



*Returning to
John Donne*

ACHSAH GUIBBORY

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Barnard College, Columbia University, USA

ASHGATE

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RETURNING TO JOHN DONNE

For Tony Kaufman

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments are almost impossible to do right—the list can go on forever, and you always feel you've left someone out, or that someone will feel left out. So many people, one way or another, have been involved with my reading, thinking, and writing about Donne, though fewer have had a direct impact on the essays here and especially this volume.

The idea of this volume was the result of the encouragement of several people in particular. For ten years, my colleague, Peter Platt, who chaired the search committee that brought me to Barnard College, has been urging me to collect my publications on Donne. Here I was a “Donne scholar,” former president of the John Donne Society, had published many articles, but never had written a book on Donne. Tony Kaufman, my husband, added his warm voice of encouragement, as he has through all these years. Then there was Erika Gaffney of Ashgate Publishing, who immediately expressed her enthusiasm, and gave me valuable advice as we discussed what the book might be. I was reluctant at first, never liking to repeat the past; I rarely re-read what I have published. But if I could not just take stock of what I'd done, but write some new pieces, have new thoughts, the project would interest me.

Now that I have completed this book, selecting what I think are my best pieces and writing a few new ones, I realize how important Donne has been to me, and how Donne has connected me with many people who have been important in my life, as well as shaping my understanding of Donne.

I am grateful to my students—both undergraduates and graduate students—over a period of four decades. First at the University of Illinois, where I went straight from UCLA when I had just turned twenty-five; later at Barnard College, where I have been since 2004—a new adventure in my life. I still remember several students from the Metaphysical Poetry course I taught that first year at Illinois. A few years later, there was Richard Powers, who would become one of the first MacArthur Fellows and a multi-award-winning novelist; and Judith Maltby, now an eminent historian and one of the first women to be ordained in the Church of England. My superb graduate students, who are now my colleagues in the profession, include (among others) Noralyn Masselink, Joshua Eckhardt, Abram Steen, Jen Mylander, Stephen Hamrick, and Mark Dahlquist. Here at Barnard I have taught Donne to wonderful undergraduates. A number have continued to graduate school, with some writing dissertations that involve Donne—Marissa Nicosia, Sara Hasselbach, and Alison Bumke. What a pleasure to think of this next generation entering the field.

I have been fortunate in my students but also in my Donne colleagues, many of whom I have spent time with at the annual John Donne Conference, which has been meeting for almost thirty years, first at Gulfport, Mississippi and now at

Baton Rouge, Louisiana. There could not be a more supportive group of scholars, who also have become my treasured friends. Those whose conversations have especially shaped my thinking over the years include Dayton Haskin, Judith Scherer Herz, Tom Hester, Dennis Flynn, Jeanne Shami, Claude Summers, Helen Wilcox, and Jonathan F.S. Post.

I am indebted also to my colleagues here at Barnard—Anne Lake Prescott, Peter Platt, Kim Hall, and Rachel Eisendrath. A special thanks must go to Mary Gordon, who team-taught a course with me on “Doubt, Death, and Desire” (we were going to say “Despair” but figured that would be too depressing), which featured Donne’s holy sonnets and *Devotions* among other texts.

Barnard College has generously supported my work in so many ways, most recently by a research leave in Fall 2012 that allowed me to work on this book. For re-typing the articles and book chapters that had already been published, I am grateful to Cecelia Lie.

Although *Returning to Donne* contains new pieces, I here acknowledge permission generously granted by the publishers to reprint versions of essays that have been previously published:

“Donne and the Idea of Decay,” ch. 5 in Achsah Guibbory, *The Map of Time: Seventeenth-century English Literature and Ideas of Pattern in History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. Copyright 1986 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

“A Sense of the Future: Projected Audiences of Donne and Jonson.” *John Donne Journal* 2.2 (1983): 11–21.

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“‘Oh, let mee not serve so’: The Politics of Love in Donne’s *Elegies*.” *ELH* 57.4 (Winter 1990): 811–833.

“Donne, Milton, and Holy Sex,” in Albert C. Labriola ed., *Milton Studies* vol. 32, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995, 3–21.

“‘The Relique,’ the Song of Songs, and Donne’s *Songs and Sonets*.” *John Donne Journal* 15 (1996): 23–44.

“Fear of ‘loving More’: Death and the Loss of Sacramental Love,” in M. Thomas Hester ed., *Donne’s Desire of More: The Subject of Anne More Donne in the Poetry of John Donne*. Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1996, 204–227.

