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THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN DONNE'S BODY POLITIC

by

Carolyn Marino

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council

For Honors in English Literary Studies

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Abstract

This thesis investigates John Donne's body/soul dialectic, and discusses how this relationship extends towards both the individuated and communal body. The first chapter grounds Donne's "Songs and Sonnets" in theology through his facilitation of the Platonic Ladder and the Great Chain of Being. It also gestures towards a shift in Donne's poetry from subjectivity to intersubjectivity. Finally, it discusses Donne's commissioned elegies, interrogating Renaissance ideas about the gendered soul, and expounding upon the impact of one person's death on the communal body. The second chapter historically contextualizes ideas of martyrdom, suicide, and Donne's term "self-homicide." It discusses the content of the sermons delivered at Paul's Cross outside St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and how these ideas helped to form religious thought during the early sixteenth century. It serves to discuss the heterodoxy of Donne's ideas regarding suicide, in contrast with his more orthodox ideas concerning martyrdom. The second chapter also yokes bodily violence to soteriology, and expounds upon the idea that the soul is edified through this violence. Overall, this thesis serves to provide an overview of Donne's body/soul dialectic throughout his oeuvre. It provides a theorization of why Donne would have endorsed relinquishing the body, despite claiming in a 1627 sermon that he loved it better than his soul.

Introduction

In the 1580s, the Spanish Armada threatened to invade Elizabethan England with the intent of reinstating Catholicism in England. When the mission failed, the schism between Protestant and Catholic sects in England deepened. Future coterie poet and esteemed pastor John Donne was a Catholic youth at the time. As a result of this conflict and others, Donne was fraught with ambivalence; he felt that he had to choose loyalty to his theology or to his sovereign. Donne's mother was ostracized for recusancy, and his brother was convicted for being a Catholic sympathizer. The persecution of his Catholic family members weighed heavily on him as he transitioned into one of the most influential positions in the English Protestant Church: Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in central London. His role was both theological and political; he was responsible for preaching on doctrine that was mandated by the sovereign. His mediation between Catholic and Protestant dogmas is ultimately an effort to heal the collective soul of a fissured nation.

Upon the death of Ann Cokayne's son Thomas in 1628, Donne sent a homily with the following consolation:

Our souls are trulie said to be in everie part of our bodies; but yet, if any part of the bodie be cut off, no part of the soul perishes, but is suckt in to the soul that remains, in that that remains of the body. When any limb or branch of the family is taken away, the vertue, the love, and (for the most part) the patrimonie and fortune of him that is gone, remaines with the family (*A Collection of Letters*, 347-8).¹

¹ Stubbs, John. *Donne: The Reformed Soul*. London: Penguin Books, 2006.

During this time, Donne was an Anglican pastor and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He was mourning his daughter's death and slowly approaching his own death, which would occur in 1631. In this homily, Donne presents an analogy that encapsulates his body/soul dialectic; an individual's death affects the communal body as losing a limb alters an individual body. Although the body no longer functions as it was originally intended to, its spirit remains the same, as the soul is imbued within its remaining members. This idea extends to Donne's body politic, which deems the political body to also be theological.

This thesis explores Donne's body politic mediated through Christianity. Donne grapples with conflicting Catholic and Protestant doctrines in order to approach an understanding of the relationship between the body and the soul, and how this relationship operates within and extends outward to the communal body. Donne also invokes Scholastic teaching, as well as early paradigms of order, as he enters into a dialectic, as opposed to a bifurcation, of body and soul. The Great Chain of Being and the Platonic Ladder facilitate Donne's ruminations. Despite the fact that Donne elevates the body over the soul, the two entities are often at war in Donne's poetry. *Biathanatos* rationalizes "self-homicide," offering a heterodox defense of suicide as a means of initiating one's entry into the communion of martyrs. Donne's final death mask engraving portrays his atrophying, yet content face as he prepares to relinquish his body with the understanding that it is the only means of achieving salvation.

Modern scholarship tends to parallel the purported dichotomy between young Donne and older Donne that was posited by his inner circle during his lifetime. Jack

Donne was considered a young, libertine figure and Dr. Donne was a mature, Anglican pastor. Biographical accounts, such as those of Izaak Walton and John Stubbs, often reinforce this dichotomy as a means of differentiating between Jack Donne and Dr. Donne. The libertine man who emphasized the sexuality of the body in his “Songs and Sonnets” is depicted as a different person from the man who lingered on God’s role in salvation in the Holy Sonnets. John Stubbs’ biography on Donne entitled, *The Reformed Soul* reinforces this dichotomy by implying that young Donne was unrefined, and older Donne was staid. The title is also a pun on the Reformation; Donne’s soul was “Reformed” insofar as he lived during the Post-Reformation era and consequently converted from Catholicism to Protestantism.

Current scholarship interrogates these depictions by addressing Donne’s emphasis on both body and soul. However, Donne’s love of the body is often equated to his love for the soul, rather than addressing the fact that he loved the body better than the soul. Stevie Davies addresses Donne’s perception of the soul as that immortal, deepest, and transcendent part of a human being.² Ramie Targoff emphasizes Donne’s unwillingness to relinquish his material body, as well as his anticipation for his body and soul to be recompacted after the Final Judgement.³ Nancy Selleck expounds upon the materiality of the body and the humoral imagery in Donne’s texts as a means of undermining

² Davies, Stevie. “The Soul.” *John Donne*. Liverpool University Press, 1994, pp. 55–76.

³ Targoff, Ramie. *John Donne, Body and Soul*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.

scholarship arguing for Donne's libertine fixation of the body.⁴ Judith A. Anderson posits that Donne's body and mind are both equal and of equal substance.⁵

This thesis undermines the dichotomy between Jack Donne and Dr. Donne, and explores the theological intricacies throughout Donne's oeuvre. It provides a reading for *why* Donne claimed to love the body more than the soul. While chapter one establishes the importance of the body, chapter two expounds upon the set of conditions through which Donne endorses relinquishing the body. The first chapter explores Donne's body/soul dialectic and establishes Donne's posited relationship between the individual and communal body. It specifically focuses on texts within Donne's "Songs and Sonnets," as well as some dirges and elegies he was commissioned to write. The second chapter provides historical framework, and discusses Donne's texts in conversation with those of his contemporaries. As an Anglican pastor, he would have been influenced by Thomas Bilson's sermons delivered at the turn of the sixteenth century. This chapter also expounds upon overtly religious texts such as the Holy Sonnets and *Biathanatos*. These texts convey Donne's theological ruminations, and specifically the idea of restoring the communal soul through violence enacted on the body. The speaker in "Good Friday" laments his sinful way of life and implores God to restore him to His *imago dei* through bodily pain so that he may be granted salvation. This thesis ultimately rejects the notion

⁴ Selleck, Nancy. "Donne's Body." *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2001, pp. 149-174.

⁵ Anderson, Judith H. "Matter and Spirit, Body and Soul, Time and Eternity in Donne's Anniversaries: A Response *." *Connotations : A Journal for Critical Debate*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2016, pp. 59-73.

that the texts within Donne's oeuvre can be dichotomized into either 'libertine' or 'religious' categories and posits that Donne's musings regarding the individual's relationship to the communal body are mediated by Christian doctrines.

Chapter One: Donne's Body/Soul Dialectic

Introduction

John Donne's body/soul dialectic is best expressed in a sermon composed for the congregation at St. Paul's Cathedral. He preaches, "the body is not the man, nor the soul is not the man, but the union of these two makes up the man" (Sermons 2, 261). In Donne's oeuvre, there is a symbiotic relationship between body and soul, in which he clearly favors the body. In his earlier poetry, his preference for the corporeal is demonstrated through his libertine depiction of the body. While young Donne eroticizes the body, he does not neglect the soul. Older Donne attenuates this eroticization, but does not eradicate it. Favoring the soul is ultimately a misguided debasement of the body because body and soul are not meant to be two separate entities. The separation of body and soul through death is a consequence of the Adamic fall in Genesis; as a result, body and soul will not reunite until after God's Final Judgment.

In this chapter, I examine Donne's body/soul dialectic through the lens of his body politic. Although Donne showcases a clear preference for the body in his texts, his perception of corporeality shifts throughout his oeuvre. Young Donne lingers on the physicality of the body. In Donne's earlier poems, the body performs the action, whereas in his later poems, the soul performs the action, even if the body lays inanimate. Despite this change, Donne is consistent in favoring the physical body. I utilize Renaissance natural philosophy to illustrate Donne's refusal to adhere to standard models of body/soul hierarchization. Finally, I describe the role of Christian theology in facilitating Donne's body/soul dialectic. I affirm that original sin and mankind's susceptibility to the

degradation of body and soul is a key element to Donne's perception of the individual and communal body.

Donne's body politic is keyed to the Christian doctrine that bodies will be united with their respective souls and ascend into Heaven after the Final Judgment. Elaine Scarry says, "as late as 1627, six years into his deanship at St Paul's and several years before his death, Donne [was still] identifying the body as that 'which I have loved better than my soul'" (71). In his final sermon delivered prior to his death, Donne remarks, "he whose soul and body are separated by death as long as that state lasts is properly no man" (*Death's Duel*). Although he declares four years prior to his death that he has loved the body better than the soul, Donne continues to emphasize man's dual nature as spiritual and corporeal. This duality informs Donne's body politic, which is predicated upon the idea that the physicality of the body is both individual and communal. E. M. W. Tillyard writes, "the comparison of the man to the state or 'body politic' was...fundamental to the Elizabethans."⁶ For Donne, the body is important because it both facilitates and substantiates soul interaction. Donne's texts focus both on the individual in a microcosmic sense, and extend outwards towards the communal body in a macrocosmic sense, with the divine soul as their unifying thread. Kantorowicz specifically notes the connection between the monarch's body and Christ's body. She writes that during this time, the *Corpus Christi Juridicum*:

Linked the building of the visible Church organism with the former liturgical sphere; but, at the same time, it placed the Church as a body politic, or as a

⁶ Tillyard, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. Random House, 1959.

political and legal organism, on a level with the secular bodies politic which were then beginning to assert themselves as self-sufficient entities (197).⁷

Although there was an overt attempt to secularize body polity, Donne continued to mediate the relationship between the communal and individuated body through theology. His 1622 sermon to the Virginia Company encapsulates Kantorowicz's definition of body politic. Donne implores the settlers to:

Looke graciously upon the Head of this Body, our *Soveraigne*...Looke graciously upon them, who are the braine of this body, those who by his power, counsel and advise, and assist in the Government thereof...Look graciously upon them who are as *Eyes* of this Body, those of the *Clergy*, who have any interest therein...Blesse them who are the *Feete* of this body, who goe thither, and the *Hands* of this body, who labour there, and them who are the *Heart* of this bodie (19).⁸

Donne is recognizing each individual body as a pertinent member of the communal body, with the sovereign as the head, and therefore the face and stability of the body. He depicts the clergy members, such as himself, as the eyes of this body, who see both physically and theologically.

