1

JONATHAN F. S. POST

Donne's life: a sketch

"The first poet in the world in some things," as Jonson said of Donne,[1] was also the first poet in English whose life was regarded as both sufficiently extraordinary and usefully emblematic to be made into a biography. It was not a writer's life in the modern sense, in which materials are excavated and analyzed in order to illuminate the specific circumstances that went into the creation of the art. Of this kind of literary biography, the early modern period is lacking, but a celebrated "life," nonetheless, was written by the first of English biographers, the pious Izaak Walton, initially for the posthumous edition of Donne's *Sermons* (1640).

Walton was a generation younger than his subject, and at times as much given to fiction as fact but, thanks to his work (constructed from notes gathered by Donne's friend, Henry Wotton), and to the emendations and additions it has received at the hands of modern scholars, Donne's life, if disputable in the particular, remains, in the aggregate, more vividly imaginable than that of almost any other writer in early modern England.[2] Although gaps in the record exist, often where we most want illumination – of the *Songs and Sonets*, for instance – a thumbnail sketch of Donne might see his life falling into four phases. The first extends from his birth in 1572 to about 1591, when, after studying at home and university and traveling abroad, Donne resettled in London in search of a career. Although our knowledge of Donne's activities and whereabouts for this early period is least reliable, the current thinking continues to underscore Donne's precarious status as a Catholic "aristocrat." His namesake father was a prosperous but short-lived ironmonger (he would die when the poet-preacher was only four), descended from the Dwns of Kidwelly, Wales. Their own aristocratic circumstance is made visually explicit in the "donor" triptych of the family painted by Hans Memling ("Virgin and Child," *c.* 1475, now in the National Gallery in London). More significantly, Donne's eventually thrice-married mother, Elizabeth, was descended from Sir Thomas More and the wide circle of Catholic sympathizers associated with the martyred Lord Chancellor. More

had been executed in 1534 for refusing to subscribe to the Act of Supremacy declaring Henry VIII to be the true spiritual head of the Church of England. That Donne identified deeply with this family history of persecution is made clear from an often-quoted remark of his from the "Advertisement to the Reader" to *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610): "as I am a Christian, I have beene ever kept awake in a meditation of Martyrdome, by being derived from such a stocke and race, as, I believe, no family (which is not of farre larger extent, and greater branches,) hath endured and suffered more in their persons and fortunes, for obeying the Teachers of Romane Doctrine, then it hath done" (p. 8).

"As I am a Christian" – but in the 1580s, the decade of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Donne was also a Catholic living under a Protestant queen. As such, he was educated at home by tutors, probably Catholic priests, and perhaps his learned Jesuit uncle Jasper Heywood, whose literary accomplishments included translating three of Seneca's ten tragedies in the early 1560s. Much later again, this time in a preface to *Biathanatos*, his unpublished pamphlet on suicide, thought to be written around 1607–08, Donne would speak about his early schooling with an aura of mystery and intrigue savored by his biographers: "I had my first breeding, and conversation with Men of a suppressed and afflicted Religion, accustomed to the despite of death, and hungry of an imagin'd Martyrdome" (p. 29). Just possibly, the famous "metaphysical shudder" was born amid this "breeding and conversation."

One further consequence of Donne's Catholicism involved his early matriculation at Oxford (with his younger brother, Henry) at age twelve. The records give Donne's age as eleven, probably in order to avoid the requirement of having to subscribe to the Act of Supremacy and the Thirty-Nine Articles, imposed on all students at age sixteen by a 1581 Oxford Matriculation Statute. For reasons of conscience, Walton tells us, Donne did not stay for the degree, whereupon he would have had to subscribe to the Oath. But whether he went to Cambridge, as both Walton and Bald suggest, or whether he left Oxford much earlier, as Dennis Flynn has recently argued, and set out for Paris in the company of other noble Catholics, and then began a tour of the continent that included participating in the siege of Antwerp, remains a matter of considerable debate, much enabled by the paucity of factual information relating to these early years (Flynn, pp. 134–46, 170–72; Bald, pp. 46–52).

Two related points about Donne's time at university are worth making. First, notwithstanding Donne's evident brilliance – Walton reports the contemporary remark "*that this age had brought forth another* Picus Mirandula; of whom Story says, *That he was rather born, than made wise by study*" (p. 23) – schooling was less important than the social connections it enabled. Second, while at Oxford, Donne developed a habit of making lifelong friends

with people as notably different from one another as Henry Wotton, future ambassador to Venice and Provost of Eton College, and Richard Martin, who would emerge in Parliament under James VI and I as a leading spokesman for the opposition party against royal absolutism (Bald, p. 43).[3] The latter point bears emphasizing, not just because Donne's epistles in verse and prose constitute a significant part of his writing, but because the centrifugal pull of diverse friendships, which would soon include aristocrats like Henry Percy, fellow amateur poets and budding connoisseurs of art, like Christopher Brooke, and court hopefuls like the generous spendthrift Sir Henry Goodyer, helped to offset the centripetal pull of a family often bent on exile and martyrdom.