“Donne’s Religion: Montagu, Arminianism, and Donne’s Sermons, 1624–1630” in *English Literary Renaissance* 31.3 (2001): 412–439.

"Donne's Religious Poetry and the Trauma of Grace," ch. 21 in Patrick Cheney, Andrew Hadfield, and Garret A. Sullivan, Jr. eds., *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion*. Oxford University Press, 2006, 229–239.

"Donne and Apostasy," ch. 37 in Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester eds., *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*. Oxford University Press, 2011, 664–677.

A Note on the Texts for Donne:

I have made slight alterations in the reprinted essays for the sake of consistency in format, but especially in quoting from Donne's poetry, using the volumes now available in Donne Variorum editions, even though they appeared after the initial publication of many of the essays. I use the following volumes of *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, gen. ed. Gary A. Stringer:

Vol. 6: *The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies*, text eds. Ted-Larry Pebworth, John T. Shawcross, Gary A. Stringer, Ernest W. Sullivan; chief commentary ed. Paul A. Parrish. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Vol. 2: *The Elegies*, senior text eds. Ted-Larry Pebworth, Gary A. Stringer, Ernest W. Sullivan II, commentary eds. John R. Roberts and Diana Treviño Benet. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Vol. 7.1: *The Holy Sonnets*, text eds. Dennis Flynn, Ted-Larry Pebworth, Theodore J. Sherman, Gary A. Stringer, Ernest W. Sullivan II; commentary ed. Paul A. Parrish. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Following the practice of the *Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, in which my latest piece was published, I have used the C.A. Patrides edition, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1985), for the *Songs and Sonnets*, *Metempsychosis*, and divine poems other than the holy sonnets, and the W. Milgate edition of *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), for the Satires and verse letters. I have kept my original references to the Potter and Simpson 10-volume edition since at this time only Volume III of the *Oxford Edition of John Donne* has been published.

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Introduction

I had never read Donne until my first year in graduate school, at UCLA. As an English major at Indiana University, I had taken Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, though most of my courses were in Victorian and nineteenth-century American literature. I thought I would specialize in those fields, and do something transatlantic. But when I read Donne's *Songs and Sonets* in George Guffey's seventeenth-century survey, I immediately fell in love with the poet. I could not believe someone who had lived so long ago could write such interesting poems. A year or so later, sitting in a graduate seminar Earl Miner taught at the Williams Andrews Clark Library so we could experience rare books first-hand, I found myself holding the leather-bound first edition of Donne's *Poems* (1633). It was then that I realized I liked old things, felt an intimate connection with the past. I was touching something precious, turning pages that people had handled centuries earlier. Donne's poems connected us.

My passion for Donne has lasted, maybe because there is always some mystery. No matter how many times I have read and taught his poems, they yield new riches and surprises. Yet I never have written a monograph on Donne. Maybe I am not patient enough to sustain a book-long engagement with a single author, but I never thought I had grasped "all of Donne." A book would need a thesis, and I never had one. Instead, for three decades, I have been publishing essays exploring different aspects of Donne's writing.

But maybe I actually *have* been writing a book on Donne over the years. I have published more on him than on any other writer, even Milton. My articles have appeared in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, *ELH*, *English Literary Renaissance*, and the *John Donne Journal*. I have published book chapters, contributed essays to three Cambridge Companions, edited the *Cambridge Companion to John Donne* (2006) and a special issue on "Aire and Angels" for the *John Donne Journal*. I have asked different questions about Donne at different times. I am always discovering new things. My thinking has changed, and is still changing, but I have a distinctive vision of Donne. This book presents this vision, collecting what I believe are my most important published essays—including those most frequently cited—and adding a few new ones.

It seems the right time to publish this book, since it is an exciting moment in Donne studies. At a time when books on a single author are hard to publish, a remarkable number of monographs on Donne have appeared in the last decade or so—among them, Joshua Eckhart's *Manuscript Verse Collectors and the Politics of Anti-Courtly Love Poetry* (Oxford, 2009), Katrin Ettenhuber's *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford, 2011), Chanita Goodblatt's *The Christian Hebraism of John Donne* (Duquesne, 2010), Dayton Haskin's *John Donne in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2007), Ben Saunders'

Desiring Donne (Harvard, 2006), Jeanne Shami's *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Brewer, 2003), John Stubbs, *John Donne, A Reformed Soul* (Norton, 2007), Ramie Targoff's *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago, 2008)—not to mention numerous book chapters and articles, as well as David Colclough's collection, *John Donne's Professional Lives* (Brewer, 2003). The fourth volume of the Variorum Edition of Donne's poetry came out in 2007; more (one hopes) are soon to come. Oxford University Press has made a major commitment to Donne studies: in addition to the *Oxford Handbook of John Donne* (2011), it has commissioned a sixteen-volume edition of Donne's Sermons, as well as the edition of Donne's Prose Letters. There is also a growing Digital Donne project.

