The quaestio with which St Thomas Aquinas begins his "Summa theologiae" includes discussions of the senses of Scripture and the use of proverbs and symbolic language in the sacred text (la 1, art. 9 and 10). Here Aquinas establishes a preference for the 'literal sense' as the bedrock of all the others, affirms the importance of authorial intention as a guide to textual meaning, and concludes that parables should best be regarded as forming a part of the literal sense. Moreover, it is quite fitting for the Bible to employ metaphorical expressions, he declares, because we human beings reach the world of intelligence through the world of sense. That thought, which Aquinas would regard as fundamentally Aristotelian, is supported by Pseudo-Dionysius, who said that the divine rays cannot enlighten us unless they are wrapped up in many sacred veils.

More practically, Aquinas continued, such language is indispensably useful in teaching. And that is why it is to be found in Christian doctrine. By contrast, in poetry metaphors are employed 'for the sake of representation', in which our human natures are disposed to take pleasure. It would seem, then, that the metaphors in Scripture teach, while those in poetry delight.

This account is by no means the most sophisticated one of its kind to have been produced in the thirteenth century. It is cursory and condensed, arguably a reflection of the fact that as a theologian Aquinas had little time for matters poetic and symb-

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2 "De cael. hier." i.2 (PG iii.132).
olic. But what he did say about scriptural sense and style exercised a wide influence, thanks in part to the authority which his oeuvre came to enjoy within the Dominican Order and beyond, and also to the amplification of the saint's exegetical theories by Nicholas of Lyre in his "Postilla litteralis". The purpose of this paper is to examine the ways in which Thomistic theory concerning the sensus litteralis was assimilated and adapted by two later scholars who, whatever their differences (and they are legion), shared at least the brief pronouncements of St Thomas which have been summarized above. Indeed, it may to some extent be read as an essay in the 'reception history' of "Summa theologicae", 1a 1, articles 9 and 10.

The texts under consideration here are the "Opus perutile de divisione ordine ac utilitate omnium scientiarum" which was written in 1491 by the Italian Dominican Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498) and extracts from the Bible commentaries of the Spanish secular Alfonso de Madrigal, 'El Tostado' (c.1410–1455). Neither writer was a stranger to controversy. In 1443 Madrigal was obliged to reassure Pope Eugenius IV. of his orthodoxy; some 21 of his propositions were challenged in disputation by Juan de Torquemada, whom the pope had appointed to this task. The most controversial issue was Madrigal's questioning of the extent to which, and the way in which, popes and priests could grant remission of sin, absolution a poena et a culpa; in addition there were two suspect doctrines which had caused offence, namely his challenging of the standard views on Christ's age at the time of His passion and the date on which He died. However, Madrigal's career did not suffer long on account of this, and a few years after the controversy, in 1445, Eugenius made him Bishop of Avila, on King Juan II. of Castile's recommendation. Savonarola was not so fortunate. Not content with having predicted, and indeed having helped to bring about, the downfall in Florence of the Medici dynasty (which finally collapsed before the incursions of King Charles VIII of France, hailed by Savonarola as a great avenger), he embarked on a crusade against the luxury and corruption of the papal court of Alexander VI. Despite his excommunication, Savonarola was quite safe while his base of power lasted: under the Council which governed Florence after Charles VIII's departure the friar's moral teachings enjoyed an exceptional vogue. However, when his party fell from power he soon found himself without friends. He was hanged and burned at the stake on May 23rd 1498.


There is some confusion in the relevant literature about Madrigal's dates. Here I generally follow those given in the "Dictionnaire de spiritualité". Educated at the University of Salamanca, in 1432 he attained the title of Master of Arts and in 1441 that of Master of Theology. During his 25 years in the university he taught poetry, moral philosophy and theology, and served as its chancellor. After the papal investigation of his opinions Madrigal spent a few months in the Catalonian Charterhouse of Scala Dei, but left when Juan II of Castile recalled him as his advisor.

On Savonarola's life and works see Roberto Ridolfi, Vita di Girolamo Savonarola (Rome 1952), and Franco Cordero's monumental study Savonarola (Rome, Bari 1986–88). I have specially benefited from vol. 1, which covers the period in which the "Opus perutile" was written.
'El Tostado' was an extraordinarily ambitious exegete and classical scholar, who persistently took on projects so massive that they defied even his energies. He began his voluminous commentary on Genesis in 1436, and over the next twelve years or so he worked his way through the historical books of the Old Testament (getting as far as II Paralipomenon) and St Matthew's gospel. In 1449–50 he completed a Castilian translation of Jerome's Latin version of the "Chronici canones" of Eusebius (for the first Marquis of Santillana, patron of the arts and bibliophile). Madrigal seems to have begun a Latin commentary on Eusebius soon afterwards, only to abandon it (having got no further than half-way through Eusebius's prologue, so extensive had the exposition become) in favour of a Castilian exposition of the same work. This vernacular work ground to a halt after Madrigal had filled five folio volumes with elaborate commentary, yet hardly one-third of the text had been dealt with. The Eusebius translation and commentaries may be regarded as a sort of complement to Madrigal's Bible commentary, an exposition of pagan history to stand alongside his account of sacred history. Among his other works, the most curious of all is a "Tractando como al ome es nescesario amar", an Ovidian jeu d'esprit on the pleasures and pains of love. No one who has confronted the many tomes which make up the œuvre of 'El Tostado' could accuse him of congenital frivolity. But his love-treatise certainly would not have pleased Savonarola.

Savonarola's reputation, in sharp contrast with Madrigal's, was won in the areas of preaching, prophecy and the practical reform of morals. The main thing which concerned him about Lorenzo de Medici ('the Magnificent') was not his patronage of the arts but the state of his soul; among the many accusations which the friar levelled at him was the charge that he promoted art of a paganized kind. And, at the height of Savonarola's influence in Florence, many people brought items of luxury, including pictures of beautiful women, ornaments and the writings of pagan and immoral poets to San Marco, where he had been prior since 1491. These articles were publicly burned. Although the "Opus perutile" was written several years before those events, it may be said to provide a justification for them. Therein Savonarola claims that Plato was quite right to say that poets should be driven out of the state. Furthermore, he calls for a law to be passed in order that those ancient books 'which were published about the art of love, about whores, about idols, and about the most foul and wicked superstition of demons should be condemned to ashes by fire. For it would be a great advantage to society if the books of the pagans which contain the praises, the shameless morals,


and the disgraceful crimes of false gods were consigned to the flames. This censorious attitude to secular literature underpins his discussion of scriptural sense and style, as we will see.