A second phase, beginning in 1591 and continuing into 1602, might be said to coincide with the final anxious years of Elizabeth's rule when matters of succession, mixed with patriotic fervor, became especially prominent. It is marked, at one temporal extreme, by our first look at Donne, aged eighteen, in the (lost) miniature, probably by Nicholas Hilliard, that underlies the engraving produced by William Marshall for the 1635 publication of Donne's *Poems*, and, at the other, by his clandestine marriage to Anne More in December, 1601, which soon led to their financially-imposed exile from London shortly thereafter. On the basis of the engraving, one should not conclude too much about how Donne actually looked (figure 1). Nor should one put too much interpretive weight on either the translation Walton provided for the motto *Antes muerto que mudado* ("Sooner dead than changed"), which the hagiographically minded biographer rendered as "*How much shall I be chang'd, / Before I am chang'd*" (Walton, p. 79), or the accompanying poem he produced for the occasion, which sets the "golden Age" of Donne's elder years against the "dross" of his youth. But the engraving does indicate a truculent Donne, more soldier than scholar, broad shouldered, hand on sword, sporting a cruciform earring, the dangling icon of his residual Catholicism: an emerging someone about to make a mark in an emerging city.

The London Donne re-entered was itself undergoing rapid change and expansion. From the accession of Henry VIII in 1509 to the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the population increased ten-fold in number: from about 50,000 people to half a million.[4] Parish steeples might remain the city's most visually conspicuous connection to its medieval past, but the streets were becoming as crowded as those of ancient Rome, a point Donne vividly captures in the first, and probably earliest of his satires (when the bookish recluse is lured out of his study to observe London's seamy underside) and then further develops in the remarkable, nightmarishly congested fourth satire.

Figure 1 Donne in 1591; from an engraving by William Marshall, prefixed to *Poems*, 1635.

Nor could it be said that London, and by extension England, was any longer an island entire of itself. During Elizabeth's reign, the nation began to utilize the navigational technologies associated with exploration and to compete against Portugal and Spain for new world booty. By 1580, Francis Drake had girdled the globe, as Magellan had done a half-century earlier. A few years later, in 1583, Humphrey Gilbert, accompanied by Walter Raleigh, laid claim to Newfoundland – "O my America! my new-found-land," as Donne would eagerly exclaim about the female body in his most sexually charged elegy beginning "Come, Madam, come" – and shortly thereafter Ralegh sought to establish colonies in both South America (Guiana) and Roanoke Island, off the North Carolina coast. The post-Gutenburg explosion of print, moreover, allowed readers to stay current with these events, whether through the burgeoning travel literature of the day or the ever-increasing production of sophisticated maps by continental cartographers like Gerard Mercator and Abraham Ortelius. The great sixteenth-century Antwerp publisher, Christopher Plantin, in fact, chose a compass as his insignia, and by the 1660s, the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer had rendered, with exquisite concentration, not just "The Geographer," compass in hand, deep in thought, but his near twin, "The Astronomer" – the latter reminding us of the astronomical discoveries associated with Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo. Mapmindedness, writes a recent historian of cartography, had become a contemporary phenomenon.[5]

Donne, at whatever stage, was pre-eminently worldly in his thinking. Compasses would have as much a place in his poetry as the Straits of Magellan. Dante, not Spenser, was part of his upbringing; Durer as well as Hilliard were at his finger tips. But the London he re-entered in the 1590s – to return to the immediate – was still a small world, geographically and socially. Although few buildings from Donne's time survive, most of the places associated with his name are within easy walking distance of one another. From Bread Street, where he was born, to Lincoln's Inn, where he studied law and later preached, takes little more than fifteen minutes. Even less time is necessary to walk from the Inns of Court to York House, at the bottom of Drury Lane, in which he would serve as Egerton's secretary; and from here to St. Clement Danes Church, where his wife, Anne (More) Donne would be buried in 1617, requires only about five minutes, and about the same again to St. Dunstan's West, one of several parish churches that Donne would hold. And from St. Dunstan's to St. Paul's, where Donne would be installed as Dean in 1621, is another ten minutes. Lining the Thames River near Drury Lane, as well, were the great houses belonging to Essex (Robert Devereux) and Somerset (Sir Robert Ker) – two of his patrons – and, of course, on the other side of the river, in Southwark, were brothels, bear

gardens, and the large out-door amphitheatres, including, as of 1599, the Globe. What separated people was not so much distance as class – a rigid social hierarchy, narrow at the top, and presided over by the monarch, attended by court favorites – and, of course, religious difference. When in disgrace Donne eventually found housing in Mitcham, a suburb of London, in the early 1600s, he sounded, at times, as if he might well be living in the Antipodes.

The 1590s were, however, remarkably full for Donne: a decade given to poetry, entertainment, theological inquiry, family stress, military adventure, and career advancement. Having come into his inheritance of about 750 pounds from the early death of his father, he was reported by his Oxford acquaintance, Sir Richard Baker, to be living, at this point, at the "*Innes of Court*, not dissolute, but very neat; a great visiter of Ladies, a great frequenter of Playes, a great writer of conceited Verses" (Bald, p. 72). Conceited verses, in conjunction with visiting ladies, sounds more appropriate to the amatory lyrics in the *Songs and Sonets* and some of the *Elegies* than to the *Satires*, with their harsh judgments of the times. Experimenting with politically edgy satire and the Ovidian erotic poem – and its potentially pornographic matter – was in vogue at the Inns of Court in the waning days of Elizabeth's reign and in step with "a new and aggressively sexualized form of distinctly English literature ... emerging into definition in the 1590s,"[6] an emergence that would be perceived by the authorities as politically disruptive and lead to works being banned at the end of the decade. (Not being printed, Donne's poems escaped the pyre, which consumed books by Thomas Nashe, John Marston, and John Davies.) As for his being "a great frequenter of Playes," the best record of his visits to the theater – his writings are bereft of references to specific plays, although not incidents – is the utter originality of his lyrics conceived as dramatic monologues.

