

‘LIKE AN ISLAND I HAD NOT ROWED TO’

God-Talk in the Poetry of Anne Sexton

Bonnie Thurston

IN HIS *LIVES OF THE ENGLISH POETS*, written between 1777 and 1780, Samuel Johnson includes Edmund Waller (1605–1687), the now less well-known contemporary of John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughn and John Dryden. Towards the end of the essay on Waller, Johnson includes an excursus on what he terms ‘Sacred Poems’, in which the following infamous pronouncements occur:

It has been the frequent lamentation of good men that verse has been too little applied to the purposes of worship, and many attempts have been made to animate devotion by pious poetry: that they have seldom attained their end is sufficiently known

Let no pious ear be offended if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please

Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical.¹

Dr Johnson admits that his is a minority opinion (‘in opposition to many authorities’), but he does not approve of religious or devotional poetry. ‘The essence of poetry is invention’, he says, but ‘The topics of devotion are few, and being few are universally known’.² The contemporary US poet Mary Oliver says essentially the same thing, albeit rather more gently, when she writes in *A Poetry Handbook*, ‘The subjects that stir the heart are not so many, after all, and they do not change’.³ It is difficult to write successful poetry about well-known and often-treated subjects, religious ones most of all.

¹ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* (New York: Dutton, 1964), volume 1, 173.

² Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, volume 1, 173.

³ Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 11.

This is exactly the point I want to address, because I think that poets and persons of authentic religious faith are faced with the same fundamental quest: to find their own voice and their own language, to speak in a fresh and original way about, if not a 'known subject' (for God cannot be fully known), at least a ubiquitous one. What I highlight in some poems of Anne Sexton is the way they are 'inventive', produce 'something unexpected' on some of the well-known 'topics of devotion'. But first, I lay a little theological and literary groundwork by making two brief points.

**To find
one's own
language of
faith, practice
and prayer,**

For anyone with authentic faith in God, or even authentic striving towards faith in God (which is where many of us live if we are honest about it), a most important part of the quest is to discover and use one's own, fresh language to speak about and to the Deity and, secondarily, to understand how that personal language connects with the familiar vocabulary of our faith community and its tradition. Put simply, the task of spiritual maturity is to find one's own language of faith, practice and prayer, usually within a historical tradition. For our faith to be authentic, it must be ours, articulated in our own voice, not memorised, parroted, recited. We can begin with traditional formulations (for example, in Christianity, creeds and the scriptures), or we can move towards them, but at some point, we must speak in our own voices.

Parenthetically, I think this is a particularly difficult and a particularly important task for women, precisely because, until very recently, most of the formulations were articulated by men; all the God-talk was essentially masculine. Men experience the world differently from women, and the metaphors they use, the language they employ, may or may not accurately reflect women's reality. Enough has been written on this in the last fifty years that I do not need to belabour the point, but I do raise it because it is one of the reasons this essay examines work by a woman poet. The 'question behind the question' is 'how do women, in particular, make God-talk?'

Striving for an authentic God-language is at root what many great poets, male and female, have been about. Certainly the great English-language poets have lifted voice and pen to speak to and about what Paul Tillich called 'Ultimate Concern', the Great Mystery that theists call God: Caedmon, Piers Plowman, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Hopkins, Eliot, Auden, R. S. Thomas and, in America, Bradstreet, Emerson, even Whitman, certainly Dickinson and, I would argue, Cummings, Stevens and Williams. These poets are fundamentally religious because, paradoxically, they are struggling

towards an authentic language with which to speak of (and sometimes to) God.

Pace Dr Johnson, in this task theologians and poets ought to be allies, because the basic nature of their use of language is similar. The formative theologians of the Western Church, St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, both assert that, in so far as it is possible to know God at all, God is known by comparisons, what St Augustine calls 'similitude'.⁴ Similitude—broadly speaking, metaphor—is the fundamental link between literary and religious language.⁵ God-talk is metaphorical talk, and poetry is metaphorical talk. If they are good at what they do, both religious teachers and poets use what is known to show us something unknown. The way Jesus used parables in the synoptic Gospels is exactly what I have in mind, and is what the Johannine Jesus says of his own teaching method: 'I have said these things to you in figures of speech' (John 16:25). This is my first point: poets and theologians employ a kind of common language, that is, they use language in similar ways.