Furthermore, Donne is convinced that eschatology does not exclusively pertain to the soul, but also to the body. The destination of one's soul is determined by the temporal actions of both the individual and communal body. Donne writes in Meditation XVII:

No man is an Iland, intire of itself; every man
is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine...
any mans death diminishes me,
because I am involved in Mankinde (1-2 & 6-7).

⁷ Kantorowicz, Ernst H. *The King's Two Bodies : A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton University Press, 2016.

⁸ Donne, John. *The Sermons of John Donne, vol. 4, no. 10*. Brigham Young University, 2004-05.

The death of an individual alters the composition of the communal body in both earthly and spiritual ways.

Gesturing Towards the Body

Donne's earliest poems showcase a clear preference for and eroticization of the body. In "To His Mistress Going to Bed" the soul is subordinate to the body. The speaker says, "as souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be, / To taste whole joys." He is persuading a woman to undress by asserting that the only way to free souls from their bodies is through copulation. Donne's speaker expresses a similar sentiment in "The Extasie" :

So must pure lovers soules descend
T'affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend
Else a great prince in prison lies (55-8).

Both speakers emphasize that they must turn to the body in order to facilitate soul interaction. The speaker in "To His Mistress" simply adopts a more libertine tone in doing so. The result is immanence; this is Donne's "extasie." Without this body/soul dialectic, the soul becomes a prisoner of the body. Sherwood notes, "Donne gives two reasons for the soul's willing descent to the body: first, imprisonment in the flesh (68) if it does not, and, second, the soul's responsibility to other men" (76).⁹ The speaker hopes that his encounter with his lover will teach "weake men" how to love with both their body and soul ("The Extasie," 70).

⁹ Sherwood, Terry G. *Fulfilling the Circle : A Study of John Donne's Thought*. University of Toronto Press, 1984.

For Donne's respective speakers in "To His Mistress Going to Bed" and "The Extasie," love's mysteries are revealed through copulation. The speakers in each poem experience different forms of ecstasy. In "To His Mistress," the speaker seeks ecstasy associated with sexual gratification. He refers to women as "mystic books" which laymen "must see reveal'd" ("To His Mistress," 41 & 43). The speaker objectifies the female body; it exists to provide spiritual understanding to men. The speaker in "The Extasie" is seeking the Greek *ekstasis*, or, the ability to stand "outside oneself." Standing "outside oneself" requires oscillation between body and soul; it constitutes a rejection of both the individuated body as separate from the communal body, and also the individual spirit, as the soul removes itself from the body to join another soul. Howe writes that Spanish mystics San Juan and Teresa of Avila of the mid-sixteenth century were "careful to assign ecstasy to an intermediate stage of mystical progress" (30).¹⁰ She writes that despite Donne's focus on the body in these texts, his descriptions of the ecstatic encounter between the speaker and his lover embody, rather than contradict mystical union. Tillyard states that this ecstasy is perfected self-knowledge, putting the speaker and his lover on a level similar to that of the angels (78). As the audience, we too experience the ecstasy secondhand through the communal body and are called by the speaker to experience this angelic love. Helen Gardner asserts that "The defect of 'The Ecstasy' is that is not sufficiently ecstatic. It is rather too much of an 'argument about an

¹⁰ Howe, Elizabeth Teresa. "Donne and the Spanish Mystics on Ecstasy." *Notre Dame English Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1981, pp. 29–44. *JSTOR*.

ecstasy” (23).¹¹ The speaker in “The Extasie” would likely disagree with Gardner that the interaction within the text is not sufficiently ecstatic; his soul and his lover’s soul oscillate beyond their bodies as they lay inanimate beside a riverbank, epitomizing *ekstasis*. However, Gardner is accurate in her assertion that “The Extasie” is incomplete. The speaker implores his soul, as well as his lover’s, to return to their bodies, while the audience, who is witnessing this “dialogue of one,” is no longer provided with text (“The Extasie,” 74). Targoff writes:

Donne has placed us in a position where we shall not hear about the gradual attainment of a spiritual love from the lips of a virtuoso or from the dialogue between a lover and his beloved, but where we shall learn about love from the most qualified of all commentators the “abler soule” which has divined all mysteries (30).

For this reason, Donne’s speaker recounts this soul interaction as if the audience is also experiencing it by simply witnessing the event. As such, the speaker marks this event as beneficial for the communal body insofar as it is generative for both bodies and souls.

Despite this focus on propagation and bodiedness in “To His Mistress” and “The Extasie,” the speakers within the respective texts orient themselves differently to their lovers. In “To His Mistress,” the speaker utilizes singular possessive pronouns to refer to the object of his love as, “My America,” “My kingdom,” “My Empire,” “My Mine.” The woman in the poem is a new conquest to be explored. In “The Extasie,” the pronoun shifts from “my” to “our,” emphasizing the multiplicity of the soul interaction: “Our hands,” “Our eye-beams,” “Our eyes,” “Our souls,” “Our bodies.” This shift from

¹¹ Quoted from Novarr, David. ““The Exstasie’: Donne’s Address on the States of Union.” *The Disinterred Muse: Donne’s Texts and Contexts*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca; London, 1980, pp. 17–39.

singular to plural possessive pronouns showcases polarized views of the body: the speaker in “To His Mistress” wants to use the body for his own means, while the speaker in “The Extasie” wants to *make use of* the body to substantiate soul interaction. Although the love relations in both poems are postlapsarian, “To His Mistress” represents an individuated love, while “The Extasie” focuses on the collective aspect of love.

The speaker in “To His Mistress” is in control of his lover: he issues commands such as “Off with that girdle” (5), “Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear” (7), and “Unlace yourself” (9). He then asks for permission to “licence [his] roving hands” (25). “The Extasie” depicts quite a different scene. The two lovers’ bodies are inanimate, as they lay on a riverbed, side by side as “sepulchrall statues” (“The Extasie,” 18). The lovers’ souls are called to action while their bodies remain still as though they are funerary monuments. It is as if their bodies are dead. There is absolutely no physical action. For Donne, this interaction between lovers is sufficient but incomplete without returning to the body to consummate it. “To His Mistress” remains predominantly subjective, while “The Extasie” is primarily intersubjective; the lovers in “The Extasie” are in dialogue throughout the entirety of the text. While the former utilizes imperialist discourse to showcase one lover commoditizing another, the latter harnesses military discourse to emphasize that two souls of equal refinement are unable to overpower each other.

Military Discourse

The speaker in “The Extasie” calls for a return to the body in a different manner than the speaker in “To His Mistress.” Donne’s speaker asserts, “Loves mysteries in

soules doe grow / But yet the body is his booke” (“The Extasie,” 61-2). After expounding upon the propagation of souls, why does Donne then call for a return to the body? Is this a libertine encounter, such as the one depicted in “To His Mistress”? “To His Mistress” and “The Extasie” mark dichotomous periods in Donne’s evolving body/soul dialectic.

Regarding “The Extasie,” Scarry writes:

Twenty-six lines are required not because Donne needs twenty-six lines mentally to reenter the body, but because by moving through a set of metaphors that define with ever-greater precision the exact relation between body and soul, he is able to prolong the moment of standing outside the body, and hence dramatize the deliberateness and the deliberation with which the body is reembraced” (72).

What exactly is the nature of the relationship that Scarry is referring to? In one sense, the propagation of souls seems effortless: it is as if two violets graft, forming offspring.

Paradoxically, Donne also depicts some hostility between the two unbodied souls encountering each other. The souls are unsure how to interact without a body to temper them. Donne utilizes war discourse to depict a stalemate between the two souls. The speaker likens souls to “equal armies” which hope to “advance their state[s],” yet “no change can invade” a soul. Donne is describing an armistice, in which both sides are preparing to enter war, recognize each other’s power, and declare a truce instead of engaging in battle. For Scarry, the bodiedness of Donne’s poems is innately collective, rather than individualistic. There is an inherent fecundity within this interaction: bodies and souls simultaneously propagate. It does not go without notice that Donne employs reproductive discourse to describe soul interaction, thus emphasizing the materiality of the soul.

Donne yokes the physicality of the body to the matter of the soul by showcasing that both bodies and souls propagate. Yet, “The Extasie” is incomplete without returning to the body. Sherwood notes, “the poem begins and ends with the lovers’ bodies. But here the body serves first the soul, then the human community, not sexual preoccupation. The bodies obediently keep their places in accordance with their ultimate purposes” (Sherwood, 75). It is evident that the speaker intends to set an example of how to love for others; their refined love is inspiring to that of “weake men,” (“The Extasie,” 70). Donne defines this weakness in *Metempsychosis* as man’s susceptibility to woman’s control, as demonstrated in Genesis when Eve convinces Adam to consume the forbidden fruit. A similar sentiment is expressed in “To His Mistress.” Despite the imperialist overtones in the text, the speaker’s control over his lover is illusory; his desire for her controls him and leaves him weak. “The Extasie” utilizes this military discourse to display strength in restraint; turning to the body is a conscious decision, rather than yielding to concupiscence.