A second portrait of Donne, thought to date from the middle of the decade, speaks to the process of refinement he was undergoing in the 1590s as Inns-of-Court man-about-town – and to his habitual fascination with his own changing identity. In the "Lothian" portrait, as it is called, Donne now appears in the suave posture of a melancholy lover, indicated in the crossed arms and wide-brimmed hat, the portions of the picture most in shadow (figure 2). No longer apparent are traces of books and a quill, visible when the portrait was discovered in 1959, and an appropriately subtle indicator of Donne's authorial activities at this stage. Most striking, of course, are the illuminated features in the picture: first the elongated fingers, then the piercing eyes and sensuous mouth, as they draw a mannerist attention to the sitter's elegant sexuality confirmed on a more explicitly irreverent level in the Latin motto, transposed from the third collect for Evensong, and arching

Figure 2 Donne in the pose of a Melancholy Lover.

over Donne's head like a rainbow: "*Illumina tenebr[as] nostras Domina*" – "lighten our darkness, Lady."[7] We might even imagine the absorption of the earlier cruciform earring into the image of the lover's crossed arms.[8]

Donne would later be haunted by recollections of his amatory exploits during these years, but the unsettled subject of religion – and persecution – was also never far from his thoughts. Sharply telescoping the chronology during his time at the Inns of Court, Walton reports that Donne did "presently lay aside all study of the Law … and [began] seriously to survey, and

consider the Body of Divinity as it was then controverted betwixt the *Reformed* and the *Roman* Church" (p. 25). But Walton omits mentioning the event that perhaps prompted this urgent inquiry, in favor of underscoring the deliberative nature of Donne's quest for the true church, including his extended observations on the writings of Cardinal Bellarmine. In early 1594, Donne's brother, Henry, died from the plague in prison, where he had been committed for harboring a Yorkshire priest, William Harrington, in his chambers in May 1593. Henry's death saved him from witnessing the grisly scene of Harrington "drawne from Newgate to Tyborne; and there hanged, cut downe alive, struggled with the hang-man, but was bowelled, and quartered" (Bald, p. 58).

Donne is silent on the matter of Henry's death, but at issue here in the reporting is a biographical conundrum centering on the problem of evaluating Donne's theological leanings. When did Donne "convert" to Anglicanism? And at what psychological cost, to borrow the darker terminology put into use by John Carey, who prefers to characterize Donne's "conversion" as his "apostasy" from Catholicism? And here one is concerned not just with determining dates involving matters of outward conformity – Donne could not have been in Egerton's service by the end of the decade if he was not, in some sense, subscribing to the Church of England – but with assessing the inward consequences accompanying such a shift in belief, a shift that Walton, for one, saw occupying Donne's mind well into James's reign. In the absence of personal testimony from Donne during these years, much can only be hypothesized about his state of mind in the 1590s. But most scholars agree that one of the keys to understanding Donne's habits of thought can be found in "Satyre III," his strenuous and brilliantly skeptical inquiry into "true religion," often assumed to have been written in the mid-to-late 1590s.

As for Donne's military adventures to Cadiz and the Azores, from June 1596 to September 1597, we are on firmer footing with regard to dates. We might also observe, à propos the two portraits, that while the sword still remained within Donne's reach, the pen produced the more lasting results. Donne's participation in these separate attacks against Spain, led by Essex, is a well-documented, small, but fascinating chapter in his life, and can only be touched on here.[9] We do not know precisely how and in what capacity he came to be part of these expeditions, which, militarily speaking, were small fires in the much larger pan-European conflagration between Catholics and Protestants. But they put Donne in some exciting company (Sir Walter Ralegh, for one), perhaps secured a connection, begun at the Inns of Court, with Thomas Egerton, the son of his future employer, who would die a hero's death in Ireland in 1599 (Donne would bear the sword at his funeral), and

they indicate as well his attachment to England's anti-Spanish policy, whatever his precise theological leanings at the moment.

But patriotism is not the pronounced theme in the poetry dealing with these adventures. The point is the more surprising – and interesting – if one recalls the jingoism frequently associated with the theaters in the 1590s, in which characters like the Mariner from *Edward III* stand and deliver set pieces describing English valor, even in defeat.[10] Donne's epigrams from these ventures are more like brief snapshots capturing the ironic mix of violence and pathos of battle ("A burnt ship," "Sir John Wingefield") – the kind of thing a modern poet like Wilfred Owen might write; and the most ambitious of his attempts at scene painting, the pair of *fin-de-siècle* verse epistles to his Inns of Court friend Christopher Brooke, "The Storme" and "The Calme," speak as much to Donne's divided and restless state of mind at this point in his career as they do of nature's disabling effects on the ship and its crew.

Back on land by October 1597, Donne was in Egerton's employment within a year. The route to preferment often has been charted from the Inns of Court, through a circle of friends, to the position of Egerton's secretary. But the most interesting event is not Donne's manner of arrival, or even his daily activities as Egerton's factotum that enabled his "whistle-blowing" fifth satire,[11] but the means of his sudden departure from York house: eloping with Egerton's sixteen-year-old niece, Anne More (no relation to Sir Thomas More), sometime in December 1601, and thereby earning both his father-in-law's and his employer's wrath in one fell swoop. Sir George More had the twenty-nine-year-old Donne and his friends, Christopher and Samuel Brooke, thrown in jail. He also attempted, unsuccessfully, to have the marriage annulled. (Then, as now, civil ceremonies were legally binding.) The episode is fully documented in a series of letters Donne wrote to both Sir George and his employer, in one suggesting to the bride's father that it was in his and therefore his daughter's, and of course Donne's, best interest for Sir George to look kindly upon an event that had been "irremediably done."[12]

What is remarkable is the apparent impulsiveness of Donne's actions, and the inability of later critics to supply a satisfactory explanation other than the obvious romantic one. Over-reaching might be seen to have played a part but for the devotion Donne always showed his wife, in letters to friends, and in both the highly personal sonnet he wrote on the occasion of her death in 1617 and the plaque he raised to her memory in St. Clement Danes church. Of course, we know about Anne Donne only from John Donne's point of view. Like many other women of the times, she left no spoken or written record of her thoughts, but Walton does describe her as having been "curiously and plentifully educated" (p. 31). It sounds as if she could have

followed her husband's thinking – and understood his poetry too, as readers have often felt.[13] "So much company, therefore, as I am, she shall not want," Donne wrote to her brother in 1614, three years before Anne would die at age thirty-three after giving birth to their twelfth child, "and we had not one another at so cheap a rate as that we should ever be so weary of one another" (Oliver, p. 76).