My second point is that God has been understood to be both transcendent and immanent, although the transcendent image has predominated in Western Christianity, probably because we have not fully appropriated the implications of the incarnation and Jesus' subsequent resurrection (another subject for another time). 'Transcendent' derives etymologically from the Latin *transcendere*, to climb across; it suggests some limit that must be surpassed or overcome. The transcendent image of God is the image of God 'up there and out there', beyond material existence and human comprehension. The transcendent God is the God of Sinai in Exodus 19, the God 'up there' in the thunder and lightning and cloud; the God to whom you had better not get too close.

The other biblical image of God is that of the immanent God: the God who is nearby or within. There is a delicious aural pun here on both 'imminent'—that which is impending, likely to happen without delay, in short, 'here'—and 'eminent', that is, 'prominent' or 'superior in rank'.

This idea of immanence was important to the Lucan Jesus, who said to his disciples that God's Kingdom 'has come near to you' (*heggiken eph humas*, 10:9) and 'is in the midst of you' (*entos humon in*, 17:21, sometimes translated 'within you'; the phrase implies something at work in a larger

⁴ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 3.34–35.

⁵ I have written in more detail about this in 'Words and the Word: Reflections on Scripture, Prayer and Poetry', *The Way*, 44/2 (April 2005), 7–20.

entity). When St Paul writes to the Church at Rome, ‘Ever since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible nature, namely [God’s] eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived *in the things that have been made*’ (Romans 1:20, italics mine), he is characterizing the immanent God: the God perceivable in creation, the material and human-relational worlds. The immanent God is in, but not of, the creation—glimpsed through it. This is the God of Gerard Manley Hopkins in ‘The World Is Charged with the Grandeur of God’.⁶ It is also the God of the contemporary Welsh poet Anne Cluysenaar’s brilliant poem, ‘This Much’.

I remember this much: the sun
twisting in knots of cloud
down the glacial cwm, one field
then another lit up like reflections
in running water, as if

somewhere behind my back
a world bent down to look
at itself in ours and vanished
into all this—trees, houses,
black-and-white cows grazing—
and whatever I was had become
awareness only.

I came to
from this to my usual weight,
the scent of grass, a sea-gull
crying its way inland.

Since then, I’m a wave pulled back
from the sea, separated, delighting
in the eye of light at its centre,
the breaking of spume, but willing
to topple whenever into the tide.⁷

With Dr Johnson’s caveat that it is hard to write successful poetry on familiar subjects and these two foundational points in mind (that both theological and poetic language are necessarily metaphorical, and that God is traditionally understood to be both transcendent and immanent), we turn to a modern US woman poet who exemplifies the fundamental

⁶ See ‘God’s Grandeur’, in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (New York: OUP, 1970), 66.

⁷ Anne Cluysenaar, ‘This Much’, *Scintilla*, 7 (2003). Anne Cluysenaar’s latest collection is *Touching Distances* (Tanygrisiau: Cinnamon, 2013).



© Paul Gillard

spiritual task to envision and speak of, and to, the Deity in one's own language, one's own voice. I have chosen a poet whose work is recent, but not frequently discussed in this context: Anne Sexton. In the course of her work, she moved from purely 'secular' poetry towards a more traditional Christian language.

Anne Sexton

Sexton might be characterized as a 'confessional poet' in the mode of Sylvia Plath. Indeed, Maxine Kumin has written in the foreword to *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton*, 'no other American poet in our time has cried aloud publicly so many private details'.⁸ Sexton studied with Robert Lowell, who many critics of US literature suggest initiated a 'confessional school' with his own *Life Studies* of 1959. Sexton, however, said she was more influenced by W. D. Snodgrass's autobiographical *Heart's Needle*, also published in 1959. Sexton's poetic world is urban and suburban, and her voice is powerfully relational. Sexton was married and a mother of daughters. Her mature work articulates what Dr Johnson called 'contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul' with a language that is both fresh and surprising in its particularity, with 'such invention as, by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights'.⁹

⁸ Maxine Kumin, 'How It Was', in *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), xix.