In describing this ecstatic experience in terms of a military stalemate, Donne also deviates from mid-sixteenth century mystic ideas about ecstatic experiences. Howe notes that for the Spanish mystics in particular, “ecstasy never matches equals in a movement toward however temporary a union. The soul is the passive partner transported by God outside the body in order to share utter intimacy with the divine lover” (39). While Donne rejects this unequal meeting of souls in “The Extasie,” he endorses it in “The Holy Sonnets,” and devotions which depict the speakers’ direct encounters with God, during which they embrace and even prefer their passivity.

Donne also utilizes military discourse in “Good Friday,” in which his speaker turns his back to God in order to receive his corrections. He recounts Christ’s death during the Calvary, and notes that his passing “make his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke” (19). Describing nature as a lieutenant posits that it is both subject to and governed by God. The speaker cites that this battle “made the Sunne winke” (200). Donne initiates a pun on “Sunne” as light imagery in the text suggests that Christ’s death left the world in darkness for a brief moment, hence the sun blinking for a brief period of time. He is also referencing Christ’s role as the Trinitarian Son. His life “blinked” because he rose from the dead after three days. Despite these subtle references to battle, Donne’s other texts tend to be more overt in their discourse.

The battle in “The Extasie” is *between* souls, while the battle in “Holy Sonnet XIV” is *for* souls. “The Extasie” displays a microcosmic battle, two souls dueling so that neither is overpowered; two souls leave their respective bodies and “negotiate there” to see who will make the first move (17). “The Extasie” occurs *between* two souls, where there is an equal force of power between the two; the duel ends in an armistice. While Donne’s speaker includes the communal body at the end of the text by inviting the speaker to be a witness, it remains at a microcosmic level. In contrast, “Holy Sonnet XIV” displays a macrocosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. Donne’s speaker presents that “reason” is God’s “viceroy in [him]” (7). However, his reason is held “captiv” and he yearns to be released from damnation through Christ’s sacrifice (8). God is clearly stronger than Satan in this text because He has the ability to metaphorically annul the speaker’s marriage to Satan so that he can be reunited with God,

thus restoring the individual to the community. It is important to note that Donne places these interactions in a military, rather than a pacifist context. The initial hostility depicted in “The Extasie” as two souls encounter each other is not ameliorated by their familiarity with one another’s bodies. This estrangement is a result of the Biblical fall, paralleling Milton’s depiction of the relationship between prelapsarian and postlapsarian Adam and Eve; the former is harmonic, while the latter is tainted by sin. Additionally, Donne’s speakers embrace passivity, allowing God to initiate these mystical experiences.

Paradigms of Order

When describing the relationship between body and soul, Donne enters into philosophical engagements concerning the natural order of the universe in which he invokes both Platonic and Christian medieval paradigms. These models of order, particularly the Platonic Ladder and the Great Chain of Being,¹² facilitate Donne’s body/soul dialectic. In seeking to comprehend the relationship between body soul, Donne invokes these paradigms, yet is not convinced by them.

In his *Symposium*, Plato ranks different forms of love by placing them on ascending rungs of a ladder. He writes, “by the steps of a ‘ladder reaching to heaven’ we pass from images of visible beauty...through the concrete to the abstract, and by different paths of arriving, behold the vision of the eternal” (18).¹³ Through this model, he

¹² E. M. W. Tillyard traces the roots of The Great Chain of Being: “The idea began with Plato’s *Timaeus*, was developed by the Aristotle, was adopted by the Alexandrian Jews (there are signs of it in Philo), was spread by the Neo-Platonists, and from the Middle Ages till the eighteenth century was one of those accepted commonplaces, more often hinted at or taken for granted than set forth” (*The Elizabethan World Picture*, pp. 26).

¹³ Plato. *Symposium*. Open Road Integrated Media, 2018.

mediates between three types of Greco-Christian love: *eros*, *philiās*, and *agape*. Plato's imagined Ladder hierarchizes these forms of love; bodily desire is on the bottom rung, ascending to love of the mind, which eventually reaches its apotheosis in love of the soul. Donne mediates between *eros* and *agape* in his texts. For him, *agape* is not achieved through denouncing the body, but by embracing the body as a crucial component of mankind.

Donne's allusions to the Platonic Ladder tend to be implicit. However, he is explicit in his allusion to Plato in "Platonic Love (The Undertaking)." The speaker asserts that his love is greater than that of the historical "Worthies" because he is able to conceal it. "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" echoes a similar sentiment: the speaker says that a lover's display of grief upon parting debases a couple's union. "Dull sublunary lovers' love, whose soul is sense, cannot admit absence, / because it doth remove those things which elemented it," ("Valediction," 13-6). In "Platonic Love," Donne does not mean that his love is great because it is clandestine. If such were the case, he would be contradicting himself; he has published his love through verse. Instead, he has kept his love "hid" because he does not have to display it through military exploits. The speaker's love is also "hid" because it is not love of the body, but of the soul. He loves virtue clothed in a human being, rather than the human being clothed in virtue. The speaker says, "For he who colour loves and skin, / Loves but their oldest clothes" (15-6). In loving virtue for itself, Donne's speaker reaches the highest rung of the Platonian Ladder.

In "The Extasie," Donne does not invert the Platonic ladder; instead, he collapses it. The body is greater than the soul for initiating human interaction in the temporal

realm. Donne conflates the top and bottom rungs of the ladder; love of the physical form leads to love fostering wisdom and understanding. Desire for another human being manifests in the body and is purified through the soul. In “The Extasie”, the speaker says, we owe our bodies “thankes, because they thus, / Did us, to us, at first co[n]vay” (53-4). Soul interaction begins with and is made possible through the body. In this way, Howe writes that Donne differs from the mystics. “Donne’s defense of the body contrasts with the mystic’s more traditional dichotomy of soul and body” (40). The interplay of body and soul create that “subtle knot which makes us man” (64).

Similarly to the Platonic Ladder, The Great Chain of Being is the structuring principle of much Renaissance natural philosophy and also a medieval Christian model depicting the order of the universe mandated by God. This hierarchy is theistic and is fundamentally rooted in the Aristotelian tripartite soul. For Aristotle, this intellectual soul tempers the vegetative and appetitive souls in his tripartite model. The hierarchy within the Great Chain of Being begins as follows: God is at the top of the chain, followed by angels, because both have only a rational soul. Humans are ranked below angels for having an appetitive and vegetative soul to supplement the rational soul. Animals follow humans because they lack a rational soul to temper the other two.

In “Air and Angels,” Donne invokes the order in the Great Chain of Being by comparing human love to that of the angels.¹⁴ He acknowledges that temporal love requires a body: “Love must not be, but take a body too,” (“Air and Angels,” 10). However, Robbins writes that love is not equal across humanity; one’s capacity to love is

¹⁴ Donne is invoking Aquinas’ theory of how angels manifest in the human form.

gendered in “Air and Angels:” “The spiritual loves the corporeal world as a man loves a woman, and the corporeal loves the spiritual world as woman loves man” (Robbins, 126).¹⁵ The speaker’s depiction of gendered love anticipates a Miltonic version of love; male love is depicted as being more refined than female love. On the contrary, Donne does not hierarchize male and female love in “Platonic Love,” in which the speaker implores the audience to “forget the ‘he’ and ‘she’” and to love virtue for itself (20). However, he does not deny that virtue can be “attired in woman,” which reminds the audience of the importance of the body (18). Love is also ungendered in “The Extasie.” He writes:

This Extasie doth unperplex
 (We said) and tell us what we love,
 Wee see by this, it was not sexe
 Wee see, we saw not what did move (29-32).

This ecstatic experience is not limited to one “sexe,” or gender; both man and woman are on equal terms. While this soul interaction begins with the body, it does not begin with sexual acts. Instead, it begins with two lovers gazing into each other’s eyes as they lay on a riverbank, “eye-beames twist[ing] and hands “firmely cimented.” Love is also ungendered in “The Relique.” The speaker remarks that he and his lover “knew not what we lov’d, nor why; / Difference of sex no more we knew / Than our guardian angels do” (“The Relique,” 24-6). The speaker in “The Relique” elevates himself and his lover; their love approaches the top rung of the Platonic Ladder because they yearn for truth and

¹⁵ Donne, John, and Robin Hugh A Robbins. *The Poems of John Donne : Epigrams, Verse Letters to Friends, Love-Lyrics, Love-Elegies, Satire, Religion Poems, Wedding Celebrations, Verse Epistles to Patronesses, Commemorations and Anniversaries*. Rev. ed., Routledge, 2013.

wisdom for its own sake. This text also destabilizes the order within the Great Chain of Being; their love is not human but angelic because of its refinement.

Donne also subverts the Great Chain of Being in *Metempsychosis*, in which he depicts the soul's transmigration through various life forms. He invokes the "Pithagorian doctrine" which "doth not onely carry one Soule from man to man, nor man to beast, but / indifferently to plants also" (*Metempsychosis*, 34 & 35-6). Siobhán Collins writes that a soul's lack of fixity in *Metempsychosis* "underpin[s] the Great Chain of being, as well as the related Aristotelian notion of the tripartite soul" (Collins, 6). The theory of transmigration indeed undermines the idea that there is a fixed hierarchy mediated by the Aristotelian soul. The Great Chain of Being is inevitably compromised if a soul inhabits the physical forms of various species. Based on Donne's trepidation regarding the soul's separation from the body upon death, we can conjecture that he did not embrace the theory of transmigration. Additionally, even *Metempsychosis* as a rhetorical exercise champions the body over the soul; the body that a soul inhabits determines its place in the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being. Collins writes that *Metempsychosis* "marginalizes the human by challenging the notion of an absolute and given hierarchy between species" (7). While Donne seemingly marginalizes the human body in *Metempsychosis*, he elevates it in "The Relique." After the Final Judgment, the two souls will return to their human forms, regardless of whether or not their souls have inhabited other forms. Even though their human forms have died, the speaker and his lover yearn to copulate.