Donne was eventually forgiven by both his father-in-law and his employer, but Egerton's sense of office would not permit Donne to be reinstated. Egerton was among the few Elizabethan officials apparently above reproach, which was one of the reasons why he was chosen Lord Keeper – that, and the part the former recusant played in the 1580s prosecuting important Catholics like the Jesuit Edmund Campion and Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary Queen of Scots. Whatever his personal feelings for Donne, Egerton was not about to relent on an employment matter that had sparked so much scandal in the small world of London. The punning phrase "*John Donne – Anne Donne – Undone*" began immediately to circulate, in variant form, and, as the century wore on, it became a well-known jest, reported even among "The Royal Apothegms of King Charles" (1669), where its elevated currency probably prompted Walton finally to include the quip in his 1675 edition of Donne's life.[14]

With wife in hand, children on the way, and no visible means of income, Donne began a long, frustrating search for employment that would last until January 23, 1615, when he would be ordained deacon and priest. There are no portraits of him in this third phase. But an increasing number of letters survive, and these depict, among other things, the highly awkward position of dependency in which Donne now found himself as he tried, again and again, to climb the slippery slope of preferment. Here is one sentence from a (1608?) letter to James Hay, whose own successful career was launched when he came south from Scotland with the King and was thereupon appointed a gentleman of the bedchamber: "I have been told that when your Lordship did me that extreme favour of presenting my name, his Majesty remembered me by the worst part of my history, which was my disorderly proceedings several years since in my nonage" (Oliver, p. 41). To help him sustain his family, Donne occasionally did receive favors from friends and patrons – most notably Sir Henry Goodyer, Magdalen Herbert, and Lucy Harrington, Countess of Bedford. But the letter to Hay, who would become another lifelong friend, suggests how hard it was, given the king's disposition, for Donne ever to pry open the door to courtly preferment.

During these years of exile – their first child would be called, appropriately enough, "Constance" – the Donne family moved often: initially to Pyrford, near Loseley House, the More family estate in Surrey, until 1606, when they

moved to a two-story cottage in Mitcham and remained there until 1611. Then, thanks largely to the help he received from Sir Robert Drury, and after a brief stop in the Isle of Wight, the family settled in a house on Drury Lane and remained there until taking possession of the Deanery of St. Paul's in 1621. Initially, Donne split his time between his growing family and going abroad in search of employment: sometimes to London, where he kept lodging in the Strand and enjoyed the conviviality of the Mermaid Tavern; and yet even here he could hardly have escaped for long the sense of his life as spectacle for common observation. "Newes here is none at all," wrote John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton on February 14, 1609, "but that John Dun seekes to be preferred to be secretarie of [the] Virginia [company]" (Bald, p. 162). Donne also journeyed twice to the continent, from 1605 to early 1606, to Paris and perhaps Venice, and then again to France as part of the large Drury entourage from 1611 to 1612.

As is often the case with Donne, the powers of camaraderie are balanced against, or, more often now in conflict with, the forces of family. The tension is sometimes concentrated in a single letter, as in this frequently quoted one to Goodyer:

> I write not to you out of my poor library, where to cast mine eye upon good authors kindles or refreshes sometimes meditations not unfit to communicate to near friends, nor from the highway, where I am contracted and inverted into myself, which are my two ordinary forges of letters to you, but I write from the fireside in my parlour and in the noise of three gamesome children and by the side of her whom, because I have transplanted into a wretched fortune, I must labour to disguise that from her by all such honest devices as giving her my company and discourse. Therefore I steal from her all the time which I give this letter and it is therefore that I take so short a list [run-up] and gallop so fast over it. I have not been out of my house since I received your packet.
>
> (Oliver, p. 33)

The Mitcham years were filled with restlessness of a different kind than what animated Donne in the 1590s. Amid the raw vapors rising from the vault below his study, he probably wrote many of his holy sonnets, the most intimate and troubled of the devotional poems, and also his treatise on suicide, *Biathanatos*. As we discover, too, from a letter written to that pillar of Protestantism, Magdalen Herbert, around 1607, Donne was composing what has come to be known as the "La Corona" sequence of devotional sonnets; and, again, in even greater detail in a letter to Goodyer from 1608 that sheds considerable light on his attempts to navigate between the Roman and the Reformed Church, Donne outlines some of his motives for composing "for [his] lesser chapels, which are my friends," the poem called "The Litanie" (Oliver, p. 38).

