



"All things are don(n)e in time":
Temporality and the Sick Body in John Donne's
Devotions upon Emergent Occasions

by

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Introduction

In his 1624 *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, John Donne, then the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, laments the "variable, and therefore miserable condition of Man," having discovered that "this minute [he] was well, and [is] ill, this minute" (7). Donne's remarks emphasize the mutability of his physical body, but also situate him in the immediacy of the moment: illness, an inescapable fact of temporal human existence, is experienced "minute" by "minute," in real time. While the *Devotions* traces the development of Donne's sickness from its inception to its eventual resolution and his recovery, what captivates a reader is the simultaneous development of divine time or atemporality that emerges alongside Donne's chronological retelling of his illness. This atemporal contemplation is coloured by Donne's inability to untangle body from soul and human characteristics from divine ones, and leads to an imbrication or layering of both human and divine characteristics.

While the *Devotions* is structured in a fashion reminiscent of other devotional texts popular during Donne's lifetime such as the "prayer book, the meditative tract, the book of directions for the godly life, and the rules for the conduct of dying fostered by the *ars moriendi* tradition," the text does not fit any "easily recognized category of contemporary devotional literature" (Frost 5). It is "much too individualized to be a solid representation of the genre" (Horn 265) and while its tripartite structure of meditation, expostulation, and prayer have been compared to Ignatius of Loyola's "appeal to memory, understanding and will," there the comparison ends (Frost 10). It is, however, worth examining the structure of Donne's text in closer detail before turning to the work itself. The first or meditative portion of Donne's

"stationes" generally posits a question or presents a problem, often one that appears bodily but which ultimately moves towards spiritual concerns (*Devotions* 5). The second or exposulative portion of the station involves an in-depth Biblical exegesis in an attempt to solve the problem or assuage the speaker, and generally ends with a forceful appeal to God for intervention or relief from bodily and spiritual affliction. The prayer, the third portion of the station, concludes with the speaker's hope that his suffering is spiritually beneficial, and reflects an attempt to find peace despite his emotional or physical distress and his uncertainty about his spiritual state. The cyclical movement of the speaker's emotions—from upset to appeal to peace—is consistently repeated in the *Devotions*, suggesting that each station is an attempt to move forward spiritually, but this reading is overshadowed by Donne's dependence on his physical body as a gauge for his spiritual health. Additionally, the regularity of this tripartite pattern does little to advance Donne's spiritual development since he recovers from his illness at the text's close, regaining his bodily health but moving no closer to spiritual certainty. While my thesis takes much of its textual quotation from the expostulations, the portions where Donne struggles most with his spiritual status and his illness, each portion of his twenty-three stations has its merits when constructing a portrait of Donne's spiritual and bodily concerns. His decision to identify each chapter or segment of prose as a "statione" suggests that the text is a spiritual work that is meditative in purpose and seemingly reflective of the Stations of the Cross; however, the bodily content of the *Devotions* betrays this aim. Ultimately, the *Devotions* remains a beautiful if enigmatic work of prose that is "intimate rather than merely didactic," and "experiential" rather than proscriptive" because of its focus on the deeply personal subject of individual illness (Pender 216). Donne's *Devotions* is not merely a handbook for those approaching death. It is a highly personalized

account of illness.

Kate Frost attempts to identify Donne's genre-defying text by insisting that it is a highly specialized type of spiritual autobiography, one that emerges "at a time when literary awareness of the secular self was just beginning" (10). While this fact may help to account for the intimate nature of a text that is part spiritual meditation and part autobiographical anecdote, Frost's partial negation of her own definition does little to convince one of her position. She insists on its ties to spiritual autobiography while admitting that the text is a "fragmentary account" loosely bound together by chronologically structured incidents, and neglectful of "important events that occurred during the illness," such as "the marriage of [Donne's] eldest and dearest daughter, Constance" (Frost 18, 17). It is a biography not of Donne, but of the body; a chronology entirely rooted in the personal, embodied experience of illness, within the limited time frame of some two weeks. For this reason, it defies categorization as spiritual autobiography. Despite the fact that Donne writes his text when "the body [came] a poor third to the mental and the spiritual," the ill body is not merely mined for secular images to translate into spiritual ones, only to be discarded afterwards (Tripp 134). Rather, Donne's sick frame remains a focal point of the *Devotions*, further alienating the text from more traditional seventeenth-century devotional works. Traditionally, the body is considered only insofar as it reflects the soul, and in its role as gauge for the soul's health, it facilitates the consideration of religious and spiritual matters. Devotional works served to provide "comfort in illness and [prepare the sick] for death...always paying careful attention to the state of the suffering soul" rather than the afflicted body (MacDuffie 111). Donne's *Devotions*, which reflects an "interest in the body and its unfolding symptoms," represents a unique adaptation of a genre that is meant to reinforce the soul's

dominant spiritual position over its temporal, physical counterpart (MacDuffie 111).

Prominent body imagery in the *Devotions* combines with vivid descriptions of physical, emotional, and spiritual illness, and reflects an unyielding attachment to temporality that has yet to be fully examined in Donne's prose. By placing Donne's body imagery in relation to contemporary theories regarding time and religious suffering, the body becomes a means of transcending the very time that it marks. If, as Kaichi Matsuura contends, it is "at those moments of exaltation" that Donne "acknowledges that the body has something sacred in it," the body's fundamental role in transcendence ought to be more fully realized (54). It is the ill body and its temporary, limited existence that prompts Donne to reflect upon his spiritual state, and the humanizing, bodily aspects that Donne imposes even on his images of the divine and of the soul that ground the *Devotions* in temporality rather than in eternity. To describe the atemporal, Donne presents a "handful of sand, so much dust, and...a peck of rubbish, so much bone:" a human body that is subject to time, and is as changeable as sand shifting in an hourglass (110).

By exploring Donne's sick body as it is presented in the *Devotions*, I will address how a temporally-bounded vision of the body colours Donne's vision of eternal life and also his conception of his illness. Thus far, scholarship which addresses the body in the *Devotions* appears to betray a medicalized or historicized thrust. Spiritual portraits of Donne's illness abound, but are largely focussed on the well-documented tension between bodily and spiritual matters or Protestant or Catholic doctrine or styles in his poetry and prose. While both these approaches merit consideration, the focus of this exploration of Donne's body is its position in time, and how temporality itself functions as a kind of negative definition for Donne's portrait of eternity. Additionally, scholars such as Michael Schoenfeldt have described in detail the

connection between the body, particularly in illness, and the configuration of self. However, little scholarship exists that explores the early modern body with respect to temporal existence, or how temporality and religion affect the ill body.

Working closely with the "humoral discourse" of the seventeenth century, Nancy Selleck reiterates Donne's focus on corporeality, but places such bodily expression within the historical and medical framework of humor theory (56). She argues for a self not individually focussed, as Schoenfeldt does, but instead for a self outwardly based; the soul, like the body was understood as humoral, subject to imbalance and change. Illness and sin exist in similar states in the humoral self in the sense that sickness is "not seen as a foreign presence within the body, but as a condition of what has become the body itself" (58). This is true of Donne's depiction of his own body; he complains in his opening lines of the mutability of the human condition, and also of the inescapable nature of that condition. From the text's outset, the reader is confronted not only with a mutable human body, subject to change, but also an awareness of the time that impacts that body.

The humoral self that Selleck describes reflects the mutability of Donne's sick body in the *Devotions*. In the absence of the Cartesian mind-body split, the humoral psyche "incorporates the self with the body and the body with the rest of the world," negating the isolation that is often seen as fundamental in the creation of an individual self with a separate body (59). Selleck's portrait of the body blends body and soul, and illustrates the connection between the individual body and the rest of society. Most important is the fact that while the "emphasis on the body is...a way of representing the self's connection and even subjection to *other* bodies, souls, and persons," it is also an acknowledgement of that body's subjection to external systems, such as

time and its measurement (60). To be humorous, as Selleck reveals,

denotes a proclivity to change; using the adjective entails a subtle but crucial conceptual shift—from immediate subjective experience to an observed sense of self-difference over time. The awareness of change implies comparison: what one was a moment ago is no longer what one is, and in the comparison neither state remains immediate. (61)

This awareness of change and lack of immediacy creates tension between the individual body and time. A cursory overview of the awareness of change makes the connection between the body and temporality self-evident; one who possesses a sick body is endowed with a heightened sense of the limited time before his or her death, and the *Devotions* is in part a meditative attempt to confront and accept mortality. From a medical and diagnostic perspective, illness itself is time-dependent and specific. As Stephen Pender points out, in seventeenth-century medicine “the relationship between antecedents and consequents and the sequence of events in time of sickness are crucial to interpreting the meaning of indications, which appear at critical times during an illness” (240). Donne’s physicians, in interpreting his sickness, “observe [his] accidents to have fallen upon the criticall dayes,” the title of his fourteenth station or chapter, one that begins the most comprehensive discussion about time in the text. Just as the *Devotions* itself reaches a climax in its discussion of time, Donne’s body reaches its “criticall dayes,” suggestive not only of an alteration in his illness, but also of a crucial time period in which to interpret the symptoms of the body.

The interpretation of the body as a readable ‘text’ of signs and symptoms has been explored by scholars such as Matthew Horn and Felecia Wright MacDuffie, but little writing

exists that addresses the link between the physical and the textual body in Donne's *Devotions* without eliminating the connection between the two. Horn suggests that Donne constructs a textual body out of his physical one by writing the *Devotions*, and that Donne thus "situate[s] himself completely in God" by so doing (368). The process Horn describes (elevating the physical to the spiritual) ultimately neglects the role of the physical body, considering it only as a vehicle for transcendence and discarding it afterwards. It becomes a physical object to be mined for its spiritual and metaphorical possibilities; it is a text read "for signs of creation, sin, and redemption" (MacDuffie 113). In MacDuffie's reading, the physical body is the "primary touchstone of [Donne's] theological imagination" and is emphasized for its capacity as a text in which to "read the state...of the soul" (105, 116). MacDuffie's work demonstrates an awareness of the importance of the physical body as a means for spiritual signs to manifest themselves, but neglects the transcendent properties of that body that Horn's work emphasizes (116). MacDuffie sees the body-as-text as a wholly physical phenomenon, while Horn sees it as a wholly abstract one, a means of creating "a dimension where the real self is beyond physical representation," but neither adequately explores the idea that the physical body plays a fundamental role in transcendence without being eliminated (368).

Donne writes his *Devotions* at a time when "physical signs urge spiritual diagnoses," a fact reflected in his text's unwavering focus on the imagery of the sick body (Pender 216). He "enlists the natural faculties of the body in order to confirm embodied experience as one key to knowledge of the soul," but the language of the body functions beyond this in the text; it is mapped onto the soul itself (Pender 220). Pender acknowledges the importance of descriptive language in Donne's *Devotions*, specifically with respect to the language of medicine; the body

in a medicalized context provides Donne with the “means and the metaphors” to address the more abstract subject of the soul (218). In acknowledging the imbrication of body and soul in early modern literature, Pender observes the overlap between the two through the lens of medical semiotics. However fundamental the role of physicians in diagnosis and treatment, Donne frequently reiterates that God is “the Phisician for spirituall health,” (44) and that the presence of his doctors is indicative of God’s will; “spirituall and temporall Phisicians” are God’s, and their work, though corporeal, is indicative of the will of God and the eternal (27). It is God who remains the “Physitian of [the] soule” despite Donne’s doctors’ best efforts to diagnose his illness (81). Even medical treatment is raised to the level of divine significance.

Despite its roots in medicine, Donne’s “specialized vocabulary” in the *Devotions* is an application of bodily language in an attempt to understand and discuss the soul (Pender 225). His talent for “sublating the spiritual out of the physical, the universal out of the particular” stems entirely from his use of the “language of embodiment,” that is, language grounded in corporeal experience (Kuchar 153). The secular language and experiences of Donne’s body inform and illuminate his discussions of the soul because the familiar language and experiences of the body make it a cogent and understandable means of discussing the atemporal and abstract. Pender nevertheless makes a noteworthy clarification regarding the body’s experiences, claiming that Donne “imagin[es] sickness as [a divine] infliction” (228). When speaking specifically of the language of the sick body, it is important to acknowledge that such illness is viewed throughout Donne’s text as a *divinely inflicted* suffering. This distinction—illness as physical as opposed to illness as a divine manifestation—is fundamental to an understanding of the body’s role in the *Devotions*. Harmony between the body and soul, as MacDuffie points out, indicates “harmony

with God,” and the absence of that harmony is an indicator of serious spiritual illness (109).

The manner in which Donne describes the body illustrates both an appreciation for and revulsion towards its limited existence. The body is praised for its capacity to detect illness, but is also dismissed as a “handfull of sand, so much dust...a pecke of Rubbidge, so much bone,” and “a leprous house” for the soul (93, 60). Nevertheless, this bodily focus illustrates what Schoenfeldt claims is characteristic of speakers in much early modern literature: the “material self,” that is, the physical body, is in large part the basis of individual identity despite its ephemeral nature (2). Donne is simultaneously drawing towards and receding from declaring his selfhood through his body, an act which is problematic for obvious reasons: declaring one's identity through a mortal body is damning if one can achieve the same ends by using one's immortal soul. However, for Donne's *Devotions*, the body is an inescapable aspect of transcendence, a means for the human to become divine and vice versa. The conflict between Donne's body and his illness (and whether or not sickness can be overcome) mirrors Donne's hesitance regarding his body as a spiritual conduit: he simultaneously draws towards an acceptance of his body's duality and pulls away from it.

The imbrication of body and soul will be discussed in greater detail at a later point, but it is worth emphasizing the extent of this overlap beyond the immediate limits of the body. When Donne claims that his “sad soul weeps blood,” for example, he personifies the soul by layering both an emotional state and a physiological response onto the soul's abstract form (*Devotions* 57). What began as a simple overlap between body and soul becomes, as the text develops, a complex layering or overlapping of human and divine characteristics that use the common ground of the body as their base. Donne's *Devotions* becomes less a discussion of the “fluid

body" and more a description of bodily fluids (Selleck 75). Fundamental to the humoral body is the notion not only of "change, but exchange—not just *personal* but *interpersonal* flux" (75). Change breeds change, both in the individual and in his or her environment. In the *Devotions*, the "interpersonal flux" that Selleck introduces between the humoral body and society reflects the shifting of human and divine characteristics in Donne's text. The sick body of John Donne possesses "no veine...that is not full of the bloud of [God's] Son" (48). The overlap between human and divine characteristics mingles phenomena from both sources: Donne claims that Christ will "take [his] soule out of this bath, and present it to...[God], washed againe, and againe, and again, in [Christ's] own teares, in [Christ's] owne sweat, in [Christ's] owne blood" (18). The bodily fluid possessed by both Christ and man links divine and human inextricably, and provides a further overlap between the two, if the embodied Christ can be considered the starting point of these shared characteristics. The blood of Christ replaces Donne's blood, tainted by both physical illness and by sin.