However, Donne condemned the theory of transmigration altogether in his final sermon, *Death's Duell*. He invokes Corinthians, writing:

Behold I shew you a mystery, we shall not all sleep (that is, not continue in the state of the dead in the grave), but *we shall all be changed in an instant*, we shall have a dissolution, and in the same instant a reintegration, a recompacting of body and soul, and shall truly be a death and truly a resurrection” (*Death’s Duell*).¹⁶

This assumption relies upon the verity of the Christian idea that souls will be recompacted with their respective bodies during the apocalypse. As such, Donne rejects even the fundamental principles of transmigration. If the soul could simultaneously recompact with all of the bodies it had ever inhabited, there would be no true bodily death, but instead eternal life on earth. This theory undermines the Biblical fall, positing a mock-paradise on earth. It is irrational to fear bodily death because it is marked by impermanence; a soul will immediately inhabit another body. Additionally, Donne states that even if a body is incinerated, there will be a recompacting of “the same body with the same soul” (*Death’s Duell*). Souls will reinhabit the bodies which they departed from upon death. Therefore, it would be incongruous for Donne to believe in transmigration. In *Death’s Duell*, Donne questions, “Is that dissolution of body and soul, the end of all... the last death that the body shall suffer (for of spiritual death we speak not now)” (*Death’s Duell*). Donne is referring to one body rather than multiple bodies. The question is not whether our souls will endure the deaths of multiple bodies, but how many deaths there will be within the communal body during an individual’s lifetime. To echo “No man is an Iland,” how many times must the bell toll during my lifetime?

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:51-2.

Cosmological Influences

When Donne oscillates between body and soul in “The Extasie,” he invokes cosmological metaphors; bodies are “spheres” and souls are “intelligences.” The speaker says that bodies “are ours, though not wee, Wee are / The intelligences, they the spheares,” (51-2). When Donne refers to the soul as an “intelligence,” he is alluding to medieval cosmology, which is based in the theory of the Ptolemaic, or geocentric, universe. In this model, the other elements in the universe act as spheres revolving around a stationary earth. Donne often initiates a parallel between the ordered universe and the body and soul. He is also embracing the Greek *nous*, or “intellect,” which refers to approaching awareness of a transcendent being. The soul is celestial in its ability to navigate both within and without the body. However, this ethereality does not undermine the material, and at times, alchemistic qualities of the soul.

In Donne’s “The Extasie,” the speaker and his lover lay on the riverbank as “sepulchrall statues” while their souls form a compound in the air above them:

All severall soules containe
Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,
And makes both one, each this and that (33-6).

When the speaker refers to “all severall soules,” he is illustrating the multiplicity of the soul. Ideas about how bodies and souls were created and compacted was a lasting debate that Donne was entering into. Even Augustine expressed ambivalence between creationism and traducianism. Creationism endorses the idea that God, rather than humans, creates a soul for each body. On the contrary, traducianism states that copulation does not only create another body, but also that offspring’s soul. Creationism emphasizes

the transcendence of the soul, while traducianism grounds the soul's materiality. Donne interrogates these conflicting theories, and engages with traducianism in "The Extasie," in which he utilizes biological terms to explain the creation of a new soul. Two souls "propagate" to form another, rather than God creating a new soul. Thus, the communal body is expanded through this ecstasy of souls.

In the aforementioned excerpt, bodies and souls emulate the Ptolemaic model; the lovers' souls are hovering above their bodies, which remain stationary. The substances continue to mix in order to strengthen that bond between souls so that their love is not degraded to "dull sublunary lovers' love," which Donne condemns in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning." According to Tillyard, the term "sublunary" was weighted for Elizabethans. "It was the difference between mutability and constancy" (Tillyard, 38). While Donne claims to love the body better than the soul, he is aware of the dangers it presents. Love that cannot endure the loss of physical contact through separation is of the basest kind.

In "The Extasie," love facilitates a symbiotic relationship; the speaker says that love "interanimates two soules."¹⁷ Donne adheres to the Ptolemaic model in "The Extasie," yet he inverts it in "Good Friday." The speaker says, "Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this, / The intelligence that moves, devotion is," (1-2). Tillyard writes, Donne "compares the soul to a sphere and devotion to the Intelligence or Angel

¹⁷ Note that Robbins' anthology edits this line to read "interinanimates two souls," rather than the 1633 print, which reads, "interanimates two soules." "Interanimates" implies that love facilitates this soul interaction, while "interinanimates" implies that the souls paradoxically communicate although they are inert.

revolving it. This [idea seen] in Donne is not just a piece of private medievalism but a current orthodox notion” during the Elizabethan era (Tillyard, 48). Donne is inverting his claim in “The Extasie” that intelligences are to souls as bodies are to spheres when he says “Let mans Soule be a Spheare” (“Good Friday,” 1). He temporarily strips the soul of its transcendent qualities, reserving divine power for God, as the “devotion” that moves it. “Good Friday” emphasizes the external influences on the soul. The speaker says that “pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit / For their first mover,” (7-8). Donne is alluding to the theory of God as prime mover, who was created *ex nihilo*. Instead of God being the “Soules” prime mover, the soul is being influenced by “pleasure” and “businesse” in “Good Friday.” The speaker’s soul is now “subject to forraigne motion” as it has deviated from God’s will (4). The speaker laments the fact that he is moved by vice and temporal desires, rather than transcendent will, which is detrimental to both the individual and communal body.

The Individual and Communal Body

Donne’s Christian theology also informs his conceptualizations of body and soul. For Donne, the body is the vehicle through which he mediates between conflicting doctrines of Christ’s body as either symbolic or consecrated in Protestantism and Catholicism. He does so to disentangle the lingering ramifications of the Reformation. Donne’s mother was also ostracized for recusancy, and his brother was convicted for being a Catholic sympathizer. Donne’s family history spurs him to scrutinize these conflicting doctrines within his texts.

He alludes to the Biblical fall in Genesis to depict man's flawed perception of the body as a repercussion of original sin. Donne's speakers are postlapsarian because they have knowledge of sin and are therefore made more susceptible to it. In some instances, his speakers accept responsibility for original sin. In texts such as *Metempsychosis*, Donne invokes the Christian doctrine of *felix culpa*, meaning "fortunate fall." This phrase embodies the idea that the first sin committed by Adam and Eve in Genesis was fortunate because it allowed for God's redemption of humanity. As a result, the postlapsarian body is able to recuperate prelapsarian virtues. The body will not remain corrupted, but will reunite with the soul after the Final Judgment. Donne writes:

That Crosse, our joy, and greiefe, where nailes did tye
 That All which always was all, every where,
 Which could not sinne, and yet all sinnes did beare
 Which could not die, yet could not chuse but die;
 Stood in the selfe same roome in Calvarie (VIII, 3-7).

This passage marks the fortunate fall as the prominent moment in salvation history because humanity's fall made Christ's redemption possible.

Donne channels these ideas through the speaker in "To His Mistress," who inverts the story of Genesis. He initiates a parallel between himself and his lover and Adam and Eve after the fall: "There is no penance due to innocence. / To teach thee I am naked first; why then / What needst thou have more covering than a man," (46-8). Donne alludes to the moment Adam and Eve become aware of their nakedness after committing humanity's first sin. Both man and woman are in the postlapsarian world. However, the speaker's lover needs to be convinced to undress, and the man tells the woman that he will teach her how to be naked by first being naked himself. Ultimately, he is going to

teach her how to sin. It is imperative to note that the speaker, who is a man, has knowledge of sin that the woman in the poem does not. This is an inversion of Genesis, in which Eve has knowledge of sin before Adam does.

Despite their respective allusions to Eden, there is a marked difference between the speakers' tones in "To His Mistress" and "Twickenham Garden." This shift in register marks an understanding that sin has caused bodily corruption, which has negatively impacted the communal body. In "To His Mistress," the speaker's tone is that of self-satisfaction regarding his sin, whereas his tone in "Twickenham Garden" is remorseful; he accepts responsibility for the Biblical fall. He says:

But oh, self-traitor, I do bring
The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
And can convert this manna to gall;
And that this place may thoroughly be thought
True Paradise, I have the serpent brought (5-9).

The speaker feels that he has caused humanity's downfall. He also asserts that he has perverted the priestly vocation by transforming the consecrated body into gall, rather than transforming the bread into the consecrated body. When Donne speaks of "transubstantiat[ing] all," he is referencing the communal body as both the congregation in Church, as well as Christ's communal body to be consumed through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The speaker feels as though he has profaned the physical body, communal body of the congregation, and also Christ's body.

This "spider love" is initially individuated and manifests outward in web-like offshoots to the communal body. The "spider love" in "The Extasie" differs from the soul that "could not speake, / [yet remembers] when it was a spider" in *Metempsychosis*

because *Metempsychosis* depicts one soul's journey through various bodies while "The Extasie" showcases the interaction between two souls, which remain oscillating above human bodies. The dueling souls in "The Extasie" have seemingly adopted human-like qualities; there is tension between the souls as a result of the Fall, marking the individual's connection to the communal body as incomplete. In *Metempsychosis*, the individual body *is* the communal body; one soul continues to inhabit new life forms beginning with the apple in the Garden of Eden. This fact is significant because it marks the onset of the communal soul as tainted by original sin. The Calvary was always going to happen because humanity was always going to fall. Collins writes, "the change [*Metempsychosis*] dramatizes is incomplete; awaiting the author/reader's participation in transformation" (Collins, 13). Donne's mediation between body and soul is marked by a lack of permanence, anticipating the soul's separation from the individual and communal body upon death. However, Donne continues to hearken towards the communal body through Christ in this text as well. The speaker notes this his soul was "made by the Makers will from pulling free" (VIII, 10). His is alluding to Christ's freedom for humanity through "pulling free" from death.

