, understanding that Jesus' death was the ultimate *scandal*:

it is a source of grace not because the Father is "avenged" by it, but because Jesus lived and died in the manner that, if adopted by all, would do away with scandals and the victimization that follows from scandals. Jesus lived as all men should live in order to be united with a God whose true nature he reveals.³

The play's the thing . . .

to a priest whereby spiritual, intellectual, and practical advice may be offered to orient the believer toward God for a deeper (effective/affective) knowledge of themselves and consequently, of God. Finally, the third part of this economy is (3), satisfaction. This acknowledges that being forgiven is more than an intellectual or spiritual experience, but a material one. An effort to repair the wrong committed, satisfaction is an attempt to remedy the moral, behavioral, and communal disorder the sin caused, corresponding "as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed." See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Part II: The Celebration of Christian Mystery," §1440-§1460, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c2a4.htm.

³ René Girard, "Are the Gospels Mythical?" *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life*, 62 (1996), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/04/are-the-gospels-mythical>.

First produced by Théâtre Petit à Petit in conjunction with Théâtre français du Centre National des Arts (Ottawa) and directed by André Brassard in 1987, *Les Feluettes* (*Lilies*, in English) instantly reaped critical praise, launching playwright Michel Marc Bouchard into Canada's theatrical spotlight. The play tells the story of a teenage love triangle between three of its principal male characters Simon Doucet, Valier de Tilly, and Jean Bilodeau. Subtitled "*La Répétition d'un Drame Romantique*," Bouchard's *Les Feluettes*, set in 1952, is focused on both a "revival / répétition" of events forty years earlier that led to Valier's death and Simon's indefinite imprisonment in 1912, and also on the rehearsals of its play-within-a-play *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*.⁴ Of the three boys, Valier is the character with a depth of insight: he understands and accepts the love he has for Simon, and Like Bilodeau, the young Simon struggles in coming to terms with his sexuality; unlike Simon, however, Bilodeau escapes the snares of confession / binaristic discourse by entering the seminary. With each boy participating in the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* play, Simon and Valier grow closer together while playing roles opposite of one another; slowly they realize they hold much deeper feelings than those of simple co-stars. A situational pyromaniac, Simon sets fires around town every time he and Valier have a disagreement, doing so because he suffers from love.⁵ Bilodeau grows jealous of Valier as the object of Simon's affections (conflicted as they are), making

⁴ *Les Feluettes* makes use of Debussy's incidental music for Gabriel D'Annunzio's five-act play, *Le martyre de saint Sébastien*, written in 1911. Reportedly, the play was not successful because Parisian Archbishop Cardinal Amette urged Catholics not to see it as the lead dancer playing Sébastien was Jewish. The accuracy of this account; however, has been contested. Mark McCue writes that "Cardinal Amette and the Paris chancery would love you to think *Martyre* was a flop, but it wasn't at all. Parisians fell over each other to get tickets, just as Americans went nuts with *Mondo Cane*, *Women of the World*, and *Bocaccio '70*. . . . Performances were packed. Toscanini loved it and immediately asked Debussy and D'Annunzio for it to take to La Scala where it triumphed."

⁵ Bouchard, 22.

fun of Valier and calling him “Lily-White” because of his effeminate.⁶ Before the exiled French aristocrat had arrived in Roberval (a city in northern Quebec), Simon and Bilodeau had been much closer friends. Because of his jealousy and the play’s homosexual overtones, Bilodeau complains to his mother, and she along with a few other mothers begin gossiping and making a move to prevent the play’s performance.