While Selleck contends that such mutability is part of selfhood for Donne, the extension of human into divine and vice versa that the *Devotions* presents forces the already stressed imagery of the body to even greater heights when Donne uses such overlap to model time in his text. As a result of binding together human and divine characteristics, Donne's text depicts a timelessness that struggles to express itself within the boundaries of time and the body. These two parallel facets of Donne's *Devotions*—the soul that must be expressed in the language of the body, and divine time that is subject to description with reference to temporality—are indicators of the greater problem that Donne's work attempts to address: the difficulty of accepting the body as common ground for both transcendence and incarnation. The inability to extract soul from

body and atemporality from measureable time is, in effect, a means of exploring the paradox of incarnation, and of the body as a physical place or space in which transcendence and incarnation can occur.

The compression and expansion of time in the *Devotions* forces a rereading of the conventional time experienced by those outside of the sickroom. The text is marked by an attempt to escape temporal limitations by manipulating them; Donne imagines his deathbed hours stretching out to years of physical suffering and prolonged spiritual torment. He is "nayed" (16) to his mattress by illness, a figurative antitype of Christ who is unable to do much more than "tell Clocks" and wait for divine judgement (78). In other instances, the course of sickness is paralleled with the creation of earth in Genesis; it moves from illness into death, death into resurrection, resurrection into everlasting life and judgement, and concludes with an "Everlasting Saboth...where [Donne] shall live as long as without reckning any more Dayes after," ironically equating the movement from temporal into eternal existence with the course of a single week, with the Sabbath being the start of eternal life (76). One is forced to suspend his or her own measure of time in exchange for the closed time of the *Devotions*, and accept the shift into the time frame of Donne's two-week illness and into the narrow space of the sickroom he occupies. Bells tolling outside the window remind Donne "that now one, and now another is buried...they have the correction due to [Donne], and [have] paid the debt that [he] owe[s]," and reiterate, through external means, the presence of time and of a reality unbounded by the confines of the sickroom (82). Donne's imagery of the body illustrates an attempt to extrapolate the limited time and space he is confined in so that he might broaden the sphere of his rapidly dwindling existence. Ironically, his use of the body and of temporal measurement to do so

reinforces the earthly ties that Donne attempts to shun.

The emergent pattern in Donne's *Devotions* is one of grounding in the body, regardless of the text's earthly or divine subject matter. In addition to using imagery of the ailing body to contemplate his own mortality, Donne's vision of eternal life, free from the "tell[ing of] Clocks," is subject to earthly constraints by means of his continued layering of human and divine characteristics (78). Immortality and timelessness become definable only insofar as they can be placed in the context of measured time, and that time is kept by describing the sick body. Donne's definition of eternity therefore emerges as a negation of earthly temporality; eternity is *not* this. As Paul Oliver argues, the fact that each meditation begins in the present tense serves "to pinpoint the progress of the illness in order to foster an illusion of uncertainty" about the possibility of recovery, a fact offset by the knowledge of Donne's "dedicatory letter which prefaces the text" (228). Apart from Oliver's "illusion of uncertainty," this present tense also orients the reader in Donne's text and reiterates his attachment to temporality. Regardless of how far the reader might stray into the atemporal or eternal in the course of each of the *Devotions'* twenty-three chapters or stations, Donne re-establishes him or her in the present at the opening of each meditation.

The immediacy of time is reflected in Gale Carrithers' and James Hardy's *Age of Iron*, in which the authors identify four dominant tropes that can be traced through renaissance culture. While all four can be said to apply to Donne's *Devotions*, two of these tropes can be applied explicitly to Donne's portrait of time: that of the "salvific moment" and "life as journey, wherein one travels wilfully, if vicissitudinally, toward God, or...away" from him (3). To clarify, Carrithers' and Hardy's notion of the "defining (salvific) moment of illumination or choice" is the

moment at which the individual's soul is 'saved' (in the Christian sense of the term) (3). Such a moment "defines a condition of discontinuity, in which the present suddenly 'in the twinkling of an eye,' becomes ontologically different from the past and in which the present will inform the future" (3-4). In Donne's case, this is generally the moment when he believes he will die and simultaneously will be judged and resurrected. The "closing of [his] bodily eyes here, and the opening of the Eyes of [his] Soule, there," occur as "all one Act;" bodily death and spiritual rebirth or resurrection become conflated in a single moment (70). Not only does Donne compress the uncertain period of time between death and resurrection, he uses the body to do so by mapping those bodily characteristics onto the soul, giving it eyes that 'see' in the same fashion as human eyes.

Rather than interpreting this progression as a linear path for the reader to follow, Eric Brown adopts Carrithers' and Hardy's "salvific moment" to argue that Donne's attempt at regular construction of meditation, expostulation, and prayer "must confront an inevitable moment of radical transformation," one that will "rework the linearity of time" that Donne has hitherto created by using a familiar, repetitive structure (48). Rather than seeing this moment as a reworking of time, I believe it exists as a punctuation in the linear structure Donne has created, a liminal space between time and timelessness. The moment of "radical transformation," either bringing the individual into something greater than himself (transcendence) or moving the divine into the temporal sphere (incarnation) does not actually occur, but is instead suspended. Brown contends that "in the *Devotions*, the salvific moment represents a movement away from sickness...a move from calculation to computation," where calculation represents earthly and linear measurement and computation represents abstract thought, completed with the mind rather

than measurable in the physical sense (48).

Despite its logical premise, Brown's claim that the *Devotions* moves from a "metaphor of a horizontal, time-bound self...[to one that] become[s] expressed in (or turned toward) the vertical sublimates of eternity" is too simplistic a reading: if one thinks of calculation as connotative of earthy and material measurement and computation as abstract, non-material measurement, one is left looking at sets of binary pairs (47). The movement in Brown's reading is from the bodily to the spiritual, the concrete to the abstract, and the linear and horizontal to the timeless and vertical. Such basic binaries are ill-suited to the complexity of Donne's attempted transformation and ignore the underlying issue that this thesis seeks to probe: to what extent can one "rework the linearity of time" (48) and the earthly, changing nature of the body from within that measurable, finite time system? Brown's work acknowledges Donne's attempt at transcendence, but does not address the difficulties of trying to rework a system that is inextricable from one's existence, or, more importantly, how the body functions as a site for both linear movement through time and "vertical" movement, in the sense of moving from the earth to the heavens or vice versa (Brown 47). His question of "how...our temporal existence affect[s] and [aids in an] understanding of the divine, of an eternity prior to and encompassing of time" is in part the purpose of my thesis, but with an important difference (49). Instead of asking how temporal existence affects an understanding of the divine, I ask how the temporally bounded physical body functions as a conduit between the earthly and the heavenly by acting as the site of transcendence and incarnation, and furthermore, whether or not such a transformation is achieved in the course of Donne's text.

The physical health or illness of Donne's body is primarily responsible for his measure of

temporality, and when—as in times of sickness—it creates concern, Donne is forced to consider transcending that body. His attempt to do so requires the use of the very body he attempts to escape; the binaries of body/soul, temporal/atemporal and human/divine are mingled in the *Devotions* for this purpose. The imbrication of body and soul is also a means of gauging change in Donne's text: if the illness of the body is an indication of the sickness of the soul, then by reading the body, Donne reads the relative health of his soul. Time is, as Donne stresses in station fourteen, “imaginary” and “halfe-nothing,” composed of the “three stations, past, present, and future” (71). While the time Donne introduces in his meditation is linear and parallels the three movements in each of his stations (past, present and future), it is also a structure that Donne condemns for its lack of substance. With respect to past and future, “one is not, now, & the other is not yet,” and so Donne is forced to live moment by moment (71). Even the most current moment slips away before it is acknowledged, since “that which [one] call[s] present is not now the same that it was, when [one] began to call it so” (71). Moments become inexperienceable by virtue of the passage of time: they are past rather than present. Apart from bending time in this portion of the *Devotions* by contemplating past, present, and future simultaneously, as well as apprehending the difficulty of the present, Donne also underscores the importance of the body. If it is only by living moment-to-moment that one authentically experiences the immediacy of time, immediacy grounds itself in bodily experience. The salvific moment emerges not as a reworking of linear time, but as a series of momentary punctuations that are grounded in the immediacy of illness, and that use the suffering human body as their frame of reference.

Bearing these themes in mind, the first chapter will explore the framework of bodily sickness and its influence on Donne's portrait of spirituality by examining how illness creates a

context for the *Devotions* and influences its content, from descriptions of suffering to the use of imagery of the sick body. The second chapter will address imbrication more deeply by addressing the connections Donne draws between himself and Christ, and by considering how the concept of imbrication that colours body and soul as well as human and divine also affects the presentation of time and timelessness. The third chapter presents Donne's *Devotions* as a textual representation of his physical illness, suggesting that by creating a text out of the body, Donne can appeal to Scripture for spiritual self-diagnosis. Additionally, the third chapter posits that Donne attempts self-transformation through an analysis of this textual body. The conclusion argues that failing such transformation, Donne negotiates the duality of his existence and of time by creating a liminal space between the two, and suggests that paradox is a fundamental part of that negotiation.

With respect to an ongoing discussion of the text of Donne's *Devotions* and its relation to his physical body, I intend to mediate the current state of scholarship by exploring the role that the physical body *does* play in Donne's text, and address how it emerges simultaneously as a marker of temporality and as a potential vehicle for transcendence.

Chapter One

The Sick and Suffering Body of Donne's *Devotions*

Despite the spiritual content of his prose, Donne's *Devotions* presents the author's sick body as the focal point of his text. Although it is the "emergent occasion" of his bodily illness that prompts Donne's spiritual ruminations, the emphasis on his sick body conflicts with the presentation of the *Devotions* as a wholly religious or meditative treatise. Rather than being used as a physical means to a spiritual end, the sick body remains the dominant reference point in Donne's text. Because his body and its illness are the driving forces behind the text's imagery and thus much of its content, vivid physical and bodily descriptions abound in the *Devotions*, and characterize Donne's presentation of the spiritual aspects of his existence.

An abundance of vivid bodily descriptions characterize Donne's presentation of his spiritual existence in the *Devotions*. This chapter explores in detail how Donne's presentation of illness shapes the content of his text through descriptions of suffering and use of bodily imagery. By first addressing the context of illness and suffering that frames Donne's *Devotions* and then by exploring in detail the way that context influences the text's content, this chapter illustrates how the *Devotions* places particular emphasis on Donne's bodily ties. Furthermore, it illuminates the extent to which Donne's body is integrated into his portrait of spirituality rather than being excluded from it. Unlike more traditional religious works that stress the body as a useful—and expendable—tool with which to explore the soul, Donne's sick body in the *Devotions* functions as more than an index for spiritual exploration: it becomes a fundamental aspect of Donne's spirituality.

Illness circumscribes the *Devotions* like a barrier, hemming in even the space Donne occupies. His claustrophobic descriptions of space in the sickbed encircle and tighten Donne's narrative into the space of a single room. Earl Miner contends that metaphysical poetry often attempts to "abolish space by transcending it," and that metaphysical poets "develop either time or place without bothering with the other" (51, 55). While this may be true of metaphysical poetry, it is not true of the *Devotions* because of the text's attempts to develop both time and space. The *Devotions* is not simply an endeavour focussed on finding a way to free the physical body from the "irresistible sequence" of temporal existence (53). Donne's text attempts both a spatial *and* a temporal transformation which will extend beyond the limits of his conscious, lived experience, and which is enacted through the body. Despite the fact that the *Devotions* was written post-illness, "six weeks after Donne first fell ill," (Stubbs 404) and completed "in less than a month," the reader is thrust into the text as though Donne remains in the sickroom and speaks from his bed (Bald 451). Without a place beyond the sickbed and the room it occupies, Donne's body becomes the physical space on and in which the dialogue of the *Devotions* occurs. The physical body, as Reinhard Friedrich argues, is "man's most intimate and yet most unknown space" and by viewing it as both the venue for and the subject of Donne's text, the body develops into a physical and spiritual location which enables it to play an important spiritual role in the *Devotions* (19).

Descriptions of Donne's isolation in the sickroom are frequently juxtaposed with images of the body-as-landscape, which ironically do not free the body from its claustrophobic encasement, but instead reinforce the boundaries of the narrow space it is forced to occupy.

Imagining the body inflated to an extreme size, surpassing that of world or universe, Donne claims that

if all the Veines in our bodies, were extended to Rivers, and all the Sinewes, to vaines of Mines, and all the Muscles, that lye upon one another, to Hilles, and all the Bones to Quarries of stones, and all the other pieces, to the proportion of those which correspond to them in the world, the aire would be too litle for this Orbe of man to move in, the firmament would bee but enough for this star. (19)

The physical body is transformed to reflect the immensity of a world, and seems a far remove from the "leprous house" of the eleventh station (60). Instead of the decaying farmhouse of station twenty-two, "ready...every day to fall downe" on its occupant, the soul, the body is almost too large for words (116). Donne finds himself enclosed in close quarters that contradict the expansiveness of his imagery. The "aire" is "too litle for this Orbe of man to move in," but it is the massiveness of his leviathan composition that marks him as God's creation: the paradox of divinity, reflected in human form, creates these staggering proportions, and reassures Donne of his divine origins even as it confines him.

The use of the same paradox of potential and extreme size juxtaposed with reality and minuteness is at work in Donne's "Annunciation," from his earlier series of sonnets which form "La Corona." Addressing the human birth of Christ, Donne emphasizes the paradox of divinity encased in a human body: the Virgin Mary's body is the site of this paradox, since she carries "immensity, cloistered in [her] dear womb" (li 14). Despite the obvious differences between Christ's body and Mary's, the paradox of Jesus' human birth can be applied to Donne's body in

the *Devotions*. The vastness of divine presence in a space as limited as a human womb creates the same feeling of circumscription as the passage above. Man is both pitiable for the weakness of his composition, but also expansive in his potential, and because of his origins as a divine creation, he is a confined being when the reality of his physical minuteness is compared with his capacity for spiritual greatness or connection with God. The sickbed exacerbates these claustrophobic feelings, since lying on one's back creates a fundamentally different awareness of space than standing, or even sitting upright in bed. Donne's "recumbent position dislocates normal perceptions and exposes him to contradictory spatial sensations;" specifically, he moves into a consideration of eternity while lying "catatonically rigid" (Friedrich 19). Donne mirrors the image of the divine Christ in his mortal mother's womb by contemplating eternity while in the narrow space of his sickbed, which is figured as both womb if Donne should be reborn and rise from it, and tomb if he should succumb to his illness.