Another possible reason for Donne's shift in tone in "To His Mistress" and "Twickenham Garden" is that he had both different motivations and intended audiences. Stubbs notes that "To His Mistress" likely circulated amongst Donne's close friends for comedic purposes. On the contrary, "Twickenham Garden" was likely written for Lucy, Countess of Bedford, who enjoyed gardening. Donne humbles himself in this poem to appease his patron, rather than take responsibility for the Biblical fall. Picciotto writes

that Donne is jesting when he remarks he has brought the serpent to Eden. However, she writes that this joke:

Provides the formula for countless lyrics that enact the fallen imagination's inability to grasp innocence as anything but a projection of corrupt desire...we can only imagine innocence negatively, by taking the measure of its loss" (Picciotto, 33).¹⁸

Although the speaker in "Twickenham Garden" jests when he assumes an Adamic stance, Donne utilizes this narration to hearken back to the communal body. It does not matter that the speaker is not truly Adam because he is still affected by a sin that he did not commit. However, Donne continues to hearken back to the *felix culpa*; postlapsarian man has regained a place in Eden despite being cast out. The speaker has been permitted to return to Eden prematurely, which makes his impure condition all the more apparent.

Although it is evident that Donne hoped to flatter his patroness in this text, Donne's commissioned poems provide keen insight into his theological musings as well. "Twickenham Garden" both praises Countess Bedford for her horticultural capabilities, and offers a reflection on the negative effects of original sin. Donne's other commissioned poems also serve a dual purpose. "The Anatomy of the World" does not solely commemorate Elizabeth Drury's death and bring solace to her family. In fact, this text and "Second Anniversary" are also ruminations on the state of the individual and communal body post-death.

Similar to "Twickenham Garden," Donne meditates on the Biblical fall in "The Anatomy of the World." However, the latter text is more of a reflection on the state of the

¹⁸ Picciotto, Joanna. *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England*. Harvard University Press, 2010. pp. 33.

earth as a result of original sin, rather than the state of an individual soul. This is a world anticipating a reintroduction to Eden. The postlapsarian world is likened to a lame body:

The world's whole frame [is]
Quite out of joint, almost created lame,
For, before God had made up all the rest,
Corruption ent'red, and deprav'd the best;
It seiz'd the angels, and then first of all
The world did in her cradle take a fall (201-6).

The earth was a vulnerable newborn prior to the fall, which has been irreparably injured until God's Final Judgment. Donne's view of the world shifts in "The Second Anniversary" in which he refers to the world not as a physically impaired human, but as a carcass. Although both poems commemorate Drury's death, Donne is not simply remarking on Drury's body, but on the communal body. In its infancy, the communal body became impaired through original sin. As a result, the constituent parts of the body are disturbed and disoriented. "'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone... This is the world's condition now" ("The Anatomy of the World" 222 & 228). In "The Second Anniversary," Donne does not depict the communal body as living; instead, it is a carcass for human bodies to feed on, as if they are worms. This is a direct contrast to his celebration of the living communal body depicted in "No man is an Iland." "The Second Anniversary" emphasizes bodily corruption and death as the result of original sin, while "No man is an Iland" posits death as beneficial to the individual; the souls of those who have passed on are absorbed and reintegrated into the living body.

Chapter Two: Bodily Violence and Purification

Introduction

During the turbulent English Reformation, conflicting Christian ideologies were a primary source of conflict and uprising. Donne lived through the reign of three English monarchs: Elizabeth I (1533-1603), James I (1603-1625), and Charles I (1625-1649). Elizabeth experienced her sister, Mary I's Catholic rule, yet was raised Protestant. Elizabeth I allowed Catholic symbols to remain during her rule, yet desired for England to be a Protestant nation. James I (also James VI of Scotland) commenced his reign over England in 1603. Similarly to Elizabeth I, James I was also raised Catholic, and became an Anglican ruler. James I experienced the Gunpowder Plot during his reign, a conspiracy initiated by Robert Catesby, along with fellow Roman Catholics, in 1605 attempting to assassinate him as the monarch. Parliament was forewarned about the stratagem by anonymous letters, and Guy Fawkes was arrested for possessing thirty-six barrels of gunpowder. As a result, the Popish Recusants Act of 1605 was reintroduced and placed more constraints on Roman Catholics. The act included the clause for the Oath of Allegiance, requiring Roman Catholics to pledge their loyalty to the sovereign rather than the Pope. During James I's reign on November 13, 1622, Donne also preached a sermon for the Virginia Company, a joint stock company endorsed by the monarch to create settlements in Virginia. Johnson notes that "at the beginning...the Virginia Company had always insisted that profit was...not the first or even the second of its aims: the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom were both important"

(128-9).¹⁹ Donne's sermon therefore had transcontinental relevance; it did not simply reach those in England, but also those in North America.

Charles I also ruled over an Anglican nation, yet was known for sympathizing with popish recusants, which unsettled Parliament. These sympathies led to Charles I being sentenced to death for high treason in 1649 during the English Civil War (1642-1651) between the Parliamentarians and Royalists. However, he debased the legitimacy of the court, believing that it was not within the magistrate's jurisdiction to condemn him. His French wife, Henrietta Maria, was also Roman Catholic, which would have unsettled English citizens.

Pastors at this time served important roles as both theological and political figures; they were responsible for adhering to the sovereign's beliefs and conveying them to congregations. Many of these noteworthy sermons were preached at Paul's Cross, an open-air pulpit at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, which remained there until 1635. The royal sovereign would often attend these sermons, and sometimes requested official copies following the oration. According to Stubbs, prior to his kingship, "Charles himself was evidently an admirer of Donne's poetry" (414). Despite this approbation, on April 2, 1627, Donne delivered a sermon at Whitehall that displeased Charles I. After Donne had drafted a manuscript of his sermon for the King's review, he received notice that the King took issue with Donne's remarks on Mark 4:24, "Take heed what ye hear."²⁰ Stubbs notes

¹⁹ Johnson, Stanley. "John Donne and the Virginia Company." *ELH*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1947, pp. 127-138. *JSTOR*.

²⁰ King James Version.

that Charles worried when Donne implored the congregation to “take heed of seditious rumors, which may violate the dignity of the State” because it further enlightened them to the idea that he was ostensibly sympathetic towards popery (438). Despite the tension that inevitably arose between Donne as a preacher and Charles I as a sovereign, Donne was pardoned. Donne was generally astute where the impact of texts, both printed and orated, were concerned. For this reason, texts such as *Biathanatos* only reached print posthumously.

Donne’s family history as popish recusants also would have made him hesitant to publish *Biathanatos*. Despite the fact that Donne’s ancestor, Sir Thomas More was executed nearly forty years prior to Donne’s birth in 1572, Donne would have been influenced by him. More was sentenced to execution by Henry VIII for refusing to acknowledge the Act of Succession in 1534. His Roman Catholic faith prevented him from recognizing Henry VIII as head of the Church of England. Being so, Donne undoubtedly ruminated on More’s ideas published in both *Utopia* in 1516 and *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* written in 1534 and published in 1553. The dialogue is set in 1528, when the Kingdom of Hungary feared the invasion of the Ottomans. Despite being a satire, *Utopia* conveys some heterodox ideas about euthanasia and suicide. Additionally, Donne would have considered More’s ruminations on martyrdom and physical pain in *A Dialogue*.

When writing his 1608 defense of suicide termed *Biathanatos*, Donne was undoubtedly influenced by Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*. More grapples with suicide and euthanasia in his 1516 text. He outlines a utopic society in which those who contract

incurable diseases may be considered eligible for death. If there is absolutely no hope of recovery or ease of pain, they can decide to enact what Donne would later term “self-homicide.” In Book II of *Utopia*, More writes that these individuals:

Behave not only reasonably, but in a manner consistent with religion and piety; because they follow the advice given them by their priests, who are the expounders of the will of God. Such as are wrought on by these persuasions, either starve themselves of their own accord, or take opium, and by that means die without pain. But no man is forced on this way of ending his life...but...a voluntary death, when it is chosen upon such an authority, is very honorable, so if any man takes away his own life without approbation of the priests and the Senate, they give him none of the honors of a decent funeral, but throw his body into a ditch (47).

Unlike Donne’s *Biathanatos*, More’s *Utopia* was published during his lifetime. Perhaps the fact that it was a satire made its heterodox ideas about suicide more palatable. More’s text imports that as long as one’s ailment is without treatment, and that the priests and the monarch are in accord, suicide is permissible. Although Donne ruminates on similar ideas, he does not import that permission from either of these groups is necessary in order for an individual to enact self-homicide.

Biathanatos, *bia* meaning “violence” and *thanatos* meaning “death,” mediates between Catholic and Protestant dogmas and refrains from expressing allegiance to either theology. Donne conflates Catholic doctrine of free will and Protestant doctrine of predestination, asserting that “self-homicide” is mandated by God. This melding of theological doctrines was overtly heterodox due to the fact that Christianity condemns suicide as the individual asserting autonomy over God’s will. Donne’s text also interrogates ancient Roman and medieval conceptualizations of honor, and notes that in

certain cases, it is beneficial to the communal body for an individual to enact “self-homicide.” In this text, he uses the terms “self-homicide” and “suicide” interchangeably.

The conflation of these terms was novel and especially heterodox. Suicide is typically associated with sin in the Christian faith, as it disconnects the individual from the community and purports an understanding of God’s will. However, Donne posits that if one is predestined to death, and understands this to be so, it seems logical to enact one’s death in order to advance the soul. Without explicitly saying so, Donne conveys that the difference between self-homicide and suicide is context. Donne uses these terms synonymously, yet alludes to the fact that all of humanity fell victim to homicide when Adam and Eve contravened God’s will. Donne considers that the first act of homicide was committed in Eden, and that all of humanity was “massacr’d at once” since salvation was no longer achievable until Christ’s death (88). He also argues that Christ initiated his own death, not because of the New Covenant, but because Christ is also God within the Hypostatic Union, meaning he could decide when to take his own life (130). Therefore, it seems logical to infer that humanity can do the same.