Les Feluettes draws parallels between these personal events and the Sebastian’s *vita*, all unfolding in the 1952 present in a prison where Simon, with the cooperation of guards and inmates, holds Bilodeau (now a Roman Catholic Bishop) captive, forcing him to watch scenes taken from the Bishop’s boyhood journal that Simon and his fellow inmates reenact. For Simon, as for Hamlet, “the play’s the thing” whereby he aims to catch his old friend’s conscience. Focused as much as it is upon theatrical representation, one of *Lilies* centrally rich themes includes uncovering the “games of truth” that entail a life being queer, that lend authority to narration, and ultimately, that permit individuals to “get by” in the world.⁷

Arriving at the prison under the impression that he has come to hear Simon’s confession, the tables quickly turn on Bilodeau; instead of hearing a confession, he is led to confess the part he played in Valier’s death. For Bilodeau as well as for several

⁶ Taken from a Girardian scapegoat analysis viewpoint, Valier is both “model” and “mimetic rival” for Bilodeau, who desires the same kind of relationship with Simon that Valier enjoys.

⁷ Foucault (in a pseudonymous commentary on his *History of Sexuality*) specifies that “games of truth” are the process whereby subjectivation and objectivation arise in the face of knowledge (*connaissance*): “This objectivation and this subjectivation are not independent of each other. From their mutual development and their interconnection, what could be called the ‘games of truth’ come into being—that is, not the discovery of true things, but the rules according to which what a subject can say about certain things depends on the question of true and false.” These “games” enable a person to reflect a normative (or queer) *object of knowledge* understood in relation to the self and to others. See “Foucault” in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Volume 2*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Paul Hurley et al. (New York: New Press, 1999), 460.

of the play's other characters, confession and an openness to "truth" prove painful, yet self-directed ordeals. St. Sebastian's love is measured against the love that various characters hold dear in their own lives, and it is this love—one that seeks to put an end to the causes and repetitions of scapegoating and sacrifice by the invention of "disease"—follows in Christ's footsteps, offering once and for all the ultimate gift of self.

The production and the boys are directed by their teacher-priest, Père St. Michel, himself something of a queer failure (he doesn't yet know how he'll manage the twenty-two arrows for Sebastian's sacrifice, and yes, he knows that last year's production of the *Ascension of St. Alphonse* was something of a mess when the doors of Heaven refused to open, and the saint's descent received more applause than all of the saint's passion put together). St. Michel resents dealing with an audience of "peasants whose taste is limited to operettas, light comedies or melodramas," and he vows to repeat to himself that he is "utterly defeated" until such a time that "I finally accept my defeat."⁸ Although the play is ultimately canceled, Bilodeau and we witness its beauty when Valier turns up unexpectedly at Simon's wedding, and the two lovers recite their lines as Caesar and Sebastian, respectively. Like Sebastian and Christ before them, Valier and Simon long for their love to be multiplied and to overcome the ignorance that surrounds them. They recite lines from *Sebastian* after Simon admits his love for Valier: "I shall be reborn. . . .One must kill one's love that it

⁸ Bouchard, 16-17.

may be reborn seven times more ardent. My destiny must be fulfilled. I must die at the hands of men.”⁹

Towards the play within-a-play’s end, the young Bilodeau overly-plainly confesses that he cares for Simon because he overheard women cooing that Simon “[was] so beautiful, only a saint could be that beautiful. . . . I wanted to be friends with a saint.”¹⁰ In addition to confessing to this mimetic desire (admiring and desiring what the other women crave), Bilodeau admits having done several things to help keep Simon “pure.” He offers his journal as proof of his love and the ways he believes Simon needs him. Referring to Simon’s new wife as the “Babylonian,” and believing that Valier and his mother threaten to “soil” Simon’s soul, Bilodeau experiences difficulty accepting the psychosexual component of his love. He blew up Simon’s transport to France to keep him in Roberval; this incident has the unintended effect of his “saint” at last confessing his love for Valier.

