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ENTER INVISIBLE: ATAVISTIC DUALISM IN SHAKESPEARE, DONNE, AND MILTON

by

Andrew Scott

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Bucknell University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature

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Approved by:

Fr. Paul Siewers, Advisor

Anthony Stewart, Department Chair

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Date (Month and Year)

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> A strange notion, this, that divine immanency, instead of doing men good, enfeebles or disorders their senses.
>
> – Apuleius

> Christian annihilation, extasis, exolution, liquefaction, transformation, the kisse of the spouse, gustation of God, and ingression into the divine shadow, they have already had an handsome anticipation of Heaven; the glory of the world is surely over, and the earth in ashes unto them.
>
> – Thomas Browne

> We are living in a material world…
>
> – Madonna

My grandfather used to tell this story about basic training. On the grenade range you were taught to count to three then throw the thing. Somewhere along the line, someone smart noticed that some grenades were going off on the count of two. Word got around. When it was my grandfather's turn on the range he turned to his drill instructor and, flouting the chain of command almost suicidally, said, "Now listen, I'm throwing this on *one*."

For my own good I'm letting this paper go on *one*, perhaps too early but at least safely—at least not too late. There are many people to thank for what is good in it, and none to blame for what isn't: my committee, Fr. Paul Siewers, Jean Peterson, and. Peter Groff; Kat Lecky and Michael Drexler, who offered early advice when it was needed; Ghislaine McDayter for correcting some bad habits; Elena Machado for early captainship; Virginia Zimmerman for taking over. And to my cohort: Olivia Maikisch, Anthony Mitchell, Grace Monroe, and Madison Weaver—class of the covid year—to whom this thesis is dedicated.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the different ways in which either dualistic or monistic points of view are represented in select works of William Shakespeare, John Donne, and John Milton. I am relying principally on the broad definition of dualism Ioan Couliano utilizes in his book *The Tree of Gnosis*. Per Couliano, dualism is not necessarily a discrete tenet of a systematized belief; rather, he means by the word to indicate an intellectual tendency toward splitting certain complex ideas—body and soul, God and man, evil and its opposite, etc.—into separate, sometimes opposing parts. This in contrast to monism, which brings into philosophical symbiosis the constituent parts that the dualist would subdivide. My cumulative argument is that an ages-old all-abiding religious monism became, in the early modern era, a scientism that would eventually equal in power and influence the church at its widest-spread and most energetic; scientistic monism, absent the mitigative presence of a considered dualism, has repeatedly led the world into catastrophe. I have chosen Shakespeawre, Donne and Milton as case studies because they are the most broadly recognizable and frequently read English language poets about whom one can meaningfully say one thing or another regarding the monism-dualism debate.

Shakespeare uses magic as a stand-in for dualism in *The Tempest,* at the end of which the character abjures dualistic thought in favor of a monism that will allow him to return to society. *King Lear,* on the other hand, is a play so riddled with misfortune that one may conclude that the material world itself is inherently evil; Shakespeare explores this idea to its ultimate conclusion, which is a sort of general nihility.

John Donne, on the other hand, was solidly a dualist. This position is clearest in his poems and longer prose pieces, and more complicated in his sermons.

Throughout *Paradise Lost* John Milton rehearses a revolutionary monism that encompasses a satire of dualistic themes. Milton's revolutionism, expressed during an era of political calamity and waning church influence, was at that point the clearest-yet sign of an emerging monomyth—a monism—as all-encompassing as Western Christianity, but of a distinctly non-religious character.

We see, then, in moving from the exploratory Shakespeare through the conflicted Donne and into the confidently immanentist Milton, the shift from one kind of monism—that based on the hegemonic power of the Christian church—into another based on scientific induction, which essentially pastes over religious dogma with a faith-based scientism.

Preface

Hannah Arendt argued, and I think she's right, that "It is in the very nature of things human that every act that has once made its appearance and has been recorded in the history of mankind stays with mankind as a potentiality long after its actuality has become a thing of the past" (273). She had the Shoah in mind—the quote is from her book on Eichmann—and while it is dangerous to metaphorize that particular catastrophe we can follow Arendt's line of thought more or less in her spirit and arrive at her conclusion without controversy—or much of it, anyway. Probably, few serious people disagree with what she says here, and to everyone else her observation is self-evidently correct—*banal*, even. And self-contradictory, too: an atavistic "act" is never just "a thing of the past"; it's a thing, too, of the future, and it's here with us today.

To what do we attribute the most terrible acts? *Evil* is a common answer; it may even be correct. I have always found Arendt's definition of evil unsatisfying, and not pragmatically helpful if that means anything. I suppose it could mean a great deal: the construct of pragmatism as vanquisher of evil is at the foundation of mass-scale atrocity. This is intuitive but should be explicated. If one argues that mass-murder degrades its target—places a race into a lower position in a cogent hierarchy, transmogrifies a people into vermin, interprets a religion as an opposing ideology, and an opposing ideology as a religion—then "evil," to the mind of the perpetrator of atrocity, is something like an inconvenience, ethically sanctioned to meet with asymmetric force but fixable through intelligent collective effort. This does not describe the Shoah. Its victims were endowed by their tormenters with totemic power—over money, media, whatever—and as such became to them something greater than common man, mind-bendingly huge, evil at a

level beyond complete apprehension. It requires a united moral effort to expel evil, whereas government factotums can take care of a bothersome infestation without troubling civilians too much.

At the foundation of that mindset is not a misattribution of evil, although downstream there is that, nor an inapt definition of evil, although there is almost always that. The mass-destructive projects of the 20th century were initiated and boosted by revolutionaries, individuals who in a group believe they know the perfect circumstances under which life ought to be conducted and think they have figured out how to arrange it that way. The revolutionary is blinkered, so he trots faithfully down the only road he knows, which he thinks is the only road there is. Sometimes this road is said to lead to justice for the poor or the oppressed, and the way there is—and this is generally euphemized heavily—by means of the oppression of other groups, which when done to them by these others is called justice, by the others.

Revolution begins in the mind when a thinker thinks he can fix his society's problems with a grand scheme better than the one he lives under. Sometimes he is right, and sometimes he is even the right man. Much more commonly, however, this monomania—which in its final, practical dimension results in the casting of some people, by type, into categories of either the degraded or the totemic, either or both to be extinguished from the earth—leads to travesty; examples are legion. It is my contention that revolutions don't merely sometimes lead to atrocity. Revolution in its very conception conventionalizes opposition; to affect any change force must meet force here on earth; revolutions and hegemonies are different by degree, not in type; one must be triumphant; ultimately only one can exist but the existence of opposition is material and

beatable, not transcendent or theoretical. Materialist revolutionism is, fundamentally, monistic.

Monism is an implicitly *immanentist*[1] sensibility associated with religious fundamentalism, and which in secular form characterizes the materialism of our own time. Clearly, monism has a powerful appeal; it fosters unity and certainty, dissolves doubt, punishes criticism and eccentricity, and makes complicated things easy to explain. Traditionally, when one monism's project threatens to grow too large another's is mounted against it. This is sometimes necessary, and sometimes it even works—the international effort against Nazism being an obvious example. But one must take note of the Soviet control that spread through formerly Nazified Europe: one monism swallows up another, a hungry ghost, unsatisfiable; little revolutionaries are routed out and chewed up. It is a never-ending thing, possibly.

There is another philosophical foundation one can accept. Seeing separation where the monist sees unity, advocating for transcendental experience over materialist immanence, dualism is appealing to some, albeit never to most. The word dualism was minted in 1700, by philologist Thomas Hyde. It originally "describe[d] the Zoroastrian doctrine of the two opposite Spirits, the Beneficent and the Maleficent" (Couliano, *Gnosis* 23), according to gnosticist Ioan Couliano. The word has since broken loose of its captivity in divinity schools and it can now refer to an intellectual tendency toward splitting a thing or an idea into two discrete, often opposing, parts. This stance is central not only to Zoroastrianism and many other religions depending on who and when one

[1] That is, seeking to bring about radical social and political change based on a quasi-Utopian philosophy.

asks; it is also a keystone of Platonism, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and the synthesis of the three known as Hermeticism. General Hermeticism argues for a dualistic view of the material world; this allows it to be both transcendentalist and magical: if the material is an illusion to be enlightened beyond, then perhaps it can also be manipulated by an initiate.

An examination of early modern English poets offers an interesting take on the monism-dualism debate. The three greatest of these poets, William Shakespeare, John Donne, and John Milton, seem to respond, in some of their respective major works, not just to then-current Renaissance Neoplatonism generally, but directly to dualism as a first principle. Shakespeare's late tragedies, especially *King Lear*, exhibit fluency with this idea. *The Tempest*—not, of course, a tragedy, but written at the end of his great tragic period-- rejects dualism for an immanentist monism. Donne, in his poetry, prose, and even his sermons, seems to have been a reluctant dualist, in the final analysis abjuring belief in the union of the body and the soul. Milton countenances dualist literature[2] only to parody it not unseriously before discarding it in favor of a monistic, immanentizing impulse, which characterized his politics as well as his theology. In other words, *Paradise Lost* does in epic form essentially what *The Tempest* does in the tragicomic dramatic format. Directly or by implication, the works of these three authors dilate upon dualism as a perennial yet transmutative project, against which an imminantist-religious monism posits itself as the true way, demanding order and conformity but promising days of ease and plenty.

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[2] Milton, in fact, specifically references the *Hermetica* three times in his work. See Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), p. 245.

If one makes the effort to delineate monism from dualism a root, rather than a branch, of human folly is revealed: religion, totalizing politics, greed and jealousy and lust and pride, are defined and valued depending on whether one takes the monist or the dualist stance. The consequences of an extreme version of the former have been mentioned. Is there a fundamentalist dualism dangerous to human life and liberty? Is there a downside to dualism? Theologian John W. Cooper suggests that dualism "has been associated with the resistance of some physicians and psychologists to consider psychosomatic actors in the treatment of their patients" (31). "Dividing humans into body and soul," Cooper continues, "has promoted all manner of other false dualisms and dichotomies in human life," such as those separating master and slave, man and woman, this nation from that one, et al. As with anything, a philosophy taken to an extreme becomes a vice. The dualist's vice, then, is an irresponsible, unreflective hedonism, an uncaring this-worldly life worth nothing in light of what's next, thus making allowances for cruelty and injustice. The monist's vice is the opposite situation, an unquestioned control that commands the work, lives, at its furthest the very thoughts, of subordinates. And if monism can also command the truth of the natural world—which scientism, the monistic project of modernity, claims to do—it will have found a way to control every aspect of material life, and in order to control inner life will present the transcendental as a children's tale, or a linguistic construct misunderstood by silly people which impedes a project of social betterment.

Today's great challenge would seem to come from a monistic scientism that is influential worldwide. The consequences of the scientistic worldview –which was born in the 17th century, grew strong in the 18th and 19th, and attained a terrible strength in the

20th that the 21st shows no signs so far of being able to combat—are barely hidden but hard for most to see. Scientism is sold as the practical dimension of the inductive scientific technique which, being based on observable data, is supposedly objective and universal. A simple version of it can be understood by all thinking people in all languages. In the absence of a challenger of equal prestige, earlier scientific efforts at reducing suffering and increasing wealth and lifespans can be elided uncritically with any claim or argument a devotee makes. Whether one understands it or not, making any argument into a scientistic one is the only broadly acceptable method of debate among sophisticated people, who make decisions—based on the science!—for everyone else.

Like a religion, scientism has its iconoclasts, whose target is frequently religion, and in religion's place they pronounce on what is best for the soul, even as they deny the soul's existence. This is a sort of spiritual-material Esperanto that spells success and happiness for all. Throughout much of the technological world—which is the larger world containing within it the industrial world—scientism has become to a great many people what religious monoculturalism was, *mutatis mutandis*, in centuries past, for all people. The Old Monism has become something New, has gained strength as it increased its reach. Monism generally is tenacious, probably the resting rhetorical and neurological stance across cultures: wherever the theological fundamentalist hasn't been replaced by the scientistic acolyte he yet exists as a theological fundamentalist of the older style. Monism is natural, tenacious, transcultural, dangerous when certain people get together in its spirit, more so when they recruit enough other people to define their majority group against all other minorities. I prefer looking at the monist-dualist debate through the lens of English Renaissance poetry, but others are useful. Of course in the middle of any such

lens is a mirror, and one sees oneself in what someone else has written. What we must discover is what’s behind the mirror, that part of history we can’t see for our own reflection. And behind *that* is an inclination toward either monism or dualism.

Chapter One--Shakespeare: The Fork in the Mind

Literary critic Robert Speaight identifies in Shakespeare's last plays a "nostalgia for an earthly paradise, [an] obsessive sense of something lost which must be recovered" (Speaight 171). Frances Yates has it that that paradise was the England of Elizabeth[3]—which "paradise" yet sired the tragedies.

The reason for Shakespeare's turning away from English histories and lighter comedy to a profounder drama of the interior remains a point of speculation. It is plain that *something* changes his cast of mind around 1600, between the composition of *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*, but what that is it is difficult to say. Could it have been sheer grief? His son dies in 1596, his father in 1601, Queen Elizabeth in 1603; none lines up precisely with the beginning of the tragic period. Perhaps the spiritual maturation and terror of death that come to some with age descended upon him: he was 35 at the turn of the seventeenth century, an era in which the average person lived to be just over 40[4]. Whatever its origin, this new darkness once inaugurated never again leaves the plays, although Shakespeare attempts to criticize and mitigate it in *The Tempest*. That play is colored by Hermeticism, as well as some common contemporary misunderstandings of it. Magic in *The Tempest* is ultimately rejected as incompatible with human society, while dualism in general is also abandoned in favor of a monism that takes the shape of an oddly bitter nostalgia. Shakespeare's agon over the monist-dualist position is born out in

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[3] See Frances Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays*: *A New Approach* (London: Routledge Press, 1975).
[4]Ben-Amos, Illana Krausman, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 4. Contrarily, Keith Thomas, probably taking into account peasant life expectancy and perhaps result-queering plague deaths, has it that "the life expectancy at birth of boys born in the third quarter of the seventeenth century was 29.6 years" (p. 6)—this datum several generations downstream of Shakespeare's time, but material life was little different one era to the next. In any case, Shakespeare ended up living long past what he could have expected, although he never reached his Biblically-allotted three-score and ten.

his final romances, wherein the spiritual struggle behind the tragedies is leavened by a return to the monistic view.

i. Magic and Monism: *The Tempest*

If the character of Prospero was indeed based, as some argue[5], on Queen Elizabeth's disgraced court magician John Dee—who was directly familiar with the *Hermetica*[6]—it could be said that, at least glancingly, *The Tempest* displays Hermetic tendencies, or, more directly, that it is a foundationally Hermetic play. Hermeticism is a boldly speculative philosophical-cosmological position that generally accepts as a first principle that matter is evil, or at least undesirable; this opens the door to transcendental, mystic, negative, and apophatic analyses of God, thereby positing a material-spiritual dualism that permitted the believer all manner of license to trammel Christian orthodoxy by bringing in the merely material practice of magic. Hermeticism is most commonly, but not always necessarily, dualistic, and one of the values of a Hermeticism-literate examination of *The Tempest* is that it provides a seemingly oxymoronic view of a monistic Hermeticism not found to such a degree outside Shakespeare's romances or certain of Marsilio Ficino's treatises.

This latest of the late romances[7], which is enchanting more because of than despite its curious melancholy, is in fact a bitterly ironic revenge play-*cum*-Robinsonade

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[5] See Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach*.
[6] See Peter J. Forshaw (2017). "The Hermetic Frontispiece: Contextualising John Dee's Hieroglyphic Monad," Ambix, 64:2, 115-139, DOI: 10.1080/00026980.2017.1353247. Link: https://doi.org/10.1080/00026980.2017.1353247.
[7] In his *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 153, Northrop Frye limns the difference between stage comedy and romance thus: "The organizing ideas of romance are chastity and magic." And while these are indeed the organizing elements, the inner content of the play can be non-heroic, perverse—as I argue is the case in *The Tempest*.

avant la lettre[8] in which a cruel magus browbeats his island-bound subjects with an autocratically paternal, ultimately unfulfilling, and almost wholly isolating "white" magic. In his ravening desire for power Prospero is a monist whose obsession with his erstwhile dukedom justifies, in his eyes, the manipulation of everyone and everything in reach. This bitter magician-satrap, occult autodidact, secretive tutor, turns the credulity of his daughter, the ingratitude of his slaves, and the very steadfastness of nature against themselves. But the play, which depicts Prospero's success without outright complaint, is ultimately ambivalent toward a magic which is anything but innocent. The mage "drown[s] [his] book" (V.i.57) as he must to return to his old longed-for life: magic is incommensurate with human society; it is an overmastering of the all-too-human that robs the monarch of his power, the state of its influence, and its fearful subjects of the chance to feel patriotic loyalty.

While the adept's understanding of magic is based on psychological insight and manipulation, there is a neurobiological element at work beneath the magus' conscious efforts. The eye sees unities where they are not necessarily evident organically[9]. This is why show magic works. It is also why people can be manipulated and lied to: the mind, at least as far as the brain goes, is naively credulous by nature. Monism, as mentioned previously, is characterized by an impulse toward unifying

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[8] Frances Yates argues that the "energetic line of thought and leadership being displayed by the young Prince Henry" [*The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge Press), pp. 186-7] and his bride, the happily-monikered Elisabeth, was responsible for the "happier atmosphere" of *The Tempest*, which was written to celebrate the wedding of the pair. Yet the play seems, to me, like a desperate grasping after the halcyon days of Elizabeth I, who was more pacific regarding occult and magical elements than was her successor, James I (James VI of Scotland), who wrote the scholarly, ambivalent *Daemonologie*, which Shakespeare rather daringly—suicidally?—raided for the parts he'd use to construct *Macbeth*. See also Frances Yates' *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach*, p. 19.

[9] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

disparate material and metaphysical elements into a single thing in the mind. Purely physiologically, then, it would seem people are natural monists unless they develop some other tendency. The average audience is the natural prey of the magic-adept. Neuroscientist and philosopher Iain McGilchrist argues that magic is nothing less than "the way that the left hemisphere [of the brain] sees powers over which it has no control" (311)—that is, the audience processes magic happenings beyond their control as literal, the left hemisphere of the brain being the part of that wet woven mass responsible, essentially, for processing order and brute categorization. Again, we see how biology has set us up for credulity. Next we ought to examine how philosophy, which appeals to the creative, syncretistic hemisphere, influences magical practices.

Hermeticism has a behind-the-scenes role to play here. Hermes[10] writes, "[God] is unmanifest, yet He is most manifest; He can be perceived by Nous; He can be seen by the eyes. He is bodiless, yet He has many bodies, or rather every body" (6.10). Or, In Couliano's words, "the problem [of understanding God] from its outset is perfectly insoluble unless a certain type of definition of God is used, called apophatic…or negative, in which God appears as unfathomable and beyond any positive predicate such as 'good' or 'providential'" (23).

This would seem to be a providential formula for a charlatan mystic, whether her philosophy is dualistic or monistic: to claim that God cannot be explicated intelligibly

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[10] The *Hermetica* were composed by different people over the course of several centuries. Hermetic literature included detailed guides on astrology, astronomy, alchemy, et al., all of which were variously influential in Renaissance Europe. Today, the tracts known as *The Pimander*—a creation story—and *The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*—a book of spells—are generally published together and titled *The Hermetica*, the *Hermetic Corpus, the Way of Hermes*, etc. These are the earliest known Hermetic doctrines; they are stylistically similar and unlike any other Hermetic works, and are therefore attributed either to a single individual called "Hermes" or to him and a contemporary of his, probably an initiate.

is to insist that blind faith in the adept is the sole path to understanding. The religious huckster does not have to believe what he claims to, and none could prove or disprove his hidden personal creed anyway. An extraordinary trust is placed in the magician—and in the physician of our day—that he will conduct himself in good faith and act authentically according to what benefits his charges and conforms with his religious and philosophical tenets.