Friedrich defines the spatial awareness of one in the sickbed as being composed of "two kinds of extension:" horizontal and upward (20). These two movements, he argues, eliminate the grounding experience of vertical perception that one apprehends while sitting or standing. The absence of a vertical component (save everything that Donne can see above himself, lying on his back) is a source of conflict between "minute details and wide-ranging speculations," in Donne's *Devotions*, or more accurately put, between the immediacy of embodied experience and the more general discussion of spiritual life and transcendence that recurs in the text (20). It is this conflict that epitomizes the difficulties of human existence in the *Devotions*. Donne is trapped in the immediacy of the moment, the instant of his bodily experiences of illness, and for this reason

there is "no in-between, no reference point to the normal, middle ground experience" (Friedrich 20). There is no middle ground, no outward frame of reference because the body serves as that frame as well as the medium of recognition of experience.

One could argue, as Friedrich does, that the sickbed is the transformative space in the *Devotions*. Certainly, Donne's bed seemingly changes in the course of even a few sentences. In one instance, Donne's sickness shifts from the external nature of illness to the internal condition of sin, and Donne himself evolves from a disobedient child into a lusty young man, but the setting of the bed remains the same. Donne describes his physical weakness in bed as "a childish frowardnes" since he "cannot sit up, and yet [is] loth to go to bed" (16). Almost immediately after this, however, he acknowledges his illness as an indication of the internal and spiritual condition of sin; he is laid "sicke in his owne bed of wantonnesse;" the childish reluctance to sleep is replaced by an adult shame of longing for lustful behaviour and an acknowledgement of sexual experience, but all occur in the defined and circumscribed space of the bed (16). It is thus not the bed that changes, but the man who occupies it.

Although confined to his bed and suffering considerably, Donne stresses the notion of pain as a means of spiritual action or betterment, and introduces the concept of action and works with the body as a means of spiritual improvement. In the case of the sick body, such action can only be carried out *on* the body rather than *by* the body. Rather than an active agent of spiritual improvement, the body becomes a passive conduit when it lies ill, and "action and practise" through illness becomes Donne's means of bettering himself spiritually, through the discomfort he feels (*Devotions* 106). The medical action he describes in station twenty is that of purging:

Donne's physicians attempt a "strange way of addition...of providing strength by increasing weaknesse," which renders the body passive in the "action and practise" it would otherwise carry out in health (106). The decrease in physical capacity marks an increase in spiritual 'work'; unable to stand, Donne allows spiritual action to be carried out in his mind through reflection and on his body through illness.

When one considers the body in the *Devotions*, two seemingly contradictory theological interpretations emerge. The first is distinctly Augustinian, and stresses that flesh is inherently sinful and ought to be mortified for its weakness and depravity, while the second is heroic, praising the body and revering it for its capacity to endure suffering as a means of divine trial or penance. While privileging the Augustinian view, Donne also presents his body as a model of the *imitatio Christi* tradition, in which "pain suffered by non-divine human beings [is] theologically meaningful and productive" despite the corruptible nature of human flesh (van Dijkhuizen 64). Ill and faced with the very real possibility of losing himself through the loss of his body, Donne uses "productive" bodily suffering to enhance the Augustinian view of the body, and to make his sick frame the conduit that facilitates painful but spiritually valuable experiences.

The Augustinian concept of the body is reflected in Donne's early descriptions of sickness, where he likens the body to a prison, and presents the isolation of illness as an additional restriction for the already weakened individual. Donne's "slacke sinewes are yron fetters," likened to a prisoner's shackles, and the weight of the "thin sheets" that press against his flesh are "yron dores upon" him (17). The imagery of the body as a decaying house that will come late in the *Devotions* is no less negative than this imagery of the prison-like body; however, it is confinement that prompts the development of Donne's text and thus renders his illness and

suffering spiritually valuable. If one considers illness as a form of physical pain, and by extension, that pain as Donne's catalyst for personal transformation, then the text of the *Devotions* serves as a record of personal reinvention and evolution. The argument presented by scholars such as Mary Arshagouni Papazian regarding Donne's theological perspective is compelling, and is worth examining for the use of the term 'election'. Papazian argues that Donne's *Devotions* presents an "Augustinian view of predestination holding that election...emanates from the hands of a just and merciful God" (Papazian 605). However, she also suggests that Donne's earlier *Essays in Divinity* express "concern for the continued suffering that God's elect must endure while on earth" (605). That concern is evident in the *Devotions*, and provides Donne with the theological backdrop against which he paints his illness as transformative and posits his symptoms as signs of election rather than of punishment.

Donne's emphasis on the body's capacity for theologically valuable suffering often encroaches upon his initial presentation of his body as Augustinian with weak and corruptible flesh. While the Augustinian view of the body suggests that the body's weakness is indicative of its corrupt state and therefore meant to be punished, the heroic view inverts the body's weakness and plays upon it as a spiritual strength. In the second prayer, Donne emphasizes the imperfection of his own body, claiming that his "knees are weak, but weak therefore that [he] should easily fall to, and fix [him] selfe long upon [his] devotions" to God (14). In a similar lamentation, Donne bemoans the soul for not being more like the body in its capacity to recognize "a tentation to sinne," the same way the heart beats faster when entering into a dangerous situation (8). Here, as there, the body is exalted for its capacities and its weaknesses: Donne's bodily frailty not only makes it easier for him to assume a posture of prayer, it

predisposes him to it because he is not strong enough to stand. The weakness of the body that necessitated its exclusion from spiritual matters becomes a strength that forces its inclusion. As in other instances in the text, Donne relies on paradox to reinforce the importance of his body; its weakness ironically becomes its strength, one that contributes to spiritual betterment. The image of the body in a posture of prayer recurs in the third prayer, when Donne finds himself unable even to kneel, but “the knees of [his] heart...are bowed unto [God] evermore,” and the weakness of the physical body is transferred to Donne's internal spiritual condition, reflected in his heart (18).

Illness establishes the connection between Donne's body and God early in the text. By foregrounding sickness as a bodily presentation of a divine infliction, Donne makes his condition simultaneously physical and spiritual, a concept addressed in greater detail in Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*. In a biblical context, Scarry posits that physical pain inflicted on the human body is a manifestation of God in the physical world, a sentiment echoed by Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen's analysis of the suffering Christian body as “an instrument for salvation” rather than a husk to be discarded because of its weaknesses (van Dijkhuizen 64). Scarry's interpretation stresses van Dijkhuizen's analysis, arguing that suffering is not “an element in a scene of confirmation [of God's existence]; it is *the* confirmation” (Scarry 200, emphasis mine). Scarry maintains that biblical passages that present the wounded human body as their focal point serve as

emphatic assurance of the 'realness' of God, but [also enact a scene] that (for the participants inside) contains nothing that makes his 'realness' visible except the

wounded human body. The powerful God does not have the power of self-substantiation. (200)

Donne's suffering, then, is proof of God's presence in his physical and temporal life. In the *Devotions*, such a presence manifests itself in descriptions of the spots on Donne's body and the fever sweats that plague him. Scarry maintains that "God has no material reality" and is characterized only by the weapons he wields, which can cause physical, bodily harm (200). Because of his "invisible and disembodied" state, God makes his presence known through bodily actions and signs. If "the weapon is a material sign of Him separate from the human body and explaining the path of connection" between the individual and God, the artillery at God's disposal is illness itself, and the suffering Donne experiences acts as a connection between his individual body and God's wholly ephemeral existence. The image of the weapon that Scarry evokes is linear; one of its ends terminates in the physical, material world, and the other end extends and disappears into the realm of the spiritual and ephemeral. This idea is perfectly embodied by illness, seemingly invisible and unpredictable, yet present through physical symptoms in the individual. The "passive terminus" of the heavens is God's end, and the origin of Donne's divinely inflicted illness, while the "active terminus, where [the weapon] mutilates and imperils," is Donne's body (Scarry 200).

Additionally, if Donne's weakened state can be attributed to or "call[ed spiritual]... correction" for his sinful (and thus sick) condition, he is willing to suffer, and asserts that an indication from God that his illness is such a correction would result in "soundnes in [Donne's] flesh" (14). The fragile body, subject to mortification, is made solid or sound when the suffering it experiences is given spiritual significance. When "the memory of this sicknes [becomes]

beneficial" to Donne, or when God "hast Catechised [him] with affliction here, [Donne] may take a greater degree, and serve [God] in a higher place" (17, 61). Either recovery from illness so that the memory of his suffering may better him, or death so that his suffering will end and he can serve God more completely becomes the focuses of Donne's desire and makes suffering purposeful and directed towards some spiritually greater end.

Donne's attempt to achieve a spiritually valuable end through suffering coincides with a shift from the individual portrait of illness, of sin, and of the human condition to a universal portrait. Early in the *Devotions*, Donne tries to universalize illness by shifting from the sensations he feels in his own body to the more collective experiences of a body suffering from sickness. Noting the decline of his condition, Donne claims that

in the twinkling of an eye, [he] can scarce see; instantly the tast is insipid, and fatuous; instantly the appetite is dull and desirelesse; instantly the knees are sinking and strengthlesse; and in an instant, sleepe, which is the picture, the copy of death, is taken away, that the Originall, Death it selfe may succeed. (11)

The immediacy of illness is recapitulated as each sensation is obliterated; vision is reduced, the ability to taste fades, appetite vanishes, bodily strength diminishes, sleep becomes impossible, and finally, the sick person dies. The ceaseless repetition of the "instant" presents sickness as a series of momentary flashes. Strung together to illustrate the demise of the sick body in question, each observation pushes the body closer to its unavoidable mortal end. The instantaneous perception of the moment coupled with the decrease in the body's faculties illustrates the spontaneity of illness, the speed at which it progresses, and eventually, the sudden finality with which death arrives. More importantly, it stresses the importance of how quickly each physical

sensation is experienced by the body and mind, and how readily it is compared to one's regular condition.

Despite Donne's emphasis on individuality and perception, the passage above presents bodily illness—and moreover, the discomfort or pain that accompanies it—as a simultaneously individual and universal construct. The experience of losing one's senses is connected to Donne through illness and pain, but is also distanced from him due to the absence of the possessive first-person. In the opening sequence, it is Donne who can “scarcely see,” but beyond this, the “I” which is Donne and which scarcely sees is dismissed after the first observation, replaced by the general “the” of a human body bearing the effects of illness. The loss of the sense of taste, appetite, and physical strength are relegated to a general, universal experience of being ill, followed by the inevitable end of all human lives: death. Although the loss of sleep described foreshadows Donne's specific condition in station fifteen, “I sleepe not day nor night,” a more universal bodily experience of illness is the focus of this early station. Donne's paradoxical attempt to make illness and other bodily experiences both personal and universal prefigures his use of paradox as a spiritual aid.

This universalization is developed alongside a highly particular and individual presentation of illness and death. Donne addresses conditions to which all human beings are subject and acknowledges his place in such a system. He declares in the oft-quoted lines from station seventeen that “no man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine,” returning to the metaphor of man-as-microcosm, and extending it to include humanity as a part of a more collective microcosm (87). Emphasizing this inclusionist view, Donne maintains that the baptism of a single child affects him, “for that child

is thereby connected to that Head which is [Donne's] Head too, and engrafted into that body, whereof [Donne] is a member" (86). While this image of humanity as a single body denotes a kind of interconnectedness that Selleck believes is central to the humoral self, Donne's illness and proximity to death are highly individualized. Friedrich claims that "one's sickness is emblematic of what is always felt but most often repressed," that is, the inescapable knowledge of one's mortality (19). The generalizations regarding death, that condition "common to all," are undercut by the particular focus on "[Donne's] bodily health" (16). The universalizing statements above lose their force when compared to the particular detail paid to the images of Donne's sick body, and to the extent to which that body's descriptive capacities are used to describe the individual soul (43). Nearing the text's close, Donne's prayers end with hope that his "soule [shall be] so much better purged than [his] body" (109). The medical purgative that his physicians hope will rebalance his humours in the opening of station twenty is internalized and applied to Donne's soul, not directed outwards in an attempt at connection with the rest of humanity. The humoral self turns not outwards to connect "the self with the body and the body with the rest of the world," but connects the self (and soul) with the body, connects to the rest of the world, and then retreats back into itself (Selleck 59). In the same prayer, Donne beseeches God to make his soul "looke, and make her use of [God's] mercifull proceedings towards [Donne's] bodily restitution, & goe the same way to a spirituall;" again with shifting focus from the external health of the body to the internal, spiritual health of the soul, and to the specific site of his own body (109).

Donne uses the "specialized vocabulary" of medicine, a specific and restrictive type of language designed to discuss the particularities of the body. Although he "ruminate[s] about the

uncertainty of medical reasoning" and uses "specific, sometimes obscure medical terms," in order to describe his spiritual state in bodily language, his desired ends are more simple than complex (Pender 225, 218). The medical vocabulary's descriptive force is merely a standardized means of discussing the human body. Such use highlights the distance that Donne tries to create between his body and his experiences. By using the words of a physician, one who possesses expert knowledge of human anatomy and physiology, Donne becomes affiliated with those who make bodily ailments and discontinuities their livelihood, instead of affiliating himself with the sick population who suffer such infirmities. This identification creates a clinical distance between the recounting of bodily experiences and the experiences themselves. What is ultimately at stake is the impact of Donne's use of such precise vocabulary: he is further distanced from his own body by using a specialized language that makes the body a clinical or universal subject instead of his own flesh. Although he freely uses medical language, and is evidently knowledgeable enough to do so, Donne's medicalization or anatomizing of his own body serves little purpose but to underscore the body's importance by seeking out more particular language with which to describe and explain that body.

Despite Donne's efforts, the power of medical language is vitiated by the inconsistencies of medical treatment in the seventeenth century. Doreen Nagy illustrates the weak and often incorrect diagnostic skills of early modern physicians, and notes the lack of clarity and separation between "authorized practitioners" and laypeople, stressing the reality that recognized medical professionals offered patients cures they might have obtained—or have obtained in more effective forms—from folk practitioners (43). Trained physicians' treatments often led to the worsening of their patients' conditions, or death. Reminiscent of Donne's twelfth station, Nagy's

observation of the outcome of these practices does little to support the idea that Donne had great faith in his physicians. Thus, the use of medical language that seemingly serves to create associations between Donne's understanding of the body and the knowledge possessed by the medical elite is for naught. Ironically, his attempts to distance himself from his illness are elaborately artificial. By discussing the sick body and seeking out the institutionally sanctioned language of medicine to do so, Donne is drawn ever-closer not only to the universal themes of illness and death, but more importantly to his own frame. When he famously claims that he has "cut up [his] own Anatomy, dissected [himself], and [his physicians] are gon to read upon [him]," Donne presents his doctors and reader not with the anatomy of a corpse, but with the living body of an individual for analysis, emphasizing the personal nature of his text (45-6).