I.

The distinction which Aquinas made (in art. 10) between unique Biblical discourse and that common to all the other branches of knowledge is amplified substantially by Savonarola in the fourth book of the “Opus perutile”. His main target is certain ‘poets’ who ‘presume to put their art on an equal footing with the Holy Scripture – to say nothing of giving it priority’. These writers are not identified, but he could have had in mind one of several Italian defenders of poetry, including Petrarch, Boccaccio and Albertino Mussato. None of those individuals actually went so far as to say that poetry was to be equated with Scripture or indeed superior to it, but Savonarola was not in the business of making such fine distinctions. In their effort ‘to prove that the art of poetry is of equal worth to Holy Scripture’, Savonarola complains, such ‘poets’ use the argument that poetry has allegorical senses just as the Bible has. Petrarch and Boccaccio, among others, certainly argued that allegory was common to both kinds of writing. And in his “Genealogia deorum gentilium” Boccaccio practised some exegesis of the type characteristic of Bible commentary, as for instance when he finds literal/historical, moral, allegorical and anagogical senses in the fable of Perseus’s killing of the Gorgon. But that is the exception rather than the rule in this treatise.

Presumably this is the sort of hermeneutics which troubled Savonarola. The ‘poets’ do not understand what they are talking about, he declares, for no branch of learning save the divine has both literal and allegorical meaning. His proof of this rests on the Augustinian distinction, as reiterated by Aquinas, between significative words and significative things. Three things, Savonarola explains, are necessary for the existence of spiritual sense. First there must be a solid historical foundation, not fable or fiction but a true account of actual events. Secondly, through this historical sense there should be the signification of some other event, whether past, present or future. Thirdly, that other historical event must ‘have been both foreseen and ordained and arranged with this signification in mind’: we are not dealing here with mere inventions.

9 Scritti filosofici, ed. Giancarlo Garfagnini (Rome 1982–88) i.265. (This forms part of the Edizione Nazionale edition of Savonarola’s works.) Here the work is edited under the title “Apologeticus de ratione poeticae artis”. Above I quote from the translation of book iv of the “Opus perutile” which is included in J.W. Binns’ article Late Medieval Poetics: The Case of Girolamo Savonarola, in: Annals of the Archive of ‘Ferran Valls 1 Taberner’s Library’. Estudios de literatura, pensamiento, historia política y cultura en la edad media Europea, no. 9/10 (Barcelona 1991) 307–39 (334).
11 See the discussion and bibliography in Minnis, Scott, Medieval Literary Theory, 387–92.
of the apostles and other catholic doctors. Here Savonarola is appealing to the belief that God, who is ultimately responsible for all the meanings of Scripture, is the only author who can use not only words but also things to signify: God alone 'could ordain things in their course that such a meaning can be derived from them'. Therefore 'No branch of learning except the Holy Scriptures properly and truly has a spiritual sense'. Unfortunately, Savonarola protests, 'some of our contemporaries ... try to allegorise the histories of the Romans and other pagans, thinking that they contain allegories in the same way as the Holy Scriptures do'; this should not be done, for 'those histories were by no means ordained with this meaning in mind'. Thus Savonarola appeals to the principle of actual textual intention as a means of establishing control over interpretation.

What, then, of the sensus litteralis itself? 'The literal sense is that which the author intends', Aquinas had declared (art.10, resp.), a proposition echoed and elaborated by Savonarola. It is not that which is 'formed by the words and letters' (as poets and grammarians suppose), 'but the meaning which the author principally intends by those words and letters'\(^{15}\). Therefore, in the parables which are used in the gospels the literal sense is not that which is signified by the words (\textit{voces}) and letters (\textit{littere}) as they would normally be understood, but rather what Christ intends to express by those words. In such cases the words signify in their normal meaning (\textit{proprie}) to some extent and figuratively (\textit{figurative}) to some extent. The literal sense is not the figure itself, but the object which is figured by it. Savonarola cites as an example Luke i.51, where it is said of God that he has 'showed might in his arm'. This is not to say that God literally has an arm, for that would be a lie. Rather it should be understood as referring to his 'operative' power, i.e. his power of doing and making. This is a slightly expanded version of a statement which Aquinas had made at the very end of art.10, where he was concerned to explain that the parabolical sense of scripture is not in itself a distinct and discrete sense, but rather a part of the sensus litteralis. At this point Aquinas had cited Luke's statement about 'the arm of God', within a discussion which affirms that 'nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Scripture'\(^{16}\).

The same solution applies to the problem of the poetic metaphors which are used in Scripture, Savonarola continues, for their meaning is also literal\(^{17}\). Here he moves into territory covered by Aquinas's ninth article, on metaphors and symbolic discourse in Scripture. The first 'contrary argument' offered by Aquinas had proposed that holy teaching should not use metaphors because what is proper to a lowly type of doctrine, poetry, appears ill-suited to the supreme science. Aquinas moderated this view in his responsio, declaring that poetry employs metaphors for the sake of representation, in which we naturally take delight (here he echoes the Averroistic version of Aristotle's "Poetics")\(^{18}\), but \textit{sacra doctrina} employs them \textit{propter necessitatem et utilitatem}. Far


\(^{16}\) Summa theologiae, ed. and trans. Gilby, 38–41.

\(^{17}\) Opus perutile, Ed. Garfagnini, 262; trans. Binns, 331.