Shakespeare does not seem to be parodying negative theology, nor is he explicitly warning against frauds. His magician Prospero, rather, is a singular case study, perhaps a sympathetic, or on the other hand a cruel, representation of Dee. At issue here is the fact that one cannot know another's true mind; the engine of his magic, therefore, may be evil despite its outward beneficence (or the other way around). Magic is effective only to the extent that faith is placed in it, unless of course one believes that it really and truly works materially—which an individual in Shakespeare's time, and any prior time in human history. That is why magic so easily gained credibility: the early modern audience is, by the lights of contemporary natural theology, materially primed for manipulation as well as culturally prodded to believe in magic's efficacy. Per Couliano, "For a subject to take part in magic practices it is not necessary that the idea of magic itself cross the threshold of his consciousness," because "there is no act which does not involve the pneuma[11] in one way or another…[therefore] the whole existence of an individual lies in the sphere of natural magic" (103). Even the pious, authentically Godly magician engaged in both sensory and intellectual manipulation, sometimes wholesomely—by way of what we now call the placebo effect—and other times malevolently, aided by familiar

[11] The Greek name—*spiritus* in Latin—for the spirit-stuff that unites man materially with nature.

demons and a ravening rage for total control. Prospero seems the former, yet every action he takes within the play's purview nominates him the latter.

In *The Tempest*, magic is indeed used to manipulate and to amaze—it is meant to be witnessed, and it is effective to the extent that it intimidates its audience. Manifest magic designates a work monistic, whether it is evident to the personae or not: consider by contrast *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which the fairies perform their magic covertly within the structure of their own game. By the time it had been written[12] a number of scientific milestones had been reached which challenged the veracity of the magical explanation of material phenomena: in 1609, Kepler described planetary motion as elliptical; a year later Galileo made his own epochal sidereal observations. With the dissemination of their work among the learned and influential the ages-old model that situated astrology at the core of science and medicine began to crumble. Yet Prospero, the true believer, clings to his grimoire out of something like a religious conviction. Keith Thomas has it that "the practice of magic became a holy quest; the search for knowledge, not by study and research, but by revelation" (320-1), and Prospero is indeed a devout, albeit in a boilerplate way. His piety seems to be the residue of a typical Renaissance upbringing rather than an authentic thing: he tells his daughter Miranda that they survived their pelagic exile "By providence divine" (I.ii.159), and his forsaking of "worldly ends" has at least the superficial ring of orthodox Christian asceticism. But there is no great evidence of divinity in him. Prospero does not fear Hell or take comfort in the Christian mysteries, and not until the final scene, after his desire to be restored to his Dukedom is granted, does he repent his cruelty. He is, in fact, dangerously heretical: Stephen

[12] In 1611, to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine.

McKnight has it that "this newly acquired knowledge [of early modern proto-scientific magical practices] transforms man into a terrestrial god capable of dominating nature and creating a utopian existence" (3-4).

The concept of an endogenous theurgy is explicated in the *Hermetica*: the Supreme Good is, "for those who have had the higher knowledge," to "become God" (1.26). (This is expressed differently in the ascetic Christian sense of *theosis*, which also was known from exploration of Greek patristic sources by Protestant Elizabethan scholars.) Hermes claims of the majority who fail to ascend this intellectual peak that "The perceptions of these people [i.e. those without *Nous*] are like those of dumb animals, having a mixture of rage and lust, they do not value things worthy of their attention, but turn to the pleasures and appetites of the body, believing that man was born for that reason" (4.5 p. 32). The good Renaissance magician overcame these temptations yet was not necessarily unwilling to indulge them in others and call it the restoration of health and banishment of melancholy. The bad or incompetent magician might in contrast fulfill grosser desires, debasing and perhaps damning both himself and his patients: he is a heretic, playing a dangerous game of soul roulette. The risk the monist runs is that all that unity can fall apart anywhere along the chain; it is an epistemological balancing act.

A monistic-minded early modern magician could have interpreted this sort of Hermetic passage—as Prospero seems to—as a sanction to break the first three injunctions of the Decalogue: to discover a god in the form of oneself and worship him above God Himself; the self-made god is an idol, and the magician relies on just such an exalted social position to convince his followers; calling oneself "god" is taking the name of God in vain. Psychoanalytic theorist Julia Kristeva discusses in *Black Sun* a type she

calls "atheistic": "those in despair are mystics—adhering to the preobject, not believing in Thou, but mute, and steadfast devotees of their own inexpressible container" (14). In this interpretation[13] the despairing magus will cling yet to the all-meaningful Mother; he remains in a state that precedes the Law--that phase of socialization, self-acknowledgement, and psychic restraint associated, ironically for the hyper-paternalistic sorcerer, with the Father. Prospero, like any magician good or bad, qualifies God by becoming a god himself. He does not believe in "Thou" in both the sense of the Other with her own theory of mind, and as in God *qua* God, who is addressed in romance languages with the familiar (and, depending on the language, capitalized) *tu* address, the English equivalent of which is the underutilized *thou*. This is a sort of disappearing act with the scriptural God as the unwilling volunteer, a practice that externalizes and transfers to others the magician's atheism. And this would, in fact, represent the prescribed religious mode of the magician, whether or not he was familiar with the *Hermetica*: no less an authority than Marsilio Ficino himself writes in his *Disputation against the judgement of the astrologers* that "that [magic] which occurs through divine action includes divining through magical cult and the knowledge of daemons and the spheres" (Ficino 79). And if Ficino was skeptical of *de rigueur* medical-astrological practice—which was nothing less than the study of coincidences—his very *telos* was the discovery of a divinely-sanctioned physical magic that, from within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy, the adept could wield to enact what he knew to be best for his fellow man. Ficinian magic was always boldly immanentist, which is to say that his reaction to the *Hermetica* predicts Shakespeare's in *The Tempest,* although in the great

[13] At least in my interpretation of it.

tragedies the playwright had taken a different rhetorical path. The relation between magic, religion, and immanentism in early modern poetry and drama is complex. But modernity has simplified and degraded that relationship by replacing magic with science, cutting out religion altogether, and ignoring the large-scale immanentist projects that have caused nothing but human misery: the all-encompassing simplicity of scientism is inadequate for discovering the mysteries of human motivation and then acting on them to a people's better interest.

The magician does not seek to make the world itself disappear—indeed for the monist the world is all there is—but he is after what amounts to the same thing: a flattening of differentiation, a unification suggested by superficial similarities. Prospero-the-Father, as mentioned, displays extreme monist-immanentist tendencies. He tells Miranda at some length how, following their betrayal by his brother Antonio, he began a program of "neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated/ To closeness and the bettering of [his] mind" (1.2.89-90). And of hers: he has "done nothing but in care of thee, / Of thee my dear one" (I.ii.16-17), and she for her part claims never to have questioned his tutelage: "More to know/ Did never meddle with my thoughts" (I.ii.21-2). The daughter under her father's aegis is congenitally a monist. But his magic suddenly becomes a horror to her, as she witnesses the tempest-tossed seafarers scattered in confederacies across the island: "I have suffered/ With those that I saw suffer!" (I.ii.5-6) she exclaims fruitlessly, and with Christ-like sympathy for the afflicted, before the hard-hearted Machiavel. Although unmoved, Prospero reacts without viciousness; he cannot afford to alienate his charge, who is central to his revanchist purpose; she is his cover, his soul's alibi, as perhaps James I's children, Henry and Elizabeth, were for Shakespeare's. In the

absence of the figurehead of the Elizabethan virginity cult, the prince and princess became her surrogates—albeit poor ones, as marriage naturally leads to childbirth, the product, of course, of the severing of the virginity knot. Henry's death at 18 in 1612—the period inaugurating Shakespeare's final collaborative plays, and a year after *The Tempest* is first performed—robbed Elizabethan nostalgists of a great hope: Henry was beloved where James was feared, and although his sister Elizabeth's marriage to the "Winter King" Frederick V of Bohemia the same year offered consolation, his ignominious reign shattered all promise of Stuart rule as a Tudor redux. It is little wonder, then, that Shakespeare's Prospero drowns hope in bitterness, or crushes it beneath the weight of his book. Monism shunts a practitioner into an all-or-nothing bargain with the world.

A magician's piety—his purity of heart and nobility of deed—determines whether his magic is white or black. Thomas writes, "The notion that purity of life was an essential preliminary to scientific discovery [which includes magic practices] ran through the long history of alchemy and shaped the Rosicrucianism of the seventeenth century" (*ibid.*)[14]. Indeed, the jealous avenging angel Prospero is the blackest of white magicians. His pseudo-asceticism[15] is at best a parody of purity, but he is able to use his daughter as a spiritual surrogate. He knows he must stop Miranda and Ferdinand from consummating their passion, "lest too light winning / Make the prize light" (I.ii.452-3).

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[14] We look again to Thomas to square the *petit dieu* with the religious orthodoxy of a pious age: "religion and magic were not rivals, but travelling companions along the path to one identical and comprehensive truth," Thomas pp. 320-1.

[15] According to Ioan Couliano, the escape of both sperm and the voice from the body—which "represent the only two modalities through which the spirit leaves the body in an observable way" [Ioan Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), p. 101]—were in Renaissance medicine incontinences which lead to spiritual and physical vitiation. Prospero vents his voice—he speaks the most lines in the play—and at least once consciously secreted sperm, Miranda being the proof. Thus he is doubly impure, and as an impure magician his magic cannot be purely beneficent, purely "white"—and, indeed, it is not.

But he is concerned with more than just the preconditions of the successful magician, and Miranda is as much pawn as talisman of virtue. In her essay "The Miranda Trap," Lorie Jerrell Leininger writes that "Prospero needs Miranda as sexual bait" (151). This sounds right. Prospero has long been looking to reassert himself as rightful Duke of Milan; this seems to be why he does not kill Alonso but instead devises an anfractuous plan to impress him into demotion, a plot with a sexual snare at its center. The revenging magician is so thoroughly obsessed by his plan—here the monist-immanentist justifies his means by their end—that he can see only a blueprint where once there was a daughter: "What, I say, / My foot my tutor?" (I.ii.468-9). The metaphoric language implied here is almost too obvious to elucidate: one *walks on*—dominates by fiat--a foot, controls something (in this case Ferdinand) by *keeping it under* one. It was debated throughout the medieval and early modern periods how meekly Christ-like a properly white magician ought to be. Part of the attraction of magic is the antichristian power it brings; those hoping to accept and benefit from magic must to some extent exonerate its practitioner from charges of pride, while ignoring the envy of God, lust for control, and greedy pursuit of money and position exhibited by less conscientious practitioners. Leininger asks us to perform a thought experiment: what if Prospero had had a son instead of a daughter? A son can say no to his father, which a daughter in a traditionally patriarchal society would not dare do, and the plot against the Milanese court goes to smash without filial participation. Furthermore, Caliban's blunt sexual threat to "people[e] else / This isle with Calibans" (I.ii.350-1) means something different if Prospero's child is male. The threat of rape, directed at a young woman, has potentially intergenerational consequences. Racial disgust and a sentimental appraisal of female

virginity posit Caliban as repellent enough that an audience can revel in his torments. By evacuating him of pitiable humanity the audience thereby transforms him from a brute with a legitimate grievance into a clown deserving of the punishment he receives, and Miranda for her part is never suspected of uncontrollable erotic passion for her Ferdinand. The woman masters herself, while the beast remains slave to appetite: *The Tempest* represents a sort of triumph of the virginity cult, won at the cost of humanism and the rejection of magic and its promise of universal Christian peace. Yet this triumph is more or less accidental, as Prospero in no other way aims to manifest humanism: he keeps slaves, after all.

The monist view, despite its tendency toward unity and universalism, does not extinguish nor is it meant to mitigate differences between people; differences of class, of religion, of race, remain a stubborn splinter agitating the human mind. Slavers—and Ariel and Caliban are nothing less than slaves—justify what they do by means of a subconscious mental, and overt outward, othering process. This phenomenon, at its core, demands that they see their chattel as abject[16], as individuals that horrify and destabilize their slavers' identities. This operation reveals the hideous double bind of slavery: to justify inhumanity toward another human being, a slave holder must somehow, through a peculiar mental process, dehumanize his slave; a person cannot recognize another person as discretely *non*-human, only as *abjectly* human—that is, as a near-miss in replication, a being so close to the real thing that in its differences (of skin color, for example) it disturbs the dehumanizer's identity because he expects to see his own humanity mirrored

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[16] I am working here with Julia Kristeva's definition of the abject, as outlined in her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

in what he knows to be another like him. The presence of the slave, therefore, forever torments the slave holder, and he expends his anguish upon his slave, from whom he has constructed a private abject vision of himself. In this way do self-disgust, horror, and a fear of chaos obtain on the master-slave relationship. We see Prospero engaging in this dehumanizing behavior toward Caliban, hailing his subject as “Thou earth” (1.2.314), “tortoise” (1.2.317), and “Hagseed” (1.2.365), and threatening him with pain and disease. A person cannot abide the abject: it is a rip in his reality, though which meaning and stability escape. The slave driver, then, represents the *ne plus ultra* of the monistic worldview: he is the monist-immanentist who engages in what he at root knows is immoral behavior and is therefore at constant war with himself, forever trying to take a high ground too steep to scale, but unable to resolve his anguish by abiding a dualist outlook[17]. Caliban rages impotently, and nearly affects a rebellion; he cannot accept his lot psychologically, although his master’s fearsome magic bends him to it physically. He is also bent to it by his master’s aborted academic efforts: Caliban states that Prospero “taught [him] language, and [his] profit on’t / Is, [he] know[s] how to curse” (1.2.363-4). The oppressive racialist believes that in the apparent absence of human intellection, the humanoid individual is fit for nothing but labor.

It might be interesting to limn this in Lacanian terms[18]: Prospero, in the name of the Father, institutes the law that is meant to bring Caliban into the Symbolic order.

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[17] This is not to say that dualism represents a convenient avenue to self-justifying immorality, although dualists have been wrongly accused of as much for millennia. Many were in fact executed by the standard-bearing and apparently irony-deaf moral monists who had previously instituted a prohibition against killing. The monistic outlook is sometimes inadequate to address immediate ethical and material concerns, and the confounded subject, unable to articulate a cogent ethic, only destroys himself as he vents his horror upon others.

[18] The following is taken from Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997).

One tenet of this law is the prohibition of acting on the Oedipus complex, here expanded to a general proscription against incest in a larger sense. In the original French, the *nom du père* is punned on—*les non-dupes errant* [19], roughly: those who can't be duped, who resist initiation by the Father into the Symbolic order and instead believe only the evidence of their immediate senses, are in error, and at risk of psychosis. This could be the credo of the magician of the scientific age: *Trust me, the evidence is a lie.* Prospero, like the magician then and the physician since[20], commands the belief of his audience only in part by the magic he performs. He is also aggressively paternal—a cornerstone therapeutic stance called in medicine the abreactive method—and here all toward his own vision of a political regime under which the magus-king rules over a slave economy. The monist-immanentist will go to any length to realize his paradise, and may therefore justify slavery as a temporary evil that will eventually sire a permanent good[21].

The monist ruler cannot afford to repel everyone, nor would his kingdom mean anything if he was the only non-slave in it: while Prospero habitually abuses Caliban, he is generally solicitous toward Ariel. The unctuous sprite—a "spirit too delicate" (I.ii.272) for base labor—is ever promised his freedom; he is his master's favored pet, although at any hint of insubordination he too is threatened with violence: "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails till / Thou hast howled away twelve winters" (I.ii.294-6). Ariel is the "good" slave to Caliban's "bad," grateful to be doing only the light labor and accepting his condition with little complaint. Perhaps the reason for this distinction can be surmised if we consider Shakespeare's Elizabethan nostalgia.

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[19] See Slavoj Zizek, "What's Wrong With Fundamentalism? – Part 1," https://www.lacan.com/zizpassion.htm.
[20] Couliano, *Eros*, pp. 28-52.
[21] See Thomas More's *Utopia* for what one might call, oxymoronically, benevolent slavery.

The exaltation of virginity implies a disgust with the body, which is also a common Hermetic trope: “He who had…prized the body, born from the illusion of desire, remained wandering in the dark, suffering through the senses the things of death” (1.19). It is little wonder, then, that the embodied Caliban—physically imposing, sexually threatening—comes in for the abuse the pneumatic Ariel is spared: to be made solely of *pneuma*, that fine star stuff encasing the eternal soul, is to be something apart from and well above grosser matter. And Ariel’s “entering invisible” throughout the play suggests a longed-for dissipation of embodiment without the full surrender of life. And if, for instance, Milton’s angels are sexual, the act is necessarily an exalted thing, taking place as it does between beings beyond fallen materiality. Prospero either recoils at the idea of his bloodline continuing because doing so necessitates sex and parturition, or he believes sex is cleansed of its evil when preceded by chastity, as Elizabeth’s spinsterhood made way for James’ children to marry, consummate their marriages, and continue their lineage. In any case, he resorts to slavery to reify the control he fears losing over his daughter and her earthly body. This magician-monist aches to control every grain of sand on his island, each strand of his daughter’s hair, the very air filled with the tiny benevolent architects of air-matter--pneumatic daemons invisibly at work.

Not all immanentists can abide slavery, and none consciously think themselves cruel; the kindly old Gonzalo is both of these. In the kingdom of his fantasies he would as ruler see to it that

> I’ th’ commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things, for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; contract, succession,

> Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
> No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
> No occupation; all men idle, all,
> And women too, but innocent and pure;
> No sovereignty—
> [...]
> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavor: treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
> Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
> Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people (II.i.162-171)[22].

Robert Speaight has it that "the whole effort of Shakespeare's mind in *The Tempest* was to realize Utopia without falling into the fallacies of Utopianism" (164), which fallacies are enumerated by Gonzalo, in contravention of the Elizabethan-Jacobean orthodoxy that "authority was sacred because, without it, society would fall to pieces and humanity 'prey on itself'" (ibid.). Prospero, who is many things but is no fool, gives up trying to reform the people he lives with: Caliban's education came to nothing—although he can speak, and eloquently so in his onomatopoetic way—and Miranda, like all girls, was only so educable (as was thought at the time and, sadly, for quite a long while thereafter). Instead, he focuses his magic on remaking nature—a radical revenger's *ecopoiesis*. He causes the titular storm, and spirits under his control manipulate matter locally. The monist-magician predicts our contemporary warlock, the monist-scientist: in Heideggerian terms, "Modern science's way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces" (20). Prospero uses nature the way loggers, real estate brokers, and, in an ever less occult manner, the little god-magicians of Silicon Valley do: the natural world is there for him to make use of for his own purposes,

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[22] This is a cheerful advancement for a poet who ten years prior had his hero not envision a better world for men "And women too" but instead lament a state in which man cannot delight him, "nor woman neither" [*Hamlet* II.ii.318].

subordinate to his will and awaiting exploitation. The very ocean is a tool for the revenger, who yearns for a long-ago kingdom in a faraway place—as does the playwright.