Much of the current energy of Donne scholars is focused on producing new editions of Donne that will replace older, outmoded ones, or (in the case of the Letters) give us the first. These scholarly editions will provide definitive texts of Donne for the twenty-first century. I see my own scholarly labors as complementary, returning attention to critically reading and interpreting Donne's texts. And even if much recent scholarship, including my own, has focused on Donne's prose (the website for the Oxford edition of the sermons website proclaims, "his religion and his prose works have arguably been the focus of the most innovative research"¹), I doubt I am alone in thinking that Donne's poetry remains the principal reason he has survived. The lyric poetry—and especially *The Songs and Sonets*—is what Robert Herrick called "The Pillar of Fame," referring to his own poetry. It is Donne the poet who has continued to provide inspiration for writers as diverse as Elizabeth Bishop, Adrienne Rich, Anthony Hecht, Wallace Shawn, Paul Muldoon, Linda Gregerson, and Kimberly Johnson.

My concern has been to engage Donne, to decipher his texts, recovering and bringing to bear on them older ways of thinking—not out of nostalgic reverence for the past but out of conviction that the past can still speak to us if we can recover and understand its language. My primary interest has been to grapple with Donne's texts rather than with the critics, acknowledging debts in my footnotes, building on others' insights and scholarship while staking out my own direction. Still, two of my essays (one on Donne's *Elegies*, the other on "Donne's Religion") had their genesis in part as a response to current scholarly positions. Even then, however, my goal was to return to the literary texts, to read them anew. The consequence, I think, is that my essays are not so tied to the occasion or time in which they were written as to lose their currency.

The essays reprinted here are presently scattered; some are not readily available (I have received requests from readers in the UK, and even Turkey). Different as they are, they are united by an overarching concern to define what is distinctive and original about him while locating his writings within various historical and cultural contexts: early modern thinking about time and history; religious attitudes towards sexuality; the politics of Elizabethan England; religious conflicts within

¹ See "About the Project," www.cems-oxford.org/donne (accessed May 25, 2014).

the church. Two essays are reprinted from volumes originally intended primarily for undergraduate/graduate student audiences, but the other essays were written for scholars. My approach is always deeply historicist, even as I have wanted to show how and why Donne continues to be relevant. I strive to make my scholarly writing accessible to the educated, interested general reader and the intelligent student, since I believe that is necessary for the survival of the humanities.

Several new essays fill out my picture of Donne and point in new directions. I have long thought that the *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasion* was due for more attention, that the dark side of Donne's love poetry has gotten short shrift in scholarship (though perhaps not in the classroom), and that Donne's important place in the history of toleration has yet to be explored. These are the subjects of three essays I have written specifically for this book.

My new essay on Donne's *Devotions* opens this volume. By meditating on Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, I hope to add to our understanding of that famous text but also to explain the quality of Donne that I find so remarkable, that brings me back to him repeatedly, and that has drawn readers over the centuries. Relatively neglected in Donne scholarship, and in mine, the *Devotions* is engaging my attention now because it powerfully exemplifies and, indeed, justifies Donne's drive to figure out the meaning of experience through creating "figures."

The rest of the essays in *Returning to Donne* are grouped into three sections that, generally, follow the chronology of their original publication. At first, I was interested in the early modern preoccupation with history and the movement of time. I then turned to erotic desire, that mysterious, powerful, disorderly thing that social and cultural forces have long sought to restrain and that is the subject of Donne's *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonets*. Most recently my work has focused on religion, the sacred, and theology. Some might say that my turn from sex to religion is an effect of age, but I doubt it. Rather, I have become increasingly interested in the ways that politics, love, and religion are interconnected in Donne's writing. My interest is fueled not only by the recognition that religion permeated most aspects of life in early seventeenth-century England, but also by my conviction that, given the proliferation of religious extremism and violence in our own world, it is critical to understand better how "religion" is as much about imagining human identity and human relations as it is about God.