It is crucial to note that Donne wrote this text in 1608 and sent it to Robert Ker, Earl of Ancrum in approximately 1619, prior to setting sail for Germany on a diplomatic mission. Stubbs notes that Donne “asked Ker to keep *Biathanatos* safe ‘if I live, and if I die, I only forbid it the Presse, and the Fire: publish it not, but yet burn it not; and between those do what you will with it’” (Stubbs, 340-1). R.D. Bedford cites that Donne also sent a manuscript copy of the text to Edward Herbert, hoping he would find a place

for it in his library (133).²¹ Additionally, the holograph purportedly circulated between Donne's friends at Oxford and Cambridge. It is imperative to note that *Biathanatos* was published two years prior to Donne's *Pseudo-Martyr*, which argued that Roman Catholics in England should pledge allegiance to James I. The prefix *pseudo* is derived from the Greek term ψευδής, or *pseudes*, meaning "false." The Greek term μάρτυς, or *martyr*, translates to "witness." Therefore, the title *Pseudo-Martyr* is translated to mean "false witness." Donne is invoking the ninth teaching within the Ten Commandments which states, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." He transforms the Roman Catholic complaint against him bearing false witness to his faith by satirizing it in the title *Pseudo-Martyr*, and addresses it in his opening "An Advertisement to the Reader." Donne writes:

For my selfe, (because I haue already receiued some light that some of the Roman profession, hauing onely seene the Heads and Grounds handled in this Booke, haue traduced me, as an impious and profane under-valewer of Martyrdome), I most humbly beseech him, (till the reading of the Booke may guide his Reason) to beleue, that I haue a just and Christianly estimation, and reuerence, of that devout and acceptable Sacrifice of our lifes, for the glory of our blessed Sauour.

Donne asserts himself as both a moral and Christian man, "kept awake in a meditation of Martyrdome" due to his family's persecution as popish recusants at the monarchy's behest. The general Roman Catholic presumptions about Donne would have left him internally teeming with mirth; they condemned Donne for undervaluing martyrdom and he had covertly written *Biathanatos*, expounding upon the importance of martyrs, just two years prior. Despite the tension that existed between the Catholic and Anglican sects,

²¹ Bedford, R. D. *The Defence of Truth : Herbert of Cherbury and the Seventeenth Century*. Manchester University Press, 1979.

Donne's address to readers showcases that he valued the material body as a means of redemption through both martyrdom and Christ's sacrifice.

Aside from those "Songs and Sonnets" which circulated between Donne's close friends and family, *Pseudo-Martyr* was his first text to be published. Since his oeuvre is prolific, it is significant that Donne's text contributing to the religious pamphlet war after the Gunpowder Plot would have been his first to be widely circulated. Publishing *Pseudo-Martyr* was a political maneuver, which likely caused James I to request for Donne to be ordained an Anglican deacon and priest in 1615, and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London from 1621 until his death in 1631. Despite the fact that Donne wrote *Biathanatos* two years prior to *Pseudo-Martyr*, *Biathanatos* was only published posthumously. Although Donne died in 1631, the first edition of the text purportedly circulated in 1644, a few years prior to when Charles I's autobiography, *Eikon Basilike*,²² *The pourtraicture of His Sacred Majestie in his solitudes and sudderings*, was published. *Biathanatos* showcases that Donne perhaps harbored and was certainly parsing through heterodox ideas about suicide, or "self-homicide," yet the fact that Charles I's autobiography expresses similar ideas regarding martyrdom showcases that his ideas on the subject were rather orthodox.

Bilson and the Descensus Controversy

Although Donne was not ordained an Anglican pastor until 1615, other members of the clergy sermonized on similar topics at Paul's Cross during Elizabeth I's rule until March 1603. Bilson's description of Christ's literal descent into Hell was a rather

²² The translation of this Greek term is "Royal Portrait."

orthodox belief for Anglicans at the time. In 1597, Thomas Bilson, Bishop of Winchester, delivered a sermon at Paul's Cross expounding upon Christ's descent into Hell.²³ This sermon was Bilson's contribution to the Descensus controversy. *Descensus* is the Latin term for "descent," and within the context of this movement, references Christ's descent into Hell, as is mentioned in the Apostle's Creed. Anglican Ruler Elizabeth I was present for the sermon; it was eventually published in 1599, which was common for those sermons delivered at Paul's Cross in the late sixteenth century. Ellie Gebarowski-Shafer notes that after Bilson reflects on Christ's descent into Hell, he sermonizes "against radical puritans and semi-separatists, who don't believe Christ literally descended into hell" (296-7).²⁴ His published sermon includes this amendment to his original oration because the idea that Christ descended into Hell was extremely polemical, and disturbed the Puritans within his congregation, who adopted a metaphorical, rather than a literal reading of the Creed.

Bilson notably received his Doctor of Divinity in 1581 and assisted in the final revision of the King James Bible in 1611. In his sermon, Bilson condemns the idea that

²³ *The effect of certaine sermons touching the full redemption of mankind by the death and bloud of Christ Iesus wherein besides the merite of Christs suffering, the manner of his offering, the power of his death, the comfort of his crosse, the glorie of his resurrection, are handled, what paines Christ suffered in his soule on the crosse: together, with the place and purpose of his descent to hel after death: preached at Paules Crosse and else where in London, by the right Reuerend Father Thomas Bilson Bishop of Winchester. With a conclusion to the reader for the cleering of certaine obiections made against said doctrine*

²⁴ Gebarowski-Shafer, Ellie. "Thomas Bilson and Anti-Catholicism at Paul's Cross". *Thomas Bilson and Anti-Catholicism at Paul's Cross*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014.

Christ had to experience death of both body and soul in order to discharge all of humanity of its sins. Bilson writes, “What was due to our sinnes Christ could not be ignorant; and as he became man to quicken our souls that were dead, not to kill his owne; and to bring us to God, not to seuer himselfe from God” (22). He condemns the circulating opinion that both Christ’s body and soul died when he was on the cross, and refers to Christ’s death as “sharpe and extreame martyrdome.” Additionally, he concurs with the early patristics that:

Christ in the garden did not onelie present his owne bloud to be the true propitiation of our sinnes, but also the bloud of his martyrs, to make their death acceptable to God, that willinglie laide downe their liues for the witness of his truth (22).

He agrees with fifth century patristics, Prosper and Augustine, that Christ sweating blood during His Agony in the Garden signifies the blood of the martyrs of the whole body of the church (28). Bilson defends that “we are sufficientlie redeemed by the death and bloud of Chrif Iesus, (without adding of hell paines to bee suffered in the soule of Christ)” (BI). Christ drips blood during the Agony in the Garden, and later blood and water pour from his pierced heart, showcasing that his blood is the seed of the Church. Bilson is expounding upon the idea that Christ’s bodily suffering was sufficient during the Passion so that his soul did not need to feel pain when he descended into Hell prior to his resurrection. Donne would have endorsed this idea as well in 1613, imploring God to use his body to mirror Christ’s sacrifice in “Good Friday” so that his soul could be exempt from suffering.

Furthermore, Bilson quotes “Bernarde” when he says that, “the whole life of Christ was a crosse and a martyrdom” (4). Bilson argues that while Christ was both

human and divine, he was not exempt from suffering; he endured much pain “from the garden to the graue,” which is exemplified through Christ sweating blood (4) and also requesting that God take this cup from him if possible (Luke 22:42). These ideas are also resonant in both Donne’s *Biathanatos* and the frontispiece to Charles I’s autobiography, which depict both figures accepting their temporal “cup” as a means of achieving salvation; Donne contentedly resigns himself to impending death and Charles I grasps the crown of thorns. Donne’s final sermon, *Death’s Duell* and Charles I’s autobiography were bequeathed to the communal body, as both texts were published after they relinquished their bodies to the temporal world.

Charles I’s Frontispiece and Donne’s Death Mask Engraving

The ideas reflected in the frontispiece of the King’s autobiography showcase similar ideas to Donne regarding martyrdom. Rather than emphasizing Charles I’s errant behavior, this frontispiece portrays him as a martyr.



The image depicts Charles I on one knee, with three crowns displayed vertically in front of him. There are two beams extending from his head; the first radiates forward from his eye towards the crown of martyrdom, and the second extends from the back of his head, and contains the phrase “*immota, triumphans,*” or, “unmoved triumphant.” It is imperative to note the vertical layering of the three crowns in front of Charles I. The crown of martyrdom is positioned at the top in the righthand corner, Charles I holds the crown of thorns in the center, and the diadem lays at his feet. The King’s arm is extended as he holds the crown of thorns; this action depicts Charles I as a Christological figure, accepting the metaphorical “cup” or “cross” that he is to bear through being sentenced to death. This crown circumscribes the term *gratia*, or “grace.” The King pays no heed to the diadem carelessly thrown at his feet, and extends his eyes upward towards the crown of martyrdom. This action signifies the renunciation of earthly titles, and the earthly

body, in favor of joining the community of martyrs in the spiritual realm. Additionally, he asserts that he has maintained God's favor through the divine right of kings, despite the fact that he was sentenced to death for high treason. The crown in the lower righthand corner is resonant of a diadem. It is engraved with the Latin term *vanitas*, or "vanity." This term links the transience of the temporal realm to that of the sovereign's life. The diadem has been placed at Charles I's feet; he has relinquished it, stretching his arm to embrace the crown of thorns. Similarly to Christ, he is accepting his cup and looking towards the crown of the martyr.

On January 30, 1649, the day Charles I was beheaded, he purportedly said to Dr. Juxon, the Bishop of London, "I go from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can be, no disturbance in the world" (738).²⁵ The King juxtaposes the corruption within the communal body for being sentenced to death during the English Civil War with the incorruptible crown of martyrdom. Charles I is also invoking the Roman Catholic corruption of the body incurred by original sin. The bishop replied, "You are exchanged from a temporal to an eternal crown; a good exchange" (738). This interaction between Charles I and the bishop, as well as the philosophy surrounding martyrdom at the time, gestures towards that of the patristics, most notably Tertullian's renowned declaration in *Apologeticus* that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Donne confirms his belief in Tertullian's statement in *Biathanatos* when he says that some of his arguments should not be taken to contravene or undermine the credibility of this belief (56). Charles I's interaction with the Bishop of London is also

²⁵ Westley, F. C. *The Spectator: Volume 18*. 31 Dec 1845. pp. 738.

strikingly similar to Sir Thomas More's final words prior to his beheading in 1535. He purportedly said, "the king's good servant, but God's first." This quote marked Sir Thomas More's entry into martyrdom and paved the way for his canonization in 1935. More was executed for treason, despite being Henry VIII's counselor and Chancellor of England in 1529.