In order to enhance his chances for secular preferment, Donne also turned, for the first time, to the world of print and propaganda. (To this point, reflecting an aristocratic bias against publication, only one of his lyrics, "The Expiration," had appeared in print, in Ferrabosco's 1609 *Book of Ayres*.) In the immediate aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot (1605), the king had issued his Oath of Allegiance (1606) requiring all citizens to swear obedience to England's temporal ruler. *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), dedicated to James, was Donne's attempt to convince English Catholics that it was possible to do so without betraying their faith. This was soon followed by *Conclave Ignati* (1611; English version same year), a quick outgrowth of the scathing satire against Jesuits that had concluded *Pseudo-Martyr*.[15] Still, neither work helped Donne gain preferment. In fact, although *Pseudo-Martyr* did lead to an honorary MA from Oxford in 1610, ironically, as the story goes, it only seemed to confirm in James's mind Donne's suitability for church, not state, employment.

Donne's other venture into print in this period met with more embarrassment than success, of even an ironic kind. The incident remains of particular interest, though, in part because modern criticism has found much value in the two extended verse elegies collectively known as *The First* and *Second Anniversaries* that Donne wrote to commemorate the death in December 1610 of fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Drury, the daughter of his patrons, Sir Robert and Lady Drury. The first, "An Anatomie of the World," Donne saw into print in 1611 before setting out for France with Drury. The sequel, "Of the Progresse of the Soule," he wrote while abroad; the two were then published together, with some other poems, in 1612.[16] But their appearance, separate or together, raised eyebrows among the patron-conscious literati because of the hyperbolic praise Donne bestowed on the young Elizabeth. Jonson was reported to have said "that Donne's *Anniversary* was profane and full of blasphemies," and "that he told Mr. Donne, if it had been written of the Virgin Mary it had been something; to which [Donne] answered that he described the idea of a woman, and not as she was."[17]

Donne was stung by the adverse reception his venture into publication got. In two letters written in quick succession from abroad concerning the matter he noted, "I hear from England of many censures of my book of Mistress Drury." Licking his wounds, he spoke with regret about "descend[ing] to print anything in verse," continued the high-minded line of defense Jonson had attributed to him, and revealed, as well, further annoyance over the very real possibility that some "ladies" might think he was insincere in his praise (Oliver, pp. 62–63).

That Donne should be so touchy on this issue points in a number of directions: certainly to the highly stratified, status-conscious society he was

forced to navigate, not always successfully (and sincerely); and, just possibly to lingering concerns about his Catholic heritage, which, at one level, *Pseudo-Martyr* sought to address. And yet, Donne was not so offended that he could afford to withdraw *The Second Anniversary* from publication in 1612 when it was still possible to do so. Nor did he altogether swear off publishing his verse. Two years later, in a letter to Goodyer dated December 20, 1614, he speaks in a hushed voice – "so softly I am loath to hear myself – and so softly that, if that good Lady [Bedford] were in the room with you and this letter, she might not hear" – of the necessity "of printing my poems and addressing them to my Lord Chamberlain [Robert Ker, the Earl of Somerset] . . . . for I must do this as a valediction to the world before I take orders" (Oliver, pp. 79–80).

Donne's quest for temporal preferment ended in January 1615, without his ever following through on his valedictory publishing pledge. As is the case with Hamlet's indecisions, Donne's delay at fulfilling a responsibility that others found highly suitable to him has invited many explanations. For the high-church Walton, the forty-two-year-old Donne required time for spiritual growth. "Jack Donne" needed time to become "John Donne," which, in Augustinian fashion, entailed coming to terms with the "many strifes within himself concerning the strictness of life" (Walton, p. 46) that find acute expression in one of the few, clearly datable (and great) poems from the period leading up to his ordination, "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward." For the more skeptical Bald, the ministry was the only option left for Donne after so many failed attempts to win secular employment. (As late as March 1614, an episode Walton omits, Donne wrote Somerset asking for the ambassadorship to Venice.) Donne's true conversion to the church begins, for Bald, only with the death of his wife (p. 328). For the still more skeptical Carey, Donne's decision to enter the ministry is simply a further extension of the ambition that drove him to seek worldly preferment in the first place.

As with Donne's other "conversion," from Catholicism to Protestantism, the evidence admits conflicting views. One might briefly note, as a way of signaling the range of possibilities, that the new seal Donne chose to symbolize the change in his life – the device of Christ crucified to an anchor used "on the letter written on the day of his ordination to Sir Edward Herbert" (Bald, p. 305) – was followed the next year by the stylish portrait of him in ruff done by Isaac Oliver in 1616 (figure 3). And both of these representations, tending in opposite directions, were followed by a third, more complicated one in verse in 1617: that of a grieving husband arguing, ingeniously, that a tenderly jealous God has taken away his wife in order to assure that "the World, Fleshe, yea Devill" will not put divinity out of the speaker's thoughts ("Since she whom I lov'd," 14). Nonetheless, by 1620, Donne's appearance in yet