Additionally, Donne is acutely aware of his doctors' potential for misdiagnoses, even as he is treated by the king's own physician. His "confidence in his physicians, and in accurate diagnosis and effective therapy...frangible," (Pender 215) Donne acknowledges God as "the Phisician for spirituall health," and seeks spiritual more than physical restitution (*Devotions* 44). Rather than tying Donne to the people entrusted with his care, such assertions further distance him from his doctors and ensure that mortality becomes intimate and solitary rather than universal. By using his sick body as the epicentre of his limited existence, Donne's text remains individual and personal rather than universal and general. Instead of these "images of anatomy...open[ing] the body up, [and making] it available and not private," the shift indicated suggests that after opening up, Donne shifts back to a focus on the personal self rather than the universal human condition (Selleck 59). He effectively opens and then closes again. The tension created between the personal and universal nature of death ultimately serves the same purpose as

the strain between the body and soul or temporality and timelessness: it foregrounds the paradox of being human, composed of both body and soul, and yet desirous to include the body in one's spiritual existence.

The experience of physical discomfort or pain also plays an important role in Donne's presentation of the body in the *Devotions*. Although Scarry's work is illuminating when considered with respect to Donne's illness and suffering (both bodily experiences), it does not adequately explain his representation of painful sensations. "Pain," Scarry claims, "is not 'of' or 'for' anything—it is itself alone. This objectlessness, the complete absence of referential content, almost prevents it from being rendered in language" (162). The debate in academic and medical circles regarding whether or not pain can be clearly voiced by the one who experiences it suggests that no definitive conclusion can be reached. The presence of pain narratives suggests that physical pain of any level *is* articulable, even if it must be scrutinized from afar by those who experience it because of its continuing physical, mental, or emotional effects. Scarry also posits that inflicting physical pain leads to the breakdown of language and articulation, not the expression of it or the construction of a narrative voice. Such pain is "language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject. Word, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost through...intense pain" (Scarry 35). For Scarry, constructing a narrative out of painful experiences is nearly impossible.

By contrast, Ariel Glucklich claims that bodily suffering is inexpressible without understanding the social and cultural context in which it is presented; societal and cultural influences shape a particular experience of pain, situated "in a specific time and place" (14).

Furthermore, he argues that "the notion of transcultural models eviscerates the very heart of what is essential in pain discourse—namely, its participation in the unique dialectic between culture and individual experience" (14). One cannot consider pain without considering the time period or culture in which it occurred, nor can one address such accounts without considering how specific cultural contexts or time periods influence individual re-tellings. These cultural parameters assuredly inform Donne's interpretation of his illness as the result of divine will. His sickness serves not only to make Donne aware of his spiritually corrupt state, but to cleanse him of it, lending a religiously inflected note to his physical discomfort.

What one cannot reject is that despite such religious interpretation and regardless of historical time period, the physical sensations of illness and of pain are responsible for driving Donne's text through each station, with each named after the progression of symptoms, diagnoses, and treatments as they occur. One is never lost because of such bodily signposts; by the third station, "the Patient takes his bed," by the eleventh, "th[e physicians] use Cordials, to keep the venim and Malignitie of the disease from the Heart," and by the twentieth, "upon these Indications of digested matter, [Donne's physicians] proceed to purge." Concluding with a "warn[ing] of the fearefull danger of relapsing," Donne's titles and descriptions follow the body's stages of illness. While Donne's attempts at spiritual recovery and purging parallel the physician's attempts to heal his body, the body remains the model from which Donne draws comparison for spiritual matters.

Bearing this bodily connection in mind, Rosalynne Rey claims that pain "always has a specific language, whether it is a cry, a sob, or a tensing of the features, and it is a language in itself as well" (4). Pain is not only recognized as having a means of verbal or written articulation:

Rey suggests that pain *is* a language all its own, regardless of its historical context. Donne's work acknowledges the transcendent quality of pain and of bodily experience. Though religiously inflected, the *Devotions* focuses largely on the painful experiences of the body during illness, and is a highly individualized articulation of discomfort and fear, as well as hope for recovery and transformation. These emotional responses are brought about by bodily experiences of illness and pain, even when the body is immobile.

Unable to move, Donne is forced to play out his spiritual and physical condition internally, and does so using a single organ: his heart. Station eleven, the near-centre of Donne's twenty-three *Devotions*, presents this organ as the epitome of overlap between bodily and spiritual conflict. It is the spiritually inclined, ruling organ of the body, possessing "the birth-right, and Primogeniture," but is also the organ through which Donne most significantly connects the pain of spiritual cleansing with the physical pain he experiences in bodily illness (56). Through his heart, Donne intensely focuses the painful bodily imagery he has been using in the *Devotions* down to the level of one organ. That this station comes nearly at the centre of Donne's text is not inconsequential. At the heart of his text, Donne pares down his exploration of bodily and spiritual paradox to a kernel which encompasses the whole of his exploration in a single station.

Images of the heart serve to present the organ as both the ruler of the body and also as a mirror in which the individual's fluctuating spiritual states are reflected. The heart's ability to undergo violent and often radical changes is made apparent through Donne's choice of verbs, many of which emphasize the heart's mutability. His heart, "melting," "inflamed," "burn[ing] like [an] Oven," "wounded," or "troubled," emerges as the physical seat of spiritual anxieties;

spiritual suffering manifests itself physically through graphic descriptions, and is characterized by violent descriptions of flame or incineration (59). The heart is weak at times, and easily aggravated, acting as a “snare” to trap its owner (59). Such hearts are furnaces for the sins of “Lust, and Envie, and Ambition,” “fuell” that creates an unbearable, undesirable blaze (59). In accordance with his own spiritual beliefs, Donne identifies his as “a melting heart, and a troubled heart; and a wounded heart, and a broken heart, and a contrite heart,” characterizing it with the language of penitential psalms (59). However, many of these terms—“melting,” “wounded,” and “broken”—are also evocative of dissolution or torture. Despite the painful experiences conjured by these verbs, Donne’s heart is also “stonie:” recalcitrant and unmovable, it is as unswayed by divine influence as the prisoner who will not confess his misdeeds even as he is punished for them (59).

Scarry identifies such hardenings as bodily indicators of spiritual uncertainty; “disobedience or disbelief” in God, she claims, “is habitually described as a withholding of the body, in which its resistance to an external referent is perceived as covered, or hard, or stiff” (202). This disobedience and hardening “necessitates God’s forceful shattering of the reluctant human surface and repossession of the interior”(204). It is this violent repossession that one finds taking place in the *Devotions*’ more lengthy description of Donne’s heart; where it was “stonie” it becomes “melting” and “broken,” subject to the “powerful working of [God’s] piercing spirit” (59). God’s participation in the individual’s purification from sin is agonizing, though desired: God breaks and shatters, contorts the individual physically and spiritually until he yields. Moreover, God’s presence in the individual is so all-encompassing that it requires that one “turn oneself inside out, devoting one’s physical interior to something outside itself, calling it by

another name" (Scarry 202). Reminiscent of Augustine's assertion that God is "more inward...than my most inward part," illness is the physical manifestation of the individual's spiritual re-devotion to God (*Confessions* Bk III, Ch 6). These painful physical descriptions are Donne's means of presenting his spiritual interpretation of his sickness.

Donne understands both his physical and spiritual states through the notion of correct interpretation. He can "gather out of [God's] Word, so good testimony of the hearts of men, as to finde single hearts, docile, and apprehensive hearts; Hearts that can, Hearts that have learnt; wise hearts...such hearts can [Donne] find in [God's] Word" (59). If Donne is to interpret *his* heart, he must turn to Scripture, and to examples of hearts divinely directed and focused. He must read the symptoms of his illness and interpret his body as a living indication of his spiritual state. However, the perfection Donne finds in biblical text is not reflected in him; the "docile" and "wise" hearts of the Bible do not compare to the hardness of his own heart. For all the positive descriptions he reads and attempts to interpret in his own anatomy, Donne's heart in the *Devotions* is only redeemable when it is subject to God's "piercing," an act that is both desired and feared for its effects on the individual's sense of self (59).

Despite the heart-centered nature of this imagery, it is important to consider the organ as a synecdochic representation of the body in the larger context of Donne's text. While station eleven emphasizes the heart's suffering, the *Devotions* is primarily a discussion of Donne's sick, suffering body as a whole rather than a focused, twenty-three station treatise on the heart's movement from sin to grace. As the body suffers in the *Devotions*, the heart is subject to blows, and breaking. The suffering of the heart in a single station mirrors the suffering of the whole body in the *Devotions*, discomfort that is characterized by an inability to be interpreted as wholly

physical punishment or spiritual trial.

The paradoxical nature of the body, both abhorred for its baseness and praised for its capacity to express the state of the soul, helps shape Donne's *Devotions* in the form of the heart. Resistant and yet longing, the heart epitomizes the paradoxical nature of body and soul, which in turn is a means of expressing the paradox of the uncertainty of salvation and eternal life. The trope of duality or paradox, expressed in this station through the imagery of the heart, is a smaller scale exploration of Donne's greater spiritual preoccupation, that of imbrication or overlap between bodily and spiritual states. As the next chapter illustrates, the idea of overlap — initially impacting only body and soul — plays an important role in Donne's exploration of spirituality and shapes his presentation not only of the soul, but also of divinity, and of time.

Chapter Two

The imbricated portraits of body and soul, and time and atemporality

The early modern period is marked by a tendency to use secular subjects—most often the human body and its fluctuating states—as gateways to discussing spiritual matters. Rather than using the body merely as a means of discussing the soul in the *Devotions*, Donne foregrounds the difficulties of imbrication between the secular and spiritual components of man and intensifies the connection between body and soul by introducing multiple points of overlap between the earthly and heavenly. Specifically, imagery of the body is mapped onto the soul so that the spiritual becomes discussable, and the characteristics associated with body and soul are blended. This blending results in transubstantial synaesthesia, a response to illness that is both bodily and spiritual. Additionally, Donne's attempts to depict his bodily experiences as Christ-like further strengthen the ties between the physical and spiritual, and emphasize the emergence of a single, though not necessarily unified entity consisting of body and soul. While Donne makes apparent the difficulties of such a construct, his choice of language assures one of the symbiotic and co-dependent relationship of the soul and the body. The impact of this imbrication cannot be understated. In addition to influencing Donne's portrayal of his body and his soul, the concept of imbrication is applied to even the portrayal of time in the *Devotions*. Imbrication provides a means of modelling the duality that characterizes human beings and that colours Donne's presentation of spiritual life.

Imbrication between the physical and spiritual in the *Devotions* begins at the level of word usage. As heaven needs "a foile of depression and inglorioussnesse in this world, to set it

off," the body is consistently presented as a foil for the soul (89). Imbrication does not only imply movement in a single direction: the body is not always rejected for its baseness in favour of its spiritual counterpart. Instead, body and soul are subject to each other's states. Donne's sick body, for example, is subject to the atemporal and spiritual state of sin that one associates with the soul rather than with the flesh. Sin is presented not only as a pervasive, constant presence in the physical body, like blood or bile, but also as a form of nourishment rather than a potential cause of bodily illness. Donne's bones become "hardned with the custome of sin, and nourished, and soupled with the marrow of sinn," stressing that its presence is common, even part of the fabric of human form (48). Because the physical body is the site at which atemporal or spiritual concepts manifest themselves, imbrication brings to light the spiritual quality of the soul in the physical illness of the body. Stephen Pender notes that "divine purpose is inscribed on the surfaces and recesses of the sick body," but early in the *Devotions*, the only divine manifestation one sees on Donne's flesh is the presence of sin that becomes a fundamental aspect of it, and which is illustrated by physical illness (220). Such sentiments cast the body in a negative light and serve as a reminder that original sin, passed to the individual at birth, is inescapably built into the human being.

The link between images of the ill physical body and the spiritual state of sin takes its origins from humor theory, which provides insight into how Donne views his sick body. Sin, like humoral imbalance, is the result of either environmental factors from without or discrepancies within the individual (Selleck 60). Because of spiritual fluctuations brought about by a range of experiences, one is constantly changing, and doing so from the inside out. Donne's image of the ill body thus emerges as an inversion of modern germ theory: the physical suffering that plagues

him is not from without but from within, stemming from his own imbalance rather than from the conditions he lives in. Just as sin is part of one's spiritual make-up, sickness is part of one's physiology, and is triggered by internal disproportion. Donne identifies the human body as a potential home for illnesses; the world's diversity of creatures is mirrored in man's "diseases, & sicknesses, of all those sorts; venomous, and infectious diseases, feeding & consuming diseases, and manifold, and entangled diseases, made up of many several ones" (20). The human body becomes a microcosm of the larger world, changing and developing with the diseases that plague it.

Early in the *Devotions*, this internal change is experienced as a weakening which arises as a result of Donne's inability to withstand temptation. The very material of which Donne's body is composed serves not to enhance his potential for spiritual betterment, but rather to increase his capacity for sinful behaviour. The sinews of his body function not for support or structure, but instead serve to "tie, & chain sin and sin together," exacerbating spiritual imbalance (48). The body appears to be at odds with the soul in this portrait, and bodily weakness and spiritual depravity collude to topple the individual. Selleck argues Donne reaches balance by becoming the kind of "penetrable self" that she identifies, one who changes and fluctuates physically, and who connects with the individuals around him by virtue of early modern physiology and humor theory (57). It is my contention that such universalizing accounts for Donne's initial attempt to understand his illness, but that his increased focus on his individuality makes such universalization impossible. Donne's humoral imbalance does not serve to connect him with society in the way Selleck suggests, but rather exists as a self-contained malady that is only solved through introspection.

Pender takes the opposite perspective of what I propose regarding the body and soul, contending instead that it is the uncertainty and change in the individual's spiritual state that is played out on his "living body" through illness rather than the imagery of the ill body being extended to encompass the soul (235). Regardless of a movement from bodily to spiritual or spiritual to bodily, a cursory reading of the *Devotions* makes apparent that the characteristics and images of the body function to create a readable context for the soul that is reflected in Donne's choice of language. Even his dissected anatomy in the ninth meditation is meant to be "read" and interpreted rather than simply medically analyzed (46). The body and soul do not simply overlap, but actually share characteristics, exchange sensations, and feel emotions. The mind and its emotional responses become party to Donne's experience, enacting a kind of transubstantial synaesthesia among body, soul, and mind, where each contributes its qualities in order to create a more unified portrait of an experience both religious and secular, spiritual and bodily.