When Simon and Valier are planning to “leave” (they make a pact to die together onsite in a fire), Bilodeau, unaware of their plans, naively believes that the three of them can enter into a communal way of living in the woods in what he likens a new Garden of Eden: “I won’t be goin’ to the Seminary. . . .It’s more important to dedicate my life to a saint. We’re gonna pray so hard. . . .We’re gonna confess our sins. . . .We’re gonna tell each other all our bad thoughts.”¹¹ As one of Foucault’s “games of truth” and a religiosocial construct, confession for Bilodeau promises freedom; for Simon and Valier, though, it is an unnecessary,

⁹ Michel Marc Bouchard, *Lilies or The Revival of a Romantic Drama* trans. Linda Gaboriau (Toronto: Canada Playwrights Press, 1990), 60-61.

¹⁰ Bouchard, 55.

¹¹ Bouchard, 66.

incomprehensible, and even condemning prospect. While Bilodeau's approach is practical (from his standpoint), the coincidence of love and flesh is the warden of a paradoxical prison for him. Caught within a religious view that associates the body with illicit pleasure, Bilodeau is seized by a turn-of-the-century Catholicism that (as Ellis Hanson reminds his readers) through its mystics, penitential practices (e.g. confession), and high art "excites and exploits the very desires it claims to disavow."¹² The failure of the priesthood to bear witness to neat distinctions between sexuality and spirit for which many believers and priests (Bilodeau included) yearn is evidenced by what I call a "catacomb economy."

The Queer Catholic Imagination and Queer Failure

While, without a doubt, Catholicism itself may be labeled queer with its metaphysical instability where "changes from divine to flesh, flesh and blood to bread and wine, and from human to cosmic spirit [encapsulate] the full incarnation of redemptive praxis,"¹³ the queer Catholic imagination goes beyond this queerness that is both at the heart of belief and liturgical practice. As the foundation and counter-economy of Michel Marc Bouchard's play, *Lilies*, the queer Catholic imagination operates parabolically and paradoxically, engendering the ways that Scripture, Tradition, and queer lives may mobilize counter and reverse discourses in the face of social and soteriological givens. Occupying a catacomb-like thought space (like Lazarus?) where faith and sexuality are mutually enriched and may "come out"

¹² Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 23.

¹³ Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus Reid (eds.), "Introduction: Queering Theology, Thinking Theology, and Queer Theory," in *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God, and Politics* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 8.

into the light of day, the queer Catholic imagination represents an alternative to the darkness that marks what Mark Jordan calls the “homosexuality of Catholicism.”

Composed of queerly Catholic epistemologies (body, belief, scripture, ethics, coming out, etc.) that signal a turn and return toward Catholic spirituality through orientational failure, the queer Catholic imagination does not propose that the master’s tools can destroy the master’s house, but instead, that the master never fully understood these tools in the first place.¹⁴ Indeed, insofar as the queer Catholic imagination values the complementarity and performativity of *all genders*, offering spiritual and “reasonable” (Habermasian) defenses of queer sex and desire it *fails grandly at Catholicity*. It calls into question the Church’s reliance on Natural Law, its theology of the body, compulsory heterosexuality and procreation, and ultimately, the theological anthropology that asserts an angry and homophobic God.

In defining queer failure, Halberstam explains that such failure can best be understood as the search for “new ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another than those already prescribed for the liberal and consumer subject.”¹⁵ Queer failure employs “low theory” and popular knowledge that “locates

¹⁴ Here it is crucial to preemptively disabuse readers of the popular (and ‘liberal’) notion that religion is oppositional to queerness. The secular imaginary institutes such thinking to its own peril; as Janet Jakobsen (summarized by Pellegrini) points out: “this alignment of the queer with secular and sexual conservatism with the religious may actually reinforce the claims of the right to a monopoly on religion.” This hazard is accompanied with a ceding of “the language of values” to religion. Elsewhere Pellegrini points out that there are many queers who do not see the value in needing to choose between “being” queer and “being” religious. See Anne Pellegrini, “Feeling Secular” in *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith*, ed. Lance Gharavi (New York: Routledge, 2012), 197, and her “Testimonial Sexuality; or, Queer Structures of Religious Feeling: Notes Towards an Investigation,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Fall 2005): 94. These concessions, I argue, not only fail in adequately describing the intersection of queerness and various religions, but they come at a deadly price, silencing intersectional knowledges that properly belong to queerness while eclipsing a critique and *emic care of self* from which queer theory, in its turn toward antisocial contortions, may stand to gain in its capacity for imagining queerness afresh.