Shakespeare's knowledge of the Hermetic-Gnostic position leads him to feel a disgust with the body and an ambivalence toward magic. The cosmology of *The Tempest* is unified, monistic: divine power occurs on earth at the hands of man. And what Prospero says of Caliban he means too of his own bitter magic: "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.275-6). Magic cannot bring back the world that was. Prospero must abjure sorcery in order to accept a post somewhat like his old one. The society of mankind cannot abide a magician: we must have our places as citizens, perhaps God-appointed in the king's case but never as gods among men. Thomas writes: "in England magic lost its appeal before the appropriate technical solutions had been devised to take its place. It was the abandonment of magic which made possible the upsurge of technology, not the other way round" (786)—in other words, the abandonment of magic meant the abandonment of meaning. Somewhere along the way magicians lost the power to convince an audience: astrology was revealed to be incapable of accurate predictions, while both telescopy and microscopy suggested possible answers to problems once deferred to destiny. Prospero is an apostate sorcerer who gives up total power, and complete knowledge, for simple community in an ersatz Eden: he somehow hangs the fruit back on the tree. Yet while Shakespeare in his late period displays a monistic streak, he sounds less convinced by either scientific possibilities or the value of practical magic than bitter that a world-age, merely *symbolized* by magic, had passed. He wrote little after *The Tempest,* and that cooperatively: like his own Prospero the poet had to strike a

compromise between his wounded immanentism and the world that is. For Shakespeare that meant a dimming of his powers, probably a slower life, an angrier but not necessarily not a meaner one. After all, how must Prospero feel after his first week back in Milan? He retains power, but a neutered version of it. One supposes he just shuts up, gets old, and dies. But he was always old, he remains incorrigibly voluble, and a quiet death could not be the goal of a man as daring and cruel as all that. Late-period Shakespearean drama offers a rebuke of the dualistic position, which is replaced by a collectivist humanism that implies scientism in its disregard for human or ecological suffering.

ii. Dualistic Tragedy: *King Lear*

The Hermetic atmosphere of *The Tempest* situates it in a lineage of Neoplatonic works that countenance practical magic as either possible and godly or silly and worthy of parody. Into the former category we would place Giordano Bruno's dialogues, Paracelsus' medical works, and, according to Yates, Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*[23]*;* into this latter category go Jonson's *The Alchemist* (like *The Tempest* first performed in 1611), probably the initial wave of Rosicrucian treatises, and the literature of the new inductive science, according to which doctrine the presence of magic in the world would be vitiated without ever quite being annihilated. *The Tempest* is ultimately critical of magic, yet it takes magic seriously as a psychological phenomenon symbolizing an abiding control over the world and one's own fate. Shakespeare had by 1611 begun qualifying a happier attitude toward magic characteristic of his early career, evolving from a callow monism representative of the optimistic Elizabethan era into the bitter maturity and ultimacy of the Jacobean era's *The Tempest*. Before he reached that

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[23] Frances Yates, *Love's Labour's Lost* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).

point, however, he passed through a pessimistic, dualistic period beginning in 1600 that lasted the rest of the decade. He develops, first in *Hamlet* and then in the other major tragedies, a dualistic, occasionally nihilistic, cosmogony aligned--coincidentally or otherwise--with the *prisca theologia* and other dualist works. The plays of this period depict an inescapable, evil world which is wholly destructive to the prospect of intelligent control symbolized by magic.

It may be worth noting that European dualism suffered a loss on February 17th, 1600, when the apostate priest and Hermetic magus Giordano Bruno was immolated in Rome for anti-Christian teachings. Bruno's death was probably noted contemporaneously by the small coterie of English court *Brunisti*—the seemingly unambiguously Protestant Philip Sidney, who predeceased Bruno by a decade and a half, and to whom many of Bruno's printed dialogues were dedicated[24], was among his admirers. Giordano Bruno had, at least as of this writing, no provable direct influence on Shakespeare, although as stated his works were known at least in a limited way by some in the Elizabethan court. The poetic truth of the matter, however, inheres on the dogged presence of dualist philosophy and its everlasting persecution: in a vision Bruno and Hamlet meet, and merge, and burn up in a common fire, to be reborn on the English stage as *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth.*

The early modern dualist of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had recourse to texts relevant to his worldview other than the *Hermetica*. Christian scripture itself was, at the time, considered by some to be an echo of the Hermetic teachings, and

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[24] See Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Oxford, UK: Routledge Press), pp. 302-319.

indeed one can read into the gospels certain extremities "rehearsed" by Hermes. Luke 9: 24 ("For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it") expresses bodily unconcern along lines found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*: "He who had…prized the body, born from the illusion of desire, remained wandering in the dark, suffering through the senses the things of death" (1.19 p 21). A similar example is found in Matthew 6: 25: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"[25] Mind-body dualism, while often misunderstood, was a concept with which the early modern English were familiar. The flesh as worthless soul-coat is scriptural—although St. Paul complicates it considerably; religious scholar John W. Cooper reconciles the dualist-Christian tradition of late antiquity and the medieval era with prevailing post-Reformation monism in a system he calls "holistic dualism" (xvi). The dualism that Cooper reads into Augustine and Aquinas[26] is odd, but bears mentioning here because both saints reference Hermetic writings in major works. From the secular philosophical canon, Plotinus' particular Neoplatonism was the principle stream of thought running through the European mystic-scientific movement[27]: beginning with Ficino and Pico, this course was followed by Paracelsus, Campanella, Agrippa, and the alchemists and Rosicrucians--the most influential in English Renaissance thought being Robert Fludd--and, in a covert way, Elizabeth's magus John Dee, plus any number of low-caste

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[25] All scriptural citations are from the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible.
[26] See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Apollos Press: Leicester, UK), p. 11.
[27] Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*

cozeners who appeared here and there throughout the country, most notably upon the English stage in Ben Jonson's mercilessly farcical *The Alchemist*.

Perhaps little is needed to justify the early modern's dualistic cosmogenic stance beyond Plato. His *Timaeus*[28] is particularly valuable for these purposes: until the twelfth century it was all Latin Europe knew of Plato[29] and is therefore the root of Platonic Medieval dualism. This dialogue is, in short, a treatise on the eternal nature of the soul—a follow-up of sorts to the earlier *Phaedo*—combined with a highly speculative discursion on human and animal physiology. In it Plato writes that "out of disorder [God] brought order," which is "better than" chaos (*Timaeus* 30a, p. 1162), a cosmogony in rough conformance with Genesis 1-2. Plato's statement that "the body of heaven is visible, but the soul is invisible and partakes of reason and harmony" (37a, 1166) is plainly dualistic. It is less severe than what the Neoplatonist Hermetics would come to believe, but their ideas follow from it directly. The *Hermetica* were venerated because they were thought to predate both Christian and Platonic philosophy; indeed, the works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus were considered righteous pagan prophecies. The important point here is that philosophers and artists of the Renaissance tended to think old texts were venerable by dint of their age, and intellectual history was seen as a continuous thing whereby one great thinker directly influenced another, who influenced another, and so on. For this reason as much as for the eternal beauty of his prose and the everlasting brilliance of his philosophy was Plato highly regarded, even if philosophers of

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[28] I will be relying on Plato. *Timaeus. The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Princeton University Press, 1961.*
[29] See the entry for Plato's *Timaeus* in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/#InteQues, also Andrew Louth, p. 111.

the medieval and Renaissance eras were working with an incomplete picture of his thought and an inaccurate timeline of his "influences."

Lear's Fool informs his master that he "hast pared thy wit o' both sides / and left nothing i' th' middle." (I.iv.191-2). If one believes the Hermetic claim that "Irreverence is mankind's greatest offence against the gods" (16.11) then this would seem to be a good thing, and it puts a fine point on the play's dualist nature. The *Hermetica* has it that "desire is the cause of death" (1.18 p. 20). One desires not pain but pleasure, and pleasure, according to Plato, is "the greatest incitement to evil," yet neither is "pain, which deters from good, also rashness and fear" (69d, 1193) a font of purification or wisdom. And so it is in the God-abandoned *Lear*: the king himself finds no comfort in family, nor reason, nor the abdication of reason. The play's characters are dualists who, lacking higher philosophical insight, do not even try to apprehend anything beyond earthly life. Ratiocination is in fact inimical to their thriving: the blind, tormented Gloucester "stumbled when [he] saw" (IV.i.19), and his famous nihilistic lament that "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' gods, / They kill us for their sport" (IV.i.36-7) is possibly a paraphrase of Plato who, in his Laws, states that man is "a plaything of God" (7. 803c). Edmund's obsession with his bastardy—and his consequent lower "nature"—blinds him, until the very last, to decency as well as political competence. Lear himself is blind to common suffering until he discovers in "mad," disguised Edgar the "Thing itself" (whole speech: III.iv.103-116)—the pitiable quintessence of the human condition. *King Lear*, like other Shakespearean tragedies (and to some extent like tragedies generally), is a play about inattention, overlooking: clarity of thought and accuracy of observation are handicapped, and while this condition is also the basis of much comedy

(including Shakespeare's), it is here a consequence of the dualist's worldview rather than an imposition from a higher-caste character. *Lear* is, perhaps, an indictment of dualism (as *The Tempest* clearly is), which here seems to lead to, or develops out of, nihilism. Whoever believes that the supernatural is beyond human comprehension, and that the body is in all its functions a byproduct of the creation of an evil material world, is part of a long lineage of dualists. As scholar of religions Hans Jonas has it,

> the idea of the unknown God opposed to that of the cosmos, the very conception of an inferior and oppressive creator and the consequent view of salvation as liberation from this power by an alien principle are so outstandingly gnostic that anyone who professed them…. must be counted as one of the Gnostics (137).

--which is to say that, despite its presence in scripture, dualism is a dangerously heretical belief system, in early modern England and elsewhere.

What is rehearsed in *Hamlet* is played out in full funeral dress in *King Lear*; therefore, an interpretation of Shakespearean dualism that inheres on the latter merits some discussion of the former. The abiding themes of *Hamlet* are melancholy and death. In *Black Sun* Julia Kristeva analyzes melancholia as a symptom—in the scientific sense as following the acquisition of illness—of political turmoil: "Changing in accordance with the religious climate, melancholia assert[s] itself…in religious doubt…The periods that witness the downfall of political and religious idols, periods of crisis, are particularly favorable to black moods" (8). The Elsinore of *Hamlet* is tenebrous, the mood dictated and determined by the *Prince Noir*; yet Claudius' Denmark is not politically dysfunctional: relations with Norway, strained as they are, continue without dramatic deterioration (and, indeed, these contretemps are resolved by the pathos of the final scene). *Hamlet* is melancholy in the Kristevan sense because the titular character alone

wills it: political dysfunction is a function of the death of one after another royal. Overall, it is the melancholy and feeling of abandonment in a hostile world that tie the great tragedies together.

*King Lear'*s melancholy is truer than *Hamlet*'s because its characters cannot muse on melancholy directly, certainly not to the length that Hamlet does. The villainous Edmund rationalizes his ravening power-madness as a function of his illegitimacy and its consequent disjointing of the self; Goneril and Reagan want the power that their father, no longer *compos mentis*, can no longer be trusted with. Indeed, only in the final scene do the personae apprehend the true bleakness of all that has come before: Kent's "Break, heart, I prithee break!" (V.iii.312) is the proper—the objective correlative--response to what has occurred:

> Lear: And my poor fool is hang'd: no, no, no life?
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never.
> Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips,
> Look there, look there. (*He dies*.) (V.iii.307-13)[30]

[30] The First Folio edition of this play punctuates Lear's final speech with periods, while the 1864 Globe Edition—the one used on the Open Source Shakespeare website, in my experience popular with students but worthless for my purposes—uses exclamation points to induce an operatic atmosphere, which I find considerably less moving: the quietism, suggesting resignation evacuated of hope, of the First Folio edition better situates Lear as a (momentarily) rational figure unencumbered by the persecution mania that characterized his madness. A mad king would react histrionically to any great stress, as he does—appropriately and movingly—to a vision of homelessness. The soberer ruler, the man the king was before he sundered his family for a grievance, is wholly tragic while the mad, manic king risks comedy, as he does throughout the play.

No other response is appropriate, yet even the one given is insufficient; there are no words—playing on the drama's theme of nothingness—that can comprehend the tragedy.

Coming at Shakespearean tragedy from the angle of another idiom can be enlightening. Kristeva analyzes at some length Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* as an exemplar of a melancholy statement shot through with incipient Renaissance humanism. She writes that "There is not the slightest suggestion of transcendency" (110) in this work, and avers that "Holbein's originality lies then in a vision of Christly death devoid of pathos and Intimist on account of its very banality. Humanization thus reached its highest point: the point at which glory is obliterated by means of graphics" (115). The Intimization of Christ makes his suffering not *unheimlich* and by evading the uncanny, and therefore the abject, the viewer of Holbein's painting must identify herself with the fact of Christ's bodily death, and therefore that of her own lesser self. This is, probably happenstantially, a rebuke of the gnostic concept of Docetism, which argues that Christ was not truly embodied as a man but rather had shown his observers a pneumatic and illusory body, which, not quite existing materially, felt no pain during the crucifixion[31] and did not die in the normative sense. Kristeva relates Holbein's painting to Luther's suggestion that suffering was a mystic path to godliness, and suggests that "if the idea of man's generation through grace is to be found next to that immersion into pain, the fact remain nevertheless that the intensity of one's faith is geared to one's ability for contrition" (120).

[31] The Manichaeans held this to be true, and because of their association with the young St. Augustine anyone curious about Western dualism must, at least in passing, take their theology seriously.

According to *Lear*'s cosmology God is absent, and suffering reigns untrammeled in His absence. The king's gnomic "Nothing will come of nothing" (I.i.92) is an apt analysis: absent the presence of the All Good, no good can manifest. Holbein's painting, in this context, suggests that embodiment is a sorrow: it is the beaten, torn, newly cold non-divine body of Christ that arrests the viewer; if matter is as easily banished, as this painting suggests it is, there is therefore no good in the body if it does not exist at least in Christ—it may, in fact, be actively evil. This is well within the remit of the *Hermetica*: Hermes warns Tat that "the gross body…[is[bound fast everywhere by evil, toils, pains, desires, passions, deceits, foolish opinions" (4.6.32), and in the dualist texts of the Gnostics—known, albeit tenebrously, by Renaissance readers of Augustine, Irenaeus, and Plotinus—one finds, according to Hans Jonas, a " widespread motif of gnostic thought: the mistrust of sexual love and sensual pleasure in general" (Jonas 72) in both Holbein's painting and Shakespeare's tragedy, which is linked to it by the theme of bleak humanism. In one of many speeches against sexual activity and parturition, Lear, in decrying adultery, ironically supports adultery to make his point: "Let copulation thrive: for Gloucester's bastard son / Was kinder to his father than my daughters / Got 'tween the lawful sheets" (IV.vi.116-18). This is not to suggest that Lear countenances sex at all by this point: "Down from the waist they [women] are Centaurs, / Though women all above" (IV.vi.126-7): his opinion of embodiment is nihilistic and, indirectly—because dualistic--Gnostic.

An examination of Holbein's painting—a work that is both a nation and a generation or two removed from Shakespeare's—is not mere woolgathering. A tonally dark exhibition of Christian teachings is hardly unknown to Shakespeare. In fact, each of

his great seventeenth century tragedies suggests in its final scene Christian iconography of one kind or another, sometimes ironically, and while there isn't room to examine them in detail, they will be stated, suggesting topics for further discussion. *Hamlet* concludes with a demonic parody of the eucharist; Desdemona reawakens after Othello smothers her, hinting at resurrection; Lear, cradling the dead Cordelia, is a sexually-inverted pieta; *Macbeth'*s Macduff, "not of woman born," is (quite imprecisely) a reference to a virgin birth, or at least a not-quite-normative one. If we extend the category to include *Antony and Cleopatra*, the serpent play of the queen's death recalls the disguised Satan in Eden. An ironized depiction of faith is not a confession of disbelief. The dualist may justify this mode of communication by arguing that what is depicted in the material world has no bearing on the spiritual realm, and that the things one does are impermeably separate from the things one believes at one's core.

In his *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy*, G. Wilson Knight asserts that "As in King Lear, the extreme mental agony [in *Hamlet*] tends towards expressions in the region of the essentially comic" (20) *Hamlet'*s denouement is grisly, excessively--even indulgently—violent, indeed arguably comic in its enumeration of death upon death. But Knight is not as convincing regarding the comic properties of the later play: *Lear*, by spacing the deaths of the villainous and righteous apart--rather than commingling several of them in a discrete scene--evades a tone that, while enriching for *Hamlet,* would diminish *Lear*. Hamlet's lament over the dead Yorick (V.i. 170-80) is the blackest comedy: there is no way to distinguish one skull from another taken out of a mass grave, and one of Shakespeare's great tragic monologues holds laughter at bay only to the extent to which the actor playing Hamlet has a gift with such subtle material.

Lear's fussing over Edgar, disguised as Mad Tom, has the structure of comedy—disguise, misidentification, the gull being taken in and promising a great reward to his cozener—but lacks its emotional content. Permeability of genre suggests a monistic streak, complicating the otherwise solidly dualistic nature of the tragedies.

Knight notes that Lear prominently displays a "'hate-theme': an especial mode of cynicism toward love, disgust at the physical body, and dismay at the thought of death; a revulsion from human life caused by a clear sight of its limitations—more especially limitations imposed by time" (15). There could be no tidier summation of Hermetic pessimism, and this hatred of the material, combined with certain other thematic peculiarities, pitches *Lear* in a register of extraordinary distress:

> The peculiar dualism at the heart of [King Lear] which wrenches and splits the mind by a sight of incongruities displays in turn realities absurd, hideous, pitiful. The incongruity is Lear's madness; it is also the demonic laughter that echoes in the Lear universe. In pure tragedy the dualism of experience is continually being dissolved in the masterful beatification of passion, merged in the sunset of emotion. But in comedy it is not so softly resolved—incompatibilities stand out till the sudden relief of laughter or its equivalent of humour: therefore incongruity is the especial mark of comedy. Now in King Lear there is a dualism continually crying in vain to be resolved either by tragedy or comedy. Thence arises its peculiar tension of pain: and the course of the action often comes as near to the resolution of comedy as to that of tragedy (182).

Lear is tragedy told with the rhythm of comedy, which resides in "This particular region of the terrible bordering on the fantastic and absurd…the playground of madness" (191): if indeed "The sight of physical torment, to the uneducated, brings laughter" (ibid.), then the magisterial power of *Lear* can be incomprehensible to any but an elite audience. But that is hardly true; Knight has it wrong. Lear's discourse with Mad Tom, his wind-whipped howl against the tempest, his entering a late scene, with Edgar, in a hat bedecked with flowers (stage direction at IV.vi.19), each of these moves to the rhythm of

comedy but elicits neither laughter nor the sense of a harmonious gathering-in that characterizes classic comedy. Bitter conniving, mistaken identity, and sexual jealousy are all stock comedy tropes, and their usage for tragic purposes is as jarring—even after the plays are familiar—as would be a murder as the catalyzing action of a comic work[32]. Northrop Frye writes, "The resolution of comedy comes, so to speak, from the audience's side of the stage; in a tragedy it comes from some mysterious world on the opposite side" (164). The comedically-shaped tragedy of *Lear*, then, is not an impossible, nor even exactly an ugly thing, but rather an awesome masterwork of forced interiority: it abides no laughter, no social reunification. In other words none of the true elements of comedy are evident, despite the appearance of what would otherwise be comic notions; the tragedy instead forces the reader or viewer to toil with its themes within herself. Lear's fascination with the disguised Edgar would under other circumstances, and in another play altogether, be comical, for example in the discordance between the vagrant and Lear's unironic honorific: "let me talk with this philosopher" (III.iv.157). Particularly jarring is Regan's "let [Gloucester] smell/ His way to Dover" (III.vii.93-4), which is witty, but too cruel to be funny, thereby coming off disjunctive.