Donne's assertion that he possesses a "slacke body [that] sweates tears" and a "sad soule [that] weeps blood" is an instance of this synaesthesia (50). The image is densely packed: the tears of an emotional response are layered over top of the physical sensation of a fever sweat. The lachrymal response is then transferred to the soul and re-grounded in blood, a vital bodily fluid. One can align emotional responses with the mind, physical sensations with the body, and spiritual experiences with the soul. The physically "slacke body" that "sweates" is first paired with an emotional response from the mind, in the form of "teares." The spiritual "soule" is then re-paired with that same emotional response, which is then grounded in "blood," bodily fluid. Donne's succinct image comes full circle, fixing itself finally in the realm of the physical. But even as the image closes, the duality of human and divine remains unresolved: the choice of

blood as a bodily fluid ensures that the image will connote both the realm of embodied experience and mortality, and also the biblical image of Christ, whose "sweat was as...great drops of blood falling down to the ground" in the garden of Gethsemane, shortly before Judas' betrayal and the crucifixion (Lk. 22:44). The image of blood is indicative of both mortality and of the paradox of incarnation, since blood sustains the mortal human body. With respect to Christ, however, blood's significance is more difficult to ascertain. It both underscores Jesus' humanity and also reiterates his paradoxical position as Word-made-flesh. With these considerations in mind, it becomes difficult to determine whether Donne is reiterating divinity in humanity or vice versa; nevertheless, the focus on the duality of the individual as human and divine in the *Devotions* remains.

Evident in these synaesthetic moments is an imbrication of human and divine that deepens the overlap between body and soul, and may serve as a solution to the ingrained original sin that has taken root in Donne's physical body. Specifically, the blood and the bodily fluids of Christ are identified as spiritual cleansing agents, and once again the abstract and spiritual are paired with the concrete and bodily. This time, however, the roles are reversed. Where once Donne appealed to God to lift him out of the predicament of bodily illness to preserve him and to temper the physical nature of the human body with divine and eternal characteristics, now the atemporal and spiritual soul must be healed or cleansed by a physical solution: Christ's blood and sweat. Sins and transgressions are deposited in "the wounds of [Christ]" (109) to ensure divine forgiveness, and in station three Donne asks that his soul be washed in Christ's "teares...sweat...[and] blood" in order to ensure its cleanliness (18).

As in the image of the soul weeping blood, such healing is problematized by Christ's duality. Although abstract sins may be deposited in physical flesh, the fact that the flesh of God's son is divine despite its earthliness creates confusion. Donne acknowledges, too, that the imperfections of his own flesh, indicative of the presence of sin, are Christ's to gather. The "open[ing of Donne's] spots" is the presentation "of that which is His, and till [Donne does] so, [he] detain[s], & withhold[s Christ's] right" (70). It is Christ's obligation to collect sinfulness from Donne, and to provide bodily fluids with which to purify him. In each instance, Donne illustrates the extent to which the divine plays a role in the individual's salvation, and lengths to which the physical characteristics of divinity serve to heal or cleanse the abstract or atemporal aspects of human spirituality.

These instances of synaesthesia are fleeting, and Donne actively laments that the imbrication of body and soul is not as practical as it might be, since the two do not adopt each other's characteristics permanently. Despite its weaknesses and failings, the body possesses the capacity to protect itself from illness through sensations that can be felt and interpreted. The soul, conversely, has none of the body's temporal indicators for health. If Donne could be endowed with "a pulse in [the] Soule, to beat at the approach of a tentation to sinne," he might be more capable of avoiding it (8). Ironically, Donne struggles with a soul that is unlike the body in its ability to defend itself from illness. It is precisely for the soul's endurance that it is favoured over the body, and yet its inability to defend itself in a bodily manner is emphasized as a weakness. The body is simply more "sensible;" more sensitive to potential illness than the soul is to potentially sinful situations (8). Despite the body's failings—so pronounced that they constitute the majority of Donne's text—it possesses the self-defence that the soul lacks. For this reason,

the body is not only privileged in Donne's text, but fundamental to his construction of self. If only in its capacity to recognize and to ward off illness, the temporal body exceeds its atemporal counterpart.

Donne emphasizes the pain felt by his physical body in order to reiterate and intensify the overlap between human and divine. Initially aligning the pains of his body with those of others, Donne eventually draws a parallel between himself and Christ. Just as the crucifixion of two thieves alongside Christ illustrates "human physical suffering as an integral part of the Crucifixion," the alignment of Donne with the penitent thief, usually on Christ's right, reiterates this thief as "a mediator between the crucified Christ and the viewer" (van Dijkhuizen 64). While the penitent thief serves as a representative of humanity and a witness to Christ's suffering, Donne's initial identification with this figure is not lasting. His aim is not to universalize his own suffering, and he does not become the "Everyman" that N.J.C. Andreasen would have him be (209). Rather than ensuring his alignment with the rest of humanity by figuring himself as the penitent thief, Donne uses the image of the thief to demonstrate his position as an exemplar of redemption, and to make him "a fellow member of the body of [God's] son" (43). Instead of using him as an image of universal redemption, Donne's temporary identification with the thief positions him as an example for others instead of their equal.

Donne frequently invokes himself as an exemplar in the *Devotions*. Among the sins that Christ suffers for "there is no sinne...which had not been [Donne's] sinne," (55) and despite his dedication to his religious vocation, Donne attempts to paint himself as the worst kind of sinner after the fashion of St. Paul (cf. 1 Timothy 1:15). He goes to such lengths as to suggest that he "may lacke much of the good parts of the meanest" man, and possesses "the mortality of the

weakest" individual. In the former quotation, he implies that his station is below even the "meanest" individual, one who is lowest in redeeming spiritual or moral qualities, and in the latter, he binds himself to the universal condition of human mortality (82). He hopes that his illness, however, will serve as "Mortification by Example;" (82) that is, that his sickness and suffering will prompt others to act, to deny "one's appetites and passions by the practice of austere living, especially by the self-infliction or voluntary toleration of bodily pain or discomfort" ("mortification," def 1). Even in his choice of words to describe his hopes of how his illness will be interpreted by others, Donne places himself in the role of exemplar, and posits his suffering as a behaviour to emulate in order to ensure spiritual betterment.

Despite such efforts, Donne undermines the image of himself as woebegone sinner by making his knowledge of his own election apparent. That he believes that he is among the elect is clear, since "no vehemence of sicknes, no tentation of Satan, no guiltines of sin, no prison of death, not this first, this sicke bed, not the other prison, the close and dark grave, can remoove [him] from the determined, and good purpose, which [God] hast sealed concerning" him; the uncertainty of his spiritual state is qualified by his knowledge of his own election (40). All of the fears Donne describes, including his sense of responsibility regarding his spiritually reprehensible behaviour that led to Christ being "crucified, & Crucified againe, by multiplying many, and often repeating the same sinnes," are rendered defunct (48). As Papizan argues, Donne's *Devotions* are articulated by a voice that "knows he is elect...[and so] his experiences of doubt...do not overwhelm him" (610). Moreover, the apparent certainty of election that Donne experiences leads him to believe that God has presented sickness as a kind of challenge or test, an emphatic, bodily declaration of his predestined spiritual state. The presence of illness is

"frame[d] as a coveted visitation, whereby physical symptoms become...the medium for the divine to communicate;" they are physical manifestations of the spiritual condition of election, not merely of sin (Targoff 143). For this reason, Donne refuses to "call any peece of [his] sicknesse, a sinne," since the very discomfort he undergoes provides proof of his position as one of those whose "name[s God wrote] in the booke of Life" (81). Although he presents himself as an exemplar of suffering and sinfulness, Donne's acknowledgement of his election renders his initial presentation of exemplary suffering little more than an elaborate performance for his readers.

Donne's previous work suggests a familiarity with the use of exemplars. "An Anatomy of the World" (1611) earned Donne heavy criticism from his peers for his ethereally virtuous portrait of Elizabeth Drury, daughter of Sir Robert Drury, a wealthy English landowner. While the circumstances surrounding Donne's desire to write such a poem are unclear, since Drury was not Donne's patron and Donne had never met the then-deceased Elizabeth, the poem sparked controversy for its presentation of the young woman as a model of unsurpassed moral and spiritual purity. Ben Jonson claimed that "if it had been written of the Virgin Mary it had been something," but to elevate a deceased fourteen year-old girl to the level of the "world soul," indicative of goodness and connection with God, was blasphemous (Donaldson 596, MacDuffie 108). Despite Donne's claims that he wrote of an idea of woman and of perfection rather than of Elizabeth as she was in reality, a parallel exists between the elevated, deceased, and anatomized body of Elizabeth Drury and the living and textualized body of John Donne. Just as "An Anatomy of the World" elevates the young Elizabeth to ethereal heights, Donne's connections between his body and Christ's ensure *his* favourable spiritual standing. Moreover, by positing

himself as a Christ-like exemplar rather than a humble, human everyman, Donne ensures that his body is inextricably linked to Christ's, and is in part such a fascinating object because of its humanity and blemishes rather than in spite of them.

Additionally, Donne attempts to reinforce the image of himself as the penitent thief not only by suffering physical pain, but also by using the imagery of the Eucharist. He notes that he has figuratively "drunke of [Christ's] Cordiall Blood for his recoverie," but this image recalls the penitent thief sometimes depicted as catching Jesus' blood in his mouth as it drips from Christ's wounds (61). The description of Donne drinking Christ's blood enacts "a kind of combined Eucharist-baptism," where his figurative drinking is compared to the thief's literal drinking of blood (van Dijkhuizen 64). This eucharistic act calls not for figurative but actual bodily fluid, and Donne's possession of a body "full of the bloud of [God's] son," makes him first the penitent thief, but moves him ever closer to a construction of himself as a Christ-like figure (48). By aligning himself directly with Christ as the text progresses, Donne is not drawn closer to his peers or to society, but rather to Christ, and also to the paradoxically divine and human nature that Christ's pained body connotes.

To ensure that the connection between his own body and Christ's is apparent, Donne uses imagery connotative of the crucifixion in descriptions of his own illness. He is "nayled to his bed," like Christ in the third expostulation (16). The third prayer also constructs careful parallels between the crucified body of Christ and Donne's sick frame: the "sharpnes of [Donne's] sicknes" is likened to "thornes," evocative of the image of Christ's thorny crown (18). The depiction of illness as pointed, metonymically evoking this first image of the crown of thorns, occurs several times as the text progresses; the "stings of sicknesse and of death" (97) and the

"sharpe accidents of diseases" (117) refer not only to the discomfort of illness, but also the first mention of illness as "thorny," (14) and create a link between Donne's suffering and the woven crown given to Christ to mockingly illustrate his title, "King of the Jews" (Mat. 27:29). This parallel is strengthened when Donne presents the sickbed as an altar in the prayer of station three, asking that God "make [Donne]...[a] Sacrifice" not unlike Christ's sacrifice for the sins of humanity as a whole (17). In some moments, as in the third prayer, Donne attempts to downplay or undermine this parallel by maintaining that he is not asking to be made into Christ; rather, he claims that God has made his "Sonne Christ Jesus the Priest," and hopes that God will "make [Donne] his Deacon," but his phrasing betrays his aim (18). His declaration "O God, my God" is a palpable echo of Christ's final words on the cross, sealing the prayer with the parallel between himself and Christ intact (18, cf. Mat. 27:46).

The image of the sickbed as an altar for divine sacrifice resurfaces in the thirteenth expostulation, when Donne asserts that "God...hast made this sickbed [his] Altar, and [Donne] has no other Sacrifice to offer, but [him] self" (68). Because of the progression of his disease, Donne is covered in "spots" that are presented as earthly manifestations of his spiritually sinful state (69). Despite his status as a "spotted sacrifice," (68) however, Donne still mirrors the human Christ who was crucified for the sins of humanity, and as a result the sick, Donnean body is "represent[ed]...as [a] eucharistic sacrifice" (MacDuffie 121). Donne also illustrates the inherent spotted nature of the flesh in this passage and thus the fundamental nature of humanity; "the flesh...spotteth it selfe with it self," he maintains, highlighting the condition that all are subject to, even Christ "who hath al our stains, & deformities in him" (69). Early in the text, Christ and man exist on the same level, since Christ "knowes our naturall infirmities, for he had

them; and knowes the weight of our sinns, for he paid a deare price for them" (10). Donne aligns himself with the suffering Christ, but also compares the mortal weaknesses of Christ with the inherent weaknesses of man. By so doing, Donne suggests that he, like Christ, is capable of bearing the burden of mortal weakness, and also of experiencing the same kind of personal salvific moment when he returns to God.

As MacDuffie suggests and Donne's *Devotions* indicates, the physical body converges with the divine in the physical body of Christ. By interpreting his body as a sign of Christ's, MacDuffie argues, Donne "experience[s those signs] in his own flesh as salvific;" he saves his soul by reading his body as Christ's through Scripture (122). By emulating Christ, Donne both distinguishes himself as an individual amongst his peers by attempting to make himself an exemplar of human suffering. When that fails, he must find a body in which the conflict between divinity and humanity is epitomized, and where the concern of whether or not timelessness can be articulated in time is assuaged. However, while MacDuffie sees the use of Donne-as-Christ as a means of changing how Donne will be interpreted by God—and hopefully, be interpreted more favourably for the parallel between Christ's body and Donne's—I believe that Donne attempts to change both God's perception of his body (and thus the nature of his suffering) and also his own. By creating a parallel between himself and Christ, Donne finds a model of the body that encompasses the paradox of humanity-in-divinity and vice versa, and frees him from the notion that his body is a wholly useless, decaying vessel that amounts to so much spiritual dead weight. In making himself like Christ, Donne makes the body much larger than itself; it is a vessel that contains the frustrating paradox of human existence: though spiritually inclined, man is mortal and subject to time.

The notion of bodily and spiritual dependence is reiterated in Donne's stations. Just as the physical signs of his illness are indicative of deeper spiritual imbalances, so too are the signs of bodily improvement indicators of spiritual emendation. Sleep, and lack of it, become symbols of divine blessing; "bodily restitution" becomes a sign of eternal rather than temporal significance (103). A body that sleeps is marked with God's "seale" and is promised "a Sabbath, and rest in [God]" (103). But the body itself also functions as a vehicle for temporal action that Donne suggests can aid spiritual improvement. By "proceeding to action" in the world, Donne ensures that he will experience a return "to [God], and a working upon [himself] by [God's] Physicke...a free and entire evacuation of [his] soule by confession" (108). The actions of the body affect the health of the soul both by potentially improving it, and also by purging the problems of the soul using the sick body, since, as illustrated earlier, the body is closely intertwined with sinfulness. The kind of action that Donne describes here is based wholly within a temporal framework, but he makes certain that its spiritual importance is reiterated whenever possible.