\(^{18}\) Summa theologiae, ed. and trans. Gilby, 34–35. Cf. the relevant passage in Averroes' Middle Commentary on the Poetics as translated into Latin by Hermannus Allemannus in 1256; translated and discussed by Minnis, Scott, Medieval Literary Theory, 282, 293–94.
from moderating the contrary argument, Savonarola wishes to reinforce it. His main
target are those ‘poets’ who use the fact that metaphors are found both in the Bible
and in poetry to support their claim that the poetic art is actually nothing other than
theology. Here Savonarola could have had in mind, for example, the statement by
Petrarch that ‘I would almost say that theology is poetry written about God’\textsuperscript{19}, or
Boccaccio’s declaration that on certain occasions ‘theology and poetry can be spoken
of as almost one and the same thing’\textsuperscript{20}. However, Petrarch and Boccaccio took some
pains to make major distinctions between poetry and theology, as for example when
they both say that there is a considerable difference in their subject matter, the form-
er being about gods and men and the latter being about God and matters divine\textsuperscript{21}.
But Savonarola is disposed to see things in black and white terms. ‘To make the lowest
branch of learning the highest, and to think that mud is gold’ is a great error\textsuperscript{22}. It is
one thing to use metaphor out of necessity and because of the magnitude of the
events being described, as is the case in the Bible, and it is quite another to use them
in order to delight and on account of a weakness as far as truth is concerned, as is
the case in poetry. When theologians speak of matters which surpass the human in-
tellect and understanding, of course they are obliged to treat of them through home-
ly likenesses, because no one could comprehend them in their naked splendour. As
Pseudo-Dionysius says, ‘the divine rays cannot enlighten us except wrapped up in
many sacred veils’\textsuperscript{23}.

Here Savonarola is clearly influenced by the statement in Aquinas’s ninth article
that the Bible fittingly treats divine and spiritual realities under the guise of corporeal
likenesses. Savonarola moves far beyond Aquinas, however, in developing a contrast
between the mysterious, sacred veiling of the kind described by Dionysius with the
dubious kind practised by the poets.

Savonarola’s criticisms of poetry may be summarized thus:

1. \textit{It treats of uncertain particulars}. The poetic mode of procedure, he says, involves
single, individual things (\textit{Poetae proprium est ex particularibus procedere}), which are
subject to great variation, and therefore if the poets’ arguments were stripped of orna-
mentation no one would listen to them\textsuperscript{24}. Here he is on shaky ground: it could be
counterargued that this feature of poetry is what makes it of special value in ethics,
wherein demonstrative certainty is not possible and individual cases must be dealt
with, as Aristotle had said and as many schoolmen had reiterated\textsuperscript{25}. (Moreover, the

\textsuperscript{19} Le Familiari, x.4; trans. \textit{Minnis, Scott}, Medieval Literary Theory, 413. For the original text of
this letter (to Petrarch’s brother, Gherardo) see Le Familiari vol. ii, ed. V. Rossi, Edizione nazio-
nale delle opere di Francesco Petrarca XI (Florence 1934) 301–3.

\textsuperscript{20} Trattatello in laude di Dante, red. I, 154, trans. \textit{David Wallace}, in \textit{Minnis, Scott}, Medieval Lit-
erary Theory, 498.

\textsuperscript{21} See \textit{Minnis, Scott}, Medieval Literary Theory, 388–92.

\textsuperscript{22} Opus perutile, Ed. \textit{Garfagnini}, 262; trans. \textit{Binns}, 331.

\textsuperscript{23} Opus perutile, Ed. \textit{Garfagnini}, 262; trans. \textit{Binns}, 332. Cf. Dionysius as used by Aquinas; refer-
ence in note 2 above.


\textsuperscript{25} See for example the relevant discussion in Giles of Rome’s highly influential “De Regimine
Principum” (c. 1285). ‘In the whole field of moral teaching’, he declares, ‘the mode of procedure,
accessus ad auctores regularly claim that poems pertain to ethics, ‘ethice supponitur’.

2. *It is the lowest form of logic.* Due to the high-medieval recovery of certain works of Aristotle and the dissemination of the scholarship of his Arab commentators, it was believed that poetry was a part of logic: the “Rhetoric” and the “Poetics” were the seventh and eighth parts of the “Organon” respectively, preceded hierarchically by the six treatises on logic proper. Their characteristic methodologies, which were supposed to have much less certainty than those of demonstration, were defined in various ways; according to Savonarola the object of rhetoric is the enthymeme, while the example is that of poetry. Knowing how to compose verses is not what makes one a poet, for the true poet has to have sufficient knowledge of logic, so that he may construct that type of syllogism which is called the example. Poetry should exemplify good behaviour in an attractive way, and bad behaviour in such a way as to make it repugnant. The aim (finis) of the poet is therefore ‘to lead men to some virtuous object through some fitting representation’. By the same token, poetry should lead men away from vicious ends, ‘in just the same way a man abominates food if it should be represented to him under the image of something abominable’. Here Savonarola’s teaching is utterly traditional, though he may have been responding to arguments such as Boccaccio’s declaration that while the philosopher proceeds by syllogizing the poet conceives his thought by contemplation and, ‘wholly without the help of syllogism, veils it as

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according to “the Philosopher”, is figurative and broad (grossus). Individual matters, Giles explains, are variable and hence uncertain in scientific terms (as Aristotle says in the “Ethics”), and therefore instruction in morality is rightly conducted by means of a figurative style, such a style being unsubtle and general and hence accessible to the entire populace. Mathematical proofs are the most exact possible, whilst moral arguments are broad. The function of geometry is not to persuade but to prove; the function of an orator and politician is not to prove but to persuade. Thus Giles justifies the way in which he will teach practical philosophy in the following treatise. Very similar arguments, of course, could be made in defence of poetry. But Savonarola will have none of this, even though one could say that ethics, economics and politics, as demarcated by Aristotle, all proceed ex singularibus.