¹⁵ Jack (Judith) Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011),

all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop.”¹⁶ It thinks about being in a way that stands outside of society’s expectations for success with its “reproductive maturity” and its “wealth accumulation.” Failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, and not knowing all constitute modes through which queer failure offers “more surprising ways of being in the world. . . .preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood, and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children.”¹⁷

In a similar manner, Catholic tradition and Scriptures taken from the “lowness” of liberation theology and a queerly immanent perspective constitute the retrieval of what theologian Hans Küng calls “dangerous memories” about Jesus.¹⁸ This perspective serves as an important element in understanding the queer Catholic imagination and the truth of failure that is, in fact, Catholic. For theologian Robert Shore-Goss, this amounts to a queer reading of the Scriptures (and also of Tradition/lives of the Saints) with a *hermeneutic of solidarity* that expresses an “epistemological privilege” of the oppressed. The Scriptures and stories of Catholic tradition form part of the Christian love story meant not merely for straight Catholics, but also for the queer for whom “the Scriptures become symbolic of their own history of political resistance, conflict, and struggle for the sexual justice of

2. N.B.: When Halberstam wrote this work, he was still known as “Judith.” In the course of this essay, I will refer to the author with the pronouns / designations “he,” “him” and “his,” and any future full references will give the author’s forename as “Jack.”

¹⁶ Halberstam, 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁸ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 121.

God's reign."¹⁹ Goss especially considers Jesus's preferential solidarity with the oppressed, his table fellowship, and his healings and exorcisms all as signs of the *basileia* practices (kingdom-making) of Christ that open the door to the sacramentalizing of queer experience in the here and now.²⁰ As the sacraments (like confession and Holy Communion) have been used as instruments of political control and exclusion rather than as representations of love-making and justice-doing, the queer Catholic imagination's response of sacramentalizing queer experience echoes Jesus' (and St. Sebastian's) *christian* love story, underscoring the connection of queers to their own sexualities and to the community at-large. Simon and Valier's decision to die something of a martyr's death reflects the place of queer failure at the heart of the queer Catholic imagination. The hope that their love may become "seven times more ardent" in bearing witness to St. Sebastian's love and imitation of Christ's sacrifice seeks to put an end to the exclusion and scapegoating that comes from the disease-making discourse that interpellates and claims knowledge of queer "others." Experiencing their desires and love as grace-filled, the young Simon and Valier, spiritually and sexually driven toward one another "embark on a path of love-making" (in the words of Robert Goss) destined to live beyond themselves. Their erotic love attests to the fatal foolishness and youthful *élan* that imagines a queer future beyond the cynical and indifferent attitude towards life and death that finds Lee Edelman affirming Lacan's understanding of love, the Freudian death

¹⁹ Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 106.

²⁰ As Mary Hunt remarks (quoted in Goss) "To sacramentalize is to pay attention. It is what community does when it names and claims ordinary human experience as holy, **connecting them with history and propelling them into the future**" (emphasis mine). *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 117.

drive, and the refusal of “compassion’s compulsion.”²¹ Describing Christian *eros*, Goss explains that it is marked by the “ability to feel passion in relatedness. . . .it is nondualistic . . . mutually generative . . . [a mark of] lesbian/gay fecundity [that is] inclusive, mutually produced and shared.”²² It reimagines from a Biblical perspective that God can be lover, that “God needs” and that “an absolutely perfect God is too constraining and too abstract a social construct for the biblical God: “The model of God as lover, then, implies that God needs us to help save the world.”²³

Alongside this struggle for liberation and the goodness of sexuality remains what Mark Jordan terms the “homosexuality of Catholicism” (mentioned earlier).²⁴ A resounding silence and a lack of language surrounds priestly queer desires.²⁵ These desires face off with a very real spiritual grappling of the Pauline (and Augustinian) “inner” and “outer” self that, when taken on the whole, calls into question a

²¹ Lee Edelman *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), see especially 68-70.