The frontispiece to the Charles I biography is similar to Donne's portrait and frontispiece to his final sermon, *Death's Duell, or, A Consolation to the Soule, against dying Life, and living Death of the Body*; this sermon was delivered on February 25, 1631 at Whitehall. It marked the beginning of Lent, and was published in 1632; Charles I was in attendance.



This image depicts a feeble and aged Donne, clothed in a white sheet, eyes closed and facing towards the East in order to await the coming of Christ (Stubbs, 468). It is especially significant that Donne faces towards the East in this portrait, which

emphasizes the state of the soul, despite the fact that the image portrays his corrupted body. The alternate name for his text “Good Friday” is “Riding Westward.” In this text, he mentions that he (meaning his body) is “carried towards the West,” while his soul “bends toward the East” (9). This image purports that through death, the body arcs in a parabola of decline, as the soul inclines towards salvation. In many ways, this portrait was a rehearsal for Donne’s death. He stood upon an urn while this portrait was taken, and mimicked the posture of a corpse. In a similar manner, Charles I faces towards the East in the *Eikon Basilike*, his back turned to the sacks of sand tied to either side of the palm tree, indicating that spiritual judgment is behind him. These engravings depict the body as agential in both individual and communal salvation. It is damaged and yet never truly relinquished, for it will eventually be recompact with the soul.

Biathanatos

Overall, Donne’s conceptualization of suicide is variegated. *Biathanatos* is marked by didacticism, in which Donne provides the set of conditions for which “self-homicide” is permissible by God. He appeals to the audience’s logos, writing that many individuals who have committed suicide “haue bene admitted to such a glorifying of [God’s] name, and haue proceeded therein, as religiously as in a Sacrifice” (36). Donne is invoking the new covenant through which Christ became a sacrifice through the passion and would save humanity from their sins. He is also noting a crucial difference between Catholic and Protestant sects. Roman Catholics believe in saints as those who have undoubtedly earned a place in Heaven for good works performed during their lifetime. It should be noted that many saints are martyrs who have died for the faith, and that

Catholics may pray that a saint will intercede in their lives. On the contrary, the Protestant sect does not include saints in their doctrine. Therefore, Donne's didactic account regarding martyrdom and how to achieve martyrdom is overtly more Catholic than Protestant.

Donne was undoubtedly aware of just how unorthodox his opinions regarding suicide were. This defense was not only brazen, but also dangerous; if individuals are aware of when God wants them to die, and are given the will to enact their own deaths, then they also have the right to alter the dynamic of the communal body without a mandate from the monarchy. In this way, Donne's ideas about suicide are both heterodox and radical as they penetrate both theological and political spheres. However, his appeal to Calvinism mitigates the harsh impact these ideas may have had on his audience. When Donne gifted Herbert a copy of *Biathanatos* in 1619, he did so under the pretense that Herbert would be able to ameliorate any assertion that it harbored dangerous doctrine (Bedford, 133).

Biathanatos begins with an invocation to Beza, a disciple of Calvin. Donne's vignette recounts an instance in which Beza was contemplating suicide; he desired to drown himself, yet believed he was saved by the arrival of his uncle through God's will. Donne expresses kinship with Beza, claiming that he too occasionally desires death. He writes, "no rebellious grudging at Gods guifts, nor other sin-full Concurrence accompanies these thoughts" (33). His idea that it is not sinful to desire death is not necessarily unorthodox, since death is also the means through which individuals reach Heaven in Christian doctrine. Donne expresses such a yearning in other texts as well. In

“Holy Sonnet XIV,” Donne’s speaker yearns to see God’s face through death, yet finds himself too spiritually impure to believe that he is destined for Heaven. Donne also yearns for his body to become a vehicle for purification; through sin, his bodily appearance has become distorted, and he hopes to become recognizable by Christ through being restored to the *imago dei*. Donne’s speaker implores God to do the harm on his body for him so that he does not have to do it himself. In this way, he requests for God to take this “cup” from him, as Christ did during the crucifixion.

Biathanatos is also similar to “Good Friday” insofar as both texts undermine the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and therefore also the priest’s role as mediator between God and humanity. However, in the former text, Donne believes himself to be imbued with God’s authority. In the latter, the speaker deems all of his attempts at penance insufficient, and would rather endure physical pain at God’s hand than have to die without acquiring access to heaven. For this reason, he implores God to be anything but apathetic towards him. Both *Biathanatos* and “Good Friday” deem spiritual edification through internal means as an insufficient roadmap to Heaven. One must endure not only spiritual, but also corporeal suffering, which is signified through the corruption of the body. The body must subjugate itself to God in order for the soul to reach Heaven upon death. However, this idea does not undermine the importance of the individuated, temporal body. As is noted in the analyses of Donne’s more secular poetry in the previous chapter, the individual body plays an essential role in expanding the communal body. One may then ask, why does Donne claim to love the body more than the soul in his 1627 sermon, yet subject it to violence? Donne posits that salvation begins

with Christ's body, but must be completed through the individuated body, such as his own or Charles I's. The martyred body is the vehicle through which the soul achieves salvation. Eventually, bodily disfigurements will be restored by God during the Final Judgment when bodies and souls recompact and ascend into Heaven. These ideas contravene Calvinist doctrine, stating that salvation is both predestined and achieved through faith alone. On the contrary, this emphasis on good works is strikingly Catholic.

In "Holy Sonnet XIV," Donne's speaker implores, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God. O'erthrow me, and bend / Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new" (1, 3-4). When Donne is imploring God to burn him, he invokes immolation. In *Biathanatos* he writes, "Immolation of Men was so ordinary that *almost every Nation, though not barbarous, had receiv'd it*. (43). However, the means through which one enacts their own death is not as important of the idea of someone enacting their own death. He awakens his readers to the idea that conceptions of death and "self-homicide" are in a constant state of change. He ultimately arrives at the conclusion that as long as one's conviction that they are destined by God to die is not accompanied by any of the other major sins, it is deemed permissible. Additionally, he makes the bold statement that "*Self-homicide* is no more against the Law of Nature then any other Sinne" because all sins contravene reason (44). For Donne, death is the means through which an individual achieves heavenly unity with God, so "Self-homicide is a greater good" (48). He also provides a martyrology and decides that the act of self-homicide is rather natural, although individual reasons for enacting one's death differ. The most notable of the martyrs mentioned is Judas Iscariot. Donne notes that Judas' "act of Killing himselfe is

not added to his faults in any place of Scriptures” (140). Donne quotes Augustine in saying that Judas’ repentance makes him a martyr, however Donne chooses not to conjecture at whether or not Judas repented. Instead, he focuses on the fact that Judas was “the most sinnefull Instrument of the most mercifull worke” through betraying Christ because His death redeemed the communal body. Donne also defines the conditions for martyrdom in his 1622 sermon to the Virginia Company. He writes that John the Baptist:

Was a *Witnesse*, of *Christ*; and he was a *Witnesse*, because hee was like him, he did as hee did, he lead a holy and a religious life; so he was a *Witnesse*. Saint *Stephen* was *Proto-martyr*, *Christs* first *Witnesse*, because hee was the first that did as he did, that put on his colours, that drunke of his *Cup*, that was baptized with his *Baptisme*, with his owne bloud: so hee was *Witnesse* (12).

Donne is imploring the settlers in Virginia to be both witnesses of the faith, and more specifically, missionaries, as he specifically discusses the role of the Apostles as missionaries throughout this text. His goal is to expand the communal body of Anglicans, and also invoke conversion “to the Christian Faith” (15). In this way, he implores the settlers to be witnesses to the faith, and even martyrs if necessary.

Additionally, Donne claims that martyrdom advances the individuated soul. Donne writes, “For certaynly the desire of Martyrdome, though the body perish, is a Selfe preservation. Because thereby out of our Election our best part is aduanc’d” (48). In describing the “Selfe,” Donne is referring to that self which is comprised of both body and soul; the body must be sacrificed in order for the soul to advance to Heaven. It is imperative to note that Donne writes that this advancement is accomplished through “our Election of our best part.” The term “election” often denoted theological context, and indicated that God was choosing someone for eternal life. However, Donne bestows this

agency to the individual as opposed to God. It is also worth noting that Donne is describing a very specific type of death when he alludes to martyrdom. The Greek term μάρτυς, or *martyr*, translates to “witness.” In the theological Christian sense, this term is reserved for those who die for their faith. Donne notes that certain conceptions of killing oneself are delineated by the laws of Church and State. He writes, “he which kills himself is reputed *felo de se* [Latin for “felon of himself”] and it is not only homicide, but also murder because it has contravened the law; the King has lost a subject (72). At the end of his text, Donne clarifies the type of death he is speaking of, saying that it is only permissible insofar as it is not an end in itself. He quotes Caietane in saying, “to expose our selues to certayne death, if our first end be not our owne death but common good it is Lawfull” (141). *Biathanatos* focuses on bodily violence enacted by the self, while Donne’s other texts tend to showcase speakers imploring God to enact the violent purification for them.