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26 For the *accessus* see the discussion and bibliography in *Minnis, Scott, Medieval Literary Theory*, 12–15.
28 The notion that being able to compose verses is not what makes one a poet is found in the Averroistic “Poetics”. See *Minnis, Scott, Medieval Literary Theory*, 291, and, for a modern translation from the original Arabic, see *Charles Butterworth, Averroes’ Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics* (Princeton 1986) 64–65. The point being made by Averroes is that only a work which combines metre with poetic intention, i.e. the purpose of composing discourses which represent objects (this being the branch of logic characteristic of poetry), should truly be called a poem. Savonarola criticises writers for not carrying out this logical function properly, though it should be emphasized that certain works which Averroes would regard as genuine, ‘true’, poems are, in Savonarola’s eyes, dangerously delightful and logically weak, and therefore must be constricted and controlled.
subtly and as skilfully as he can under the outward semblance of his fiction\textsuperscript{32}. According to Savonarola, if the poet did not veil and obscure his deficient subject-matter with similitudes its weakness would be apparent to all.

3. \textit{Literary pleasure is debilitating}. Far from making a positive response to Aristotle's statement that mankind naturally takes pleasure in representation (as reiterated by Aquinas), Savonarola argues that poetic representation, however 'fitting' it may be, can 'delight' its audience in a way which is superficial and deceptive. The 'tender minds of young men' should not be nourished on poems which 'are full of lust and the most foolish and wicked sexual liaisons of gods and men\textsuperscript{33}; such books should certainly be removed from their sight – and so Savonarola proceeds to justify their destruction. He even criticizes certain contemporary poets, who have written 'about religion, about morals, and about virtue, covering the truth of faith with pagan blandishments and deception\textsuperscript{34}. At first sight these works may seem useful and necessary (the two criteria of acceptability as used by Aquinas), but 'to the wise men who perceive the things that are God's' their use is very limited, i.e. by reading them 'sinful young men involved in the charms of the flesh' may be 'persuaded to abandon vice and love affairs\textsuperscript{35}. Therefore such poems just do not go far enough; they cannot bring their readers 'to true remorse and purity of heart, and Christian chastity': for that to happen would be a miracle! Clearly, very few poets, whether classical or contemporary, pagan or Christian, can slip through Savonarola's moral net, the mesh being so extraordinarily fine.

Here, then, Thomistic theories relating to the \textit{sensus scripturae} and the metaphorical language of the Bible have been pressed into the service of an extraordinary polemical exercise, which seeks to kill the letter and deny the spirit of poetry.

II.

The differences between Savonarola's attitudes and those of Alfonso de Madrigal are writ large in two \textit{quaestiones}, as included in the Spaniard's commentary on Matthew xiii, which interrogate St Thomas's articles on the senses of Scripture and its use of metaphorical and symbolic language (These discussions were prompted by the biblical chapter in which Christ tells the parables of the sower, the cockle, the mustard seed, etc.). In the initial outlines of the arguments for and against the propositions, and concomitantly in the closing replies to those arguments, the influence of Aquinas is quite obvious and \textit{verbatim}. Yet the central \textit{responsiones} or determinations are very much Alfonso's own, although on occasion ideas from Aquinas certainly do appear in them.

The first of these \textit{quaestiones} (no. 28) asks: 'an sint plures sensus eiusdem litere, et quot sunt\textsuperscript{36}. After rigorously limiting the places in which the four senses may be

\textsuperscript{32} Genealogia deorum gentilium xiv.17; trans. \textit{Osgood}, Boccaccio on Poetry, 79.

\textsuperscript{33} Opus perutile, Ed. \textit{Garfagnini}, 263; trans. \textit{Binns}, 332–33.

\textsuperscript{34} Opus perutile, Ed. \textit{Garfagnini}, 270; trans. \textit{Binns}, 338.


\textsuperscript{36} Opera omnia quotquot in scriptura sacra expositionem et alia, adhuc extare inuenta sunt (Cologne 1613) ix pt. 2 85–88. Alfonso's exposition of Matthew xiii alone runs to 90 \textit{quaestiones}. 
sought in Scripture, in a manner which sometimes follows the letter of Aquinas and is generally in accord with the spirit of Nicholas of Lyre, Madrigal describes their operations in detail. The literal sense may be regarded as historical, because it signifies ‘naked history’ (nuda historia), here taking historia in the broad sense which includes everything which is signified immediately by ‘the letter’ of Scripture, but not what the author wished to signify, as for example through parables and metaphors, because what is signified thus in the bark or shell (cortex) of ‘the letter’ is not the literal sense. For example, the passage which says that ‘the eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and his ears unto their prayers’ (Psalm xxxiii.16) does not actually mean that as such, for the literal sense is always truthful, and it is false to say that God has eyes or ears. But this passage is meant in a parabolic sense, the literal sense being that God always takes care of the good, acting in such a way as to make it seem that he is always watching over them and listening to their prayers. From this it would seem, declares El Tostado, that sometimes one and the same passage can have two literal senses, because the author means to intend both those senses to be taken from his statement.

Later in this same quaestio Madrigal offers a more elaborate treatment of parabolic signification. There, following but altering Aquinas, he rejects the suggestion that the parabolic sense is a sense in its own right, distinct from the others. Aquinas had argued that the parabolic sense is contained in the literal sense, because words, as intended by their author, can signify either ‘properly’ or figuratively. Madrigal proposes that the parabolic sense is not intended by an author in the same way as is the regular literal sense; neither is it applied by us. Rather it is a sort of ‘veiled literal sense’, which is directed towards (ordinatur) the literal sense, either to veil or decorate it, or for other reasons.