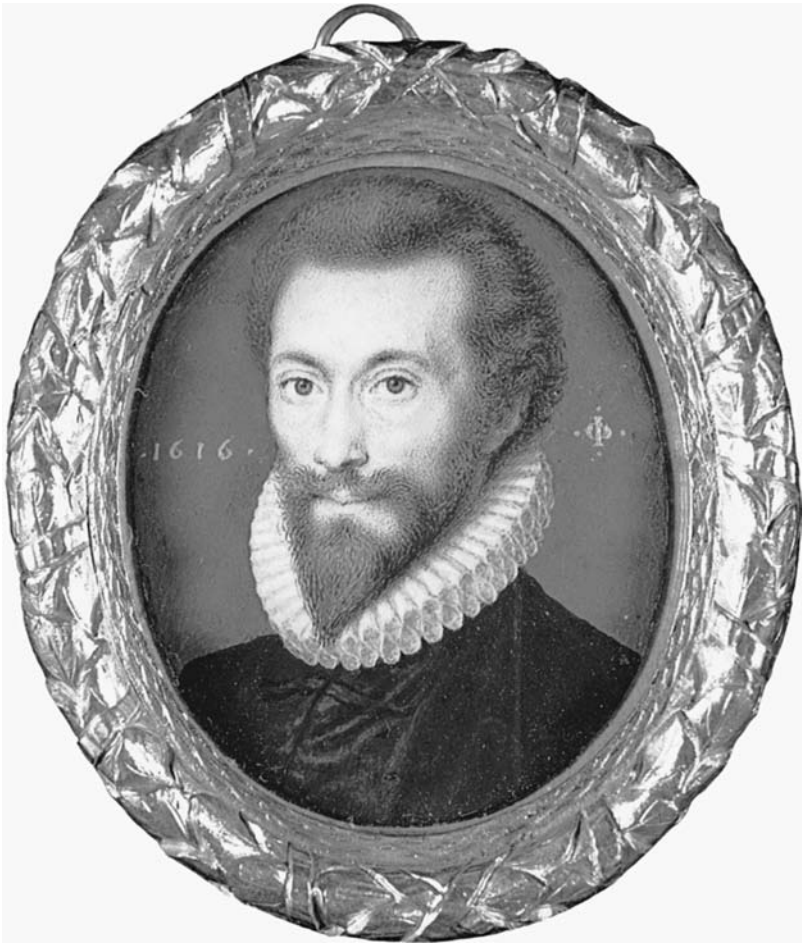

Figure 3 Donne in 1616; from a miniature by Isaac Oliver.

another picture wearing the dress of a Roman orator, but looking monastic, suggests, visually at least, that worldly and spiritual identities were beginning to converge (figure 4).[18]

The last phase, Donne's years in the church, can be summarized more briefly, if only because, to quote Walton, those activities "which had been occasionally diffused, were all concentred in Divinity."[19] Except for one sojourn abroad in 1619, Donne remained in or around London until his death in 1631. At court, Somerset was out, George Villiers, elevated to Duke of Buckingham in 1623, in. But Donne's friendships were wider than those of a single court faction, just as his theology – and his church – were born of convictions broader than what might be attributed to either Germany or Rome.

Figure 4 Donne in 1620, as shown in the portrait in the Deanery of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Donne's clerical career began auspiciously when he was appointed royal Chaplain to the king. Then, if the chronology is right, it took an odd turn when he failed to be awarded a Doctor of Divinity by Cambridge (which James had promised), but was rumored, instead, to have been granted the Deanery of Canterbury, which was not true but, according to the gossipy Chamberlain, created envy among his contemporaries. His career soon got back on track with the receipt of several benefices. One, the rectory of Sevenoaks, was a sinecure from his old employer Egerton, and it was in conjunction with a visit in July 1617 that the remarkable Anne Clifford, then wife to the third Earl of Dorset, Richard Sackville, noted in her *Diary* hearing Donne preach. (His poems and sermons would be among the books later depicted in her triptych portrait by Jan van Belcamp known as the "Great Picture of Lady Anne Clifford.") But Donne's most important early

appointment was, without doubt, as Reader in Divinity at Lincoln's Inn on October 24, 1616. Here, among some old academic acquaintances and in familiar haunts not far from his house in Drury Lane, Donne first assumed regular preaching duties – fifty sermons in his first year – and began to hone the public rhetorical skills that would soon lead to his becoming one of London's most eloquent and prominent sermonizers – the "Golden Chrysostome" of eulogistic record.[20]

As a measure of his success with this most favored of Jacobean literary forms, to say nothing of ongoing personal connections, Donne was invited to preach in a variety of different settings, each with its own cliental and specific ecclesiological concerns: at court, both at Whitehall and Denmark House, Queen Anne's residence; and at Paul's Cross, with its mixed, open-air audience and opportunities to preach on controversial topics. And, of course, Donne preached frequently at both St. Paul's, after he was appointed Dean in 1621, and nearby St. Dunstan's West, a living held by the Earl of Dorset, to which Donne was appointed in 1624, and where Walton, then a linen draper, was a parishioner.

Donne's one sojourn abroad after his ordination was as chaplain in the service of Viscount Doncaster (the same James Hay). The venture turned out to be a futile, costly, diplomatic mission to head off the conflict between a resurgent Hapsburg empire and resistant Protestant states that would lead to the Thirty Years War. The embassy's journey took Donne through Heidelberg, Germany, to Bohemia – modern-day Czechoslovakia – then north to the Netherlands where, among other cities visited, he delivered a sermon at the Hague and received a medal honoring the Synod of Dort, which he later bequeathed to Henry King. Still, the most memorable impression Donne left of this excursion was in the first of three great valedictory hymns he wrote after taking orders: "A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany."

Donne took his ministerial duties seriously, at one point vowing indignantly in a late letter (against rumors of his affecting ease in his sickness), "that I might die in the pulpit; if not that, yet that I might take my death in the pulpit, that is, die the sooner by occasion of my former labours" (Oliver, p. 117). More debatable is how much Donne felt bound as a preacher by the political favors he received. A sermon itself is occasional, and often requires, as scholars have shown, a full reading of the historical context if one is to catch the political drift. Sermons were not subject to censorship, but a sermonizer who offended the king could spend the night – or more – in the Tower. One of Donne's most controversial acts involved his being invited (that is, required) to preach at Paul's Cross on behalf of James's *Directions to Preachers*, which the king had published in an attempt to restrain the barrage

of criticism directed from London pulpits against official policy favoring Spain in the immediate aftermath of the defeat of the Elector Palatine in 1620. Donne seems to have negotiated James's absolutist politics here well enough to cause serious debate among current scholars as to his leanings.[21] A few years later, under Charles I, Donne would himself become anxious when the king signaled suspicions about a sermon he had preached.