A concern with discord characterizes Edgar especially, Lear initially, and the surviving characters finally, albeit in this last case largely outside the remit of the play. Edgar has it that Lear "childed while [Edgar] fathered" (III.vi.109). Reflecting on Lear's diminished mental state, he recognizes "How light and portable my pain seems now,/ When that which makes me bend makes the King bow" (III.vi.107-8). The natural order

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[32] A conclusion to which Dostoevsky, J.M. Synge, and a few others seem to have come and treated as a dare.

has been upset: it is grotesque when "we our betters see bearing our woes" (III.vi.101). Lear's final stand, with Cordelia by his side, sees him having given up his humanity and attempting to attain to the highest creatureliness: the two will "sing like birds i' th' cage" (V.iii.9); those that part the two "shall bring a brand from heaven, / And fire [them, i.e. Lear and Cordelia] hence like foxes" (V.iii.22-3). A gnomic exchange between Lear and his fool suggests the depths of the king's abasement:

> Fool: Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?
> Lear: No.
> Fool: Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.
> Lear: Why?
> Fool: Why, to put his head in; not to give it away to his
> daughters, and leave his horns without a case.

The oyster comparison is significant. Tillyard reminds us that to the early modern mind, "the elephant and the oyster" are represented "as at the top and bottom respectively of the animal creation" (82). Lear's inability to puzzle out, or take more than perfunctory interest in, the Fool's riddle portends his debasement. Homeless, hunted, heath-dwelling Lear wages, from the moment he leaves his castle, a losing battle against his own degradation, with even his own mind conspiring against him. On the other hand, it is only through degradation, or the appearance of it, that Edgar can survive: if he is, being man, yet above an elephant, he knows he must become the lowest of his kind: he is "besought / To take the basest and most poorest shape" (II.iii.6-7)—that of a "Bedlam beggar," Poor Tom. Again the Fool jests: "The man that makes his toe / What he his heart should make / Shall of a corn cry woe" (III.ii.31-4)—that is, the upsetting of the natural order (cf. Tillyard) will not be abided, and if challenged will bring the agonist to harm: if it cannot

be resisted it will mete out punishment. In this disordered world even "Things that love night / Love not such nights as these" (Kent, III.ii.42-3), recalling *Macbeth* II.iv,, in the supernatural nightmare world of which Duncan's horses eat each other. If there is—or ought to be—a division between ensouled human beings and soulless animals, there, too, must be a duality separating man from animals, natural animals from supernatural--or magical, likely evil--ones, harbingers of doom or the wrath of God, where He is present (and He is not in Lear).

The natural order is further buffeted by storms of evil ambition. As with Lady Macbeth's command that she be "unsex[ed]" so that she might attain to strength and viciousness enough to commit regicide, Goneril's assertion, "I must change names at home and give the distaff / Into my husband's hands" (IV.ii.17-8), is not a feminist taking-charge but yet another assault on the natural order of things, which puts into discrete and sometimes opposing categories men and women, human and animal, elephant and oyster, etc.—in other words, sees the world dualistically, as a series of ideas one opposed to another. It is, in fact, a double assault, in which Goneril manifests a masculine and Albany a feminine aspect, paralleling the situation between Lear and his elder daughters, who change places as, on the one hand, one party becomes childishly dependent on others while, on the other, the role of ruler, protector—*father*—is assumed. Filiopietism is the engine of action in *Hamlet* and the culminating mechanism of *King Lear*. The quiddity of the parent-child relationship is to some extent upended in *Lear*—another example of the characters' motion against natural order. In his *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim notes that "we are not comfortable with the thought that occasionally we look like threatening giants to our children…nor do we want to accept

how easy they think it is to fool us, or to make fools of us, and how delighted they are by this idea" (27), and Lear qualifies on the latter point. He thinks he is still the household tyrant, but by the dawn of his madness he is seen by his daughters, and some of the male courtiers, as the pathetic watchman of the family fortune. Cordelia's injunction to "Love, / and be silent" (I.i.63-4) is both an explication of her own plans and a recommendation to her increasingly manic father. Lear responds to his favorite daughter's rebuff histrionically: "Ingratitude! Thou marble-hearted fiend, / More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child / Than the sea-monster" (I.iv.226-8): to the persecution-crazed king his daughters have become the "threatening giants" of Bettelheim's passage. There is dualism at work here: what is not good (in Lear's mind) must be its opposite.

Yet a transmogrification of parent into child is never fully completed. If it had been, the world may have fallen back into joint—at an odd angle and never again without some pain when in motion, but aspiring to the stability endowed and insisted upon by the natural order. In this liminal space between parent and child, ruler and subject, powerful mover and helpless invalid, persecution becomes the natural order of things to Lear once he leaves his castle for the hearth. His moving exclamation upon meeting "Poor Tom" (one among many invisible "poor naked wretches" [III.iv.28,] who impels the king to acknowledge "I have ta'en / Too little care of this!" [III.iv.32-3]) is punctured by a self-loathing question directed at, rather than to, the man before him: "Didst thou give all to thy daughters? And art / thou come to this?" (III.iv.48-9). Lear, in the first stages of his deterioration, apparently cannot recognize madness in another: the state of madness is his new natural order, and it illuminates a world where daughters are expected to hunt fathers, sons to plot against *their* fathers (the Edgar-Edmund-Gloucester subplot), and

hearth-dwelling vagrants to limn human frailty philosophically, as a Fool might. A kingdom so rearranged would, madly, rule from the bottom up, avaricious courtiers responsible to the tyrant-child at the foundation of things. While madness is normative in Lear's private world, he does still recognize a caste separation between himself and his new guest. Literary scholar David Hitchcock has it that "Vagrancy, first and foremost, was a crime of status" (2) in early modern England. Hence, perhaps there is more sensitivity than there at first appears to be in Lear's questioning after the man's usurped fortune: a vagrant is after all a man, albeit a lesser one, the oyster to the king's elephant. A man stripped of status still fits into the category labelled *man*, only he is now guilty of the crime of being stripped of status; this is a silly tautology that the mentally diminished Lear seems to see past. Literary historian Linda Woodbridge states that the Elizabethan-Jacobean vagrancy panic had little real-life referent. Panicky people heard and repeated stories of vagrants, or "masterless men," "keeping women as sex slaves," passed on tales "that they were unemployed by choice…that they spoke their own language, thieves' cant" (ibid), among other eerily persistent stereotypes. Despite the absence of proof for these accusations, vagrancy was legislated against as if it were common[33], which is one way—a cruel one—of "taking care" of it. Shakespeare is not saying that all men are equal. Rather, being a dualist—at least for a while—he sees opposing ideas within discrete categories. The beggar (Edgar) becomes king at the play's end, a metamorphosis

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[33] One ought to bear in mind the abject nature of homelessness—more or less life's worst-case scenario, hardly a life at all, some would say—and the fact that it has the potential to befall almost anyone. If understood through Kristeva's theory of the abject, then we can discover the foundation of the fear many feel in the presence of the homeless: "It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (*Abject* 4); that is to say, repulsion toward the vagrant is fear of discovering a humanity in common with him, with the consequence to myself that I must toil with the idea that his fate could be my own, the two of us being of a kind. Learning why Poor Tom is in his (supposed) position is imperative to the newly-homeless Lear: he needs to know how he can prevent his situation from getting worse.

of one sort of man into another. If this were common it would suggest a monistic—comedic, as previously discussed—sensibility in which unity of all can be achieved. Shakespeare evades this interpretation by positing success against failure (Edgar/Lear), life against death, etc.

Lear is cruel to Cordelia, but he has no opportunity to ruin anyone else directly; in the absence of regal power he becomes nihilistic. Lear will grant Cordelia nothing in exchange for anything less than a vow of fanatic filial fealty. Edmund, attempting to trap Gloucester into banishing Edgar, with purposeful ineptitude hides a letter, claiming that it is harmless. But of course he would not hide it if that were so: "The quality of nothing hath such need to hide itself" (I.ii.34). In I. Iv. Lear takes too little head of the Fool's riddles on nothing: "Why, no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing (I.iv.135). Nihilism is a possible consequence of dualism, and many Gnostic sects were accused of libertine antinomianism. Shakespeare here seems critical of the dualist stance, perhaps afraid of taking it too far himself—thereby running the risk of social censure by ever-prevailing monism. The Fool's part in the play oddly, disturbingly, comes to nothing: he disappears from all action or comment; Lear addresses his "poor Fool"—that is, Cordelia—with a common affectionate diminutive. As in *Hamlet*, the death of the Fool diagnoses the world as evil, as beyond wisdom, humor, abstract thought, or any sense of play. By contrast, in *Lear* the Fool, by metamorphosing into Cordelia via a sleight of speech, suggests a world eager to destroy everything good and true. Yorick may have died of age or disease, but the Cordelia-Fool is cruelly executed by villains. Edmund's conscience returns to him too late to save her: he has overlooked the right and the good past the world's fatal moment, and he winds up with nothing.

Shakespeare ultimately turns against the dualism of *Lear* and the tragedies. It is difficult to say quite why—but then, his motivation for taking up the dualist position in the first place, and that for a full decade, we must cede to the province of speculation. The dualist position is always overpowered by the monistic one: Lear's force of personality is overmastered not so much by the magic Prospero wields as by the structure the mage yields it to. Perhaps Shakespeare simply wearied of defending a perennially unpopular position, and one hopes he found happiness beyond the bitterness expressed in *The Tempest*. But such self-protective conformity is hard-won, and John Donne, despite his public persona, seemed unable to excise a transcendental, soul-contra-body sensibility from his system of thought. Donne's death was nowhere near as operatic as that of Giordano Bruno in the Campo de Fiori, but it could have been: his recusancy made him a marked man, and it is confounding, yet strangely inspiring, to see him regularly edge toward dualist heresy. It is to this work, in its several forms, we now turn.

Chapter 2: John Donne, Reluctant Dualist

In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," John Donne writes:

> Our two souls therefore, which are one,
>   Though I must go, endure not yet
> A breach, but an expansion,
>   Like gold to airy thinness beat.
>
> If they be two, they are two so
>   As stiff twin compasses are two;
> Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
>   To move, but doth, if the other do (ll. 29-36).

He is speaking of two souls "which are one," a unity. But his poems turn on his conceits—sometimes-strained metaphors that transmogrify the original subject into another, thereby elucidating a theme—and once the two-in-one souls become "twin compasses" that "are two," the meaning is revealed: Donne severs the union between objects and concepts, conventionalizing a dualism that emphasizes the discrete parts of what begin in unity. Connections between things and ideas are misleading in Donne's poetry, as well as in much of his prose work. His special contribution to English poetry is to consistently tease out these differences and place them, if not in opposition, then in their discrete places to be observed as parts within a whole, which is not wholly destroyed, just qualified.

John Donne was born into this world a Catholic, left it a put-upon Anglican, and would posthumously be acknowledged by its English-speaking inhabitants as the greatest of the seventeenth century metaphysical poets, and probably the greatest poet between Shakespeare and Milton. Yet Donne's philosophy is the subject of debate.

Literary scholar Theresa M. DiPasquale argues the monist position from the locus of what she sees as Donne's residual Catholicism[34], while early modern scholar Ramie Targoff contends that Donne was "a dualist who rejected the hierarchy of the soul over the body…who longed above all for the union, not the separation, of his two parts" (22). Targoff's position—that Donne was definitively a dualist who longed in vain for the comfort of a monistic worldview he could never satisfactorily prove to himself—seems the stronger, in part due to the literature close to the poet: Donne "was familiar with the work of Plotinus, whom he quotes in his sermons, and whose description of the soul's ecstasy in the Enneads served as the locus classicus for medieval and early modern Platonists" (31). He quotes Avicenna, the Persian Neoplatonist, in a letter to Henry Goodyer[35], and his personal library held volumes of Cabalist Ramon Llull, who believed in the eternality of the soul; Italian Aristotelian philosopher Antonio Bruno; and several works on the occult and European folk belief regarding illness and monsters[36], all of which attest, at the very least, to Donne's curiosity regarding the body-soul problem. The poetry was written between 1593 and, possibly, 1631, the year of his death. He wrote *Biathanatos* in 1608, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* in 1624, and the sermons during the decade, beginning in 1621, in which he was Dean of St. Paul's. His outlook remains dualistic through all of these in that he consistently disunifies the often grotesque body higher from spiritual concerns, although he complicates this view in the sermons.

[34] Theresa M. DiPasquale, *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross,* ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1995), pp. 81-91.
[35] Ramie Targoff, *John Donne: Body and Soul* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 8.
[36] Targoff, p. 7.

Donne was a dualist—sometimes a rather strained one; and his dualism is not as solidly founded on classical and occult sources as Shakespeare's. Donne, well- and widely-read, has been the subject of more scholarship and criticism than any other English poet between Shakespeare and Milton. He is an appropriate subject for study here because of the sophistication of his dualism and the extent to which he expounded on and challenged it. Significantly, no other dualist poet—not Marvell, nor Herrick—boasts such a rich body of work, and only the essayist Sir Thomas Browne exhibited dualistic thought to anywhere near the extent that Donne did. Donne is important to anyone seeking an understanding of dualistic thought as it existed in an era that was intolerant toward religious heterodoxy. Unlike Shakespeare, Donne left posterity with a record of his opinions—whether those opinions were authentic or otherwise none can say—in the form of letters to friends, and to a more dubious extent in his sermons and the major prose pieces. While it is on the one hand reductive to conflate Donne the man with his poems' personae, or with the priest or the friend of the letters, it is not helpful to try to argue for one or the other as his "authentic" voice.

i. The Thing Itself, and Its Opposite: The Definitive Dualism of the Poetry

Theologian John W. Cooper has it that "A completely consistent Aristotelianism is untenable for Christians, for Aristotle's soul is only the form of the body and not a substance as such" (13); Platonism, then—via various divines or by means of his own intellection—would seem to be a clearer origin point for Donne's philosophy. But unlike some the Neoplatonists who influenced him, Donne did not hate the material: Targoff asserts that "The idea that each soul belongs to an individual body was of the utmost importance to Donne—there is perhaps no single idea more important

to his metaphysics" (8). Embodiment in Donne is, indeed, necessary to his conceits, which often depend upon bodily, physical, and spatial peculiarities to wield the power they do: his poetry explodes the body, turning outside the inside matter in search of the exact location of the eternal soul. The grotesque body is for Donne a topographical map of ceaseless wonder and insight.

It is notable in poetry as exploratory as Donne's that evil is not a principal concern, as it is, by contrast, in Shakespeare. Again, unlike certain of his Neoplatonic forebears, Donne sees embodiment as worthwhile, and the doctrinal suggestion of an eventual apocalyptic taking-up of the body whole and intact is a theological point he puzzles over throughout his work. For Donne, misfortune mirrors both the natural and the technological world (to be discussed further in the section on his prose), but to be misfortunate is not a hypostasis of Divine retribution, or the manifestation of natural evil. A world, or at least an artistic worldview, evacuated of evil is not one freed from terror, however; the visceral presence of terror may in fact suggest the persistence of evil, even if it is not faced down directly. The question of theodicy is not an empty one, just one Donne does not care to address. In some poems and at great length in the prose Donne discourses on the idea that we suffer for no purpose, or none that we can discern. In his post-illness *Devotions* (again, discussed at greater length below), the answer to despair is blind faith; with that in place there can be meaning in the business of writing about love, and angels, and compasses. In Donne's poetry, metaphor-making and scholastic curiosity merge into a kind of theology of elevated emotion, and in his theological writings themselves, he renders a complex view of the relative morality of various sins into a

radical defense of human agency under Divine aegis--territory Milton would explore before arriving at a similar conclusion, with a different meaning.

Throughout Donne's poetry one thing is always at least one other thing, united not without some strangeness or, as Samuel Johnson put it, the constituent parts of Donne's conceits are always "heterogeneously yoked together by violence." Donne's conceits are, contrary to prevailing interpretations, about "twoness rather than oneness" (Targoff 50), a definitionally dualist stance. Such willingness to separate previously united objects or concepts is not only dualistic, it would seem to defy trinitarianism. This is consistent with Donne's habitually against-the-grain attitude toward everything: he seems occasionally to believe that not only has death *not* been defeated but it is in fact the essence of life, yet writes in his Holy Sonnet 6 ("Death, be not proud"), "Death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die" (14), a more orthodox tenet, but whether it or the other represents his authentic belief or is just another example of his this-is-also-that conceits, is down to one's particular analytic technique. Donne must always have it both ways, and perhaps he can, if the Resurrection is considered. It seems that the key to limning his contradictory assertions is to focus not on death *qua* death but on how he metaphorizes pain and the grotesque body. Truth and grace do not so much arise within his personae as they break in roughly through their flesh and rob them of understanding: bodily matter is not evil, just stupid. Holy Sonnet 10 draws a particularly visceral portrait of a man coming into faith, desperately yet in some fear that no intercession will come:

> Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
> As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me; and bend

Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new (1-4).

The persona begs to be "[b]atter[ed]," rather than convinced, or led, or shown visions; the spirit is coerced to enter him viscerally, to "force to break" his resistance that he might be made anew. This is revealed religion at its bluntest and least deniable. God, standing in for both life-into-death and grace won through pain, brutalizes the persona—would, indeed, be *forcing* Himself upon him in a Jovian manner were it not for his desperately-rendered consent. In Donne's work, the body impedes the spirit, and must be overcome—be ruined—to affect revelation; it seems that, while he does not hate the body, he sees its mutilation as a prerequisite. The body is not an evil thing, but rather an inconvenient, albeit appealing, one. In "Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness," the persona must be "made thy [God's] music" (3); his "physicians by their love are grown/Cosmographers, and I their map" (6-7), an ignominy which medical men by necessity of their trade visit upon patients. Donne's body, to the physician, is no longer a singular entity, but stands metonymously for every other human body in a related state of either poor or hale health, depending on the situation. The physician, conscientious cosmographer, thus becomes unwitting theologian, revealing by the impersonal uniformity of bodies he creates the banality of pain and death—that is, Christ's triumph over the same, in a body like our own—contrary to Kristeva's analysis of Holbein's *Dead Christ*.

Targoff writes that "For Renaissance Neoplatonists, the body is at best a preliminary medium through which a deeper, more enduring connection to the soul is conducted; at worst, it is a harmful distraction, obstructing the lover from his or her true focus on heavenly, spiritual beauty" (58). Neither quite describes Donne: his is a middle

way by which the body is used both as a vector for pleasure, which after all exists as a as a result of divine omnipoeisis (and can therefore not be said to be evil—unless the creator is evil, as some Gnostics believed), and as the conduit to divine revelation; Donne the medical patient and theologian is not out of conformance with Donne the lover, and believes that grace will come forcefully, bodily. Unity-cum-grotesquerie is articulated most famously in “The Flea,” in which the titular pest “suck’d me first, and now sucks thee,” so that “in this flea our two bloods mingled be” (3-4). The object of the persona’s affection “know’st this cannot be said/A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead” (5-6), as the loss of virginity—of maidenhead—is metaphysical, extra-corporeal: in the mingling of blood is apprehended the higher purpose implied by the sexual act, and the would-be lovers are purified by the abolition of creatureliness, assisted in such by a living thing that feeds off the human body. If sex is sinful outside of marriage, and marital sex is the distasteful consummation of an unappealing rite, then an arrangement wherein consummation takes the shape of mutual chastity must be considered a higher aim than most couples aspire to. Flea poems and paintings were a discrete genre throughout Europe during the early modern era, and it is curious to consider why. Through the intercession of a lesser animal, intimate relationships might begin: the keen-eyed conquistador must comb the vista of his beloved for the little pests, taking his care as helpmate, in as much time as it takes a painter to capture the scene. Contemporaneous Dutch paintings show women in various states of *dishabille* scratching anxiously at fleas, which are not represented in the paintings themselves[37]. A sort of dissembling

[37] See for example 'The Flea Hunt' by Gerrit van Honthorst, in which a Caravaggian play of light reveals not the person and divinity of Christ but the nude figure of an eager, smiling woman.

pornography, such artworks insist upon the virtue of indirect bodily contact: one is looking for fleas, after all, and cannot help it if he encounters breasts and legs during the expedition.