In Madrigal’s 29th quaestio, on parable and symbolism (based on Aquinas’s ninth article), a distinction is made between parable and metaphor. Metaphor consists of a transumption wherein we ascribe the properties of a thing to another thing, inasmuch as a similarity exists between the two things. For example, someone may be said to have been killed in the mouth of a sword, or the tongue of fire may be said to devour a straw. Of course, a sword does not have a mouth and fire does not have a tongue, but here a certain likeness is involved, namely that fire devours, i.e. consumes (consumit,
meaning that it eats up or destroys), and a sword also 'consumes', as if it had a tongue and its mouth devoured something. Similarly, when it is said that God has eyes and ears (cf. Alfonso's discussion of Psalm xxxiii.16, in his previous quaestio) this does not mean that he actually possesses such things, but rather that it seems like he does, in view of his behaviour towards the just. Parable, by contrast, occurs when we wish to say something but instead of expressing it in so many words we say something else, by which the first thing could not obviously be understood. In the case of the parable of the sower Christ could not be understood by the seed considered materialistically, but rather with reference to the word of God being established in the hearts of men. In parable there is always comparison (comparatio) and likeness (similitudo); in metaphor, however, we have likeness but not comparison, because comparison must always be made between things which are separate, whereas metaphor works through likeness. Moreover, in parable there are always two discourses (locutiones): one, in which what is to be understood is not expressed as such, and the other, in which that of which we wish to speak is plainly expressed, and this is the explanation of the parable (expositio parabolae). The parable of the sower, and its exposition, exemplifies this. And when the exposition of the parable is not stated openly, it tacitly exists.

Why, then, should metaphor and parable be used in Scripture? The main reason, Alfonso says, is because of the divine sublimity. Sacred Scripture speaks of God, and if we wish to speak of Him with reference to what is 'proper' to him, i.e. in accordance with his properties, this is impossible, because God is without time and quality, whereas human language (vox) inevitably involves these things. Since God cannot be spoken of by us in a proper sense (proprie), if we wish to speak of Him this must be done in a manner which is 'improper' (improprius) and figurative. As Pseudo-Dionysius says (and, we may add, as Aquinas had reiterated), 'the divine rays cannot enlighten us except wrapped up in many sacred veils'; that is to say, we cannot understand anything of God unless under certain sacred veils, these being the metaphors used in holy Scripture.

Such speech is particularly important as far as the uneducated (rudes) are concerned, declares Alfonso. Since our salvation lies in holy Scripture — as John v.39 says, 'Search the scriptures: for you think in them to have life everlasting' — it is necessary that everyone should understand it to an appropriate extent. But the rudes can learn only through things of sense (sensibilia), and they could not gain knowledge of God by any other means. While metaphors do not give them knowledge which is open and uncovered (apertus) they do provide knowledge with reference to certain qualities, and this is sufficient for their salvation. Later in this quaestio he suggests a reason (of a quite unDionysian kind) as to why metaphors drawn from lowly things are preferable, namely because they are the more easily understood by the rudes. This diverges from Aquinas, who in his corresponding discussion had praised metaphorical language for its function as a 'figurative disguising' which protects what is holy from the unworthy (this again follows Dionysius). Madrigal mentions this idea only briefly, being more interested in metaphor as a teaching aid.

But let us return to Madrigal's 28th quaestio. Here he explains that sometimes a passage which cannot be understood as a parable may be regarded as having two literal
senses\(^{39}\). Exodus xii.46 says of the Paschal lamb, 'neither shall you break a bone there-
of'. While the literal meaning of this passage, which refers to a Jewish ceremony, is ob-
vious enough, it would seem to refer to Christ, as is confirmed by John xix.36, where we read that 'in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled' Christ's legs were not bro-
ken on the cross. The only way in which this fulfilment could take place, declares Al-
fonso, is in the sense in which the passage is written, and that is the literal sense. Then
there is the case of the statement, as made in II Kings vii.14 and I Parlipomenon
xxii.10, 'I will be to him a father; and he shall be to me a son'. Literally, this refers to
Solomon, yet in Hebrews i.5 it is taken \textit{ad litteram} as referring to Christ. If it were
meant allegorically, then it could not be cited as a proof for, as Pseudo-Dionysius says,
'mystical theology does not prove'. However, concludes Madrigal, it is rare for a pas-
sage to have two literal senses; normally it has only one.

This account of the 'two literal senses' is clearly indebted to Nicholas of Lyre's de-
velopment of Aquinas's exegetical theory in the second prologue to his "Postilla litter-
alis". There Lyre suggests that sometimes one and the same \textit{littera} has a \textit{duplex sensus litteralis}\(^{40}\). He takes as his example I Parlipomenon xxii.10: literally this refers to Solo-
mon, yet at Hebrews i.5 St Paul takes it as referring to Christ. The Apostle must have
taken it literally, since the \textit{littera} is being adduced as proof that Christ is greater than
any angel, and proof cannot be had from a mystical sense, as Augustine says (and as
Aquinas reiterated in art. 10, ad 1um). Lyre goes on to explain that Solomon fulfilled
the prophecy less perfectly than Christ: he was the son of God \textit{per gratiam} whereas
Christ is the Son of God \textit{per naturam}\(^{41}\). Similarly, Madrigal asserts that a \textit{littera}
cannot have two equally important literal senses. The more important sense is the one which
actually fulfills the Scripture, and in the case of the passage about the bones not being
broken that is the sense which relates to Christ.

Discussions of this kind may be taken as a sort of high-water mark of at least the
\textit{theory} of literalistic exegesis in the later Middle Ages. Of course, the \textit{practice} of allegor-
ical exegesis continued; the spiritual senses flourished in many contexts. Yet their sta-
tus had changed, and at least some allegorical readings did not have quite the prestige
which once they had enjoyed. That view is supported by the next section of Madrigal's
28th \textit{quaestio}, which is hard not to read as a thoroughgoing affirmation of the advanta-

\(^{39}\) Opera ix pt.2 85.

\(^{40}\) Biblia sacra cum glossis (Lyon 1545) i fol. 4r. See further the related discussions in Lyre's com-
mentaries on II Kings vii (ii fol. 104v) and Hebrews i.5 (vi fol. 134v). In the latter passage Lyre
cites Augustine's statement that only from the literal sense can arguments be drawn, clearly influ-
enced by Aquinas's application of it at "Summa theologiae" Ia 1, art. 10, ad 1um. This sentiment
is of considerable importance in Madrigal's \textit{quaestio}, 28; cf. 174 below. With Madrigal's elabora-
tion of Lyre on the 'double literal sense' should be compared the similar treatment at the begin-
ing of Richard FitzRalph's "Summa in quaestionibus Armenorum", on which see \textit{A.J. Minnis,
'Authorial Intention' and 'Literal Sense' in the Exegetical Theories of Richard FitzRalph and
John Wyclif}, in: Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 75 section C no.1 (Dublin 1975), espe-
cially 8–10. On the popularity of Lyre in fifteenth-century Castile see \textit{Julian Weiss, The Poet's
Art: Literary Theory in Castile c. 1400-60}, in: Medium Aevum Monographs n.s. xiv (Oxford
1990) 85–86.