Each of the three sections ("Time and History"; "Love"; "Religion") begins with a short introduction reflecting on the trajectory of my engagement with Donne, and occasionally suggesting a corrective or afterthought on my earlier thinking. New essays conclude the second and third sections: a short piece on Donne's *Songs and Sonets* forms a coda to Section II on "Love," and the final essay, at the end of Section III on "Religion," explores Donne's concern with religious toleration, placing him in a broad (and unusual) historical context. Like the first of my essays reprinted here ("Donne and the Idea of Decay"), "Donne, Milton, Spinoza, and Toleration" takes on his whole corpus, early and late, poetry and prose, and thus fittingly concludes the volume. It discusses Donne in relation

to Milton and Spinoza, reflecting new directions in my scholarship as I seek to bring together Christian and Jewish perspectives and to move more freely across confessional, disciplinary, and period boundaries.

I have decided not to revise the arguments of the reprinted essays, but I have made small changes. I have altered the editions used for Donne's poetry (and thus the quotations) in the interest of consistency but also to take advantage of the Donne Variorum volumes that have been published. (See "A Note on the Texts," in *Acknowledgements*). Using the new texts has occasionally meant that I had to add an explanatory note, or include a few new words in the text (and these I have put in brackets). I have sometimes made slight alterations in the format of citations, again to create more consistency among essays whose original publishers had different editorial styles. Finally, at the end of each reprinted essay, I append a list of "Subsequent Scholarship" that readers might find relevant to the subject or that continues the conversation.

* * * * *

I keep returning to Donne, reading him, teaching him, writing about him. Donne's mind is so interesting, his language seductive, with its twists and turns, the equivocations and figures. He is someone I want to know. To teach and write about Donne, I have had to learn about a different time, place, and culture, even a different religion. But Donne also feels very present, because his writing is so energetic, so alive, and he writes about what continues to matter: our yearning for love and intimacy, our desire to believe in—and feel connected with—something greater and better than ourselves. He speaks to me powerfully, even though I am a twenty-first century Jewish American woman, not a seventeenth-century Christian English man.

I have watched students share my excitement about Donne over years of teaching, first at the University of Illinois, and now at Barnard College. Forty years ago, I first taught Donne in a "Metaphysical Poetry" course and saw my students, who were only a few years younger than me, delight in Donne's double-entendres, his boldness, his wit. Donne was the bad boy we loved. In the fall semester 2013, teaching a senior seminar on Donne at Barnard (a different experience at a women's liberal arts college), I found my students no less enthusiastic. (They voted for the picture of Donne for the cover of this book, saying it was "the most sexy" since it showed skin.) One day, after we had spent an hour on "Loves Alchymie," they announced, "Donne is fun!" as if that was something they had not expected. One student followed up with an email, "how witty, exuberant, sassy, intelligent, exciting, melancholy, otherworldly, conniving and convincing John Donne is in his writing!" I could not have put it better.

In reading a poem or a prose passage from Donne, we watch him thinking, questioning, trying to understand and represent experience, or at least his reaction to experience (whether actual or imagined, it does not matter). Donne is always trying to figure things out. I suppose you could say that that is what many artists do, whether through music or painting. It is what scientists do, as well as humanists. But, for me, Donne, with his rage for order, epitomizes our nature as

meaning-seeking beings—even if the meaning we find sometimes is that there is no stable order.

In our postmodern world, we think of order as something we impose, construct, imagine. But in Donne's early modern world, people believed order was "out there," waiting to be understood, discovered, even if, as Francis Bacon said in his *Novum Organum*, "The human intellect is constitutionally prone to supposing that there is more order and equality in things than it actually finds."² Though Donne repeatedly asserts there is an actual, discoverable order created by God, he also seems very modern in flaunting the fact that, in metaphor-making, he is actually creating (not simply perceiving) order in experience.

Donne obsessively analyzes the experience of living—whether it is the experience of love, or doubt, or despair, or illness. Yes, he is of his time and place. His experiences and ways of understanding them were culturally specific, yet his writings are not so bound to the particularities of his culture, moment, and gender that we cannot identify with them. For we are all desiring, suffering, seeking beings, and Donne gives fresh expression to these experiences, without any trace of sentimentality. I love Robert Herrick, with his focus on the pleasure and beauty of small things, and Andrew Marvell, whose elegant poems continue to elude me. But, for me, Donne and John Milton share the literary prize in the struggle to decipher the larger meaning of life. (A Shakespearean scholar would, of course, add Shakespeare.) Where Milton takes on the problem of human history, Donne attends to the personal, even in his most public sermons. And, for all the oblique play of wit, his writing is intimate and direct, addressing the listening reader in a way that makes you feel he is speaking directly to you (for the moment)—which explains why he was such a powerful preacher.