Elegy 10 (“The Anagram”) moves beyond voyeurism into a metaphysics of eroticism. Its dualism is represented as the separation of common beauty from true, or of society from the poet-lover. The poem’s Flavia “Hath all things, whereby others beauteous be” (l. 2), but she has them in the wrong places, or out of proportion: “her eyes be small, her mouth is great” (l. 3). She is not even a virgin: “Give her thine, and she hath a maidenhead” (8). Yet “She’hath yet an anagram of a good face” (16), lacking no necessary part. What seems at first a caddish exaggeration into proto-Cubism of an imperfect woman is in fact a celebration of chaotic substance over enforced order. This would be an odd conclusion for a standard Neoplatonist to reach, and an analysis of the poem along those lines does suggest that Donne was willing to take the orthodox view, if just now and then and in a spirit of play. In the poem there is present a cogent theology, one that abjures the body—to say nothing of beauty—in favor of a holistic view of the body-as-soul vector. The bodily substance, the world of matter, is of no importance—until it is, thanks to pain, death, or sex, each of which either supplants Divine considerations temporarily or combines the sacred and the profane in a grammar of liminality: to exist between Heaven and Earth—and if Earth is taken to be a surrogate for Hell in times of distress—is to find oneself in Purgatory, in which the Protestant convert Donne would not believe (in public). He smuggles such a definitive, dangerous piece of Catholicity into his ontology by way of metaphor. And when he has gotten too close to the fires of heresy, he steps back and takes refuge in poetry, in the argument that all is

artifice. So with "The Anagram": To love the lady for her disfigurement is to follow one's own independent path to happiness, to salvation—to take the narrow road: "One like none, and lik'd of none, fittest were, / For, things in fashion every man will wear" (55-56). Here again Donne is proffering a bespoke theology. The parallel to the mistreated Christ is clear, and one steadily apprehends the portrait of a mutilated Savior: a Christ with His flesh savaged, His sinews twisted and drained, the Blessed scalp split from the skull causing the face to droop, the eyes to look or to shut anagrammatically one below the other. Christ the man in His Passion was made supremely ugly by the externalizing of His closed body, yet, the poem implies, His beauty is not tarnished for all that: He still has His spirit, His message, and the broken human form that was His covenant, simply rearranged--made an anagram of. If one takes the Neoplatonic view that matter means nothing in this world of defeated death, it might be said that although it was "Fitting indeed, then, and wholly consonant was the death on the cross for us" (56), the spectacle of Christ's death is significant for having happened in the public sphere, high upon a cross for all around to witness ("Even on the cross He did not hide Himself from sight" [*ibid.*]), a point finely-figurative Renaissance painting drove home for an audience of voluptuaries. Whether Christ's body *had* to change so dramatically to gather in callow believers is beside the point if death—and therefore pain and affliction—mean nothing in this world. Donne plays with the standard line here: he seems to follow the orthodox Neoplatonic view that matter is a cause of indifference at best, yet his other work qualifies and complicates this view, steering him well clear of monistic implications.

The fact of Christ's transfiguration and resurrection provide the justification for Donne's profane combinations; if death can be defeated, then the veil of life—which

amounts to nothing compared to eternity—can be rent and re-stitched, a dualist body-soul division the poet agonized over. Donne, a science enthusiast, occasionally brings alchemy and trans-Atlantic travel into his work. Yet he was enough of a man of his time to find use for pneumatic beings, the angels and creative demons that populated the Renaissance world and all of human history before it. In "The Apparition" the poem's persona threatens to haunt an inamorata:

> When by thy scorn O Murd'ress, I am dead,
> And that though think'st thee free
> From all solicitations from me,
> Then shall my ghost come to thy bed (1-4).

This liminal state of life, ghosthood, represents a Pyrrhic triumph over death, and also glances off the dangerously heretical idea of Purgatory, about which the recusant Donne would have known something, and once believed in[38]. In *Hamlet in Purgatory* Stephen Greenblatt argues that "Purgatory forged a different kind of bond between the living and the dead, or, rather, it enabled the dead to be not completely dead—not as utterly gone, finished, complete as those whose souls resided forever in Hell or Heaven" (17). The poem's "Murd'ress" cannot escape from her ghost lover, the bond beyween the living and the dead being secured by an indeterminate in-between state. A similar state is inhabited by other of Donne's lovers: "No where / Lives a woman true and fair" ("Song,"17-18); "Must I, who came to travail thorough you, / Grow your fix'd subject, because you are true?" ("The Indifferent," 17-18); the "Usurious god of love" ("Love's Usury," 3) is apostrophized, and the Holy of Holies is invoked to silence a combative

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[38] To the extent that Purgatory was an orthodox Catholic tenet the Catholic Donne family, and the poet in his early years, would have accepted it as true.

lover in “The Canonization” (“For God’s sake hold your tongue, and let me love” [1]). Lovers are viscerally torn apart, and just as viscerally brought together; the rakish male persona tends to protest at length, not necessarily without success. But in what we would call Donne’s love poetry—as opposed to his devotional, or combative, or rhetorical, or nettlesome poetry—he makes clear that romantic love is a mutual habitation of man and woman. “A Lecture upon the Shadow” traces how “These three hours that we have spent,/Walking here, two shadows went” (3-4), and the manner in which, at noon, “We do not those shadows tread” (7). The lovers’ shadows, having been noticed, become precious to the persona, those cast at noon standing for openness and mutual honesty. He notes that “The morning shadows wear away,/But these grow longer all the day” (22-23)—that is, trust and honesty increase—even though “love’s day is short…Love is a growing, or full constant light, / And his first minute, after noon, is night” (24-26). Love, then, is an anxious thing that must be held fast to, even as it scratches its way into lovers and builds its aerie atop their hearts. Why is love so bodily destructive for Donne? It would be easy enough to note a parallel to Christ’s bloody Passion, in which love is elevated by the exposure of its sinews and shattered bones. And while the historical John Donne had a difficult time of marriage, he seems to suggest in his love poetry that if one searches for love because one primally possessed it as a two-pronged soul (recalling Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*), then the reunion of souls that had been parted must necessarily be as violent as was their original sundering. The dualism of man and woman for early Hellenic Christians, as historian of Christianity Andrew Louth writes, was “doctrine of double creation [that] makes a distinction within creation between the firsts creation of spiritual beings in the image of God, and the creation of

human beings, embodied and marked by sexual differentiation" (115). That is to say that working backward from an apprehension of human sexual duality one may infer the prior creation of a being opposite to mankind which, depending on one's point of view, would be either worse than the near-angel that man is or much better than the destructive, demonic force that he is.

ii. Uninvited: *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* and Grotesque Duality

As explicitly as, and more personally than, in the poetry Donne in his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* describes an embodied world contrary to Divine perfection. The illness that compelled Donne's *Devotions* was probably typhus, an infectious disease spread by lice, chiggers, and fleas. Symptoms of the disease are as Donne describes them: Intense fever, bodily aches, delirium. Having contracted the bacteria at roughly the time of the last London plague outbreak, Donne—as any patient would—confronts the idea that he had been allotted a death sentence, particularly if he had noted the telltale typhoid rash which, perhaps, could be mistaken for bubonic rot. The treatise was written during his convalescence, and registers of deep sickness were therefore a recent-past memory which left notes of suffering within the poet's body. (Typhus is today treated with a course of the antibiotic doxycycline, after which the prognosis is highly positive; untreated, the illness is slightly more likely than not to be fatal.) It is not idle speculation to wonder at his post-sickness psychology, as it is a universal condition. The convalescent will wonder, Why did I survive? What did I do to deserve to suffer so? And what must I do to keep from suffering in future? What one must do to become well again was, in Donne's time, often less appealing than letting a disease run its course. Keith Thomas sums up the state of early modern medicine thus:

> In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries university-educated physicians were given a purely academic training in the principles of humoral physiology as set out in the works of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen. They were taught that illness sprang from an imbalance between the four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile). Diagnosis consisted in establishing which of these humours was out of line, and therapy in taking steps to restore the balance, either by blood-letting (by venesection, scarification or applying leeches) or by subjecting the patient to a course of purges and emetics… [the physician] focused on what we should regard as the symptoms of disease—fever or dysentery—rather than the disease itself (10).

The great seventeenth century physician Thomas Sydenham, arriving at same conclusion Donne does in the *Devotions*, thought that medical cures tended to be more harmful than the diseases they were purported to treat[39].

The great value of *Devotions* is the look it offers into the psychology of recovery. That it was are written by a great poet in possession of a keen theological mind and powers of concentration—and, apparently, near-miraculous recourse to lucidity—serves to nominate the feelings and fears of anyone who has passed through an analogous experience only to find himself dumb before the unconcerned universe. One option the convalescent has is to renew his life, to strive to be whatever is meant by the term *a better person.* These types are flooded by charitable feelings, as well as an excess of energy and, frequently, something akin to what Freud called the "Oceanic" feeling: That one-ness with life and matter throughout all time, producing sometimes monastics and other times philanthropists, and yet other times hedonists—many of whom are deemed madmen. But there is another option: one may descend into despair. The suddenness of infectious disease takes a man by the scruff of his life and dandles him above the world from a perilous height. And to the Renaissance mind, the question is forever, How have I

[39] Thomas, p. 17.

sinned that I deserve this, and what is expected of me now that I have recovered? Advances in medical science would be able to address the former question, sometimes pin-pointing a precise etiology; the latter query is considered outside the discourse of modern medicine. Oddly so, because "medicine"—as distinct from surgery, chirurgery, or the treatments suggested by cunning folk—was considered until the middle-late nineteenth century to be a conflation of whatever was contemporaneously known to be scientifically true, the attitude of the patient as it participated with that of the physician, and a sometimes speculative and, per the disease's vicissitudes, mercurial theology which identified human in suffering a complex theophany.

Physicians down the ages, and of every religious persuasion, have observed that a sense of peace, perhaps due to the reception of grace, often overcomes the patient in his final stage of life. Mystics believe that this peace can be experienced well before dying begins, through intense focus and (in some traditions) by the Grace of God. Mystics will suffer privation meekly; poets, not so much: John Donne's *Devotions* is the cry of a lacerated soul pried from the body and forced to lie without hope amid the terrible silence of God. Donne is not blessed with new insight or visited by angels; instead he is left to make what he can of solitude without any higher instruction. In his illness, Donne acknowledges a divine spark within humankind, but argues that we "blew it out, by our first sinne" (*Prose* 71). These are the words of an ill man who recalls his sins in snatches but cannot meditate on them. All who suffer are solipsists, Donne neither more nor less than any other. He does not manage to lose his religion altogether; instead, it mutates within him, and he states that "Solitude is a torment which is not in hell it self" (*Prose* 80). He means, somewhat humorously, that one does not lack for company among

eternity's sinners, who are more prevalent than the world's pious. The greatest torment of hell, according to some, is solitude in the form of the separation from God. Bodily illness is a simulacrum of such a torment. A man on what could be his death bed will generally become numb to divine considerations as he is prodded, bled, and filled full of this or that nostrum. (In Donne's case, dead pigeons were pressed against the soles of his feet to draw illness away from his torso[40].)

It's funny to the reader that Donne retains enough lucidity to report that "I would not make Man worse than hee is, Nor his Condition more Miserable than it is. But could I though I would?" (*Prose* 98), but it's chilling to consider the ramifications of his (temporary) self-obsession. As his body becomes grotesque and inhospitable, so, too, does the world as he sees it—a view in conformance with the Renaissance understanding of the body as microcosm. This is something beyond self-pity. We read in the *Devotions* reasoned arguments for the existence of God, but we ascertain little faith in the Paschal Mysteries. This is faith by rote. Abandoned by his health, Donne becomes his poetry: Grotesque, argumentative, bifurcated; the great metaphysician meets the attending physician, watching the watchers from within himself. Sickness, that "rebellion of the body" (*Prose* 108), is an instance of disorder, and therefore in contravention of God's nature; if it could be put back into order, disease would cease, and the patient would return to a state of grace in unity with Christ, who knew no sickness. St. Athanasius makes this connection explicit:

> Every one is by nature afraid of death and of bodily dissolution;
> the marvel of marvels is that he who is enfolded in the faith of the cross

[40] John Donne, *Selected Prose*, ed. Neil Rhodes (London, UK: Penguin Press, 1987), *Introduction*, p. x. I have relied on Rhodes' presentation of Donne's prose, which is based on first editions published in the seventeenth century, after Donne's death.

> despises this natural fear and for the sake of the cross is no longer cowardly in face of it (58).

Those who are "cowardly in the face of" sickness and death are those who have yet to accept the Christian mysteries as true. Donne, then, is not only a heretic but—being that he was Dean of St. Paul's—an apostate in a dangerous political position; his distraction from belief is akin to a dismissal of it. In *The Cross* he writes that "Material crosses, then, good physic be, / And yet spiritual have chief dignity. / These for extracted chemic med'cine serve, / And cure much better, and as well preserve" (*Poetry* 25-28). When well, the poet acknowledges the preeminent healing power of belief; in the midst of illness, by contrast, he wonders "whats become of [man's] soaring thoughts, his compassing thoughts, when himself brings himself to the ignorance, to the thoughtlessnesse of the Grave?" (*Prose79*). For Donne as for others, illness and perfect faith are not consonant, and only with the return of wellness will faith bloom, if it has not been pulled out by the root.

With some seriousness it could be said that Donne was thrilled by his sickness. The wasting, purulent body is implied by many of the poems, and death is a specific fascination. Such a dramatic illness eliminates the need for theorizing about what the body can withstand, how degraded humankind can be by ugliness, and now devout a person can remain under a massive suasion of pain. Donne despairs periodically, yet he shows courage and self-possession throughout his *Devotions*. His imagination of the grotesque body is dualistic: the soul is a thing from which courage and devotion come, the body its test. As will be discussed later at length, Donne never quite articulated a cogent account of the soul's passage from the living to the dead body.

iii. To What End? *Biathanatos* and Heretical Duality

A logical consequence of despair is a fixation on suicide. There is irony here: The convalescent can feel simultaneously grateful for his life and unworthy of living it. His suicide, then, is both a termination of personal distress and a sacrifice to his conception of a higher good. In 1608, some years before his most significant illness, John Donne wrote *Biathanatos*, a rhetorically-sound, thematically difficult defense of suicide utilizing Biblical precedents to rescue the act from the realm of mortal sin. Discussing a contemporary's intentional drowning, Donne admits that he has "often such a sickely inclination" (*Prose* 29), due to he's not quite sure what. He suspects the act itself is defensible, or at least not categorically *indefensible,* along pastoral lines, but admits that his opinion could be colored by his melancholic temperament as well as by his "having [his] first breeding and conversation with me of a suppressed and afflicted Religion…hungry of an Imagin'd Martyrdome" (ibid.)—a coded allusion to his hereditary Catholicism. Yet he proves uninterested in dispelling martyrology wholesale; rather, he expounds upon it for the sake of his argument:

> But howsoever, that none may justly say that all which kill themselves have done it out of a despaire of Gods mercy (which is the onely sinnefull despaire) we shall in a more proper place, what we come to consider the many examples exhibited in Scriptures, and other Histories, finde many who at that act have been so far from despaire, that they have esteemed it a great degree of Gods mercy to have been admitted to such a glorifying of his name, and have proceeded therein as religiously as in a sacrifice (*Prose* 32).

The foundational problem with suicide, according to Donne, has to do with motivity: The suicide of despair gives up the life God gave him, and is therefore a sinner; the suicide who dies for the sake of God's grandeur, however, is to be extolled as excellently virtuous. This is speculative theology of an urgent sort, one in which the body

participates wholly and irremediably in the practice of religion. While the early Church Fathers could argue in favor of martyrdom—although Athanasius does not explicitly do so—their position was informed by their contemporary political climate: Christians were a persecuted albeit peaceful minority, for whom the acceptance of death was the only way to meet a life of threat and privation. But in early modern England, the widespread murder of Christians did not occur; even persecuted Catholics are granted the right to lead their lives, albeit vitiated and isolated ones. Donne is calling upon the oldest Christian notions when he writes that "Our body is so much our owne, as we may use it to Gods glory, and it is so little our owne, as when hee is pleased to have it, we doe well in resigning it to him" (*Prose* 48): Assent to killing in God's name dates to Abraham, and it can be argued (this is Donne's view, more or less) that if God might command murder, He might as reasonably command *self*-murder, the pious not being encouraged to make distinctions or ask for qualifications. Donne follows this logic to a dangerous conclusion (*Biathanatos* was not published during his lifetime): If God may will a suicide (and the Bible suggests He may), and Christ had foreknowledge of His own death, then Christ committed a drawn-out suicide. Such an act of "self-killing" by our Savior would seem to eradicate the foundation upon which the sinfulness of suicide has been presumed—either that, or it appears a morbid heresy.

The implication that Christ killed Himself has profound ramifications for the faithful. One is exhorted to live a "Christ-like life," and the saints and the martyrs are approbated for their deaths, the greater portion of them in fact passively putting their lives in the hands of their nemeses so they might achieve a glorious death. The pious Christian is therefore always a suicide *manqué* in the absence of God's direct

intervention. One is put in mind of St. Francis, who sought martyrdom but was too well-liked to find it. To die for the faith is to participate to the uttermost in a Christ-like life. Generations of mystics report discussions with Christ in which He says He would die again and again, in ever more painful ways, to absolve the sins of the least among men[41]. This suggests that the epistemology of the crucifixion is not dependent upon its historical or political context; that is, Christ would have died anywhere by any hand to the same purpose. How, then, can the suicide be condemned? Donne suggests that self-willed deaths of despair are sinful, but he does not go into great detail regarding the nature and presentation of despair, and the spiritual circumstances that might mitigate its sinfulness. It seems that the Donne of the later *Devotions* despairs, but he does so that he might be refined and come nearer to his faith. It is scriptural that Christ suffered despair in Gethsemane (Luke 22: 43-44), and again on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 25:34); at what exact point is His suicidality evacuated of sinful despair and replaced with sin-free purpose? The would-be suicide of early modern England would have been troubled by Donne's argument, as are many now; the common belief was that extraordinary events of great and lasting good no longer happened, and that God intervened only to show his displeasure by means of storms, fires, and plague. Despair, then, was seen as an incomprehension of God's critique; religious council and good works were necessary to get to the root of one's suffering, at which a man would find previously unarticulated shortcomings. This should sound something like modern-day psychotherapy, while sounding too like something quite apart from and beyond it. Both the priest and the analyst assist the suffering in discovering the etiology of his pain; each prescribes what

[41] Julian of Norwich is the major English exponent of this idea.

we now call a "mindful" attitude toward this pain in the hope of achieving therapeutic remission. What the priest could promise that the analyst can't is a cogent cause-and-effect: If God has been understood properly, then we must simply do as He wishes and we will be well and remain safe. Bodily ailments, as discussed before, supplant this ability to reason, and almost necessarily remove one from God, albeit often only temporarily. Donne's radical view of suicide hinges on the transformation of despair into piety. That he does not clarify the alchemy by which this change is affected is the most unsettling part of the piece. In his own illness Donne experienced the terrible silence of God, so cannot be said to have inside knowledge of the Divine. Yet for him direct, theophanic experience is but one avenue to grace, and this belief in a transcendent dimension of the Divine inapprehensible to the human mind is clearly, classically dualistic.

iv. Last Orders: Sermons and Negative Dualism

The dualist stance is most difficult to defend in the sermons. John Donne spent the last decade of his life as an ordained priest in the Anglican church, whose doctrine he preached from no less eminent a place than St. Paul's in London. Donne's homiletics, unsurprisingly considering the fixation on the grotesque that is observable throughout the poetry and longer prose pieces, rely on the piling up of visceral imagery associated with death and decay. At times he seems less to be analyzing scripture than airing personal anxieties; Ramie Targoff argues that Donne was a dualist who yet longed for the union of body and soul, and who touches on such a possibility here and there. The sermons, indeed, challenge the idea that Donne was a dualist without superseding it. Targoff limns Donne's aesthetics thus: "The elemental and the spiritual, the body and the soul: the

excellence of God’s design lies in the fact of human dualism” (Targoff 114). If this is true—and the rest of his work seems to indicate that it is—then it is worth searching for the same tendencies in the sermons.