The belief in "action" as a means to establishing salvation is crucial; before Donne acts, he must believe that his actions can save or damn him, and after he acts, Donne may potentially undergo bodily or spiritual repercussions, "suffering" for what he has done (107). Nevertheless, "doing" occupies "the most eminent, and obvious, and conspicuous place," and present, temporally located action is of the utmost importance (107). Action can potentially save or condemn the individual, and by extension, human mortality provides a limited window of opportunity during which to perform these actions. Donne stresses the importance of action as he opens his meditation in station twenty, maintaining that "though counsel seeme rather to consist of spirituall parts, than action, yet action is the spirit and the soule of counsel" (104). It is action

completed by the body, in real time, that Donne emphasizes, and part of the insurmountable difficulty of facing death lies in knowing that one's time is limited. The immobilized, sick Donne is unable to act beyond mental contemplation of what has already occurred (or what may occur in the limited future). Aware of the potential opportunities he has wasted, Donne struggles to reveal the atemporal significance of temporal action and to explain atemporality itself through the limited, temporal means he has available to him.

The temporal framework in which Donne operates forces him to consider the limitations of his existence, boundaries from which he can only be freed by salvation. It is unsurprising, then, that the atemporal can only be described with respect to the limitations of the temporal space that Donne occupies. One of the earliest images of resurrection in the *Devotions* is bound up in a conflation of time; Donne can only escape the temporality that binds him to this world by imagining instances where time is stretched out, or more often compressed into the claustrophobic space of several lines. In this early example, death and resurrection are contained in such a space. 1 Corinthians 15:52 identifies the angel's trumpet as the call to resurrection, but in Donne's *Devotions* the trumpets are merely another manifestation of the voice of God himself. Trumpets or voice, the divine sound prompts Donne to rise, and acts as the catalyst for the conflation of time: "the sounding of the voice, and the working of the voice shall be all one; and all shall rise there in a lesse Minute, then any one dies here," (13) Donne claims, echoing St. Paul's sentiments that "in the twinkling of an eye...we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). Inasmuch as Donne's technique is simply a sound knowledge of his Bible, it is also a means of creating parallels between Donne's work and those biblical passages that stress a break or alteration in temporal existence, and that suggest, as 1 Corinthians does, that for those elect

"death [shall be] swallowed up in victory" (15:54). Despite the timelessness Donne will experience, the influence of that qualifying mention of time is problematic; "all shall rise there"—presumably in heaven—"in a lesse Minute, then any one dies here." Atemporality remains dependent upon and is compared to the very time that it is not.

It is not only compression that time undergoes in Donne's text, but expansions and lengthenings as well. Donne asserts that God is capable of completing "the worke of a thousand yeere in a day, or extend[ing] the worke of a day, to a thousand yeere" (104). All temporal measurements, he suggests, can be either expanded or contracted at God's will. The necessity of comparison is still present; Donne must articulate God's infinite power within the confines of measured time in order to illustrate his point. Additionally, when Donne prays that "time may bee swallowed up in Eternitie," the physical image of time being literally consumed by some greater force is violent rather than reassuring, and also parallels 1 Corinthians 15:54 in its choice of verb (97). That time and death are described with reference to a bodily action is both an implication of the power of divine time and of the relentless use of the body as a reference point: time does not merely fade into timelessness, nor does death simply vanish. They are swallowed whole by an adversary much larger than themselves.

One might argue that Donne's exploration of the elasticity of time serves to underscore the ultimate insignificance of temporality itself in comparison to the vastness of eternity, or that his use of time is merely an employment of his pre-existing knowledge to describe what is beyond his grasp. While both are valid points, the text nevertheless illustrates a vision of eternity marred by an inability to disconnect from measurable time. Rather than developing as a parallel alongside atemporality, time is imbricated with its opposite. Donne's lamentation that his

"business now [is] to tell Clocks" in an attempt to measure the remainder of his earthly existence also thinly disguises a fear of "entering...into Eternitie, where there shall bee no more distinction of houres" and thus no manner of discerning one's development over a measurable period (78). This lack of development or potential improvement creates anxiety and illustrates the struggles experienced by an individual who is "not in Heaven, because an earthly bodie clogges [him], and...not in the Earth, because a heavenly Soule sustains" him; it is the predicament of a creature both human and divine (16). Hence, Donne's relations of time and divinity are grounded in the body, in hours, in illness, and in the comfort of the measured and temporal.

The conflation of time and atemporality illustrated here can be viewed as an extension of the imbrication of body and soul and the human and the divine. Additionally, this overlap also changes the perception of the time that unfolds during the *Devotions*. Measurable time necessarily becomes the time experienced by the sick body because it is Donne's only means of interacting with his surroundings because of his isolation. He laments that "when [he is] sick, and might infect....[there is] no remedy, but...absence, and...solitude" (25). These periods of quarantine are tempered by thought and reminiscence about the body. By using his body as a marker for the passage of time, Donne situates his reader in the midst of his unfolding illness; his reliance "on acute sensory awareness...vivif[ies his] subjects and thus give them an inescapable immediacy" that is compelling to read (Morrissey 33). It is this immediacy that functions as punctuation in the linearity of time and that potentially leads to salvation.

The immediacy of Donne's bodily experiences encourages a grounding in the body and in the instantaneous perception of oneself in the world, and recalls the "salvific moment" of

Carrithers and Hardy (45). Brown explores this concept in greater detail and contends that lapses in bodily health, discordant though they may be with the linearity of human life, force their sufferer to a consideration of his personal salvation. For Donne, these moments occur within the context of embodied existence, but differ from what Brown proposes. Rather than a conflict of direction, where the "time-bound self become[s] expressed in (or turned toward) the vertical sublimities of eternity," Donne struggles with the motility of human existence (Brown 47). Donne does not abandon the earthly in favour of a vertical movement towards the heavenly, but attempts to balance a life that is comprised both of human and divine characteristics and movements, not exclusively in one direction or pertaining wholly to temporal or atemporal subjects. It is not a shift from one type of time or space (from horizontal linearity of temporal existence to the vertical atemporality of divinity) that Donne's work seeks to address, but the difficulties of moving back and forth between these extremes, of potentially creating a middle ground between the two, and moreover, to address what it means to be defined by this contradiction.

It is precisely this paradox that characterizes human existence in the *Devotions*, and which is most aptly explored by Ricardo Quinones. In his study of the understanding of time during the Renaissance, Quinones presents a possible answer to the difficulties of moving between temporally-bound moments and eternity. By arguing that a single occasion can be all-encompassing for the early modern individual, Quinones effectively seals the gap between temporality and eternity, claiming that the early modern person

will sense the lines of his own life coming together in the fullness of the present moment, where past and future are annihilated. By analogy with eternity, the present is not merely the moment at hand; it is summary and all-embracing,

compressing in the depth of its vision a completed and rounded-out picture of human existence. (27)

This instantaneous perception of the linearity of time is what Donne's *Devotions* struggles to achieve through the exploration of temporal conflations and expansions, and the "fullness of the present" is intertwined with Donne's embodied perceptions. Henri Bergson's concepts of time and perception that also identify the body as a fundamental aspect of the individual's comprehension of his existence are useful constructs here. One's awareness of the physical world, claims Bergson, "appears, rightly or wrongly, to be inside of us and outside of us at one and the same time; in one way it is a state of consciousness; in another, a surface film of matter in which perceiver and perceived coincide" (45). Individual consciousness is both the medium through which one perceives and the parts that constitute the ability to do so. Bergson's consciousness, simultaneously "inside of us and outside of us" mirrors Selleck's concept of the humoral body. Both affecting and affected by the outside world, the body is both the medium of change and the measure of it. The passage of time, like the body, is perceived both as part of the individual and the medium in which the individual exists.

Speaking of the body, Bergson contends that a measure of time, commonly called duration, can be distinguished in part by physical movement or motion: one considers time as the measure of motion after the motion has been completed, and that distance or length can be divided and measured. In the case of the *Devotions*, the most pertinent part of Bergson's definition is the twofold significance of motion that he identifies: it is both "muscular sensation...[and] part of the stream of our conscious life," and a "visual perception, [that] describe[s] a trajectory" since motions "claim a space" (50). Donne in his sickbed seems

incapable of making the motions that Bergson identifies as crucial to duration, yet the sick person is certainly aware of the passage of time, though perhaps in a manner different from those around him. Even a stable object without consciousness illustrates the movement of time: a piece of fruit, left to sit on a kitchen table, will moulder and rot despite the fact that it does not move in any observable fashion. It requires a conscious subject, however, to notice that fruit's decay; one "cannot speak of a reality that endures without inserting consciousness into it," and reality is necessarily comprised of individual experiences, bound together to create a framework of time that includes all individual experiences of it (Bergson 48). Donne is both mouldering fruit and observer, forced to "practise [his] lying in the grave, by lying still, and not practise [his] Resurrection, by rising any more" (16).

It is this collective fabric that Bergson calls "impersonal time," not subject to measurement or individual perception, to which Donne seeks to attach himself (47). The overlap of individual consciousnesses contributes to a kind of whole, and it is first composite time that Donne tries to connect with through the tolling of the bells in station sixteen; he is, as the title suggests, "remembred of [his] buriall in the funeralls of others" (81). The bells tolling for the funeral of an unknown neighbour instantly remind Donne of his own mortality, of the experience of ageing, illness, and eventual death that he participates in along with the rest of humanity. Connection with this shared experience binds Donne to other human beings, and encompasses him in a more complete and extended version of perceived time, comprised of his own experiences and of those around him.

Transcendence of this seemingly more-encompassing time is what Donne struggles with as the text progresses. From the "impersonal time" that Bergson identifies and the "fullness of

the present" that Quinones describes, Donne directs himself towards a divine time incapable of description, and which he seems incapable of ever reaching while he is alive. The initial connection with his neighbour over the tolling bells cannot override the fact that the journey that Donne makes is completed in solitude, though it is completed with God. Rather than engaging in the "intermediary of motion" that Bergson suggests would make Donne the conscious subject, bound by measurable time, Donne's motionlessness is an attempt to prepare for timelessness itself, but whether or not he achieves a movement into timelessness is doubtful (Bergson 50). For now, the "fullness of the present" captivates him, and the unfolding of all instants in a simultaneous understanding, or at least the conflation of temporal and atemporal events, dispels some of his anxiety regarding death and resurrection. Space and time are conflated at the end of the thirteenth prayer, when Donne asks that "this bed-chamber, & [God's] bed-chamber...be all one roome, and the closing of these bodily Eyes here, and the opening of the Eyes of [his] Soule, there, [be made] all one Act" (70). Donne prays for the conflation of temporal and atemporal existence, and the result is one of simultaneous awareness of time, a consciousness that can "grasp, in a single, instantaneous perception, multiple events lying at different points in space" (Bergson 45). What Donne works towards is an understanding of the concept of divine time. Such time is unbounded by and simultaneously incorporated into the linearity to which all human beings are subject.

The atemporal puzzle that Donne's *Devotions* addresses has roots firmly embedded in an Aristotelian understanding of time, characterized as "measure of motion according to before and after," and used as a measure of discernible change (*Physics* 4.11). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the notion of "celestial reductionism," of time as an Aristotelian construct

where time and motion are "coordinated or reduced...to real moving objects," was an accepted concept (Ariotti 32,37). However, the Aristotelian concept of unchanged heavenly bodies that acted as guides for the movement of the imperfect material world fell under attack in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Piero Ariotti makes evident, first Copernicus' work on heliocentrism (which does not, at first glance, contradict Aristotle), then the work of Johannes Kepler and later Isaac Newton helped to unseat the long-standing belief in the perfect and unchanging patterns of planets or heavenly bodies. Intended to explain the movement from Aristotelian concepts of time to more modern ones, Ariotti's opening point is a useful one when considering the motion between temporal and atemporal that Donne makes in the *Devotions*: "one of the major conceptual innovations of science in the seventeenth century is the introduction of the concept of an absolute time independent of external motion" (31). It is *this* version of time that Donne attempts to connect with by addressing God in his text; by acknowledging the duality of his body and soul and his divine and human nature, Donne hopes to transcend his body without leaving it.

Although the immediacy of illness forces Donne to a consideration of much larger matters, the *Devotions* is marked by his inability to describe the atemporal topics of soul and timelessness without images of the body or the temporal frame of reference that helps to sustain them. Additionally, these depictions of time as contracted or extended periods serve to illustrate the difficulties of describing atemporality in the language and form of temporal experiences, such as those of the body. What the text moves towards is something beyond the limitations of linear time, but also beyond the more composite descriptions of "full...moment[s]" that Quinones describes, or the "impersonal time" that Bergson constructs as an overlap between multiple, lived

experiences of the world. Ironically, since the immediacy of the moment is a defining feature of salvation, Donne's visceral and bodily preoccupation becomes fundamental to the salvific moment, the instant when transcendence is achieved. Donne struggles to express an atemporal transcendence in temporal terms and to identify the salvific moment that defines him spiritually within the instantaneous experiences of his body. By constructing a textual body that represents this paradox, Donne creates a space where transcendence can occur, but one that is both dependent upon the body for its construction and independent of the body in its existence. The creation of a textual body and its impact on Donne's understanding of his illness and his spiritual health is the topic of the final chapter.

Chapter Three

"Gon to read upon me": The construction and interpretation of Donne's textual body

The parallel drawn between Donne's body and Christ's in the previous chapter prompts an exploration of another transformative shift in the *Devotions*: that of the body into printed text. Donne suggests that life and, by extension, the life lived in a body, is a work to be read for spiritually significant signs. Illness becomes a means of "reading of [the] body as a microcosm...for signs of creation, sin, and redemption" but also a means of pinpointing the importance of the sick human body in spiritual transformation (MacDuffie 113). The written 'body' of the *Devotions* can be considered a literary representation of Donne's experience of illness and thus a 'textual body.' By creating a text wholly representative of the physical experiences of his sick frame, Donne transforms the physical into the written, and provides himself with a work that can be interpreted in the same manner as other texts. The creation of Donne's textual body provides him with a means of understanding his illness, attaching spiritual significance to it, and potentially a means of achieving spiritual transformation. Unable to move from the confines of his sickbed, Donne's instantaneous recognition and explanation of his body's symptoms serve to situate him in time while freeing him from it. Not unlike Quinones' "fullness of the present," where past and future are annihilated, and the present moment stands as an analogy to eternity, effectively presenting eternity in the present moment, Donne's textual body is linked both to the instant and to eternity. By tying the present symptoms of his body to the unchanging Scripture of the Bible, Donne attempts to interpret physical illness and, by extension, the textual body constructed out of that illness. Provided with a biblical guide to his

textual body, Donne attempts to interpret his physical symptoms as spiritual ones, and thus 'read' his illness for signs of election and spiritual redemption, enacting a shift into atemporality while remaining in the sickbed.