⁹ Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, volume 1, 173.

© Else Dorfman



Anne Sexton

And so we turn to the work of Anne Sexton itself, focusing not on her poetic techniques (although that would make an interesting study), but on her God-talk. Anne Sexton is not an easy poet to read, or perhaps even to like. Born and raised in wealthy, suburban Boston, she had little formal education after high school and was by all accounts a *femme fatale*. She married young, produced two daughters and claims she began to write poetry at 28 after seeing a television programme in which I. A. Richards lectured on the sonnet. Her poetic work chronicles her emotional upheavals, her nervous breakdowns and hospitalisations. The *Norton Anthology of American Literature* says 'Sexton writes about sex, illegitimacy, guilt, madness, suicide'.¹⁰ Indeed, Sexton herself remarked that poetry 'should be a shock to the senses. It should also hurt.'¹¹ Hers certainly does.

Her poems are grounded in her experience as a woman and seem to be attempts to record emotion before convention or the passage of time might diminish its rawness. She lashes out, revealing intimate details of her private bodily and emotional life—details which, frankly, I could sometimes do without. But that is the point. Sexton draws us in by the shocking image. She is reaching out to us, although in an unconventional

¹⁰ *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Ronald Gottesman and others (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), volume 2, 2501.

¹¹ Quoted in *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, volume 2, 2501.

way. Her poems are often addressed to people or entities with whom or with which she wants to connect; she is calling out into the darkness hoping to find someone there.

The voice of the poet did connect in (and, in retrospect, we might also say *with*) the 1960s when, as Professor Lawrence Cunningham once remarked in conversation, America was in the midst of a ‘collective nervous breakdown’.¹² She won a Pulitzer Prize in 1967 for her book *Live or Die* and received grants from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Ford Foundation. By the early 1970s her poetic star had begun to wane. The critical response to one of her last major readings at Harvard University was tepid at best. ‘Richard Burgin wrote in the Boston Globe, “Sexton’s is a poetry of highly intense surface without enough behind it to be fully satisfying”’.¹³ When her collected poems came out in 1981, *The New York Times Book Review* found the later poems less controlled and striking than earlier work. The reviewer (and novelist), Joyce Carol Oates, wrote

As early as the mid-60s, her poetry had begun to lose its scrupulous dramatic control and to be weakened by a poetic voice that ... spoke ceaselessly of emotions and moods and ephemeral states of mind.¹⁴

(It may be that modern literary critics generally view the religious imagination as an ‘ephemeral state of mind’.) Robert Mazzocco, reviewing Sexton’s *The Death Notebooks* and *The Awful Rowing toward God*, said in a 1975 *New York Review* article, ‘the later poems ... seem to me less commanding, strike dissonant strains, chromatize the key-board, or become programmatic ...’.¹⁵

I question these assessments because it is precisely in these last books, and especially in *The Awful Rowing toward God*, which was published posthumously in 1975, that Sexton struggles most explicitly towards her own God-language. Is it that the poems are less controlled, or that the subject is one with which professional literary critics are profoundly uncomfortable? In a long interview in *The Massachusetts Review*, Sexton admits she wrote the volume ‘... like I’ve written nothing else: in two

¹² Lawrence Cunningham and Thomas Merton, ‘Citizen Merton’, in *Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton*, edited by Morgan Atkinson and Jonathan Montaldo (Collegeville: Order of St Benedict, 2008), 140.

¹³ Jeffrey L. Lant, ‘Another Entry in the Death Notebooks’, *Southwest Review*, 64 (Summer, 1979), 219.

¹⁴ Joyce Carol Oates, review of *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton* in *The New York Times Book Review* (18 October 1981), 3.

¹⁵ Robert Mazzocco, ‘Matters of Life and Death’, *The New York Review* (3 April 1975), 22.

and a half weeks With three days out. One for exhaustion and two for a mental hospital. Then out and back to the book.' She described the process as 'a seizure of inspiration'.¹⁶ One writer called *Awful Rowing* 'a journey on uncharted seas'.¹⁷ But I do not think so. I think the volume exhibits Sexton's struggle to find her own God-language. What she comes up with is intensely incarnational. Sexton seeks to make the transcendent God immanent.