There is throughout Donne’s oeuvre an element of slyly humorous self-pity; he is openly “cowardly” in the *Devotions,* and in his poetry he is as often rakish as devout. Even his sermons are touched by this strangeness. An extract, *From A Sermon Preached at White-Hall, 8 March 1622* is odd for a priest, and eerily anticipates the Freudian death drive: “Doth man not die even in his birth? The breaking of prison is death, and what is our birth, but a breaking of prison?” (164). *Contra* Athanasius, death, Donne says, has not been defeated but is, in fact, the cornerstone of life. This idea recalls the medieval chant “Media vita in morte sumus,” rendered by Donne’s generational precursor Thomas Cranmer in *The Book of Common Prayer* as “in the midst of life we are in death”. The Donne of the sermons displays an obsession with death on par with Shakespeare’s during the tragic period.

To say that life begins in death is to suggest an eschatological dimension to the Oedipal drama, as indeed Donne does, in his peculiar way:

> When those bodies that have beene the children of royall parents, and the parents of royall children, must say with Job, to corruption thou art my father, and to the Worme thou art my mother and my sister. Miserable riddle, when the same worme must bee my mother, and my sister, and my selfe. Miserable incest, when I must bee married to my mother and my sister, and bee both father and mother to my owne mother and sister, beget, and beare that worme which is all that miserable penury (*Prose* 322).

This is a particularly colorful part of his final sermon—known as *Deaths Duell*—given during his final illness, shortly before his death. He is suggesting that to be born into

death is to say that death is one’s mother; life, then, is the father against whom we rebel in order that we might achieve our desired consummation with the mother—that is, that we might die and so be twinned with her, enter into the state of her. But if life is the father, and God the source of all life, then is God not the father to be transgressed against by entering into death? Donne’s fascination with the doctrinally possible defense of suicide antedates his priesthood. Yet in his pastoral career he seems to abandon the question, perhaps for reasons of job security, but maybe because it is redundant: if we are born into a death and die a final death to be death-born into the afterlife, what concern is the death-method, anyway? But doctrinally, that does not wash. The dreadful hitch in Donne’s position is that such a desire—for death, mother-reunion--can be consummated at any time, but not without committing the mortal sin of suicide; in this life-that-is-death, this quasi-Oedipal desire for death cannot be achieved, thus life itself is a purgatory between birth-death and death-salvation—unless one can argue that suicide, in some cases, is no sin.

Life characterized by death at its start also necessarily participates in the grotesque. If the grotesque involves bringing to the outside what normally remains inside the body, what is more grotesque than the act of parturition, the full deliverance of a new world-in-microcosm into death, into its grave of air and sky? Donne is explicit: in this same sermon he has it that “all our periods and transitions in this life, are so many passages from death to death (*Prose* 315)”; ours is a” life spent dying (318),” and after the “manifold deaths of the world” (ibid.) we enter a final death, rotting away in a grave, a banquet for the worms. “For in our mothers wombe wee are dead so, as that wee doe not know wee live, not so much as wee doe in our sleepe” (ibid.): everything but life is

death; life before birth is death rather than nothing, or oblivion, or any such thing. Indeed, the living do not have life if they cannot consciously think; sleepers are as simple, as mindless—as *dead*—as the infant *in utero*. Donne seemed to be interested in everything: nascent science and far-flung travel, philosophy within and without the Greco-Roman tradition, strange, discredited ideas[42]—possibly *because* they had been discredited. A dualist is, after all, a contrarian, and the sense of play at the core of the dualistic stance manifests in practice as a broad, promiscuous curiosity, by which one's core beliefs are not polluted by new or novel or evil ones because there is something about them that puts them in opposition to central dualistic principles.

The Donne of the sermons would seem to be suggesting a bizarre, almost atheistic, monism whereby life is the midwife of death after death: "dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrifaction, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave." Yet, per Targoff, "Donne was not what philosophers call a hylomorphist"—a proponent of the Aristotelian concept that the body and soul are inseparable—"He was a dualist, but he was a dualist who rejected the hierarchy of the soul over the body, a dualist who longed above all for the union, not the separation, of his two parts" (Targoff 22). Targoff contradicts the idea that Donne was a cleaver of ideas, at least if we take her meaning as broadly as we can and apply it to the poetry and prose as well as the sermons. Of course, the Donne of the poems *is*, to some extent, the Donne of the sermons. That is, the dualist-separatist philosophy that exists in the poems and longer prose pieces is still evident in the sermons, but primarily by

[42] Targoff: "Donne is skeptical of Paracelsus, whose collected works he owned and seems to have read with attention," p. 94.

implication: he desires the union of body and soul but does not always preach it. If Donne—a non-hylomorphist—believes the body and soul not to be a single unified thing, and he notes that the body decomposes after its last death without arising, then the soul must be somewhere else—it must escape putrefaction, suggesting therefore a body-soul dualism. This interpretation is central to Targoff's argument that Donne believed in the resurrection and recombination of the earthly body, within which the soul continued to live. This is not necessarily unorthodox, but it is, in Donne, unsatisfactory. Unlike William Tyndale, Donne was no psychopapannychist[43]—that is, he did not believe that the soul slept, in some intermediate state, in the grave within the body to be called up, with or without the body, into the afterlife. It would seem, then, that Donne the dualist never quite reconciled his standard position with the stated beliefs of the church. Perhaps he wished, as a husbandman of the *via media*, that yet another nuance could be discovered in a religious stance that was after all only several generations old, and self-contained within Britain.

In in extract from a *Sermon Preached at Lincolns Inne* (possibly on Easter of 1620), Donne compares the human body to a book in which God has written His laws: "All this is bound up in this velim, in this parchmin, in this skin of ours" (*Prose* 148), a corrupt thing imprinted with a beautiful law. He argues that attention paid to the body is a sacrilege; after all, "Thy Saviour neglected his skin so much, as that at last, he scares had any" (ibid.). Women are at particular risk of such corruption, as they are tempted to "that abomination of painting"—make-up—which condemnation he extends to painters as understood generally, those who "have presented to us with some horreur, the sceleton,

[43] Targoff p. 9-10.

the frame of the bones of a mans body" (ibid.). Make-up is an atavistic concern of Donne's, and as a young man he was quick to defend its use. In his *Paradoxes*, he puts it thus: "Foulness is lothesome; can that be so too which helps it?" (Prose 4). A beautifully made-up face is all the more likely to be engage in kissing, "the strange and misticall union of Soules" (ibid.), which act suggests Donne's dualistic bent by implying that only through certain types of bodily contact can souls merge, even as bodies do in manifold ways; they do not work always in concert, in other words, insinuating that they are separate things, even if one is, temporarily, within the other. He continues the *Lincolns Inn* sermon with the flat statement that "all shall rise; but not all to glory" (Prose 149). Yet if "Between that excrementall jelly that thy body is made of at first, and that jelly which they body dissolves to at last; there is not so noisome, so putrid a thing in nature" (ibid.), why is it that God in His heaven "reunites in an instant armes, and legs, bloud, and bones, in what corners so ever they be scattered" (Prose 150)? Donne acknowledges as much: "That that soule which sped so ill in that body…should willingly, nay desirously, ambitiously seek this scattered body…this is the most inconsiderable consideration" (ibid.). Yet "I the same body, and the same soul, shall be recompact again, and be identically, numerically, individually the same man" (ibid.). He expresses a horror of the grotesque body, which is made clean—yet still at first in its grotesque shape—by God at the end of time. Or is it? Donne consistently argues in the sermons for a body-soul union divinely affected, yet he is unclear on the role of the soul in that in-between time between life and afterlife—that is, during death and necrosis.

It is life as it is lived between the major jelly-makings of birth and death that is truly "so noisome, so putrid a thing in nature"; life is an appalling pitstop along the soul's

true path. Hermes has it that "no beauty and goodness are to be found in the things of the cosmos. For all things which fall under the eye are images and, as it were, paintings" (6.4 39). Donne is, consciously or otherwise, echoing Hermetic thought when he decries painters and "painted" women, both deceptively beautiful lies. If the things of this world are to be shunned, then a painting like Holbein's "Dead Christ" is an extraordinary offense, a corporealizing and profanation of Christ put on display as a dead thing for the eye to wander over, while the soul—this is the lacuna in Donne's theology; the soul must be somewhere—it cannot be destroyed—and to be holy it must not participate in the world of death and decomposition, even if it exists temporarily amid such things. The body is an object of disgust that clouds apprehension of the soul's nature; indeed, the body's various states—during sex, illness, in sorrow or joy and finally (finally?) in death—are the major subject of Donne's work in total, not the soul. The poet, like the painter, idealizes a world which ought to be shunned, and if, say, George Herbert (a contemporary of Donne's) could write devotional verse well, there was still an aspect of "painting" about it, in its careful diction and, in Herbert's case, its novel typography. Donne's poetry is difficult to date; many poems may have been written later in his life, a sort of dualist outlet for the doubtful-dualist sermon writer. It would seem, indeed, that pastoral Donne advocates for a chiliastic hermeneutics whereby the world of life must be abandoned in order to attain the world after life. He arrives in this and similar sermons by a sort of negative, apophatic dualism, whereby a renunciation and aspirational disaffiliation from the world imply a transcendental dimension of the divine without quite naming or systematizing it.

Donne's *Sermon Preached to the Honorable Company of the Virginian Plantation, 13 November 1622,* is a simplistic reiteration of his pet concerns. He urges his countrymen to colonize the new world as emissaries of Christ, not as businessmen. Indeed, in a Christmas Day sermon that same year, Donne says to his congregation, "If you will mingle the service of God, and the service of this world, there is no reconciling of God and Mammon" (*Prose* 196), orthodox enough fare—and also standard-line sacred-profane dualism. The plantation sermon strikes a discordant note, in part because the audience of today understands the brutality of that colonial arrangement: a disinterested attitude toward violence is one possible consequence of a particularly irresponsible dualism. John Cooper acknowledges that "Dividing humans into body and soul has promoted all manner of other false dualisms and dichotomies in human life (Cooper 13)," such as slavery, misogyny, et al. Yet it is not the case, as Cooper would have it, that the body-soul dichotomy as a rhetorical stance is itself responsible, in the cause-and-effect sense, for bureaucratically enforced bigotry. It is the materialism of the monistic stance, rather than some hedonistic-nihilistic dimension of the dualistic, that is responsible for hierarchization—the domain of the left hemisphere of the brain[44], to which the rigidity and gross unity of monism appeal. We are reminded by Ioan Couliano that

> A system of ideas is not innocent, and many battles are fought for…many brave Christians were disqualified by their more vociferous brethren for a simple iota that it is not hard to understand why dualists were so tenaciously and persistently tracked down until, apparently, they were altogether uprooted from Western society (*Gnosis* 240).

[44] See Iain McGilchrist, The *Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 2009.

Donne separates the divine from the fiduciary, and wholly discourages the latter. Nowhere does he argue for the soullessness of other races—whether on principle or because it was taken for granted by most educated Europeans one cannot say—and, indeed, if the mission of exploration is (as Donne might have put it) to spread the gospel, creating a world of Christians, and if being a Christian endows one with an eternal soul—even if those peoples, as pagans, previously lacked souls—then Donne would seem to be advocating both dualism and Christian orthodoxy, a happy and uncommon position on the surface that evades tackling the ethical consequences of colonialism by way of just the sort of dualistic disinterest Cooper warns of. As a dualist, and rightly or wrongly, Donne stayed out of politics to the extent that he could, unlike John Milton, a politically active monist.

John Milton: The Monist's Monist

Eve and Adam anticipate that "[they] shall be as gods" (IX.708) after eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The paganistic polytheism suggested by the plural recalls passages in the *Hermetica*; more relevantly it seems to be a gloss of St. Athanasius' exhortation for the faithful to "become God," with which suggestion, based on the outcome of the above, John Milton may have disagreed. Yet the poet hardly thought Christianity a foe to be slain or a puzzle to be decoded. As haughty a line as "our reason is our law" (IX. 654) could be read as blithely heretical, but taken in its broadest meaning this does seem to be Milton's view, his way of justifying man to God—which man has done over and over ever since. What needed justifying in the 17th century followed from that required of the 16th: The Reformation with real intellectual violence split Western Christianity apart; after such a catastrophe Europeans could begin to imagine the Church, such as it was on either side, divested from or swallowed up by a religion-surrogate. Politics, science, art, and education were crammed into the God-sized hole in the Western mind and found to fit. Ever since, with ever greater frequency and zeal, religion's substitutes have in a concerted anabasis come to occupy nearly every space in life where religion once went: doctrine has become politics; faith, science; art, propaganda; and education, which had proffered doctrine, faith, and art in something like the spirit of a humanism corrupted in the interest of ecclesiastical conformity, now renders politics, science, and propaganda into an anti-humanist, ironically Utopian project in the interest of state conformity. *Paradise Lost* was not consulted as a manual for this change, *per se*; rather, it emerged at an inflection point in the history of ideas, and represents the highest-

minded consideration of an increasingly atheistic and scientistic trend in late-Renaissance thought.

i. The New Way, Same as the Old Way: Political and Theological Concerns

Milton was a revolutionist and a Puritan, a fiercely nationalistic, hyper-rationalistic, a thoroughgoing, unabashed, unconcealed monist-immanentist whose poetic influence in the Anglophone world has seldom waned. In his mature work early modern scientism, founded on Baconian induction, reaches its apotheosis. Milton generally and *Paradise Lost* in particular crossed over a line on one side of which was an old, religious monism, while on the other side was the rationalistic, antitheistic scientism that prizes *progress*, such as it is, above timeworn values. Ioan Couliano, in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance,* locates an influential, even causative, relationship between English Puritanism and scientism: “Sociology has long since established the fact of a shift in vocational interests toward science and technology in Puritan England, bringing about a contact between scientific vocations and religious Puritanism” (xx). There may even have been an intellectual halo effect: “The decline of old Catholic beliefs was not a result of persecution: it reflected a change in the popular conception of religion” (87), not necessarily an unexpected development among England’s oppressed recusants but a surprising conclusion for the government-backed Puritan population to come to. Or perhaps not so surprising, as per Tillyard, “The Puritans and the courtiers were more united by a common theological bond than they were divided by ethical disagreements” (4).

Paradise Lost is in some sense a catalogue of Milton’s ethical disagreements and his justifications for them. The precise nature of Milton’s beliefs will continue to be

debated, probably pointlessly. His polemical tracts suggest that he was a friend of freedom and liberty, an uncommonly bold pamphleteer backing the anti-censorship cause who, when writing in favor of the right to spousal divorce, took into account women's concerns to an extraordinary extent considering the time period. But Milton was no pre-Enlightenment prophet of liberalism, a conclusion one may arrive at after reading his poetry. The prose pieces have retained popularity among educated persons, but the aggressively monistic *Paradise Lost* is the only work of Milton's that is still commonly read, or at least known by the general population as the antecedent of various references and phrases, and it therefore suffices as the locus from which Milton's point of view and thematic obsessions ought to be examined. By the lights of *PL* one can read *Areopagitica* and the divorce tracts as representing not necessary conditions of demotic freedom, but rather as possible results of a unifying, immanentizing political project that might, albeit only incidentally, nominate anti-censorship and divorce, and whatever else, as discrete rights rather than as specific and possibly unpredictable consequences of an emergent, publicly entrusted liberalism. Milton's world was yet characterized by the mutability that affected Shakespeare's and Donne's, along with almost all Englishmen of time. But Milton's answer to his age's anxiety is fundamentally different from that of the earlier poets: he seems to suggest that reform ought to take place within the church as well as the state, concluding that the two—depending on which scholar you ask—ought to become a consolidated thing. And once all legal, military, devotional, and educational sectors are corporatized to the purpose of a totalizing philosophy of progress, a Puritan/anti-royalist Utopia becomes feasible. *Paradise Lost* illustrates Milton's intent to justify man to man, to allow one to subordinate the other, even to convince the other that he *ought* to allow

himself to be subordinated in the name of the church, the state, the good of mankind—indeed, of *progress*. This is political millenarianism clothed in the vestments of the old religious monism.

The space in which *Paradise Lost* takes place has incorrectly been called dualistic: the world of *Paradise Lost* is really one contiguous, “enchanted” or “permeable” world which, per philosopher Charles Taylor, “shows a perplexing absence of certain boundaries which seem to us essential” (33), “us” being we late moderns. Satan travels between Heaven, Earth, and Hell, prevented from doing so only by rather foolish gatekeepers who can largely be charmed or argued out of the way: “Heav’n hides nothing from thy view, / Nor the deep tract of Hell” (I.27-8). God admits that “our Adversary whom no bounds / Prescribed, no bars of Hell nor all the chains / Heaped on him there nor yet the main abyss / Wide interrupt can hold” (III.81-4). Milton is at pains to make this not just clear but obvious; he even enumerates the Satanic itinerary:

> he rode / With darkness, thrice the equinoctial line
> He circled, four times crossed the car of Night/
> From pole to pole traversing each coloure,
> On th’ eighth returned and on the coast averse
> From entrance or cherubic watch by stealeth
> Found unsuspected way (IX. 63-9).

Although Satan is unable to reascend to Heaven, he is capable of visiting any other place the poem mentions, and Heaven, anyway, is not some transcendental state or an indescribable world beyond all other worlds but a physical location wherein Satan and his co-revolutionists had dwelt until just prior to the opening of the poem.

Even Satan recognizes the greatness and extent of God's power— "Heav'n hides nothing from thy view, / Nor the deep tract of Hell" (I.27-8)—and therefore he must think that he would be capable of raising an army of comparable power in order to win the war of Hell against Heaven. Another possibility is that Satan's war is purposely a suicide mission. The reader might consider Satanic motivity, at which point the traditionally dualistic view of *Paradise Lost* becomes untenable: for Satan to make at least some sense as a hero, he must be so to speak *locked out* of Heaven, which is the case in the poem, rather than situated in a dimension categorically different from and beyond it, which would be the dualistic analysis. A monistic reading of the epic further clarifies the tenuousness of the hero-Satan position consequent of dualism: if his goal is materially impossible, then Satan's assault on Heaven is not just pointless but idiotic. An idiot-Satan deprives readers of their "humiliation and [their] education" (xiii), as Stanley Fish puts it. Furthermore, the very task of writing—dictating, really—such a complex epic would have been a wasteful chore for the poet if silliness were the intent, as "Milton's concern with the ethical imperatives of political and social behaviour would hardly allow him to write an epic which did not attempt to give his audience a basis for moral action" (1). The presence of a foolish, rather than simply an ineffectual, Satan would make evil a trifle; yet nowhere in the poem does the author brush the problem of evil away blithely, which would be the point in the first place of the silly-Satan stance. It would in fact be a *dualistic* rhetorical stance, albeit a simplistic one, in that it would suggest that evil and its opposite do not coexist individually, and that the latter exists unmolested by the former. Milton's immanentism-monism is established, or nearly: he was a politically motivated moralist with an eye toward Paradise—on earth.