Donne's capacity for transformation is grounded in the bodily experience of sickness, but also in the text that his infirmity helps to produce. Both Horn and MacDuffie maintain that the body is used as a vehicle for transcendent movement. MacDuffie is concerned with the text as a body of work, one which is informed by the physical experience of illness. The transformative aspect of infirmity lies in the correct interpretation of that text by God. The body is therefore changed in a manner not unlike the humor theory stressed by Selleck; the mutable flesh must be interpreted correctly in order to discern what transformations have occurred. However, rather than a change that is outward and visible, and that connects the individual to the rest of society the way Selleck's interpretation of humor theory does, Donne's bodily changes in Horn and MacDuffie's interpretations are stressed as deeply personal and individual. The body imagery I have explored in Donne's *Devotions* is, for MacDuffie and Horn, an acknowledgement of the physical body's importance, but is also a reinforcement of its role as spiritual conduit. The body may be the site of transformation, but in Horn's case, it is discarded after it has served its purpose. When considered from the perspective I propose, the body in Donne's *Devotions* is both the site of the spiritual transformations of transcendence (the movement of self beyond the physical limits of one's body and the material world) and incarnation (the act of Christ being made flesh, or God's "Incarnate Word" [Sobosan 395]). Rather than being discarded afterwards, these two transformational acts stress the body's role as catalyst in Donne's spiritual transformation and reiterate its importance in spiritual matters.

Although the final interpretation of Donne's soul cannot come until after death, the interpretation of his illness falls to him in this world, and acts as a guide to the potential interpretation of his soul. Sin, "the root, and the fuell of all sicknesse," aligns spiritual and physical suffering, and Donne must therefore interpret his body to read his soul (118). As Ramie Targoff notes of the thirteenth station, Donne undergoes a "transformation of the meaning of [his] illness: he successfully reinscribes the signs of his disease as evidence of his election;" however, it is for himself that Donne accomplishes this goal, and it is through his physical body that he manages to complete it, "through bodily, not spiritual symptoms" (142-3). It is through the textual body that such reinscription occurs, and it is the written text that provides an apt means of interpreting the physical and spiritual changes in Donne. Were the written text not present, Donne's body and his speech would be his only means of articulation. While speech has the power to convey both the physical and spiritual suffering that the *Devotions* addresses, it has none of the permanency of the printed word, and it does not provide an opportunity for the discussion of both physical and spiritual matters in the same way Donne's text does. The physical suffering and the spiritual conflict that Donne experiences is translated into the printed text, and both coexist in the framework of the *Devotions* in a way that they simply cannot in the body. Abstract and spiritual qualities, while reflected in the state of the sick body, cannot be explored on the body as they can in a text. Hence, writing about his body provides Donne with an outlet, a means of discussing the spiritual concerns that physical illness raises. The physical body remains the primary cause of such examination, but it is the individual mind that possesses the means to examine the body and soul.

While he acknowledges that the *Devotions* is a textual body informed by Donne's

physical experiences, Horn suggests that the text provides Donne with a concrete sense of identity, rendered more stable because it is grounded in God, who is "the ground for all permanence, [and] the centre of changelessness" (368). The question of whether bodily decay means loss of the individual is thus wholly erased. However, when one discerns how important bodily experiences are for Donne as a theological tool, it seems unlikely that the only aim of the *Devotions* is a movement from the physical realm of the body to the spiritual realm of the abstract (and, by extension, the textual). If anything, the exploration of illness, which motivates Donne to produce a text reinforces his dependence on his body as a means of articulating both his spiritual and physical states while exploring avenues for physical recovery and spiritual salvation. While the text of Donne's *Devotions* may serve as his "substitute body," it does not effectively replace his physical frame (Horn 368). Instead, it works to bring the physical discomfort that he feels into dialogue with the spiritual concerns of which he believes such pain is indicative.

The textual body initially emerges as a figurative construction, a parallel of the physical body that is read for its symptoms. Donne claims his physicians have "seene...and heard [him...he has] cut up [his] own Anatomy, dissected [him]selfe, and they are gon to read upon" him (45-6). The metaphor of "read[ing]" the body is not coincidental; the body is presented as a work to be read and understood, and then solved by appropriate medical treatment. In the same manner that Donne's physicians will accurately interpret his physical body's symptoms for temporal ends, Donne attempts to read his textual body for spiritual signs, and with God's help, to interpret them as a sign of his election. The illness that Donne suffers from is not "casuall, or without signification," but when he reads illness "in that language, as it is a correction" (40).

Correct comprehension of his illness as a manifestation of divine will allows Donne to "translate it into another [language], and read it as mercy" rather than punishment (40).

Donne's means for attempting a 'translation' are limited at best, and relying on the body alone for interpretation results in failure. Comparing interpretation of his body's symptoms with the astrological assessment of signs in the heavens, Donne stresses the failure of such arts, and claims that

Comets and blazing starres, whose effects or significations, no man can interrupt or frustrat, no man foresaw: no Almanack tells us, when a blazing starre will break out, the matter is carried up in secret; no Astrologer tels us when the effects will be accomplished, for thats a secret of a higher spheare. (51-2)

Despite the apparent validity of astrological almanacs as guides during the seventeenth century, Donne maintains that such textual authorities fail to provide adequate explanation for his symptoms. Like a "blazing starre," Donne's illness is not foreseen by earthly means or astrological divination, reinforcing the interpretation that it is divine in origin, belonging to "a higher spheare." The appeal to "Almanack[s]" is useless; just as the presence of heavenly bodies outside these predictive texts undermines astrology, the attempt to interpret illness via such signs is rendered obsolete and unreliable.

With the failure of astrological means of bodily interpretation comes the failure of interpreting Donne's body by means of its symptoms. Those weakened senses that were indicators of illness early in the *Devotions* are no longer reliable or readable signs. Donne checks his body and discovers that his "forces are not enfeebled, [he] find[s] no decay in [his] strength, [his] provisions are not cut off, [and he] find[s] no abhorring in [his] appetite," and "yet [his

doctors] see, that invisibly, & [Donne] feele[s] that insensibly the disease prevails" (52). Despite his seemingly asymptomatic state, Donne is aware that his condition is not improving, and may in fact be worsening. The momentary sensations of the body that were a means of interpreting sickness are oddly absent, and the body in and of itself becomes an inaccessible work. It is a self-constructed text that has slipped away from its author and cannot be interpreted, at least not through the methods Donne has hitherto been using.

Failure to interpret his symptoms and the eventual absence of obvious changes or signs prompts Donne to move beyond his body's text and to appeal to the highest textual authority. With frequent biblical allusion, Donne compares his illness, his sins, and his spiritual state with some exemplary figures, drawing parallels between himself and Christ, Moses, Job, Jacob, and many others (27, 21, 28). He draws on their strengths and admits his own weaknesses in comparison; he has "not the righteousness of Job," for example, but possesses "the desire of Job, [he] would speak to the Almighty, and [he] would reason with God" (21). He struggles with the unrelenting loneliness of illness, but also acknowledges that Moses "was commaunded to come neere the Lord alone," and thus argues that "solitarines, & dereliction, and abandoning of others, disposes us best for God" (27). The isolation of his sickness betters Donne's spiritual situation, and in each case, Donne's comparison of his own circumstances with those of a biblical figure yields positive interpretations of the different pains he experiences. Loneliness, sickness, and mental and emotional discomfort are continually interpreted as divine indications, symptoms of Donne's spiritual election that stand in place of his absent bodily symptoms. Furthermore, the references to these biblical figures reinforce the notion of God as ultimate interpreter, and God's word as a text superior to that of Donne's body.

By creating parallels between the physical and mental sensations that Donne feels and those of Jesus, Moses, Job, and countless others, he ensures that the synecdochic goodness and suffering of these biblical figures is transferred to his situation, and also to the interpretation of his sickness. By creating parallels between his situation and that of various biblical exemplars—models of emotional, physical, and spiritual strength—Donne ensures that their commendable characteristics are translated to become his own. Rather than suffering bodily illness that can be interpreted by medical texts, Donne suffers spiritual illness that can only be correctly interpreted through its parallels to biblical passages and figures. His appeal to figures that represent the higher textual authority of the Bible reinforces the parallels between illness and divine presence, and also provides a textual reference point from which Donne can interpret the spiritual component of his bodily afflictions.

Donne's interpretation of Scripture leads to the configuration of his illness as a spiritual affliction as much as—if not more than—a bodily one. In his mention of God in the fifth expostulation, he claims that one "dares not looke upon [God] face to face" but rather "by way of reflection, in the consolation of his temporall or spirituall servants"(28). The temporal action of Donne's physicians and the sensation of illness are the divine "reflections" of which he speaks, and he observes his body indirectly because of the divine origins of his illness. Playing on "reflection," Donne identifies his body as both an object to be reflected or meditated upon in the mind and an object indicative or reflective of divine will. In the former sense, the body is a topic on which to ruminate; it is meant to be analysed and returned to for signs of divine importance. In the latter, the body is doubly reflective not only as an image of God, but also as a site at which divine will manifests itself—in Donne's case—through illness (cf. Gen. 1:27). Unable to observe

God directly, Donne relegates his discussion with the Almighty and his reflections about his physical and spiritual conditions to text. The creation of text from the experiences of the body is a reflection in multiple senses of the term: unable to look directly at God, Donne must see the Almighty's influence on his sick body. Additionally, the text functions as a reflection of the soul, since the body's condition is indicative of the health of its spiritual counterpart. The *Devotions* is both a contemplation of Donne's bodily state and an identification of that state as being the will of God, and its function is both spiritual and temporal.

MacDuffie suggests that of greater importance than the translation of the body into text is a favourable interpretation of that text by God. By aligning his body with Christ's, MacDuffie argues that Donne "reads his body as a sign of the body of Christ," and "suggest[s] to God a possible transformative rereading of [his] situation" (120). Although Donne's focus appears to be on God interpreting him favourably, much of his discussion of reading, writing, translating, and interpreting does not appear to indicate favourable interpretation by God, but rather an interpretation by Donne on God's behalf. When Donne realizes that his sickness may be something his physicians can diagnose, he rejoices that "it is a degree of good, in evill, a degree that carries hope & comfort in it, when [one] may have recourse to that which is written" (47). Textual basis for diagnosis, both physical (via medical texts) and spiritual (via Scripture), gives Donne comfort, since appealing to the authority of text may yield better chances of accurate interpretation. It is Donne who is "refer[red]...to that which is written" in the books of Scripture to seek out his own spiritual diagnosis rather than appealing to the Almighty directly (48). The task is carried out via spiritual reflection on Donne's part instead of being directly conducted by God.

Donne repeats this reflective exercise in the eighth station, which addresses the presence of the king's physician, sent to aid Donne's doctors in diagnosis and treatment. Connecting the reflection of God's image to the perception of his sick body, Donne notes that "as we see [God] heere in a glasse, so we receive from [him] here by reflexion, & by instruments. Even causal things come from [God], and that which we call Fortune here, hath another name above" (44). "Reflexion, & ...instruments" take on double meanings; reflection describes not only the tactic that the individual must employ to look on God's works (such as illness), but also the action that Donne's physicians must complete as they observe his condition, come to a diagnosis, and propose a course of treatment. "Instruments" are also part of this wordplay, referring not just to the medical implements that the physicians wield, but also to the fact that the physicians themselves, "causal" though they may be in Donne's eyes, are also divinely directed in the treatment of his illness (44). Sickness, like the image of the divine, requires reflection in order for it to be properly seen and correctly interpreted, suggesting that the sick person must put distance between himself and his illness through recovery. He must also take time to consider his own illness in the broader context of sickness and spiritual discomfort, informed by readings from the Bible and parallels to biblical figures.

Despite the appeal to the unchanging textual authority of the Bible for interpretation of his body, it is important to consider the role of time in Donne's portrait of spiritual interpretation. While the connection of the physical body's state with a spiritual state suggests a movement beyond time in which to reach a judgement, this is not the case in the *Devotions*. As I have demonstrated earlier, many of the physical aspects of Donne's existence are explored or emphasized as a means of facilitating discussion about their atemporal counterparts. In those

examples, the temporal is merely used to discuss the atemporal, a guideline for the heavenly experiences that will come after earthly existence has passed. When speaking of transformation, however, Donne does not alter his temporal measurement. Instead, the instant is retained as the metaphorical framework in which to carry out bodily and spiritual transformation. Although his attempted movement is towards the divine and to a place unbounded by temporality, the presentation of the moment becomes a central trope in the *Devotions*, unaltered despite its attachment to spiritual and heavenly affairs.

The instant is also the time frame in which Donne believes divine interpretation of his spiritual state will occur. In the fifteenth prayer, Donne returns to the interpretation of his bodily state—in this case, his insomnia—as an indicator of his spiritual health. The closing lines of the prayer are a plea to be “returne[d]...to that Minute, wherein [God] wast pleased with [Donne],” and for God to “consider [Donne] in that condition” (81). This does not suggest that Donne was looked upon favourably by God for only for a single instant, but that Donne desires an eternal extension of that favourable moment. Just as the timely interpretation of Donne's symptoms is essential to a diagnosis, the divine instant becomes crucial to a favourable spiritual interpretation of Donne's soul and to his salvation.

Donne's relentless emphasis on a limited time frame in which God will reach a definitive assessment of his soul takes its cue from seventeenth-century medicine, which used “the sequence of events in time of sickness...to [interpret] the meaning of indications, which appear at critical times during an illness,” such as the presence of Donne's spots (Pender 240). Considered a valid scientific method, planetary alignments and astrological charts were consulted and as a medical means of discerning the “Critically Dayes” of those afflicted with sickness. Nicholas

Culpeper's *Semeiotica Uranica, or an Astrological Judgement of Diseases from the Decumbiture of the Sick* (1655) provides such an analysis of astrological arts and their application in medical treatment. His text promises to provide the reader with a means of discovering "the Cause, Change, and End of the disease," as well as an astrological guideline that will expose "whether the Sick be likely to live or dye, and the Time when Recovery or death is to be expected." Astrological interpretation of illness was not only used to facilitate the interpretation and treatment of symptoms, leading to a diagnosis, but also to provide a time-line for particular diseases. As Culpeper's subtitle suggests, these methods could also be used to discern the conclusion of one's illness, be it death or recovery, and the time it would take to occur.