The Awful Rowing toward God opens with the poem 'Rowing', which describes this search for God. After lines alluding to her childhood development, the poet writes,

and God was there like an island I had not rowed to,
still ignorant of Him, my arms and my legs worked,
and I grew, I grew.¹⁸

The journey is not an easy one, and the poet has no illusions about the destination.

... I know that the island will not be perfect,
...
but there will be a door
and I will open it
and I will get rid of the rat inside of me,
the gnawing pestilential rat.
God will take it with his two hands
and embrace it. (417–418)

God is the island towards which the poet, afflicted with emotional suffering she calls the 'pestilential rat', the 'rat inside of me', strives. She has no illusion that God will be perfect—an unorthodox thought to be sure—by which I think she means that 'finding God' or 'experiencing God' will not result in a peaceful and perfect life. (One remembers the Johannine Jesus' promise to give peace, but 'not ... as the world gives', John 14:27.) But, like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, God will embrace her negativity and suffering. The poem closes with this stark line: 'This story ends with me still rowing' (418). Apparently Sexton's God-quest is about the journey, not the destination, a wisdom recommended by many spiritual teachers.

¹⁶ Anne Sexton, in Gregory Fitz Gerald, 'The Choir from the Soul: A Conversation with Anne Sexton', *The Massachusetts Review*, 19 (Spring, 1978), 76.

¹⁷ Nancy Yanes Hoffman, 'A Special Language', *Southwest Review*, 64 (Summer, 1979), 209.

¹⁸ Anne Sexton, 'Rowing', in *Complete Poems*, 417 (subsequent references in the text).

In ‘The Poet of Ignorance’ Sexton explores what she does not know:

There is an animal inside me,
clutching fast to my heart,
a huge crab
...
I have tried prayer
but as I pray the crab grips harder
and the pain enlarges.
I had a dream once,
perhaps it was a dream,
that the crab was my ignorance of God.
But who am I to believe in dreams? (434)

Sexton images her inner darkness, her demons, as ‘creepy’ things (rats, crabs) living inside her, and she seems to think her deliverance will come from outside herself. Although it is unusually imagined (which is the point), this is recognisable Christian soteriology; we are broken inside, and it takes Christ to fix us. For this reason the incarnation is the crucial axis of human history as, likewise, it is crucial in Sexton’s poems in this volume. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men cannot put Annie together again. It takes the King to do that.

‘The Earth’ imagines the formless God in heaven longing for the embodiedness of earth. Although a very different poem, its situation is like that of R. S. Thomas’s ‘The Coming’, in which God shows Christ the world, and he responds ‘Let me go there’.¹⁹ In Sexton’s poem,

God loafs around heaven,
without a shape
but He would like to smoke His cigar
or bite His fingernails (431)

The disembodied Deity is separated from the creation, but longs for it. The poem reminds me of Rainer Maria Rilke’s ‘Du, Nachbar Gott’, in which the persona worries that God might be thirsty and alone in the dark.²⁰ Sexton’s poem continues by listing the ordinary, earthly and earthy things God longs for, and draws the conclusion that God envies the physical bodies of created beings:

¹⁹ *Poems of R. S. Thomas* (Fayetteville: U. of Arkansas P, 1985), 83.

²⁰ Good translations of this poem appear in *Poems from the Book of Hours*, translated by Babette Deutsch (New York: New Directions, 1975), 12–13 and *The Book of Hours*, translated by Annemarie S. Kidder (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001), 6–9.

He does not envy the soul so much.
 He is all soul
 but He would like to house it in a body
 and come down
 and give it a bath
 now and then. (432)

The poem evinces a rather sweet sympathy for God's predicament. While its point of view is startling, its theology is quite orthodox: God takes the initiative to come to be with the creation. This is the melody of 'Emmanuel', God with us, in a late twentieth-century key. Its longing for incarnation breaks the code in Sexton's God-talk. For her, God is found in the particularities of daily living, in incarnate life.