Whether in the privately circulated *Elegies* and *Satires*, or the published prose of the *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* or his *Sermons*, whether writing about erotic desire in the *Songs and Sonets* or agonizing about salvation in the *Holy Sonnets* or anatomizing his struggle with a near fatal fever in the *Devotions*, Donne articulates in his unique way what it means to be a feeling and thinking being in a body. He labors to figure out experience through metaphors that are vivid, memorable, but shift in the process of discovery his writing re-enacts. I think of those revelatory images—"A bracelet of bright haire about the bone" in "The Relique" (l. 6); the two lovers in "The good-morrow" whose hearts are reflected in their faces which are reflected in each other's eyes. The almost dizzying shifts of figures in "A Valediction forbidding mourning"—the dying men saying farewell to their souls, the "melt[ing]" lovers (l. 5), "gold to ayery thinnesse beate" (l. 24), and finally the "twin compasses" (l. 26).³

² Francis Bacon, *The Instauration magna Part II: Norum organum and Associated Texts*, ed. with Introd., notes, commentaries, and facing page translations, Graham Rees and Maria Wakely, The Oxford Francis Bacon, vol. XI (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 83 (aphorism 45).

³ For the text of the *Songs and Sonets*, I have used *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: Dent & Sons, 1985); for the holy sonnets, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, Vol. 7, Part 1: *The Holy Sonnets*, gen. ed.

Many of Donne's lyrics begin with a problem the speaker is trying to solve. In each poem the problem is different: "Aire and Angels," "A Lecture upon the Shadow," "The Extasie," "Loves Alchymie," "The Indifferent." In "Loves growth," the speaker is puzzled by the fact that what he thought was his "infinite" (l. 6) love has endured the "Vicissitude" (l. 4) of winter and become "more" in the spring (ll. 8, 15). Can something infinite grow? If his love changed, how can he be sure his love will not grow less over time? The holy sonnet beginning "Batter my hart" considers the problem of his sinful, resistant, helpless self, hardened by sin, wondering how he can possibly be redeemed, how he can possibly be God's rather than Satan's.

Having begun with a problem, a Donne poem then meditates on it, analyzes it, conducting an argument through various metaphors and analogies, resolving the problem by the end of the poem with a generalized statement that seems "true" even if only provisionally. And then we move to another poem, watch the process unfold again. As Dayton Haskin observes, Donne "provides no sequence that generates a larger narrative frame for individual poems." We are left with contradictions between poems (not to mention those within them).⁴ Judith Scherer Herz asks, "Does Donne believe what he so often passionately asserts? Absolutely at the moment of its articulation, one feels, although not necessarily beyond the poem's last words." Donne's poems fit a world that is always changing, in which we are never the same: he "speaks in multiple voices, tones, and registers and performs many selves, all vying to be the single self."⁵ And, I would add, these features of Donne's poetry embody his conviction that one has to keep figuring things out as long as one is alive. As the speaker in *Satyre III* says, speaking of the search for "Truth," which "stands" "On a huge hill, / Cragged, and steep," "hee that will / Reach her, about must, and about must goe; / And what th'hills suddennes resists, winne so" (ll. 79–82). Hard labor, but pleasurable labor of the mind and imagination.

Donne's seductively intelligent, witty voice draws us in, inviting, indeed compelling us to figure out his writing—that is, to both witness and understand the process of his figuring things out. He challenges us to participate in and share the process, and the result is the feeling that we are discovering truths even as he is. And this is what makes Donne so much fun to teach in a classroom, why he always seems new, why I keep returning to Donne.

Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); and for "Satyre III," *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁴ "Dayton Haskin, 'The Love Lyric [Songs and Sonets],' in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, ed. Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester (Oxford University Press, 2011) 18–205, 185.

⁵ Judith Scherer Herz, "Rereading Donne's Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 101–115 at 112, 110.

Chapter 1

Figuring Things Out: Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*

The *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* is one of my favorite texts, though I have written about it only in passing. It is a liminal text, not just because Donne imagines himself inhabiting a space somewhere between earth and heaven, life and death, but also because the text straddles private and public. It echoes preoccupations of his earlier erotic lyrics (which were private, kept from the public) while articulating notions of community and the body's role in worship voiced in his public sermons. My concern here is not with the politics of Donne's religion—except insofar as it reflects Donne's sense of what it is to be human—but with the imaginative work of *The Devotions*, which is spiritual work. The text bursts with hard-won insights as Donne confronts not the joys and frustrations of love but mortality, the vulnerability of the body that we take for granted so long as it is working well, so long as we are not sick.