***Biathanatos* and other texts**

Donne’s texts provide evidence that he ruminated on similar ideas to Bilson regarding pain and martyrdom. Donne’s use of military discourse throughout his oeuvre alerts his audience to the hostility within the communal body that resulted as a consequence of the fall. It is important to note that while Donne’s earlier speakers orient themselves to female counterparts, his later speakers orient themselves to God. For instance, while the speaker in “The Extasie” anticipates a stalemate between two human souls, the speaker in “Holy Sonnet XIV” wages war with God, begging God to commandeer him. The initial hostility the two souls are met with in “The Extasie” is

resonant of the fall; the first interaction between two people is marked by aggression until they recognize that one is unable to subdue the other. Tom MacFaul gestures towards this encounter, terming romantic love a “zero sum game” for Donne. This equity of exchange vanishes in the Holy Sonnets, in which the speakers not only anticipate, but also desire God’s usurpation. Regardless of the speakers’ counterparts in Donne’s texts, there remains one constant: Donne’s speakers are imbued with rhetorical prowess; they alter their disposition towards their subject to provide provocative and convincing rationale for the body’s importance in salvation history. The individual cements their place in society by copulating with another. As a Protestant pastor with a deceased wife, Donne’s perception shifted. Copulation is no longer a sufficient means to ingratiate oneself in society; instead, Donne as an Anglican pastor is married to the Church as Bride of Christ. The individual body must be subjugated to God to restore the soul. In order for this to occur, the body is subjected to violence, as a means of engaging with both eschatological and soteriological matters. The body must yield to brutality, violence, and even death, as a means of spiritual edification.

Donne still uses military discourse in his later texts; however, his speakers have shifted from powerful imperialists and rulers to defenseless men, susceptible to usurpation. Consider, for instance, “The Sunne Rising,” in which Donne’s speaker declares that his female counterpart is “all states, and all, princes, I” (21). He acts as an omniscient God who can “eclipse and cloud [the sun] with a wink” by closing the curtains so that they are once again left to darkness (13). If Donne’s speaker does not have the power to make the world dark by forcing the earth to spin on its axis, he has

relatively equivalent power by being able to shut out the sun by forcing his curtains shut. In “To His Mistress,” Donne’s speaker is an explorer discovering his female counterpart. She is his “America,” “new-found-land” and “kingdom” (29 & 30). Donne’s speakers know this power is somewhat illusory, which is expressed in “The Extasie,” in which the speaker and his lover meet on equal terms, and enter into a stalemate. However, even this illusionary veil is dropped in his later poems. In “Holy Sonnet XIV,” Donne’s speaker wants to be overtaken and commandeered by God. He is declaring himself vulnerable, “like an usurp’d town to another due” (5). In this text, Donne conflates the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets, his rhyme scheme being: abba, abba, cdcd ee. This opaque form leaves the audience mystified as to whether or not this is a love poem for God. Donne invokes feelings of romantic love at the volta, when the speaker shifts from military to marital discourse:

Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov’d fain,
But am betroth’d unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me (8-14).

In conflating both Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnet forms, Donne complicates his relationship with God. God is both an omniscient entity, as well as a passionate lover. Overall, the speaker is lamenting his dalliance with the devil, and implores God to engage and “ravish” him (14).

Donne’s speakers have ceased to blazon women, and have chosen to blazon God instead. This speaker is not only relinquishing his body, but also his masculinity to God. Although it would seem that God is then in the position of the woman, Donne’s speaker

relinquishes his autonomy to God, putting himself in the position that the women in his poetry typically are in. Donne is engaging with the crisis of masculinity of the late sixteenth century, which problematized earlier depictions of violence being done to the woman's body as a result of "violent, masculine desires" (Campana, 36).²⁶ Joseph Campana notes, "the task of Spenser's poetry [in the 1590s] was to process the consequences of the Reformation and to reform masculinity by making a virtue of vulnerability" (39). This reconsideration of bodily violence commenced when considering the Calvary and Christ's vulnerability on the cross. Shakespeare's 1595 play, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, further contemplates these ideas. When Romeo refuses to fight Tybalt, he laments, "O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate" (3.1.1620-1). It is this vulnerability that results in the violence done to both Romeo and Juliet's bodies.

Donne is aware of these gender constructs and consequently showcases his masculine speakers' vulnerability in his texts. In "Holy Sonnet XIV," his speaker confesses to God, "Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend, / But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue" (6-7). His reason has failed him, and he has fallen within Satan's grasp. This poem is both the speaker's prayer and plea for God to fight for his honor and defend him, as a damsel in distress, from Satan. He has no care if God will "imprison him" once he has been recaptured, as long as he will be ravished by God's love.

²⁶ Campana, Joseph. *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity*. Fordham University Press, 2012.

In “Good Friday” Donne invokes similar themes. This text is comprised of heroic couplets, and contains forty-two lines overall, which can be segregated into three sonnets. These sonnets contemplate salvation history, focusing on the Calvary. Donne’s use of heroic couplets signals Christ’s role as humanity’s hero and savior. Although Donne’s speaker references the Triduum, it should be noted that this poem is entitled “Good Friday” to invoke parallelism between the speaker’s death and Christ’s crucifixion.

The first sonnet utilizes light/dark imagery to create a visceral polarization of the forces of good and evil. Christ is the “Sunne” at the center of the universe. Donne uses the same metaphor in “The Sunne Rising.” The speaker says, “Hence is’t, that I am carried towards the West / This day, when my Soules form bends toward the East” (9-10). In this instance, the impending separation of body and soul is exigent. The speaker mitigates this fear by recalling Christ’s “rise and fall” on the cross (13). He is appealing to the paradox of Christ as both fully divine and fully human. The speaker in “Good Friday” differs from Donne’s other speakers because he is focused more on Christ’s fall than humanity’s. The speaker identifies with Christ not because he is made in the *imago dei*, but because Christ too has fallen; Christ’s material body has been destroyed, “his apparel [made] rag’d, and torne” by his own creation, although, impermanently so (28).

In the second sonnet, beginning on line 14, the speaker in “Good Friday” imagines himself a spectator at the Calvary. Although he is grateful for Christ’s sacrifice, he imagines he would be unable to look at Christ dying on the cross. He wonders, “Could I behold...that flesh which was worne / By God, for his apparel, rag’d, and torne?” (22& 26-7). He is depicting what Bilson considers Christ’s entry into martyrdom. For Donne,

the Calvary is the most perfect act of “self-homicide,” consummate in the fact that Christ has relinquished his body not only to advance his soul, but for the individual’s opportunity to be initiated into the communion of saints. In *Biathanatos* Donne expounds upon the perfection of charity through this sacrifice when he says that Christ spoke of it so slightly when he appeared to the travelers in Emmaus (129). Sir Thomas More also expounds upon this moment in *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*. He addresses Christ’s question to the two disciples going towards Emmaus: “‘knew you not that Christ must suffer passion, and by that way enter into his kingdom?’ [and wonders] Who can for very shame desire to entere into the kingdom of Christ with ease, when he himself entered not into his own without pain?” (151). His letter to ‘Master Leder’ shows that he too feared his own entry into martyrdom. He writes, “I trust both that they will use no violence forcible ways, and also that if they would, God would of his grace and the rather a great deal through good folks’ prayers give me strength to stand” (Marshall, 125).²⁷ In this way, More passes his metaphorical cup to God, although he envisions a merciful death, while Donne’s is innately violent.

Donne’s third and final sonnet in “Good Friday” commences with a question: “If on these things I durst not looke, durst I / Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye” (29-30). He wonders if he would be able to look upon Mary, whose sacrifice does not go unnoticed or unappreciated by the speaker. Overall, he hopes to mirror Christ’s sacrifice for humanity by relinquishing his body to the Lord. Just as humanity destroyed Christ’s

²⁷ Marshall, Peter. “The Last Years.” *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, edited by George M. Logan. Cambridge University Press, 2011. pp. 116-38.

body through crucifying him, the speaker begs God to employ violence upon his own body: punish mee, / Burn off my rusts, and my deformity” (39-40). In a sense, Donne’s aforementioned death mask engraving showcases this sacrifice. His body is aged and he is ill, an image which is preserved both in the engraving and replicated in a marble statue at St. Paul’s Cathedral. Charles I’s death embodies a different type of violence. His frontispiece does not exhibit bodily corruption. However, he was beheaded which violated the unity of his body and is another form of corruption, enacted by the communal body. Furthermore, his death is similar to Christ’s; Christ’s own people chose to crucify him, and Charles I’s people initiated his beheading. In both cases, the communal body contravenes transcendent power; Christ being God incarnate, and Charles I being imbued with divine right.

Overall, Donne conceives that so long as “self-homicide’ is not executed in conjunction with any other major sin, and if it is not done with the sole purpose of ending life, then it is permissible. His idea is epitomized through Christ, who resigned his body to violence during the Passion and advanced the communal soul. Donne’s death mask and Charles I’s frontispiece mirror this bodily subjugation; Donne rehearses his own death and Charles I resigns his body and accepts his own crown of thorns.

Conclusion

When Donne preached at Paul's Cross in 1627 that he loved his body better than his soul, he was slowly yielding to the idea that, according to Christian theology, he would have to give up his body in this life in order to enter into the next. He often meditates on death and enters into rhetorical exercises on self-homicide in *Biathanatos*. In *Biathanatos* in 1608, Donne wrote that our soul should be considered our "best" part, while he conveyed in his 1627 sermon that he had not loved his "best" part as such.

Instead, he chose to love the body because it was that which he must lose. Donne's oeuvre showcases his acknowledgement that he should favor the soul, yet demonstrates his inability to do so. In many ways, the material body substantiates one's place within the communal body. It is also the vehicle through which the communal body is expanded through copulation. Christian theology facilitates Donne's musings on body and soul and also mitigates his fear of losing his material self. This idea is especially showcased through Donne's rhetorical exercises in *Metempsychosis* and *Biathanatos*. *Metempsychosis* envisions one soul entering into numerous bodies, thus subverting the importance of any particular body through emphasizing the communal body of all life forms. *Biathanatos* contemplates self-homicide as a means of earning one's right to martyrdom through mirroring Christ's sacrifice for humanity. For Donne, subjugating one's body to martyrdom is the most perfect sacrifice because this act has the potential to advance one's soul. For these reasons, Donne's engraving of his death mask symbolizes his contentment as he looks towards the East. Although this death would alter the

communal body, Donne believed he would eventually be eternally united with both the physical body he was relinquishing, and the communal body of saints.

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