\(^{41}\) Cf. Biblia sacra ii 104v: 'Alia autem dicitur in scriptura de Salomone utroque modo, que scili-
cet verificata sunt de ipso [i.e. Solomon], licet minus perfecte, et de Christo perfectius ...'.
ges which the literal sense has over the spiritual senses. For here the sensus litteralis is said to be the only sense of Scripture which is at once immediate and determinate, and capable of verification, fulfilment, and affording proof in argument.

Of particular interest is what Madrigal has to say about the 'determinate' or fixed quality of the literal sense. It is not in our power, he argues, to give the littera whatever sense we want, but rather we must accept that which it produces. The mystical senses, by contrast, can be changed at will: 'Mystici autem possunt circa eandem scripturam variari iuxta voluntatem nostram'. For example, the death of Goliath can be allegorically interpreted as either the destruction of the power of the devil by Christ's passion, or the victory which Christ won over death through His resurrection. The issue of which of these two senses is signified here is not a major one. Similarly, the tropological and anagogical senses can be multiplied and varied. The reason for this is that the literal sense is taken from (elicitus) the littera whereas the mystical sense is attached or added (applicitus) to it, and because such addition is in our power, we are able to vary the mystical senses freely. But the littera is unitary and onefold, and therefore what is elicited from it must needs be a unitary sense. Moreover, this means that the literal sense is the only sense in which Scripture can be said to be fulfilled. For in the case of the mystical sense, fulfilment would involve the completion of all the allegories and all the tropologies which we would wish to apply, and we could not know when this was completed, since it would always be possible to apply yet another mystical sense. Then, it might be said that a passage was completed in one of its mystical senses but not in another (all mystical senses being equal in status).

The same principles underlie Madrigal's amplification of Aquinas's statement that arguments may be drawn only from the literal sense of Scripture (art.10, resp.). Proof always proceeds from what is known. Since mystical senses are uncertain because it is not evident whether this is the mystical sense of a passage rather than that, it follows that they cannot be used in the process of proof. Indeed, a single passage can have disparate and opposing mystical senses, and therefore one and the same passage could be cited in proving contradictory things, which would be quite unfitting.

It would seem that Madrigal is rendering the mystical sense redundant in many ways. Savonarola, I am sure, would not have approved; in his view Madrigal's argument would have come perilously close to the error of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who is attacked by Savonarola for believing that allegories about Christ and the Church were made up after Christianity had established itself. Madrigal could have replied that much significance of this kind is firmly and fully established by those many passages in the New Testament which explain the Christian implications of various events which occurred under the Old Law. His utter respect for those explanations is manifest. Over and over again 'El Tostado' places great emphasis on what the littera determines: here is utter security, a remedy for confusion, a means of attaining certainty about mystical meaning. But, one may wonder, what about those allegories which appear not to be supported by any literal sense of Scripture?

42 Opera ix pt.2 86–87.
43 Opera ix pt.2 87; 'sensus mystici nihil probant ...'.
Madrigal's opinion on that issue may be inferred from remarks made in the course of his exposition of Jerome's letter to Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, which forms part of the Bible commentary's prolegomena\textsuperscript{44}. Jerome had complained about the number of people who, supposing themselves to be experts on the Bible, force passages to suit their own meaning, and misrepresent the author's views. Madrigal fully endorses, and elaborates, these sentiments\textsuperscript{45}. Since the divine truth is invariably the most certain, our judgment must be ruled by it; the divine law should not be bent to our intellect\textsuperscript{46}. Scripture cannot be understood through distortions. Since the wishes of men are many, if everyone wished to twist scripture to his own purpose no certainty could ever be had. Hence the importance of respecting specific authorial intentions in exegesis. This statement is very much in keeping with Madrigal's distinction (in \textit{quaestio} 28) between the 'elicited', safe and single \textit{sensus litteralis}, which is the expression of the author's intention, and the conflicting and various 'applied' mystical senses which may be attached to the text. One may infer that 'El Tostado' believed that at least some of those mystical senses were the result of gratuitous, perhaps even misplaced, human ingenuity. After all, before him Nicholas of Lyre had complained about certain earlier exegetes who had 'so multiplied the number of mystical senses that the literal sense is in some part cut off and suffocated among so many mystical senses'\textsuperscript{47}.

What, then, of Madrigal's views on that matter which so obsessed Savanarola, the crucial difference between Scripture and \textit{ars poetica} in respect of symbolic discourse? Madrigal poses the question thus: should Scripture share the practice of using metaphors with the art of poetry, an art which concerns things which have little dignity unless they are surrounded with decorations – just like a woman whose ugly face is covered with paints\textsuperscript{48}? Holy Scripture, he replies, does not seek dignity through things which are added to her or placed all around her, but rather her dignity comes from her subject, which could not be grasped by us unless there was some means whereby it descended to our infirm earthly situation, and this entails the use of metaphor, thanks to which we learn something of heaven. Both the least of things, poetry, and the greatest of things, theology, use metaphors. Poetry uses them for purposes of ornamentation; Scripture, in order that its doctrine may be understood.

Poetica ergo metaphoris utitur, quia est omnia minima: sacra autem Scriptura utitur illis, quia est omnium maxima. Poetica etiam utitur illis, ut ornetur: sacra autem Scripture, ut intelligatur\textsuperscript{49}.

\textsuperscript{44} Since this letter emphasized the difficulties of theology in order to elevate it above the subordinate arts and sciences it provided commentators with an occasion for the expression of their views on the \textit{ordo scientiarum}; hence Madrigal's position thereon affords an excellent point of comparison with the opinions of Savonarola as outlined in his "Opus perutile". The Spaniard applies his very considerable knowledge of secular literature; of special interest is his extensive quotation of Alan of Lille's "Anticlaudianus".