Although Donne rejects the consultation of astrological references as a means of diagnosing his illness, he does make use of the "Criticall dayes" that make up the framework for correct diagnosis (71). Whittling them down to critical instants, Donne uses these brief moments as the temporal measures in which he conducts his spiritual assessment. The time in which a just or correct spiritual judgement can be conducted is relegated to the minutest span of temporal measurement, and the massivity of divine judgement and deliberation over the state of Donne's soul is compressed into the fleeting span of a single moment. It is the "salvific moment" that provides the answer to Donne's spiritual uncertainty rather than deliberation over his twenty-three stations or the consultation of astrological charts (Carrithers and Hardy 3). Despite the fact that divine time can supposedly be expanded or contracted as God wills it, the pressure of the instant weighs on Donne, who attempts to interpret divine will. It is deeply paradoxical that despite such rhetorically complex deliberation about the correct spiritual interpretation of his sickness, Donne never concludes with any sense of finality about his spiritual state. Regardless

of his uncertainty, the instant is stressed as the time frame for spiritual interpretation, and a favourable result will re-apparel Donne in his own body after the judgement of his soul; the moment of "awaking" will result in the "reinvesting [of Donne's] Soule, in [his] Body," suggesting a return to the flesh facilitated by a favourable interpretation of the soul by God (76).

By using a measure of time in transformation, Donne ensures that a temporal component is included in the transformative process, despite the fact that the textual body represents a move away from the earthly and bodily in favour of the heavenly and spiritual. Because the experiences of the ill body serve as important factors in the construction of an interpretable text of spiritual significance, the spiritual transformation that Donne fixates upon cannot be said to be wholly transcendent or incarnational. While physical and spiritual aspects of Donne's existence frequently overlap or are blurred in the *Devotions*, the transformation of Donne's body into text appears to be a transcendent act which encourages a movement of self beyond the limits of the world. However, whether or not Donne's text privileges incarnational or transcendent transformation is unclear, and is complicated by both the reliance on the body and the inclusion of the instant as a temporal measure for divine judgement. Donne articulates the presence of his spiritual concerns on the textual body that is the *Devotions*, and creates a means of reading physical symptoms as spiritual signs, bolstered by Scriptural interpretation. In this sense, the movement of the text appears to be away from the physical realm and into the spiritual. His text, like God's physical inscription of sickness on the body, consists of flesh-made-word. But while the textual body can be said to indicate transcendence, the parallels between Donne's body and Christ's previously explored suggests that Donne is emphasizing the physicality of the body as common ground for both human and divine. Such a reading enforces incarnation as the dominant

spiritual movement of the text.

The *Devotions* presents the reader with paradox even at the moment of potential transformation by simultaneously playing out transcendent and incarnational movement: God's divine inscription of illness renders Donne's flesh a living text, marked by "spots, [that] are but the letters, in which [God] hast written [his] own Name, and conveyed [him] self" to Donne (70). God has "inscribe[d] his presence and his will on the body's fragile page" and thus made Donne's body a text for both divine and self-interpretation (MacDuffie 112). Donne then makes a text out of his own body, turning his flesh into words and contributing to the making of the physical body (ill or otherwise) as something beyond itself. An indicator of his spiritual condition and a potential means of reaching a means of personal transformation, the body expands beyond the boundaries of the sickroom, and is not fleeting nor ephemeral. These two acts—divine will manifesting itself as the bodily inscription of illness, and bodily experience being translated into text—ensure that the spiritual movement of the *Devotions* is neither earthward or heavenward, but remains paradoxically pulled between both. Donne remains hemmed in by this spiritual stasis, unable to move heavenward in a transcendent act, or earthward in an incarnational one. This spiritual stasis, characterized by paradox, emerges as both the problem and solution to his spiritual belief.

Conclusion

Liminality and Paradox in *Donne's Devotions*

The nature of Donne's recovery at the conclusion of the *Devotions* suggests both physical and spiritual rebirth or resurrection that cannot conclusively be said to have occurred. By rising out of his bed, Donne indicates that the spiritual steps undertaken in the course of the text have been beneficial and have reached some level of completion. The ill Donne, recovered from and shaken by his experience, comes out spiritually wiser and more certain of his election. However, as Papazian points out, the "movement from anxiety to peace" that Donne attempts as he moves through each of the twenty-three stations comes up short as the text concludes (611). Instead of exploring his peace in the twenty-third station, Donne's addresses the fear of physical and spiritual relapse. Moreover, he indicates that such a setback is of greater spiritual concern than one's initial transgressions, as "contempt wounds deeper than an injury; a relapse deeper than a blasphemy" (*Devotions* 125). Papazian argues that the "internal cycle" of each station from uncertainty to acceptance and understanding of God's will contributes to no greater spiritual work on Donne's soul (611). The moments of fear and doubt are not erased, but instead remain unassuaged upon recovery, "betray[ing] the speaker's election" (611). Papazian navigates this puzzling, open-ended conclusion by suggesting that fear and anxiety are necessary aspects of the elect individual; they are, ironically, the price that he pays to be welcomed into heaven after his death. Since Donne's recovery temporarily precludes that death, and thus a final divine judgement about his spiritual state, the text builds towards a moment that never actually arrives: that of Donne's salvation.

The question of whether or not the divine expansion and contraction of time can account for the brevity of the salvific moment is worth examining. Presumably, such expansions can make the salvific moment—which appears to human beings as little more than an instant, and suggests instantaneous judgement on God's part—a more acceptable length for the weighty task of the divine assessment of one's soul. By recovering, Donne renders God's capacity to expand or contract time moot, since he never crosses the threshold into atemporality, and never reaches the moment of divine judgement.

How, then, is one to account for the unyielding attachment to the body, or the focus on momentary instants of time as a means to move beyond those temporal and earthly aspects of Donne's existence? This question is best addressed by considering the process by which physical or spiritual changes occur in the context of Arnold van Gennep's rites of passage. Victor Turner further explores and simplifies van Gennep's exploration of spiritual and social rites of passage by breaking them down into three distinct stages or phases: "separation, margin, and aggregation" (Turner 94). In the most basic sense, a rite consists of an individual's separation from his peers (separation), his transformation or change (margin[alization]), and his reintegration into society once his alteration is complete (aggregation). It is the second stage that is of greatest value to the discussion here, one that van Gennep describes as "liminal," and that is characterized by mutability and inconsistency (11). "Liminal rites" are those acts that serve as "rites of transition" between two different stages, such as the period when an adolescent boy undergoes cultural, social, or physical changes that usher him into manhood (11). Liminality is explored in greater detail by Turner, who presents it not only in the context of van Gennep's rites, but also as its own category of being. Liminality denotes a "being that [is] in between...[that has]

broken with prevailing structure[s]" of time and earthly existence (Carson 59-60). It is both part of the structure of a rite of passage, and is also a mode of being separate from the rite, a space where the act of becoming and the instability of existing in-between states is itself a state.

The *Devotions* represents a completed rite of passage in the sense of the three stages that van Gennep and Turner describe, but only in a social sense and not in a spiritual one. Separation, the first phase, marks "the detachment of the individual or group" either from the state he once occupied or from society as a whole (Turner 94). Donne's sickness illustrates this detachment, isolating him from all but his physicians and reinforcing the social removal that illness necessitates: "solitude," he claims, "is a torment, which is not threatned in hell it selfe" (25). Because of the spiritual context that Donne attaches to illness, his separation is spiritually justified as an opportunity to focus on his relationship with God: like a monk in a cloister, Donne in his sickbed is made ready for spiritual transition. Next, the "intervening 'liminal' period," marks those passages that describe the imbrication of body and soul, where the speaker's "characteristics...are ambiguous" (Turner 94). By frequently imbricating physical and spiritual states and characteristics, Donne not only explores the interconnectedness of body and soul, but also emphasizes the instability of both his physical condition and his spiritual state. Finally, upon recovery, Donne is re-integrated into society, and his "passage is consummated," but only physically, through health and his return to society and the church (Turner 95). The personal spiritual work that Donne must complete is still in limbo; in the course of the *Devotions*, he does not achieve the transcendence that will render his election certain and his life everlasting.

As an independent state in itself, liminality provides a context for the incomplete spiritual transition explored by the *Devotions*. Donne's sick body becomes the embodiment of Turner's

liminal space, presented as

necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial [sic]. (95)

The sick body is thus recognizable as such; it is "betwixt and between" health and illness, uncertain of whether or not it will improve. Indeed, Donne's greatest fear is the ambiguity of sickness; he "feare[s] not the hastening of [his] death, and yet [he] do[es] fear the increase of the disease" because of the uncertainty that characterizes illness (30). Its end result will not necessarily lead to the death that will extinguish Donne's fears about divine judgement when he is resurrected; it may lead to a transition back into health, further from the salvific moment. Moreover, because of the spirituality present in Donne's portrait of illness, the sick body is perhaps a more suitable liminal space than it first appears. Because the health of the body is indicative of the relative health of the soul, the transitions Donne faces are not only temporal and physical, but also atemporal and spiritual. As a result, death does not free him from these transitions: dying would mean encountering the liminal space between death and resurrection, between lying in the grave and being welcomed into everlasting life. The human being, composed of body and soul, is "suspended... betweene Heaven and Earth...[he] is not in Heaven, because an earthly bodie clogges [him], and [he is] not in the Earth, because a heavenly Soule sustains" him (17). Donne's vision of the devout individual is of one caught or trapped, not merely floating in limbo but actively being pulled between the two opposing facets of his

existence. The Christian human being is characteristically liminal.

As Brown and Papazian have demonstrated, the *Devotions* is a text that either builds towards the instant of salvation, or that completes a series of doubt-to-belief cycles that do not result in Donne attaining certainty regarding his election. Papazian's argument is intriguing when one considers the liminal component of illness: the price Donne pays for election is uncertainty about that election while alive, and each station of the *Devotions* reiterates this point. Indeed, despite the spiritual triumphs at the end of each station, the conclusion of Donne's text is voiced by a man still uncertain of his election, who must continue to listen for God's voice in order to "proceed...and be so established, as may remove all suspicions" (*Devotions* 114). This uncertainty of election and the struggle between earthly and spiritual binaries remains the single constant thread of the *Devotions*. The middle ground between earth and heaven is liminal space; faith coloured by uncertainty, and a spiritual emphasis on the body that cannot be ignored. Donne keeps body and soul together by using the body as the liminal space where faith occurs. It becomes a threshold between temporality and atemporality that can potentially be crossed, but is not in the course of the *Devotions*.

In Donne's *Devotions*, liminality marks the space between belief and non-belief, or between life and death, or between body and soul. These transitional spaces also mark the distinction between time and timelessness, with the physical death of the body as the defining event that will complete the transition between the two states. In death, Donne reaches the end of mortality, and the beginning of atemporality and eternal life, provided he is among the elect. The closer Donne gets to the end of his temporal, earthly existence, the closer he gets to timelessness. Beyond death, the transition from the grave to resurrection means Donne's salvation will occur,

and he will move into atemporal life, but he never fully faces this instant.

Targoff is convinced that Donne's greatest desire is not necessarily to achieve transcendence or to be accepted into heaven at death; in Targoff's view, he remains enthralled by his position on the threshold. As she notes of Donne's funerary monument in St. Paul's, "what Donne has asked the artist to capture is not the moment that he will open his eyes and be reanimated, but the moment preceding this, when his very body is filled with joy and anticipation" (183). It is this instant that the *Devotions* seeks to capture in text. Donne's fixation becomes the liminal space in between doubt and certainty, body and soul, earth and heaven. It is the pleasure "in looking toward, but not yet arriving at" the next phase of his existence (Targoff 183). By placing himself between events and standing on the brink of death, of resurrection, and of everlasting life, Donne places himself in a position where he can experience the moment before rather than the moment of transcendence. Pulled between the two poles of his being, Donne remains oddly static, simultaneously standing outside of and in the midst of the progression of linear time, both reliant on and free of bodily constraints.

Donne lingers on the threshold of eternity by remaining connected to his physical body, and by using paradox to consider binaries (time/timelessness, human/divine, body/soul), he can contemplate both without committing wholly to either. In the *Devotions*, God and grace exist "in a transcendent place that can be appealed to but never actually inhabited, addressed but never fully embodied in material terms" (Kuchar 550). To reach such a transcendent place requires moving beyond solipsistic desire to a disembodied state. It is an act to which Donne's text cannot fully commit because he does not die. The imagery of Donne's body in his religious prose is stretched to its very limit, bringing Donne and his body to the brink of death, timelessness, and

God's grace without actually crossing over and achieving these ends.

Ironically, the one transition that will cement Donne's election and begin his eternal life is one that the *Devotions* cannot complete. His desire is paradoxical; Donne yearns for the certainty of eternal life and spiritual election, and yet cannot let go of his body, or the temporal existence which sustains it. Gillian Evans argues that paradox in Donne functions as "a philosophical device, even a theological method" for Donne's exploration of his spiritual state (2). Rather than a means to an end, the use of paradox in Donne's religious work *is* the end. Like the liminal space created by the spiritually inconclusive end of the *Devotions*, paradox is a means of contemplating the leap without making it. The *Devotions* leaves one floating in limbo, unable to move backwards or forwards; the text identifies and probes paradoxes inherent in spiritual belief, but arguably leads to no greater spiritual evaluation for Donne. Perhaps the greater suggestion is that paradox is what religion thrusts in front of the individual and asks that he or she believe—not without exploration, but ultimately without a conclusive answer. In a rhetorically dazzling display, the paradoxes central to Donne's *Devotions* characterize the immensity of religious uncertainty and the questions that plague religious belief. As Evans notes, "nothing contains and compresses speculation more effectively than the paradox," and it is in paradox, standing on the threshold, that Donne finds if not peace, then certainly a safe place from which to observe and explore the duality of his existence (6).

The John Donne of the *Devotions* exists in liminal space, between the terror of being non-elect and the peaceful certainty of having his place in heaven confirmed, and by so doing uses the uncertain state of liminality as a way of making peace with the fluctuations and contradictions inherent in both human existence and religious faith. Aware of the tension created

in this life by the uncertainty of his election, Donne positions himself in a state that embodies that uncertainty, is filled with possibility, and is defined by its inability to be defined. In this fashion, the *Devotions* plays out the tensions between heavenly and earthly, and illustrates the attempt to understand and accept the contradictory nature of human existence.

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