The monistic view, as it ever was before and will be forever after, dominated the early modern English perspective as it does, in a different form, our own. Elizabethans were “obsessed by the fear of chaos and the fact of mutability” (Tillyard 16): they took it on faith that an ideal, divine order piloted their earthly order, and “they were terrified lest it should be upset, and appalled by the visible tokens of disorder that suggested its upsetting” (ibid.). Northrop Frye is more direct in arguing that the 17th century was “a period of social history in which an aristocracy is fast losing its effective power but still retains a good deal of ideological prestige” (37). A change-averse nation headed by an atrophied aristocracy is primed, somewhat ironically, to uncouple itself from tradition and reunite more or less in the spirit of revolution, the aim of which is always to establish new traditions, hierarchies, and values. In other words, the post-revolutionary society is a nascent conglomerate awfully like the old one, but sired and subsequently destroyed with the help of the *demos*. John Milton, some decades down the line from the Elizabethan era, was particularly anxious about mutability: he wanted to manifest a new social order and thought it had arrived in the form of the Protectorate. Every monist bears this mark: the attempt to bring about an earthly “paradise” by arbitrary social redesignation and quasi-Utopian political realignment is the monist-immanentist’s great goal. By contrast, note that the dualist sees in this sort of scheme a contradiction of his worldview, which, being characterized by an unknowable space below which exists the polluted material world and the wrongdoings of ignorant mankind, is disinterested in, even hostile to, an immanentist project. The monist’s position allows no room for the transcendent experience that the dualist prizes so highly.

Indeed, the monist-immanentist view is summed up in the lapidary exhortation that "Earth be changed to Heav'n and Heav'n to Earth, / One Kingdom" (VII.160-1).

ii. Paradise Lost as Satire of Dualism/Gnosticism

Renaissance historian Wayne Shumaker has shown that Milton specifically references the *Hermetica* three times in his work[45]. These references are not in *Paradise Lost,* nor are they individually important here, but being as they are found elsewhere in Milton's work it could be said without controversy that Milton was acquainted with some Hermetic literature, and was competent enough with it to allow it to shape his work at least occasionally. How seriously did he take Hermeticism? Even absent specific references, Milton in *Paradise Lost* seems to have been serious enough about Hermeticism and related beliefs to satirize the disaffiliative dualism they imply. To bother with such material at all a poet as self-consciously serious as John Milton must have considered his satiric target a threat to some degree. This gets complicated very quickly. Milton may yet have had some sympathy for heretical belief systems[46]: the Puritan notion of the individual "divine spark" was possibly introduced into Christianity by the Gnostics, who lifted the idea from Plato. Hans Jonas is rather confident that this is

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[45] See Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), p. 245: "Milton refers three times to Hermes: in Il Penseroso (lines 87-88, where Hermes is evidently an astrologer); in Ad Joannem Rousum (line 77, where the question is of placidam…requiem, sedesque beatas to be granted partly by Hermes); and in De idea Platonica (lines 33-34, where Ter magnus Hermes appears as 'knowing in secrets,' arcani sciens). According to J.H. Hanford, 'Hermes was included in Milton's edition of Justin,' i.e., in the edition of Justin Martyr's Opera published at Cologne in 1636. Milton was willing also to consider whether any knowledge comes to us about those beings which are called Lares, Genii, and Daemons; and in the De doctrina christiana he granted the probability that 'there are certain angels appointed to preside over nations, kingdoms, and particular districts'" (245). See J.H. Hanford, John Milton Poet and Humanist (Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), p. 106, n161, and p. 86."

[46] Questions persist regarding Milton's trinitarianism. The publication of his *De Doctrina Christiana* a century and a half after his death has, as with his other prose works, addressed certain questions intriguingly without answering them satisfyingly enough to become the word of expert consensus. For an exploration of Milton's possible Arianism see Maurice Kelly, "Milton and the Trinity," *Huntington Library Quarterly,* vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 315-320.

so: “It is no exaggeration to say that the discovery of this transcendent inner principle in man and the supreme concern about its destiny is the very center of gnostic religion” (124). An odd conclusion follows from this: that Milton’s peculiar religious convictions, if not his political fixations, arguably and ironically have their root in dualist theology, making his anti-dualist immanentism resemble a sort of intellectual patricide.

Like the Gnostics, the politically active Milton was a rationalist. Hans Jonas explains: “The combination of the practical, salvational concept of knowledge with its theoretical satisfaction in quasi-rational systems of thought—the rationalization of the supranatural—was typical of the higher forms of Gnosticism and gave rise to a kind of speculation previously unknown but never afterwards to disappear from religious thought” (36). Milton’s Puritan activism is a more emphatic variety of such “quasi-rational systems of thought.” The early Gnostic Ophites— “snake people”—were, despite their peculiar method of worship, also rationalists who believed that Satan, in serpent form, was a bringer of knowledge—human self-knowledge and the knowledge of God—and was to be worshipped apparently quite literally. Milton’s own serpent-Satan is an arch rationalist who makes a compelling case to Eve: in a perfect world made just for her and her helpmate, what real harm could come of eating from the Tree? Knowledge cannot be a bad thing if it leads to a more fulsome understanding of God. Of course, the pair had not learned, or decided to ignore, the spirit of God’s law, which is to conform to God’s law without question. Stanley Fish writes, “In Milton’s monistic universe…a sin against the source is a sin against all” (159), and so it is: a single small transgression is equal to a cardinal sin, and will be punished accordingly. The stakes are high; things are

very serious. But the reader of *Paradise Lost* ought to keep in mind that seriousness is not consanguine with tragedy.

It is probably impossible for a satire to be formally tragic. In any case, the Gospels—the source of Milton's plot—are not, finally, tragic: Northrop Frye writes that "The action of comedy, like the action of the Christian Bible, moves from law to liberty" (181). Therefore Frye's assertion that "The watcher of death and tragedy has nothing to do but sit and wait for the inevitable end; but something gets born at the end of comedy, and the watcher of this birth is a member of a busy society" (170) is true of Milton's epic as well: at the end of it Adam and Eve are "born" into a new world, into a new life, characterized by a greater capacity for knowledge and dimensions of pain unimaginable in Paradise. It has been established that *Paradise Lost* is narratively comic rather than tragic, and it can therefore provide the skeleton of a lively satire. Frye states that "Satire itself appears to have begun with the Greek *silloi* which were pro-scientific attacks on superstition" (231). Milton, as established, was a monist; his type of monism is eventually subsumed by a "pro-scientific" variety. A kinder word for heresy might be "superstition."

Perhaps the moralistic Milton felt threatened by the *ne plus ultra* of dualism: nihilism, which is an amoral, pessimistic hedonism. Jonas argues this point, not about Milton but about dualism and Gnosticism in general:

> The disruption between man and the total reality is at the bottom of nihilism. The illogicality of the rupture, that is, of a dualism without metaphysics, makes its fact no less real, nor its seeming alternative any more acceptable: the stare at isolated selfhood, to which it condemns man, may wish to exchange itself for a monistic naturalism which, along with the rupture, would abolish also the idea of man as man. Between that Scylla and this her twin Charybdis, the modern mind hovers.

> Whether a third road is open to it—one by which the dualistic rift can be avoided and yet enough of the dualistic insight saved to uphold the humanity of man—philosophy must find out (340).

Nihilism is incompatible with Utopianism, and if nihilism (proto-nihilism, technically, in Milton's time), as Jonas argues captivatingly and Eric Voegelin incorrectly, is the logical conclusion of naïve dualism ("dualism without metaphysics," implying some education is necessary to avoid tipping into nihilism), it is to be feared and attacked by the active immanentist. Yet Milton's satirical voice is not as bitter as Juvenal's, or as gently bemused as Horace's. In fact, at times it seems downright deadpan. God says to the Son: "Nor shalt Thou by descending to assume / Man's nature lessen or degrade thine own. / Because Thou hast, though throned in highest bliss / Equal to God and equally enjoying / God-like fruition, quitted all to save / A world from utter loss and hast been found / By merit more than birthright Son of God" (III.303-10). The theology here is Gnostic, offered without interpretation as if it is ridiculous on its face: if by not assuming "Man's nature," which is degrading, then Christ's body on Earth must have been made of some other thing. One common Gnostic interpretation, called Docetism, argued that Christ's body was pneumatic—of angel-stuff—and He therefore felt no pain on the cross. This is so blindingly heretical that, to St. Irenaeus among others, it is laughable.[47] So it goes throughout the epic: the line "Let none seek needless cause t' approve / The faith they owe. When earnestly they seek / Such proof, conclude they then begin to fail" (IX.1140-2) is anti-rationalistic and arguably anti-Gnostic, but it would seem to implicate the rationalist Milton in the sort of Gnostic logic games he goes to some length to decry.

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[47] Is scientism an unintentional satire on the comedy of the human condition, in so far as Christians see things? Is scientistic monism, then, a parody of religious monism? There is not room here to discuss this, but it is worth taking up elsewhere, in the future.

In Luke we learn that "two fruits, good and evil have no common origin: For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Luke 6:43). Gnostic teachers had different opinions on this: if knowledge and exile are bad, then so too are the tree and its fruit; if good, so it is with the tree and fruit. One could almost have it both ways: bad fruit is responsible for mankind's torment in an alien world of matter, while thanks to good fruit he at least knows it. A line from Proverbs asserts Gnostic values, although somewhat torturously: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). A Gnostic would cheer the "wisdom and instruction" being commended, while proffering the idea that "the Lord" is two beings, the all-good One and the demiurge that created the material world and was incorrectly identified in Genesis as consanguine with the good God. Again, these ideas are rehearsed in the *Hermetica*. Hermes: "What is born is full of suffering, for birth is suffering; and when there is suffering the Supreme Good is never there; and when this Good is there, there is no suffering at all" (6.2). But a life that is only suffering, in anticipation of a world beyond which cannot be apprehended while on this earth, is not inherently comic, silly as it is on its face to the orthodox. Formally this is not the stuff of comedy: "The ritual pattern behind the catharsis of comedy is the resurrection that follows the death, the epiphany or manifestation of the risen hero" (215), which is the case in an orthodox reading of Genesis[48] and therefore in *Paradise Lost*.

The roles death and intentionality play in comedy are complicated when they show up in a secondary plot subordinated by a larger and more complex one. Nested

[48] This is true in terms of a Christological reading, but an historiographical or Judaic reading reveals something else.

concentricities of plot do not necessarily have to follow the broader comic outline, although the extent to which they do brings a formal and thematic excellence to the piece. One can wonder, then, about the unsatisfying absence of Satan periodically and then permanently in the latter half of the poem. Earlier I mentioned a reading of Satan's rebellion as a sort of suicide—one that becomes figurative in its failure to manifest literally. Michael and Raphael seem to think they know about everything God knows. Satan, then, could have presumed as much, but one would imagine that in a war against God the rebel army would lose—that they would lose *everything*. The army must, then, have been prepared for death. In fact, the only options, logically, are death or total victory, the latter of which is impossible yet not necessarily. A reader must recognize that, while not impossible, a Satanic overthrow of God is so unlikely as to be out of consideration, "hence," Frye writes, "the importance of the theme of creating and dispelling illusion in comedy: the illusions caused by disguise, obsession, hypocrisy, or unknown parentage" (170). If Satan's illusion remains throughout the poem—throughout the portions he is in, anyway—it is yet not an illusion to a reader, who as an intelligence separate from the events of the poem necessarily by such a condition rids himself of illusions: the "disguise" of the serpent-Satan, the "obsession" of an ineffectual Satan, the "hypocrisy," one could deem it, of God and The Son who, unlike Satan, are not aggrandized versions of what they are in scripture, and are in fact unmemorable, their scenes the most tedious. Is this a sort of hypocrisy of the orthodox poet's? No serious person has ever called *Paradise Lost* "Satanic," but it might seem, perhaps to a young or inexperienced reader, that Milton had a preference for Satan, considering the outsized attention his poem gives him. Perhaps this represents a feint toward suicide in the form of

state execution: just as Shakespeare risked condemnation by writing and performing his witchiest play for the anti-demoniac James IV, the blind, aging Milton—who unlike many of his peers escaped execution for their roles in Cromwell's government—may have put forth a Satan-heavy poem as a dare. To the unsympathetic reader it is as if he is admitting that he is old, suffering, and hopeless; he has abandoned quiet contemplation of God for the fireworks and histrionics of the Satanic scenes.

iii. Scientism and the Misprision of Humanism

According to Ramie Targoff, "For Milton, to be all spirit is to be 'improved' from the human condition of embodiment" (18): "Time may come when men / With angels may participate and find / No inconvenient diet nor too light fare. / And from these corporal nutriments perhaps/Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit" (V. 493-6). Transmogrification from the material to the pneumatic body is the objective for Milton, and if, in *Paradise Lost*, no person has yet done so, the two people in existence have no reason to doubt the word of God's angels who say they should be able to. The angels enjoy the same things man does:

> Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st
> (And pure thou were created) we enjoy
> In eminence and obstacle find none
> Of membrane, joint or limb, exclusive bars.
> Easier than air with air, if spirits embrace,
> Total they mix, union of pure with pure
> Desiring, nor restrained conveyance need
> As flesh or soul with soul (VIII. 622-9).

But the things the angels eat and the sex the angels have are better than mankind's analogs because the pneumatic body itself is to be preferred over the material, the fleshly

body. This in contravention of John Donne's belief that the body, while troublesome at times, was worth being resurrected wholesale, rather than being transformed into transmundane pseudo-matter. Donne's body-soul dualism allowed him room to sentimentalize, eroticize, and display grotesquely embodiment; Milton's monism demands that the body, like the state, be improved—or at least be improvable in the first place, and that it is one's responsibility to try to do so to the fullest possible extent. And if that responsibility is paramount, the devout monist must make the facts of the matter fit to defend his plan.

While "The work some praise / And some the architect" (I. 731-2), the totalizing impulse leaves the monist desperate to flatter both, which he can do only if these each come up to code. Should this architect appear unworthy, then it is not his tower that needs fixing but his nature, responsibility and talent that must be qualified. This perfectionist tendency is always present among monistic thinkers: the creator God, of course, cannot be bad (or, as the Gnostics would have it, evil, or indifferent, and in any case a being other than the true God) even if the lives of His highest creations are characterized by misfortunate and grief, and end after a shockingly brief time considering the age of creation on Earth. Where the Gnostic or dualist might make sense of the creation of evil by an all-good being by arguing that that being is not God *qua* God but a lower demiurge not to be worshipped or trusted[49], the Puritan, unable to deny the supremacy and truth of the God of the Tanakh and harboring revolutionary tendencies concludes that mankind is prone to sin and therefore potentially evil—which is a

[49] Cf. John Donne, who was not a Gnostic but rather a dualist whose primary concern was eschatological embodiment; that is, his dualism focused on the mind/body problem and its salvational implications, while the Gnostic's first duty is to explain away evil.

precarious rhetorical stance. In effect, God and heaven are traded for man and his material world. Man thereby assumes the role of an Augustinian damned creature, enlightened by arbitrary and unknown grace and capable of material, if not spiritual, perfectibility. From just this sort of situation arises the paradox of the "Protestant work ethic and the spirit of capitalism," noted by sociologist Max Weber: God's will saves only the elect, and to demonstrate they are indeed chosen but don't yet know it, the elect must be as successful and perfect as possible. This new Protestant revolutionary, staid and steely, sublimates the Athanasian quest to "become God" into his effort to keep up with the Joneses.

Milton wrote:

> Why should not Man
> Retaining still divine similitude
> In part from such deformitie be free
> And for his Maker's image sake exempt?
>
> Their Maker's image, answered Michael, then
> Forsook them when themselves they vilified
> To serve ungoverned appetite
> And took His image whom they served, a brutish vice,
> Inductive mainly to the sin of Eve.
> Therefore so abject is their punishment,
> Disfiguring not God's likeness but their own (XI.511-21).

The ontology at work here is anfractuous: man, made in the physical image of God, was made morally inferior, and as a consequence of this inferiority he sins; yet why, Adam wonders, does God not eliminate altogether sin ("such deformitie") for His reputation's,

His image's, sake? Michael's answer is that sin put man beyond God's grace—made man a distortion or an abject version of His image which affected God's stature not at all. According to Tillyard, "*Paradise Lost* is in the main a traditional and orthodox poem," treating as themes the "two great components of the traditional world picture: the glory of creation and the havoc sin made of it" (23). Adam is prevaricating between orthodoxy and a sort of Gnosticism. It is the Puritan overcoating that gives the sect its monistic bent: small societies pull away from the world to live a simple, Biblically legalistic life. But that smallness, that reclusiveness, can be scaled up, and this is what the Puritans who remained in England and executed King Charles I managed, forever with an eye toward a new method of human socialization. There was nothing about Puritanism quite heretical enough to keep its initiates outside or apart from the circles of power. Satan represents the successful Protestant revolutionary who realizes some of his perfectionist project—and who also cannot, due to the laws of nature which only a God antipathetic toward him can change, bring his plan to full bloom. The Protestant immanentist is saying, at the very bottom of his scheming, that God made a mistake, that the world isn't what it was meant to be. The religious monist is, in effect, either a blasphemous demiurge rejecting God's plan for his own, or something close to a true Gnostic, who believes that the god that made the world was not God, thus resistance is not blasphemy if what one is resisting is the plot of some stupid or evil creator-demiurge. This can become tangled: the Puritan revolutionary is, despite what may look like his blasphemous immanentism, neither Gnostic nor dualistic, and it is his immanentism that makes him so. No Gnostic, and hardly any dualist Christian, would presume to enact an inscrutable God's unknowable plan, whereas the Christian monist-revolutionary thinks he has a line on what God wants

and knows how to get it done. The monist does not think he knows *better* than God, just better than everyone else in the world and, his template being Eden, he seeks to return the world of man to its natural state of perfection.

In our time, one can see that the word of God has been superseded by the success of intelligent scientific effort. The scientistic mind must conclude that God, therefore, was either wrong, lying, or to us seemingly mistaken for some unintelligible reason, and only in this last and most opaque case does God make any sense at all as the God of scripture. From the dualist point of view, it is strange and unhelpful to discard an entire tradition because of a few technical mistakes in its bylaws. The monist, however, can brook nothing less than a totalizing narrative: exceptions to the rule are not, as they are for the disinterested scientist, simply exceptions, but rather landmines of proof that detonate beneath an established truth and atomize its validity as an idea even worth considering. This is modernity's *agon* between science and religion. The theological monist is either the religious devout who argues that Biblical imprecisions are human misinterpretations, or the atheist who forces him into that position. The atheist is simply hostile to religion; the scientistic atheist is hostile, but he has a plan. Milton puts it this way: "Our Maker bids increase. Who bids abstain / But our destroyer, foe to God and Man (IV 748-9)—that is, anyone opposing the monistic order (in this case God's word) is an enemy of progress (those who do not increase, "foe[s] to God and Man"). There are no half measures when one is trying to build Utopia, and the final irony is that the religious monism Milton represents would shed its theological concerns only to apply its methods in the pursuit of a scientistic eschaton, which has only material meaning.

The immanentist tendency seen in certain monists often involves maximum-scale political and religious reform. And what can scale up can, at least in this case, be scaled down: the monist's experience of the world is highly egoistic; he can fashion himself into God's emissary on earth and thereby justify his reconstruction of the material world. If God is a material concern, then the monist has no need for the transcendental: it is immaterial, difficult to explain, and illogical. We see a sort of proto-scientific monism at work here in the privileging of material proof over experiential wisdom or speculative philosophy. It isn't that the scientific method is bad, it isn't even that the scientific method can't answer every question, it's that the scientistic monist *thinks* it can and will steamroll all moderating voices. The discourse of materialist immanentism is collectivist, which would seem to be just a step removed from the purpose of any major religion. That is, the Utopian wants what's best for everyone he thinks deserves it—he makes the decision on who goes to Heaven and who to Hell—but stops before reunion with God, the One, the Monad, et al. This is not a difference simply of degree but of categorical quality: the modern term Christian atheist is a non-sequitur.[50] Milton wants it both ways: he wants to create Paradise, choose who gets to go there, and eliminate competition, all the while knowing that what he is doing is just what God would do in his situation.