\textsuperscript{45} Opera i 28.

\textsuperscript{46} "Sacra autem Scriptura veritas divina est, ideo iudicium nostrum debemus regulare per illam applicando ad eam, non autem applicare legem Dei ad intellectum nostrum . . ."

\textsuperscript{47} Postilla litteralis, Prologus secundus, in Biblia sacra i fol. 3v; trans. \textit{Minnis, Scott}, Medieval Literary Theory, 269.

\textsuperscript{48} In Matt. xiii quaest. 29; Opera ix pt.2 88.

\textsuperscript{49} Opera ix pt.2 88–89.
Actually, Madrigal is making an apparently higher claim for poetic language in Scripture than the one which had been advanced by Aquinas in the corresponding passage:

... poetica utitur metaphoris propter repraesentationem, repraesentatio enim naturaliter homini delectabilis est. Sed sacra doctrina utitur metaphoris propter necessitatem et utilitatem ... (Ia 1, 9, ad 1um)\(^{50}\)

For in place of Aquinas’s curtly expressed notion of ‘indispensable usefulness’ Madrigal offers the (Dionysian) idea that without metaphor none of us – not just the rudes – would find Scripture comprehensible. ‘Per istas intelligimus aliquod de excelsis, quæ forte non intelligeremus si sine metaphoris dicerentur’. According to the Spaniard’s account, then, parable and metaphor in Scripture have great efficacy in teaching, particularly for the benefit of those with little learning, but also for mankind in general, because all of us need such means to help us understand a little of what is ultimately incomprehensible by the human intellect.

More generally, Madrigal’s lively version of the Thomistic distinction between scriptural and poetic metaphors should be seen as an utterly conventional statement of priorities, and certainly not as evidence that Madrigal shared Savonarola’s deep-seated distrust of ornamentation in every sense of the term. For the Italian tended to lump together female adornments and the colours of rhetoric within a broad category which also included the eloquence cultivated by didactic poets of his own day – and perhaps even that found in the writings of some of the most unimpeachable of the catholic doctors. One of the most intriguing aspects of the “Opus perutile” is the extent to which it threatens to break with what might be called the Augustinian tradition of accommodating eloquence in theology and in the Bible itself, as expressed in “De Doctrina Christiana” and endorsed by a host of late-medieval schoolmen, including Aquinas. At one point Savonarola does briefly refer to the “De Doctrina” as having proved that the Holy Scriptures were ‘most eloquent, since they were written by God’\(^{51}\). Yet his suspicion of eloquence emerges near the end of the treatise, where we find him arguing that God carefully protected his scriptures from the taint of pagan eloquence, physically punishing those who ‘wished to adorn the Holy Scriptures with oratorical and poetical dye’\(^{52}\). Similarly, when confronted by the fact that the prophets sometimes employed verse, Savonarola avers that ‘they did this to entice the feeble minds

\(^{50}\) Summa theologiae, ed. and trans. Gilby, 34.


\(^{52}\) Opus perutile, Ed. Garfagnini, 269; trans. Binns, 337. Earlier in the treatise, Savonarola had protested that he was not attacking eloquence and high expression as such but rather the most vain pride which poets take in such things, but since his standards are so high it would seem that precious few writers could come anywhere near meeting them. ‘I will not condemn those who are eloquent and wise in the ways of this world, if they imitate in all things, Jerome and Augustine ... Live as they lived, poets and orators and philosophers, and consecrate your wisdom and the splendour of your language to Christ the Lord, and I will place my fingers on my lips’ (trans. Binns 328). One might retort that there are certain passages in the writings of Augustine and Jerome which would hardly meet Savonarola’s stringent criteria. And the fact that, in the final analysis, he has to appeal to the lives which those writers led, may be taken as indicative of this failure to segregate the different kinds of writing at the level of style, mode, discourse. Godly living has become the only yardstick of good writing.
of men, using it as an instrument or handmaiden'. And, although he cannot deny that St Paul occasionally quoted from pagan poets, he attempts to limit the damage, as he would see it, by arguing that the Apostle did this rarely and with the briefest of quotations.

These attitudes are very far away from Madrigal's. Our view of the Spaniard's position on classical literature is confirmed by the sheer amount of time and energy which he spent in expounding the fables of the poets, an excellent example being the elaborate treatments of the Labours of Hercules which are included in both versions (Latin and Spanish) of his exposition of the "Chronici canones". This is heavily indebted to a work with which Savonarola was utterly out of sympathy, Boccaccio's "Genealogia deorum gentilium". Here Madrigal 'applies' a quite extraordinary number of 'additional meanings' (to employ the idiom of the Matthew commentary) to the text of Eusebius. But even here the principle of authorial intention surfaces, as when (in the Castilian version) Madrigal follows a citation of Fulgentius' moralization of Antaeus with the remark, 'this is the moral sense, with which we are not concerned, because we know that the creators of this fable had no such intention in their fiction; we shall follow the literal sense, as intended by them'. Typically, Madrigal's main interest is in establishing which Hercules is being described here, and the date of his encounter with Antaeus. Indeed, the investigation of authorial intention may be described as one of the dominant characteristics of Madrigal's scholarship, an analytical technique which he applied to interpretative cruxes wherever they appeared, whether in sacred or secular literature.