In a twist on the nuptial imagery of the Christian mystics, the poem 'When Man Enters Woman' depicts sexual intercourse as a place where God is found (428). Speaking of 'The Touch', in the volume *Love Poems*, Sexton says it 'shows something about my feeling that there's God everywhere'. Asked about sensuality and physicalness, she responded 'I am saying, in that is God'.²¹ In 'The Sickness unto Death' God is found in an orange and in Hitler, as well as in traditional religious objects (441). Part of the long poem 'Is It True?' is a litany of praise to 'useful objects': spoons, mattresses, typewriters, ladders, skillets, shoes. 'Not So. Not So.' asserts that God is in graves and bees and tailors and birds and potters and ant-hills (472). But Sexton's most clear and charming articulation of God-with-us is the poem 'Welcome Morning'.

There is joy
 in all:
 in the hair I brush each morning,
 in the Cannon towel, newly washed,
 that I rub my body with each morning,
 ...
 All this is God,
 right here in my pea-green house
 each morning (455)

Finally, God is in ordinary, daily life (emphasized by the refrain 'each morning'). As Sexton says in 'Not So. Not So.',

²¹ Fitz Gerald, 'Choir from the Soul', 80.

I cannot walk an inch
without trying to walk to God.
I cannot move a finger
without trying to touch God. (472)

The Awful Rowing toward God ends with the poem 'The Rowing Endeth': 'I'm mooring my rowboat / at the dock of the island called God'. (473) On the island God and the poet play poker. The poet holds 'a royal straight flush'; God 'holds five aces', and wins because a wild card had been announced that the poet did not hear. God begins to laugh, and the poet laughs, and 'The Absurd laughs' (474).

Dearest dealer,
I with my royal straight flush,
love you so for your wild card,
that untamable, eternal, gut-driven *ha-ha*
and lucky love. (474)

In the midst of the unlikely situations into which the poet writes herself and God, there is a great deal of traditionally Christian imagery and biblical allusion. While Sexton herself said 'there's no Catholicism in my family, really, except on my father's side',²² *The Norton Anthology* notes that Sexton 'had abandoned the Roman Catholicism into which she was born' although 'her poems enact something analogous to preparing for and receiving religious absolution'.²³ She reports that she spoke to a priest during the 'break' in *Awful Rowing* in the mental hospital and asked for baptism and communion, which were denied because she'd have 'to do the studies'. Sexton responded,

Look, I can't do that, Father ... because it would ruin, it would
formulate, my thinking: I'd want Him to be *my* God anyway. I don't
want to be taught about Him; I want to make him [sic] up.²⁴

Trying to pin Anne Sexton to a particular Christian tradition misses the point which, as she says, is to 'make [God] up', that is, to discover her own language for God. She is constantly taking the advice she gives:

In other words
take off the wall
that separates you from God. ('The Wall', 445)

²² Fitz Gerald, 'Choir from the Soul', 77.

²³ *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, volume 2, 2501.

²⁴ Fitz Gerald, 'Choir from the Soul', 78.

Again, I am reminded of Rilke's poem, in which 'there is but a narrow wall' (*Nur eine schmale Wand*) between the speaker and God, '... builded of your images. / They stand before you hiding you like names ...' (*Aus deinen Bildern ist sie aufgebaut. / Und deine Bilder stehn vor dir wie Namen*).²⁵ Sexton dismantles the wall between herself and God by using fresh, startling, 'ordinary' language to speak of and with God.

For Sexton, sensuality, physicality, is regenerative and thus godly. Her listing of commonplace things and activities becomes her litany of gratitude to the God she finds reflected there. It is a testament to the truth of the words of the psalmist that the human mind and heart are a mystery (Psalm 64:7a), that one of the loveliest poems on hope in our language was written by a woman on the verge of suicide.

Snow,
blessed snow,
comes out of the sky
like bleached flies.
The ground is no longer naked.
The ground has on its clothes.
The trees poke out of sheets
and each branch wears the sock of God.

There is hope.
There is hope everywhere.
I bite it.
Someone once said:
Don't bite till you know
if it's bread or stone.
What I bite is all bread,
rising, yeasty as a cloud.