Donne's later years were marked by periods of extremely poor health. Given the presence of the plague that raged through London in 1625, sickness itself was hardly unusual, but in Donne, illness often brought with it remarkable bursts of creative inspiration, especially when the sickness was his own. As one critic has recently put the matter, when Donne "felt most gravely threatened he also felt compelled to produce his most defiantly lively writing."[22] The year 1623 was one of those charged valedictory moments. Suddenly struck down by what is now called "relapsing fever" in early December of that year, Donne used the intervals of recovery and lucidity to pen, with near super-human speed and concentration, the series of prose meditations tracing the effects of his sickness titled *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. By January 9, the work was already registered with the Stationers' Company for publication, the speed perhaps owing, in part, to the presence of some enterprising Fleet Street printers among Donne's St. Dunstan's congregation. Although the focus here is characteristically on himself, as it is in the "companion" work, the "Hymne to God My God, in my sicknesse," Donne had no qualms, as a divine, about publishing this emblematic portrait of his sufferings, much as, some years later, with death approaching, he would choose to leave not one but two images of himself to posterity in the statue carved by Nicholas Stone and in the famous sermon, "Death's Duell, " preached at Whitehall "Before King Charles I (February 25, 1631)."

Before we arrive at Donne's saintly end, though, a few more worldly concerns bear mentioning. In conjunction with describing the great grief Donne felt over the death of his wife, Walton reported that Donne "gave voluntary assurance" to his remaining children "never to bring them under the subjection of a step-mother" (p. 51). The little we know of the seven Donne children then still alive has been compactly summarized in Bald's biography (pp. 547–56). The oldest son, John, followed haltingly in his father's clerical and literary footsteps, seeing into print much of his father's work, including the *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651). The next son, George, assumed his father's active star. He became a soldier, and at the time of Donne's death, he was a Spanish captive languishing in prison in Cadiz. But the most intriguing saga for literature students involves the oldest child, Constance. In one of the more remarkable family alliances – the

ever-watchful Chamberlain called it "the strangest match" – Donne's twenty-year-old daughter married the recently widowed Edward Alleyn, "the old player,"[23] in early December 1623, just as Donne was succumbing to relapsing fever. No doubt the marriage was arranged. The 57-year old Alleyn was wealthy, and agreed to a settlement of 1500 pounds payable to Constance at his death. The match, in turn, added another touch to Alleyn's ongoing bid for respectability as the founder of Dulwich College – the dignity of a knighthood would elude him. But for reasons apparently having to do with a loan Donne promised Alleyn, the two men fell out in 1625, at which point, the aging actor and now Master of the King's Bears, who had made his fortune on the wrong side of the Thames, accused the Dean of St. Paul's, now on the right side of the river, of reneging on his promise and using words "more 'fitting you 30 years ago when you might be question[ed] for them then now under so reverent a calling as you are'" (Bald, pp. 464–65). Alleyn was to die within the year, and Constance would remarry, but the strange fracas points, by way of the pulpit, to the never-quite-forgotten stigma of Donne's raucous youth.

The other matter of more than anecdotal interest involves Donne's will, and here I mean only to point to the accumulated nature of particular gifts that distinguishes it from his own father's will executed some sixty years earlier (Bald, pp. 560–67). The son was not as wealthy as his father, which is hardly surprising. But the possessions he did have, he gave with great care to named individuals. This was especially true for the many pictures Donne somehow acquired during his life. Except for a picture of James and "that Picture of myne which is taken in Shaddowes" (the Lothian Portrait), all are of religious subjects. As was customary with inventories from this period, the paintings in the will are identified by location rather than artist.[24] As such, they invite us to imagine, in some detail, the interior of the Deanery as a reflection of its occupant's taste and interest.

To select just a few: in the parlor were two pictures of a more formal sort, the historian Paolo Sarpi of Venice, and Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspa in North Africa (507–27 CE). In the little dining room was a picture of "The blessed Virgin Marye," its Catholic subject matter and placement reminding us that Donne's durable Catholic mother was part of his household until two months before his own death. In his study, too, was a second portrait of the Virgin (with Joseph), to be given to "my ancient frend Doctor Brooke Master of Trinitie Colledge in Cambridge," in company with "the picture of layinge Christe in his Toombe," left to the Earl of Kent. Four large pictures of the "fowre greate prophettes" were to remain in the hall. A "Picture of Adam and Eve," hanging in the "greate Chamber," was to be bequeathed to the Earl of Dorset, and "in my Chamber" is "the Picture of Marie Magdalene"

Figure 5 Donne, from the effigy by Nicholas Stone in St. Paul's Cathedral.

for my "kynde Frend Mr. George Garrard." The subject matter and location of that last picture is especially provocative (the converted "Jack" looking at the converted Mary.) But the whole arrangement, and the manner in which the gifts are disposed, speak to a sophisticated awareness of religious and social inclusiveness, artful to the close.