Of course, we have seen Savonarola appealing to the same principle of auctoris intentio in his account of the literal sense of Scripture. But he did not extend it in a positive way to the ars poetica, and was extraordinarily reluctant to concede that there was any substantial ground common to the two kinds of writing. The area of stylistic overlap which he does allow is minute, and policed by a host of caveats. When Savonarola applies the principle of authorial intention in denying that pagan histories have a true allegorical sense he is seeking to expose pagan ignorance and the inferiority of pagan literature. In sharp contrast, when 'El Tostado' argues (in his exposition of Jerome's Letter to Paulinus) that Virgil did not prophesy concerning Christ, this is done with scholarly respect for what the poet actually had intended by his words, that meaning being allowed its own validity. The fourth Eclogue is read as offering consolation to

55 Cf. the similar comment in the Latin version: 'sed cum constet de litterali sensui, non est nobis moralis necessarius volentibus rerum veritatem inquirere, cum non sit ille quem intendit fabule fector'. Cited by Keightley, Hercules in Alfonso de Madrigal's "In Eusebium", 138. I am grateful to Professor Keightley for providing me with the Castilian parallel.
56 Opera i 29–30. Madrigal also discusses the Aeneid i.664 ('Hail, only Son, my might and majesty'), and ii.650 ('Such words he spake and there transfixed remained'), which had been cited by Jerome within the argument that Virgil cannot be called a Christian on the strength of such statements. Those who read the poet, 'El Tostado' declares, know full well that he did not seek to confirm our faith, because Virgil's intentio does not square with that proposition. The specific intentions of Biblical authors should similarly be respected; here is a means of testing interpreta-
the Consul Pollio, whose son had just been born, by suggesting that this offspring's lifetime would be an age of justice and peace. The virgin Astrea (i.e. Justice), who had fled the earth on account of many evils, would return, thus ushering in a new golden age and marking the reinstatement of Saturn's benign rule. Classical literature, then, does not need allegorical exposition to valorise it. But as our remarks on Madrigal's account of the Labours of Hercules indicate, in such a context the Spaniard was certainly not averse to practising that kind of hermeneutics. Savanarola's "Opus perutile" would, of course, deny all this as being vain or dangerously misleading.

Despite the Thomistic inheritance which they share, therefore, our two schoolmen maintain exegetical theories and practices which are fundamentally irreconcilable.

III.

Among the *retractationes* included in the preface to the third edition of Beryl Smalley's "Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages" is an expression of regret for her preference for the literal sense of Scripture over the mystical senses, to some extent a result of her concentration, in respect of the late-medieval period, on the exegesis of certain secular scholars and scholastics rather than that produced by the monastic communities. And she certainly had a blind-spot concerning Joachim of Fiore. This redressing of the balance is of course right and proper, but it seems to me that, in the history of ideas which cluster around the notion of the *sensus litteralis*, her controversial heading 'The Spiritual Exposition in Decline' still has life in it. If, to quote Smalley's last word on Aquinas's exegetical stance, the saint was a 'conservative' (albeit an 'enlightened' one) rather than a 'radical' on the matter of the four senses, it may be said that many schoolmen, among whom the unfortunately neglected Alfonso de Madrigal should occupy a prominent position, produced more radical versions of that literalism. On the other hand, ultra-conservative versions of the same basic Thomistic ideas could also be produced, as I trust has been amply demonstrated by our consideration of Girolamo Savonarola's "Opus perutile", a work which is concerned to emphasise the special status which the Bible enjoys over and above all other books, the results of merely human authorship, and hence identifies allegorical sense as one of the qualities which make sacred Scripture unique.

In considering such evidence, however, it should always be remembered that exegetes like Lyre and Madrigal, who did so much for the cause of literalistic exegesis and offered such substantial critiques of the multiplication of mystical senses, were eminently capable of producing allegorical interpretations themselves, depending on their
intentions in writing, the perceived needs of a particular audience, considerations of genre and *modus scribendi*, and the like. As a supplement to his monumental “Postilla litteralis” Lyre wrote a much shorter (but for our purposes highly significant) “Postilla moralis”. Madrigal had planned to compose a moral exposition of the Bible. And the fact that he could firmly pursue a literalising inquiry into authorial intention on one occasion certainly did not preclude his practice of allegorical interpretation on another, whether the text before him was secular or scriptural.

All this should warn us of the vanity of broad generalisations about the late-medieval history of the four senses. Clearly we need many more substantial studies of individual Bible commentators, of the type which Beryl Smalley wrote so well; too many substantial tomes of exegesis remain little known and less studied. In the fifteenth century in particular, an intimidating amount of work remains to be done. It may be hoped that the reception-history of at least the Thomist tradition of hermeneutics may be followed in the future. For the moment, we may wonder at the fact that the wings of ‘the angelic doctor’ were able to stretch so far, to loom over thinkers so markedly different as Girolamo Savonarola and Alfonso de Madrigal.

**APPENDIX**

I wish to offer a minor but significant emendation to the text of Aquinas’s “Summa theologiae”, 1a, 1, art.9 as edited by Thomas Gilby in the Blackfriars edition.

It would seem that in this passage Gilby has mispunctuated and mistranslated the Latin:

*Si igitur aliquae ex creaturis transumerentur a Deum tunc oportet talem transumptionem maxime fiere ex sublimioribus creaturis et non ex infimis; quod tamen in Scripturis frequenter invenitur*.

If then the properties of creatures are to be read into God, then at least they should be chiefly of the more excellent not the baser sort; and this is the way frequently taken by the Scriptures.

As here edited, the text apparently says that metaphors drawn from the more excellent sort of creature are often found in the Bible. But this hardly works as a contrary statement which challenges the initial proposition, ‘should holy teaching employ metaphorical or symbolical language?’ It would be more appropriate as an argument *in favour of* rather than against the use of metaphors in Scripture. Surely Aquinas’s point is rather that Scripture often employs metaphors derived from the lowest creatures, a practice which could well be criticised. Certainly that is how Alfonso de Madrigal read this passage, and I am in agreement with him. Therefore I would substitute a full stop for the semi-colon in the edition of the Latin, and have ‘Quod tamen in Scripturis frequenter invenitur’ printed as a separate sentence. This would produce the following translation:

So, if any of these creatures were metaphorically to be applied to God, then such a metaphorical
application should be drawn from the superior rather than the lowest sort of creatures. But such
examples [i.e. from the lowest sort of creatures] are often found in the Scriptures. [And therefore
sacred writing should not use metaphors\textsuperscript{60}.]

\textsuperscript{60} Cf. the translation in Minnis, Scott, Medieval Literary Theory, 239.