There is hope.
There is hope everywhere.
Today God gives milk
and I have the pail. (467–468)

In a letter, to be read after her death, that Sexton wrote to her daughter Linda, she said '... I've had a good life—I wrote unhappy—but I lived to the hilt'.²⁶

²⁵ *Poems from the Book of Hours*, 12–13.

²⁶ Linda Gray Sexton and Lois Ames, *Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 380.



God-Talk and Poetry

Why is it important to consider how a twentieth-century US poet has made 'God-talk'? Because it helps us understand the process more broadly, to envision it more clearly, to do it better ourselves. One of the founders of the academic discipline of religion and literature, Amos Wilder, wrote: 'The poet is rather an image-maker than a preacher, a celebrant than a teacher'.²⁷ Herein is the importance of Sexton: she makes images; she celebrates. If theologians are willing to pay attention, poets can teach them what, in practical fact, their abstract language means. To be specific, in the Christian frame of reference, the work of Sexton illustrates the importance of that most fundamental of all Christian concepts, incarnation, by insisting that we attend to bodily life, to the senses and all they can teach us. Sexton's work evinces an edginess, a fragmentary quality. Just below the surface in most of her poems is something akin to lament. She speaks to God 'over there' or 'up there' and calls God down with startling metaphors or similes. She finds God in her suburban kitchen. For her, the parts do not quite fit together, but God is in the puzzle.²⁸ The God-talk of Sexton's poems instructs us not to look elsewhere for God; God is here. Hers is the insight, taken from Erasmus by Carl Jung, that, summoned or not, God is here,²⁹ or the insight of the Holy Qur'ān, which teaches that

²⁷ Amos Wilder, *Modern Poetry and the Christian Tradition* (New York: Scribners, 1951), 232.

²⁸ I wrote this sentence before I read Kumin's foreword, which speaks of Sexton 'fighting to put the jigsaw pieces of the puzzle together into a coherence that would save her' (*Collected Poems*, xxxi).

²⁹ See Carl Gustav Jung, *Letters: 1951–1961*, edited by G. Adler, A. Jaffe and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975), volume 2, 611: 'By the way, you seek the enigmatic oracle *Vocatus atque non vocatus deus aderit* in vain in Delphi: it is cut in stone over the door of my house in Kusnacht near

God is closer to us than our jugular vein (50.16). And this, according to J. Hillis Miller, is one of the primary uses of lyric poetry, 'to lead to a recognition of the presence of God in every moment and every event of time'.³⁰

But let us not lose sight of the fact that this is so because the poetry, itself, is excellent. Dr Johnson's objection to religious poetry is not that it is religious, but that it is often bad poetry. Particularity, not abstraction, makes for good poetry. Sexton is a poet of particularity. She attends to her own emotional and bodily life, and presents it, in sometimes shocking detail, in her poems. Unflinching looking and detailed reporting of what is seen characterizes her 'God-talk'. In our struggle towards authentic spiritual language she says, in effect, 'start where you are; see what is really there; articulate that'.

'From poetry', wrote Dr Johnson in the 'Life of Waller', 'the reader justly expects, and from good poetry always obtains, the enlargement of his comprehension and elevation of his fancy ...'.³¹ I find this in the work of Anne Sexton. She stimulates in me what the Buddhist tradition calls 'mindfulness', aliveness and focused awareness in the present moment, a great asset, surely an intellectual and spiritual virtue in a multi-tasking and distracted world.

Bonnie Thurston lives in solitude, having resigned the William F. Orr Professorship in New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2002. She has written or edited eighteen theological books and five collections of poetry, most recently *A Place to Pay Attention* (Cinnamon Press, 2014). Her church affiliations include the Episcopal Church, USA, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She was ordained in 1984, gives retreats and serves as a spiritual director.

Zurich and otherwise found in Erasmus's collection of *Adagia* (XVIth cent.). It is a Delphic oracle though. It says: yes, the god will be on the spot, but in what form and to what purpose?

³⁰ J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* (Cambridge, Ma: Belknap, 1966), 188.

³¹ Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 174.