Donne died on March 31, 1631. Most biographers rightly give way to Walton's account of Donne's last sermon – "when, to the amazement of some beholders he appeared in the Pulpit, many of them thought he presented himself not to preach mortification by a living voice: but, mortality by a decayed body and a dying face" (p. 75) – and, with a few emendations,[25] to the detailed attention given to the minister's somber preparations for death, including having his picture drawn with eyes shut, standing on an urn, somehow wrapped in a winding sheet, "with so much of the sheet turned aside as might shew his lean, pale, and death-like face, which was purposely turned toward the East, from whence he expected the second coming of his and our Saviour Jesus" (p. 78). Having retired from "his beloved study" to his "bed chamber," Donne apparently meditated on this emaciated image in his closing hours – in the same room that also contained the picture of Mary Magdalene. As for its afterlife, the sketch served not only for the Droeshout engraving of Donne soon to appear on the frontispiece to *Death's Duell* (1632) but as the model for the marble statue carved by Stone and his workers, still in St. Paul's (figure 5). By the finest of ironies, the erection of the statue, anonymously paid for at the time, was later revealed to be by Donne's physician, Simeon Fox, youngest son of John Fox(e) author of the fiercely Protestant *Book of Martyrs*, scourge of Catholics, and whom Donne had satirized in the curious work of his known as *The Courtier's Library*.[26] One wonders whether the son still felt too much of the father's heat to declare openly the part he was playing in creating the new idol of St. Paul's.

NOTES

1 Ian Donaldson (ed.), *Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 597.
2 The principal biographical sources underlying this essay are Walton's *Life*; Carey, *Donne*; Flynn, *Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility*; and Bald, *Donne*, with additional comments from Barry Spurr, "The John Donne Papers of Wesley Milgate," *JDJ* 15 (1996), 189–201.
3 For further information on Martin and Wotton, respectively see Tom Cain, "Donne and the Prince D'Amour," *JDJ* 14 (1995), 83–111, and, in the same issue, Dennis Flynn, "Donne, Henry Wotton, and the Earl of Essex," 185–218.
4 Lawrence Manley (ed.), *London in the Age of Shakespeare: An Anthology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), p. 1.
5 P. D. A. Harvey, *Maps in Tudor England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 15. I owe this point to my student Kevin Sher.

6 Lynda E. Boose, "The 1599 Bishops' Ban, Elizabethan Pornography, and the Sexualization of the Jacobean Stage," in Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (eds.), *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 192.
7 My comments are indebted to Annabel Patterson, "Donne in Shadows: Pictures and Politics," *JDJ* 16 (1997), 1–35, esp. 9–11; see also Appendix E in Helen Gardner (ed.), *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). A more esoteric reading of the painting's symbolism can be found in Kate Gartner Frost, "The Lothian Portrait: A Prolegomenon," *JDJ* 15 (1996), 95–125.
8 For the symbolism of Donne's crossed-arms posture see Ann Hurley, "More Foolery from More?: John Donne's Lothian Portrait as a Clue to his Politics," in Ann Hurley and Kate Greenspan (eds.), *So Rich a Tapestry: The Sister Arts and Cultural Studies* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), pp. 72–87.
9 See Bald, ch. 5, and Flynn, "Donne, Henry Wotton, and the Earl of Essex," 185–218.
10 Giorgio Melchiori (ed.), *Edward III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), III.i.141–84; see the accompanying note about the speech possibly influencing Donne's "The Storme" and "The Calme."
11 "Whistleblowing" is Dennis Flynn's word in "Donne's Most Daring *Satyre*: 'richly For service paid, authorized'," *JDJ* 20 (2001), 107–20, at 108.
12 P. M. Oliver (ed.), *John Donne: Selected Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 9–16, at p. 9. In the absence of a definitive single edition of Donne's letters, and because Oliver includes letters not published in the 1651 *Letters*, I quote from Oliver's text.
13 The lure of Anne Donne is well represented by the essays in M. Thomas Hester (ed.), *John Donne's "desire of more": The Subject of Anne More Donne in His Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).
14 See Ernest W. Sullivan, II, "Donne's Epithalamium for Anne," in Hester (ed.), *Donne's "desire of more,"* pp. 35–38.
15 For a history of the publication circumstances, in part correcting Walton's account, see T. S. Healy, SJ (ed.), *John Donne: Ignatius his Conclave* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. xi–xxix.
16 For the compositional history of the *Anniversaries* see W. Milgate (ed.), *The Epithalamions, Anniversaries, and Epicedes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. xxix–xxxiv.
17 Donaldson (ed.), *Ben Jonson*, p. 596.
18 For responses to this portrait see Paul Sellin, *So Doth, So Is Religion: John Donne and Diplomatic Contexts in the Reformed Netherlands, 1619–1620* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), p. 200, notes 58 and 59.
19 Walton, p. 48.
20 R[ichard].B[usby], "In Memory of Doctor Donne," in Grierson (ed.), *Poems*, vol. I, p. 386.
21 See Jeanne Shami, "'The Stars in their Order Fought Against Sisera': John Donne and the Pulpit Crisis of 1622," *JDJ* 14 (1995), 1–58.
22 Andrew Motion, intro. to *John Donne: Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* and *Death's Duel* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. xii.
23 Chamberlain's comments can be found in Aileen Reid and Robert Maniura (ed.), *Edward Alleyn: Elizabethan Actor, Jacobean Gentleman* (London: Dulwich

Picture Gallery, 1994), p. 29. I have drawn on essays in this volume by S. P. Cerasano, Susan Foister, and J. R. Piggot for further information on Alleyn.

24 Susan Foister, "Paintings and Other Works of Art in Sixteenth-Century English Inventories," *The Burlington Magazine* 123 (1981), 273–82.

25 For a history of corrections made to Walton's account, see Richard S. Peterson, "New Evidence on Donne's Monument: I," *JDJ* 20 (2001), 1–51.

26 Bald, p. 533. See also Donne, *The Courtier's Library, or Catalogus librorum*, edited and translated by Evelyn Mary Simpson (London: Nonesuch Press, 1930), p. 44, and Donne's satirical entry as translated: "*The Art of copying out within the compass of a Penny all the truthful statements made to that end by John Foxe*, by Peter Bales."