²² Goss, 166.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mark D. Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 82.

²⁵ The unrelated, unconscionable sexual abuse of minors among clergy emerged as a symptom of an inability to come to terms with adult sexuality in the midst of the sexual revolution of the 1960s. See D.R. Hands, “Beyond the Cloister-Shamed Sexuality in Formation of the Sex Offending Clergy” in B.K. Schwartz and H.R. Cellini (eds.), *The Sex Offender* (Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute, 2002). For a more in-depth analysis of the scandal, see also John Jay College of Criminal Justice, “Executive Summary” in *The Nature and Scope of the Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States, 1950-2002* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2004). I take exception to such abuse (and the practice of paedophilia in general) as being called “queer” since biologically, childhood does not constitute an identity any more than one’s sex does, but remains, instead a phase of human development wherein an identity is still being shaped. As such, I stand behind the thought of Margot Gayle Backus who posits that such behavior constitutes “queer sexual violence” that includes the possibility of “queer abuse.” Citing Modleski (2000), Backus notes that such abuse exploits the inferior economic, intellectual, social, and physical differences between adults and children. See “‘Things that Have the Potential to Go Terribly Wrong’: Homosexuality, Paedophilia, and the Kincora Boys’ Home Scandal,” in Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke (eds.) *Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory: Queer Interventions* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 238-9; 241.

widespread economy of self-loathing and scapegoating.²⁶ These performative conflicts and exchanges construct the *high ecclesial closet* that is built upon the necessary and sufficiently silencing tactics of compartmentalization and deniability that hinder speech and charges of institutional hypocrisy. Ultimately, a *catacomb* economy of queer desire emerges, hinging on the closing doors of the sacristy and the confessional, shaped by pernicious promises of power and games of truth. As a holy performativity of queer failure, the ecclesial closet doesn't flatten Halberstam's theorization, but instead, squeezes it sideways, laterally impacting spiritually scripted relations in authoritative, aesthetic, and personal ways that ultimately bear out queerly material consequences.²⁷ With the theoretical opening of the ecclesial closet's doors and windows—indubitably hidden behind layers of Felliniesque

²⁶ For more on the “inner” and “outer” components of the self identified by Paul and Augustine, see Philip Cary's *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. 47-51. Theologians Mark Jordan and James Alison both attest to this economy of scapegoating. For Jordan, the identification of the “sodomite” is the product of the “hysterical theological imagination” that deploys a scripted and effective sin-identity. Dependent upon the script of this sin-identity, the offender is performed and performs the sodomite into being. His response (without a new language) is compassed by the prevailing discourse. See Jordan, *Silence of Sodom*, 114-116. Alison, building on the mimetic and anthropological theories of René Girard (see *The Scapegoat*, 1982), reveals the scapegoat mechanism at work when the church excludes others because of their sexuality. Through much of his work, Alison refers to Jesus as the “forgiving victim.” Seen from this angle, Christ's mission was to put an end to the scapegoat mechanism once and for all. This view subverts theologies of atonement that portray God demanding sacrifice; through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, God reveals the truth/fullness of humanity to itself, and mimetic rivalry and scapegoating are seen for what they are: human constructs designed to create an “inside” and “outside” along with false notions of human “goodness” and “badness.” For more on this as it applies to sexuality, see Alison's “Towards Global Inclusion of LGBT People Within Catholic Communities: A New Theological Approach,” Lecture, Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, The Ways of Love International Conference, Rome, Italy, October 3, 2014, <http://www.jamesalison.co.uk/texts/eng74.html>.