The physician and the medical laboratory researcher are scientistic, commonly atheistic, monists responsible, under the modern immanentist hegemony, for addressing human cosmology and the problem of evil. The obvious objection here is that they are trained to do no such thing. But formal training is not necessarily as important as

[50] Deism expressed a disinterest in God, but God still had His part to play in the system.

broadmindedness; therefore, a physician-philosopher is possible (and we have seen some: Lewis Thomas, Anton Chekhov, Walker Percy, the grotesque humanist Rabelais, etc.), but no physician has any real incentive to become one. Medicine is a difficult, rewarding career lionized by the hegemon and generally trusted by the *demos*, whereas the philosopher is dismissed as self-indulgently recondite and materially unhelpful; why, in that light, would a medical doctor tarnish the bright gleam of his status by plashing about in the eternal mudbank of philosophy? James Le Fanu writes in his history of medicine "The demonstration of the curability of tuberculosis and the role of smoking in lung cancer changed" the public's trust in medicine, "for both relied on statistical methods of proof that soon permeated every aspect of medicine to become the main—indeed the sole—arbiter of 'scientific truth'" (27). This was a 20th century event that mirrored other scientistic shifts. John W. Cooper warns against the scientist-immanentist project: "Although great advances have been made in understanding the functions of the brain and their correlation with various mental states, there is no conceptual need to abandon a doctrinally required dualism in favor of monism" (xxvi), although he does state that dualism "has been associated with the resistance of some physicians and psychologists to consider psychosomatic actors in the treatment of their patients" (Cooper 31), an assertion expounding upon Le Fanu's comment on statistical methodology's presumed superiority over all other forms of medical exploration: patient report, cultural examination, the presence of autoimmunity, etc. While Cooper, among others, finds dualism a useful stance from which to examine Christianity, anyone interested in progress would necessarily move forward within the monistic realm. In the way that minor doctrinal matters once consumed and sundered different religious sects, monistic

scientism cannot recognize multiple viewpoints or data-gathering methods as valid or useful. This is not supremacy for its own sake: the scientific project demands that the world and everything that is known about it conform to an extant framework arrived at via a falsifiability that it cannot itself abide. Scientistic monists can change their minds: with relativity theory Einstein took from Newton what Newton had taken from God, namely an abiding world-picture with its gears in place and visible for the curious. And there is scientistic sectarianism, which can mislead members of the general public, in the case of medical controversy, at their most vulnerable. Milton's cosmological materialism presages the current broadly-accepted theory on the creation of all matter. God created Milton's world. Big bang theory is, from one point of view, the conventionalization of the Ur-miracle in scientistic terms.

The monism of the physician, and of the scientistic immanentist generally, is a misprision of Renaissance humanism, which had both an orthodox and an occult religious dimension that the scientist subsequently gutted from it. This misreading is understandable: McKnight explains that for Ficino, Bruno, et al, "magic, which was condemned by medieval theology, became the highest stage of philosophy and inspired the search for the means to control nature and to perfect society" (40). Occultism, judicial astrology, alchemy, and other proto-scientific means of acquiring knowledge of the natural world each had at that point a magical component, in the sense that the magus-scientist was able to accept broken chains of cause and effect as acceptable proof of natural fact, there being some magical *B* that, somehow or other, got you from *A* to *C*. We can see this curiosity and thrill of discovery in the post-Baconian scientists, whose formal method provided a natural explanation of the magician's miraculous-seeming step

B. The early Renaissance magicians display this same love of knowledge for its own sake, but they differ from the modern scientist in that everything they could discover about the natural world ostensibly led to a single point, at which point the nature of God could be understood, God being *a priori* natural fact. The scientific method is more rigorous than the magical or hermeneutical: one must establish causality in order to explain results, while magic was methodologically sloppy and its explanations speculatively cosmological—which is to say, lacking any material proof. But increasingly over time adopters of the scientific method, confidently rid of the infestation of superstition and the yoke of God, would take less seriously the method's final rhetorical step—drawing a conclusion and articulating it to an audience—until explanations became so abstruse, methodologies so anfractuous, and scientists and physicians so disinterested in slow-walking an ignorant public through an experiment and spelling out for them the ramifications of their hard-won conclusions, that the public good—an expression indicative of a secular humanism—was ceded to the elevation of research for its own sake. Experiments are often well-designed, but conclusions are illogical, even unlikely. Scientism did not develop an oppressive streak over time, its discoveries just made millions of micro-cases against the older religious monism. But from the beginning—which began before the scientific method— scientism arrived in the clothes of mysticism: Pico della Mirandola's two forms of magic, one blasphemous and demonic, the other which "proves, when thoroughly investigated, to be nothing else but the highest realization of natural philosophy" (53), are equally suspect and, in the Neoplatonist magical tradition, not necessarily materially different. The magician paid lip service to Christian orthodoxy while the scientistic pseudo-Christian was not much mired in

concerns over the religious legality of his practice. In the character of Prospero we can see magic as a system of radical material control. The modern scientistic view removes questions of piety altogether and explains magic as naturalistic but misunderstood by simpler people. Heidegger is skeptical of at least the methodology involved in this development. He has it that "modern science's way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces" (20), a neat description of scientistic monism that implies that such a view has its logical end in something inimical to the flourishing of potentially all life on this planet.

I have probably made *Paradise Lost* seem pessimistic, even anti-humanist. Pessimism is probably endemic to satire, and a thwarted revolutionary like Milton would not encourage himself to compose lighter fare. At issue is a common misunderstanding of humanism, particularly as it began in the Florentine Renaissance and eventually arrived on English shores. It is worth examining the key Renaissance humanist tract, Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man,* in relation to Milton's Puritan monism. The much-vaunted humanism—really a cosmopolitan elitism—of this polemic paves the way for, and encourages, the arrogance of the science-centric immanentist. In his *Oration* Pico writes that man is best of all creatures; he receives "the envy, not of the brutes alone, but of the astral beings and of the very intelligences which dwell beyond the confines of the world" (4). This is certainly true in *Paradise Lost*. Adam, and to a much lesser extent Eve, converses with angels in various states of being—pneumatic, serpentine, etc. Pico, and Milton to some extent, is orthodoxically anthropocentric, yet creepingly paganistic: Pico's desire for a syncretic system incorporating Christianity, classical paganism, Hermeticism, and Kabbalah is in service of a weird, highly modern elitism privileging the

magicians (the proto-scientists), with designs on deconstructing the church. He commands readers to forgo the advice of the divines: "Let us disdain the things of earth, hold as little worth even the astral orders and, putting behind us all the things of this world, hasten to that court beyond the world, closest to the most exalted Godhead" (12). Milton parts ways with Pico here. The poet's immanentist tendences would mean nothing if he agreed that the things of this world are worthless; that is in face a non sequitur, as an immanentist does not attempt to improve to the highest possible degree a thing he hates. The idea of turning away from the material has scriptural precedent; disinterest in "the astral orders" is, arguably, scripturally sound as well, albeit contrary to tradition. The selection of the word *Godhead* in Pico's passage is a giveaway. It is awfully Neoplatonic, even Gnostic. Why not just *God*? Pico is aiming to defuse the power of God over the lives of Europeans. For that, he is generally considered a rational humanist, when what he really was, based on a close reading of his *Oration*, was an elitist quasi-dualist. Paraphrasing Empedocles, he claims that "there is in our souls a dual nature; the one bears us upward toward the heavenly regions; by the other we are dragged downward toward regions infernal, through friendship and discord, war and peace'' (19)—a comfortably Platonic notion establishing body-soul dualism. From there arrives at this:

> Openly to reveal to the people the hidden mysteries and the secret intentions of the highest divinity, which lay concealed under the hard shell of the law and the rough vesture of language, what else could this be but to throw holy things to dogs and to strew gems among swine? The decision, consequently, to keep such things hidden from the vulgar and to communicate them only to the initiate, among whom alone, as Paul says, wisdom speaks, was not a counsel of human prudence but a divine command…Origen asserts that Jesus Christ, the Teacher of Life, revealed many things to His disciples which they in turn were unwilling to commit to writing lest they become the common possession of the crowd" (60-1).

This is a dilation of both Luke 8:10—"And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand"—and Matthew 13:11—"He answered and said unto them…it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given"—making doctrinally sound the idea of withholding scriptural knowledge from the "common crowd." Such an interpretation would seem not to have the church's best interests in mind. Some in 1517 agreed: a quarter century after Pico's death Martin Luther would decide that problems of elitism and corruption in the church could only be solved by a destructive, interruptive, bitter assault on tradition, so that those at the head of the Reformation hierarchy could establish their own sort of elitism, and waste into irrelevance in a corruption particular to themselves. In Milton's time, the ascendant Puritan sect-collective would go so far in its demand for power as to execute a king and persecute his subjects, who historically could be punished for practicing Catholicism or Judaism—that is, they were already shouldered with a heavy theological yoke. In contravention of John W. Cooper, who worried that a dualism broken free of the seminary would be a mean world's excuse for inequality and cruelty, it is monism, not dualism, that is characterized by a worrisome elitism.

Pico's humanism, at times glancingly dualistic, is yet, in the cumulative force of his argument, an immanentist *cri du coeur* whose polyglot syncretism deflects from his pessimism and totalizing tendencies. The *Oration* has it that it is "not freedom from a body, but its spiritual intelligence, which makes the angel" (10), which suggests that angels are not different from mankind materially or ontologically; angels are men who have attained a maximal understanding of God. Even pre-transgression Adam knows that

“’To attain / The heighth and depth of Thy eternal ways / all human thoughts come short, Supreme of Things” (VIII. 411-13), which, if true, means that Adam and Eve can only ascend through the angelic orders by way of an apophatic experience of God: the *via negative*—a surrendering of the whatness of God in favor of a what-God-isn’t-ness—is the articulable dimension of the mystic experience, and even then it is generally impenetrably recondite and self-contradictory—not to mention dualistic. That is key: Milton’s Adam is a Pollyanna who is just glad someone is talking to him. Anything he thinks, any theological speculation he speaks in the poem, cannot, therefore, mean to be revealing or particularly intelligent; what Milton is doing here is propounding dualism as the province of the natural idiot, which is right in line with his satirical gloss of such a stance. But, of course, he goes one step further: satirist-monist wields his pen and takes his revenge, but the revolutionist-monist brandishes his gun and takes what he wants. Humanism is not only not incompatible with revolutionary Utopianism, it is its very moral center. That does not mean that the monist’s eschaton cannot in some ways improve the lives of the oppressed. It’s just that it never does so for long, and to argue in favor of trying it again the revolutionary has recourse not to history—which proves exactly the other point—but to a rhetoric of misprision. Humanism connotes a concern for everyone’s well-being, and characterizes the revolutionary, too. The problem is that the revolutionary has decided that everyone needs what *he* says they need, not what they feel could solve their problems or improve their lives, and as the religious monist has become the scientistic monist he has amassed reams of data by which he can *prove to you* that he knows better than you what’s good for you. The religious, Miltonian, monist is not at odds with humanism in its original sense—in which it was meant exclusively for

certain educated humans of the gentry—while those disinterested in revolution—peace-lovers who are what most people think of when they hear *humanism*—are left yearning for the more involuted world of Shakespeare and Donne, for the knottily syncretic poetry of a porous age of wonder and mystery.

Epilogue: Thoughts on the Way Out

Guiraut Riquier, the last of the Occitan troubadours, survived a genocide and later wrote, in his poem “Ab plazen”:

> Bringing harm
> Night wears on,
> It would seem.
> Such chagrin
> I’ve not known.
> No sweet dream,
> For I can’t see her I admire,
> Though to comfort her I aspire,
> And desire
> To see the dawn.[51]

This verse seems simplistic now because the tradition Riquier was part of has been thoroughly conventionalized by various European balladic traditions. Yet a close reading, keeping the poet’s ethno-religious particularity in mind, reveals a symbol system that, while more or less intelligible today, is inaccessible to a culture ignorant of Neoplatonist and Gnostic traditions. Night—ignorance— “brings harm,” apparently (“It would seem”), and in an evil world of distractions and illusions the facts as apprehended by the primary senses are indeed suspect. The balladeer up to this point has not known “Such chagrin”: he is only now recognizing the fact of his ignorance, possibly as an aftereffect of an apophatic revelation which, being difficult to express, is loosely implied but not stated in the verse. The persona cannot see the “her” that he admires—the beloved noblewoman,

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[51] Translated by A.S. Kline, 2009, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/FromDawnToDawn.php#anchor_Toc246328036. Accessed 04/23/2021.

yes, but also the church, a feminized metaphor for the Bride of Christ. She could also be Sophia, a sacrificial female knowledge-bringer in many Gnostic systems. The poet will do only as much as is required to "comfort" her: he will just barely stay alive, only just keep breathing—*aspire* from the Latin *aspirare*, *to breathe*—because this world is not what is worthwhile. The realm beyond is what he desires, and "To see the dawn" is to recognize and modify one's prior ignorance. This may or may not be pessimistic, depending on one's sympathy, or antipathy, toward Gnosticism. And perhaps a survivor of genocide is entitled to a certain extravagance of rhetoric and emotion.

Riquier lived long enough to amass a corpus of lyric poetry whose influence, formally and cosmologically, survives in Chaucer and Malory[52]; it is evidenced in Shakespeare's songs, interpolated into Donne's close-to-the-bone poetry, and it is indirectly satirized by Milton the anti-dualist epicist. One could say that, taking it as a whole, pre-modern poetry influenced by Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, or dualism, makes up an apocryphon—a "secret book"—expressive of a secret history, the writings of whose chroniclers have in a sense been smuggled out of their own era, where they were inconvenient and even dangerous, and into our own, theoretically more tolerant, time.

It is probably clear, although I hope I haven't made the point too aggressively, that I am sympathetic for any number of reasons to the dualist position, which I associate with tolerance, curiosity, peacefulness, and other such values that I find worthwhile, over

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[52] See Meric Tutku Ozmen and Safak Horzum, "The Reversal of Courtly Love Tradition in Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur: The Case of Tristan and Isolde." *SÖYLEM Filoloji Dergisi*. December 2018 for a discussion of Malory's heterodox treatment of courtly love, a view Chaucer took periodically. Eg. "The Knight's Tale" ticks off the major troubadour boxes but it is made the subject of parody elsewhere in *The Canterbury Tales*.

the monist position. But it does no good to sentimentalize. As discussed, dualism can be implicated in various bigotries and social disturbances, albeit on a small scale and primarily to a merely local extent. But the so-called "dualism," so often implicated in world-breaking terrors, that separates and opposes master and slave, supreme race and inferior, male and female, is really a totalizing monism that, as discussed in the preface, totemizes what those in power claim to be all-powerful target groups, which are always minority populations—except in the case of women, who for reasons outside the purview of this paper tend to be overmastered by a particularly sophisticated brutality despite their being often a majority, or at least a large plurality, of any population. A group does not "dehumanize" those it oppresses; there is no point in dominating anyone who does not value freedom and reason—the very point of the master-slave relationship is a cruel and ironic reflexive disgust. No totalitarian state has tyrannized, say, horses, who can yet be haughty, violent, disease-ridden, and inarticulate—which traits, when pointedly presumed about some fringe human group, mark them for oppression.

One can be a dualist in a vacuum; to be a monist is to join the majority in plugging up all vacuums. To an extent, the monist-dualist problem inheres on crowd psychology: often, what begins as a generous cause naturally winning the support of the majority ends in internecine struggle, and too little is done in between to justify the bloodletting. That being the case, Ioan Couliano expresses the surface appeal of contrarian dualism:

> It was, after all, a lucky event that the gnostics were losers in history; for had they not been, they would have chosen one path and walked it forever. Since they had no chance to do it, they deserve the appealing title of champions of free thought in Western history, freedom

> to think through not one but all possible choices of a logical problem (242).

Couliano held the dualist rearguard until an agent of the totalitarian nation of his birth flew from Bucharest to Chicago and shot him in the head while he was on the toilet, ostensibly a humiliating way to die. Yet it would probably be clear to most that the dishonor lies with the still-anonymous Romanian assassin and not the brilliant professor who escaped that regime and used his fame to magnify its imbecilities.

Even today, certain monists are genocidal. Most are not. The monists of Western democracies insist that, as they are not committing genocide, the price they want to exact for the world they want to see is trifling—that they can at worst be called annoying but well-meaning. It would be going too far to make the point to say that monistic revolutionism, wherever it begins, ends in totalitarianism. Yet that is essentially the revolutionary's goal, by which lights peace and contentment are bourgeois roadblocks. Most monists are short-winded and basically physically non-violent, but their propaganda requires a visceral impact to recruit fellow-travelers. It's not that speech itself is violence. At issue is the evermore sophisticated utilization of a kind of psychological sadism that resembles and adopts its discourse from medical treatment; followers of the day's scientism—that is to say, followers who recognize its tenets as good and true—can thereby penalize themselves as deficient rather than simply ignorant, and the deficient, of course, have no right to participate in the immanentist project they support more histrionically than anyone else. The teleology of revolutionary monism is always theoretical rather than human. The implication that material improvement will result in human contentment is suspect, because an elite group of revolutionaries always decides what is materially good, and who is human.

For now, the bastard child of Milton's revolutionism has won out over Donne's dualism or Shakespeare's *via media*. We in technocratic democracies are at the mercy of scientistic advancement for its own sake: I can only pay my electric bill digitally; I require a computer to do so; my computer needs to be plugged into an electrical socket in order to work; the power is out because I couldn't pay the bill on my dead computer, etc. This is a frivolous example meant to stand in for truly serious matters, one of which is a rising tide of skepticism toward technology. I would seem like just the sort of person who would cheer on such a movement. But the unfortunate outcome of anti-technologization has been the fellow-traveling of the anti-*scientistic* group and an anti-*science* cohort that by association implicates the former group in the latter's idiocy.

As a consequence of the hegemonic adoption of a hard-lined scientism, the important things that important people are supposed to do don't get done. To take an American concern as an example: one can read in major news and cultural organs an atavistic call to treat shootings "as a public health crisis," an obnoxious non sequitur favored by people who talk incessantly about "health care" and know nothing of medicine—the scientistic hegemon, in other words. I will forgo listing additional examples, because that one makes the point well enough: it is through *science* that Utopia will be immanentized, and science, being disinterested, will create a formally perfect society that we can look forward to with Panglossian eagerness! But science is not disinterested, and does not in itself advocate for anything. *Science* refers to both a formal construct—a standard rhetorical tool—and the body of observable yet disprovable facts discovered thereby. It is logical, or is supposed to be: a hallmark of scientism is its

antagonism toward philosophy, which is exactly the thing the scientist needs to draw conclusions about his experiments. Today, a scientist without such a foundation does not even consider, let alone articulate, this, and his principal audience of devotees would not understand it if he did.

The point for them is not to understand. It just is, it *just must be*. I favor the dualistic mode because by that route one can understand both the facts and the truths of the world. The world all around us is not all there is, and I have no scientific proof of that because it is categorically not a scientific question. Supernaturalism and logic are incompatible. Each requires a different sense, so to speak; religion, whatever exactly it is, is a dimension of curiosity and understanding inherent in people that, like any other sense or ability, is missing in a small percentage of the population. It probably isn't a material thing, but, for the sake of a thought experiment, please pretend that it is. If a friend asked you, "Did you see that?" it would be nonsensical to answer, "I didn't hear anything": they are categorically different modes of apprehension. In this way scientific inquiry cannot satisfy religious seeking. They are asking two different kinds of questions that are only accurately answerable in their own respective degrees. One can find it put much better in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*: "[The religious faculty] becomes an essential organ of our life, performing a function which no other portion of our nature can so successfully fulfill" (58). The eschaton is not coming around the next corner of this "world without end," as Shakespeare knew, Donne prevaricated on, and Milton rejected. A Miltonian society will be revolutionary, and if it reaches a certain level and amasses enough of a following, it will crush the dualists—the Shakespeareans, the Donne-ists—beneath the weight of its assumed responsibility.

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