At the heart of the *Devotions* stands Donne's need to understand his sickness, and thereby to gain some control, some sense of agency in a situation that strips one of it. Figures and metaphors are what allow him to make sense of his condition. In virtually all Donne's writing, we witness his intense search for a sense of significance to experience, not just a grasping towards faith—that there is something more than the physical and transient (a faith the speaker of "Love's Alchymie" lacks)—but a hope that something transcendent actually *inheres in* the body, the physical.¹ Such an impulse drives the celebration of sexual love in "The Extasie" but also the bitterness of "Love's Alchymie" and "Farewell to love." And it fuels the *Devotions*.

It is easy to believe in some transcendent (and positive) meaning in moments of joy such as those celebrated in "The good-morrow" or "The Sunne Rising," but it is harder to believe that when one is sick or miserable. This is the task Donne gives himself in the *Devotions*: to discover meaning and significance, something positive and transcendent, in sickness.²

Twenty-three devotions chart the course of Donne's sickness, from "*The first alteration, The first grudging of the sicknesse*"—when he is "surpriz'd with a

¹ Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), speaks of "the absolute centrality of the body and soul's union" in Donne's metaphysics, and "his belief in the mutual necessity of body and soul" (2, 5).

² The text I have used is John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. with commentary, Anthony Raspa (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

sodaine change,” his health “overthrow[n]” (17)—through his “stormie voyage” (67) and anticipation of death, to his recovery, which is tentative and precarious, since the doctors warn him of “the fearefull danger of relapsing” (121). This is a difficult book, facing mortality and sickness and the anxiety and despair, the sense of vulnerability that illness provokes. Donne captures that experience in compelling, vivid terms that strike anyone who has been weakened by serious illness, or watched someone else struggle with a terminal disease. Donne focuses, relentlessly, on the body and the emotions and thoughts prompted by the body’s suffering. He captures as well as anyone ever has the interdependence of body, mind, and emotion. Above all, however, he wants to make sense of illness, which is (he says) the human condition. We might compare our current recognition that “disability” is a state we all will at some time experience, that being able-bodied is only a temporary, precarious state.

Each of the twenty-three devotions marking the progress of his disease has three parts: the Meditation considers Donne’s condition at a particular moment as it reveals the condition of “natural man”—that is, as it is universal. The sections of Expostulation and Prayer that follow are, I would say, less universal, for they interpret the present moment in terms of the Bible (New Testament as well as Old) and man’s relation to God. With the rare exception of Meditation 5, the Meditations are “secular” and universal and do not presume a distinctly Christian perspective. I find these sections most moving, most appealing. The Expostulations are filled with references to the Bible, and here Donne asks questions of God, struggling with God as Jacob, David, and Job did in the Old Testament, and as Jesus did in the New. It is no accident that each Expostulation begins, “My God, my God,” echoing Jesus’s address and question to God as he was undergoing the Crucifixion (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46), which actually echoes the opening of Psalm 22. In the Prayer that concludes each devotion, Donne prays rather than questions, submitting his will and his reason, as he embraces both God and Christ, convincing himself that God has not, in fact, forsaken him.³ Indeed, this is what the whole set of *Devotions* works towards; it is

³ Rapsa’s description of the three sections of each Devotion emphasizes the structuring thread of images: the Meditation describes Donne’s symptoms in images. “The Expostulation adopts these images to describe the filial relation of Donne to God the Father; and the Prayer adopts them in turn to illustrate the presence of God in the world of man.” See Rapsa’s Introduction to Donne, *Devotions*, xxiii. See also Kate Narveson, “Piety and the Genre of Donne’s Devotions,” *John Donne Journal* 17 (1998): 107–136, and her ch. 23, “The Devotion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, ed. Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester (Oxford University Press, 2011), 308–317, which observes that “Donne created a more individual voice than the norm” (314). On the form of the *Devotions*, see further Kate Frost, *Holy Delight: Typology, Numerology and Autobiography in Donne’s “Devotions upon emergent occasions”* (Princeton University Press, 1990), and Brent Nelson, “*Pathopoeaia* and the Protestant Form of Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*,” in *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation: New Perspectives*, ed. Mary A. Papazian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 247–272.