²⁷ As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes in *Epistemology of the Closet*: “Christianity may be near ubiquitous in modern European culture as a figure of phobic prohibition, but it makes a strange figure for that indeed. Catholicism in particular is famous for giving countless gay and proto-gay children the shock of the possibility of adults who don't marry, of men in dresses, of passionate theatre, of introspective investment, of lives filled with what could, ideally without diminution, be called the work of the fetish. Even for the many whose own achieved gay identity may at last include none of these features or may be defined against them, the encounter with them is likely to have a more or other than prohibitive impact.” (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 140.

velvet—when crisp air and the playfulness of truth-revealing light greets what can be considered nothing other than Catholic camping, inescapably, more queer failure is bound to follow on the heels of the sacristan’s startling command: “open the doors and windows, we’re getting dressed!”²⁸ Here failure (as Christ at the last Supper) consumes itself to effect spiritual at-one-ment, and occasions queer *anamnesis* or a remembering of the renting of the temple veil. Because, in the unfolding of Christian history, there is no dewy joy of Easter morning without darkness and the destruction of hypostatic union, queer failure plays out in cosmic proportions. As Halberstam theorizes: queer failure “provides the opportunity to use negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life.”²⁹

Failure, Future and Forgiveness

Returning to the initial image this paper began with of Francis speaking at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, the repetition of queer failure and its interaction with the queer Catholic imagination rises again to the surface. In a “Stop the Church” action organized by ACT UP/New York (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), queers from across New York City had gathered at St. Patrick’s to attend a Mass to protest Cardinal O’Connor’s use of the pulpit and the Eucharist to advocate for his position against safe-sex practices in addition to wielding his influence to withdraw an important pastoral letter from the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic

²⁸ Here I am especially captivated by Federico Fellini’s film, *Roma*. Although I have not confirmed it, some sources claim that the Vatican demanded that portions of the film be censored. The part of the film that especially resonates for me is a drag show of high ecclesial closet proportions. See “Vatican Fashion Show-Federico Fellini (Roma [1972]),” YouTube video, 10:15, posted by “God Spanker,” May 20, 2012, <https://youtu.be/QMQ4JicUs1A>.

²⁹ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 3.

Bishops) entitled *The Many Faces of AIDS*.³⁰ Goss likens the event to Jesus' "cleansing of the temple." Many protestors entered the sacred space merely to be heard and to be seen; however, one protestor drew a great deal more attention when, upon receiving the Eucharist, he crumbled it in his hands and threw it to the floor. Unlike Goss, I consider this action of Eucharistic violence well placed and while shocking, suitable. Going beyond the Christian norms of sanitized sanctity, this protestor, in his rage against the Cardinal, his power / knowledge, and games of truth, the protestor reveals a knowledge of Christ who sought to end scapegoating and unnecessary death. As painful and as unorthodox as it may have been for the protestor to crumble and allow the Eucharist to fall to the floor, the action calls Christ into being who and what he was called to be: the ultimate sacrifice and end of exclusion of "others" from God. This is why, at the end of Bouchard's *Lilies*, when Bishop Bilodeau admits to playing God and having willingly left Valier in the attic to die from the couple's intended fires of martyrdom, Simon can refrain from killing his "old friend." It is not a Gospel of "niceness" as Simon can still feel the hatred for Bilodeau he has felt for over forty years. In the anamnesis of theatrical representation, repeating the circumstances of Valier's death as Simon's play does, Bilodeau is left with the memory and reality of his actions, and face to face with the queer failure of Valier's death, its memory and love bearing fruit seven times more ardently as Bilodeau is left to pick up the pieces of his confession and long held shame. He is called (as Catholics are now being called by Pope Francis), to reconcile with a past toward LGBTQ Catholics that has involved marking queer others by

³⁰ Goss, 148.

requiring silence, shame, and separation from God. The future and the truth, as Bilodeau knows in seeing and confessing his crime, lies in “the revival of a romantic drama,” a reconciling subtitle that is as liturgical as it is liberating.